

Research and Planning



Choosing your Waterway

Things you should consider when choosing where you will row:

Are you allowed to row here?

Consult the relevant waterway authority before you start making detailed plans. Some lakes have areas designated as nature reserves and no boating is permitted.

Make sure the waterway is open to traffic – locks or bridges may be closed for repairs.

Check again before the start of the tour – the situation may have changed.

What sort of trip is it?

Does it aim to be a relaxing holiday or more of an extreme challenge?

Some routes lend themselves to sightseeing with lots of interesting cultural places to stop along the way and some will be really physically demanding – maybe because of rough water, longer distances and tricky navigation or difficult weather conditions.

If you know beforehand who will be coming, make sure that you have taken into account the skill and fitness levels of all the participants.



How long is your tour?

You can make a day trip from the club on familiar water or do a long tour of a few days. Some rowers are lucky enough to be able to row for days straight from their clubs, whereas some will need to travel to do a long trip. Contact clubs in the area where you are touring as you may be able to borrow or hire boats from them.

When you map out your route you should consider how many hours a day you will be rowing, allowing time for rest stops and locks. Typical touring boats travel at around 8 – 10 km per hour and locks will usually take around 20 – 30 minutes to navigate through.

Up to 35 km a day is a reasonable distance for most people, though an extreme tour or challenge can last for weeks and cover more than 60 km a day.

When are you going?

Most tours take place in summer when there may be events taking place on your chosen waterway. Check with the local waterway authority and also any local rowing, canoeing, sailing or other clubs on the reach in case there is a regatta or other competition happening – you don't want to get in their way. Also remember that accommodation may be full during the school holidays – book early.

Where can you launch from?

Rowing clubs are generally very happy to welcome rowers from other clubs and charge very reasonable prices to use their facilities. Just contact them in advance to get permission to use their boating areas. You may also be lucky and get them to open up the club house or use the grounds for storing boats or camping.

Slipways sometimes charge for use and you will need to find out who owns them. Some landing stages such as ones designed for sailing are too high for rowing boats so it's worth checking this if you see one marked on a map.



If you are using a boat on its normal stretch of water, the chances are it will be licensed, though it's worth asking if you are borrowing a boat.

If you are taking a boat to a new place, you should find out who has jurisdiction over the waterway. Details of the main UK authorities are listed in the Appendix.

Note that in many places the waterway authority will require you to thoroughly clean your boat and oars before launching in order to prevent cross-contamination from other waterways. Make sure you bring buckets and cleaning materials with you.

Thinking about your Participants

Who is coming on your tour? How many of them will there be?

How many boats will you have? If there are small locks, how many will fit in at once?

If you are hiring a coach, how many passengers can it take?

What level of fitness and experience will your people have? If the distances are long, beginners won't be able to keep up.

Will you have an experienced person in each boat who can be a boat captain?

Do any of your participants have disabilities or known medical conditions? Do you need to take special precautions?

Sculling or sweep?

Can all your participants do both? Can they all cox?

Advantages of crew sculling:

- Mixed crews (gender, strength, experience)
- Boat is easier to balance
- Shorter blades – may be necessary on narrow waterways
- If one person is unable to row, boat can continue with 3 rowers

Friends on the bank

A land crew is a wonderful thing! Having a group on the bank is great for operating locks, providing some extra safety support as supplier of picnics, so encourage your participants to bring a non-rowing partner.

Maybe you have friends in the area who would come and meet you, or other rowers from your club – it's always useful to have some spare rowers to take over if someone has to drop out. Appoint an official photographer, especially if you are rowing a scenic route. Good photos are really nice to have as a record of the trip, and can be uploaded to a gallery and linked from the recreational rowing website.

And finally – allow some time for sightseeing and hand out information on places of interest to visit. This can be easily obtained from local tourist information offices or online.

Useful resources

The [Inland Waterways Association](#) website it lists all the stretches of water and says if they are navigable or not and for how long

