

making a splash

Discover Jersey's adventurous side with an aquatic enterprise that's been making waves with locals and tourists alike

by Matt Hill

After growing up amid the beautiful scenery of Jersey, Derek Hairon has always had an affinity with outdoor pursuits. But he knew he would have to leave his island home to discover the world. Adventurous escapades followed as he cycled across Europe and kayaked in locations as exotic and varied as Nepal, Canada, and Ireland. But it wasn't until he returned home that his most challenging adventure began.

Spotting a gap in the market, he decided to join forces with his business partner, Gary Kemp, and use their joint experience and knowledge to set up a kayaking business.

"We noticed that Jersey has some of the best locations for kayaking," says Derek, "but there was no one catering for it. People in New Zealand were doing it, so why not us?"

After studying similar businesses around the world, and paying close attention to the requirements of the local [read on →](#)

Island adventure: Derek Hairon joined forces with an old friend to turn his dream of setting up his own kayaking business on Jersey into a reality



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With its clear waters and stunning scenery, Jersey is the perfect holiday destination



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authorities, the two began turning their idea into reality. “Instead of just talking about it, we put our money where our mouths were and went for it,” says Derek. “We saw how others were doing it, and then we decided that we could do it even better.”

By choosing a new design of kayak that doesn’t require you to climb in, the partners made the activity less daunting. “We found that a lot of people were put off kayaking, but the American ‘sit-on-top’ design is much more accessible,” explains Derek. “It was a bold decision to base the business around this design of craft, but it paid off.”

In the last three years, Jersey Kayak Adventures (www.jerseykayakadventures.co.uk) has grown as kayaking has become one of the island’s most popular activities, with a new group of eager paddlers, together with their qualified and knowledgeable guides, setting off to discover the cliffs, caves and wildlife of the coast every day.

“Our research proved to be correct,” says Derek. “Now people realise it’s something that anyone can do. In the past, they might have talked about going canoeing, but these days it’s all about going kayaking.”

The crest of the wave that the company is now riding on wasn’t reached without plenty of planning. “The start-up costs were more than we expected, but we had a cushion in case

that happened,” Derek admits. “We also made a point of working with the authorities, which saved a lot of time and frustration.”

Derek and Gary also had to deal with Jersey’s unique legal system, which makes a number of peculiar demands, and there were no schemes to help the small business get on its feet, as there are in the UK.

The issues of insurance, health and safety could have dampened the pair’s enthusiasm yet, according to Derek, a dose of common sense quickly cut through the red tape. “It’s the job of the business to set the standards, and not hide behind the health and safety legislation,” he asserts.

“Too many people use health and safety matters as an excuse to not do things, when really business needs to take responsibility for this issue and put in place systems that are based on national standards of good practice.

“Speak to the experts and they will try and help you find the solutions to make things happen.”

Four years after both men gave up their jobs to embark on the venture, Jersey Kayak Adventures is not only an established island enterprise, it is continuing to develop and expand. “We now also offer walks into the inter-tidal zones with Jersey Walk Adventures.

“Jersey has some of the biggest tidal zones in the world,” explains Derek. “And when the sea is out, an amazing rocky moonscape is revealed.”

With plans to forge relationships with fellow businesses, and a group of enthusiastic specialists who are all too keen to welcome newcomers to the sights and sounds of the island’s aquatic surroundings, Derek and Gary have proved that kayaks really can make a splash – both financially speaking and in the more literal, exhilarating sense. **VB**

treasure island

Jersey’s distinctive landscape, coupled with its accessible size, makes it the perfect location for a variety of activities. “It’s like a mini New Zealand,” says Derek. “As it’s so small, you can do a lot all in the same day.” Whether it’s coasteering (that’s traversing the tricky rocks around the coast), sailing, surfing, rock-climbing or kayaking, Jersey has it all – and, thanks to the growing number of luxury hotels on the island, such as The Club Hotel & Spa (left), you can also wind down in style after an energetic day out.



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