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## Kayaking Salt River a cool alternative to tubing

by John Stanley - Jun. 7, 2010 09:04 AM  
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Mention the Salt River and everybody thinks of tubing. But it's also a terrific place to kayak.

### Kayaking the Lower Salt River

**When:** Long trips (4.5 hours) start at 8 a.m. Short trips (2 hours) start on the hour from 8 to 10 a.m. Occasional trips may be offered at 11 a.m.

**Where:** Saguaro Lake Ranch.

**Admission:** \$35 for the 2-hour trip, \$60 for the 4.5-hour trip.

**Facilities:** Restrooms, snack bar, drinks at Saguaro Lake Ranch. Restrooms, picnic tables and grills at the Granite Reef Recreation Area.

**Difficulty:** Easy, but kayakers must be at least 12 years old and be able to swim.

**Details:** 480-984-2194, [saguarolakeranch.com](http://saguarolakeranch.com).

The stretch of the Salt River between the Stewart Mountain and Granite Reef dams, long a favorite area for tubers, is generally slow and fairly shallow. There's no real white water, but there are enough riffles to give beginning kayakers a few thrills. For the most part, though, it's a slow, gentle drift.

"It's a really great place to kayak because people can paddle around out there and not be afraid of (personal water craft)," said Nancy Kanu, of Phoenix, who taught kayaking and canoeing for 25 years. And the scenery, she said, is nothing short of spectacular.

Once when she was out early, she saw a wild horse drinking from the river.

"That was the most awesome thing," she said.

Kayaks can be rented at the Saguaro Lake Ranch, nestled below Stewart Mountain Dam. Tubers also can get outfitted at the resort.

The ranch offers two outings, a 2-hour float and a 4.5-hour float. The long trip is nearly 13 miles, a series of rugged cliffs and desert vistas, just off the riparian corridor that meanders all the way to the Granite Reef Recreation Area.

"(The river) is just a great place to relax, let go of everything and forget about work for a while," Saguaro Lake Ranch manager Sean A'Lee Bevell said. "This is one of the most peaceful, beautiful and scenic places around the Valley."

The ranch's kayaks are the colorful, plastic, sit-on-top variety, easy to maneuver and practically unsinkable. After a few minutes of instruction, you're ready to launch.

"Now is the perfect time to go," Bevell said. "The river is higher than it's been in years."

You'll boost your chances of spotting deer, javelinas and a small herd of wild horses if you go early in the morning. It's cooler then, too.

Speaking of wildlife, keep in mind that tubers tend to party hearty on the weekends.

"You'll have a quieter experience if you go during the week," Bevell said. "You'll see more wildlife and avoid (most) tubers if you come in the morning, especially on Thursday or Friday."

The first part of the float takes you past the craggy cliffs at the northern end of the Goldfield Mountains. Later, you'll see the Four Peaks to the northeast and get a close-up view of Mount McDowell (a.k.a. Red Mountain) to the west.

For much of the trip you can sit back and let the current carry you along - paddling just enough to steer - and still make good time. A breeze usually blows along the river, enough to keep you cool on even the hottest days.

There are several places along the route to pull off for a quick break or to enjoy a picnic lunch.

Even if you're not much of a bird-watcher you'll enjoy seeing blue herons, white egrets, red-winged blackbirds and the flock of swallows in the sand cliffs area.

In many places you'll have the river to yourself, the only sound the steady slap of water against your hull. Once you reach the Blue Point Bridge, though, you'll find lots of tubers on the river and a few anglers on the banks.

The Verde River flows into the Salt about nine miles from your launching point. Prepare for a bit of maneuvering and watch out for folks in the river here. Not long afterward, as you turn south and pass Mount McDowell, the river widens and slows considerably, a sign you're approaching Granite Reef Dam.

After the river makes a big bend to the west, start working your way to the left bank, and look for the best takeout spot you can find along the brushy banks of the Granite Reef Recreation Area.

## Kayaking Salt River a cool alternative to tubing

The folks from Saguaro Lake Ranch will be by shortly to pick you up.

### Tips for kayaking the Lower Salt River:

• Although this is probably the safest river for kayakers in Arizona, paddlers must remember to never stand up in any river more than knee deep, longtime kayak instructor Nancy Kanu said. If your foot gets stuck, water pressure can easily push you down into the water.

"People can drown in three feet of water," she said.

- If you capsize, float feet first downstream, holding on to your kayak, and make your way to shore.
  - Wear river shoes or old tennis shoes. Flip-flops tend to float away and don't protect your toes from sharp rocks and debris.
  - Synthetic clothing will keep you relatively cool and dry. When wet, cotton is clammy.
  - Wear a brimmed hat to keep the sun off your face and neck.
  - Use sunscreen liberally, and remember that sunlight reflects up off the water and can burn you in surprising places.
  - Stay hydrated. Bring plenty of water and/or sports drinks, in plastic bottles or a hydration pack.
  - Glass containers are not permitted.
  - Take energy snacks.
  - Use a dry bag to protect wallets, car keys, cellphones and cameras. In a pinch, you can use re-sealable plastic bags, doubled or tripled up.
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