



The 10 Essentials for Hiking

Whether you're going out on a day hike or an overnight, one of the smartest things you can do is always adhere to the 10 Essentials for Hiking. These essentials are items to pack in your bag and have handy in case the elements or an accident upend your best laid plans.

Disclaimer: *The information provided on this page serves as general recommendations for visitors to the White Mountains region. The White Mountains Attraction Association and its employees are not experts or professionals in the outdoor recreation field, and are not liable for any accident, injury, or fatality resulting from outdoor recreation.*

- **NAVIGATION**

A paper map and compass are required equipment. Helpful add-ons are a [GPS device](#), [personal locator beacon \(PLB\)](#), [satellite messenger](#), or [altimeter](#). Do not rely on your cell phone and apps to guide your way; cell service in the White Mountains can be spotty, and oftentimes nonexistent when out on the trail. Make sure you understand the basics of map reading, as well as how to operate your chosen navigation or emergency signaling device, before setting out on the trail.

- **HEADLAMP**

No matter the time of day, bring a light source whenever you adventure. You never know when a short hike might turn into an all-day affair due to unforeseen circumstances. Remember to pack extra batteries as well.

- **SUN PROTECTION**

Even in the snowy White Mountains, sun protection is a must year-round. Items to consider include sunglasses, sunscreen, and sun protective clothing.

- **FIRST AID KIT**

From items for foot care (like moleskin and blister pads) to wrap bandages for sprained ankles and insect repellent in the summer, it's a great idea to keep a small first aid kit tucked in your backpack.

- **KNIFE/MULTI TOOL**

A simple, sturdy knife can come in handy in many emergency scenarios, and also makes a great tool for sharing trail snacks.

- **FIRE STARTER**

Packing a compact backpacking stove can turn a long uphill slog into something to look forward to. Anyone for hot chocolate at the top? In case of emergency, packing matches and tinder, as well as a candle (which provides a great, consistent flame) also just might save your life. Rescuers can spot smoke from a signal fire much easier than a solo strander hiker.

If you choose to use either option, do so responsibly. Visit the [White Mountain National Forest](#) website for [backcountry fire regulations](#) during non-emergency situations.

- **SHELTER**

A quick emergency shelter is a must, and even more so in the winter. A [bivy sack](#) is a lightweight, packable option to keep you relatively sheltered from the elements.

- **FOOD**

Pack extra snacks, always. Pick calorie dense options to help keep your energy up.

- **WATER**

Hiking in the White Mountains entails a fair amount of exertion, even for very fit hikers. Bring more water than you think you need, and a simple water purification option such as iodine tablets, a water filter, or sterilizing pen. Don't depend on water sources found along the trail though; just like all things in nature, they can be unpredictable!

- **RAIN GEAR/WARM LAYERS**

"Cute" isn't a priority when you're hiking. Forget clothes that will look nice in pictures, and instead focus on warm, waterproof, windproof layers that will keep you safe during any excursion. The best outfits are ones you can adapt, including base wicking layers to keep you dry, cozy toppers like a lightweight down jacket or fleece, and weather repellent shells. Long underwear bottoms, weather-blocking pants, a hat, mittens/gloves, and extra socks are a must as well.

You can remove or add items as needed, but always save room in your pack for all options (and keep them in easy-to-reach spots to adapt your 'fit throughout your hike). The mantra to remember is "dress like an onion". Peel off layers when you are feeling warm and add layers when feeling cold.

Last but not least....steer clear of cotton. This fabric gets wet and stays wet for long periods of time, which can bring down your core temperature.

Bonus! We're adding one more to the list...

- **PROPER FOOTWEAR**

Street sneakers, sandals, and other stylish shoes have no place on the trail. During an average hike in the White Mountains, you will encounter sharp rocks, slick roots, muddy spots, and many other conditions. Be smart and stick with a pair of hiking boots to keep your feet dry and safe.

Visit the “Winter Hiking” section of this page for additional winter recommendations.

This 10 Essentials list is an aggregate based on the information found on several prominent outdoors sites, including:

- National Park Service ([nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov))
- The Mountaineers ([mountaineers.org](https://www.mountaineers.org))
- REI Co-op ([rei.com](https://www.rei.com))

The 10+ Essentials for Winter

Pack as if your life depends on it. Always bring the 10 essentials plus the below winter items based on your hiking plans and chosen route.

- Navigation
- Headlamp
- Sun Protection
- First Aid Kit
- Knife/Multi Tool
- Fire Starter
- Shelter
- Food
- Water
- Rain gear/warm layers
- Proper footwear

PLUS

Add for Winter:

- Extra warm clothing (insulate parka, extra mittens)
- Balaclava or face mask
- Insulated boots
- Overmitts
- Snowshoes

Add for Above Treeline:

- Crampons
- Face mask
- Ice axe
- Goggles

Add for Avalanche Terrain:

- Avalanche transceiver
- Avalanche probe
- Snow shovel
- The proper skills and knowledge to know how to use said equipment (including attending an Avalanche Safety Course)