

Course Overview

The Northwest Sea Kayaking & Alpine Backpacking course is an expedition through two of Washington's most beautiful and diverse ecosystems: the San Juan Islands and the North Cascade Mountains. Your course will begin the moment you are picked up at the Seattle-Tacoma airport, and will continue through your trip into the San Juan Islands and the North Cascades of Washington, where the real discoveries take place.

You don't need to have previous sea kayaking or mountain travel experience. We will teach you skills for wilderness travel—how to pack appropriately, paddle kayaks, set up tarps, backpack, climb, and navigate.

From getting up early, packing your bags and cooking breakfast to paddling a kayak or hiking up a mountain, traveling in the wilderness is demanding. It can take every waking moment to get from point A to point B. Past students and instructors agree that arriving physically fit will enhance your experience and ability to do well on the course and ultimately allow you to take full advantage of the expedition.

Course Areas

SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WASHINGTON – Nestled between Vancouver Island and the North Cascades, the San Juan Islands are a unique coastal cruising ground with large expanses of sparkling water and mountain scenery. During your journey you will encounter coastlines with a combination of sandy and

rocky beaches, shallow and deep harbors, placid and reef-studded bays. Knotty, twisted Madrona trees grow along much of the shorelines while evergreen fir and pine forests cover large inland areas. Sightings of harbor seals, porpoise and eagles are common as well as the rare glimpse of an Orca whale.



WEATHER – The islands get less average rainfall than the surrounding area due to the rain-shadow effect of the Olympic Mountains. Summertime high temperatures are around 70 degrees Fahrenheit while lows could be in the 40's.

THE NORTH CASCADES, WASHINGTON – The North Cascades are called the “American Alps” for their rugged beauty and glaciated peaks. They remain some of the wildest and most untrammelled wilderness in the United States. The North Cascades host the greatest concentration of glaciers in the “Lower 48” and are full of high mountain meadows peppered with wild flowers. Our course area in the Pasayten Wilderness and North Cascades National Park hosts some of the most scenic backpacking routes in the United States.

WEATHER – Temperatures typically range from freezing to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The Alpine Backpacking portion of our course area is on the eastern side of the Cascades, and thus tends to be

moderately dry; however, rain and thunderstorms are not unusual. Early-season courses (May/June) may spend time camping on snow, while mid-summer courses tend to have more moderate temperatures.

Course Activities

SEA KAYAKING – The sea kayaking section will allow you to explore some of the 400 islands and inner coastal channels of Washington. You will paddle with your group, seeking out beaches to sleep under the stars and get acquainted with the fascinating natural and cultural history of the Pacific Northwest coast. The overall technical emphasis of this section is to learn paddle strokes, self and assisted kayak rescue techniques, marine navigation, and weather/sea state assessment. Instructors will teach you the teamwork and communication skills necessary to travel as a group in a working waterway. You may also have the opportunity to do a service project with a local land agency, hike to an island vista, or just comb the beach.



ALPINE BACKPACKING – During the backpacking section, you will be transported to the North Cascades where you will hike into the Pasayten or Sawtooth Wilderness area. You will travel with backpacks on and off trails through rugged mountain terrain. The overall technical emphasis of this section includes backpacking skills, Leave No Trace wilderness ethics, and navigation and camp-craft techniques. Leadership, communication, and responsibility will continue to develop as you prepare for the “final expedition.”

PEAK ATTEMPT – Peak attempts are day-long enterprises often entailing pre-dawn starts. Your course will include at least one peak attempt depending upon the weather and the student’s physical preparedness. Successful peak climbs require patience, efficiency, and teamwork to reach the summit. Alpine backpacking course do not use ropes or technical rock climbing.



FINAL EXPEDITION – Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. During the travel sections of this course, Outward Bound instructors purposefully and gradually transfer certain leadership responsibilities to the students, culminating with our “Final Expedition.” Near the end of course – if your group has demonstrated the necessary leadership,

team problem solving and wilderness living skills – students may be given the opportunity to travel without your instructors immediately present. Instructors maintain overall risk-management by using check-ins, careful route planning and accurate assessment of group abilities. Many of our students feel this phase of the course is the most rewarding, as the group learns to work together, problem solve, and accomplish a goal independently, while utilizing all the skills they have acquired during the expedition.

FINAL CHALLENGE EVENT – We typically end our courses with a Final Challenge Event—an individual final physical push. This might take the form of a run or a triathlon-style challenge.

SOLO – In order for profound learning to take place, students need time to reflect on their experience, and Solo is that opportunity. The Solo experience provides an important break from the rigors of the expedition and gives students the opportunity to reflect on their Outward Bound experience. With sufficient food and equipment, students will set up camp at sites of their own, using the wilderness skills learned during the first portions of the course. The amount of time students spend on Solo is based on length of course, weather, student condition, age, and Instructor preference. Solo campsites are chosen to offer as much solitude as possible (yet be within emergency whistle-signaling distance of other group members). Most students spend their Solo time journaling, drawing, reflecting, thinking and resting as they process lessons of the course to focus on their goals for the future. Instructors check on each participant at regular intervals, as safety is always the top priority.

SERVICE – Service to others and the environment is a core value of Outward Bound and is integrated into each course. Groups follow Leave No Trace ethics as part of their service to the environment and engage in acts of service while leading and supporting fellow students. Designated service projects are coordinated with land managers like the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service to collaborate on land restoration projects. Additionally, students may have the opportunity to work alongside select social service agencies like nursing homes, hospitals, and organic farms. Seeing the impact of their actions firsthand, students develop an ingrained appreciation of service, and transfer this desire to serve their communities back home.

OUTCOMES – This course will introduce students to the ideas of leadership, character development, and service that are integral to Outward Bound. Students will begin to develop these skills in an expedition setting so that they can continue to grow once they return home. Instructors will work to challenge students to try new things and step outside their comfort zones. As a team, each group will work together to complete difficult tasks necessary for backcountry travel.

Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what your itinerary may look like. Your actual course plan will vary according to weather, student skills and abilities, and instructor preferences.



Course Description

Northwest Sea Kayaking & Alpine Backpacking

15 Day Course

Day 1	Course Start
Day 2	Intro to sea kayak skills such as wet exits, rescues, and basic paddling
Day 3-6	Explore the Islands by kayak; continued kayak and camp craft skills
Day 7	Switchover
Day 8-10	Backpacking and navigation skills
Day 11	Peak attempt
Day 12	Solo
Day 13	Final expedition
Day 14	Final Challenge Event & Service
Day 15	Course end and transportation home

22 Day Course

Day 1	Course Start
Day 2	Intro to sea kayak skills such as wet exits, rescues, and basic paddling
Day 3-10	Explore the Islands by kayak; continued kayak and camp craft skills
Day 11	Switchover
Day 12-14	Backpacking and navigation skills
Day 15	Peak attempt
Day 16-17	Solo
Day 18-20	Final expedition
Day 21	Final challenge event & service
Day 22	Course end and transportation home