

Peaceful moonlight paddling on B.C. coast brings kayak trip to life.

By Michael McCarthy, Canwest News Service June 30, 2009

There are many ways to celebrate the full moon. Tribalists flock to raves on the beaches and newagers to celebrations such as Stonehenge in Great Britain.

And on B.C.'s Sunshine Coast, you can enjoy a full moon experience without travelling too far, simply by registering for a Moonlight Paddle Tour. Enjoy the sunshine by day and the moon at night.

The Sunshine Coast is a kayakers delight. The name rings true: the entire coastline enjoys the sunniest weather anywhere in the region.

Although new resort developments are popping up all over the province, thankfully the Sunshine Coast seems to have dodged the worst aspects such as mini-malls, overbuilt resort properties and urban condos crammed into rural lots.

The Sunshine Coast boasts a wide array of coves, beaches and islands and the protected waters of Georgia Strait make for excellent paddling.

My own seafaring ability is limited to floating small toys in the bathtub with my child, and my previous experiences with kayaks have been restricted to hearing about the "Eskimo roll" (wherein you learn how to escape if the boat overturns in the water) and then running the other direction when offered the opportunity to actually get in such a craft. So going out on the open ocean with was a first for me, and if I can do it then anyone can.

The first thing one learns about kayaking is how to deal with disaster, and that's as far as many people want to go. Perhaps safety lessons shouldn't be offered, but it's the law. If you are out in the open ocean with big waves then you really want to know how to deal with the situation.

However I have come up with a second safety secret that may prove far more valuable: just don't go out places where it is risky to paddle.

The Full Moon Paddle Tour with Halfmoon Sea Kayaks starts after dinner, when winds die down. We put in the water and muddled about in the myriad tiny inlets for which the Sunshine Coast is famous.

We slowly wound our way south a few kilometres, a dozen tiny boats moving along the coastline through small channels and in protected bays with the setting sun looming on our right. The water was like a sheet of glass.

The only difficulty was in paying attention to paddling - a gigantic setting sun on the horizon absorbed most of my attention. It slowly sank over the Strait of Georgia in a vast maroon and gold puddle, taking forever to disappear. Without rocking the boat too much, I managed to remove my camera from its hiding place under the tight cover that keeps water out of the cockpit and took endless shots of this fabulous sunset.

We entered Buccaneer Bay as a huge white full moon rose majestically into the night sky, casting a ghostly glow over the still waters of the lagoon. It was difficult to know which way to look: in front, the last of the sunset burned in purple splendour over the Strait of Georgia, while behind me the moonrise lit up the land.

The only sounds were the splish splash of the paddles and the cries of gulls riding the wind. An inquisitive harbour seal stuck his head out of the water and was gone.

I paddled home well behind the armada of other boats, following their glow sticks in the twilight, the full moon lighting up the entire tableau like some sort of movie set, a guide from Halfmoon Kayaks accompanying me for safety.

Full moon paddles are only available once a month during the months of May through October, but a wide range of other day and evening excursions can be booked. More intrepid paddlers can explore offshore destinations, camp overnight on multi-day trips, or head to more challenging locations where you need to be an expert or insane to ride the gigantic tidal bore that roars through the narrows twice a day.

But that's a different challenge, and for most people a gentle paddle along a scenic shoreline will do quite well, thank you. Having the full moon along for company is just an added bonus.

For more information log on to www.halfmoonseakayaks.com. For more Michael McCarthy travel stories, log on to www.intentional-traveler.com.

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