
A Texas Nature Kayaking Guide

Kayak Camping – Safeguards & Personal Hygiene

This includes personal items, a first aid kit, an emergency kit, other items, and actions that you can take.

Personal Items

Make a list of personal items to take. The following list is a good place to start:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sunscreen, | Over-the-counter medicines, |
| Lotion, | Toothbrush and toothpaste, |
| Insect repellent containing DEET, | Comb/brush, |
| Chap Stick, | Soap, |
| Cough drops, | Towel, |
| Prescription medicines, | Wash cloth |

Toilet paper (The trip hero is the person who has extra toilet paper when everyone else runs out.),

First Aid Kit

Remember that a first aid kit is only as good as you know how to use it. Hopefully, you will never have to use a first aid kit, but it is nice to have one available when you need it. The contents of such a kit will vary with where you are kayaking and what you are doing in the kayak. The first aid kit for a camping trip will usually be more complex than a first aid kit for an afternoon paddle. See the Texas Nature Kayaking Guide entitled First Aid Kits and Emergency Kits for a complete listing of the contents of the first aid kit carried by Herb Nordmeyer. The reason his first aid kit is so complete is that he takes groups from 8 years old to 80 years old out on overnight trips, and he has gone through Advanced Wilderness First Aid training.

Nothing should be in your kit that you do not know how to use. If all you can do is kiss a boo boo and put a band-aid on it, then your first aid kit should consist of your kissers and band-aids. If you are in this situation, you should consider some first aid training so you can add a few more items to your first aid kit.

Emergency Equipment

Again, see the Texas Nature Kayaking Guide entitled First Aid Kits and Emergency Kits for a complete listing of the contents of the emergency kit carried by Herb Nordmeyer.

Other items

Here are a few additional items that should be considered to ensure personal protection and comfort:

Duct tape has many uses outside of the first aid kit (can be used to repair anything from kayaks to dry bags),

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A few sanitary napkins, diapers, Depends, or similar in the kit only hurt the male ego. They are great for staunching blood flow.

If you take a roll of cheap Cling-Wrap and cut a 2-inch end off the roll, you have a handy wrap that you can use before the duct tape to keep the duct tape from sticking to skin.

Extra rope,

Extra batteries for headlamps, lanterns, GPS, etc.,

Weather radio,

Two-way radios,

GPS,

Compass (A friend suggested a deck of cards. He says that every time he lays out a hand of Solitaire, someone looks over his shoulder and points out a move he missed. He can always ask that person for directions.),

Heavy-duty trash bags,

Aluminum foil,

Toilet paper and a portable potty (5-gallon bucket with a toilet seat attached or a light weight folding frame with a toilet seat attached. With either one, a plastic bag is inserted that contains some sanitizing gel.),

Needle and thread,

Matches and fire-starting supplies,

Glasses case,

A couple of cheap tarps for windbreaks, ground cloths, and screens,

Comet is reported to keep out unwanted critters if sprinkled lightly around the campsite,

Leather gloves (for work and the Dutch oven),

A SPOT satellite tracking device if you are going to remote or hazardous areas.

Lifestyle Changes

Rising water

When camping on the water, always consider whether the water level may rise and create problems. If you are on a large lake, the likelihood of that happening without you knowing it is fairly remote. If, however, you are on a stream or river with a large watershed, the water level can rise due to distant rain or dam releases. Many of us have placed a stick or a pile of rocks at water's edge when we make camp and then monitor it during the evening and before we go to bed. Usually this will tell us what is happening, but not always.

Kayaks should be pulled up above anticipated water levels and also secured. There is an early warning signal that is available and does not require you staying up and monitoring the water level. When you secure your kayaks, run the bow rope around a tent pole or stake before tying off the distal end to secure the kayak. If the water comes up and moves the kayak, there will be a tug on your tent that will hopefully wake you up.

Pathogens

The two most common sources of pathogens on a camping trip with you are your right hand and your left hand. Wash them. Even when they do not need it, wash them. Before fixing meals, handling food (cleaning fish), and eating, wash them.

Dishes that are not completely cleaned are another source of pathogens. Immediately after every meal, wash the dishes. Use hot water and soap. After they have been washed and rinsed, give them a final rinse with cold water and bleach.

Sharing of snack food from a common container is another method of transferring pathogens from one person to another. A reliable wilderness medicine source says that one should not share snack food from a common container or drink from the same container unless one is willing to kiss that person on the mouth. Myth Busters, a TV show, reports that after testing, they could find no evidence to support this concept and labeled it a myth.

Water

Do not drink untreated natural water without filtering it or treating it in other ways. Before you go into an area, check to determine the quality of water. In Texas, the Devil's River has some of the highest-quality water available. Moving up the Rio Grande to the Big Bend, during low flow times, the dissolved solids increase. Some of those dissolved solids are natural; some are leachates from old mining operations. Filters do not remove them. Natural gypsum in the water can lead to diarrhea. This is water that the average kayak camper cannot treat. Where the natural water carries dissolved material that may be harmful or toxic, it is appropriate to carry the water you will be using to drink.

Sanitary Wastes

The human body must pass waste. In some areas it is acceptable to dig a hole and deposit the waste. In others, especially as waterways become more popular, this could lead to digging holes where holes have recently been dug. In those situations, authorities are requiring that all solid human waste be hauled out. There are a number of portable toilets available that use chemical bags to collect the waste.

Animals

Animals love human food, and we may think they are cute when they try to beg a little food at our campsite. Raccoons can be very destructive while trying to get to your food. Bears are much more destructive than raccoons. Do not store food in your tent unless you want the local bear or the local fire ant colony to come into your tent to get it. Food storage should be away from your sleeping area. Some people have reported that kayaks with tightly-closed hatches make good food storage areas.

If a wild animal shows up around your camp and appears friendly, be careful. The animal may be diseased, or it may have lost its fear of humans and may resort to biting and scratching if it does not get its way or if one of your children tries to pick it up. Transporting such an animal back to civilization to be tested for rabies is not an easy task. This may mean that your child has to take rabies shots because you were not "unreasonable" when junior wanted to pet the nice fox. If you encounter a large land-based predator, such as a bear or a mountain lion, do not run. Make yourself as large as possible, wave your arms, and yell or blow your whistle. If you encounter an alligator, try to quietly move away. Chances are it is going to want to get to safety (deep water), and you do not want to be tipped over as it heads to its place of refuge.

Cuts and Scratches

In the wilderness, all injuries need to be taken seriously. Monitor all injuries, and start taking aggressive treatment action before you would if you were at home. At home if an infection spreads, the minor emergency clinic and a shot of antibiotics is just a few minutes away. On a kayak camping trip, professional treatment may be a day or more away.