

## Adventure Travel

## ★ PADDLING IN GEORGIAN BAY

## Kayak experience means chilling out the hard way

Mastering 'wet exits' survival key

Channel follows voyageur route

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

KILLARNEY, ONT.—I'm wrapped in a condom and headed out to sea. Although that's what it feels like, I'm actually stuffed inside a rubber kayak sprayskirt and on Georgian Bay.

It's all part of the "Intro to Kayaking" excursion, conducted by Killarney Mountain Lodge, an adventure outfitter 75 kilometres southwest of Sudbury.

A few moments earlier, our group of four had completed a safety orientation in the lodge's swimming pool.

"Mastering wet exits (escaping from a capsized kayak) is critical to your survival," says Kyle, our lead guide. Although being submerged headfirst in frigid water at 9 a.m. wasn't my idea of the best way to kick off a long weekend, I figured once it was done, the worst was over.

I was wrong. Gale-force winds meant we would be confined to Killarney Channel. Known in Ojibway as Shebahonaning, or "safe canoe channel," it is protected from direct exposure to Georgian Bay by George Island and is a natural passageway once used by voyageurs on the fur trade route from Montreal to Thunder Bay.

Now, the rest of the group was paddling, as instructed, down the channel. I, despite my best efforts, was heading in the opposite direction — towards the open waters of Georgian Bay.

"Excuse me, somebody," I shout. "How do I turn around?" "Sweep hard to the left," yells Kyle. Several sweeps later, I'm going in the right direction but



Kayakers negotiate the Killarney channel, known in Ojibway as Shebahonaning, or 'safe canoe channel.' The waterway is sheltered from the harsh weather of Georgian Bay.

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still 50 metres behind the group. Gael, the other guide, falls back and becomes my personal cheerleader and tourism expert.

"Way to go," he says. Uumph, I hit his kayak with bumper-car force.

"Remember, feather your paddle to stop," he says, pausing to point out Our Lady of Lourdes shrine on George Island.

I catch a glimpse of blue and white before I'm in the path of a cruise liner. More big sweeps to the left and I'm aiming for the dock — backwards.

"Great effort," he says. "Keep it

up. See that commercial fish boat? And Herbert's Fish and Chips beside it? People fly their floatplanes in just to eat there."

Stretching for 48,500 hectares, Killarney Provincial Park is one of Ontario's eight wilderness parks and boasts the rocky remains of the 2-billion-year-old La Cloche mountain range. As we near Killarney Bay at the end of the channel, a landscape of churning blue water and rocky ridges lies before me. I consider my aching arms.

"How far is that gourmet kayak trip on Sunday?" I ask, thinking

that we must have covered several kilometres by now.

"Very short — only 10 kilometres," says Gael. "And look, today you've already done one kilometre."

I reach inside my windbreaker for my water bottle. Within seconds, I'm looking at my reflection and realize I'm going over.

Face first, paddle lost, I'm soon upside down under the kayak.

My ears fill with icy water and then my nose. This is a familiar feeling. I think back to 9 a.m. and pull the ripcord. The kayak skirt releases and I bounce to

the surface like a fishing bobber.

"First capsized of the season," announces Gael, pulling his kayak up within seconds. Out comes the emergency kit. Despite his surfer-dude appearance, his kit is very well equipped. In addition to bandages, he totes a bag of Gummy Bears. "They boost a victim's blood sugar in the event of a crisis," he explains.

From adventurer to victim in under 60 seconds. But, apart from lead shoes and Q-tip hair, I'm okay and slide back into the kayak. "You recovered really

well after 'the incident,'" he says, as we paddle back. "Most people would have given up."

I didn't know that was an option. But I do ask if Sunday's gourmet kayak lunch can be delivered to my room.

► Killarney Mountain Lodge is on the north shore of Georgian Bay. It's open May 5 to Oct. 21. Visit [www.killarney.com](http://www.killarney.com) or call 1-800-461-1117.

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