



FISH ARE JUMPIN'



phers with expensive equipment) are unlikely to capsize in calm waters. **3. "PLAY KAJAKS": 'SIT-ON-TOP', 'SURF' KAYAKS.** Using the traditional kayak paddling and sitting techniques, these unsinkable, light, and short boats (up to 3.5 meters) are a cross between kayaks and surfboards. Some are designed specifically for surf, while others may feature two seats for short jaunts in and out of the water. Many sports fishermen have adopted sit-on-tops as the perfect vehicle for setting up the poles and kicking back with beer, book, sandwich, or smoke in hand.

Technically, kayaking is easy. The famous underwater roll and the emergency exit (exiting the cockpit whilst submerged underwater) are used mostly in white-water kayaking. The latter situation, however, should be practiced with a tutor in shallow calm water just in case. You should only get into a kayak if you are a good swimmer able to swim under water. Particularly in the sea, beware of shallow waters. Capsizing in one-meter or two-meter depth over an irregular floor is more problematic than in three meters of unobstructed water. Also beware of the sea's current and waves. Shore waves, depending on their size and the weight of your kayak, can throw it against you forcefully. Don't put in a heavy kayak when the waves are taller than 50 cms. Even then, it's difficult and dangerous.

Beginners will probably have to use a number of 'damage control' strokes such as paddling backward to brake or to correct turning. Even advanced paddlers routinely use corrective strokes, albeit less dramatic. After a few times on the water, paddling is a subconscious affair and the boat goes where you want it to, most of the time.

Steering presents the greatest challenge to the beginner, and specific movements are either eased or hindered by the type of boat. Broadly, shorter boats are easier to turn and longer boats are easier to keep in a

straight line. Accurate steering is via a combination of subtle (and not always obvious) stroke variations that are beyond the scope of this article but probably well documented on the Web. In the most general terms possible, paddle close to the boat and all along it to go forward, and behind you and away from the boat for turning toward the other side. Beginners will probably have to use a number of 'damage control' strokes such as paddling backward to brake or to correct turning. Even advanced paddlers routinely use corrective strokes, albeit less dramatic. Something to aim for is to only occasionally have to paddle twice on the same side, the most efficient propulsion being one stroke on each side. After a few times on the water, paddling is a subconscious affair and the boat goes where you want it to, most of the time. As to proper handling of the paddle, keep one fist always tight (right hand if you're right-handed) and let the paddle pivot before tightening your other fist and stroking on that side (paddle blades are always set at a right angle from one another in order to prevent the blade that is up in the air and moving forward from catching the wind).

THE RIVER AND WETLANDS EXPERIENCE IN ANDALUSIA

Flowing or tidal, rivers worldwide are all different, but they're all the same: usually silty, occasionally smelly and mosquito-ridden, but always frequented by countless animal species and embellished by water-loving flora. Andalusia is home to the Guadalquivir, Spain's largest river, and the Parque de Doñana at its mouth is often said to be Europe's most important wildlife sanctuary, famous for flamingoes and lynx among other species.

But you don't need to go to Doñana to experience the region's endless variety of fauna and flora. If you're really going to get away from the roads and noise, you can do so only by foot or in a kayak. Between Conil and Málaga, there are at least six rivers flowing into the sea that are navigable in kayak: Río Salado (Conil), Río Barbate (Barbate, Vejer), Río de la Jara (Tarifa), Río Palmones (Algeciras), Río Guadarranque (Algeciras), Río Guadiaro (San Roque), and Río Guadalhorce (Málaga).

In addition, the man-made inland reservoirs these rivers flow from or through are wonderful places to kayak, and there are plenty of inland rivers that are navigable throughout the year. You can also kayak on the sea with the right equipment and weather conditions. Of the aforementioned coastal rivers close to Tarifa, hundreds of kilometers are navigable throughout the year but winter rain opens up the water paths much further into the interior, so that week-long trips are possible. Possibly the best time to kayak is early spring, with the water level still high and Andalusia's tropical and early-blossoming flora at its most spectacular.

For this article the photographer and writer took a two-day trip on the nearby Río Barbate (mouth on the coast at town of Barbate, just before Caños de Meca). We were nervous about the 3,000 of camera equipment we took along, and without water housing, we weren't able to take all the wildlife shots we would have wanted to. Wildlife photography is difficult in any case, but sitting in a kayak even more so. You have to set aside the paddle and hope that the natural movement of your boat isn't excessive. This problem is worsened if you're using a telephoto objective. With other lenses you have to be successful in approaching the animals and preparing your shot before they flee. I won't get into the system Hervé used to keep the camera dry and change lenses as needed. We had to cover distance so we needed to take pictures onboard but it's probably more relaxing to shoot from the shore or, in the absence of dry housing and a body for each lens, to use a cheaper and smaller point-and-shoot camera despite its limitations. Another tried and tested option is not to take pictures at all...

ON THE RÍO BARBATE

The Río Barbate is the heart of the hydrological system including, from north to south, the Embalse (reservoir) de Barbate and Embalse del