

Kayaking: OPPORTUNITIES FOR LAKE HURON



PORT AUSTIN KAYAK

The southern Lake Huron coast is a fantastic setting for outdoor exploration. Promoting the region’s natural assets can help build vibrant communities and support local economies. This series of fact sheets profiles different outdoor activities that could appeal to residents and visitors of Michigan’s Thumb. We hope this information will help guide regional planning, business development and marketing throughout the region. **Here we provide an overview of kayaking – including details on what is involved in the sport, who participates, and what is unique about kayaking on Lake Huron.**

WHY KAYAK ON LAKE HURON?

Southern Lake Huron offers a diverse and beautiful shoreline for kayaking with opportunities to paddle along sandy beaches, unusual rock formations, historic lighthouses, and quiet rivers and wetlands. A 122-mile water trail has been developed along the coast between Quanicasee and Lexington, with 44 boat access points. Kayakers can paddle close to shore the whole route, enjoying open water views and safe access to land. Michigan’s Thumb Area is also well suited for kayak camping trips, kayak fishing and surf kayaking, all within an easy drive of southeast Michigan.

How Popular is Kayaking?

In the U.S.:

- 7.8 million Americans went kayaking at least once in 2008.
- 2.8% of Americans age 6 or older were involved in kayaking.

In Michigan:

- 28% of households participated in kayaking or canoeing in 2007.
- 7% of those who participated considered kayaking to be one of their three most important outdoor activities.
- 20% of households own a canoe or kayak.

Who Kayaks?

A snapshot of U.S. kayakers:

- **Participation:** Kayakers made an average of 10 outings each in 2008. 47% of kayakers made 1 to 3 outings.
- **Gender:** 56% are male.
- **Age:** 36% are between 25 – 44; 30% are over 45.
- **Income:** 57% earn over \$75,000/year.
- **Education:** 51% have a college degree or higher.

- **Geography:** 14.1% live in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio or Wisconsin.
- **Ethnicity:** 82% are white.

Economic Impact

The Outdoor Foundation estimated the annual economic impact of all paddlers (river and lake kayakers, canoeists and rafters) in all of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio and Indiana. They found:

Participants	4.6 million
Trip-related Spending	\$1.78 billion
Gear-related Spending	\$433 million
Total Tax Revenue	\$396 million
Jobs Supported	34,999

Source: Outdoor Industry Foundation, 2006

Why do People Kayak?

A recent survey reported the following motives for canoeing, kayaking and rafting:

- It’s relaxing.
- It’s a great way to get exercise.
- It’s fun.
- To enjoy discovery and exploration.
- To get away from usual routine.

Industry Outlook

Nearly half of all Americans participated in some type of outdoor recreation in 2009, and 82% of this group planned to spend more time outdoors in 2010. Participation in kayaking has grown over the last few years, and now more Americans paddle (kayak, canoe, raft) than play soccer. Kayaking has a variety of positive aspects, including:

- Kayaking is a “lifetime sport.” It is accessible to people of all ages and ability levels, making it a great family activity.
- Participation is possible in urban, suburban and rural areas.
- Little instruction is required, and beginners can be successful.
- Kayaking can be combined with other activities, such as photography, bird watching, fishing, hunting, camping, hiking or biking.
- The sport has minimal impact on the environment.
- Kayaking can be enjoyed alone or in groups.
- It is a form of boating that does not require gasoline.

RECREATION PROFILE: Kayaking



KAYAK OPPORTUNITIES ON LAKE HURON

SOUTHERN LAKE HURON WATER TRAILS

A blueway or water trail is an established route for kayakers and canoeists that includes boat launch areas, camping locations and points of interest. Water trail organizations work to inventory and enhance coastal public access points, bolster environmental protection and promote recreational opportunities. In the Thumb, there are two active water trail organizations: the Tip of the Thumb Heritage Water Trail, and the Blueways of St. Clair. Both provide excellent maps and route suggestions for paddlers.

KAYAK EVENTS IN MICHIGAN

Kayak events, such as festivals, competitions, workshops and group paddles can build a strong kayak community and help an area become known as a kayak destination. Here are a few examples from Michigan:

- A kayak shop in southeast Michigan has been leading **local kayak tours**, sometimes in conjunction with other festivals. A recent survey showed that these tours attracted new people to the sport.
 - 76% of tour participants did not own kayaks.
 - 46% had just started kayaking.
 - 60% kayaked only a few times a year.
 - 64% were over 40 years old.
 - 76% thought they would participate in another kayak event.
- **Adventure triathalons** that include kayaking have become popular. Clarkston and Manistique currently host adventure races with a kayaking component.
- In 2010, Port Austin began hosting an annual **sea kayak symposium**, with speakers, field trips and skills training. The 2011 symposium will overlap with the Harbor Festival in June.
- Kayak fishing is attracting new people to both kayaking and fishing. Michigan has an active club that organizes **kayak fishing tournaments** in Lake St. Clair and events for veterans called Heroes on the Water.



What other Activities do Kayakers Enjoy?

A 2009 report by the Outdoor Foundation found that many paddlers enjoy other outdoor activities. The most common activities were:

- Fitness walking54%
- Backyard and car camping45%
- Hiking43%
- Freshwater fishing40%
- Road/paved surface bicycling37%
- Wildlife viewing27%

RECREATION PROFILE: Kayaking



What makes a Community Kayak-Friendly?

- Water trails with maps, websites, brochures and signs on roads and water.
- Scenic, clean and accessible waterways.
- Kayak rental opportunities.
- Boat launch sites with amenities such as: launch areas that are safe for kayaks and motor boats, safe parking, stores, picnic areas, restrooms.
- Information about interesting natural, historical and cultural features of the area.
- Updates about water and weather conditions online or through mobile apps.
- Shuttle service for paddlers.
- Storage area or place to lock boats so kayakers can walk into town.
- Links between water and land-based trails (kayak one way, hike or bike return).
- Camping areas.
- Waterways that have designated areas for motorized or non-motorized boats.
- Collaboration with local, state and nationwide kayaking organizations and tourism agencies.
- Marketing that promotes kayaking experiences and services.

Types of Kayaking

There are three main types of kayaks: recreational, sea/touring and whitewater. The majority of U.S. kayakers (67%) use recreational kayaks, but more specialized styles of kayaking are becoming more common. On Lake Huron, most people use recreational or sea kayaks that allow paddlers to sit below the deck, protected by a spray skirt or cover. “Sit on top” style kayaks likely wouldn’t offer enough stability or protection from waves on Lake Huron.

- **Recreational Kayaking** uses mid-length boats that are designed to be stable, comfortable and maneuverable on lakes, ponds or rivers.
- **Touring or Sea Kayaking** uses long, narrow kayaks that can move quickly on large water bodies and carry camping equipment. In the Thumb, sea kayakers could paddle between state and county parks and camp close to the beach.
- **Whitewater Kayaking** uses short, wide boats on fast-flowing rivers.
- **Surf Kayaking** allows kayakers to ride the waves like surfers or just play in the surf with whitewater boats or specially designed kayaks.
- **Kayak Fishing** lets anglers quietly access good fishing spots. Kayak fishing boats are now made with adjustable holders for fishing poles.
- **Kayak Sailing** allows kayakers to use a small sail to make long paddles easier.

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