

Whether You're Up in the Sky or Down in the Water There's an eXtreme Sport for You

Topics Covered:

Hang Gliding Heaven: Experiences of a Gliding Junkie

Hang Gliding vs. Paragliding: What's the Difference?

Interpreting the Lingo and Other Basics to Surfing

Kite Surfing Can Be a Kick for the Adrenaline Seekers

Ride the Wave With Surfing

Watercross: Jet Skiing Gone Wild

What You Should Know About Whitewater Kayaking

Riding the Rapids: How to Start Out Whitewater Rafting

Kayaking to the Extreme: Man Against Nature

Join the Polar Bear Club: Try Ice Swimming!

No Sleeping Allowed in the Sport of Wakeboarding

Whether You're Up in the Sky or Down in the Water There's an eXtreme Sport for You

Hang Gliding Heaven: Experiences of a Gliding Junkie

If you have never experienced hang gliding before, you are missing out on one of the true feelings of real flying. The feeling of soaring through the air at gentle speeds over beautiful landscape is simply breathtaking. With some instruction, this experience can be enjoyed by almost any person, of any age. How many times have you seen a person celebrating their 75th birthday on the news and celebrated by hang gliding?

It is a wonderful experience and is fairly easy to learn. Hang gliding takes no special skill, only that you have moderate upper body strength, so this makes it a perfect "extreme" sport for almost any age.

An Australian man named John Dickenson built the first form of hang gliding in 1963. He built the first craft out of a sort of kite. The word about this new contraption soon spread and people were rushing out to experience this new form of extreme sports. Now, the hang gliders that are made for today's use are much safer and sturdier. These machines are able to reach high speeds for those looking for an extreme way to fly or can be used to simply float gently across the sky.

When learning to hang glide, important instructions are given. The first time hang glider, which is looking to experience the thrill of flying once, might want to consider a tandem glide. This is much like the tandem jump that a first time parachuter would experience. The instructor and the new glider are harnessed together and the flight is made together. This give the instructor complete control so that no one is injured and the first time glider can enjoy the experience.

Despite popular belief, a hang glider does not simply jump off a cliff to fly. When hang gliding, the glider will run and then the wings will take to the air. This launch is always carefully calculated before the fly so that the pilot has complete control of the gliding before ever reaching the edge of the cliff, or from wherever they are flying from. Some more experienced pilots may choose to launch from a move vehicle or lightweight plane.

Whatever they choose, the pilot should be experienced before flying solo. All pilots must take courses in how to flying and become accredited. In addition, since this is now a requirement, hang gliding accidents have decreased since the 1980s when these courses were not required.

Anyone over the age of 14 can learn to hang glide and there is no age limit. Most people who want to hang glide might choose to rent equipment, however there are plenty of people who do this as a passion. A new hang glider will cost about \$4000 brand new. A hang glider owner must also purchase a harness that will cost around \$1000 new and parachute that will run around \$600. Sometimes, a hang glider can purchase used equipment at a fraction of the new price, but it is always advisable to make certain used equipment is in superior working condition before buying.

Many people who hang glide for the first time do not describe hang gliding as a scary or harrowing experience. Instead, most describe gentle hang gliding as a wonderful experience that makes them feel free and floating. Even those who have a fear of heights do not feel scared since there is no feeling of falling. Each flight is carefully planned and executed, so most gliders feel comfortable with their experience in the air.

One of the most exhilarating hang gliding experiences can be had when you choose a unique location for your flight. How about trying to fly over the ocean or timing your flight right at sunset or sunrise? Many hang gliders love to have their flight near the mountains or other scenic landscape. Many even describe their hang gliding experience and peaceful and heaven-like.

Of course, there are those who like to turn any sport into a true "extreme" sport. Some might choose to push the limits on this sport and try to reach excessive speeds or jump from the highest cliffs. There is a place for those hang gliding enthusiasts, too. In 2000, the first world record in hang gliding was broken with top speeds. However you choose to hang glide, this will be an experience you will surely never forget.

Hang Gliding vs. Paragliding: What's the Difference?

How do you suppose the first hang gliders were invented? With all inventions, it is the thinking that gets the ball rolling. Back in the 1960s a couple of water skiers, who must have gotten bored simply gliding on top of the water, wondered what it would be like to soar above the water. After brainstorming a bit, they decided to hook themselves up to a couple of kites and get back on their water skis.

As the boat began pulling them, the air caught the kite and there they were above the water, though certainly landing back in the water! Through much trial and error, the current form of the hang glider has been developed and now they are launching themselves from mountains instead of the water!

Paragliding began in Europe from those daredevils who enjoy both the thrill of skydiving and jumping off cliffs. The first few attempts were nothing more than parachutes attached to the back of those jumping and off they went. There were a few modifications, which have led to the paragliders we have now. They must have thought, "I wonder if we can fly if we do this?" and paragliding is born. Like hang gliding, after a few trial and error designs, they have developed into what we use today.

The primary difference between hang gliding and paragliding is the structure of the wings. The wings of a hang glider resemble a V-shape and are constructed with a frame that makes the wing structures solid as opposed to the paragliding wing structure, which is soft, and take on a more oval-shaped shape. Another primary difference is that paragliding has a learning curve to it because its flight is done at slower speeds.

A hang glider is heavier due to the solid structure of the wings and can weigh between 70-100 pounds. Paragliders can be carried in a large backpack. Also, hang gliders have the speed but rely more on the conditions than do paragliders.

Besides the shape of the canopies, the structure is another difference between hang gliding and paragliding. The paragliding canopies are much thinner and therefore more susceptible to ultra violet rays which can destroy the canopy. The hang gliding canopy is constructed of sturdier material and is not as affected by the ultra violet rays.

The safety conditions between hang gliding and paragliding are primarily the same and normally the equipment is not the reason. The attitude of the pilot goes a long way towards safety. If the pilot is reckless with no regard of the elements or the other pilots, then there will be safety issues. In most extreme sports, though you have individuals who are considered mavericks and simply refuse to go along with the perceived norm. There are times when this can lead to creativity and adventure and other times when taken to extremes it can be down right dangerous.

There are some things to consider before deciding whether to invest in hang gliding or paragliding. If you are a family person and want to bring the kids along for the adventure, you may find it a bit of a challenge. Consider this as you and your family are packing for this wonderful day trip and gathering supplies, remember the hang glider does not fold easily and is cumbersome both in setting up and dismantling.

Once you are at your destination, will you be the one going to the top of the mountain or the entire family, will you be taking a tram or driving. Once you are there, will there also be a place for your family to relax and enjoy the launch? Or will they have to be shuffled back in the vehicle to the place you are going to land? Now for the hang gliding enthusiast and their family, these considerations may appear small in contrast to thrill of flying or supporting the family member ready to jump from the mountain.

Paragliding has the ability to be a bit more spontaneous in that you can toss (with respect of course) the paraglider in your vehicle or on the back of your motorcycle and go. You do not necessarily have to launch from a mountaintop although many do.

Ultimately the choice is yours and is definitely dependent on your lifestyle. Certainly, whether you choose to enjoy either sport the experience will be incredible!

Interpreting the Lingo and Other Basics to Surfing

Surfing is a sport with a long history. Invented by the islanders of Hawaii in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, the United States saw a gigantic surge in popularity of this sport in the 1960s. Suddenly surfing was hip, in, and an entire subculture sprang up around the fiberglass board. Movies were made that prominently featured the surfing communities, music sang of their exploits, and an accomplished surfer was akin to a hero figure in many beach towns.

When you come right down to it, the basics of surfing are really not all that complicated. You obviously need a beach and some waves, a surfboard, a leash attached to the board and to you to make sure you can retrieve your board if you fall off, and maybe even a wetsuit to keep you warm during long exposure to water.

It will help to practice standing on the board and getting on the board before you actually hit the waves. Similarly, acquaint yourself with the proper etiquette that should be observed when surfing with others. Nothing is worse than being dubbed a rude surfer when you can avoid this label with simply a few friendly gestures and some advice from experienced surfers.

Yet some wonder what it is about the lingo that seems to get thrown about by surfers. Never mind the weird hand signals and handshakes (they're just showmanship); the lingo however is at times truly important to communicate exactly what it is that you need. Some terms are obvious, others a bit odd, and some may be considered downright Byzantine. Here are some examples:

The term "Eddie would go" is frequently banded about in surfing circles when surfers are daring and double dog daring each other to take on waves that regular surfers would not consider tackling. Eddie is none other than famed surfer and tragic figure Eddie Aikau who gained fame and a stellar reputation in surfing circles around 1975 to '77. In 1978 he disappeared when trying to get help for shipmates that were hanging on to a capsized boat.

Whatever you do, do not give away the locations of great surfing spots that others have entrusted to you in confidence. Doing so will earn you the title, "namer" which is tantamount to blaming you for any crowds that appear at that spot. The next time you face your surfing buddies, if they are still on speaking terms with you, you might as well wear a scarlet letter on your wetsuit.

Another term that you definitely do not want to have attached to your name is that of "quimby." A quimby is a surfing newbie who is more of a pest and etiquette breaker than a novice who is truly trying to learn the sport.

Going on "dawn patrol" simply means to go surfing in the early morning before the sun comes up. The advantages are obvious: a lot less people.

A more serious term that anyone heading into the ocean should know is that of "rip tide" or "rip." A rip is a current in the water that heads straight out into the open ocean. Swimmers who are caught in a rip will be carried out to sea and sometimes drown because they tire themselves out by trying to swim against the current, which is an exercise in futility.

Instead, hang on to your board and enjoy the ride, or swim with the current but try to get to the edge of the current and the simply swim out of its side. While this will take you to the ocean, your board will help you to get back.

As you can see, the surfing community thrives on its sense of belonging and yes, as a novice you will probably earn a bit of ridicule in the beginning. Don't try so hard to fit in, but instead respect others' space, apologize when you break an etiquette rule, and just try your best when you're out there. Don't let some of the territorial surfers get to you, and instead hang out with

those who will show you the ropes. Once you have mastered the art of surfing, remember your humble beginnings when the next newbie stumbles onto the beach with a brand new, unused, unscratched surfboard in hand!

Kite Surfing Can Be a Kick for the Adrenaline Seekers

Wow, what an image that title conjures up! The pure adrenaline rush from surfing and getting airborne at the same time! Is there any better way to live? To many extreme sports enthusiasts, the answer is no.

When you first learn to kite surf, also known as kiteboarding, you don't need to worry about starting on the water. You get the privilege of starting on the beach, so that if you have to ditch the kite, instead of swallowing a mouth full of salt water, you get to eat the sand instead. After a bit of practice, and when the instructor thinks you are ready, you get to strap yourself to a board. These boards are not the same length as a regular surfboard.

In addition, it has a length more common to that of a snowboard. When you are one of these, you will face the wind or get a mouth full of salt water or maybe you have perfected the "ditching" technique and will fall gracefully into the water.

There are several stages involved in learning to kite surf and although they may seem complicated they can be learned in a relatively short amount of time and all of them are performed on land.

The First Stage:

It is important to become familiar with the wind window, which is the distance from one end of the kite to the other and arches like a rainbow.

Next you learn about the equipment, putting it together, taking it apart, and checking for any possible malfunctions.

Demonstrate your understanding of the three wind zones including launching and landing positions.

You have to learn how to untwist the lines

As in water skiing the correct position of your arms in response to the movement of the kite is important.

Knowledge of the wind patterns is also helpful, though you don't have to become a meteorologist.

This can seem a bit overwhelming, but in reality it does not take long to master the basics. Once you have proven proficient in these skills, **stage two** will teach you the basics of self-rescue and the ability to re-launch while you are in the water.

Stage three helps you get comfortable in the water with the kite minus the board because the wind will pick you up whether your feet are attached to a board or not and knowing how to handle the kite and dismount are extremely important. The final stage, stage four is you, the water, wind, kite and board!

The kites that are used in kite surfing range in sizes from several feet to 40 feet in width and if you are beginning this sport a wind speed of 5 to 6 knots is sufficient. Experienced kite surfers can fly across the waves and sometimes get as much as 60 feet off the water.

Some helpful hints for those considering kite surfing:

- Enroll in a training course
- Always kite surf with a partner, this will help keep you and those around you safe
- Avoid areas that are overly crowded
- Definitely do not walk in front of someone else who is practicing
- Do not attempt to grab someone else's lines, even if you think you are helping them
- A knowledge of weather patterns can be quite helpful since you are relying on the wind to launch you into the air
- It cannot be overstated, safety gear is of utmost importance

Kite surfing does not require you to "ride the waves" so to speak. It has more to do with the wind and the direction the wind is coming from. The way you place your kite in the wind, determines the kind of lift you get off the water. Now, it is important to not have the image in your mind of a sail, which is what a windsurfer will use, but picture a kite, a very big kite. The kite surfer controls the kite by holding on to a bar which is at the end of very long kite strings and uses this to direct the kite into wind zones to get the lift off the water.

For those who enjoy the sports of surfing, snowboarding, water skiing, or any other form of flying through air kite surfing is definitely a sport you should consider. The adrenaline rush you get from being air borne is amazing and once you try it you are likely to come back again and again.

Ride the Wave With Surfing

Summertime brings to mind sun, waves, and surf. You probably have considered trying to surf at one point. You sit on the shore and watch in amazement as the pros perform their tricks and sometimes wipe out. Along with the pros, there are people of all ages taking to the sport of surfing. Learning how to stand on the board, ride the waves and they are having a great time doing so. This article will take a look at the beginning basics of surfing.

Before your feet ever hit the board, it is a good idea to know the rules about surfing:

Absolutely no alcohol – you need to be alert while surfing and everyone knows that alcohol impairs your judgment and being in the water intoxicated is not a smart choice.

Always notice where you are on the water and the other surfers and individuals who are in the water.

Those giant waves look cool sitting on the shore, but once you start surfing, be realistic and do not get into a wave that is too much for you. Stay in your comfort zone.

If you are not physically fit, start doing so now. If you were to lose your board at the end of a day and have to swim back to shore, you will need all the strength you have to make it.

The old adage applies to surfers the same as it does to swimmers – do not go in the water at least 45 minutes after you have eaten.

Notice the types of beaches you are surfing on, if they are patrolled then stay within the designated limits.

There is a rule among surfers that the person closest to the breaking point of the wave gets to ride that wave. Remember that and do not try to take someone else's wave.

Do not panic if you are caught in a rip – if you do, remember that you paddle across the rip not against the rip. Rips are strong currents that will carry you out to sea!

Now being out in wonderful sun and surf means you should not forget your sun block protection. You may want to consider purchasing a wet suit or UV rash vest for protection.

Never surf alone – a surf buddy is very important besides the fact that you have someone there to help you if you get into trouble it is always more enjoyable to share a sport you love with a friend.

Check the surf conditions of the beach you want to surf before getting out there. Talking with the locals of the area is always a great idea.

Do not enter the surf without doing some stretches to warm up your body. You want to enjoy the surf not have to leave due to muscle injuries.

Now that we have explored a bit about a surfers conduct, it is time to learn how to catch those waves. Normally the beginner practices how to “pop up” which is a term that refers to changing your position from lying on the board to standing on the board. Now you do not practice this in the water, first you do so on the sand. You need to find your surfing stance and as strange as this sounds consider the position you naturally take you are walking and go skidding across a patch of ice.

Whichever foot you have out front while you are skidding across the ice will be the same one you use while surfing. Once that is determined it is time to learn how to pop-up. If you cannot

learn the proper technique to stand on your board, surfing will be a bit difficult for you because the surfers stand on their board and not lie on it the entire time. If you are familiar with press-ups, you will not have a problem with pop-up, as they are very similar.

The first step is to straighten your arms in front of you and then bring your legs up and under your body. As you prepare for the surfing position, make sure your feet are in the correct position, hands should be by your shoulders and “snap” to a crouched position in one flowing movement (yes, you will probably fall a couple of times) once you have mastered this it is time to try the water – have fun.

Watercross: Jet Skiing Gone Wild

Being the extreme sports enthusiast that you are, you may think you have tried every extreme sport imaginable. However, there may be one you have yet to discover – the exciting world of watercross. What exactly is this sport, you ask? If you have a snowmobile and you love to jet ski, then you are on the verge of enjoying watercross. Using the snowmobile with a few modifications, you can reach speeds in excess of 60 miles per hour.

Your summer will never be the same once you have taken to watercross. Whether you engage in the sport for enjoyment (and the pure adrenaline rush) or decide to take to the races, your summer will be changed forever. The modifications required to transform your snowmobile to the water are minor. One of the most obvious will be the removal of the seat because you will be standing as opposed to sitting.

The object of the modification is to lighten the load so that you will be on top of the water as opposed to sitting in the water. There are many outfitters across the country that can help you with the specifics. Your goal is to get your snowmobile watercross ready, which means you want to get yourself on top of the water, not sitting in the water. Certainly, if you do not wish to part with your beloved snowmobile, you can purchase a watercross. Your decision will be fueled by your passion.

Watercross most definitely qualifies as an extreme sport. The very definition of extreme of any nature is that you push beyond the boundaries. You try to attain that unattainable and there is always a risk involved. Looking at one aspect of watercross in determining if it meets this classification would be the speed.

If you are skimming on top of the water in excess of 60 miles per hour and you were to crash in some fashion, that water you will be landing in is not going to be soft. You will bounce, fly, and flip before you land and sink. You also run the possibility of hitting something on the way to the water. Watercross is dangerous and adrenaline junkies are drawn to the sport like a moth is drawn to a flame.

Safety is very important in any sport, especially extreme sports. Some of the precautions necessary to watercross include having a life jacket. Watercross riders are usually wearing gear that closely resembles that of a motocross racer. Along with the gear, a helmet is essential. Watercross riders are also required to attach a rope at least 20 to 30 feet in length, which at

the end is attached a buoy of some sort in case you have to ditch the craft and it begins to sink. Once the rescue team has seen to your safety, they will tend to the retrieval of your equipment.

For those of you who are interested in the spectator portion of extreme sports, there are several events that are worth adding to your calendar of events. There are the races that feature speed, jumps, and flips and the occasional wipeouts that are exciting to watch.

There are also professional exhibits where the champions of the numerous watercross races across the nation perform inventive tricks and jumps that will have you standing in your seat. You will see them perform back flips and barrel rolls among other feats that will be gravity defying. You will certainly be amazed at the program and will come back year after year to enjoy what they have to offer the audience.

For something a little different, look at watercross racing in Iceland. Now watercross in Iceland goes about things a bit differently in that they do not modify their snowmobiles and the winner is the one who can do the most laps before they and their snowmobile sink.

For the extreme sports junkie, how can you pass by an opportunity to go flying across the water attached to 200 plus horsepower at speeds over 60 miles per hour? Call your local dealer in water sports equipment today, better yet go visit them in person and start on your next great adventure! Who knows, you may be the next person they are all cheering for in the stands as you perform gravity defying stunts!

What You Should Know About Whitewater Kayaking

To say that whitewater kayaking is a sport where you paddle a kayak up or down stream in a river would be a dramatic oversimplification. Kayaking, especially in whitewater situations, is challenging and can be dangerous.

The kayak itself is a long, thin shaped boat with a rounded or V-shaped hull. It has a center seat for the pilot and a waterproof skirt that fastens around the pilot's waist to stop the water from entering the boat. Kayaks can be as short as 6-feet long or as long as more than twice that length. They are usually constructed of a rugged plastic, which reduces the damage done by sharp rocks in the river's rapids.

The paddle for a kayak is as unique as the kayak itself. It's a double bladed paddle that, by nature of its design, dictates that you paddle on one side of the kayak and then on the other side -- back and forth -- unlike a rowboat where you paddle with two oars simultaneously.

There are four basic kinds of whitewater kayaking: playboating, slalom, riverrunning and creeking.

Playboating is a sport unto itself. It involves putting a kayak through a series of 'gymnastic-like' moves with colorful names like cartwheeling, looping, surfing and spinning. An experienced playboater can practically stand a kayak on its nose because the kayaks used for playboating are designed to allow the bow and stern to be easily submerged. This facilitates all the trick

moves required in playboating. The sport of playboating has its own competition built around it that is, appropriately enough, called the "whitewater rodeo."

Slalom kayaking is precision kayak racing. The racecourse for the slalom event is normally some designated section of a river that has been set up with a series of gates that must be navigated in a particular order. The gates are color-coded (red and green) poles that are suspended vertically over the water. The red poles serve as the gates for the race in one direction and the green poles are the gates that must be navigated while going in the opposite direction.

The winner of the slalom race will get from point A, through the correct gates, to point B and back again, through the other gates, to Point A before anyone else. The kayaks used for slalom racing must be a certain size and will be made out of fiberglass and carbon fibers which makes them sleeker and faster than other kayaks. Slalom kayaking, in case you don't remember where you heard that name before, is an event in the International Summer Olympic Games.

Riverrunning is a bit schizophrenic. It takes the kayak from a leisurely row down one section of a river to a portion of the river that is a frenetic obstacle course through fast rapids and even over waterfalls. Not for the faint of heart, riverrunning puts the kayak and its pilot through almost every possible adrenaline-pumping maneuver. This category of whitewater kayaking includes day-trips, multi-day trips with overnight camping on shore and river races known as whitewater races.

Creeking is also known as extreme kayaking and if riverrunning is a bit schizophrenic, creeking can only be called a bit psycho! Extreme kayakers go looking for the wildest, most dangerous stretches of the unfriendliest rivers and then challenge them.

The extreme kayaker's world of pure adrenaline consists of billions of gallons of water powering its way through narrow canyons, pouring down granite-lined chutes and cascading over multiple waterfalls, some as high as 80 feet. However violent and dangerous this sounds to the person who is not addicted to the extreme, this scene of wet mayhem is only an interlude in their search for the next Class VI rapid and the next 80-foot waterfall.

Also called "steepcreeking" and "hairboating," the sport was born in the mid-1980s, when a small group of kayakers began looking for something more than overcrowded rivers with weekend warriors out in their kayaks and canoes. This group began a concerted effort to find the places where the others would not dare go and they went. Places like Triple Falls on the Little River in North Carolina. Triple falls takes the dauntless kayaker over three waterfalls that total a 125-foot descent. The unwritten rule for "steepcreeking" is: a one-mile stretch of the river must drop at least 250 feet to be a suitable venue.

Riding the Rapids: How to Start Out Whitewater Rafting

The best way to start whitewater rafting is by booking a whitewater rafting "adventure" organized by and guided by professionals. When looking for the right place to go, read the literature very carefully. You should know what you are looking for, and understand what you are getting. If you are after danger and the thrill ride of your life, you'll easily find a place that

will supply it. If, on the other hand, you are looking for a fun-filled family adventure, minus the 'extreme adrenaline cocktail', you will just as easily find a place that is happy to oblige.

The term "whitewater" refers to the color of rushing river water when its being churned up by a combination of the river's speed and any obstruction that tries to slow it down or make it change course (obstructions like rapids -- large rocks in the water --- and waterfalls). This combination of fast water and obstructions is what turns a mild ride into a wild ride.

In the literature for the whitewater rafting adventures, you will get a hint about the 'attitude' of the potential adventure if they mention the "class" of the whitewater areas they traverse. There are actually six classes of whitewater, as designated by the International standard called the International Grading System.

Class 1 is actually an absence of whitewater -- no rocks and no waterfalls

Class 2 has some whitewater areas but they are considered mild and easy to navigate through or around.

Class 3 has some whitewater areas that are more difficult than Class 2 but generally considered safe for large whitewater rafts.

Class 4 gets you into whitewater that is too rough for the inexperienced rafter to attempt without having a highly experienced guide. The rapids are trick and can capsize a raft if not approached properly.

Class 5 indicates an area where the wise rafter should actually scout the area before attempting to run it. At class 5 there may be areas that are impassible (safely) for the raft or that need to be approached with extreme caution.

Class 6 whitewater is so rough it may spell disaster for even the most experienced rafter. A raft in a class 6 area is in extreme danger, which is why you will not find a reputable company that will normally advertise these whitewater conditions for their potential customers without a warning.

There are some things that are safety "musts" in the whitewater-rafting arena:

You must wear a well fitting life jacket and know how to swim in it.

If you plan on paddling the raft at any point in the experience, you must be sure that you are physically fit enough to do it. Paddling the raft is hard and tense work that requires intense concentration and physical stamina -- especially during the more severe conditions.

You must never raft alone in whitewater conditions.

You must plan to be off the water when the sun sets.

You must understand what is expected of you. Every person in the raft in whitewater conditions has a job to do -- even if it is just moving to one side of the raft or the other when the guide says to do it.

You should, for your own safety, take a water safety class before you set out for your rafting adventure and you really should read everything possible about rafting safety.

In most cases you will find that rivers are tamer in the summer than they are in the spring -- this is due to the runoff from melting snow in the spring. Rainy seasons also have the effect of making a river run faster. You'll find the slowest rivers, rivers with the least water volume and with more hazards on the east coast and faster rivers with a higher water volume on the west coast.

If you book a rafting adventure, the company will supply most of the essentials but there are some other things you should plan to bring:

- In the spring and fall you'll need a wetsuit along with appropriate footwear that either ties on or straps on your foot. You will also need:
- Waterproof sunscreen or sun block
- Bug spray
- A change of clothes (appropriate for the season)
- Sunglasses that you don't mind losing or sunglasses with a neck strap

Kayaking to the Extreme: Man Against Nature

A kayak is a small boat with a cockpit where the kayaker sits. The cockpit has a piece of waterproof material (called a spray skirt or a spraydeck) that is designed to be secured around the kayaker's waist and keep water out of the cockpit. This makes the kayak almost unsinkable unless it runs into something, like a big rock, and develops a hole.

While a kayak may be virtually unsinkable, it is easily capsized (turned upside down) which, considering that the kayaker is more or less tied into the cockpit, makes it the kayaker's least favorite position. As you would expect, the first thing a kayaker learns is how to recover from that upside down position. The kayak is moved through the water with a single paddle that has two blades, rather than the single blade you normally associate with a paddle.

The recreational kayaker will take a leisurely paddle down a river and "shoot" right through some mild (slow) rapids. However, when confronted with whitewater (dangerous rapids or waterfalls) the recreational kayaker will portage (carry the kayak) around them. Not so the extreme kayaker. The extreme kayaker not only anticipates dangerous rapids and high waterfalls, the extreme kayaker looks for them.

Whitewater areas on rivers have six classifications in what is known as the International Grading System. The easiest whitewater to navigate is called Class I and the nearly impossible to navigate is called Class VI. These classifications change as the river or the whitewater itself changes from season to season or, sometimes, from day to day.

Here is a rundown of the six classes from Wikipedia
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitewater#Classification_of_whitewater):

Class 1: no rapids, smooth flowing water

Class 2: some rough water--the line is easy to see and pursue

Class 3: whitewater but very safe for larger rafts; kayakers and canoeists should have good rolling or self-rescue skills

Class 4: whitewater for experienced paddlers only; the route through the rapids may require quick maneuvering

Class 5: whitewater for advanced paddlers; scouting the rapid may be required, and there may be hidden hazards, which require precise maneuvering

Class 6: impassable or exploratory; for teams of experts, taking all safety precautions

The extreme kayaker's world of pure adrenalin consists of billions of gallons of water powering its way through narrow canyons, pouring down granite-lined chutes and cascading over multiple waterfalls, some as high as 80 feet. However violent and dangerous this sounds to the person who is not addicted to the extreme, this scene of wet mayhem is only an interlude in their search for the next Class VI rapid and the next 80-foot waterfall.

Also called "steepcreeking" and "hairboating", many of these extreme kayak adventures are organized by American Whitewater (<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/>) a group that has a goal of protecting and nurturing the enjoyment of America's rivers. The sport was born in the mid-1980s, when a small group of kayakers began looking for something more than overcrowded rivers with weekend warriors out in their kayaks and canoes.

This group began a concerted effort to find the places where the others would not dare go and they went. Places like Triple Falls on the Little River in North Carolina. Triple falls takes the dauntless kayaker over three waterfalls that total a 125-foot descent. The unwritten rule for "steepcreeking" is: a one-mile stretch of the river must drop at least 250 feet to be a suitable venue.

Kayak designs have changed along with the sport. Extreme kayakers require more maneuverability and a tougher hull on their kayaks and kayak designers have responded with new styles and new materials. It should be a surprise to no one that safety among the extreme kayak community is a big issue and some extreme kayakers are worried that those concerns will attempt to ruin their fun.

Extreme kayaking, whatever you call it, is evolving and maturing and while it may or may not get safer, it will always provide the adrenaline high that gives extreme sports their reputation. Extreme sport, remember, isn't a death wish or even a desire to take wild and ridiculous chances. Extreme sport is about an individual challenging him or her to beat the odds, regardless of the odds. It is about an individual achieving a level of focus, determination and

resultant accomplishment that that individual had previously doubted him or herself capable of achieving.

Join the Polar Bear Club: Try Ice Swimming!

It is the depth of winter, and your friends are heading out for some sports activity. Of course, what comes to your mind is ice skating, skiing, or maybe even snowboarding. But upon closer observation, you notice that their gym bag is filled with towels and bathing suits. Where are they going? You may be surprised to hear that ice swimming is growing in popularity. Long since popular in Finland, ice swimming is a trend that combines the refreshing properties of a dip in the water at freezing temperatures with the thrill seeking spirit that is so common to many Americans.

As with any sport, there are some suggestions to make this swimming adventure if not enjoyable, at least somewhat more bearable:

Don't enter the swimming hole straight from a sauna or other highly heated environment. While it makes sense to stay warm in the winter, exchanging an overly hot environment for an overly cold one may wreak havoc with your body. Instead, gradually cool yourself down so that the dip into the icy water will not be a shock to your system. Once you come out, however, by all means head for the warmest spot you can find!

Do not dive. Diving in these freezing temperatures may shock your brain and you may very likely fall unconscious and never reach the surface again. Instead, keep your head above water at all times. Additionally, diving may disorient you and you may find yourself underneath the ice, unable to find the way back to the hole.

Do not go ice swimming by yourself. Even if you think this is a great regimen for keeping fit and healthy and you love to plunge in at six in the morning, be sure to have somebody with you who are physically capable of getting you out of the water if you get into trouble.

Find a safe place to swim. A hole in the ice is not enough. Instead, be sure that there is a ladder secured for easy access, as well as a safe access path to leave the ice and reach terra firma again.

Consider wearing surfing boots. These will help your feet to stay somewhat warm, protect them from shards of ice, and help you to have a good steady walk on the ice. After getting out of the cold water, the last thing you want to experience is a slip and fall on the frozen lake!

Have a nice warm place to go to after getting out. A sauna would be perfect, but a hot tub or even warm bathtub will do.

As you can well imagine, a dip in an icy lake is invigorating, and many ice swimmers enjoy making this a frequent event. As a matter of fact, a number of ice swimming clubs, referred to as Polar Bear Clubs, have sprung up around the nation. Many have websites that feature a group of friends who will get together once or twice a week for a nice dip in the frigid waters.

Men and women, young and old, athletic and not so buff, all join together. In a friendly atmosphere everybody jumps in, stays in for a few minutes or remains for a quarter of an hour. Sometimes they horse around in the water, and other times they do not.

Since these groups are so large, they usually go to the nearest beach rather than cutting a hole into the ice of a lake. Very often during these club events paramedics are standing by to ensure the safety of all participants. Many polar bear clubs require their members to visit their physician prior to the onset of swimming season just to make sure their systems can take the shock of the water. All clubs insist that member will sign a release so as to hold the club harmless from any claims in case there is an accident.

After all, membership is entirely voluntary, and since there are no medals or ribbons to win, there is no pressure to stay in the water longer than one feels comfortable doing. Onlookers are never far away, and sometimes these onlookers will turn into ice swimming enthusiasts themselves! How about you? Are you ready to give it a try?

No Sleeping Allowed in the Sport of Wakeboarding

What do you think of when you hear the word "wakeboarding?" Wakeboarding is a bit like snowboarding except for the fact that it is on the water. It is a bit like water skiing, though you do not use water skis you use a board. If you are confused keep reading, as this article will take a closer look at the sport and some of the terms that wakeboard enthusiasts frequently use.

A-Frame: this term describes a rail that is shaped in the form of an "A."

Bail: describes when you fall on your wakeboard.

Blind: is where the wakeboarder has the handle and their back facing the boat.

Bonk: touching your board on an obstacle.

Case: landing right on top of the wake in an abrupt fashion.

Core: the material inside that is used in a wakeboard.

Digger: a bad wreck

Dock Start: the rider can either stand and leap off the dock as the boat goes or sits on the edge of the dock and slide off.

Eye-Opener: you land so fast on the water you do not have time to close your eyes.

Fat Sack: this is a sack that is filled with water and placed in the boat to make the wake bigger.

Glass: referring to smooth water.

Jib: riding the wakeboard on anything this is not water.

Mobius: This invert contains at least a 360-degree spin in it.

Nose: the tip that is closest to the end of the boat

Pop: this is when you release from the wake and you generate pop.

Wakeboarding is a combination of several sports and goes back many years. Those who enjoy this sport use a board called a Skurfer, which is a hybrid of a water ski and a surfboard. While the wakeboarder is on their board, they are tethered to a boat that pulls them. The objective of the wakeboarder is to jump up and through the wakes doing tricks and trying not to crash.

When wakeboarding first began, there were no straps that held the feet to the board, but that all changed around 1985 when the first straps for the foot were drilled onto the board. This was a great advancement in the sport because without the foot straps, the athletes could not do higher jumps or get bigger air. The straps made the sport more dynamic and free flowing. Prior to wakeboarding, the name of this sport was called skiboarding. Wakeboarding can be done whether you are four years old to eighty years old and anywhere in between.

The shape of the wakeboard has changed several times over the past few years. Now these boards have reached the design that they are today and allow the wakeboarder to gain big air and do exciting aerial tricks. This scores big points with the judges and spectators.

If you want to learn how to use a wakeboard, there are lessons available anywhere that you find a sufficient amount of water. The lessons vary depending on what you want to learn. You can learn to launch with one lesson or have more than five lessons. It all depends on what you want to know. In California, they have the following types of lessons:

The Launch: this is a great package for any skill level, as you will learn any trick you want to know about from beginning to advance. This lesson is approximately three to four hours long.

The Local: this is a great lesson for the wakeboarder who has some experience and want to learn more techniques and tricks that will advance you to the next level of wakeboarding.

The Competitor: this package is for the serious wakeboarder who seeks continual improvement. With this package, you will be given three separate lessons.

The Pro: if you want to learn how to ride like a pro this package is for you. You will receive five separate lessons and can work on whatever you believe your need is to become an expert at wakeboarding.

Lessons on Your Boat: this is a great lesson for those who prefer to ride behind their own boat. You simply hire an instructor who will give you the same quality lessons you would get if you had taken them without your boat.

