



## **Guided Overnight Boundary Waters Canoe Trips**





## **Welcome, *Boozhoo!***

Thank you for booking an overnight trip with Border Lakes Tour Company! We are a locally-owned guiding company operating out of beautiful Grand Marais on the North Shore of Lake Superior. We specialize in overnight and day trips in and around the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

We set ourselves apart from other businesses around the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness by focusing solely on guided outdoors experiences rather than offering guiding as simply an add-on to an outfitting, lodging, or sports retail operation. Our mission is to share our love for this area with visitors; share stories about the human and natural history of the region; teach wildlife identification; inform visitors of the threats to the Boundary Waters and other public lands; and to give people the skills they need to feel safe and confident in a canoe and in a wilderness setting.

In this packet you will find info about the following:

- **The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness**
- **What To Expect**
- **Essential Eligibility**
- **Code of Community**
- **Safety, Rules, and Regulations**
- **Trip Timeline**
- **What Is Included**
- **Packing List**
- **Meals**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**



*Wake up to a mist-covered lake. Paddle along the Canadian border. Hear the call of loons at night. See the northern lights.*

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, or the BWCA, is a natural wonder located in the northern reaches of Minnesota on the Canadian border. This wilderness area spans over 1 million acres of land and is famous for its interconnected network of lakes and waterways, making it a haven for canoeing and camping enthusiasts.

The Boundary Waters offers a true backcountry experience; the area is devoid of roads, buildings, and other modern forms of human development. The glacier-carved land is distinguished by towering pine and spruce forests, rugged rock outcroppings, and tranquil bogs and wetlands. From the tops of soaring vistas, you can observe the diverse array of species that live in the area such as moose, bald eagles, loons, and others. An abundance of fish live in the deep lakes and in the rivers that cut through the landscape. These rivers cascade over the Laurentian Divide, creating waterfalls and pools perfect for swimming.



Our guided overnight tours into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness are truly one-of-a-kind. We provide the highest quality gear, food, and service, to ensure you have a safe, fun, and memorable Boundary Waters experience.

The guides at Border Lakes Tour Company take the lead on planning your route, portaging the heaviest packs, and cooking gourmet meals. Along the way, we'll share with you our knowledge of the area's history, flora, and fauna.

Our tours are the perfect way to explore this beautiful area at your pace—we do our best on public trips to meet everyone's unique goals and experience level. Trips start from a variety of locations along the Gunflint Trail near Grand Marais, Minnesota. Public overnight trips require a minimum of four participants and have a maximum of eight participants.

## What can I expect on an overnight canoe trip?



Above left: a group *portages* their gear between lakes. Right: Gear for a five day canoe trip.

Your trip will traverse the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, a remote wilderness area that is minimally maintained by the US Forest Service. Although our canoes are light, packs may be heavier, ranging in weight from 20 to 60 lbs. **Your guide will carry the canoes and heaviest equipment.** This gear is carried from lake to lake in a process called *portaging*. Portages, or the trails between lakes, are often rocky and uneven. **Please review our [essential eligibility criteria](#) and communicate any mobility concerns before booking your trip.**

- **Active participation** is required on all guided canoe trips. Although your guide will take the lead on all activities, each person will be expected to assist with paddling, portaging, meal preparation, and set-up and tear-down of camp.
- **Routes** vary considerably based on what your group wants to achieve. Some routes can be a “base camp” where your group stays at one campsite for all or most of the trip and does day trips to points of interest in the area; or the route can be a loop where the group is moving to new campsites almost every day.
- **Cell phones** make great cameras on overnight trips, however, there is no cell phone signal in the BWCA. If you choose to bring your cell phone, please bring a small waterproof bag to store it in.
- **Weather** in the BWCA can vary dramatically. Throughout the summer, the temperatures can range from 40 degrees overnight to 85 degrees during the day. Rainfall is common during the summer season, particularly in June and September. *It is essential to pack for all types of weather conditions.* Please read our recommended packing list extremely carefully.



- **Bugs** are a fixture of the Northwoods. Gnats and mosquitos are most prevalent at dawn and twilight, and in cool, damp weather. Please bring the appropriate gear (headnets, bug spray, etc.) to ensure you will be comfortable.
- **Showers** do not exist in the Boundary Waters. If you wish to bathe, the lakes are your best option. However, absolutely no soaps or other bathing products are allowed in Boundary Waters lakes.
- **Participants will sleep in shared tents**; if you prefer to have your own tent, we may provide you with a single-person tent for an additional cost (see pricing sheet). Please be aware that Boundary Waters campsites have limited tent pads (flat places for tents to be set up); the more tents on the trip, the fewer good tent pads will be available.

**Public Trips:** participants who booked together will have their own tent, and solo travelers will never be required to share a tent with someone of the opposite gender. If you prefer to have your own tent, we may provide you with a single-person tent for an additional cost (see pricing sheet). Please reach out if you have any questions.

- **Bathrooms** in the BWCA are called *latrines* or *biffs*. Latrines are pit toilets that are located at every designated campsite (see photo below). The latrines are privately away from the main campsites but there are no enclosed bathrooms, outhouses, or other indoor facilities. We provide toilet paper, soap, a basic hand washing station, and hand sanitizer.



*Above: A standard bathroom, or latrine, in the BWCA.*

## Essential Eligibility

Our number one goal on trips is to ensure your safety. To help you identify the skills you will need to successfully and safely participate in a guided overnight canoe trip with Border Lakes Tour Company, [please visit our website to see the Essential Eligibility Criteria](#).

If you are unable to meet any of the criteria, please get in touch with us. We may be able to make a reasonable accommodation unless it would change the trip's fundamental nature, compromise your safety or the safety of other participants or guides, or place an undue financial or administrative burden on Border Lakes Tour Company.

## Code of Community

At Border Lakes Tour Company, we are dedicated to fostering a culture of equity and inclusivity, embracing individuals from all walks of life. We do not discriminate based on race, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or background. Our commitment is unwavering – everyone is welcome. We constantly seek to grow in our capacity to serve those of different abilities and diverse backgrounds.

Border Lakes Tour Company is committed to our community. Our goal is to create an environment where all individuals, regardless of their identity, feel valued, respected, and included. To promote safety and comfort for all, we require individuals to act respectfully at all times when they are on our property or participating in our programs, behave in a mature and responsible way, and respect the rights and dignity of others. Please read our full [Code of Community](#) for more details.

## Safety, Rules, and Regulations

**Wilderness travel, canoeing, and camping are inherently risky activities.** At Border Lakes Tour Company, your safety is our top priority. Although we choose the overnight routes that are the most easily accessible by emergency services, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is an extremely remote area. Therefore, you will be required to observe the following non-negotiable rules during your overnight trip. Failure to observe any of these rules may result in the immediate termination of your trip and no refund.

- Trip participants must wear a PFD (i.e. lifejacket) at all times while in a boat.
- No consumption of alcohol, marijuana, or any other recreational drugs.
- No smoking, vaping, or using any tobacco products.
- No cliff-jumping, tree climbing, rock climbing, or diving headfirst into water.
- No unsupervised swimming.

Swimming can be a welcome relief from the work of canoeing and portaging and it can be fun, but **careless or risky stunts have no place in wilderness travel**. Swimming is only permitted at times and locations that your guide has determined as safe. For children 17 and under, swimming is initially only permitted in waist deep water or with a life jacket on and must always be supervised.

Our experienced guides are Red Cross First Aid and CPR certified and are fully equipped with **medical kits** and **satellite emergency devices** to ensure that you are safe during your entire trip.

Because your trip will traverse a wilderness area, there is the possibility of encountering wild animals, however, they generally are more scared of us than we are of them. Your guide will teach you how to observe wildlife safely from a distance.

At Border Lakes Tour Company, we take every precaution to ensure that your trip through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is not only enjoyable but also safe. You can trust that you are in good hands with our expert guides who are dedicated to making your adventure one you'll never forget.

## Trip Timeline

- After booking your trip, ensure that you and everyone in your party have reviewed and signed all forms sent to you by Border Lakes Tour Company.
- Watch the following short [videos](#) required by the US Forest Service for all Boundary Waters visitors.
- Two to four weeks prior to your trip start date, you will have an informational video call with your guide. We will do a virtual “pack-out” where you will pack your bag and be able to ask your guide questions about your gear.
- A poll will be sent out ahead of time to find the best date and time for the call. We will choose the time that works best for a majority of participants. If you are unable to attend the virtual pack-out, the call will be recorded and you will be emailed a link. If you still have questions about packing, feel free to email us.

### Public Trip

#### Day Prior to Trip:

- **Meet** at YMCA Camp Menogyn or another nearby lodge at approximately 6pm. The exact location will be communicated to you at least four weeks prior to your trip start date.
  - **Please arrive after having eaten dinner!** No dinner will be available on site. You are welcome to bring snacks so you don't get hungry during the evening.
  - We will not be returning to the bunkhouse so all items not going on the canoe trip will need to be stored in your car.
- **Parking** is available at all entry points. Multi-day parking is generally safe, however, Border Lakes Tour Company is not responsible for any stolen or damaged items.
- **Sleeping Arrangements:** The night before the start of the trip, participants will sleep in a bunkhouse. Bunkhouses are rustic amenities with shared sleeping quarters that include individual bunk beds. Bunk beds sleep one person per bed. There are enough beds so that no one will be required to sleep on the top bunk.

#### Start date:

- A simple breakfast provided by your guide at lodging.
- Permit pickup with an official Boundary Waters permit provider.

### Private Trip

#### Day Prior to Trip

- **Stay in booked lodging (not provided) in the Grand Marais area.**
  - Please contact us about any questions related to lodging.

#### Start date:

- Morning (flexible): **Meet at an official Boundary Waters entry point** or permit provider for a final gear check and to go over rules, regulations, and safety procedures.



- **Parking** is available at all entry points. Multi-day parking is generally safe, however, Border Lakes Tour Company is not responsible for any stolen or damaged items.

### **All Groups**

#### **Start date (continued):**

- 10am: Start paddling!
- 1-2pm: Lunch (provided).
- 2-4pm: Make camp at a designated campsite.
- 4-6pm: Dinner prep and free time.
- 6pm: Dinner (provided).
- Free time before bed. Stargaze, look for the northern lights, sit around the campfire, play a game.

#### **Additional days:**

- Some groups prefer to base camp for the entirety of their trip, while others prefer to change campsites every day. No option is better than the other, and we are happy to accommodate a mixture of both!
- Our guides will offer hikes, and other activities for your group to visit on your additional days.

#### **End date:**

- 7-8 am: Breakfast (provided).
- 8-10am: Begin packing up camp.
- 10-12pm: Paddle towards the boat launch.
- 12pm: Lunch (provided)
- 1-4pm: Paddle to boat launch and farewell.
- Dinner and overnight lodging on your own.

All stated times are flexible to accommodate for group needs and weather conditions.

## **What is included?**

Our guided overnight tours are fully outfitted. This includes, but is not limited to:

- The services of an expert wilderness guide
- An overnight wilderness permit
- High-quality, organic meals
- Dishes and cookware
- Water filtration
- Canoes, paddles, and life jackets
- Dry bags
- Sleeping bags
- Sleeping pads
- Tents
- Toilet paper, soap, and hand sanitizer

## Packing List

**All of your personal items—excluding your footwear, sleeping bag, and pad—will need to fit in a 20-30 liter dry bag.** It's important to have enough warm and dry clothes, but we don't want to overpack! We strongly encourage our participants to bring wool or synthetic products which will keep them warm and dry. The saying "cotton kills" reminds us that cotton (which includes denim – so no jeans!) holds moisture and will draw heat away from the body when wet. [Check out this great REI article](#) about how to dress your kids for the outdoors--there's some great info in there that we can all learn from!

You will need to have one set of "wet clothes" that will be used everyday while canoeing. We recommend fast-drying pants or shorts, a fast-drying top, wool socks, a fast-drying warm layer, and a pair of shoes/boots with ankle support that can get wet. Your remaining clothes will be several changes of "dry clothes" for while in camp (for example: wool socks, warm pants, fleece sweatshirt, light down jacket, shirts, sandals).

**Pro tip:** Whichever boots or shoes you would like to use as "wet" boots during the trip, we recommend, at least a week in advance, to fully submerge them in water and to then go for a walk in them. Even if they are old, trusted, worn-in shoes, it can be a very different experience if you have never walked in them when they are soaked. This will help to "break in" your boots some and show you if there are any concerns with them when wet.

Your "wet" and "dry" clothes should never be stored in the same place and your dry clothes should never be used as wet clothes. **Proper clothing is the best and easiest way**

**to ensure a safe and comfortable trip.** Please review the list below for all recommended items. **Do not hesitate to bring extra warm layers.**

**Necessary:**

- **Rain gear:** Rain jacket at a minimum, rain pants if you have them.
- **“Wet” shoes:** Closed-toe shoes/boots that will get wet.
- **“Dry” shoes:** Tennis shoes or sandals. Crocs, Keens, Texas, or Chacos all work great. No flip-flops.
- **“Wet” clothes:** One set of clothes that will be used everyday while canoeing.
  - fast-drying pants or shorts
  - fast-drying top
  - fast-drying warm layer (long sleeve shirt or light non-cotton sweatshirt)
  - underwear
  - Wool or synthetic socks
- **“Dry” clothes:** Clothes that are worn in camp/off the water and are meant to be kept dry.
  - wool socks (1-2 pairs)
  - fast-drying shirts (1-2)
  - underwear (1-2 pairs)
  - warm pants
  - shorts
  - fleece sweatshirt or warm synthetic layer
  - hat (light head warmer or beanie)
  - long underwear or other warm base layer
  - light down jacket (most necessary in June and September)
- Toiletries (including any prescription medication)
- Headlamp or flashlight
- Sun hat or baseball cap
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen (we ask that you use a reef-friendly sunscreen to protect our waters)
- Bug spray
- Reusable water bottle (Nalgens, Hydroflasks, and Camelbaks work great!)

**Optional:**

- Swimsuit and a compact, fast-drying towel
- Camera
- Book, puzzles, cards, games or something to do with your down time

- Fishing gear and permit
- Cash to tip your guide (many guides also have Venmo)

**Please do not bring:**

- Valuables that you do not wish to lose or damage
- Speakers or any noise-producing electric device
- Jeans or any denim clothing items
- Flip-flops
- Cotton socks



## Meals

When it comes to trail food, we like to go gourmet! We provide high quality meals, sourcing our ingredients from local, humane, and organic providers to the best of our ability.

**We have extensive experience accommodating all types of dietary restrictions.** This includes, but is not limited to, dairy-free, gluten-free, egg-free, nut-free, vegetarian, and vegan diets. In some cases, we may need to charge a small fee in order to accommodate complex dietary needs. Additionally, we cannot guarantee that ingredients did not come into contact with allergens. If you have a life-threatening food allergy, we strongly recommend that you bring your own meals.

### **Public Trip Menu Selection**

Your dietary restrictions will be collected in an informational form after booking. Once the full group's dietary restrictions are determined, a menu will be sent out. Due to the size and composition of public trips, we are unable to modify the menu unless due to a previously undisclosed dietary restriction.



### **Private Trip Menu Selection**

You will be sent a form with a variety of meal options. You will have the opportunity to indicate any dietary restrictions and general appetite level. Please follow the instructions on the form.

Please feel free to bring along easily packable, non-perishable snacks for yourself such as nuts or energy bars. If someone in the group has a particular allergy with severe reactions, we will require the entire group to not bring this food item or ingredient. You will not be able to bring any perishable items or those items that require refrigeration. Thank you in advance for your understanding.

**Lunch** is generally the same meal everyday, tailored to your group's dietary needs. An example lunch may be: a simple wrap with hummus, sausage, and cheese with trail mix, dried fruit, and an energy bar.

Please look over some of the **breakfasts** and **dinners** guests have enjoyed on previous trips. Menu items are adjusted seasonally and are based on current supplies. The meals listed below are examples and are not guaranteed offerings.

### **Previous Trip Meals:**

#### **Breakfast**

- Blueberry Pancakes and Sausage
- Breakfast Burritos
- Egg McMuffin
- Oatmeal with Dried Fruit

#### **Dinner**

- Chicken Pad Thai
- Curried Lentils with Rice
- Fajitas with Chicken or Steak
- Brats and Burgers

### **Previous Private Trip Specialities:**

#### **Breakfast**

- Sweet Potato, Kale, Sausage Hash
- Cinnamon Rolls
- Bagels, Cream Cheese, Salmon

#### **Dinner**

- Porcini Risotto with Goat Cheese
- Steak with Cherry Reduction Sauce
- Korean Rice Bowls

## Frequently Asked Questions

Please look over [our webpage](#) for frequently asked questions. Do not hesitate to call or email us with any additional questions!

**Please share this packet with every participant on your trip—thank you!**



**Call or email us with any questions or to book your trip!**

**Border Lakes Tour Company**  
**(218) 387-8717**  
[borderlakesguiding@gmail.com](mailto:borderlakesguiding@gmail.com)