

# Hiking For Beginners

Human beings are merely mammals in more expensive clothing, so it's only natural that we have an innate need to connect with the earth, wind and water. If you are one of those people who yearn to get up close and personal with Mother Nature every chance you get, hiking can be the perfect activity.

For some, hiking is more than a recreational pastime; it's been a way of life as long as they can remember. The love of hiking is often developed from family vacations, when youngsters barely old enough to scale a riverbank are strapping on hiking boots and traversing the wild outdoors with their earthy Mom and Dad. From these cross-country outings came skills # and memories # to last a lifetime.

Others discover the joys of hiking later in life. Older kids journey with scout troops. Packs of teenagers search for the perfect spot to hang out. Frenzied professionals seek refuge from the demands of home and business.

Whatever the reason, one thing is certain: People go hiking to shake off our contemporary hassles, and enjoy all that nature has to offer.

Hiking for beginners can be tricky, and you can always spot a first time hiker. Rookies hobbling under fifty pounds of gear for a two-night trek. A backcountry pack overflowing with a ten pound tent, a dozen bagels, two spare pairs of shoes and loads of whatcha-macallits carefully packed "just in case".

Seasoned hikers can snicker at the rookies, but let's face it; every one of us has painted this same picture at one time. Newbies take heart: it won't take long for you to shake the excess pounds from your back, and clock enough miles on your boots to have you traveling lean. As time goes, you'll find yourself learning the ropes and fine-tuning your art along the way, until your pack decreases in size as quickly as your appetite for bagels.

In the meantime, here are some hiking tips and advice for you live by, as you work toward your Experience degree from On-the-Trail University:

## Be Prepared

Hiking is fun and makes you feel free as a bird. Remember, though, that there are basic safety rules that you've got to follow. This is the outdoors, and anything can happen. Failing to prepare for your anything-goes journey can be the cause of backcountry disasters and near misses. Inadequate clothing, bad judgment calls and the inability to read a map have all led to life-threatening hiking situations. The first step in hiking for beginners is to know what you need to bring, understand what you need to do, and then follow through. Know the conditions. Check the weather forecast, dress in layers and bring a lightweight rain jacket # just in case. Be aware of the trail and surroundings. If you're hiking in a national park or conservation area, check with park management for advice on local conditions and permitting procedures. Check your bookstore or look online for hiking guides and maps. Use them.

## Know Your Equipment

Hiking for beginners leaves no room for vanity. No one cares what you look like, or whether you're coming across as a hiking "dork". Outdoor temperatures can drop quickly after the sun sets, so make sure your sleeping bag is insulated. Staying warm is infinitely more important than looking cool. And it's a lot smarter. Hiking equipment is not about coordinating your ensemble. It's about staying safe # and it can save your life.

## Have Fun

In the end, hiking is all about having fun. Otherwise, no one would do it. To a hiker, lacing up a pair of boots and stomping for miles through remote wilderness is a luxury vacation. Mosquito bites and scratches are five-star amenities. If you're hardcore about your love of nature, all the trouble pays off in fun and freedom.

Remember, there's no stress in hiking. Take your time and enjoy your journey. Watch the clouds drift by. Breathe in the fresh air and drink in the sunshine. Catch a butterfly, and then let it go. Hiking for beginners isn't difficult # it's the start of a beautiful friendship.