

Palamos Kayak Trip February 2022

"I did not know what to expect but the trip far exceeded all my expectations"

Palamos pronounced 'Pal a moss' is a Spanish seaside resort on the Costa Brava approximately 90 minutes drive north of Barcelona. It is perfectly situated in the middle of the Costa Brava coastline so both the north and south areas can be accessed. The wind is primarily a northerly which determines the paddling conditions. Since the coast runs in a roughly south westerly direction, low wind conditions allows the north section of the coast to be accessed. If the wind is strong in the north, the orientation of the coast means the south section is relatively sheltered and there will be stretches of coastline with acceptable conditions to paddle in for much of the time. The coastline is mainly cliffs peppered with beaches and small coves. Many of them consist of pink granite or impressive rock layers strewn with arches, large and small caves and the occasional blow hole. It's a very picturesque paddling environment with a raft of rock hopping opportunities depending upon the paddler's skill level.



Marc is our guide who owns and runs Sea kayaking Palamos. He is an exceptional paddler and has known several members of the club for years since he is a regular attendee at the Anglesey Symposium. He has guided on the Costa Brava for approximately 20 years so can estimate the sea conditions all along the coast based on the forecast to suit our needs. He is also a very sociable guy so is happy to have a beer or come out for dinner with us.

Each day commences at 9.15 when we are picked up by Marc in his van at the accommodation. We return at roughly 17.00 depending on how far we have had to drive to the paddle spot and how many beers we want to drink afterwards at a local bar. Paddle distances are round trips of up to 16k (10 Miles), about 5 hours including an hour stop for a picnic lunch. This are usually left-overs from the night before.

Listed below are a brief description of the paddle trips:

Palamos – Calella de Palafrugell (16k)

The first paddling route is heading north out of the small sandy bay next to the marina where Marc keeps his kayaks. The idea being that people can check they are happy with their boats and equipment with any issues being resolved whilst still at base rather than an hour's drive up the coast. The paddle is a great introduction to the Costa Brava as it consists of impressive pink granite cliffs, beautiful



little coves and enough rock hopping opportunities in the swell to improve skills. Marc encourages you to push your limits and get out of your comfort zone.

Sant Feliu de Guixols – Palatja D’Aro (10k)



This paddle runs from one large sandy bay to another around a large headland with lots of rocky inlets, small caves and sea stacks at one side of the bay. It has the advantage that if the sea conditions become challenging there are still lots of nooks and crannies to explore and play in. This area proved ideal for improving turning skills including edging, sweeping and tactical approaches to turning in restricted areas around the rocks.

Tamariu – Aiguablava (14k)

After paddling for roughly an hour below the soaring cliffs and around impressive sea stacks there is a huge cave that can be paddled into. 70m into the cave there is a chamber where you can just rest and listen to the lapping waves against the walls. Next time I come I’ll definitely bring a torch.



L’Escala – Punta del Milo (12k)



This paddle was the perfect example of why weather forecasts must be checked in advance. The outward leg had perfect flat conditions with minimal wind and a flat sea state. The return leg consisted of a 1.5m confused water swell with the less experienced members of the group being relieved when the shelter of the originating bay was arrived at.

This paddle is fantastic. The first major point of interest is a headland with a massive arch through which you can paddle into the next bay. Marc tells us this time of year is the best time to paddle it since in the summer months it is plagued with speed boats and jet skis. The highlight is then found ten minutes further on which is a blow hole that you can paddle the nose of your kayak into. If you do this be prepared for a massive blast of sea water as the hole expels the trapped air.

“The forward paddling instruction massively increased my confidence when the sea conditions became difficult”

Tossa Del Mar – Canyet (16k)



This is another beautiful rock hopping paddle underneath the cliffs of the coast line. There are several small caves to paddle into and various sea stacks to paddle around. Just before the lunch stop at a picturesque cove, there are the remains of an old walk way that leads out in to the sea with a bridge you can paddle through.

After one participant needed a rescue after not timing the wave correctly between rocky gaps, Marc’s response was:

“it’s not dangerous – try it again – it’s only water – never stop playing”,

Parc Natural Del Cap de Creus (16k)



There are two aspects to this trip, the kayaking and the walk around the national park. The launch is at the village of Cadaques where Salvador Dali lived. His house is the one with the large spheres on the top of various parts of it. The geology of this area is predominantly metamorphic rock (rock formed under intense heat and pressure) which means it is extremely hard. It is also very sharp so we are warned to be careful with the boats and our hands. The natural park has strange rock formations which Dali used as inspirations for many of his sculptures. The most

infamous being the Great Masturbator. The paddle follows the coast past many bays and rocky outcrops with the highlight being a huge arch which the whole group can paddle into. There is a large white lighthouse on a cliff in the distance with a rectangular ochre outbuilding next to it. The interesting fact about this is that the building has been converted into a curry house. Ten minutes further on we paddle into a very picturesque sheltered bay where we land at a small cove for lunch. The cove is the starting point for our walk around the natural park with the strange rock formations that inspired Dali. It takes some imagination to see what Dali saw but it is very impressive. The return paddle is much shorter since we take a direct line along the coast.

Palamos Marina (Training Session)



When the conditions are such that there are no sheltered areas so the paddling would be very challenging, Marc offers the option of skills training in the marina (along with coaching from Tom). The water is shallow and therefore warm, and it's next to the beach so if anyone capsizes they can easily drag their boat to the shore. Skills to prevent capsizing were practiced on the beach first and then put into practice on the water. Edging and turning skills were also worked on. One member of the group was given Greenland roll improvement tips and another wanted to practice her self-rescue skills.

Calcotadas

A Calcotada is a gathering in Catalonia where calcots are eaten which celebrates the end of winter and the beginning of spring. A calcot is a sweet spring onion but looks more like a small leek. Twice during the trip Marc arranged our own calcotada showing us how to cook and eat calcots. Marc, the maestro of the barbecue, roasted the unwashed calcots on the BBQ until they were black. They were then wrapped in newspaper for 30 mins or so to cook in their own juices. Eating them consisted of holding them with one hand by the green leaves at the top whilst with the other hand pinching the top of the burnt black stem and gently pulling down. The burnt outside strips off revealing the white cooked flesh underneath. You then dip it in the special calcot sauce, tip your head back and put in your mouth. Very messy but delicious.



Additional Information

There was a group of 8 on this trip with mixed abilities ranging for some who had paddled for 30 years or more whilst one member had only paddled for 6 months. The advantage of having Marc as our guide was that he encouraged you to get out of your comfort zone and paddle through gullies and into caves that initially you may be reticent to do. Because of Marc's abilities you always knew that if you misjudged a wave or the swell and capsized you would be safe since rescue was seconds away.

Everyone in the group felt that they had improved their skills by the end of the trip. This was not just due to the odd skills session but by continual tips and encouragement from Marc and Tom as we paddled the routes. Everyone was invited to ask for as much or as little as they wanted. Marc is a

pleasure to watch as he forward paddles and I would recommend to anyone who plans to go on the trip in the future to just paddle behind him and try to emulate his style.

The trip was arranged between the 14th Feb and the 28th Feb and the weather was very good for paddling. There was only one day with wind gusts up to Force 9 when we couldn't paddle. The temperature ranged between 14 – 21 Celsius whilst out paddling. Some wore dry suits which they found too hot on some days whilst others wore a 2mm shorty wet suit and carried a thin cag just in case it got too windy. The sea temperature was quoted as 14 which is a far cry from that of the North Sea.

Discussion was had within the group on how they wanted to cater. Eat out in the variety of restaurants in Palamos or self-cater with the proviso that everyone could do what they wanted. In the two weeks the group ate out once for dinner and once for lunch. One member of the group was vegetarian and another vegan. The carnivores amongst the group agreed to eat veggie meals and having experienced the first dish, Majorcan vegetable casserole, were completely convinced. Tom is a master of vegetarian cooking using a plethora of high quality fresh vegetables and herbs and created fantastic meals consisting of up to four dishes. Cooking for 8 takes some effort so everyone pitched in either cooking or chopping. Double quantities were made with the left overs used for lunch the next day with fresh bread. Far better than a ham or cheese butty that most of us are used to.



All transport is provided by Marc including picking us up and returning us to the airport. He facilitates shopping trips and provides a wealth of local experience which includes guiding at the Geologic Park and at the medieval village of Pals.

The majority of the group flew from Edinburgh on Ryan Air. The accommodation was a house with grounds and swimming pool. Next year's accommodation has already been selected and includes a large kitchen and living area ideal for a kayaking group.

A budgetary cost for the trip is £500 - £600 including flight, accommodation and guiding. The only kayak equipment to take are helmets, footwear and dry suits/wet suits. A range of NDK kayaks as well as spray decks and buoyancy aids are provided. Food and drink are separate.

Essential Lingo:

Cinco cervezas grandes: Five large beers, useful for four people when Tom is present

Dos pequeños cervezas: Two small beers

Te con leche: tea with milk

Chocolate caliente: Hot chocolate

Una Mas: One more