

## Snorkeling

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required  
First-Aider and Lifeguard/Trained Water Rescue Required

**Council Approval:** Required

**Activity Permitted For:** J C S A



### About Snorkeling

Snorkeling is a great way to explore underwater life without the complicated equipment required of scuba diving. It is important to learn how to breathe properly using snorkels and to receive instruction from an experienced snorkeler or equipment-rental facility.

Coral, an ecosystem of shell and marine life, is a popular attraction for snorkelers and must be respected. As ocean organisms that support plants and fish, coral reefs are an essential part of the underwater ecosystem. Unfortunately, the coral reef is threatened by climate change, ocean acidification, and people who mistreat it. Touching coral can harm the delicate outer layer, which may take up to 100 years to recover.

It is important to know where to snorkel: just about any body of water is appropriate, but snorkeling is most recommended in warm ocean water with minimal waves or current.

#### Learn More:

- [National Association of Underwater Instructors](#)
- [Professional Association of Diving Instructors](#)
- [Snorkeling Info](#)

## Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. For resources and information on accessible sport and adventure activities, visit [Move United](#). Learn about the resources and information that the [National Instructors Association for Divers with Disabilities](#) provides.

## Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as the proper equipment, prior experiences, and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

## Safety Activity Checkpoints

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP).** Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong, such as, an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, or sudden illness.

**Standard Safety Guidelines.** Refer to the "Standard Safety Guidelines" in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) which apply to all Girl Scout gatherings and activities. When the adult-to-girl ratio, or other safety parameters, are stricter for a specific activity than in the Standard Safety Guidelines, always follow the stricter parameters in the activity chapter.

**COVID-19 Guidelines.** Review the "Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts" section in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the "Standard Safety Guidelines" section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal's specific COVID-19 guidance](#). When applicable, always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

**Ensure participants are able to swim and are comfortable in the water.** Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Consult Parents/Guardians about girls' swim abilities before event. See the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoint](#) for samples, or ask your instructor for guidelines.

**Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Ensure the snorkeling instructor holds instructional certification from Scuba Schools International (SSI) or the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) or has equivalent certification. Snorkeling instructors should have ARC Lifeguarding with Waterfront

**Verify certified lifeguard or open water rescue is present.** If the snorkeling instructor is not also a certified lifeguard, you will need a lifeguard present. Lifeguards need current ARC Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module or YMCA Waterfront Lifeguarding Certification, or the equivalent. You need one certified lifeguard for every 25 swimmers. The primary guard must be an adult (age 18). Secondary guards can be 16 years old.

**Size up snorkeling gear.** Ensure the appropriate sizes of masks, snorkels, and fins are available, and make sure that masks fit girls' faces securely and comfortably. An air space is needed in front of the eyes in order to see properly underwater. Also, keep in mind that objects viewed underwater while wearing a mask appear about 25 percent larger and closer than objects seen through a mask out of water.

**Safeguard valuables.** Do not leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place. If working with a snorkeling school, inquire about the company's storage amenities.

**Prepare for emergencies.** An adult with rescue experience and/or certification must be present. If snorkeling from a boat, at least one adult should have small-craft safety certification or equivalent experience. (One person can hold both of these qualifications.)

Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in first aid, including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of near-drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with wilderness first aid. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)]

**Get a weather and wind report.** Never snorkel on a stormy or extremely windy day; strong winds and large waves decrease visibility and make swimming difficult. On the day of the snorkeling trip or lesson, check [Weather.com](#), or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate. If weather conditions prevent the snorkeling activity, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.

**Use the buddy system.** See [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints 2023-2024](#)

**Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning.** Exit water immediately, and head to shore. Take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet and place hands on knees with head between them.

## Safety and Required Gear

- **Wearable flotation device:** Consult with your instructor to evaluate whether participants should wear a flotation device such as a simple waist belt or snorkeling vest. Water currents or surge, visibility, and participants' swimming ability should be considered. If life jackets are recommended by the instructor, then use [U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets](#) (Type III recommended) that fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure they're in good condition with no tears.
- **Snorkel**
- **Mask**
- **Emergency flotation device:** At least one graspable and throw-able personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) needs to be immediately available

## Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Snorkeling

Snorkeling is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form](#) to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
  - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California, have a current background check, completed the troop chaperone course and troop driver course (if transporting girls), and completed the [California State Mandated Reporter Training](#). Troop Leaders can find this information in their [Volunteer Toolkit](#).
  - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
  - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your [MyGS Account - GSLearn](#) in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
    - The **Trip & Outdoor Advisor Course** is required for all overnight and [high-adventure activities](#).
    - The **Camp Out course** is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer

than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.

- The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
  - The **Girl Scout Small Craft Safety Training** is required before you take girls on a small craft water adventure.
- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops/groups must select a high-adventure vendor from the [High-Adventure Approved Vendor List](#), which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the council's and volunteer's legal interests.

