

# OFF WE GO CAMPING!

## PLANNING YOUR FIRST CAMPING ADVENTURE!



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## Introduction

It's no surprise that camping is one of the most popular recreational activities in the world, especially in North America. It's an opportunity for many to get out and enjoy nature and experience wildlife up close.

Some may consider camping to be almost too popular based on the increasing difficulty in booking spots on campsites, especially in the summer as sites tend to become even more crowded. But camping has also become a major family pastime and, as some would say, is a really good and considerably cheaper alternative to booking a holiday. A few miles out into the natural wilderness void of cars and buildings can mean a whole different part of the world altogether! ☺

There are a variety of activities which campers can enjoy including fishing, swimming, hiking, hunting and even taking videos or photos of wildlife. But every camping trip has one purpose which is enjoyment. Regardless of the season or whether it's an individual expedition or a fun family outing, safety naturally is the most important thing prior to stepping out into the wilderness.

It is crucial to not only be well-organized but also well-prepared before travelling outdoors. Being prepared makes all the difference between an enjoyable campout and a world of disarray and misery. The following tips will certainly help you be prepared, be responsible and most importantly...be safe.☺

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## The Four Seasons

### Summer Camping

If you've ever noticed the trend, camping is always at the peak of its popularity during the summer season because of a few important reasons.

Not only are children out of school for a good two months but the weather is exceptional. Unfortunately one of the drawbacks is that campsites and campgrounds are considerably more difficult to reserve which means that booking in advance is pivotal to your overall camping experience.

It is also important to be physically prepared for summer camping. Constant exposure to the sun can lead to heatstroke, sunburn and even dehydration which means staying hydrated by drinking plenty of water is especially important along with protecting yourself from the heat using sunscreen.

Insect repellent should also not be dismissed as spending time outdoors means exposure to nature's pests, particularly mosquitoes. Here are some additional tips to make for a better summer camping experience:

- Bring lots of water to stay hydrated.
- Try to avoid hiking and being overly active during extremely hot temperatures.
- Stay in the shade if possible and don't expose yourself to the sun for too long.

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## Winter Camping

Camping in the winter requires an exceptional amount of fortitude because of various conditions, particularly the frigid temperatures and unpredictable weather.

Many people still enjoy winter camping because of the added excitement in managing to brave possibly rigorous winter weather. Winter also makes for beautiful scenery, less wildlife on the prowl and being able to book campgrounds without worrying too much about large crowds as is the case in warmer seasons. Winter sports are also appealing as one can participate in fun activities including skating, skiing, snowboarding, tobogganing, tubing, and more.

Just like summer camping, winter camping requires a good amount of preparation. Here are some tips to help make your winter camping experience a safe one:

- Bring lots of water to stay hydrated. Dehydration is still possible in winter just as it is in the summer. It's a good habit to drink water even when not thirsty.
- Bring a good amount of clothes to stay warm and avoid frostbite. Rain gear is also a good idea for rainy conditions.
- maintain a good diet and make sure to consider proper nutrition including complex carbohydrates to help you stay warm.

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## Fall & Spring Camping

Camping is an all-season adventure so there is no proper or improper time of year to experience nature. More people are actually beginning to book camping grounds during these transitional seasons because of the fact that campsites are not overbooked as they commonly are in the summer season. The weather is also not too hot or cold and the autumn season makes for a fantastic scenery with the changing and falling of the leaves.

Spring season also has its benefits as the weather tends to cooperate and the blooming of flowers makes for a splendid view. What also is appealing to many campers in the springtime are the birds and ducks making their way back, allowing for hunting not to mention that hiking is a lot easier than it might be in the summer or winter because there is little fear of frostbite or heatstroke.

With the exception of winter season, campers can enjoy a barbeque outside consisting of any number of meals such as hotdogs and burgers. As always, every season has its benefits but overall, the experience of being out in the wilderness is an adventure which millions of people crave which is why camping, as either an individual experience or a family experience, is growing rapidly throughout the world! 😊

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## Choosing The Best Tent

Tents come in a variety of sizes and styles and can accommodate anywhere from one to a dozen people or even more. The tent that's right for you obviously depends on your needs. Some things you may want to consider while shopping for a tent might be:

-How many people will be joining you in your camping trip? Will you require a tent big enough to accommodate a large number of people?

-Are you comfortable with a single sleeping area or would you prefer separate compartments based on however many people will be joining you?

-Is your camping trip more hiking-based? Will you be carrying it on your back or travelling by vehicle? The size of the tent will be crucial if you plan on carrying it with you.

### Tent Styles

The most common styles of tents are Frame tents, Dome tents, Ridge tents, Touring tents, Vis-à-vis tents, Hoop tents, and Geodesic tents.

Frame tents are generally popular because of the headroom and overall space

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provided. There are separate sleeping compartments available and comes with a steel frame-structure so transporting the tent by car is far more convenient.

Dome tents have been dominating the market recently. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of tents available in stores are Dome tents mainly because of their durability, ease of set-up and ease of transportation, thus making it a popular choice among campers.

Ridge tents are triangular and rather sturdy, offering plenty of head room but are not favourable in heavy winds because of lack of support. They tend to be amongst the easiest to set up but are found lacking during unpleasant weather.

Touring tents are one of the few which allow a person to stand up and even walk inside. Touring tents also have see-through windows.

Vis-à-vis tents offer sleeping compartments and hoop tents which are often called tunnel tents are popular amongst hikers and mountain-climbers because they are light in weight but still very sturdy. Geodesic tents are similar in structure to the popular Dome tents and are actually even stronger, being able to resist heavier winds.

When picking out a tent, do make especially sure to find one which is favourable based on the season. Weather can be unpredictable which means a tent which can handle wind and rain is your best bet.

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## Backpacks & Rucksacks

Choosing an adequate backpack is almost as important as finding a good tent. Depending on the type of camping trip planned, will you be carrying a backpack for a large portion of your trip? Will you be doing a lot of hiking?

It's especially important to plan ahead regarding what types of activities you plan on doing merely for the fact that carrying a heavy load on your back could result in aches and pains and quite possibly, if done extensively, could do harm to your back from the constant strain, especially from long hikes over rocky terrain.

### Backpack Types

There are a couple of choices regarding what backpack is right for you - an internal frame which hugs the body and is ideal for long walks even up hills, and an external frame which doesn't fit as snugly to the body but does allow the body to remain cooler during long walks.

The best type of backpack is one which you would feel comfortable walking with if your camping trip requires a lot of walking. A backpack which is light and durable and also water-resistant is ideal but most importantly, a well-fitting backpack which isn't a hindrance to your body is the most important factor. One thing to remember is that weight on your back should be distributed efficiently and evenly so the shoulder area carries 30% while the rest carries 70% or so.

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## Sleeping Bags

No camping trip can be fun if you don't have a good night of sleep. That's why having a quality sleeping bag is essential so that you'll be well rested and ready for the tough day ahead.

Just like tents and backpacks, there are a variety of sleeping bags available and finding the right one depends on what you personally find comfortable. It's also important to note the means of transportation and whether you'll be packing your gear on your back during hikes.

### Shapes

Sleeping bags come in rectangular shape and mummy shape and the style which is right for you depends on your general way of sleeping. Some people may not give much regard to how they sleep but it can play a factor in terms of having a good night's sleep overall.

A mummy bag would be suitable for those who tend to curl up whereas those who like to sleep sprawled out would find the rectangular bag more comfortable. The mummy bag's smaller size also requires less energy for heating up and also has a hood which can be pulled tightly around the head area, creating additional warmth. The rectangular bag on the other hand contains more air space and ends closer to the chest area.

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## Temperature & Insulation

A sleeping bag greatly helps to maintain the warmth of your body through insulation but the construction of the bag is what will decide how well it is insulated. You would be well suited to choosing a bag with a temperature rating based on the conditions of the climate.

When choosing a bag, you should take into consideration not just the climate but also the types of activities you will be doing which can have an effect on your level of fatigue and metabolic rate among other things.

Down is known to be the best insulator because it is small and can be compressed quite easily. Unfortunately Down bags lose their insulation-capabilities when wet but a well-maintained Down bag can last a long time. Synthetic bags on the other hand can remain well-insulated regardless of being wet but weigh considerably more and don't have the durability of Down bags.

No matter what type of sleeping bag you choose, it's important to make sure it's the best choice for your sleeping needs. As long as you take care of your sleeping bag, much like your tent and backpack, it should last you a very long time.

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## Building a Campfire

What could be more fun during a camping trip than sitting around a campfire with family and friends at night under the bright shining stars? Building a fire is quite easy but it's important to do so responsibly so as not to damage the natural environment.

### Location

Finding an area which is suitable for building a fire is especially important. In the wilderness it can be a bit more tricky as opposed to an actual campsite. It's important to follow the rules as laid out by park rangers and to find a site which is not too close to forested area, particularly bushes, and also not too close to a rocky area. It's also necessary to make use of a fire ring if provided but in the case that it isn't, stones will do the trick to help contain ash.

### Firewood

You can get firewood from your natural surroundings and it's ideal collecting twigs and branches which are suitable for a campfire. It's also recommended that you bring firewood with you in the chance that wood is not readily available in the area.

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## Light a Fire!

Building a fire requires a little bit of experience in truly getting it right but the process is relatively simple. A fire will burn properly with the aid of several pieces of wood along with heat, air, and fuel. First thing needed is tinder which can be twigs, leaves, paper, wood shavings or pine needles. Followed by that is kindling which is mainly smaller sticks and then ultimately firewood which is larger wood to help maintain the fire.

To construct the fire, simply lay the kindling over the tinder in a criss-cross pattern while ensuring not to build too many layers as fire requires air to burn. There should be a small amount of room at the very bottom (the base) in order to light the tinder. Once lit, simply adding firewood will help keep the fire burning.

Safety is important so it's wise to not leave the fire unattended nor allow inexperienced people or young children to maintain it. Fire should be handled responsibly which means only those who are experienced in creating and maintaining fire should be supervising it.

## Extinguish Your Fire

Making sure a fire is extinguished is extremely important. Use water to snuff out the hot kindles and cover it with earth if need be. Carelessness could lead to spreading wildfires so make sure your fire has been put out completely.

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## Food Choices For Camping

Foods tend to vary depending on the type of camping you will be doing. If you are headed to a camping ground with shops in the area, you will likely have a wider variety of foods available to you as opposed to camping out in the wilderness where you will need to pack enough food to keep you going for the duration of your trip.

It's normally a good idea to carry light on a camping trip unless you're using a caravan but if you are doing a lot of hiking then keeping pots and pans in your backpack likely isn't a good idea. You will need to make a choice between bringing fresh meats and poultry and bringing frozen foods and canned foods.

Another thing to keep in mind is to try to bring only the necessary foods as opposed to junk foods. It's helpful to have a bit of knowledge of the quality foods the body requires to function at its best, especially on a camping trip where dealing with nature's unpredictable conditions can be harsh on the body.

You can consider bringing foods from the main food groups including meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, nuts, any type of fruits and vegetables, bread, cereal, pasta, milk, yogurt and cheese. These are basically the main foods inside the food pyramid which consists of what our bodies require to remain healthy and strong. These food ideas are general but you are fit to bring what you feel is necessary to keep your body energized and sufficient on your trip.

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## Freeze-Dried Meals

Freeze-dried meals can be a little bit pricey but they are a very popular choice among many campers. They have a long shelf-life, are very light, and can be made instantly with a little bit of hot water, not to mention it's a complete meal.

Freeze-dried foods are generally nutritious despite what some may think. They contain fresh ingredients and most times can taste as fresh as a home-cooked dinner. Obviously with freeze-dried foods, despite being stripped of its moisture and put into oxygen-proof and moisture-proof bags, it looks presentable enough and definitely healthy enough for a camper. Most foods can be freeze-dried but freeze-dried foods are a definite advantage for campers, especially in the wilderness where stoves and microwaves aren't close by. All it takes is a little heating and you have a decent meal.

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## Camping Activities

One of the most popular camping activities which is normally only limited by one's own creativity is story-telling by the camp-fire, particularly stories about your own camping-activities and what you enjoyed most about the day's experience. What adults enjoy mostly are the chances to live their youth again which is what really makes campfire activities and camping in general so much fun.

### Ghost-stories

One of the most popular campfire activities known to man! Stories from folklore passed down hundreds of generations and many of these stories still fascinate kids even today. It's suffice to say that kids would even prefer a good ghost story above anything else and all it takes is a little imagination.

Even adults love a good ghost story but nothing beats a story using the "within the woods" approach. This is where the story-teller becomes much more intimate with the listener by laying out a fictional haunted back-story of the camping grounds which they are camping in or even taking it to a scarier level by mentioning the killer or maniac who lurks the camping grounds. Obviously some of these stories will not be suitable for kids but for adults, it is still entertaining. As always, everything is only limited by one's creativity and personality.

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## **Star-Gazing**

There is also an opportunity for friends and family to fully unwind which means spreading out on the ground and looking up at the night sky and just soaking up the atmosphere and nature in general. This is an age-old activity almost as popular as story-telling. Generally people try to make their own observation of the stars in the sky but it's also a very good conversation piece among campers. With a little study-up, it can be the perfect time to educate kids on some basic astronomy and teach them about the major constellations.

## **Board Games**

No television or video-game console needed in order to pass quality time with family and friends. Board-game entertainment has been in existence for thousands of years in some form. There is no shortage of board games to choose from and can be played in any environment. What makes board games so good is that anywhere up to even a dozen players can be involved. Card-games likewise are great fun.

## **Writing Journals**

For some of the more serious-campers or ones who generally like to record their daily-activities, keeping a journal is not only a good way to pass the time but it's also great for those who like to look back in the past. Making a log of activities

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can sometimes be helpful to those who like to camp regularly since it's a way of keeping a record of things that might have been good or bad and can be improved upon on a future trip.

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## Lay The Rules

A lot of things may not be anticipated before a camping trip. In nature, many things can occur which is why it's crucial to be fully prepared, especially in the wilderness.

### Surroundings and Supervision

It's important to be familiar with what's around you. Even drawing up a small map to help locate things such as a large tree which can be used as a guide back to the camp should one get lost during a trek outside of the camping area can be very helpful.

It's advisable for kids to be supervised by adults wherever they go. But in some cases when this is not possible, it's best to have kids in groups with all kids notifying each other of their whereabouts. Laying out the area and boundaries and making sure kids don't venture outside of that specific area is important.

Whistles can be handy tools should one get lost. But most importantly, a mini-map which identifies different areas of the grounds so that one can use as a gauge of their location in order to make it back to the campsite is ideal. This is why it's important to scope the camping area before separating into groups or going out individually.

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## The Road-Trip

Camping can be a lot of fun but depending on your location you will also need to prepare for a rather lengthy road-trip to the camping grounds. Kids often become restless so entertainment in the car is necessary in order to keep the peace en route to the destination.

### Make a Stop

Being well prepared for a camping trip is one thing but being well prepared for a road trip is something else. Making a stop every few hours is necessary to avoid carsickness and it also allows everybody to "refuel" since a long drive can be draining both mentally and physically. You need your keen senses on the road which is why it's a good idea to stay fresh and alert. This may benefit the driver even more so than the excited kids in the backseat but all in all, taking consistent breaks is good for everybody.

### Navigation

Unless you're using a GPS device, having your passengers navigate during the journey is handy and also much safer. Having kids involved in the navigation is also a great way to teach them how to map-read which is ideal as they will gain experience and be more attentive, alert and responsible as they grow older.

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## Have Fun!

Exploring new parts of the world is always exciting but vacationing can be a burden on the wallet. This is why camping is so popular because it's not taxing, it can provide a great and rewarding experience for the entire family and it can be a lot of fun as you enjoy the world outside of the city.

What's important is to have fun first and foremost. Camping is one of the biggest and most popular activities in the world and is still growing tremendously as a preferred pastime for millions of people.

If you still have yet to venture out into nature and enjoy the wildlife, what better time is there than now? 😊