

Rafting Introduction:

In white-water rafting, participants guide and paddle a raft through **whitewater**, or a river's rapids. The sport's popularity began to grow when it became part of the Olympic Games in the 1970s. Today it's estimated that between nine and 10 million people have tried white-water rafting, with about three million rafters running a river more than twice a year.

Rivers won't always fall easily into a classification and may surprise you with their difficulty. You'll also need to learn how to "read" the river from your raft and from the shore (called **scouting**).

The art of river reading involves looking at the different elements of the river to determine any possible dangers. Break down your read by first looking at the big picture, such as the direction of the current and scouting any hazards such as fallen trees or big rocks. Then scout out the details, such as available rest stops (known as **eddies**).

Rivers on the East Coast require more technical expertise than those on the West Coast, and have a greater number of boulders and rocks to navigate. West Coast rivers tend to have higher water volume and steeper descents. Be sure to pick a river that interests you -- you'll be looking at the scenery for the duration of your trip!

When planning an East Coast rafting adventure, some of the best river runs are the Ocoee River in Polk County, Tenn., which was home to the 1996 Olympic Canoe/Kayak White-water Slalom competition; the Nantahala River in Bryson City, N.C.; the Gauley River in Summersville, W.V. and the Chattooga River outside of Clayton, Ga. The Chattooga River, for the film buffs out there, is where "Deliverance" was shot.

The roar of the rapids! The thrill of cascading waterfalls! Give whitewater rafting a try. Here are some reasons why you should take the plunge:

- Whitewater rafting is an exciting way to see the great outdoors.
- Whitewater rafting is a challenging (but fun) way of testing your strength, endurance, reflex time and ability to think on your feet.
- Whitewater rafting is a group activity that brings friends closer together through teamwork.
- Whitewater rafting is a sheer adrenaline rush.
- Whitewater rafting gives you bragging rights to whatever river you tamed, making you much more attractive to the whitewater groupies everywhere.