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TRAVEL

Scenic Kayaking Adventures That Splash Through Gorgeous Landscapes

The view from the water provides exciting encounters with wildlife



Kayak tours give you a chance to see the world in a slower, more scenic way. Here, women kayak along Sydney Harbour with the bridge and the Sydney Opera House in the background.

COURTESY DESTINATION NSW

By Dana Rebmann, AARP

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Kayaking zen. Being on the water is always better than just looking at it. With nothing but the power of your own arms, kayak tours naturally allow you to see the world in a slower, more scenic way. Beginner paddling options abound and often offer unparalleled opportunities to spot wildlife. From outside Scottsdale, Arizona (yes, you can kayak in the desert!), to Sydney, Australia, here are a handful of knockout spots around the world where you can make a memorable splash.



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Lower Salt River, Tonto National Forest, Arizona



In Arizona, kayakers can travel along Lower Salt River in Tonto National Forest.

RYAN CORDWELL/EXPERIENCE SCOTTSDALE

While a saguaro cactus-flanked river running through the Sonoran Desert outside Scottsdale is enough to turn heads on its own, it's the locals, so to speak, that truly inspire awe in these parts.

Wild horses, with origins reportedly dating back to the late 1600s, live along the Salt River. Bald eagles and river otters are also frequently spotted along the riverbanks and towering red cliffs. Riverbound Sports Paddle Company runs beginner-friendly kayaking tours April to September for \$120. REI Co-op offers tours year-round starting from \$136.

For more experienced kayakers comfortable with floating solo, Saguaro Lake Guest Ranch offers self-guided kayak trips with directions and transportation back to vehicles left at the put-in area. All of the equipment you'll need is included, starting at \$51.

Sydney Harbour



Kayak tours in Sydney generally occur in the morning when the water is calmer.

COURTESY DESTINATION NSW

Imagine enjoying your morning dose of caffeine while watching the sun rise over Sydney Harbour Bridge. Now, imagine doing it while floating in a kayak. Sydney by Kayak has thought of seemingly everything to jump-start your morning, including a splash-proof insulated cup filled with your favorite hot, barista-made beverage and kayaks with cupholders. Getting up before the sun can be challenging, but early risers are rewarded with photo-worthy skies and calmer sea conditions fit for novice paddlers. Rates from about \$102 based on current exchange rates.

During tours with OzPaddle, you kayak up to and around the Sydney Opera House. Participants get to see all its striking angles from a new perspective, and possibly catch a sighting of the wildly popular long-nosed fur seal named Benny (after Bennelong Point, the opera house's location), often seen sunbathing on the icon's waterfront northern steps. There are also opportunities to see a variety of birds including cockatoos when gliding alongside the Botanic Gardens. Tours are weather dependent, but typically launch in the morning to take advantage of less boat traffic and quieter conditions. Rates from about \$99 based on current exchange rates.

The Islands of Fiji



Kayakers in Fiji in the turquoise waters surrounding VOMO Island Fiji can encounter parrotfish, turtles and small whitetip reef sharks.

COURTESY VOMO ISLAND FIJI

Fiji boasts 333 tropical islands stretched over an area slightly larger than Washington state. Nicknamed the soft coral capital of the world, the Fijian Islands are blissfully sunny and warm year-round, and home to abundant [marine life](#), making them an ideal destination for kayaking.



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At Wakaya Private Island Resort & Spa, guests can hop into clear-bottom kayaks and explore the surrounding marine reserve, home to a plethora of colorful fish, turtles, manta rays and even endangered giant clams. From atop a kayak, paddlers can get a clear view of the resort's coral restoration underwater nursery, where collected Acropora coral fragments are tended to for up to three years before being transplanted back to damaged reefs. Rates at the [all-inclusive](#) property set in the Lomaiviti archipelago begin at \$2,500.

The turquoise waters surrounding VOMO Island Fiji, between the Mamanuca and Yasawa island groups, house an equally stunning variety of sea life including parrotfish, turtles and small whitetip reef sharks. Water enthusiasts are encouraged to explore on their own; staff can recommend routes depending on skill level and desired intensity. Rates at the all-inclusive property start at \$1,130, with a two-night minimum.

At the Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort, you can paddle out on the peaceful waters of Savusavu Bay to the private island of Naviavia, or kayak alongside the resort's mangrove restoration program, to see how essential the tropical plants are to preventing erosion on the island of Vanua Levu. Rates at the all-inclusive property start at \$1,123 based on current exchange rates.

Sunshine Coast, British Columbia, Canada

Not only is the former fishing village of Lund (Indigenous name Klah ah men), 122 miles north of Vancouver, located at Mile 0 of Highway 101, it's the gateway to Desolation Sound. Perfect for first-time paddlers, half-day outings with Terracentric Coastal Adventures tend to follow the periwinkle- and sea star-studded shoreline. Harbor seals, bald eagles and humpback whales make the occasional appearance. Terracentric also runs an end-of-the-day paddle that offers a front-row view of sunset. Tours operate May through September and start at \$66 depending on exchange rates.



At Klahoose Wilderness Resort along the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia, Canada, kayakers can encounter Pacific white-sided dolphins and humpback whales.

COURTESY KLAHOOSE WILDERNESS RESORT

Approximately a 45-minute boat ride from Lund, Klahoose Wilderness Resort's remote location offers serenity, but solo kayaking in the surrounding waters rewards paddlers with a peace and solitude hard to experience any other way. Curious harbor seals love to pop up behind kayaks, and along with catching sight of intertidal life, opportunities to glimpse Pacific white-sided dolphins, Dall's and harbor porpoise, and humpback whales abound. About a 15-minute paddle from the resort dock, among towering trees and rocky shores, kayakers can view pictographs that may date back a thousand years. Indigenous owned and operated, Klahoose is open May to October. Visit in the fall and along with kayaking you can make the hour-long boat ride to nearby Toba Inlet, where grizzly bears are often spotted feasting on spawning salmon. A three-night stay at the all-inclusive resort starts at \$2,097, depending on current exchange rates.

Channel Islands National Park, California

Touted as the Galapagos of North America, this under-the-radar U.S. national park includes five of the eight California Channel Islands (Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel and Santa Barbara). The national park can be reached via ferries operated by park concessionaire Island Packers or by private boat.



Kayakers at Channel Islands National Park in California may travel along cliffs and get a chance to explore sea caves.

COURTESY WILL ADAMS

On Santa Cruz Island, where towering cliffs plummet into crystal-clear water teeming with wildlife, Channel Islands Adventure Company leads paddlers of all levels along the coast and into sea caves. (All caves are optional.) Most of the year there are two tour options available: one with 2.5 to 3 hours of paddling, and another with an hour to 90 minutes of paddling. Cost starts at \$145, plus \$66 ferry transportation.

Channel Islands Expeditions leads guided tours along the shoreline of Anacapa Island — home to the largest breeding colony of endangered California brown pelicans — from May to November. Along with options to explore sea caves and spot wildlife, including harbor seals and sea lions, there's time allotted at the end of each paddle to snorkel in the island's expansive kelp forest. All snorkeling gear and wetsuits are included for \$265.

If one day exploring Channel Islands National Park doesn't sound like enough, Lindblad Expeditions National Geographic cruise line offers a five-day sailing to the Channel Islands including kayaking, hiking and exploring by zodiac. Rates from \$3,310.

Dana Rebmann lives in California's Sonoma County wine country and writes about travel, nature and wine. Her work has appeared in Hemispheres, AFAR, Garden & Gun, TheTelegraph.com and more.
