

Seal Trail – Visitors Guide

How to Plan a Canoe Trip on the Seal Trail

What follows is a general overview of some of the main steps required to plan a genuine Seal Trail canoe trip. Remember that successful adventures don't just happen, they are always the result of careful planning. Paddlers must know their equipment, know their limits, and respect the environment. The most important prerequisite for a safe trip is good judgement. The Seal Trail Visitors Guide describes conditions that may be encountered as well as preparations paddlers and boaters should make for a trip on the Seal Trail Canoe System.

- As you plan your trip, ask yourself about the type of nature experience you seek.

The Seal Trail Canoe System practically overflows with opportunities for paddlers of every variety and skill level. You'll find here some of the finest lake-to-lake and backcountry canoeing in the whole of Northern Europe. Alternatively, numerous quiet rivers, ponds and small lakes - perfect for family outings - will give you a more recreational canoe experience, with varying degrees of skills required.

Whether you're looking for high adventure, exploration, solitude, inspiration, nature studies or fishing, the Seal Trail offers a wide range of opportunities to meet your high expectations. From one day guided trips to as long as you please. All trips are tailored to your abilities, ensuring the ultimate for you.

- Gathering information and maps

If you are reading this, you have completed the most important step of planning a successful trip. A Seal Trail Canoe Routes Map is an essential tool for this task. It shows you the entire canoe system, all possible access points and canoe launch places, campsite locations, protected areas, historical sites, services, portages and the many canoe route possibilities.

Local tourist information offices provide further information on the services available within the Seal Trail Canoe System area and skilled outfitters are ready to work with you to determine the exact type of trip you are looking for.

- Trip planning criteria

How many days you'll be on the water ?

How many of those days you'd like to be travel days ?

The level of canoeing/kayaking and camping experience in your party ?

Whether your focus is on fishing or travel and exploration or both?

What type of fish you are looking for ?

The time of the season you'll be coming ?

No experience is necessary for you to enjoy a Seal Trail canoe trip. Our local outfitters can design a trip for anyone and everyone: for beginners, for families, for seniors, for anglers, for photographers, for wildlife observers, or for those wanting a little of everything. We are there to help you make the right decisions to achieve an unforgettable canoe and kayak experience.

- Deciding what type of outfitting you require

The main thing to know is whether you prefer a canoe or a kayak as your means of journeying along the paddling paths of the Seal Trail. There are suitable routes for both types without forgetting traditional Finnish rowing boats. Choosing a kayak is very similar to choosing a canoe. Both move through the water powered by a paddle and both are used for similar activities. To choose the proper equipment, you must make an honest evaluation of your intended needs and uses.

One obvious difference between canoes (rowboats) and kayaks is in packing and carrying capacity. The kayak is long, thin, and tapered, and the openings to the interior may be quite small. Thus, large or bulbous packages don't pack well. On the other hand, kayaks are faster and better suited for touring on open waters. Sleek sea kayaks, which have become very popular for travel among the islands of Lake Saimaa, are not recommended for first timers.

A good choice for long expeditions and lake cruising is a long, seaworthy tripper canoe, which can keep lots of gear dry. There are many open water crossings and very few portages on the Seal Trail Canoe System. Since the use of wheeled portage devices is allowed everywhere and most of portages are easy, the weight of equipment is not of crucial importance.

There are basically three kinds of packages available for your outfitting needs: *Guided Trips* are all-inclusive packages, featuring exquisite meals, camping equipment, small groups, certified guides, and totally outfitted canoes/kayaks. Sometimes these packages also include accommodation before and /or after – even during – trips and shuttle services. If you are looking for something special, we have guides that are native to the area and can lead you through the Seal Trail like no other can. *Complete outfitting* is an option used by novice and experienced canoe trippers alike. Using the services of an outfitter takes the trouble and the expense of purchasing costly equipment out of a canoeing adventure. Complete outfitting includes canoeing/kayaking and camping equipment and food package. *Partial outfitting* is the ideal plan for people who already have most of their own equipment, but may need to rent a canoe/kayak, or other bits and pieces of equipment. All items can be rented on an individual basis. *Route planning service.* The Seal Trail Canoe Routes Map gives advice on route selection but does not give specific route plans. Commercial outfitters will usually give route advice to people using their services free of charge.

If the choice is not immediately clear don't hesitate to ask for further information from our regional or local tourist information offices. You can also contact the Seal Trail area outfitters directly. We have experienced, skilled and knowledgeable staff prepared to help you plan a trip best suited for you and your time frame.

The Principles of the Finnish Right of Public Access

Paddling has expanded in recent years to include practically every corner of the world. Nowadays, with the boom in canoeing and kayaking, it's an increasingly popular form of outdoor recreation. Canoeing has also become the chief means of journeying into remote wilderness areas and providing the adventure that people are seeking.

Finland's nearly 190 000 lakes and countless rivers make it one of the finest canoeing regions in the world, with hundreds of routes to choose from. Compared with other well-known paddling destinations, like Canada or the USA, Finland has one clear advantage: everyman's right, which gives everyone the chance to enjoy outdoor pursuits and the freedom of the country's vast forests and waterways, with very few restrictions.

The ancient concept of everyman's right gives everyone – foreign citizens included – the basic right to wander freely in the countryside, without needing to obtain permission, no matter who owns or occupies the land or the waters. This right of public access may only be limited by official prohibition enforced by public authorities e.g. certain areas inside protected areas have been set aside to safeguard rare animals or plants. A permit is required to enter these areas as well as some strict nature reserves. Otherwise quota permits, user fees, official entry points and dates or group size limits are truly unknown in Finnish national parks and protected areas!

This list summarizes the rights and responsibilities of both Finnish and foreign citizens in the Finnish countryside under everyman's right.

You may

- Walk, ski or cycle freely in the countryside, except in gardens, and the immediate vicinity of people's homes, and in fields and plantations which could be damaged.
- Stay or set up camp temporarily in the countryside, a reasonable distance from home sites.
- Pick wild berries, mushrooms and flowers, as long as they are not protected species.
- Fish with a rod and line.
- Paddle, row, sail, use a motorboat, swim or wash in inland waters and the sea.
- Walk, ski, drive a motor vehicle or fish on frozen lakes, rivers and the sea.

You may not

- Disturb other people and damage property.
- Disturb breeding birds, their nests or young.
- Disturb reindeer or game.
- Cut down, damage, or break branches off trees on private or public property.
- Collect moss, lichen or dead wood from private or public property.
- Light open fires without the landowner's permission, except in cases of emergency.
- Disturb the privacy of people's home sites, by e.g. camping too near them, or making too much noise.
- Leave any litter.
- Drive motor vehicles off road without the landowner's permission.
- Fish or hunt without the relevant permits.

(Information from: The Finnish Ministry of the Environment)

Nationalparks and Other Protected areas

- There are some special rules and regulations affecting canoe trippers, which should be understood before setting off. Further information on protected areas and National Parks is available from Metsähallitus or tourist information offices.

Low Impact Camping ...LEAVE NO TRACE !

The Seal Trail Canoe System represents some of the most valuable and characteristic habitats and land forms of the amazing Finnish Lakeland. Canoes and kayaks bring you close to northern rugged but fragile nature. The more of us there are, the more important it is that we all follow low-impact camping practices wherever we may go. Your cooperation in following these guidelines and regulations will make your experience more enjoyable and help preserve Finland's rich natural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel and dry grasses.
- You should preferably spend the night on a designated campsite, where you will find a fire ring, a woodshed and a privy. Otherwise select a previously used site. Altering a site is not necessary.
- Leave your campsite as you found it. Avoid removing rocks or moss.
Refrain from cutting, peeling, or defacing live trees.

Dispose of Waste Properly

- Pack it in pack it out. Trash barrels are not available at backcountry campsites. Repackage food to minimize waste.
- You may burn paper trash on your campfire and throw organic waste in composting toilet, where provided.
- Carry out the rest of your garbage to regional recycling bins or garbage containers.
- Use the campsite toilets. If there aren't any, deposit solid human waste in cat holes at least 60 metres away from water, trails or campsites. Bury everything completely. Dispose of fish remains and spoiled foods the same way.
- To wash your dishes, dump wastewater 60 metres away from the water's edge and use small amounts of biodegradable soap.

Leave What You Find

- Protect cultural resources, including archeological sights. Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

- Where fires are permitted, use only established fire rings and wood that is stored there for that purpose.
- Keep fires small. Use a lightweight camping stove for cooking instead. During times of high forest fire danger, only camping stoves may be used.
- Burn all wood to ash. Put out campfires completely.

Respect Wildlife

- Observe but don't disturb. Do not go ashore for a rest stop or to make camp near the nesting places of breeding birds. Avoid disturbing ringed seals on their favorite resting areas.

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them. Avoid wildlife at sensitive times: mating, nesting and raising the young .
- Control pets all times or leave them at home.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Availability of designated campsites is on a first-come, first-served basis. Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience. Smaller groups decrease campsite deterioration.
- Let nature's sound prevail. Avoid loud noises and voices. Remember that noise carries a great distance across water.

Thank You for Your Cooperation!

Safety Tips

• Finland's climate and weather

The climate in Finland is best described as temperate with a more continental twist in the eastern parts of the country where the Seal Trail is located. Paddlers looking for true adventure in the North are happy to know that summer in Finland is warm and bright. As regards temperature, Finland is more favoured than most other countries with a similar geographical position (e.g. Canada) between the 60th and 70th northern parallels. The temperature is raised by the Baltic Sea, large inland waters and by airflows from the Atlantic, which are warmed by the Gulf Stream.

The average daytime temperatures often rise above 20 degrees Celsius (68°F) in the summer months. Since our inland waters are relatively shallow, the temperature of the water in the larger lakes ranges during the same time from 18°C to 20°C. In protected bays and smaller lakes surface temperatures can be even higher. Annual precipitation averages in this region 550 mm (21,6 inches). The paddling season begins in May and continues until late September, when the temperatures drop and bring on the colors of fall. By November the lakes freeze and remain frozen until May.

Since Finland is located in the zone of prevailing westerlies where tropical and polar air masses meet, weather types can change quite rapidly. Stretches of weeks of sunny, warm weather are likely during the summer, but who can say exactly when. The likelihood of strong winds (14-20 m/s) is very small, except in connection with occasional thunderstorms.

Short-term weather forecasts can be found on the Finnish Meteorological Institute's web site (<http://www.fmi.fi>).

In Finland weather reports are read on the radio every day also in English.

• Insects

Expect mosquitoes, black flies, gnats, and other insects to peak in June or July. They are part of the northern experience wherever you may travel. Still, there are much less insects near the lake districts than in the forests or on wet bogs and mires. That's why the Lakeland is the the most popular summertime tourist region in Finland. Effective insect repellents are available at almost every grocery and store.

• Water Quality

Seal Trail lake water is as good and pure as it looks. Drinking it without filtering, boiling, or treating it is rather safe except in warm weather or close to shore and near bigger villages.

• Wildlife

Not a problem in Finland. For example precautionary measures regarding bears are not needed.

• Emergencies

Knowledge and skill can reduce the element of risk but it can never be completely eliminated. For this reason, a safety harbor system for paddlers has been designed for the canoe routes of Seal Trail. It means that all established campsites, natural harbors (anchorage or docking sites), and some traditional backcountry sites have been given a special code, which you can see on the Seal Trail Canoe Route Map or signs posted at landing sites.