

Outdoor Winter Activities and Sports Tips

Getting Active This Winter

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Winter Hiking 101

Winter hiking is much like hiking any other time of year only it's cold, snowy and slippery. With a few additions to your three season kit you can hike year round.

Plan Your Route

When winter hiking, especially when you are first starting out, plan your routes with an easy exit. You don't want to do a loop that gets you too far from the trail head until you know exactly how you respond to the cold.

If you are an avid hiker it is smart to cut your distances in the winter as the going is slower and more demanding. To start, cut your distances in half and build from there. It's also a good idea to avoid steep or treacherous terrain as the increased risk of slipping makes it much more dangerous when covered with snow and ice.

Keep Your Feet Happy

For winter hiking you will want a supportive hiking boot like other times of year but additionally you need them to be waterproof and insulated enough for the temperature. Many insulated hiking boots have cold weather specific rubber for better grip and a lip on the rear to retain crampon and snowshoe straps.

Boots with liners aren't well suited for hiking as they tend to have a sloppier fit allowing your foot to slip in the heel. This can lead to blisters.

When it comes to socks you want to choose merino wool or synthetic knit material for warmth and moisture wicking. For maximum warmth consider wearing a thin liner sock with a heavier wool hiking sock over it. This also reduces friction thereby decreasing the risk of blisters.

Never use cotton socks in the cold as they retain moisture. This will lead to cold feet and increase the risk of blisters.

Dress The Part

When heading out into the cold you need to deal with the temperature, wind and snow. You best accomplish this by dressing in layers.

Start with a wicking base layer against the skin followed by as many insulating layers as needed topped off with a waterproof-breathable shell. You can shed layers as needed to keep from sweating.

A puffy jacket is useful to have in your pack to throw on to stay warm when you take a break.

Traction Is King

The addition of snow and ice often makes it slipperier than rubber tread can handle so adding some type of traction devices to your feet is necessary to keep from wiping out.

If the snow is less than 8 inches deep, then micro-spikes are all you need for traction. These are little metal spikes that attach to your footwear with a thick rubber strap.

Once the snow gets deeper than the best option is to strap on a pair of snow shoes. Modern snow shoes give you both flotation on the snow and the traction of crampons with metal spikes on the bottom.

To add further stability, trekking poles with snow baskets and steel tips are a good idea. They also make for a better workout as you are now involving the muscles of the upper body.

Manage Your Moisture

Getting wet in the winter can be life threatening so do your best to stay dry. Start your hike slightly cool so you don't start sweating right away. Add or remove layers to stay warm but not too warm so you don't sweat.

If your pants and jacket allow for venting, make use of it when you are working hard to minimize sweating. If there is heavy snow fall, use the hood from your shell jacket to keep your head from getting soaked.

Don't Forget The 10 Essentials of Hiking

This is a collection of gear you should never head out into the woods without.

1. **Navigation:** map, compass, altimeter, GPS device, personal locator beacon (PLB) or satellite messenger
2. **Headlamp:** plus extra batteries
3. **Sun protection:** sunglasses, sun-protective clothes and sunscreen
4. **First aid:** including foot care and insect repellent (as needed)
5. **Tools and Repair:** Knives, tools, and a gear repairs kit.
6. **Fire:** matches, lighter, tinder and/or stove
7. **Shelter:** carried at all times (can be a light emergency bivy)
8. **Extra food:** Beyond the minimum expectation
9. **Extra water:** Beyond the minimum expectation
10. **Extra clothes:** Beyond the minimum expectation

Conclusion

You don't need to limit yourself to hiking in warm weather. With the right gear and knowledge, you can get out year round and enjoy nature.