

Enchanted Nature Tours
A Beginner's Guide
To Becoming A Naturalist



**Basics of Forest Safety
and Nature Exploration**

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“It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

Indeed, in our world there are potential dangers everywhere. In nature there is no possible way to guarantee your complete safety. This guide is meant to get you started in the exciting world of nature exploration, but there is so much more to learn. Some lessons you will learn by reading, some by experience, and some will be learned the hard way, by making mistakes. This booklet is for informational and entertainment purposes. In no way are the authors, the distributors, or anyone else liable for injury or damages you may cause or sustain. Please... do not be discouraged or intimidated by possible dangers. The array of benefits and sensational experiences far outweigh the risks!



Here are a few facts to consider:

- Nature stimulates imagination and creativity
- Time spent in nature nurtures the body through fresh air, sunlight, exercise and vitamin D creation
- Vitamin D levels increase as we spend time outdoors
- Vitamin D protects us from bone and mental problems
- Time spent in nature can reduce anxiety & mental illness
- “No one will protect what they don't care about and no one will care about what they have never experienced” - Sir David Attenborough
- A life of all work and no play is a wasted life
- Time in nature has (scientifically-proven) preventative and healing effects
- The average person is spending 90-95% of their life indoors.
- Humans need the outdoors whether we know it or not
- Medical professionals around the globe are now “prescribing” time in nature for the health benefits

HIKING AND FOREST SAFETY

*“And into the forest I go
to lose my mind and find my soul.”*

John Muir

Everyone needs to lie on the ground looking up. Everyone needs to feel the wind in their hair. All humans need to be grounded and balanced by spending time in nature.

Taking a walk in a busy urban park and hiking into the forest are two very different activities. Planning can make both very enjoyable. This short guide is meant to help you with your planning.

There is an amazing feeling when you're surrounded by nature. Breezes rustling through the treetops, the sound of streams trickling down the mountain, and the endless shades of green make every minute of preparation worth the effort. For the most enjoyable and safest experience, **PREPARATION IS ESSENTIAL!** Planning for an adventure is actually fun and helps to build anticipation. I love to open a trail map and study it for days (or weeks) before an upcoming adventure.

STEP 1: PLANNING IS THE BEGINNING OF THE HIKE!

When going for a hike in a forest, here are some safety tips:

1. **Look at a map** to orient yourself *before* you hike.
 - Which direction will you be hiking?
 - Where are roads, waterways, and other definitive features? Which direction will get you “out of the woods?” If you are unfamiliar with maps, North is at the top. East is to the right. South is at the bottom of the map. West is to the left.

2. **Plan for unpredictable weather conditions.**

IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT THE FORECAST IS!
Warm days can easily turn dangerously cold. Sunny days can turn into raging downpours. **BE PREPARED!**

3. **Tell someone your hiking plan.** It doesn't matter whether it's family or a friend. It doesn't matter if you're going for two hours or two weeks. Tell someone. Send them a note with the following info:
 - The date and time that you expect to hike
 - Location and trail name (If you will veer off on other trails, those should be listed too.)
 - Is the trail a loop? Will you turn around?
 - The date and time that you expect to return (Leave yourself a cushion so that emergency services aren't called if you're a “little late”)
 - The contact information for the nearest ranger office or emergency response services.
 - The names and emergency contacts of anyone hiking with you.
4. **Don't hike alone.** Sharing the experience is safer, more fun, and will give you someone to relive the adventure with in the future.
5. **Be prepared to turn back.** No matter what the reason is, always turn back if necessary. Some causes for turning around might be:
 - You or your hiking partner is fatigued more than expected.
 - The weather unexpectedly looks menacing.
 - You're running out of time. If darkness will appear sooner than expected, turn back.
 - You find unexpected conditions on the trail like swollen streams caused by rain/snow.
 - It is better to turn back than need to be rescued.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

There are many expensive products and clothing brands on the market. Do not believe that you need high-tech, expensive gear to enjoy a day in nature. You may choose to purchase some high-end hiking products, and yes these products may make your time spent in nature more comfortable, under certain conditions, but do NOT think expensive clothes and gear are essential.

CLOTHING

If you spend enough time around outdoor enthusiasts, you will eventually hear, “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”. This is hogwash! There is most definitely such a thing as bad weather *and* bad clothes. Weather can kill you and that would be bad, so yes there is “bad weather”! We can choose clothing to match the weather, the terrain, and the activity that we choose to engage in.



CLOTHING

What you “pack” and what you “wear” are BOTH important!

LET’S START FROM THE GROUND UP



Footwear

Boots (Maybe)? Athletic Shoes (Maybe)?
Sandals or Flip Flops (*NOOOO!!!*)

Your feet are your only mode of transportation while you’re hiking. If a shoelace breaks (always pack extras), if a sole comes unglued, or your footwear causes blisters, your hike will quickly become miserable and quite possibly DANGEROUS.

A comfortable pair of hiking boots, in good repair, is the best footwear from a safety perspective. The soles tend to be thick and rigid, which supports and protects the sole of your foot. Boots lace up higher than shoes and offer ankle support. The problem here is that some people find boots uncomfortable. They find boots too heavy and cumbersome.





The next step down is a hiking shoe. This is similar in design to the common sneaker, but offers more support, durability, and protection. They are lighter than boots but do not offer ankle support. Many long distance hikers are opting for the hiking shoe because it can reduce fatigue. If you multiply the extra weight of boots, times every foot lift on a 5 mile hike, it could add up to lifting more than 2,000 pounds of extra weight in the end.



Sneakers, tennis shoes, running shoes...call them what you want. Most everyone has a pair. They are comfortable, lightweight, and are great for casual conditions. On a well-worn, smooth trail, sneakers are acceptable. They most likely wouldn't be great for longer hikes over rough terrain.

You don't have to pick just one shoe. You can match your choice to conditions. Appalachian Trail thru-hikers have changed the name of Pennsylvania to "Rocksylvania" because of the ankle-twisting, rocky conditions. If I'm unfamiliar with a trail, I choose boots to be prepared. If you're hiking a sandy, flat coastal trail, sneakers might be the preferred choice.

Flip-flops, clogs, and sandals are for the beach, not for hiking. If you don't trust me, be sure to throw some extra shoes in your pack. You're going to need them.

Socks

Those white cotton athletic socks you wear everyday are functional, but there is a better choice. A thick pair of Merino Wool socks will wick moisture away from your feet and provide extra cushioning. The extra cushioning will make your boot/shoe fit better which prevents blisters. If the term "wool" has you scratching, don't worry. Merino wool is as soft as cotton and a whole lot more durable. If you're not ready to invest in a pair of thick Merino wool socks, go with what you already have...but definitely go!!!

Let's take a minute to talk about tying your shoes. Yes, you've been doing it since you were a little child but have you ever taken a minute to think about what you're doing. You need to adjust and cinch down the laces on your shoes or boots until your foot is snug inside. There needs to be zero slippage of your foot inside the shoe. Movement leads to blisters and that can take the joy out of hiking. If your shoes are loose no matter how tightly you lace them, they are the wrong size. Pay attention to your feet! They may swell while hiking. Strangely enough, lacing your footwear too tightly can cause this. If your feet do swell, take a break, take off your footwear, and let your feet rest for a few minutes.

Pants or Shorts?

Like the choice of footwear, you need to match your clothing choices to the conditions. Shorts offer comfort and ventilation but don't offer protection from scratches, cuts, insects, etc. You can buy a pair of name-brand hiking pants. You can also buy off-brand hiking pants that are comfortable too. Leggings/Yoga pants are popular. The least preferable choice would be denim jeans. They are heavy, don't breathe, and restrict movement. Cotton, in general stays wet. Synthetic materials are preferable because they are lighter and dry quickly.

Your Base Layer

Underwear, tee shirts, bras, support/shapewear and thermal underwear are now covered under the term, "your base layer." Again, synthetic material is superior for its lighter weight, breathability and faster drying time.

Dress And 'Pack' for the Weather

Weather is highly unpredictable, especially in the mountains. During early/late summer and the shoulder seasons (Spring and Fall), it is common to experience all four seasons in a weekend or even one day. You can be sweating at one point and freezing the next. Sunny days turn to rain in a matter of minutes with a fast moving weather fronts.

The key is to be prepared. First, protect your extremities. You need a winter hat for your head, gloves for your hands, and an extra set of socks in case your feet get wet (even in the summer). A scarf to cover your face and neck are also recommended. Second, you need to insulate your core. Layer up lightweight, loose fitting clothes, and top it off with a water-resistant, breathable jacket. If you have a jacket that you like but it's not water resistant, an affordable alternative is to purchase a clothing water repellent spray. Nikwax brand has some reputable products.

Hypothermia occurs when the body is losing heat faster than it can produce it. It may surprise you that Hypothermia can set in at room temperature. Age, hypothyroidism, low blood sugar, high blood pressure, medications, dehydration, alcohol use, and other conditions can contribute to Hypothermia. The best cure for Hypothermia is prevention. How do you prevent it? Prepare for your hike. Be sure to pack appropriate clothing, food, and fluids. You will also need rain protection.

Necessary Gear

Appropriate Clothes: Synthetic materials are preferred. *Comfort is a requirement.*

Extra Clothes In Your Pack: Change of socks and items to stay warm...EVEN IN THE SUMMERTIME.

Footwear: Don't forget the extra shoelaces. If you wear boots, you might want to throw a pair of lightweight shoes in your car or pack to change into at the end of the day.

Poncho: They are inexpensive, lightweight, and have a million uses. You can use it as a ground cloth, a shelter, and it will even cover your backpack .

Food and Water: Bring more than you think that you will need. Hiking is exercise and you will be burning calories. Pack nutritious, calorie-dense food. Taking a lunch break by a stream, in the shade of the forest is an enchanting experience. Water is essential. A cheap, lightweight option for a reusable water bottle is a 1-liter sized bottled water. Once the bottle is empty, just refill it. At 8.345 pounds per gallon or a kilogram per liter, water is heavy, but dehydration is dangerous and easily prevented. If you hike near streams or other water sources, a mini water filter would be a good investment. For about twenty bucks, you can prevent Giardia, E. Coli, and other nasty conditions. This also means that you can carry less water on your back because you have the ability to refill in the backcountry.

A Knife-It's your choice. Some people think a machete is necessary, others prefer a Swiss army knife, and ultra-lite hikers prefer a single edged razor blade. I carry a fixed blade that is about 3-4". My hiking partner prefers a lightweight folding Opinel brand knife. It's up to you, but bring a knife.

A Small Disposable Lighter: If an emergency arises, your **NUMBER ONE PRIORITY IS TO STAY WARM!**

There is a saying among experienced outdoors enthusiasts.

- You can survive 3 weeks without food
- You can survive 3 days without water
- You can survive 3 hours without shelter (warmth)
- You can survive 3 minutes without air

These numbers can certainly be disputed, but it correctly prioritizes the requirements for human survival. Breathing, staying warm, then water, and lastly food are what you need if you ever find yourself in an emergency while hiking. You can carry a small lighter, waterproof matches, a flint and steel, or a blowtorch. The choice is yours. Just be sure that you have the ability to make a fire if necessary. One other key to warmth is staying dry. Don't forget the poncho.

Toilet Paper and a small Trowel (hand shovel)

A Compass and a Map: Getting lost can happen, especially if a trail is not well marked or well maintained. I have been lost on multiple occasions. It happens and it is nothing to be ashamed of. When we become disoriented, it is frightening. A good compass will be invaluable. You can purchase a waterproof map, or print a map and put it into a plastic bag. For free printable maps go to:

<https://viewer.nationalmap.gov/basic/?basemap=b1&category=histtopo,ustopo&title=Map View>

If you get lost, keep calm. Getting lost is terrifying. If you pause, collect yourself, and breathe, you will remember that you planned for this. You already checked which general direction the road is from your position during your planning. Remember, "Planning is the beginning of the hike!" If worse comes to worst, just hike out to the road, and make your way back to the car. Stay positive, you may even find the trail again.

Some First Aid Supplies: An ace bandage, sterile bandages, a bandana, and some moleskin blister pads are a good start. Knowledge of first aid is important too!

A Headlamp: You may not plan on hiking after dark, but be prepared in case you are forced to.

That's about all of the necessary gear except for one thing:

KNOWLEDGE. I don't care how expensive your clothes are. It doesn't matter how many high-tech gadgets you bring. Without knowledge, gear is worthless. Learn basic first aid. Learn how to eat and stay hydrated while on the trail. Learn about the area that you are planning to hike.

You must practice using your compass. Go to a local park and imagine that you are in a dense forest. Every tree suddenly looks the same. The trail has disappeared, you're disoriented, and you admit to yourself that you are lost. Which general direction is the road? Take out your compass and use it to navigate out of the imaginary woods.

I have had the pleasure of saltwater fishing many miles off of the coast. At my height, the horizon is about 3 miles away due to the curvature of the earth. This means that after motoring 3 miles out to sea, the shoreline disappears and you see nothing but water in all directions. One day we were fishing 17 miles off shore. After we caught our limit, we decided to anchor up and cool off with a swim. The boat circled around the anchor line and we enjoyed a quick swim. We pulled the anchor up, the captain asked us, "which direction is back to shore?" Everything looked exactly the same as far as we could see. The sun was at the peak, not rising or setting. Thankfully, there was a high quality compass on board and we relied completely on it to safely return from our expedition. Had we relied on intuition, we could have been headed for Europe, Cuba, or Canada. We NEVER would have made it to any of those places. Learn to use and to trust your compass. It may save

The Hike

You've woken up extra early, driven to the trailhead, the daylight is just visible and the woods are waking up. The air is cool and a little damp. Birds are singing. You hear a squirrel rustling in some leaves on the ground. The feeling you feel is peaceful and in harmony with the rhythm of the Earth. At the same time, you feel an overwhelming excitement in the pit of your stomach. After a quick look around, you pull on your backpack and excitedly embark on your expedition.

- Did you check the weather before your left?
- Did you check your map for general directions of the road, waterways, and where you're hiking?
- Did you pack the map and compass?
- Do you have extra food and water?
- Do you have extra clothes to keep warm and dry?
- Do you have everything on the Necessary Gear List?

Then, we're off! Most hikers have a destination in mind; like a waterfall, a scenic overlook, or a fire lookout tower. It's okay to have a destination, but you're more than the average hiker, **YOU ARE A NATURALIST!** As you move gracefully through the forest, your eyes are scanning from the ground to the treetops, and in all directions for mushrooms, insects, amphibians, birds, wildflowers, lichens, and any of the other miraculous life forms that may grace you with their presence. You have a profound understanding that all of these life forms are interdependent and woven together in this amazing fabric of life. Of all the celestial bodies in the universe, Earth is the only planet (that we know of), which supports life. Your ears are alert to the breeze rustling the leaves, maybe insects are buzzing, or maybe you hear a

beautiful bird song. You think to yourself, "I wonder what kind of bird that is." Maybe you take out your mobile phone and record the chirping so that you can identify it later. That's the difference between a hiker and a naturalist. You care enough about nature to learn. Taking photos of plants, mushrooms, and anything else that interests you is another great tool for identification later on. Enjoy the hike while you're hiking. Don't waste your time accessing the internet trying to find the name of that strange looking mushroom. Just take a pic and move on. Studying and comparing pictures is a joy in and of itself that can be enjoyed on another day. Plus, you get the pleasure of re-living your adventure a second time. While we are on the subject of pictures, I want to share a quote from a very wise woman named Aliyyah Eniath:

***"Take nothing but pictures,
leave nothing but footprints,
kill nothing but time."***

Wilderness, public land, forests, parks, and any other natural areas are gifts that need to be protected and preserved. Prime real estate is often the target of investors that would make it accessible to only one private owner rather than maintain it for the enjoyment of the masses. The Wilderness Act, a key piece of legislation protecting public land in America, defines wilderness as:

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

It is incredibly infuriating to visit a beautiful landscape only to find trash. The number of times we have had to pick up other people's trash is ridiculous. If you pack it in, you pack it out! Of course, we don't need to preach to you. You're a naturalist who appreciates, treasures, and loves nature.

So you've covered some distance and now you're starting to climb uphill...*with a backpack on*. Your heartbeat is beginning to rise and your breathing is a little faster. This is perfectly normal and happens to everyone. Everything will level out as you hike. One thing to keep in mind is to breathe deeply. Short shallow breaths will not keep your muscles properly oxygenated.

Take breaks when you need to. Some hikers like to make rules for breaks. I've heard people recommend, 20 minutes of hiking to 10 minutes of rest. Others prefer 25 minutes to 5 minutes. Some folks just take a break whenever they feel like they need it. The point here is to take breaks. Listen to your body. You can always increase your fitness level in the safety of your home/neighborhood. You don't want to push yourself to the point of injury or complete failure while you're out on the trail. How are you doing? Are you staying hydrated? Are you giving yourself some nutritious snacks to fuel your body? If you are, you might find that you need to answer the call of nature. This is not the most polite subject matter, but there are few things we need to cover.

1. Pack your toilet paper in a zipped plastic bag in case it rains. Wet toilet paper is useless.
2. No matter what kind of "business" you are doing, it is best if you can find nice dark, rich soil to do it in. This soil contains more microbes that will speed up the biodegradation of your waste. It is also easier to dig in if you have to dig a hole (referred to as a "cat hole" by outdoor enthusiasts).

3. We never advocate going off the trail, because you might step on vulnerable plants or creatures. You could cause soil compaction or erosion, or cause a number of other problems. This is the one time that you need to get off the trail. You need to be 200 feet (about 70 steps) away from water and trails. Please be cautious of stepping on plants or any life.

4. If you need to...you know...then dig a hole with your trowel. You might want to do this near a tree so that you have something to hold on to while you're squatting. Bury your waste with the soil that you dug out of the hole and tamp it with your foot. Place some branches over the hole to discourage animals from digging. Hardcore "Leave No Trace" followers will actually pack out their dirty toilet paper. Yeah...that sounds kind of gross, but just zip it up in multiple plastic bags.

What is Leave No Trace you ask? It is a list of simple principles that we adhere to in order to protect the land that we love. Some of the problems Leave No Trace prevents are polluted water, destructive fires, damaged trails/natural areas, and protecting at-risk wildlife. We encourage you to visit and contribute to LNT.ORG to find out more.

The seven simple principles are:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors

Each of these principles is covered in-depth at www.LNT.org

Please take the time to look at their site.

A Few Last Hints

- Check the weather and stay home if necessary.
- If there is wind or a breeze, pay attention to the direction it is blowing. If the wind is coming from behind you, it is carrying your human scent ahead of you. Wild animals have a much keener sense of smell than humans. Your scent will cause most animals to hide or change course to avoid you. If the wind is blowing from the front, be aware that your scent is being carried backwards. Seeing a bear in the woods can be exhilarating and frightening at the same time.
- If you see a bear, raise your arms and talk to it. Make sure that the bear is aware of your presence. It will most likely lumber off and not bother with you. If you're in a group, get close together and raise your arms to look as large as possible.
- Don't wear perfume, cologne, or lotions. Those products might make you smell like food and may cause wildlife to be attracted to you. Moreover, other hikers are trying to enjoy the fresh air, not your cologne!
- Do wear insect repellent. Insects can carry diseases. and Ticks are the worst! They are like little septic tanks with legs. We recommend using repellents with Picaridin as the active ingredient. You might also want to consider treating your hiking clothes with a product called Permethrin as well. Insect bites are unpleasant, dangerous, and preventable.
- You can do this! The opportunities to engage nature start right outside your door or your window. Look more closely at everything. Learn about what you are looking at and **you are now a NATURALIST.**

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO JOIN US ON ONE OF OUR ENCHANTED NATURE HIKES. TO FIND OUT MORE AND BOOK AN EVENT, PLEASE GO TO:

<https://www.enchantednaturetours.com>

WE WOULD LOVE TO MEET YOU AND SPEND THE DAY WITH YOU. THERE IS MAGIC IN THE FOREST. COME AND EXPERIENCE IT. YOU WILL NEVER SEE THE WORLD IN THE SAME WAY AGAIN.

Happy Trails!



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