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HOW TO PREPARE FOR A TRIP IN NATURE



Guidelines for teachers, educators, parents and all those who want to spend more time in nature

For a relaxing, safe and invigorating adventure in nature, it is necessary to spend some time preparing as well. Bringing everything you need, while not overloading yourself with stuff, is a skill that is best practiced by frequent trips to the outdoors! Over time, you will make your own personal list of must-have items for nature trips and you will be able to pack a backpack in a blink of an eye, and get ready for another day in your favourite natural environment or to start exploring new landscapes. If you have no experience, ask someone who does and can teach what to do. One of the basic rules is that you should never go into nature ALONE, especially to unfamiliar places. And why would anyone go alone when it's always better with company?!



INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACE YOU ARE GOING TO AND ORIENTATION TOOLS

Before you set off on an exciting outdoor adventure, be sure to check the weather forecast and basic information about the place you are going. Check whether there is a map of the hiking trails (printed or digital), how difficult the tracks are (length and ascent), what basic infrastructure there is (picnic areas, toilets), whether there are springs or drinking fountains on the trail, lookouts, waterfalls, if it is a protected area and the whereabouts of visitors centre where you should check in. Find out more about cultural and historical sights you could visit in the area.

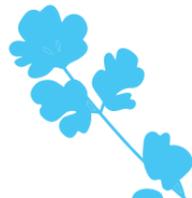
It is also important to check whether your route passes through any private property, hunting grounds or military training grounds, and to observe any signage about movement restrictions. If you happen to pass nearby or over private property, whether it is a smaller or larger group, take care not to cause any damage to the property or crops and make sure not to leave any garbage behind. If you pass through hunting areas, make sure to check if the hunting season is open and contact the local hunting association (make sure to do this if your excursion is on a Sunday or during the autumn or winter, when the hunting season is underway).

A faithful companion of any map is a compass or the corresponding app on your mobile phone. You can use these to determine your location and the direction you want to take, especially if the hiking trails are poorly marked. It's also useful to have emergency contact numbers – that of the property manager in case you're in a protected area, and the number of the nearest ambulance or mountain rescue service. Charge your phone battery before you take off and make sure you use your device only as a camera, map reader, compass or for emergency calls, so that your battery lasts longer.

CLOTHING AND SHOES

When spending time in nature, it is best to dress in layers, because this will allow you to easily adapt to changing weather conditions and physical activity. Footwear should be comfortable and closed in order to protect your feet, semi-deep or deep and, if necessary, waterproof (based on the terrain, season, and weather forecast). In addition to the clothes you are wearing, it is a good idea to bring some spare clothes. Depending on where you are going, decide if shorts (comfortable and cooler) or trousers (protect against insects, ticks, scratches, and are warmer) are better – both have their advantages, but which one is the right for your day in nature?

During the hot summer months, it is a good idea to take a spare T-shirt, so you can swap your T-shirt when it gets sweaty, while a long-sleeved T-shirt will offer additional protection from the sun or changeable weather, especially in mountainous areas, where temperatures can change quickly. Alongside comfortable footwear, socks are the best remedy for blisters. Sweaty, torn or wet socks should be changed for fresh ones in order to help your feet carry you for miles and miles without blisters. If necessary, socks can also be used as improvised mittens! If the weather is unstable, or you are going to the mountains, make sure to take a raincoat. In addition to protection from the rain, a raincoat will also protect you from the wind. You don't need to carry spare shoes with you all the time, you can leave them in the vehicle and change them before returning home, especially if your shoes are wet and muddy – which happens very easily in nature.



FOOD AND WATER



If there are no springs or taps at your destination, and you plan to be there up to 4 hours, you should take at least one litre of water with you. It is best to take the water in a light metal bottle with a thermal insulation case – this way the water will stay fresh for a long time, especially during warm days. Avoid sweetened and carbonated juices. Believe it or not, you will actually be thirstier if you drink them!

Spending time in nature can be very energy demanding, especially if you are planning on doing longer walks, so it is important to bring enough appropriate foods – light, long-lasting and high-calorie foods. Avoid salty foods, such as snacks and sandwiches with salty cured meat products – they will only make you thirsty, which means you will need to carry a lot of water with you. In addition to pastries, it is very useful to bring fresh or dried fruit, nuts, seeds, cereal bars or a candy bar.

PROTECTION FROM THE SUN AND INSECTS

Adequate sun protection is an essential in your backpack. Hats or caps and sunglasses are especially important – not only during summer days, but also if you are going to higher altitudes, where the sun is stronger, or in winter, if you hike in the snow. Prolonged exposure of the eyes to sunlight reflecting on the snow can be very uncomfortable and even painful if you have sensitive eyes. It is also important to protect your skin. It is good to take a protective cream and lip balm with you and use them as needed during your outdoor trip. If you are sensitive to insect bites, make sure to bring a repellent to reduce the possibility of bites.





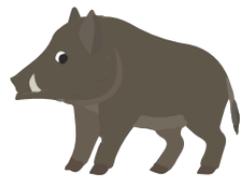
MEDICINE AND FIRST AID KIT

If you use any medication regularly, they should definitely be an integral part of the equipment you carry with you. In case of minor or major accidents in the outdoors, it is necessary to carry a basic first aid kit that contains a disinfectant, plasters, sterile gauze, bandages of various widths, elastic bandage, allergy and pain pills, insect bite cream and tweezers (for removing ticks or thorns). It is very useful to carry adhesive tape, which can be useful in many situations.



NATURE EXPLORATION KIT

Complete your adventure with useful nature exploration accessories, such as a magnifying glass, binoculars, a small flashlight and a research diary. Beneath the fallen leaves and stones, and in fallen trees, cavities, streams and puddles, there is an incredibly rich micro-world – invisible at first sight, but always present – the entrance ticket to which is a magnifying glass. Binoculars will make you feel like giants, bringing you closer to distant landscapes, birds and squirrels in the tops of the trees. If your adventure continues after sunset, a flashlight will safely light your way back, and you can record your impressions and discoveries in your research diary.



SOME MORE ADVICE AND A COUPLE OF USEFUL TIPS



Going out into nature with a group can make packing a little easier and make it a team project. There is no need for everyone to carry everything. Agree on which members of the group will bring sunscreen, repellent, insect bite cream or a map. An adult in the group should definitely bring a first aid kit, along with a small Swiss Army knife, which can be very useful. This way your backpacks will be a bit lighter and, together, your group will have all the things you need.



If you are planning a longer stay in one place, it is useful to bring a mat or a blanket to sit or lie on. It is a good idea to bring some garbage bags. They can act as rain protection if you don't have a waterproof cover for your backpack, or you can use them for collecting garbage you come across during your walk. Even though you didn't leave the garbage, you can make a big contribution by picking it up!

LEAVE NO TRACE



Spending time in nature requires respecting certain rules of conduct that will, on one hand, make your trip safe, and on the other hand, contribute to the preservation of nature and reduce human impact.





Bring everything back home that you took with you on your trip. Do not leave garbage in nature, even if it is biodegradable, like food scraps or tissues. Your backpack will definitely be lighter on your trip back because you ate the food and drank the water. So, you will have enough space to take your garbage with you and dispose of it appropriately. Leaving garbage in nature can be dangerous for animals, cause fires, and pollutes beautiful natural landscapes.

Feeding wild animals very often gives us the impression that we are doing something good and that we are helping them. But the fact is that wild animals do not need our help to find food, so when we feed them we are doing more harm than good. Most wild animals have a specific diet, and thus a specific microflora in their digestive system. Consumption of human food (processed, salty, sweet, spicy, with flavour enhancers) can disrupt this microflora and negatively affect animal health. An even worse effect is that wild animals can get used to human food, which will influence their behaviour – they start getting closer to roads, car parking, picnic areas, and garbage bins, where they are much more vulnerable and exposed to danger.

Stick to marked hiking trails – it is safer for you and safer for the environment, and you won't damage vegetation, which may harbour rare species of plants and animals. Leave the flowers, lichens, butterflies, stones, cones, mushrooms and everything else that enchants you with its beauty in its place in nature. Do not take anything home with you. This also applies to small animals such as turtles, lizards, grasshoppers and the like. Take a photo or make a "mental picture" and leave everything where it was found, because that's where it belongs. Leave nature in the state you want to find it. By doing so, you show respect for the local population and other visitors, but also for the entire living world.



CHECKLIST FOR ADULTS:

Equipment:

- backpack, waterproof backpack protection
- appropriate clothing and footwear (+ spares), raincoat
- water and food
- hat/cap, sunglasses
- sunscreen, lip balm, insect repellent
- map, compass (or application), phone, emergency numbers
- medicines, first aid kits
- magnifying glass, binoculars, flashlight, research diary
- whistle, Swiss knife, garbage bags
- sitting mat/blanket



Preparation:

- basic information about where you are going
- announce your visit to the visitor centre (if you are going to a protected area)
- get a map (printed or digital)
- check the weather forecast
- emergency numbers
- charge batteries (phone, camera)



CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS:

Equipment:

- backpack, waterproof backpack protection
- appropriate clothing and footwear (+ spares), raincoat
- water and food
- hat/cap, sunglasses
- sunscreen, lip balm, insect repellent
- map, compass (or application), phone
- medicines (that you use daily)
- magnifying glass, binoculars, flashlight, research diary
- sitting mat/blanket



Preparation:

- check the weather forecast
- get a map (printed or digital)
- charge batteries (phone, camera)





The inspiration for writing this text and spreading the message that every trip to nature can and must remain without any negative impact on the environment comes from [The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics](#) and a large number of nature lovers, among which are participants of our WWF Nature Academy, who have publicly shared their experiences of preparing for an outdoor trip.

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Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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PROTECTED AREAS FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE