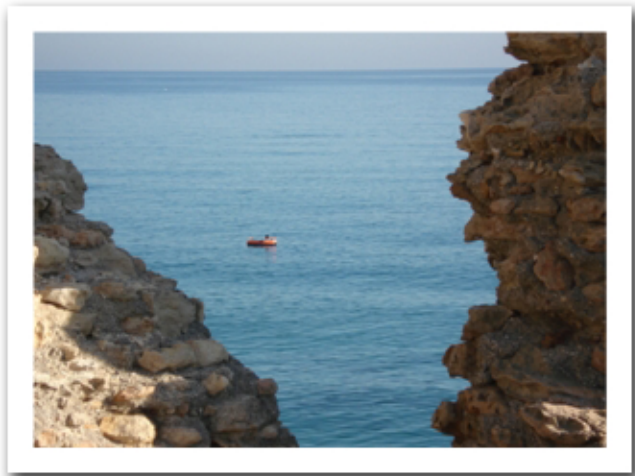


Paddling in Paradise

We can now check out local sailing conditions online, and if they are good—as they usually are this time of year—we wheel our 20-foot-long, two-man kayak down the hill on its little trailer to Burriana beach, and off we paddle into the calm blue Mediterranean.

The open water is smooth as glass once you get more than 100 feet away from the shoreline. We start out toward the east, where only small, half-moon-shaped cove beaches interrupt the craggy cliffs that drop right down to the aquamarine sea. Nerja is blessed with underground rivers and springs, and natural waterfalls cascade down over ancient caves carved into the walls of the cliffs. Hundreds of gulls and terns make their homes in smaller caves etched into the rock face, and you paddle around giant upturned boulders whose guano-covered surfaces glisten white as snow under the sun. To cool off, guide your bow toward a break in the rock wall and take impromptu showers on the way into and out of a series of small caverns. Mussels cling to the rocks just above and below the waterline.



We have yet to join the local kayaking club that organizes daily and weekly excursions around Nerja's seven cove beaches, but we've talked to many of the club's officers while gearing up and have been extended a few kind invitations. We're told that we would be the first English-speaking members and certainly the first Americans. One of the benefits of membership is a storage locker right on the beach, which would mean no more pulling the kayak back up the hill—a definite advantage. We're also told that there are moonlight excursions that often evolve into full-blown beach parties—this is the clincher. Nobody knows how to have a good time like the Spanish. The late Andalusian poet, Federico Garcia Lorca wrote, "The dead in Spain are more alive than the dead anywhere else." You can imagine how alive the living are!

We purchased our two-man Bic kayak (yes, the plastic pen manufacturer) from Decathlon, a large French-owned sporting goods store in Malaga, for around 700 euro—much less than it would have cost in the States. They also happily delivered it, at no additional cost, and within 15 minutes of the promised time.

The best thing about kayaking in this area is that once the fishing fleet comes in with their morning catch, there is hardly any boat traffic—no motorboats or Jet Skis to terrorize you.

P.S. If you're interested in learning to kayak, Rob Dawson at Adventura Sports on Burriana Beach takes beginners out for a three-hour cruise for only 20 euro. Once you have demonstrated some proficiency he'll rent you one from his fleet for a longer journey. He also organizes scuba-diving trips, horseback trail rides, and mountain treks. Adventura: Playa Burriana, Nerja; tel. +34 952520471; website: www.adventuranerja.com

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