

Sleeping Bags

Making sure you sleep comfortably in the great outdoors.

Some of your most important gear for a multiday hike (or any camping trip) is a sleeping bag and pad. While quality bags don't have to break the bank, be sure to purchase a quality bag from a reputable outdoor retailer, as this will not be a bag for a child's sleepover but an important piece of gear that could quite literally be a lifesaver.

Sleeping Bag

When shopping for a sleeping bag, the main factors to consider are: rating, fill, and shape.

- **Rating** – When deciding what temperature rating to choose, make sure to give yourself at least 10 degrees leeway on the low end. So, if the average temperature for your favorite trail is 50 degrees at night, purchase a sleeping bag rated to at least 40 degrees.
- **Fill** – Bags are filled with either down or synthetic fill to keep you warm. Down is durable, light, and efficient but is useless when wet and is difficult to dry out. Synthetics are a bit heavier and don't compact as well, but remain warm when wet. For moist, coastal regions, a synthetic fill bag, although slightly heavier, is usually a better choice.
 - *Synthetic* sleeping bags can be again divided into short fiber and continuous filament. Short fiber mimics down and is the preferred industry standard¹.
 - *Down* sleeping bags are classified by how many feathers are in a pound of the material used. For example, a bag with a 600 count has 600 down feathers in one pound. Higher quality bags have more insulating down plumage and fewer of larger, non-insulating feathers.
- **Shape** – most sleeping bags today are cut in what is called a “mummy” shape. This reduces weight and increases warmth. For people who may feel constrained in such a bag, rectangular bags are also available. Another alternative that's growing in popularity is the sleeping quilt. These are based on the idea that since the bottom part of a traditional bag is compressed, its warming properties are lost. Therefore the bottom can be eliminated. These quilts save weight and typically wrap around your sleeping pad. If you're considering this option, be sure you have a quality sleeping pad that is comfortable to sleep on.



¹ Townsend, Chris, ed., et al. *Encyclopedia of Outdoor & Wilderness Skills*. Camden, ME: Ragged Mountain Press, 2003: pg. 305.

Finally, while it seems like common sense, be sure that your sleeping bag fits. Nowadays, sleeping bags are made in a variety of shapes and sizes to fit men, women, tall people, and short people. If you want the best night's sleep on the trail, get a bag that is comfortable for you.

Sleeping Pad

Since significant heat can be lost through contact with cold ground do not underestimate the value of a good sleeping pad.

The cheapest and lightest pads are closed-cell foam pads. These pads are durable and can double as a quick seat during a brief rest on the trail or during a meal.

The alternative is an inflatable pad. Many hikers find these to be a little more “deluxe” than a closed-cell foam pad, providing a more comfortable sleeping surface. These can be heavier, however, and you must stay aware of your surroundings to avoid a puncture in the pad.

So take a hike, and be sure to sleep tight in a sleeping bag that meets your needs.

