GLIDING across the open water, paddle in hand, blue skies above and the warm sun on your back sounds like a perfectly pleasant way to spend a few hours on a summer’s day.

Stand-up paddling (SUP) is one of the fastest-growing water sports and experts say it’s also a full body workout that benefits all fitness levels.

It has caught on in Victoria, where lessons are available in many holiday towns, as well as city beaches such as St Kilda — you can even learn on the Murray River.

While fairly easy to learn on flat water, paddling hard or through waves and currents means SUP can provide a lung-busting workout.

Australian world surfing champion Tom Carroll (right) first tried SUP about 10 years ago and splits his time on the water between surfing and SUP. “The first time I tried stand-up in the surf, I was trashed after 30 minutes. I couldn’t believe it,” he says.

“What’s great about stand-up is it’s a full body workout. When you are paddling hard, everything is working — your lats (latissimus dorsi), your back, your shoulders, your arms, your hands, your feet and toes, all the way to the back of your neck,” he says.

“The arches of my feet, my toes, and especially my stabilizer muscles around my hips have become much stronger. Just walking around after paddling has even become easier.”

But starting out, he advises spending time on rivers, lakes and in still water or around marquees.

“In calm water it’s quite relaxing but you can turn it into a workout there by learning how to spin the paddle,” he says.

“It’s a core workout and actually uses your whole body. To engage the paddle your whole body has to work in a chain of movement.”

In calm water, he said it’s an activity everyone can enjoy.

“At first, with a bit of help, anyone can give it a go on flat water. You can do it, definitely, whether you’re a kid or an older person who wants to do some gentle exercise.

“Enjoying a little adventure around a river or bay is quite calming.”

The act of paddling, while standing on an unstable platform, uses almost every muscle from head to toe just to move forward and stay upright. It also gives the brain a workout as it works to keep balance in rocky conditions.

Stability, a vital component of everyday life also improves with time spent SUP training.

“Stability is one of the five foundations of fitness, and crucial for any athletic movement,” US SUP trainer Isaiah Troyman says. “If you can’t stand on your feet, you can’t run or jump, and stand-up takes that to another level.”

It is said that an hour’s stand-up paddling could be equivalent to as many as 1500 side sit-ups with rotations, providing a huge boost to the upper body and core strength.

Exercising on the open water also provides much-needed calm, relaxation and a way to connect with nature.

“The best part of stand-up is it’s outside and in nature,” Carroll says. “When I’m responding to my natural environment, I feel more alive, and have a more positive feeling in both my body and mind. I am not sure there’s another workout that encompasses so many great things.”

He said it’s worth taking a lesson, getting a coach or watching a training video to learn proper technique and get more out of your workout.

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