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# What the WATER Can Give You

BY GEORGIA GREGORY

WATER COVERS 70 PER CENT OF THE EARTH – IT ONLY MAKES SENSE TO USE THIS WONDROUS, UNPREDICTABLE EXPANSE FOR OUR OWN PEACE OF MIND AND BODY.

It was Leonardo da Vinci who said, “Water is the driving force of all nature” – and, as humans, part of Nature, it is no wonder we find an irresistible connection with the source itself.

We gravitate towards water in flocks of friends and family or in simple solitude, with wide eyes and an intense curiosity. People pay higher prices for houses close to the beach – and the views aren’t the only advantage. The ocean has always been a traditional place where people have gone to heal, both physically and emotionally. When you hear the sound of waves, the wave patterns in your brain are altered to induce a tranquil state of mind, decreasing stress and other health problems.

While calming the mind, healing wounds, reducing pain, improving skin conditions, and flushing out toxins, it also inspires your creative side and sense of being at one with Nature.

It’s also the impulsive nature of the water that sparks the interest, because no matter how good you are, open-water sports can always provide a challenge in variable conditions.

While it’s hard to get your head around a sport being a leisure activity, it often tends to be the balance of place, mental space, and physical conditioning water sports provide that draw people in for the long run.

Therefore, this summer, in an attempt to avoid the heat while still wondering at the beauty Australia has to offer, consider trying one of these water sports that will leave your fish-like tendencies hooked and enjoy the break from your typically hectic life.

## STAND-UP PADDLE SURFING

Stand-up paddle surfing has proved to be a popular pursuit among young and old, requiring the right amount of fitness, finesse, and coordination to really succeed at the sport.

The first stand-up paddle surfers emerged in Waikiki in the early 1950s, when the post-war tourism boom saw Matson cruise liners deposit thousands of thrill-hungry Americans on the beach under the shadow of Diamond Head. Naturally, they wanted to try their hand at the new sport of surfing under the expert guidance of a Waikiki beachboy. And there were plenty of beachboys up for the job. Not only was their job to teach, but also to provide the photographic evidence that the foreigners were action-seekers. After all, there was no point risking life and limb in the pounding breakers unless you had a photo to prove it.

It was then that one of the Ah Choy brothers came up with the ingenious idea of standing on the board with the camera and riding the wave to capture the moment. Thus, inadvertently, a new style of surfing was born, originally known as ‘beachboy surfing’.

Beachboy John Zabatocky, who started to surf with a paddle so he could take photos, soon adopted paddle surfing as his surfing discipline – and the sport grew from there as more and more people realised how much fun this aspect of surfing could be.

However, don’t be alarmed if you only heard of this sport in recent years – or even just now, reading this article – because in the past five years the sport has really taken off as the benefits and pleasure it provides have spread.

Stand Up Paddle Surf Australia (SUP) introduced the sport to Australia in 2002 through world champion tandem surfer Chris de Aboitiz and his business partner Hayden Stintman. Starting in Noosa Heads, Queensland, they both then took a road trip to Bondi Beach, introducing the sport to beaches along the way. Chris has now moved on, but Hayden, at 28 years of age, has the youth and enthusiasm to take the sport to the next level.

SUP is now run by Hayden, a Noosa local who was an avid surfer until a back injury caused him to give up surfing and turn to stand-up paddle. After learning from the best (Chris de Aboitiz), Hayden developed a passion for stand-up paddle boarding, which has rehabilitated his back injury so he can now surf again.

Stand-up paddle boarding is low impact, high in pleasure, and above all has amazing health benefits – it’s Pilates, yoga and sport all wrapped up in one.



“Stand-up paddle surfing is a perfect activity for middle-aged men and women because of its great core workout.”  
- Hayden Stintman

“Stand-up paddle surfing is a perfect activity for middle-aged men and women because of its great core workout,” Hayden says. “As we get older, this part of our anatomy starts to fail, so it is important to keep using our muscles in the correct way.

“However, if stand-up paddle surfing is self-taught, damage to your core can happen; so lessons by professional instructors is important. It’s easy to learn with an instructor, but if self-taught you can easily get it wrong, just like a bad golf stroke.”



This sport is enjoyed particularly by women, who tend to take up the challenge with more ease than their often-more-confident male counterparts. “Women have an advantage over men for several reasons,” explains Hayden. “Their weight is less, and they tend to be shorter than men and therefore have less pendulum effect. It’s also a sport that does not require muscle, but is instead focused on technique. So where men tend to over-muscle it, women are more patient. As well as this, when instructing men and women, the women listen and the men just want to go out and get into it. It takes a lot more patience than people think.”

While persistence is the key, as with most sports, the technique is easy to master with instruction on flat water. “The lessons we provide usually start with 10 minutes of on-land instruction, and then it’s onto the board where the rest of the instruction is done,” states Hayden. “The whole process takes about an hour and a half, and it’s always fun. The challenge most people find is when or if they choose to hit the surf.”

Operating from beautiful Noosa Heads and Rainbow Beach (just north of Noosa Heads, in Queensland), SUP holds its sessions in the Noosa River, where it is safe and scenic. On one side of the river, there are multimillion-dollar houses, and on the other side is the mangrove wilderness. You will also see a variety of wildlife including turtles, fish, stingrays, and birds of all colours.

SUP is the longest-running and most established stand-up surf school in Australia. The company offers group and private lessons, fitness, team building, and competition skills training for kids, adults, school and corporate groups. There is a range of classes, from sunset paddles and ladies classes to demo days if you are interested in buying a paddle board.

This easy-on-the-body and calming sport can provide an immense amount of enjoyment for all those involved and for all ages. It can also challenge those who wish to be pushed. The more experienced stand-up paddle riders use their bodies and paddle to twist and turn the board onto waves, where long-board surfing techniques take over. So if you’ve always wanted to ‘hang ten’, this is the sport that can get you there.

#### SEA KAYAKING

David Fisher, President of the NSW Sea Kayak Club and a CFO himself, knows how business life is full of complexities and pressure – and the water is where he can leave all of that behind. “The sea can offer some amazing experiences with whales, dolphins, turtles, penguins. I’ve experienced all of this inside and outside the Sydney Harbour environments in my kayak,” says David.

Sea kayaking not only provides great self-improvement but also gives the body a bit of the mental and physical exercise it needs. “Sea kayaking helps build strength, particularly in



the core and upper-body areas, endurance and persistence,” David says.

What is unexpected for many is how sea kayaking challenges the mind. “Kayaking offshore challenges our fears of open water and sharks,” comments David. “The NSW Sea Kayak Club has a healthy degree of in-house training and continuing education that inevitably puts us outside our comfort zone. The shared experiences with each other are always very encouraging and positive.”

Ultimately, the physical perks of kayaking develop into the softer areas of friendships and social networking. “Combining the friendship with the fitness and skills to paddle on remote parts of the Australian coastline [is the ultimate perk],” states David. “When the adventure of the open ocean beckons, the team comes into play in supporting one another. In our club, we focus on the recreation and the adventure and don’t race each other; we paddle as a group. We focus on sticking together; and in times of challenge, such as a capsize, the group really does need to pull together as one. I remember being part of a group that towed a gentleman on the open ocean for 12 kilometres because he had hurt himself. Of course, this was unusual but not unheard of.”

The adventuring doesn’t require fitness at all to start with. The NSW Sea Kayak Club has fairly strict ability levels that are adhered to, so there are trips and training tailored to all levels whether beginner, intermediate or advanced.

David admits that persistence pays off fairly quickly, and after a few times one can get the hang of it. “Of course, I’d be lying if I said fitness and flexibility aren’t important,” mentions David. “However, paddling skills, a positive attitude, and confidence can be mighty assets to have on your side where fitness might be lacking.

“We train regularly in drills, including self-rescuing and rescuing each other. You need to know how to get back in when you find yourself capsized somewhere offshore in deep water away from land. We incorporate some drills into our regular trips, and other times we hold specific training events, often in challenging sea conditions.

“Kayaking has given me physical exercise, self-improvement, and a refreshing camaraderie with my social network within the club that includes all walks of life, people you’d likely never otherwise meet but for the shared interest in kayaking.

“The social side of the club is the most prized and underrated benefit, like when you get invited to join a group on a trip. I recently enjoyed a 12-day trip paddling and camping around the Whitsunday group of islands, enjoying areas like the Molle Islands and Whitehaven Beach. A couple of other highlights were a three-day trip from Port Stephens to Forster and a five-day trip along the Nadgee Wilderness coast in southern New South Wales. I also regularly paddle in Sydney Harbour and along the Sydney coastline.”

It is always different, and your skills are responsible for your making headway in meeting what the sea and weather conditions send your way.

The NSW Sea Kayak Club primarily offers trips, training and the club magazine. Club trip leaders run a mixture of trips to suit all levels throughout the year, some regular weekly events, and other ad hoc day or weekend overnight trips – perfect for the busy but adventurous businessman. •



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For more information on Stand up Paddle Surf, please visit [standuppaddlesurf.com.au](http://standuppaddlesurf.com.au).

For more information on Sea Kayaking NSW, [nswseakayaker.asn.au](http://nswseakayaker.asn.au).

