

Hiking Gear

Getting back to nature with a picnic in the park can be good for the soul. Becoming one with nature by taking a five or ten-hour hike is good for the soul, the mind and the body. Hiking is a great way to get your body moving and clear your mind as you quietly travel nature's path.

Experienced hikers know that nothing can be expected along the trail, whether you're on a daylong excursion or trekking for weeks. Conditions can change, accidents can happen, and hikers of all levels must be prepared for anything. Wearing and packing the right hiking gear can mean the difference between a dreamy date with Mother Nature, and your worst nightmare. Here is an outline of must-have hiking gear for any excursion:

Backpack and Raingear

A backpack is as essential to hikers as the air we breathe. But not just any backpack will do. Your pack needs to have enough room to accommodate all of your gear and then some. Everything needed for wilderness survival needs to fit into a lightweight, preferably waterproof pack.

Speaking of waterproof, don't forget the raingear. Rain protection to wear and another to duck under should be first on your packing list. If you're thinking, "I only hike when it's sunny and clear", think again. Conditions can change in just a few moments. Besides, hiking on a rainy day is a great way to become accustomed to rains that will catch you unawares sooner or later. Buy a raincoat, set out for a muddy hike, and you'll be ready for anything Mother Nature can send your way.

Food

Maybe you'll only be hiking for a few hours, so you don't need to pack food. Or, maybe you'll find a piece of paradise that you can't bear to leave right away. Or, you get lost in the woods for seven hours. Worst yet, maybe you'll twist your ankle and have a painfully slow hike home. Expect the unexpected, and be prepared with extra food. Sooner or later, you're bound to get hungry. Tuck some granola bars, fruit, trail mix and water into your pack. Consider it an essential part of your hiking gear.

Boots

Hiking boots have become a fashion statement, but don't be fooled by a pretty face. Chances are, the hiking boots you bought at the department store don't give you the traction and support you need to tackle rough terrain. The boots you choose should be lightweight, as every pound of boot equals five pounds of added weight to your back. If you put too much weight on one part of your body, another part will complain, and you've got to compensate to make your whole self happy. Choose your boots based on the kind of trailblazer you are. Some trails can be hiked in a pair of sneakers, while others should only be traversed in proper hiking boots. Ask an associate at your outdoors supply store for advice on the best boots for you.

Gaiters

OK, these can look goofy, but your choice of hiking gear should be about function, not fashion. Gaiters keep water from running down your legs and into the tops of your boots, something you'll appreciate when the rains come. Waterproofing your boots won't make sense if you've forgotten to seal the hole where your feet and legs go in. Consider gaiters a part of your raingear package, and pack them in.

Socks

It's recommended that hikers wear two pairs of socks. Combining an outer wool sock with an inner polypropylene sock will drain moisture from your feet. This is a valuable practice that all hikers should get in the habit of doing. Making your feet more comfortable will make your hike infinitely more enjoyable.

A hike is the perfect way to experience the best of nature, and the right hiking gear is essential in getting the most out of your hiking experience. Choose gear that is designed for hikers and made by reputable manufacturers. Proper hiking gear is built to take on Mother Nature and made to last, so your investment today should take you over plenty of terrain.