

# Planning your first SUP ADVENTURE

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**Pics:** Georgina Maxwell, Sonja Jones, Matt Haydock, Red Paddle Co and Chris Brain

For many paddlers, once you have practiced the fundamental skills required for SUP like paddling forwards, turning, steering and getting back on the board, you might feel like you are ready to take it a step further. Heading out on your first SUP adventure is a fantastic milestone in your personal paddling journey, but moving from the safety of being close to shore or a fixed location and going somewhere further can be a challenging step. There can be lots of elements to consider and knowing where to start and what to think about can be difficult, especially if you don't have any other paddling experience to lean upon.

To help you plan an awesome SUP experience, I have identified some considerations and key questions that you will want to ask yourself before you set off. You can think of this as a checklist to work through to make sure you have covered all the key aspects to planning your trip.

Do remember that if you are really new to on the water adventures, even a short trip in what may seem like a straightforward location can feel very exciting and that most paddlers' first trips are done in sheltered environments with fewer hazards and risks.

## What experience do I have?

Considering your current experience is a key place to start when planning a SUP adventure. If you're starting from scratch then it is best to enjoy taking small successful steps first and to build up from there, rather than throwing yourself in, quite literally at the deep end.

If you are just getting started with SUP it can be difficult to benchmark your personal skills especially if you have no one else to compare yourself to, making it hard to work out how competent you are and what kind of trip may be suitable. You may feel like you have good board control when you are paddling and can make it go where you want to, but are these skills still strong with small waves, some wind or after an hour of paddling?

## Consider

- Can I effectively move my board forwards and steer and control it easily?
- Am I able to change direction and to accelerate my board if I need to avoid a hazard?
- Can I paddle kneeling and prone in case I need to?
- If I fall in the water can I swim back to my board and climb back on easily?
- Am I happy being in deeper water and potentially further away from the shore?

A good place to start could be a canal journey, as they typically allow for easy access and egress and are not affected in the same way by the wind as maybe an open water journey could be.

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### What do I want to do?

Once you have the SUP bug, dreaming about amazing SUP adventures can occupy your thoughts throughout most of the day! When you plan your trip, you need to consider what your motivations are for the trip are and what you want it to feel like. It's perfectly fine to want to use your SUP to enable a slightly more adventurous picnic, but of course it could also be used to facilitate a much longer physical challenge too. Remember that starting small is probably safer (and more enjoyable) at the start, you wouldn't take up running and set off for a marathon on your first time out would you?

### Ask yourself

- Do I want a relaxed and gentle experience?
- Am I looking for a physical challenge?
- Do I want to explore new locations from the water?
- What kind of distance do I want to cover?
- How long do I want to be out for?

### Who am I going with?

Whilst a solo adventure may be a great future goal, there is definitely some security to heading out with peers and/or more experienced paddlers initially. Other paddlers can help with planning, assist with decisions

along the way and can add to the security of being on the water if you are less experienced.

### Think about

- What can I contribute to the journey?
- What can others contribute to the journey?
- Am I directly responsible for anyone on the journey e.g. children and family and can I look after them in this environment?
- Am I capable of looking after myself as well as supporting the others at the same time?

### Where am I paddling?

All of the previous questions will directly influence where you can head to for your SUP adventure. The key point when choosing the location is that the environment must match the skills and experience of the paddlers. If the environment/location is too challenging or too advanced for the group, this is when issues will typically arise.

You may well already have a venue or a trip in mind, but if you are unsure where to paddle the 'Go Paddling' website has a whole host of information aimed at paddlers getting out and planning trips for the first time in the UK. The website has trail maps, paddling challenges and paddlepoints, which allows you to search for access and egress points and points of interest too.

A good place to start could be a canal journey, as they typically allow for easy access and egress and are not affected in the same way by the wind as maybe an open water journey could be. There are also some great stretches of river that make amazing SUP venues, but a bit of care and research must be done beforehand to ensure that the river is suitable for your



skills and experience. In England we can gain this information from the flood warning information service and links to information about Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland river levels can also be found too. If you are outside of the UK a quick online search should bring up the relevant information for your region.

Of course many other paddlers love to take their boards to salt water venues and there are incredible opportunities for play in estuaries, at the beach or on the coast. These venues do have additional considerations as you must take into account the tide and the effect it will have on the trip. Even the slowest moving tide could mean that you may not be able to paddle against it and cannot safely return to land.

Finally, one of the biggest considerations when choosing where to paddle must be the expected weather conditions. This can affect the direction you choose to go, the time of day you might want to set off, how you dress and the kit you take with you. Wind can have a huge effect on SUPs and you don't want to be in a position where you spend the day battling against it. Forgetting to check the weather forecast can lead you quickly into a dangerous situation, so going online to check beforehand is critical. There are some great websites and apps available and a good one, which can give us all the information we need is called 'Windy'. A few minutes spent checking when you are planning could save you plenty of time and trouble!

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### Have you thought about

- If the intended trip matches your skills and experience?
- Taking a map?
- Where will you get in and out and are there points to escape along the way?
- Gaining a recent weather forecast?
- If the wind is blowing in your favour or will it be against you?
- If the wind is blowing you towards the shore or away from it?
- Checking the tide times?
- Checking the river levels?

### Are there any hazards or risks?

Understanding what you will experience along the trip is critical to identifying hazards and risks that you may need to deal with as you paddle. As you follow your journey on a map, look for points where you are further away from the shore or places you will need to cross a larger expanse of water. If you do this, not only will you be more exposed to the wind, but you could also come across larger craft which may not be able to avoid you as easily.

If you are paddling on a river you may also come across weirs, which can create powerful and lethal currents in the water. Keep your eyes peeled for sudden changes in the height of the water appearing in the distance (horizon lines) and avoid going too close, as you can easily end up in a position where you can't paddle away from them.

On many navigable sections of water, hazards can be marked on the map or identified with signage at water level, however, this is not a given. Paddler guidebooks can be a great source of information and you can always ask online to see if anyone else has already paddled where you are planning to go and can give you up-to-date information too.

### Do you know

- If there are any potential hazards during the trip?
- If there are any moments where you may need to be more aware of your surroundings?
- How far away from shore you will typically be?
- If there are other boats and craft on the water?
- If these boats will be making waves that might knock me from my board?
- If you can get off the water if you need to?

### What equipment do I need?

Your first SUP experience can most likely be completed with almost any board and

minimal additional equipment. However, if you're planning to head out for a longer trip, it can be worth considering if your board is suitable for the distance.

Longer boards designed for touring are typically more manageable when covering distance and often have space for a small amount of equipment. Taking time to check the condition of your board, making sure it is pumped up to a suitable pressure (if using an inflatable) and examining the condition of your leash will be time well spent. Remember that your leash is part of your safety kit and there really should be no need to remove it when you are out on the water. Many SUP paddlers may choose not to wear a PFD (buoyancy aid) but if you do this, you need to be wearing your leash at all times, confident in the water, a good swimmer and able to self rescue back onto the board with ease. If you're not sure, then wearing a PFD will bring a bit of extra reassurance and a simple one that fits well is likely to be all you need.

For your journey you also might want to pack extra kit, which you should be able to store on your board in a small dry bag. Some of the contents of this kit could be regular things that you know you will need such as your lunch and a drink but other things could be packed for those 'just in case' moments.

I typically advise paddlers on what they need to take on a trip: we need to be able to fix people, feed people, keep warm and call for help. This means we want to consider some kind of first aid kit, spare food, spare layers, maybe an emergency shelter as well as having your phone/radio available to hand.

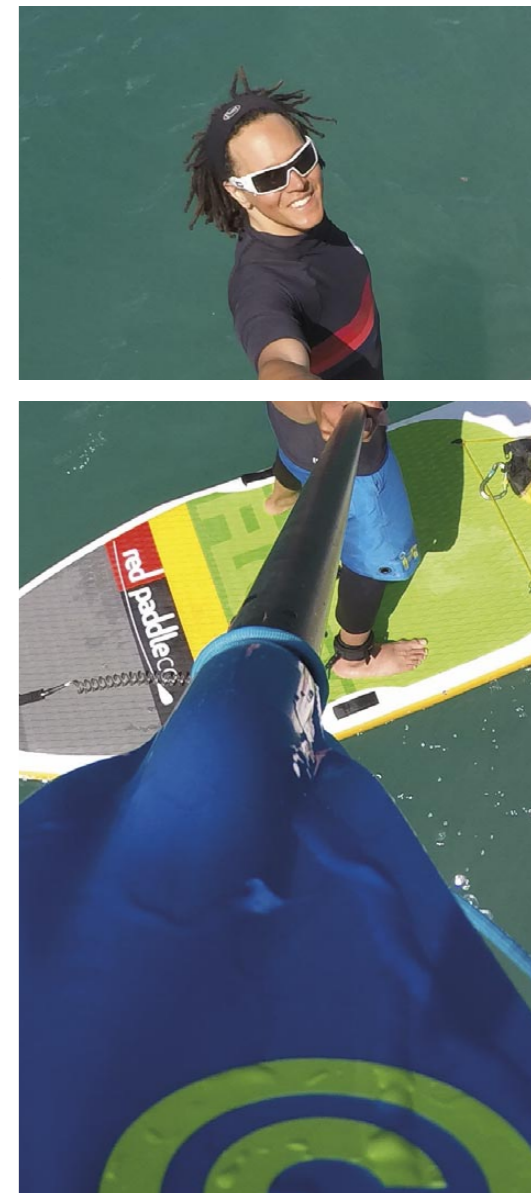
### Consider

- Is my board suitable for the trip distance/duration?
- Have I checked the condition of my board and paddle?
- Have I checked the condition of my leash (including the velcro)?
- Will I be wearing a PFD?
- Is my clothing suitable for the trip and will I be warm enough if I fall in?
- What emergency equipment do I have?
- Can I carry this equipment on my board?
- Can I give my location if I need to?

### What will I do if there is a problem?

Even with the best planning and preparation, you could still come into difficulties along the way. If you have chosen a more straightforward journey with a sheltered environment, then the solutions to problems

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### Chris Brain Coaching

Chris has been kayaking, canoeing, SUPing and coaching for the last 15 years and runs his own business, Chris Brain Coaching, delivering paddlesport coaching, safety and rescue courses and REC First aid training.

Chris would like to thank Red Paddle Co, Pyranha kayaks, Palm Equipment and Go Kayaking Northwest for making fantastic kit and their continued support.

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are likely to be fairly simple. However, if you have been more ambitious with your trip then you may have some bigger challenges on your hands. Time spent practicing paddling whilst kneeling or helping someone back onto their board before you go on your trip, will be time well spent.

Making sure you have covered some of the basics like telling someone where you are going and what time you are setting off and coming back will go a long way towards the trip being successful.

### Ask yourself

- Can I paddle to the side and leave the water easily?
- Can I get myself back on my board and could I help someone else if they are struggling?
- Have I practiced towing another paddler if they need it?

- Can I paddle kneeling/prone in case I can't stand up?
- Have I told someone where I am going and what time I aim to return?
- Does this person know what to do if there is a problem?
- Is my phone/radio close to hand?
- Have I considered how I would handle an emergency?

Do bear in mind that every SUP adventure on the water will hold an element of risk and the checklists above cannot account for everything that you may face on your journey. Reflecting and learning from your experiences will be key to being able to head out on more remote trips in more challenging situations.

**Good luck heading out on your first SUP adventure!**

