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What attire should I choose for the floating shelter?

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In recent years, STARLING has invested heavily in new concepts. We developed many unique trips such as our floating hide trips under the impetus of Yves Adams.

Thanks to mobile huts floating on the water, you can make fantastic images of water and wading birds. What's special about this type of photography, is the exceptionally low vantage point that guarantees you'll get great images. The hut is one thing, the attire another. Because we get quite a few questions about the best clothes to wear, Yves Adams decided to share his experiences with you! Read below to find out what your options are for getting into the water.

Swimwear

This is the cheapest solution. Obviously, you can only use this when the water is very warm, as you can stay motionless in the water for a very long time. Moreover, swimwear does not protect you from leeches or vegetation.

Rubber wading suit

The rubber wading suit is a fairly cheap suit, but it does not "breathe". So you have to expect to sweat hard when it gets a bit warmer. It is also not flexible, which is sometimes tricky in crouching positions. Lastly, it is also quite fragile and the rubber needs to be maintained well to avoid quick wear and tear. Most models also don't come very high, which means you can't go deep, or squat low in the water.



Yves in action in the Brenne during a floating hut workshop! © Martine Decoussemaeker and Jacky Launay

Neoprene wading suit

Usually the best option for frequent use. Neoprene is quite strong, stretches with you, and insulates best. Some models come high, most conveniently one up to just below the armpits. A neoprene wading suit comes in different thicknesses. Don't choose the thinnest, even if it is mainly meant for warm water. With thicker models, the seams are stronger, even though they will not last a lifetime with heavy use (especially when it stretches frequently and strongly in a crouched position) either.

A general advantage of a wading suit is the open upper section, which leaves your arms and shoulders free, and allows you to take off a jumper as soon as it gets too hot. A model with clip-shoulder straps is ideal. Velcro sometimes makes too much noise, even though it is more convenient to adjust quickly depending on having to walk with it or sit with it on the bottom. Because the suit is open, you obviously can't go too deep into the water. You can find fairly cheap models in many sports shops. They often come with fixed boots that allow you to put on an extra pair of warm stockings if it is cold. However, if the boot size is too big, they often get stuck in deep mud and steps are difficult. In shallow water, men can easily put the suit down for a sanitary stop.

Nylon wading suit

These suits are often used for fly fishing and are more easily available without rubber boots (i.e. just the nylon "stockings"). This allows you to put sturdier shoes on top, which will then naturally get wet. Typical are the "fly-fishing botinnes", with felt-like sole, which prevent fly-fishers from slipping on slippery stones. You can also pair this suit with sturdy "crocs" or sandals made for water sports. These suits are often more expensive and do not insulate anything. They are, however, more compact and lighter than a neoprene suit.



Splash! A sublime sculpture from a floating hut. © Yves Adams

Neoprene wetsuit

A neoprene wetsuit is used by surfers or warm-water divers. Sometimes very cheap to find and come without shoes or stockings. This suit is combined with loose surf shoes or neoprene stockings. You get completely wet with this suit, but the neoprene retains a layer of water around your body, and this gradually warms up. So it's ideal for warm conditions, but you come out of the water completely wet, and you have to change completely when you're done. The wet neoprene suit is often harder to dry (heavy) when you're done. With this kind of suit, you basically cannot sink. Combined with flippers, you can also float in deep water.

Nylon drysuit

This suit is used by divers. It is quite pricey unless you buy it second-hand (which is very often available). A drysuit is completely

waterproof due to the exciting rings around the neck and wrists, so it can be perceived as somewhat claustrophobic. Especially when it starts to get hot, it is completely one with your body and can feel oppressive.

Better choose a model here that is a bit larger, so you can squat down enough and put on insulating clothing underneath. There are special full-body suits, which have insulating material that are not squeezed shut by the water pressure on the drysuit, thus maintaining their insulating function. Here, choose a model with a front zip, otherwise you will often need help to put it on or take it off. It is usually made of trilaminate or other types of nylon. Depending on the position of the zip, this allows a man to take a sanitary stop in shallow water (although it is no mean feat not to move or make noise in a drift hut and open the suit's heavy zip). The stronger models in particular do sometimes make some noise around the arms, which are almost always above water.

Neoprene drysuit

This is the same as a nylon drysuit, but with an insulating function. This suit is used by divers in cold water and during long dives. It is quite heavy in weight, but cheaper than nylon. This suit is only suitable for winter situations.

Mr Jan Gear Suit

This is a "multi-purpose" solution. Made for the floating hideaway photographer! Waterproof like a diving suit up to the neck, without the annoying pinching neck closure. It is possible to swim with it, and also quite easy to air-condition due to the zip up to the neck. In shallow water, it is also possible for men to take a bathroom break. This can be combined with shoes of your choice, such as surf shoes, which in turn are ideal to combine with flippers. It is a fairly light suit and immediately dry after use. Ideal for flying holidays. It can also be used for e.g. sailing (with life-jacket).

General summary and extra tips!

You often leave in very different temperature conditions than when you finish. Air-conditioning is therefore important, to prevent both hypothermia and overheating. There are some things you cannot protect yourself from, such as leeches. These climb up on any type of suit until they get to your neck. Checking often is the message in leech-rich waters. Having a knife nearby to cut a hole in the suit in case of emergency is always advisable.

A flotation device is generally strong enough to keep a person above water, even if water runs into your suit. With an open wading suit you better not risk yourself in deep water anyway, even though you can in principle swim across a short zone with it. But we strongly advise against that.

Finally, an angle finder is recommended if using it via live-view is not optimal. An angle viewfinder avoids the awkward crouching position of looking directly into the camera's eyepiece, and bending deeply forward, which can result in water getting into a wading suit. With an adapted diving suit, you can be up to your shoulders in the water, and do look straight into the eyepiece. Swimming goes with flippers in deep waters, but once the wind picks up, you can't stay on the spot for long without making a lot of movement and disturbing your subject.Finally! You often lean on the bottom with your knees, so your suit is easily damaged there. Knee pads can help protect your suit.

Grebe adorned in magical morning light. © Yves Adams















