

Whitewater Rafting in Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont:

Top Whitewater Rafting Safety Tips for a Guided Rafting Tour

Here is a series of top safety and planning tips for a rafting trip with an outfitter. They include choosing a good outfitter, choosing the correct trip, equipment and trust in the outfitter and guide.

When choosing an outfitter look at a few things – experience, location, facilities and staff. For safety, experience and staffing are most important. Consider how long the outfitter has been rafting the river that you are considering and see if there is info on their website about their staff and their experience. Do trip leaders have many years experience on that river? Are owners of the company out on the river guiding trips?

Choosing the correct trip for your group is critical for your enjoyment and level of desired thrill and risk. Most outfitters offer milder and wilder trips, sometimes on the same river. Carefully choose a trip that will be exciting for all paddlers in your group, but not scary or intimidating to some. Scared rafters often freeze at inopportune times and can negatively impact the safety for all in the raft. Scared rafters also tend not to return to raft again – find the trip that is a good mix for everyone involved.

Hopefully you have chosen an outfitter that has excellent equipment and safety gear. Rafts covered with duct tape and patches are not a good sign. Faded, tattered, moldy life jackets are not a good sign. Smelly, ripped wetsuits are not a good sign. Clean, recently updated gear is essential.

When your gear is issued before the trip, make sure it is properly adjusted. The best adjustment happens when your guide adjusts it to you or at a minimum checks it thoroughly after you have adjusted it yourself. Poorly adjusted PFD's/life jackets and helmets are likely to be uncomfortable and not as safe as they can be. Make sure the expert double checks all gear before getting in the raft.

Finally, trust the outfitter and the guide during the trip. Your guide knows the river better than you. Do not question individual moments and decisions on the river – your guide is taking you down the river in the best way to balance thrills and safety. Listen and respond quickly to commands during the rapids. A quick response by a raft crew ensures the best ride down the river in terms of thrill, but also minimizes potential hazards that must be avoided along the route. If something unexpected happens, listen and respond with safety in mind. Your guide has the best intentions to save a swimmer, avoid a rock, etc. but can only assure that a minor incident does not blow up into a major incident with the help of their crew.

So pick an experienced outfitter with good gear and trust your guide – you will have a great time on the river!

Article by Frank Mooney, Crab Apple Whitewater Rafting ownership family

Deerfield River guide since 1990, Millers River guide since 1991, Kennebec River guide since 1991, Dead River guide since 1991, West River guide since 1991. Total of over 2,000 river days and over 12,000 river miles.