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Why I Always Choose a Kayak Adventure on My Trips — and Why You Should, Too

Booking a kayak tour can add a new element of adventure to your trips — and provide mental and physical benefits that may surprise you.

By [Mariah Tyler](#) | Published on June 1, 2023



Finally reaching the arch view on a clear bottom kayak tour in Cabo San Lucas. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIAH TYLER

One of the most alluring parts of experiencing new things through travel is having the ability to assume a temporary identity — we can be whoever we want to be and explore curiosities beyond our normal realms. Although I grew up in a landlocked metropolis, my parents were avid outdoor aficionados, and every vacation of my childhood was spent in nature. One of

notebook on a riverside rock. This trip greatly impacted my childhood for many reasons, but it was also the trip we went whitewater rafting — my first introduction to the thrill of being on a boat, paddle in hand.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIAH TYLER

A few years later we stayed in a simple log cabin in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas where the White and Buffalo Rivers meet. We spent a day canoeing along the calmer waters of the Buffalo River, and the tranquility of paddling along with my parents, making stops along sandbars, is ingrained in my memory. It's a feeling that came to define what it means to me to escape.



The long canoe on the Buffalo River in Arkansas from a trip in 2002. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIAH TYLER

Fast forward to adulthood, and I remain a city girl in my everyday life, but I will always be the first to volunteer to get on a boat — even if that means commuting to Manhattan on the ferry or taking a guided kayak tour on the Long Island Sound to a haunted lighthouse. During the pandemic, I convinced my family to kayak on White Rock Lake in Dallas, Texas. I've become quite enamored with the kayak as a way of exploration in a new or even familiar place.



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On a kayak around the haunted lighthouse on the Long Island Sound in October of 2016. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIAH TYLER

Last fall, I woke up early to kayak with a new friend in Banderas Bay in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Gentle waves carried us along the coast as we paddled for a couple of miles watching birds catch their breakfast. The perspective you gain while floating so closely to the surface of the water makes you feel small but reminds you you're a part of something bigger. This feeling is what keeps me coming back. Despite the physical challenges of kayaking, the refreshing waters keep you alert and balanced, helping you carry on.

On a recent trip to Cabo San Lucas, I went all in on exploring the ocean through water activities. We had booked the [Corazón Cabo Resort & Spa](#) based on their exclusive offerings through an adventure operator, Caboelectric. Before our first water outing to try electric surfing, I started to get that same feeling you get before riding a roller coaster or bungee jumping — a cocktail of adrenaline and nerves. It will be fine, I told myself, but roughly 45 minutes into the experience it became evident that I did not in fact love it the way I love paddling. The choppy waters crowded with taxi boats and the challenge of trying and failing to pull myself up onto the board (my skin would stay raw for a week from the attempts) diminished all of my excitement and confidence. We started to rethink our whole itinerary.



Finally reaching the arch view on a clear bottom kayak tour in Cabo San Lucas. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIAH TYLER

Kayaking to *El Arco*, Cabo San Lucas' famous arch, was on the schedule for the next morning, and my need for adventure promptly resurfaced. The four-mile trip would be a challenge on fairly choppy waters, however, and I wasn't prepared to tackle it alone. The experts at [Cabolectric](#) offered to send one of their guides with me in a two-seater kayak, which felt like the best choice given the circumstances. The trek out into the deep yet bright blue water was fairly smooth, and our earlier departure time allowed us to miss most of the water taxi traffic entering the San Lucas Bay.

My guide navigated around Pelican Rock and we arrived on Lovers Beach, where there are immaculate rock formations with so much history and texture. Soon after, we kayaked as close to the arch as law allows. Paddling up to it and sitting in its presence felt nothing short of ethereal. When you're on a motorless vessel with just your arms to power you, rocking up and down ever so slightly with the motion of the waves, a feeling of being at one with the water takes hold. It's a quiet moment that allows you to tune into natural sounds and sights in a completely different way. Our journey back to the beach was a bit more challenging as the boat tours began to populate the waters, but we watched a sea lion swim beneath our clear-bottom kayak,



View of the Cabo San Lucas arch seen from the kayak. PHOTO: MARIAH TYLER/TRAVEL + LEISURE

I'm not alone in my desire to explore the world by watercraft — research has shown that water-based adventures can help calm our minds. Best-selling author and marine biologist [Wallace J. Nichols](#) has spent years conducting research that proves that being near, on, or in water can help improve our mental health and overall sense of wellbeing. In what Nichols deems a “blue mind,” our brains are calmer, the water off-setting a “red mind” overwhelmed by the stresses of daily life. When we immerse ourselves in the sight, feeling, or sound of water, he found, our cortisol levels decrease and we are overcome with a sense of serenity.

In addition to reducing stress, paddling through the water on a kayak is remarkably empowering. Simply being in control of where you go and how you get there does something to the confidence we all need. As someone who tends to worry often and question everything, kayaking enables me to be in full control. When the adventure is over, I take that confidence boost with me into my everyday life and am better for it. Whether it's with the flow or against the flow of the water, you learn that you can manage your



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARIAH TYLER

Whether you're a professional, amateur, or novice, booking a kayak tour can add a new element of adventure to your trips and provide mental and physical benefits that may surprise you. For me, it ensures that I am constantly tuning into the earth, feeling at one with the water, and coming home empowered — all thanks to my parents for instilling that love of outdoor adventure in me from the start.

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