

KAYAKER INFORMATION

Overview, Currents & Weather

The Swim Around Key West is 12.5 miles and the course goes clockwise around the island. There is no way to get lost as you are kayaking the circumference of an island; land should always be on your right and you should never be so far out that you cannot see land. The farther out you take your swimmer, the farther he/she has to swim back in. However, there are times when you must paddle a longer distance to avoid shallows. Remember that you can kayak in MUCH more shallow water than a swimmer can swim. Be aware of the depth of the water and steer your swimmer away from potentially shallow waters.

You will encounter the deepest water during the first five miles of the course. Beyond that, you can see the bottom, with the exception of Key West Harbor until you exit Fleming Cut.

Currents play a role in the race and can change with little notice. Generally the water is calm with a few waves, but nothing dramatic. Of course, weather can change quickly and cause a change in the water, so you should be prepared for anything.

There are two areas where swimmers will benefit from the tide. When entering Key West Harbor, you will find a push for about two miles. This will end when you come out under the Fleming Cut Bridge at mile 5. At mile 9, you will go under the Cow Key Bridge and should have a good push for about one mile. This push will vary depending on your speed and when you enter these areas. If the conditions are challenging on one side of the island, keep in mind that after you turn the next bend, conditions will change. The head wind will eventually become a tail wind and vice versa!

Your presence alongside the swimmer is essential to him/her completing the course. Failure to stay alongside your swimmer could place him/her in jeopardy. You are providing protection from jet skis and other motorized craft on the water. Don't assume everyone is paying attention or expecting a swimmer in the open water.

There are three areas where kayakers must be especially vigilant. The first is going through Key West Harbor between miles 2.5 and 4.5. This is a fast portion with a lot of boat traffic. There are no cruise ships in port this year.

The next area is Fleming Cut. This is one of the most exciting and fastest portions of the swim. It is a narrow cut and you will fly through. Be aware of motorboat traffic and also the pilings that hold up the bridge. There is construction in this area this year impeding travel through one of the lanes, so it is even more narrow than usual. Be extremely cautious as you go through this cut. The bridge marks mile 5.

Finally, you have Cow Key Channel, another area with a lot of boat traffic. When you go under the bridge you will be at mile 9. It is strongly recommended that you stay within the channel markers, where you will have the deepest waters. If you attempt to take a short cut (the sea wall) you may not be able to get through, depending on the tide. This "short cut" may cut the swim short! If you end up in water too shallow for the swimmer to get through, the swimmer will be disqualified. This is tragic, as he/she has already swum almost 10 miles. Don't chance it. You have a sure bet if you stay within the channel markers. However, the final decision is up to you and your swimmer.

In addition to protecting your swimmer you are the swimmer's supply line to nutrition. You have his/her liquids and food products. Becoming separated from your swimmer could pose a great threat to his/her safety. No one is more important to your swimmer during the event than you!

Start & Finish

We will start in the water and finish on the beach. As a kayaker, you should take note of your swimmers clothing and headgear so as to be able to find him/her once the crowd clears. Generally all swimmers start together and kayakers move farther away from shore with a visual on their swimmers. It will be very easy to lose your swimmer at the start. Don't panic if you cannot find your swimmer right away. Let the other

kayakers and motorboats around you know that you are looking for someone and everyone can work together to find the missing swimmer. We have always been able to match people up after the initial start, but **it is always best to enter the water with your swimmer, get a visual on him/her and keep it as you paddle to the outside and wait for the start**, when you can paddle closer to your swimmer for the rest of the race.

The reason for the two-wave start is to assist slower swimmers. If a swimmer doesn't get in to Key West Harbor before the tide changes he/she will be forced to swim against the tide, diminishing the chance of success. Any solo swimmers choosing to enter the first wave start and completing the course will receive a finisher's medal but will not be eligible for any placement trophies. Finisher medals are awarded to solo swimmers and relay teams that complete the full course within 8 hours.

In the final stretch of the course, you will find ten poles/pilings offshore and parallel to Smathers Beach. This is the last half-mile of the race. No motorized boats are allowed inside these wooden poles and swimmers are advised to keep them on your right. Swimmers must continue to last (10th) pole and then make a sharp right turn and head toward the beach. You will see a clearly marked chute on shore, which is the finish line. Kayakers should stay with their swimmer as they head to the beach, but do not go through the finish chute. Please call out your swimmer's name and number as he or she approaches the finish chute. This will help our finish line volunteers if the body markings on the swimmer are not clear or easily visible.

Hydration, Sunscreen & Gear

You will be on the water for 5-8 hours, so hydration and sun protection are essential for both swimmers and kayakers! Salt water and the hot tropical sun add to the necessity. Be prepared with sunscreen, brimmed hat and polarized sunglasses. Make sure you apply sunscreen before you leave shore. Even as a kayaker, it will not be possible to apply sunscreen during the event. Even though you will be paddling slowly, you will still be busy keeping your course, watching your swimmer and preparing and providing the necessary food and drinks for yourself and your swimmer. You may be able to stop occasionally and quickly reapply sunscreen, eat or drink, but don't count on relaxing in the sun all day. You will be busy!

Kayakers should pack their own drinks and snacks and should follow the same guidelines as swimmers. Consider gel packs or energy bars cut up in pieces. Put each piece in a separate baggy. If you have several pieces in one bag and it all gets wet (salty), you will not want to eat any of it. Make sure whatever plan to eat it is well sealed and easily accessible.

We suggest that all swimmers drink liquid every 20 to 30 minutes while in the water. Swimmers will give you their drinks and snacks in their own containers and instructions as to how often they want to drink and eat. One idea is to tie a thin rope/cord around the drink bottle so if you drop it, it won't float away. You may be asked to refill the same bottle from others as needed. This can be a challenge if it is wavy or windy! A big part of the escort's job is to remind swimmers that it is time to hydrate and refuel.

It is required by law that you have a Personal Floatation Device (PFD) with attached whistle in your kayak. If you cannot swim, you should wear your PFD. If you choose not to wear it, do not stow it in a hatch – it must be ready to grab in an emergency.

Required safety gear for kayakers:

- PFD w/whistle attached
- Paddle (obvious)
- Map of racecourse in waterproof case, if possible
- Cell phone in waterproof case. Do not put your cell phone in a plastic baggie. Instead, use a dry bag or waterproof case that can be purchased in most sporting goods or boating stores.
- If you have a sit-in, cockpit-style boat: spray skirt, bilge pump or other bailing device (a milk carton with the bottom cut off works or even a large cup)
- Waterproof watch or timer

Optional gear:

- Paddle leash or spare paddle

- VHF radio, GPS, binoculars, camera (preferably waterproof)

Safety

There will be several Committee Boats identifiable with yellow flags that are tasked with observing our swimmers and their escort vessels. If you have ANY needs, flag one of these boats. Additionally, there will be three to five safety kayakers with yellow pennants on the course that will be able to assist you. All swimmers will receive the cell phone numbers of our race officials and the event's radio frequency (74) in laminated plastic. Escort boaters are urged to keep these numbers in a handy place.

All swimmers will be given, at the time of registration or on the beach on the morning of the swim, an orange pennant on a rod with the number of the solo swimmer or the relay team. That pennant must be placed prominently on the kayak or boat so as to be visible to all. The Committee Boats will recognize you as a participant of the Annual Swim by that pennant. Most likely, you will need to attach the pennant to your kayak with duct tape, available at the swim start.

If, for any reason during the event, you end up with a different swimmer from whose number is on your pennant, PLEASE let race officials know this at checkpoints, the finish and any time you are in contact with a committee boat. If your swimmer drops out, we may need you to continue paddling with a different swimmer who has lost his/her kayaker. Be prepared for anything!

If your swimmer cannot continue the race, contact a nearby Committee Boat who will escort your swimmer to the finish line. If no Committee Boat is in sight, telephone Committee Boat Captain Don Nelson, who will then contact a Committee Boat. If your swimmer is unable to swim, have him/her hang onto the bow of your kayak. All swimmers must be accounted for, so if your swimmer drops out of the race for any reason, please contact the race director immediately!

If you or your swimmer is in danger, do not panic. Follow the recommended procedure:

- 1) Flag a nearby Committee Boat.
- 2) If no Committee Boat is in sight, call Committee Boat Captain Don Nelson and follow his instructions. He is equipped with a VHF Radio and will contact any nearby Committee Boat to come to your assistance.
- 3) If you cannot reach Don Nelson, contact Race Director Terrence White or Kayak Coordinator Katie Leigh. Program these numbers into your phone before you begin the race!
- 3) Only contact 911 after all other avenues have failed.

Note: If the Coast Guard at any time feels the weather is dangerous or the swimmers are in danger, they have the right and duty to call the event. We will not question their authority. If the event is called we are sorry but there are no refunds and no alternate date for 2021.

Swimmer Rules

Swimmers may not touch the boat/kayak or the ocean bottom. Swimmers must swim around all piers. Do not attempt to swim under the piers! No fins, snorkels, wet suits, body suits or devices/clothing that give extra buoyancy, propulsion or skin protection will be allowed.

The Lightning Rule: *If a lightning storm threatens a participant, you may swim/paddle to shore or get into your escort boat and head for shelter. Once the threat passes, you may re-enter the water as near as possible to the location you exited. Swimmers will not be disqualified from the event; however, the clock continues to run.*

After the Race

At the end of the event, kayakers have several duties.

1. Hand in the orange pennant to the volunteers on the beach. Please help us keep our costs down by returning these pennants. Thank you for your cooperation.
2. If your kayak was delivered to the beach, you will be REQUIRED to place this kayak in the designated location, which may include loading it directly onto a trailer or truck. (Your rental kayak will be marked

with a sticker from one of these rental outfitters and your swimmer's race number.) Do not leave your kayak on the beach and expect the rental companies or volunteers to return your kayak to the appropriate location!

Final Questions, Concerns or Comments

We thank you again for participating in the Annual Swim Around Key West and we wish you and your swimmer the greatest success. If you have any questions after reading this material, please contact Katie Leigh.

Important Race-Day Contact Information

Race Director	Terrence White	(305) 304-4341
Committee Boat Captain	Don Nelson	(305) 304-0091
Kayak Coordinator	Katie Leigh	(773) 502-5087