



# BALANCING ACT



MISSOURIANS HIT THE  
WATER TO EMBRACE  
A STAND-UP ACTIVITY.

**STORY** Porcshe N. Moran

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LEFT: Roo Yawitz, general manager of Boathouse Paddle Co. in St. Louis, guides his stand-up paddleboard around Post-Dispatch Lake in Forest Park. BELOW: Our writer, Porcshe Moran, tries SUP for the first time. The results were mixed.



**MY FIRST ATTEMPT AT STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING WAS FAR FROM SMOOTH SAILING. ON A WARM SUNDAY AFTERNOON, MY HUSBAND AND I WENT TO FOREST PARK IN ST. LOUIS FOR AN EXCURSION ON POST-DISPATCH LAKE. THE RENTAL COMPANY GAVE US EACH A BOARD, A PADDLE, AND A LIFEJACKET. AFTER A FEW INSTRUCTIONS, WE WERE IN THE WATER.**

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My husband caught on quickly. His previous experience with canoeing gave him enough paddling knowledge to be able to steer his board. I, on the other hand, have never been in a canoe or a kayak, let alone paddled one. As I struggled to get the board under my control and keep my balance, the sun seemed to beat down incessantly on me, becoming hotter and hotter. My frustration grew as I watched my husband and the other SUPers glide past me with ease and grace. I wanted nothing more than to admit defeat, go back to shore (if only I could get the board turned around!), and never see another paddleboard again. Eventually, I gave up on standing on the board and decided to sit on it in a cross-legged style so I could focus on my paddling technique. Luckily, this is a perfectly acceptable way to paddleboard—you can also kneel or lie down. In this new position, I began to calm down, and the paddling got easier. I was finally able to enjoy the surroundings, which included St. Louis landmarks such as Government Hill, the World's Fair Pavilion, Art Hill, the St. Louis Art Museum, and the fountains of the Emerson Grand Basin. There was plenty of nature and wildlife, too, including a variety of water birds and songbirds, and native grasses and wildflowers that are home to butterflies, bees, and dragonflies.



PATRICK MURPHY

BELOW: The proper stance is necessary for stability on a stand-up paddleboard. You can also sit or kneel on the board.



Roo Yawitz, general manager of Boathouse Paddle Co., which took over dock operations at Forest Park in May 2018, says Post-Dispatch Lake is a perfect place to try paddleboarding for the first time.

"If you cover all the permissible water, it is about 1.5 miles," he says. "The lagoon is a controlled environment with no tide or current, so it is a great place to learn. We have two types of paddleboards—one for beginners and one for people with more experience."

Despite my rough start, I ended my adventure with a desire to try stand-up paddleboarding again in Forest Park and other places around the state. Like me, many Missourians are discovering the joys of stand-up paddleboarding. The activity has taken off in both urban and rural areas. Data from the Outdoor Foundation show that 2.8 million Americans participated in

stand-up paddling in 2014, up from 1.1 million in 2010, with participation increasing among all age groups.

"Stand-up paddling is one of the fastest-growing water sports in the world," says Don Dutton, owner of Going Coastal, a stand-up paddleboard retailer at the Lake of the Ozarks. "A decade ago, paddleboarding was virtually nonexistent in Missouri. In 2012, Going Coastal was the first company to sell paddleboards at the Lake of the Ozarks."

Although stand-up paddleboarding has long been popular in Hawaii and on the West and East Coasts, Joe Alfafara, owner of Ozark Paddle Boards in Springfield, says Missouri is an ideal place to enjoy the sport.

"I am originally from Southern California," he says. "I started paddleboarding in the ocean, where it is a lot harder to do. The lakes and rivers in Missouri are calm and easy, which make

## HOW TO STAND UP AND BALANCE ON A PADDLEBOARD

1. Stand alongside the board in about knee-deep water.

2. Place a hand on each side of the board and hold it by the edges. Work your way onto it in a kneeling position, just behind the center point of the board.



3. With eyes looking forward, keep your hands on the sides of the board to stabilize it and move one foot at a time to place your feet where your knees were.

4. Start by raising your chest up while keeping your knees bent as you let go of the board with your hands. Once your chest is vertical, extend your legs to stand up.







TOP: Boards and paddles rest on the shore of Lake of the Ozarks. LEFT: On Table Rock Lake in Branson, a stand-up paddleboarder sees the lake from a different vantage point.

them great places to learn, and the scenery is beautiful.”

## ADVENTURES IN EVERY DIRECTION

Nearly every region of Missouri offers optimal locales for stand-up paddleboarding adventures to suit people of all skill levels. The Missouri River, which flows from Kansas City in the west to St. Charles in the east, plays host each summer to the MR340, a grueling 340-mile paddling race across the state. In the west, endurance paddlers take to the 970-acre Lake Jacomo in Blue Springs. Casual paddlers gravitate to Blue Springs Lake in Lee’s Summit and Longview Lake near south Kansas City for peaceful sunset and moonlight trips. The waterfowl refuge and feeder creeks on the north side of Smithville Lake in Clay County make it an attractive spot for stand-up paddlers who want to connect with nature.

“The Kansas City area is a great place for paddleboarding,” says Christy Kurtz, founder of Paddle KC, a social club for Kansas City-area stand-up paddleboard, canoe, and kayak enthusiasts. “We have many lakes, rivers, and creeks in this area, plus wonderful paddling destinations a short drive away. Our members’ favorite locations depend on the type of paddling they prefer.”

In addition to Forest Park, the eastern part of the state features Creve Coeur Lake, Simpson Park Lake, and the Mississippi River. Stephens Lake Park and Finger Lakes State Park in Columbia, Lake of the Ozarks State Park, and the cove at Ha Ha Tonka State Park near the 15-mile marker of the Niangua Arm are options in central Missouri.

“The Lake of the Ozarks is great for stand-up paddleboarding because of the many coves and tributaries. There is always somewhere new to explore,” Don says. “Even busy coves by

5. Position your feet so they are parallel, about hip-width distance apart, and centered between the edges of the board.
6. Keep your toes pointed forward, knees slightly bent, and your back straight.



7. Keep your head and shoulders steady and upright. Shift your weight by moving your hips.
8. Your gaze should be level at the horizon. Avoid staring at your feet.





day are suitable for paddling in the mornings and evenings. Go out when it's busy to challenge your abilities."

The southwest has the calm Bull Shoals and Springfield Lakes for beginners, the 43,000-acre Table Rock Lake for intermediate paddlers, and Lake Taneycomo for the more experienced. The Current and Jacks Fork Rivers provide paddling opportunities in the southeast. The Missouri Canoe and Floaters Association website at [MissouriCanoe.org](http://MissouriCanoe.org) is a comprehensive resource for river maps, descriptions, and outfitters around the state.

### WORKOUT WITH A VIEW

Fans of stand-up paddleboarding tout its benefits to both the body and the mind. According to research by the Outdoor Foundation, exercise is the top motivator for stand-up paddlers, as you can burn up to 500 calories per hour with this sport. Enjoying family and friends and observing the scenic beauty also rank high on the list. Stand-up paddleboarding offers a unique chance to look down into the water, instead of out and across as you would in a canoe or kayak.

"Paddleboarding is a fantastic full-body workout, with muscles from head to toe engaged during balancing on the board and during paddling," Christy says. "It improves strength, endurance, coordination, flexibility, and core stability. It's also a great way to spend time outdoors and enjoy nature, which boosts mental health and happiness."

Christy started Paddle KC in January 2015 because she wanted to meet more people who share her love for paddle sports. The group has more than 400 members who get together on a regular basis to partake in paddling experiences and increase paddling skills.

"Too many people paddle alone, learn things the hard way, and are unaware of important safety considerations for paddleboarding or kayaking," Christy says. "Joining Paddle KC helps new and experienced paddlers enjoy this fantastic hobby more."

### START WITH THE BASICS

The basics for stand-up paddleboarding are a board and a paddle. Other optional equipment includes a paddling life jacket, a safety whistle for emergencies, a waterproof pouch for storing your phone, a sunglasses retainer strap, and a way to transport your board on your vehicle, such as a rack or SUP foam blocks. Christy suggests renting or borrowing a board to try out the sport before you invest in equipment.

"Paddleboarding is easier than you might think," she says. "It's an option for any size, shape, or fitness level. And unlike some hobbies, like bicycling, there are few consumable supplies or maintenance costs once you make the initial investment."

When you are ready to buy, Don and Joe recommend shopping at a brick-and-mortar store.

### HOW TO PADDLE: BASIC FORWARD STROKE

Make sure the teardrop-shaped blade of the paddle angles away from you and toward the nose of the board. When you're paddling on the right side of the board, your left hand will be on the T-grip and your right hand a few feet down on the shaft. When you switch sides, reverse your hand positions.





BELOW: Stand-up paddleboarders take to Table Rock Lake.



LEFT AND TOP: Lake of the Ozarks attracts adventurers on a warm day.

"My best advice for a beginner is to buy a board from a company that knows paddleboards and can fit you with the right board for your needs," Don says. "Make sure the salesperson does stand-up paddleboarding and lets you try several demo boards to get a feel for the different sizes and styles before you buy. Stand-up paddleboards are not a one-size-fits-all purchase; buy the wrong board and you won't use it. Buy the correct one, and it will provide years of enjoyment."

Inflatable boards are the best pick for stand-up paddling in Missouri, Joe says. They are less expensive and more durable than the traditional hard boards, and they can be folded down to suitcase-size for convenient travel and storage.

"People used to come in and go straight to the rigid boards, and they wouldn't even look at the inflatables," Joe says. "Now, I can't keep them in stock. Missourians are used to being rough with their kayaks and canoes, but you can't do that with a rigid board because it will crack. The inflatable boards can handle being knocked around and you can roll them up and put them in a backpack."

## FROM DRY RUN TO WET FUN

For aspiring stand-up paddleboarders who want instruction before they hit the water, many dealers offer introductory lessons that cover basic safety procedures and techniques. When Joe gives a beginner a lesson, the first half hour or so of training takes place indoors. He says it is easier to teach some paddling skills on dry land.

"Once I get them on the water, they are paddling like a pro within 15 to 30 minutes," he says.

Canoeing experience is helpful, says Jared Peterson, manager of the Columbia location of Alpine Shop, an outdoor recreation supply store. The nice, easy strokes needed to move forward in a canoe are similar to those used for paddleboarding. Jared tells beginners to start on their knees until they are balanced; upon standing up, keep the weight on the toes and slightly bend knees forward. With that advice squared away, Jared's top tip for eager SUPers is short and sweet:

"Have fun, ask questions, and expect to get a little wet! The ability to stand on the water is pretty amazing."

1. Plant the paddle in the water by reaching about two feet forward, then push the blade all the way under the surface. Move the paddle back through the water to your ankle, then out of the water. Set your gaze on the horizon and focus on a nonmoving object ahead.



2. Keep your arms straight and twist from your torso as you paddle. Push down on the paddle grip with your top hand rather than pulling the paddle back with your lower arm. Some people find it helpful to think of pulling the board past the paddle rather than pulling the paddle through the water.



3. To go in a reasonably straight line, you'll need to alternate strokes on either side of the board. There's no set number of strokes per side; try three or four strokes on one side, then switch to the other.



4. The more vertical you keep the paddle, the straighter you will go.

