

Outdoor Living



Doing It All Safely

Enjoying outdoor living starts with understanding its risks

Most of us live tightly scheduled lives in comfortable surroundings. That can make camping or fishing trips a little disorienting, in particular if there are abrupt weather changes or if you go far enough out that cell phone reception becomes spotty.

Preparation is the key to managing these every-day challenges.

HAVE A PLAN

If you're hiking, the Wilderness Society recommends selecting a trail that matches your personal fitness level. Don't strike out before determining exactly where your hike or the trail itself will end. If you're new to this trail, be on the look out for potential hazards, including steep climbs, dangerous rock formations or an obstruction on the trail. If you're fishing or camping, map out where you're headed and how to get back. No matter the outdoor activity, develop a time estimate so that you can let others know how long you'll be gone.

KEY SUPPLIES

Outdoor living requires a number of key supplies in order to have a safe and enjoyable experience. Bring a map and a compass in case you're unable to connect to a cell tower. Pack fire-starting sup-



© ADOBE STOCK

plies and a pocket knife into a waterproof container, along with a whistle and a first-aid kit. Carry extra food and water, noting that you might have to bring more if you have a larger party. Make sure you have the right kind of footwear, since slipping and blisters are major concerns for campers, people who fish and hikers. If you're

unsure of what else you'll need, talk to a representative from your local outdoor supply store. Specialty footwear is needed, for instance, if it's going to be icy or muddy. Boating also requires specific safety tools.

WATCH THE WEATHER

Be aware of the weather

forecast before you leave, and make sure you have on the appropriate clothing. Understand, too, that conditions could very well change. So you might need to dress in layers, or bring along a hat and sunglasses. Rain gear of some kind is a must. Hypothermia is a particular worry, and it can set in very

quickly if you've worked up a sweat and then temperatures suddenly drop.

LEAVE NO TRACE

Pack out whatever you pack in. Zippered plastic bags are ideal on short trips. Dispose of your trash in appropriate containers, or bring it all back home.

Heading Out On the Water

Sometimes the best fun happens after you leave dry land

Boating isn't just for those with huge yachts. There are crafts of every size and price point available for this special brand of outdoor fun. As boating has become more common, however, so have the risks. Newcomers might be unfamiliar with the vessel, or unaware of safety hazards like water depths and changing weather.

Here's a look at several ways to enjoy boating, along with some tips on making the most of it when heading out on the water.

MOTORIZED BOATS

Grab your sunglasses, hat and sunscreen before powering up on a motorboat. The experience isn't dissimilar from driving a car, in some respects. You should be familiar with how to operate the boat, remain sober, and follow the rules of the waterway like no-wake zones. These crafts come in a vast array of sizes, from smaller-sized fishing boats and deck boats to pontoons and much larger vessels. Handling them may require special skills. In some states, a driving test or license may be required. Make sure all safety equipment is in place before leaving the dock, especially an adequate number of life vests.

KAYAKS

These small crafts glide along the top of the water, and



© ADOBE STOCK

are typically designed for individual use. That makes them very portable, and easily stored. They're often available for rent at lakes and rivers, and can also be purchased at local sporting-goods stores. If you're inexperienced, talk to experts there about where you'd like to

go, with an eye on the setting and potential hazards like rapids or sharp rocks. Kayaking on a lake can be a much different experience than on a river. Pay close attention to the weather, in particular if there are wind advisories. They can create waves which easily

swamp a kayak.

CANOES

Deeper and bigger than kayaks, canoes are more difficult to transport and store and also a bit harder to maneuver. But their size makes them ideal for enjoying a day on the

water with others, and you can fit more gear into the boat. These vessels are constructed in a wide range of widths, with the widest versions offering far more stability. If you don't own a canoe, they are also often offered for rent on local waterways.

Campfire Dos and Don'ts

They provide warmth and light but also present certain dangers

Gathering around a fire is one of the staples of any camping trip. Besides providing a cozy nighttime experience, they also double as an outdoor range for dinner. Still, safety is a key concern as you build and maintain any fire. You may also need to check beforehand in case the area is under a burn ban. Some parks also have specific rules in place.

Here's a list of the dos and don'ts associated with campfires.

PREPARING THE AREA

Keep emergency equipment on hand, including a bucket of water, easy accessible dirt or sand, a shovel and a first-aid kit in case of burns. Look for a level spot away from dry grasses, shrubbery or low-hanging branches. Once you've found a cleared area, dig a fire pit that's at least a half a foot deep, and two feet across. Pile the dirt around the hole in order to contain your fire.

Avoid building it at the base of a hill. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reminds us that fire can travel quickly uphill, escaping the intended burn area and then potentially spreading very rapidly. If you're at a campground, try to reuse holes that are already



© ADOBE STOCK

there in order to disturb the land as little as possible.

GETTING STARTED

Once the area has been safely prepped, it's time to collect sources for your fire. The first layer of the fire should contain tinder, or dry leaves or pine needles. The second is

kindling, a layer of dead or dry twigs. Finally, you'll need larger sticks or logs, preferably thicker than three inches. Place the tinder along the bottom of the pit, then stack kindling in a leaning, upright position to create a cone. Light your tinder and let the fire get well underway before

adding larger pieces of wood. Continue to feed the fire until it's the size needed to warm up and get cooking.

PUTTING IT OUT

One of the most critical elements of fire safety revolves around what happens afterward. Drown fires with water

and sand or dirt. Continue mixing the ashes with your shovel until the fire is completely out. This process should begin at least a half hour before you intend to fall asleep or leave, so you can be on the look out for flare ups. Never leave a fire before it is fully extinguished.

You Don't Have to Go Far

Make the most of the great outdoors without booking a flight

Sometimes our busy lives don't provide an opportunity to reserve an entire weekend to get off the grid. Preparing for these trips, from mapping it all out to packing up, can sometimes feel overwhelming. Maybe you're just not into sleeping outside.

The good news is, you don't have to go far in order to get out there. In fact, there are plenty of fun options for outdoor living that are very close to home.

HAVE A COOKOUT

One of the very best parts of camping is gathering around a fire to cook up something delicious to eat. Why not replicate that experience with a weekend cookout? Everything tastes a little better when it's been warmed over an open flame, from s'mores and hotdogs to hamburgers and pizza. Fire up the grill right in your own backyard, or take advantage of public grills often found at local parks and recreation areas. Just remember to completely extinguish any fires you start to reduce its risk of spreading. If you want to get even closer to the camping experience, make a project out of it by digging your own backyard fire pit.

KITE FLYING

What better way to take

advantage of a beautiful, breezy afternoon than flying a kite? It's a great activity for young and old alike, with a variety of exciting kite designs to choose from. More experienced kite flyers can ramp up to the stunt models. Look around to see if there is a local club devoted to kite

flying, and start building a new community of friends.

FARMERS MARKET

Farmers markets are a staple of spring and summer, where you'll find locally sourced fruits, vegetables, proteins and breads. In warmer climates, they are a year-

round treat. Spend the morning browsing under the sun, then cook up some of the freshest food to be found anywhere. Larger markets offer the kind of amenities that keep folks on site practically all day, including street food, crafts and musical performances.

GO TO A PARK

There's often more to do these days at the park than swinging and climbing on a jungle gym. In fact, some municipal marks have expanded to include walking trails, boat rentals, bird watching excursions, botanical gardens and more.



© ADOBE STOCK

What to Wear

Being outside means dealing with the elements, so gear up

You'll need the right kind of clothing, footwear and accessories when hunting, fishing and camping — and oftentimes the requirements are sport- or season-specific. But certain rules apply across every situation, if only because you're likely to get wet, dirty, hot or cold simply from being outside.

The best outerwear is constructed to protect you from these natural elements, while also offering a free range of motion and needed ventilation. Here's a look.

CHANGING MATERIALS

Decades ago, the average all-weather gear was made with polyvinyl chloride or some similar kind of plastic material. PVC gear is still favored by anglers, because its slick surface makes it easy to clean — and it's priced a little lower. But these days, most non-fishing outerwear boasts more breathable polyester- or nylon-based fabrics that have various waterproof coatings. Campers, hunters and other outdoorsy types should go with PVC-based fabrics when looking for waterproof protection when it gets stormy, in particular those with heat-welded seams.

HOW IT WORKS

Breathable fabrics allow air



© ADOBE STOCK

to pass through without letting in rain or snow. In this way, moisture is transferred to the outside of the clothing, rather than getting trapped inside against your body. The most effective versions allow you to avoid feeling clammy, hot, cold or sticky when you're out and about. You'll be more comfortable in the cold, and drier in warmer climates.

OTHER ACCESSORIES

Depending on where you're headed, you might need vests with pockets, jackets with removable liners for fishing, or special boots for hiking in rugged conditions. Stash stoves are all the rage, and there are as many backpack options as there are hills to climb. Don't forget foldable chairs and

flashlights.

AFTER DARK

Don't forget to gear up for bedtime, too. There's a woody nostalgia associated with any campsite, but you'll still need a good night's sleep — and that once again requires insulation, soft comfort and ventilation. Seek out premium pads that offer

plenty of all three, and sleeping bags designed to guard against the elements. Solo hikers might need nothing more than a pup tent, while a group of hunters might opt for larger, more tricked-out versions. Depending on the season or climate, a local outdoor goods dealer may have specific recommendations on what works best.

The Perfect Fly-Fishing Trip

A little research can ensure everything lives up to expectations

Fly-fishing trips don't just happen. Before a lure ever hits the water, you'll have to become an instant expert on your destination's species, weather, terrain and catch laws. You'll save time, money and lots of headaches by learning as much as you can in advance.

KNOW THE FISH

Be aware that the species you're hoping to catch might not be available. Lodges tend to list all of the fish which may be caught in the area over the course of an entire year. But you may be looking for trout when they're not in ample supply because it's the off-season. So, in order to avoid a very unpleasant surprise, call ahead to find out more from the lodge personnel, local pros or someone from an area sporting goods store. If you're specific enough in what you're looking to catch, a calendar change for your trip may be in order.

KNOW THE SPOT

Not all lodges are alike. Your research should include their website and independent review sites. Request a list of references to find out more through conversations with others who have stayed there. Ask the staff important ques-



© ADOBE STOCK

tions, too. What species is best caught during the time of year you've booked? What kind of amenities are included? Are there specific things you should bring with you? What percentage of your lodgings are from repeat customers? This will tell you more than anything about the value and quality of the lodge.

TRUST YOUR GUIDE

If you choose to fish with a guide, give them a truly honest assessment of your skills. You won't have a productive day if you say you're an expert when you're not. Others would be taken to a spot where the water is less choppy, deeper and clearer, for instance. Ask the guide what a reasonable

expectation for the day should be, instead of telling them about your expectations. Then listen to their suggestions, and follow them. That's why you're paying these guides — because they know the water better than you.

KNOW THE COST

There are basic costs for

any fly-fishing trip that are built in, including travel, room and board, among other things.

Lodges and similar fishing destinations sometimes build in extra fees, however, and that can lead to a serious case of sticker shock when it comes time to pay the final bill.

Your First Camping Experience

Advance preparation will help smooth the way for a relaxing trip

The point of a camping trip is to unwind while disconnecting from a busy world. But how do you get started as a newcomer? Here's a handy checklist of things you'll need to do in order to get up close and personal with the natural world.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

New campers should look for established campgrounds with a host of amenities like bathrooms, showers, fire pits and grills and electrical hook-ups. They typically allow you to pull into a parking spot adjacent to where your camper or tent will be set up. This provides a bridge experience before taking things in an even more rustic direction.

The next step would be camping at one of our national parks, wildlife refuges, conservation lands or state parks. You'll find incredible scenery, interesting wildlife, trails and other ready recreational activities. There may be a fee, but it's typically inexpensive. Start in designated camp spaces, then move more deeply into the woods once you're more experienced. Remember cell phone reception can be spotty, and the terrain and weather conditions can become quite challenging.



© ADOBE STOCK

GET THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

If you plan on being on site for a while, you'll have to plan on cooking. A camp stove is the easiest option for beginners, and you'll need charcoal or wood. You can also utilize a grill or dig out a fire pit. Just make sure you have a shovel

and bucket of water nearby so that the flames can be completely extinguished.

Depending on the size of your group, you may need a larger tent or camper. Talk to someone at the local sporting good stores about the latest in tent technology, which provides exciting new options

when it comes to space, ventilation and insulation.

Bring a tarp along in case of rain. You'll want to place this under the tent, both to capture more warmth and to keep the water out. Sleeping bags have also come a long way, with versions meant both to keep us warm and help us stay

cool, depending on the conditions. Air mattresses and sleeping mats up the comfort level. If you're not sure how often you'll return to camping, consider renting certain camping equipment. You'll just have to make sure it's in good working condition when it's returned.