

Kayaking: What to Wear

Tim Tanner • 2013 • Ohio State University Extension



Introduction: A trip out on the water can be more safe and enjoyable if the kayaker is appropriately dressed for the conditions. Follow this guide as you plan your next trip.

Always Wear These



1. **PFD/Life Vest**—Always wear a PFD, even in light open touring situations. Performance PFDs will help you maintain strength on longer, more active trips.

2. **Appropriate Footwear**—Close toed shoes are important for river kayaking whereas attached sandals are an okay substitute in light open touring.

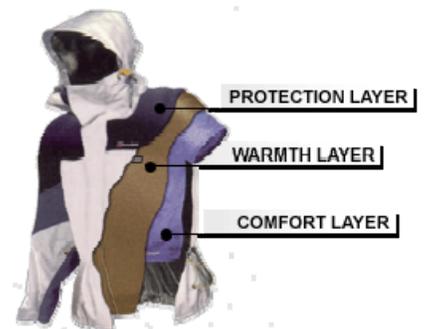
3. **Appropriate Headwear**—If you will be in rough open water or river kayaking, a helmet is a must. Otherwise, you may consider a sun hat if the skies are clear.

Bonus Items to Consider: sunglasses (with strap); watershoes

What to Wear on a Cold(er) Day

Definition: When planning your kayaking trip, research the latest water temperature forecast from <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/> and air forecast from a reputable service. If the combined temps will be near or below 120°F, use this as your dressing guide.

- ♦ **Dress in Layers**—Start with a “wicking” fabric close to your skin, then add a fleece fabric in the middle, and conclude with a long-sleeved wind-breaker as the outer shell. Wicking undergarments and fleece/wool socks are also helpful.
- ♦ **Plan B**—If you are just out for a light daytrip, leaving extra clothes in the car is a good idea.

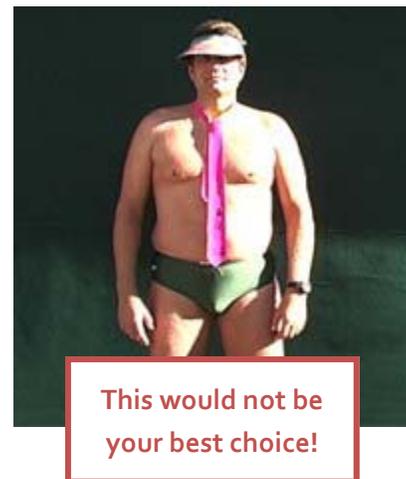


Bonus Items to Consider: fleece hat; paddlers gloves; wet/dry suit if quite cold or if you plan to get significantly wet

What to Wear on a Hot(ter) Day

Definition: Most recreational kayakers take to the water when the weather and water is quite warm. Dressing appropriately here is largely a matter of comfort.

- ◆ **Try to Stay Covered**—A full-body outfit of light-colored wicking material is ideal if you can tolerate the heat. If not, make sure to apply waterproof sunscreen to all exposed skin not covered by your swimsuit.
- ◆ **Swimsuit**—Though it is tempting to just wear a swimsuit in hot weather, kayakers will be more comfortable wearing swim shorts on the bottom rather than bikini or thong cut items.



What Not to Wear

Definition: These items will make for a long day (or worse!) if you get wet.

- ◆ **Cotton/denim**—These items will dry slowly and may encourage hypothermia if the conditions are too cool. They can also weigh you down.
- ◆ **Valuables**—Watches, jewelry, car keys, cell phones, etc. are all easy to lose or soak on a kayaking trip. Some jewelry items may also pose a safety risk in tough conditions.

Further Reading and Resources

American Canoe Association. (2005). *Instructor's manual*. Springfield, VA: American Canoe Association.

Association, A. C. (2011). *Essentials of Kayak Touring*. Birmingham: Menasha Ridge Press.

Dillon, P., Oyen, J., & American Canoe Association. (2009). *Kayaking*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Duer, C., Giesbrecht, G. G., Rankine, T., National Water Safety Congress, Inc., & United States. (2008). *Cold water boot camp USA*. Mentor, OH: National Water Safety Congress.

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