



Canoe Journey 2024 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Indigenous people along the Pacific Coast have been traveling by canoe since the beginning of time. A canoe is much more than just a means of transportation. Canoes are interwoven into Indigenous culture. They are part of ceremonies and traditional practices, which vary Tribe to Tribe and canoe family to canoe family. Canoe Journey gatherings represent resilience and bringing back cultural ways that [United States policy](#) tried to eliminate from Indigenous people, including language, traditional practices and ways of life. These sacred canoes carry our Elders, youth, cultural keepers, language holders and families.

What is the Canoe Journey?

Canoe Journey, also called the Tribal Canoe Journey or Tribal Journey, is the annual tradition of traveling on ancestral waterways by canoe. Canoe families leave their homelands, often staying at other Tribal locations, and arrive together at one location to share cultural traditions. Canoe Journey was revitalized in 1989 with “The Paddle to Seattle” and has grown nearly every year since. Tribes and other Indigenous groups are also doing smaller canoe journeys.

What does it mean that the Tribes are “hosting?”

Hosting is a way of Tribe(s) welcoming canoe families into traditional homelands. It often involves formalities of ceremony, organizing the sharing of spiritual songs and dances and providing food and a safe place to sleep. The focus is the kinship connections the Tribes have with each other. This is different from festival-type events, which are focused on sharing different celebrations with the public.

What is a Canoe Family?

A canoe family is one or more canoes that may represent a Tribe, First Nation or invited Indigenous group. It can also mean a family or group of Indigenous people. There may be canoe families that invite non-Indigenous people to join them.

What are the positions in a canoe?

Canoes have a skipper, who sits in the back of the canoe. The skipper is responsible for guiding the canoe and ensuring safety. Canoes can also have many “pullers” — the equivalent western term is “paddlers.” The first bench on the canoe is for the “pacers,” who set the pace for the rest of the pullers.

Why are we careful about calling it a “canoe” instead of a “boat?”

Canoes were originally carved from cedar trees, which are sacred to most Indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest. We honor the cedar tree’s spirit by using the term “canoe.” To use the term “boat” is disrespectful.

What is “Protocol?”

Protocol is an official system of rules that help canoe families honor Indigenous teachings. In general, it can mean the canoe family coming from the furthest away is welcomed ashore first. It can mean the order of canoe families to share songs and dances is organized by the distance travelled. It can also mean Elders are served meals first.

What is “Regalia?”

Regalia is the sacred apparel worn. It includes shawls, dresses, masks worn on the head or face, or items used in ceremony, like dance paddles. Regalia is often created and worn in ceremonies. It can be passed down generation to generation. It is disrespectful to call what is worn a costume.

What happens when canoes land?

Canoe families will ask the host Tribe(s) permission to come ashore. They will introduce themselves, their intentions during their visit, sing a song and/or ask a person of honor to speak. The host Tribe(s) will respond with a song, share words and give official permission to beach the canoe and come ashore.

How can the public be respectful at the landing site?

Canoe Journey is a sacred, but not a secret, ceremony.

- Pay attention to what is happening and step back to allow space for this to be about the Indigenous people.
- Listen and observe more than talk. You can do your own research to answer questions you may have later.
- Be quiet and respectful. Don’t talk during a prayer, when an Elder is talking or when a canoe family is requesting permission to come ashore.
- Avoid swearing or speaking in degrading ways.
- Participate only if you are invited and follow the above behaviors. Food and beverages may only be available to canoe families.
- Ask before touching a canoe or stepping in to help.