

A Beginner's Guide to Camping

Camping, the ultimate staycation! If you live in Canada you are particularly lucky! People come from all over the world to experience our parks! In this guide you will learn all the basics of camping. How do I pitch a tent? What do I need to know about wildlife? How do I build a good camp fire? This guide will also provide you with information about where to go and other useful camping facts.

What first?

The first step in a fun family camping trip is getting all the gear! You will need a few basic things to get started. Firstly you will need a tent. A tent is the most important part of any camping trip! You have a few options when it comes to getting a tent. If this is your first time camping and you aren't sure if you are going to make this a regular vacation then ask a friend if they have a tent you can use, if not then check with local vendors to see if you can rent one. Many outdoor stores and sports clubs offer camping gear rentals. You can also purchase a tent.

Important tent tips!

Keeping water out!

Make sure that the tent comes with a tent Fly. A Fly is a waterproof fabric tarp that stretches over the body of the tent. The Fly is the most essential component in making a tent water proof in a rain shower. Also, most tents have folded seams or double stitching, this increases the tent's durability and water resistance. If you can see the stitching in the seam then it may leak in heavy rain. You can prevent this by purchasing a seam sealing spray. Lastly, most tents come with a water resistant heavy weight floor material. Make sure that the floor fabric goes up the tent wall by a few inches, this will prevent moisture from seeping into the tent in the rain.

How many people? Most tents have a number that state how many people it sleeps on the package. Tents can sleep from 1 to 16 people however 2, 4 and 6 person tents are the most common. This number represents the maximum number of standard size sleeping bags that can fit into it. However it does not take into account things such as bags for clothing and other camping gear. When purchasing a tent get one that sleeps one or two people more than you will actually need, this will leave room for your baggage.

A bigger tent isn't always better.

If you are a family of 4 do not purchase a 16 person tent unless you plan to only camp in very warm weather. A tent is very effective at keeping body heat in overnight. If the tent is too large it will not be as efficient at keeping you and your family warm!

Staying put.

When you purchase a tent it will come with stakes or pegs that will anchor the tent to the ground in a breeze. You may need to purchase additional stakes with the tent as most prepackaged stakes are made of soft plastic or aluminum and may bend or break when you try to hammer them down into the hard dirt at most campsites.



How to set up a tent:

After you have your tent it's time to set it up! The first time you use a tent always set it up at home. That way if there are any parts that are missing or in need of repair you will know about it before you go on your trip! Most tents come with an instructions but here are a few general tips.

Push tent poles through the pole sleeves, do not pull them as then are more likely to come apart. If a tent pole gets stuck do not force it, this could break the pole or rip the tent.

Try to pitch the tent on a flat area. If this is not possible then position the tent so that the door is facing downhill, this will make it easier to enter and exit the tent.

Make sure that tent pegs are hammered into the ground at a 45 degree angle from the tent; this will help to keep to strengthen the guy lines and tent pegs.

Fire: Always set up your tent at least 10 feet away from your camp fire and keep a look out for embers from the fire.



Trees: Do not set up a tent under a tree. As nice as it would be to sleep under a shady tree it can cause quite a headache. Birds perch in trees and can create a mess on your tent. Additionally trees can be dangerous in high winds or thunderstorms.



Propane: Never bring propane powered lamps or heaters inside your tent. This puts you at serious risk for carbon monoxide poisoning.



What to pack?

Now that you have your tent you should look into what other item you will need to bring. Remember that camping is essentially downsizing your house for a few days. Here is a list of items that you should consider packing. Remember, if you are going with another family you can share the packing responsibilities. That way you don't bring two of the same item and both families can save space!

Essentials		Flashlight	
Tent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Batteries	<input type="checkbox"/>
Air mattress or bed pad	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cooler	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sleeping bag	<input type="checkbox"/>	Camping stove and fuel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extra blankets	<input type="checkbox"/>	Soap	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warm cloths	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dish rag or sponge	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pillow	<input type="checkbox"/>	Paper towels	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thick Socks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Eating/ cooking utensils	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warm Sweater	<input type="checkbox"/>	Table cloth and clips	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rain jacket	<input type="checkbox"/>	Roasting skewers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sunscreen	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ice (usually supplied at camp sites)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bug repellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hiking and Fun	
Band-Aids	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cards	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wash bucket or basin	<input type="checkbox"/>	Book	<input type="checkbox"/>
Camping kettle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Binoculars	<input type="checkbox"/>
Camping fry pan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Board games	<input type="checkbox"/>
Matches	<input type="checkbox"/>	Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paper (news paper)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bear spray	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hammer or hatchet	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marshmallows	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dustpan and small broom	<input type="checkbox"/>	Camera	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extra tent stakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sturdy Shoes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pet Leash	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bear Spray	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water Bottle	<input type="checkbox"/>		



The Campfire:

One of the best parts of camping is the camp fire. A good camp fire will cook your food, keep you warm and hold mosquitoes at bay. It is very easy to start a campfire, for this reason it is important to know how to safely handle a camp fire, especially around children.

How to start a good cook fire:

1. Fire Bans: Check the area that you will be camping in for any fire bans. If it is a private camp site then you can call ahead otherwise you can check www.albertafirebans.ca for more information.

2. Hazard check: Before you start a fire, look around your area to be sure that there is nothing extremely flammable near your fire area. Also add water to a wash basin or a small bucket to put out any stray embers quickly.



3. Start small: All fires start small. Bring newspaper with you and crunch it up into fist sized balls. Stack a few of them into the center of the fire pit. Next take small bits of wood (kindling) and lean it against and on top of the paper. Fire needs oxygen so make sure that there is enough space for air to get in.

4. Slow and steady: Gradually add larger bits of kindling, eventually moving up to split logs. It may take as long as long as 15 minutes for a small fire to grow to a reasonable sized camping fire.

5. Coals: The best fire to camp over is one with a small flame and lots of hot coals. Usually a fire has to burn for at least 20 minutes before the embers are at a good level for cooking.

6. Put it out: When you are done with your campfire make sure you put it out. Fires can continue burning in the ashes of a fire put beyond 24 hours, even if you can't see any flames. For this reason make sure that you douse the fire with lots of water, then stir up the ashes and douse it again.

Wildlife:

Wildlife are one of the many reasons that people go camping. During the day it is not unusual to see finches, deer and even elk and at night campers can often hear mourning doves singing or coyotes howling in the distance. Alberta's parks are well known for the diverse representation of all kinds of Canadian species!

Safety:

Seeing a wild animals is a wonderful experience, many people even make it their hobby! If you are interested in learning more about local plants and animals there are many books that detail what can be found in your region. Negative encounters with wildlife are generally rare and easily avoidable if the right precautions are taken. If you are concerned about what creatures may be near your camping area call the camp site or park ahead of time.

Space: Give animals their space. Never approach a wild animal especially if it appears to be a young animal. If an animal is threatened by you it may feel the need to defend itself.

Elk: Surprisingly elk are said to be the most dangerous animals in Alberta's parks. Never approach an elk as they are unpredictable and incredibly strong. If you find yourself being charged by an elk quickly find a vehicle or large tree or and stay on the other side.

Cougars: Cougar attacks are rare. In a close encounter where the cougar appears to be watching you never run or turn your back. Keep eye contact with the animal, shout and appear as large as possible. Prepare to use your pepper spray.

Orphans: If you see and orphaned animal make note of where you saw it and leave it alone. Wild animals often leave their offspring for long periods of time while they forage or hunt for food.

Hiking: If you are hiking in the woods be sure to make noise, this will alert animals that you are near and gives the animal the opportunity to leave if it feels uncomfortable. Only hike with 2 or more people and never let children out of sight. Keep dogs on a leash as they are known to attract predators.

Bears: Bear attacks are rare. If you ever meet a bear up close in the wild do not make eye contact or panic. Every bear has its own personality and will react differently to humans. If the bear appears calm speak to in a calm voice and back away slowly, never run. Knowing bear behavior is very important in knowing how to react.

On the road: If you see a wild animal on the road do not get out of the vehicle. Drive slowly and watch out for animals crossing. Many animals are drawn to the highway to lick road salt or scavenge.



Where to go?

There are many private and public camp grounds across Canada. The best way to find a good place to camp is to ask a friend or go online. One of the best resources is to go online and look up national or provincial parks in your area. Canada's parks are overseen by two different branches of government.

National parks are maintained by the federal government through parks Canada. Notable National Parks include Canada's first national park, Banff in Alberta, the location of the world's fastest flowing tides, Fundy National Park in New Brunswick and Gros Morne National Park a UNESCO world heritage site in Newfoundland.

Provincial parks are stewarded by the provincial government. Every province has its own park system. Each province has its own web site detailing its parks and recreation options

What amenities do camp sites have?

The amount of amenities available depends on the kind of camping you wish to do. Amenities range from queen sized beds and private patios to no amenities at all. There are many kinds of camping that our parks offer!

Comfort Camping: This kind of camping is much like staying in a hotel. It is the most expensive kind of camping but it is ideal for first time campers or campers with mobility restrictions.

Front Country Camping: This kind of camping is the most common kind of camping. Front country means parkland that is assessable by vehicle. These kinds of areas usually offer electricity, water, toilets, showers and additional recreation programs.

Back Country Camping: Back country camping is camping in an area that is not accessible by vehicle. These camp sites are only assessable by hiking or horseback, and they usually offer bear safe food lockers and toilets. This kind of camping is recommended for experienced campers and hikers.

Random Camping: This kind of camping has not amenities and usually occurs in the back country. Check with the local park office for regulations related to random camping. This kind of camping is recommended for experienced campers and hikers.

Go Camping!

Now that you have all your gear and you have picked a site all you need to do is book it! Try to book as far in advance as possible. The earlier you book them ore site options you have! You can usually book online or call the park wardens office for more information on booking. Some camp sites also offer first come first serve camping. If you decide to camp at one of these sites try to arrive as early as possible as these sites are often extremely popular on weekends.

Important links:

National Park camping Reservations	www.reservation.pc.gc.ca
Wildlife Information	www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/pc/guide/nature/nature01.aspx
British Columbia Provincial Parks	www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks
Alberta Provincial Parks	www.albertaparks.ca
Saskatchewan Provincial Parks	www.saskparks.net
Manitoba Provincial Parks	www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/parks
Ontario Provincial Parks	www.ontarioparks.com
Quebec National Parks	www.sepaq.com
New Brunswick Provincial Parks	www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca/See/Parks.aspx
Nova Scotia Provincial Parks	www.parks.gov.ns.ca
Prince Edward Island Provincial Parks	www.tourismpei.com/pei-provincial-parks
Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Parks	www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/parks/parks/index.html
Yukon Territorial Parks	www.env.gov.yk.ca/camping-parks/tombstonepark.php#
Northwest Territories Territorial Parks	www.nwtparks.ca
Nunavut Territorial Parks	www.nunavutparks.ca
Canadian Wildland Fire Information	www.cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca