

 Chicago Tribune

Mast Appeal

From moonlit paddles to beer can races, our picks get you on the water

By Sandra Langeneckert
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Are you envious of all those sunbaked folks living a Jimmy Buffett-like existence out on the water, but you don't have the Warren Buffett bucks to buy a boat? Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned sailor, our top water-bound picks mean that you won't be left high and dry this summer.

Chicago Sailing Club

North end of Belmont Harbor, Dock B, 773-871-7245

Newbie: Choose from among plenty of beginning lessons and charters out of Belmont Harbor. Highlights include small group fireworks charters to Navy Pier on Wednesday and Saturday nights for \$85 to \$100 per person.

Sea dogs: The club also offers rentals and advanced classes, as well as Wednesday night "beer can" races, a citywide sailboat race. What's with the name? After the race is finished, you and your fellow sailors can kick back with a couple of cans of beer for a leisurely sail back to harbor.

Chicago Sport and Social Club

1516 N. Fremont St. 312-335-9596

Newbie: Cruise along the Chicago River with this four-week introductory kayaking class (\$120). Weekly evening classes, held from 6 to 8 p.m., leave from Ogden Slip at North Pier. The next session starts Aug. 10.

Sea dogs: Beginner and intermediate classes for those with some paddling experience under their belts kick off Aug. 12. We're hoping they'll teach us how to roll a kayak without spilling our beer.

Chicago River Canoe and Kayak

3400 N. Rockwell St. 773-704-2663

Newbie: Check out their moonlight dinner paddles on Saturday night (\$36 includes dinner). Other outings for beginners include "pub yaws" to Slow Down, Life's Too Short (1177 N. Elston Ave. 773- 384-1040) every other Thursday night (\$25; the next one is this week).

Sea dogs: Set out on your own with an affordable canoe or kayak rental: \$14 per hour (\$10 on weekdays).

Chicago Yacht Club

300 W. Belmont Ave. 773-477-7575

Newbie: Learn the basics of sailing in the dinghy sailing program. The final session of the summer begins Tuesday (members \$250; non-members \$295).

Sea dogs: Once you've mastered the dinghy, suck up to club members to land yourself an invite for a weekend sail.

The Northwest Passage

1130 Greenleaf Ave., Wilmette 847-256-4409

Newbie: Looking for a little more nature than you'll find in the city? This adventure travel company is worth the trip to the 'burbs. A one-day introductory sea kayaking course costs \$99, but includes all equipment and lunch. Or, check out a two-hour midweek evening paddle, also open to first-timers, for \$40. Both launch from Wilmette's Gillson Park (Lake Avenue at Lake Michigan).

Sea dogs: Once you've perfected your stroke, the company offers advanced classes and sea kayaking tours throughout the Midwest and to more exotic locales such as Greece and Belize.

Lincoln Park Boat Club

Located at the lagoon on the east side of the Lincoln Park Zoo's parking lot, 773-549-2628

Newbie: Try your hand at introductory sea kayaking, rowing and sculling instruction. The one-day kayaking class is \$60 for a 4- hour lesson. Multiday rowing and sculling lessons are \$144 for members and \$180 for non-members.

Sea dogs: Club members have access to a fleet of boats and are eligible to join competitive rowing teams.