

Kayak Diving's Frequently Asked Questions

By Tom Bergendahl



1. Do I need any special training to kayak dive?
It is important to have 20 or 25 cold water/New England dives logged and be in good physical condition prior to attempting to kayak dive. It is an “advanced” level of diving and can be challenging if not a bit strenuous. Physical fitness helps!
2. Where do you put the tank and the rest of the dive gear?
After securing your buoyancy compensator, and regulator to your tank, it gets strapped into the back tank well or concave part of the Sit-on-top kayak. You can then place your fins, mask, hood and gloves into a catch bag and secure that within the b.c.’s cummerbund. If you have a weight belt (which I prefer and highly recommend for kayak diving) it gets strapped into the front part of the boat. My Necky Dolphin has a front hatch where I stow it and the anchor, etc. Putting the weights up front helps to balance the load and keep the weight more evenly distributed.
3. How do you get into the kayak?
Everything should be strapped down prior to getting in. Never try to stand in a kayak. Pull yourself up into the boat by reaching over to grab the far side of the kayak. Once you are mostly in, sit in the seat area in the center of the boat to keep yourself from tipping over.
4. What do you do with the kayak while you are diving?
Anchor or tow it along with you. Anchoring is my preference, but sometimes if the wind or current is strong, you might want to have it within easy reach. A tethered dive is attaching a line to your kayak and towing it (and your dive flag) with you while you dive. An anchor is great in most conditions because you can leave the flag and/or float with “DIVER BELOW” next to your kayak and then swim back to it at the end of the dive.
5. Any special things to be concerned with when you anchor?
Yes! When you descend the first thing to check is your anchor’s position and placement on the bottom. It needs to be secure or in a good spot, but not too secure because you will need to haul it back up at the end of the dive.
6. What happens if the forecast calls for rain or thunder storms?
Rain is fine...but it is ok to re-schedule. Thunder storms are to be avoided. Choose a different day. Always check your forecast prior to going out. It is good to know if you will have a sea breeze or strong winds, and what the tides are on the day of your dive. If the seas are rough you might want to hold off

for another day which will be calmer. When in doubt, err on the side of safety.

7. Can I bring my camera?

NO! When I am doing “intros” to kayak diving, my answer is generally no. Task loading is not a great way to start out. There are too many other things to learn on a 1st trip out.

8. Weight belts.....What if you are not sure about the correct amount of weight on your belt/bc?

Another “learned from that one” experience. Don’t slow yourself or your buddy(s) down by trying to tweak your weights at the last minute. We had one person stop all of us for 20 or 30 minutes because he was not sure if he had the correct weight on his belt. Get it done early!!!! Show up half an hour or more early if you have to mess with your weights. Make sure you won’t plummet to the bottom with too much weight prior to putting your tank on. Proper weighting is very important and the sign of an experienced vs. a newbie diver. That’s why I said 20 or 25 cold water dives prior to attempting a kayak dive.

9. How to prevent accidents? Also known as, how to make sure the kayak is there when you get back up.

Conditions are everything. They dictate whether you dive and whether or not your kayak will be there when you surface. Pay attention. If it is really rough, don’t go. Live to dive another day. If you must go, find the lee side of the rock or island, or do a tethered dive. Peace of mind is worth playing it safe.

10. What is the sequence of events when you get to your site?

Choose the optimal spot for anchoring. Drop the anchor. Tie it to the kayak in at least two places. Place your tank into the water (clipped or tied to the kayak **with the air on & b.c. inflated**), get the flag and/or float in the water, tied or clipped to the kayak. Put on your fins. Drink some water to stay hydrated. Put on your hood. Pull up your wet suit jacket and make sure the hood is tucked under it. Pull your mask out of the catch bag & either use spit or mask defogger to make sure it is clear for your dive. Drink some more water. Rinse your mask. Strap on your weights. Jump into the water and get into your tank. Tighten up the various straps on your BC and weight belt. Get your mask on, followed by your gloves. Grab the catch bag and tickle stick and prepare to descend down the anchor line.

11. How do you make sure that you find your anchor line & boat at the end of a dive?

Anchor just off the rock or island. I try to find the part of the bottom where it goes from sloped rocky bits of the island to flat and sandy bottom. You can then go out in one direction, use roughly half of your tank, turn around and look for the anchor line when you think you have gone most of the way back. If you dive a site enough, you will learn the terrain and get a very good sense of where to find your anchor and line. You can then ascend your anchor line and do a 3 minute safety stop at 15 feet.

12. End of dive.....what is the sequence?

I like to secure my catch bag to the kayak and then take off my weight belt which gets stowed in the forward part of the kayak. Remove the tank and push it up and into the kayak. It might take a few attempts. Strap it down. Pull yourself onto the boat. Remove your mask, gloves and fins and stow them in an additional catch bag. Secure them to the tank. Re-check your lobsters against the gauge. Stow them in a hatch or up in the forward part of the boat. Re-hydrate....a.k.a. drink some water & have lunch or a snack.

13. Leaving the rock or island.

Pull in the dive flag or float and secure it to your gear. Pull your anchor up and secure it to the boat. Paddle back to your launch site.

Just a f.y.i.....when I get home, everything gets rinsed out in fresh water and dried.

14. How can kayak divers be good stewards of the oceans and environment?

Bring back the floating plastic bags and other debris that you will see on your paddle out and back. My biggest catch so far is the power boat battery that I found off Children’s Island. We can set a good example by trying to do our part to clean up.

Please call/text/email me if you need more info!!

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