

The STAYCATION WINDFALL for the UK

With international travel for the remainder of 2021 under new levels of scrutiny by the UK government and confusion at what can and cannot be undertaken, the Paddler has taken a look at several UK destinations that may tickle the palette of paddlesport aficionados, embracing the so-called 'staycation'. Maybe something here could give you inspiration, so here we go from north to south...

Oban, Scotland

North Northumberland and Berwickshire



OBAN, SCOTLAND

Nothing can match the feeling of paddling around a headland and seeing the world open up in front of you. In Oban, on the west coast of Scotland, our lives are filled with these moments. We perch on the fringes of the world, where a myriad of islands laps the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

Looking at a map of the waters around Oban, you can easily understand why the sea was once a thoroughfare, not a barrier. Patches of land lie dotted in a blue expanse of maritime highways. Oban is the Gateway to the Isles, and Calmac Ferries run steadily in and out of the harbour. Thanks to the Scottish Canoe Association, kayaks travel free on the ferries, so with nothing more than a trolley, a foot passenger ticket and a sense of adventure, the intrepid paddler can launch themselves out across the Hebrides.

But many of the best destinations aren't reached by ferry. Many of the smaller islands just off the mainland used to be inhabited. The Garvellachs were home to monks living in beehive cells; Belnahua, one of the slate islands, housed a densely packed population of quarrymen and their families, despite no water source. Further north lies the remains of lime kilns carved out of the hillside. All these are testament to the fact that long before roads and trains, goods and people travelled this stretch of coast. Now, they make perfect camp spots for paddlers.

The interplay of land and water creates a fantastic range of conditions for sea kayakers. North of Oban, the scenery is dominated by mountains and sounds narrow into sheltered sea lochs. Paddling south, the sea takes over. To the west of the main islands – Luing, Scarba, Jura, Islay – you can be exposed to the full force of the Atlantic. Here, there is nothing between you and America.

Sneak around the inside, however, and you enter a very long funnel. The sea, which had plenty of space flowing into the Sound of Jura between Islay and Gigha, becomes ever more squeezed as it pushes northwards, left with no choice but to force itself out through the tiny gaps of the Corryvreckan, Grey Dogs and Sound of Luing. Get your tidal planning right, and there's up to seven knots of free ride and plenty of fun. Get it wrong, and you'll be faced with the world's third-largest whirlpool.

Wildlife, too, loves strong tides and varied coastlines. Common and grey seals tag along behind kayakers. Otters dive in and out of the kelp, snatching crustaceans from the seabed. Sea eagles, first reintroduced on Mull, have spread and now nest along the coast. Porpoises and dolphins follow the mackerel migrations. Minke and even humpback whales visit occasionally. Black guillemots nest in Oban's harbour wall.

The west coast of Scotland is, without doubt, one of the most superb and versatile paddling destinations in the world. Oban is one of its highlights.

Sea Kayak Oban offers trips, courses and expeditions for all levels from beginner to expert, as well as BC qualifications and custom bookings. Our shop specialises in quality kayaking equipment and clothing, and we hold one of the largest sea kayak demo fleets in the UK.

Web: www.seakayakoban.com

Mail: adventures@seakayakoban.com

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND AND BERWICKSHIRE

Having lived and worked here, mainly on the water, since 1999 I can wholeheartedly recommend the area for your UK staycation – from two days to two weeks, you will find plenty of paddling adventures to make you happy.

This area has to be one of the best intermediate sea kayaking venues on the east coast. We also have a fantastically wild touring river to boot with a few interesting tributaries.

The sea kayaking is suitable for most paddlers, but I would not recommend it for beginners to the sport looking to take their first paddle strokes on saltwater. This is due to the exposed nature of the coastline and the North Sea – a shallow body of water, relatively speaking, it used to be a big estuary! The North Sea has a reputation amongst sailors as a bit unpredictable, mainly because of its tidal flow up and down the east coast. Although we don't have the biggest tides, just over five metres at big springs, there are a few areas where the tide gets squeezed and can run at five knots at its maximum.

The main highlight must surely be the Incredible Farnes Islands – possibly the most highly populated and varied sea bird breeding site within five miles of the UK coastline in the summer and a very important Grey seal pupping area in the winter months (up to 2,500 in the last few years). The National Trust manages the Farnes Islands, with strict rules as to where and when you can land, so please contact Ollie Jay, Active 4 Seasons, to get the latest information so as not to rock the boat inadvertently.

The next highlight would be the fabulous St. Abbs headland just across the Scottish border. Impressive coloured cliffs with sea stacks and caves to explore out with the sea bird breeding season. In the summertime, the cliffs are full of breeding sea birds, now including the Northern Gannet (our biggest sea bird).

Lastly, the fabulous River Tweed and its tributaries must get a mention as one of the least paddled major UK rivers. A source to sea 97 miles from Tweedsmuir to the Historic Berwick upon Tweed, the most northerly town in England. This would be a once in a lifetime adventure. It has been paddled by canoe in 15 hours for those who aspire to race these things, but it is well worth a four or five-day gentle jaunt!

The coastal strip becomes very busy during the school holidays, so I recommend heading north to Berwick upon Tweed or inland to Belford or Wooler to get away from the crowds. There is a wide range of accommodation available from hotels to campsites.

Berwick Youth Hostel has some excellent family rooms, Pot A Doodle Do, just south of Berwick, have heated wigwam huts for four people and yurts. Top quality guest houses include The Gables, near Duddo, and the Market Cross in Belford. Campsites include Budle Bay and Paxton House on the River Tweed.

Active 4 Seasons, run by Ollie Jay, has operated in the area since 1999. The most experienced and highly qualified coach and guide in the area. We can offer guiding, coaching, and boat hires for those not wanting to bring their equipment across the country. We also offer rock climbing, coaststeering and history bike tours for those looking to keep their feet dry for the day.

Web: <http://active4seasons.co.uk>



Eilean nan Caorach Maja, Oban

St. Abbs headland





Strangford Lough

STRANGFORD LOUGH, NORTHERN IRELAND

Ireland, as a paddlesport destination, is well known for its world-class sea kayaking. The Atlantic coastline and its thousands of island have attracted paddlers from all over the world.

Often overlooked is the fantastic network of inland waterways, lakes and our amazing sea loughs. Some have been developed as canoe trails in Northern Ireland and blue ways in the Republic of Ireland.

For UK paddlers looking for a place to visit, may I draw your attention to the biggest sea lough in the UK and Ireland, namely Strangford Lough.

Strangford Lough, designated as Northern Ireland's first Marine Nature Reserve, is one of the most richly bio-diverse regions in Europe, with over 2,000 marine

species spread across 150km². When journeying between the hundreds of islands, you will often come across otters, common and grey seals, arctic terns, porpoises and on occasion, you may be lucky enough to view a passing Orca!

My intrigue with Strangford Lough started some 25 years ago, and from that time, I have paddled sea kayaks, canoes and SUPs on the lough most weeks. What lures me back is the promise that no two days will be the same. I have had unbelievable experiences, from watching otters fish within four metres to cheeky young seals coming to nuzzle our sea kayaks. At the other end of the spectrum, the lough has provided adrenaline-filled days with great friends playing on the bar mouth's tide races and overfalls. Big downwind runs in gale-force winds and playing on the wave at the Angus Rock have all added to the magic of this place.



Snowdonia & North Wales

The high point for me must be the shared experiences with family, on camping trips out to Salt Island, when the kids were toddlers and now paddling among the islands with my teenage daughter: I have had many memorable days introducing novices on Tollymore National Outdoor Centre's Discover and Explore sea kayaking, canoe and SUP courses, through to training advanced sea leaders and coaches. Strangford is such an enchanting environment; it truly has something to offer all paddlers irrespective of their age, ability or experience.

If exploring our heritage is of interest to you, two prominent National Trust properties, Mount Stewart and Castleward, overlook the lough and can be easily accessed from the shore. For further information, visit the Strangford Canoe Trail: www.canoeni.com/canoe-trails/strangford-lough/

Logistics. Getting here is easy, with Belfast only a stone's throw away, Dublin airport is a straightforward two-hour motorway drive, and you also have a choice of ferry ports within easy reach. Some several small villages and towns border the lough shore, making it easy to restock with essentials.

Tollymore National Outdoor Centre offer several options for novices and experienced paddlers to access the lough. We stock a broad range of touring SUPs, canoe, sea and touring kayaks and can supply all paddling, camping equipment and experienced leaders on our programmed and bespoke courses. We offer the full range of British Canoeing personal performance, leadership and coaching awards.

Email: admin@tollymore.com
Web: www.tollymore.com

SNOWDONIA & NORTH WALES

Snowdonia and North Wales are incredibly scenic and accessible for paddlers of all craft and all abilities. The many lakes, rivers, estuaries and canals allow for a multitude of options and progressions. Add in the world-famous sea kayaking venues of the Great Orme, Anglesey and the Lleyn Peninsula, and again, you've got a multitude of trips from sedate meanders along the different cliffs and caves to tide races and committing crossings. If you consider basing yourself relatively centrally, then these different environments are all within an hour.

Many of the lakes within the Snowdonia national park, or just on the fringes, allow for access by paddle craft. Places like Llyn Padarn, Llyn Geirionydd and Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake) can all be paddled and are, for the most

part, nestled within the tourist honeypots. Paddle a short distance from the car parks, and you can get the feeling of being away from the crowds. If you were after a family-friendly venue, then the lagoons of Llyn Padarn should be considered as there's plenty of exploration that can be done without the fear of drifting into trouble. Just a little note on access, all the lakes here have pay car parks, and Bala Lake has a small fee for boat launching. All fees go toward the upkeep of the area, including the car parks, launching spots and the wardens.

After more of an adventure? The estuaries and simple tidal journeys of North Wales offer a wide range of varied and interesting journeys for the experienced touring paddler. The Conwy, Mawddach and Dwyryd estuaries provide a good escape with multiple beaches, islands and sandbanks to provide both lunch spots and interest during the trip. These estuaries can be paddled but SUP boarders need to pay attention to the tides as some of the road bridges could feel quite low on headroom. At the right tides, a paddle around the more accessible areas of coastline provides breathtaking views and the potential for jaw-dropping wildlife.

For example, the Menai Straits now have a family of seals living around the cluster island in-between the bridges. Another suggestion could be the Trearddur Bay, Porth Daffarch area, as the coastline between these two bays has a mix of small cliffs and sandy beaches, giving the feel of remoteness with the ability to get out if it's needed. The Moelfre, Benllech area can feel similar but could be quieter on the really busy days/weekends. Both can feel hard work or could be dangerous if the weather and tides haven't been considered.

Venturing further on from these areas will find some of the most iconic sea journeys that North Wales has to offer. The steep cliffs and tide races around the north coast of Holy Island and Anglesey can be a real undertaking for the experienced, but the rewards are well worth it. Good boat/craft handling skills and knowledge of tides and weather are a necessity for these trips. Still, the rewards of otherwise inaccessible islands, looming cliffs and caves, and jaw-dropping wildlife (porpoise, seals and dolphins have been seen around both the Bull Bay and Penrhyn Mawr areas) make these areas very special indeed.

For any information on tides, water levels, trip planning, or weather considerations, see the local guidebooks for detailed information (Welsh rivers, Welsh sea kayaking and Welsh canoe classics); if unsure, seek local knowledge or local guiding/coaching.

Email: info@pyb.co.uk
Web: www.pyb.co.uk

Strangford Lough



North Wales



WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD, BERKSHIRE

Anyone who lives in or has visited the Windsor and Maidenhead area will know how fortunate we are to have the Thames on our doorstep. There are the usual challenges of boats, flow, locks, swans and weirs, but with good preparation and some local knowledge, it is an ideal area to get out on the river.

With Windsor Castle as the leading local attraction and Henley, Marlow and Runnymede's historic towns, there is no shortage of accommodation from camping through to five-star hotels. There is also an extensive choice of activities, coffee shops, pubs and restaurants for time off the water. Home to Bray Lake Watersports, its members, have been paddling the borough for over 40 years and offer up a few of their favourite launch spots from which to enjoy the Thames.



Windsor. Photo: Doug Harding



Bude, North Cornwall



Bray Lake Watersports

When passage permits, lake users can access the Thames from the cut behind the clubhouse. Portage is via a platform down a few steps and, if you are lucky, you may get a glimpse of the elusive but beautiful kingfishers.

Once on the river, it's upstream to Monkey Island, Bray Lock, Maidenhead and Boulters Lock or downstream past the iconic Bray Film Studios, Oakley Court Hotel, Windsor Racecourse and the Church of St Mary Magdalene at Boveney before arriving in Windsor with an iconic view of the castle on your approach to the town.

Hurley Village

Off-road parking is available near the church, with a short walk along the footpath to the lock for launching. Portage is clearly marked next to the public toilets. From here, you can go upstream to Hambledon and Henley, downstream to Marlow and Cookham or enjoy a gentle paddle around the islands to Hurley Weir. Hurley is home of a former Benedictine Priory, and The Olde Bell Inn, in part dates to 1135, was a hostelry to the Priory.

Cookham

The start of the Bray Lake Christmas Paddle for some years now, stopping at Boulters Lock for hot chocolate and mince pies before finishing at the lake. There is on-road parking, and the launch is via a slipway next to the Ferry Inn next to Cookham Bridge. Upstream is Marlow, passing the Bounty, an ideal stop off for a locally brewed beer or lunch. Downstream you pass below the beautiful Cliveden House before reaching Boulters Lock, with its picnic area, café and public toilets. Cookham is recorded in the Domesday Book as Cocheham and was most notably the home of artist Stanley Spencer (for whom there is a permanent exhibition).

Runnymede

There is the main car park with its café and public toilets, but there are several options for parking along this stretch of the river and various opportunities to launch from the bank. Going upstream, you will paddle alongside Prince Albert's Walk in the extensive grounds of Windsor Castle, passing the end of the Jubilee River before reaching Windsor itself. In 1215, Runnymede was the site for the sealing of the Magna Carta. www.braylake.com

BUDE, NORTH CORNWALL

Summer paddling in the UK means surfing, and there is no better or more traditional venue for surf kayaking than Bude in north Cornwall. Kayakers have been coming to Bude since the 1960s with their September pilgrimage known across the country as Bude Week. Indeed Bude has such a high international reputation that it will be hosting the World Surf Kayaking Championships in September 2022.



With numerous beaches and bays both north and south of Bude, you'll be able to find the best waves for everyone. To the north and at low tide, Sandymouth and Northcott Mouth offer vast stretches of sandy coastline and less busy waters. Northcott Mouth, in particular, is worth the visit just for the Cornish cream tea at its rustic tea garden!

Bude itself has a choice of three beaches, with Crooklets Beach being the most exposed and home of Bude's famous Surf Life Saving Club, the first lifeguard club in the country. Middle Beach is a bit rocky at high tide but sandy at low. Then between the river and the seawater swimming pool is Summerleaze Beach, busy with tourists and swimmers during the day; it is an excellent venue either for an early morning or evening session. With a small swell, Summerleaze can be the best beach in the world for learning, but with a larger swell can be technical and dangerous, especially as the tides and rip currents pass the half-tide cross at Cross Rock.

Follow the coast road South for a couple of miles, and you'll arrive at the venue for the 2022 World Surf Kayaking Championships. Widemouth Bay is a vast sandy beach attracting all types of surfer: it can be busy, but it can also provide surf all day long with various peaks to choose from. Black Rock Beach is at the southern end of Widemouth and will be the venue for the World Championships. It has its facilities and access and can be a little quieter than the main beach, undoubtedly worth visiting.

Get organised before you come down. There are no kayak retailers in Bude, the closest being 45 minutes down the A39, but plenty of surf shops. The website Magicseaweed will give you some valuable weather and swell forecasts before you leave home. For most novice surf paddlers, a swell forecast of 1-3 feet will be perfect. A map of the area and a £2 local tide time booklet are great when you are here. Talk to the local surfers, lifeguards and paddlers as they are a great source of the hour by hour knowledge and will know exactly where to go for the best waves at the best tides. And finally, make sure you understand and abide by good surfing etiquette; let's make sure Bude remains a friendly and welcoming place to surf.

For local information, you can always contact Bude resident Simon Hammond, former World Surf Kayak Champion and author of the book Surf Kayaking: The Essential Guide. He runs a small kayak coaching business in the town called Shoreline Extreme Sports and is always happy to provide help or advice.

Email: info@shorelineactivities.co.uk
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Tel: 01288 354039

RIVER MEDWAY, KENT

Known as the Garden of England for its spectacular coastline views, rolling green hills, an abundance of orchards, iconic Oast houses and historic buildings, Kent boasts to both tourists and locals. So, what better way to explore the sights of Kent than from the River Medway – a flowing 70-mile river from West Sussex to Sheerness where it meets the sea.

The perfect setting to unwind, relax and enjoy the countryside, you can paddle underneath the shadows of beautiful woodland and meander through meadows, villages and towns. This used to be a significant trading route back in the day, leaving a river full of history to explore. The majestic river has a diverse ecosystem rich in wildlife, birds and plants. A hidden gem of a river, it's an uncrowded, wide and meandering river, with lots of well-kept canoe passes, portage points and places to stop off and have picnics on your adventures.

Sites along the way include Tonbridge Castle, the stately Allington Castle and the art sculpture park with a good range of pubs to stop off on the banks. There is a range of launch points on the River Medway, including launching from the Paddle Cabin's brand new slipway, giving access to a part of the river that many people haven't discovered, despite it being on their doorstep.

"The Paddle Cabin is your home on the water, a place to come and prioritise time in the outdoors, sit around the campfire post paddle, with gorgeous public footpaths running past. If you do head down to the River Medway, come and say hello - it is our favourite word after all. We would love to share the paddle way of life with you from our woodland home on our favourite river in Kent. Trust us, and it really will make your soul happy." Hayley.

Web: <https://paddlecabin.co.uk>
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THE JERSEY ISLES

Explore an island shaped by the sea where some of the most astonishing tides in the world circle the coast. Arrive on Jersey, and you'd think a wetsuit is the national costume of the island. This is an island where watersports is the number one activity, and on a summer's day, the smoke from BBQs might make you think Jersey is on fire.

The shape of Jersey means there is always a suitable bay to launch from in almost all wind directions and sea states. Jersey Kayak Adventures offer guided kayak tours and courses. Discover bays and sea caves with local staff who will enable you to explore the hidden coastline and history of the island. You'll soon notice the island has one of the largest tide ranges in Europe (up to 12 metres). For paddlers wanting an adrenal rush, there are tide races and overfalls.

Suppose you prefer to explore and chill out, paddle within one of the many turquoise blue bays on the north coast beneath sea cliffs. There are many sea caves to explore, but remember to keep an eye out for any swell because the island faces the Atlantic swell, and St Ouen's bay is a top surf spot. Or, drift about on a guided kayak tour and gaze into the crystal clear waters surrounding the island.

Getting to Jersey is easier and quicker than many realise. There are flights from many UK regional airports, and ferries operate from Portsmouth and

Poole. The island has a vast range of holiday accommodation ranging from five-star hotels to Airbnb and camping sites, with no shortage of places to eat and attractions to visit. If you prefer historical sites, you might be spoilt for choice with Neolithic Dolmens, castles and the more recent legacies of the German occupation during WWII. Walkers can explore a network of coastal and inland paths.

Jersey Kayak Adventures supply all gear so you can avoid the hassle of bringing all your equipment with you. Their sea kayak fleet includes sit-on-top sea touring craft, sit inside and high-performance sea kayaks, and surf skis.

Jersey is where you can paddle in the morning, visit one of the many attractions in the afternoon and still have time to enjoy an excellent meal out in the evening.

Jersey Kayak Adventures Ltd operates daily guided sea kayak tours and courses and trips for the more experienced paddler with the option to obtain British Canoeing awards. Director Derek Hairon wrote the Channel Island section of South East England & Channel Islands guidebook (Pesda Press) and has kayaked worldwide.

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