

THE BEGINNER'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO ADVENTURE TRAVEL

Hiking. Camping. International Travel. Solo travel.
Budget Tips

Everything you need to go from curious beginner to confident adventurer



1. INTRODUCTION

What adventure travel means

Adventure Travel is one of the best ways to explore the world. It pushes you out of your comfort zone, connects you with the outdoors and the world as a whole, and serves a purpose casual travel cannot fulfill. Whether you dream of climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, level four whitewater rafting, or exploring foreign countries alone for the first time, this guide is your starting point.

Who is this guide for?

- Complete beginners who have never experienced adventure travel
- Casual travelers ready to try something more active
- Outdoor enthusiasts wanting to travel further
- First time solo travelers looking for tips and budgeting advice

What you will learn in this guide

- Types of adventure travel
- How to manage fear and embrace discomfort
- How to choose the right first adventure
- How to save money when adventuring
- The best gear for different types of adventures
- Safety fundamentals for adventure travel
- How to prepare for your first adventure
- Everything necessary to pack for your first adventure
- How to be a good traveler

How to use this guide: Read it end to end for a full overview, or jump to the section most beneficial to you. Each page will cover a different topic.



2. MINDSET AND EXPECTATIONS

Before you commit to your first adventure, the most important preparation is mental. Adventure travel is something that requires optimism and alertness. While it is fun and life-changing, you are also going to have to be prepared for any unfortunate events. These can range from blisters, bad weather, forced change of plans, and physical pain. But that's the point of breaking out of your comfort zone! Here's how to embrace it.

Managing Fear

Fear is natural and common, it shows that you're expecting the unexpected. But most beginners let their fear stop them from experiencing their first adventure, and that's what I wanna steer you away from. Most beginner adventures are actually proven to be safe when planned properly. Acknowledge the fear, research thoroughly, and take one step at a time.

Embracing Discomfort

The most you'll remember the most are the uncomfortable ones. The final mile of a brutal hike, the cold morning in a tent, and the moment you've pushed yourself beyond your comfort zone. Comfort is temporary, growth is permanent.

Setting Realistic Goals

- Start smaller than you think you need to
- Build experience before planning a strenuous adventure
- Compare yourself to only who you were yesterday, not to anyone else

- Celebrate small wins, they matter!



Me on my first extended backpacking trip! (Lost Coast, CA, March 2022)



3. TYPES OF ADVENTURE TRAVEL

Adventure Travel is a broad term. Here's a breakdown of the most popular types for beginners, from the most accessible to the more committing.

Hiking and Trekking



The most accessible form of adventure travel, especially if you live in a mountainous area. Day hikes require almost no experience and minimal equipment. Multi-day treks involve camping, navigation, and self-sufficiency. Great starter destinations for one would be the Grand Canyon, the lost coast of California, and Yellowstone.

- Day hikes: perfect for first timers, easy to find locally
- Overnight backpacking: introduces camping and carrying a full pack
- Multi-Day Treks: Camino de Santiago, Routeburn Track, Salkantay Trek, etc...

Camping



From car camping to camping in the wild, camping builds the foundation needed for outdoor skills. It is also the most affordable kind of accommodation.

- Car camping: Great for families and beginners
- Backcountry/Wild Camping: requires permits and a Leave no Trace mentality
- Glamping: For outdoorsman who also enjoy luxury

Water Sports



Kayaking, canoeing, rafting, and paddleboarding are adventures activities enjoyed on lakes, rivers, and oceans. This activity requires you to live near bodies of water to do frequently, but you can travel to a body of water and still take these activities up. There also many guides that offer beginner guided trips without any experience.

- White water rafting: guided tours and low level rapids are perfect for beginners. [Example here](#)
- Sea kayaking: leads you to stunning coastlines and island exploration. [Example here](#)
- Paddleboarding: Sitting down or standing up, great for beginners

Rock Climbing



Outdoor rock climbing is a bit more difficult, as it requires a a doable route and knowing how to set it up. However, indoor rock climbing is much more accessible and easier, as the routes are already created and labeled by level of difficulty. You can do either bouldering or top rope climbing at an indoor gym.

- Start by doing an indoor climbing course before an outdoor one
- Take a rock climbing course
- Research best places for beginners to outdoor climb

International Adventure Travel



There's a whole world out there, make the most of your adventures! International adventures will add cultural immersion and the opportunity to challenge yourself. Examples of international countries for beginner adventurers include Nepal, New Zealand, Costa Rica, and Patagonia. All these countries have opportunities for trekking, cultural immersion, and learning something new.

- There is one adventure travel program I recommend over all the others. Done it twice, considering a third run. It is called [GIVE Volunteers!](#) What is special about them is that they allow you to adventure while giving back to a community. I have been on their Tanzania trip, Thailand trip with the elephant excursion add-on and considering Costa Rica. Every dollar I spent on it was worth it! Every program is different in terms of projects and activities, but all of them balance volunteering and adventuring very well. GIVE Volunteers also assists you in every way before, during, and after your trip!
- I have not experienced them myself but other travel companies you can start your adventure with include [Intrepid Travel](#), [Much Better Adventures](#), [Under 30 Experiences](#), etc...
- Another option is if you attend a university with an outdoor program, check it out! I got my foot in the door with [Boise State's outdoor program](#).

Budget Adventure Travel



Adventure travel doesn't have to be expensive. Camping, staying in hostels, and work exchanges are the best ways to travel on a budget. For solo travelers, I highly recommend staying in hostels.



4. CHOOSING YOUR FIRST ADVENTURE

Your first adventure should challenge you just enough without overwhelming you. Here's a framework to choose wisely.

Match the trip to your fitness

Be honest about your fitness level. Most hiking distances and elevation gains are available online. If you are not regularly active, climbing Mt Kilimanjaro, for example, is not a good first adventure for you.



Fitness check: Can you comfortably walk for 2+ hours? That's the minimum for a beginner day hike and a good starting point.

Consider Guided vs Self-Guided



Guided trips don't require as much logistics on your end, provide safety support, and offer expert knowledge. They also provide a set itinerary for the trip and a set price that normally, covers MOST of the trip. A good example of guided trips that do well with all of the above is GIVE Volunteers. While they may be more costly than a self-guided trip, it is the safest entry point for beginners who have had little to no experience with

international adventures.



Thus, self-guided trips require more planning and safety measures, but they do provide more freedom. If you insist on doing a self-guided trip for your first adventure, the smart thing to do would be to use a destination management company (or DMC). Think about a DMC like a travel agent, but for a specific destination and type of adventure. DMC's offer local knowledge, expertise and resources, and implementation of cultural immersion, tours, logistics, and transportation. They can also craft an itinerary in accordance to your preferences. Item of note, they do cost money to use but think about it, the money you spend is used to ensure your safety. Examples of DMCs include [Exploor Peru](#), [Alpine Adventures](#), [ERM Tours](#) and [Safaris](#), [Experience Morocco](#), etc...

BEST PRACTICES:

Start Local



Your first adventure does not need to be international. Local national and state parks, nearby hiking trails, and nearby campgrounds can offer great experience with minimal risk.

Beginner Friendly Destinations by Activity

Hiking

- Cinque Terre, Italy-great if you want to see coastal trails
- Olympic National Park, Washington, U.S.-varried terrain, great view of the Pacific

Ocean

- Camel's Back Trail, Boise, ID, U.S.-More of a walk than a hike, but still with amazing views

Trekking

- Camino de Santiago Spain-Walk at your own pace, very little elevation gain
- Routeburn Track, New Zealand-places to stay and amenities all along, long walk
- Iceland-Various types of treks, all with beautiful scenery

Water Sports

- Big Island, Hawaii-Guided opportunities to kayak and snorkel with dolphins
- Costa Rica-Various white water rafting opportunities ranging from class I to class IV rapids
- Greece-Various islands with lots of opportunities for boating

International Budget Adventures

- Thailand-Getting there isn't cheap but everything else is
- Lisbon, Portugal-Affordable stays, dirt cheap Ubers and metro, affordable food
- Peru-Affordable stays and food, plenty of adventure opportunities



5. INTERNATIONAL ADVENTURE TRAVEL

Your first international adventure can be one of the most life-changing events in your life. Here's what all beginners need to know before their first international adventure.

Visas and Entry Requirements

- Check Visa requirements at least 3 months before departure (or whenever is recommended by the country's government)
- Examples of countries that require visas are Tanzania, China, India, Brazil, etc...
- Passport validity: Make sure your passport is bought 6 months in advance or doesn't expire 6 months before your trip
- Use official government sources to book and for info

Vaccinations and Health

- Consult a travel health clinic 6-8 weeks before departure
- Common vaccines: Typhoid, Yellow Fever, Malaria meds (depends on the region)
- Regions that will likely require vaccines: Africa, SE Asia, Central America
- Carry a basic travel health kit: (see chapter 9)



Register your trip with your country's foreign affairs department (ex: STEP program in the U.S.) It allows embassies to contact you during an emergency.

Cultural Awareness



Adventure travel takes you to communities far from mass tourism. Respecting local customs isn't just polite, it makes your experience richer and gives you a better story to share. Tips before you go:

- Research dress codes, especially when visiting religious sites. For example, at Buddhist temples in Thailand, shoulders and knees must be covered and shoes must be removed before going inside.
- Learn a few words of the local language.
- Ask before photographing religious places and certain people.
- If encouraged, leave tips for your guides.

Best Beginner-Friendly Countries for Adventurers



New Zealand-Laid-back, English speaking, diverse terrain

Costa Rica-World class eco adventure, safe, very Americanized, used to adventure travelers

Iceland-safe, diverse terrain, adventurers flock there frequently

Portugal-safe, laid-back, and great for solo adventurers

Canada-safe, English speaking, similar to America, good mix of city and wilderness



6. BUDGET ADVENTURE TRAVEL

Adventure Travel has a reputation for being expensive, but it doesn't have to be. With the right strategies, you can do an adventure trip on a budget.

Free & Low Cost Adventures



- National and State Parks often have free entry days and annual passes
- Wild Camping (safety measures required)
- Trail running and hiking have no cost except for the required footwear
- Day hikes from cities are often free

Budget Accommodation



- Camping: Most affordable option by far
- Hostels: Great for solo travelers, cheap, and have opportunities to form community among guests
- Work Exchanges: Worldpackers, WWOOF, etc...

Gear on a Budget



Gear can be a pricey upfront cost for new adventurers. Here's how to minimize it:

- Rent before you buy-especially for camping gear, kayaks, and climbing equipment. For example, I rent outdoor equipment from the Boise State Outdoor Center
- Buy second-hand: Thrift stores, FaceBook Marketplace, REI used gear, used gear on Amazon
- Borrow from friends and family for your first trip if possible
- Budget brands: REI Co-op, Costco, certain products on Amazon, etc...

Budget Flight and Transport



- Use Google Flights and Skyscanner to research, then compare prices among airlines
- If traveling in a city, use the metro rather than Ubers and Taxis
- For meals while traveling, cut back on eating out and buy food at grocery stores instead
- If you travel frequently, it would be smart to get a credit card where you can earn points on flights and hotels. Examples are Capital One and American Express.



Budget Rule of Thumb: Accommodation+transport+food=80% of your travel budget. Gear is a one time investment spread across many trips.



7. ESSENTIAL GEAR BY ACTIVITY

You don't need to own every piece of gear before your first adventure. Start with the basics and build your collection over time. Here's what you need for each activity.

Day Hike Gear



- Crossbody or a small backpack with a holder for your water bottle
- Footwear: Hiking boots or trail shoes. Socks that rise above your footwear.
- Navigation: Downloaded offline map (AllTrails, Google Maps, etc...)
- Hydration: 2L water capacity minimum. Bring a backup water bottle if needed
- Layers: A jacket with a t-shirt underneath, pants with shorts underneath. When it warms up, you can put your jacket and pants in your day sack.
- Emergency: Headlamp if it gets dark, band-aids, whistle

Overnight Backpacking



Everything above plus:

- Backpack fit for backpacking. Would recommend a 45L-65L.
- 3-person tent or however big of a tent you need
- Sleeping pad and sleeping bag rated to the lowest expected temperature. For example, if you are backpacking in the winter, I would get a sub zero sleeping bag
- Cooking: lightweight stove, fuel canister, pot, utensils
- Food: non-perishable meals and snacks. Examples: Mountain House meals, trail-mix, tuna in a bag, pasta noodles and mix in a bag

Water Sports



- Life jacket with a whistle (may be a requirement in some states)
- Dry bag (stuff all your personal belongings in here, they can't get wet while inside the bag)
- Waterproof phone case
- Sunscreen
- Helmet, paddles, and a flotation device (if not provided)

Rock Climbing



- Climbing shoes (indoor places often have rentals)

- Harness and belay devices (indoor places also have rentals on these)
- Helmet (only for outdoor climbing)
- Chalk bag
- For outdoor lead climbing: full rack, cams, and draws (do a course first)

Buy vs Rent: Beginner Guide



Buy First: Footwear, layers, rain jacket, daypack. These get used every trip

Rent First: Tents, sleeping bags, kayaks, climbing gear, bikes. Rent 2-3 times before committing to a purchase



8. PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

Good planning is the difference between a trip that flows and one that falls apart. Here's how to approach it.

The Planning Timeline



3-6 Months Out

- Choose a destination and activity type
- Book flights (3-4 months before is where you can secure the best flight deals)
- Research visa requirements and begin applications if needed
- Book guided trips and accommodation (they fill up fast)

1-3 Months Out

- Visit travel health clinic for vaccinations. I go to this place called Passport Health in Boise and all the costs are included.
- Purchase travel insurance (a lot of frequent travelers use SafetyWing)
- Required Gear (make a packing list or use the one your group tour leader provides)
- Begin fitness training specific to the activity
- Apply for permits (Examples of places that require permits are the Grand Canyon, Machu Picchu, etc...)

2-4 Weeks Out

- Download offline maps and load routes
- Share your itinerary with your emergency contact
- Test your gear before opting to pack it
- Research local emergency numbers and nearby medical facilities]

Travel Insurance



A must for adventure travel, because you never know what may happen! Standard travel insurance often doesn't include adventure activities. Look for policies that cover:

- Emergency evacuation and rescue (without insurance, you'll be stuck paying over 50K for a helicopter rescue)
- Medical expenses abroad
- Adventure activities
- Trip cancellation and adjustment

Recommended providers: SafetyWing, Arch Roam Right, World Nomads, Allianz, etc...

Permits



Many popular adventure spots require permits that must be booked months in advance. Always check permit requirements during your research phase. Popular trails with permits:

- Inca Trail, Peru-Book 6 months ahead
- Everest Base Camp, Nepal-national park fees and TIMS card required
- Mt. Kilimanjaro-Book permit 2-3 months ahead



9. SAFETY

FUNDAMENTALS

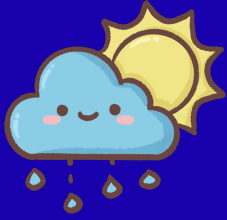
Adventure travel carries real risks. The goal isn't to eliminate risk, it is to know how to manage it. Most accidents while adventuring are the result of poor planning, weather changes, or lack of cautiousness.

The 10 Essentials



1. Navigation: Phone with downloaded offline maps, or if you're old fashioned a map, compass and a GPS device
2. Sun Protection: Sunscreen, sunglasses, hat
3. Insulation: Extra clothing layers beyond what you think you need
4. Illumination: Headlamp (for when it gets dark)
5. First aid supplies: band-aids, cooling gel (for sunburns and finger burns) and anything else you may need in the First Aid necessities
6. Fire: fire-starter, matches, lighter (Comes in handy when camping)
7. Repair tools: Knife, duct-tape, gear repair kit
8. Nutrition: Extra food beyond rations
9. Hydration: Extra water, filtration tool
10. Emergency shelter: Tarp or emergency blanket

Weather Decision-Making



The mountains and open water don't care about your plans. The most important safety skill you can develop is being prepared. Tips to consider:

- Check forecasts from multiple weather apps the night before and morning of
- Make a plan to evacuate if need be
- Lightning, high winds, and flash flood warnings are non-negotiable stop signals
- Leave as soon as possible when conditions start to deteriorate

Basic First Aid for Outdoor Adventures



- Blisters: (common when hiking long distances) drain with sterile needle, cover with a bandage
- Sprains: compress the sprain with ice and elevate the part of body
- Dehydration: Drink before you're thirsty, about 500 ml per hour of activity
- Altitude sickness: Hydrate, take sickness pills, descend if it does not improve
- Hypothermia: Add layers, get dry, eat, seek shelter

If you are wanted to work in wilderness leadership, consider taking a Wilderness First Aid (WFA) course. [NOLS](#) and [REI](#) offer WFA courses.

Knowing Your Limits



- Always have an exit strategy
- Tell someone your plan before you leave
- Don't let anyone stop you from having the adventure of a lifetime!



10. FITNESS AND TRAINING PREP

You don't need to be an athlete to do adventure travel. However, you do need to prepare for the physical demands of your trip. Here's how:

The Base: Cardio



Most adventure activities are cardio like activities. Prepare yourself by:

- Walking/Hiking: Helps prepare for trekking adventures
- Running: Builds endurance
- Cycling: Great low-impact cardio, builds leg muscle
- Swimming: Helps prepare for water sports

Activity-Specific Training



For Hiking and Trekking

- Train on hills and stairs
- Break in your hiking boots
- Practice hiking with a backpack
- Practice hiking for 2+ days in a row

For Climbing



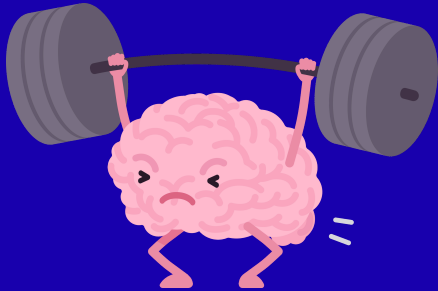
- Grip and upper body strength training
- Core Strength exercises
- Flexibility: hip and shoulder mobility

For Water Sports



- Upper body and core strength (Builds strength for paddle strokes)
- Practice swimming laps at a local pool or lake, or if you're lucky, ocean!
- Kayak specific: Paddling practice

Training Timeline: 12 Week Beginner Ramp



- Weeks 1-4: Build base, 3-4 sessions a week, modern intensity
- Weeks 5-8: Increase load, add elevation/distance/duration each week
- Weeks 9-11: Peak Training-simulate trip conditions as closely as possible
- Week 12: Reduce volume, rest, recover, and prepare mentally

Training Principle: Specificity matters. The best training for hiking is hiking, the best training for swimming is swimming. Start with what you have, and then build up.



11. SMART PACKING

**Packing well is a skill. Most beginners overpack on their first trip.
Here's how to pack smart.**

The Layering System



Layering is the foundation of outdoor clothing. Three layers cover almost every condition:

1. Base-layer: Moisture wicking (moves sweat away from skin)
2. Mid-layer: Insulation (traps warmth)
3. Outer layer: Weather protection (rainjacket or winter coat)

Master Packing List



Clothing

- 2-3 moisture-wicking base layers and/or t-shirts

- At least 1 insulating mid-layer
- 1 waterproof jacket
- 2 pairs of hiking socks (wool recommended)
- Hiking pants and/or shorts
- Warm hat and sun hat
- Gloves (during winter)
- Lightweight camp shoes (Chacos recommended)

Gear Essentials

- Daypack or backpack (depends on trip)
- Trekking Poles (makes strenuous hikes more bearable)
- Headlamp+batteries
- Water bottles
- Basic first aid supplies
- Navigation system (downloaded offline maps, compass, GPS, etc...)
- Sunscreen, bug spray, chap stick

Camping Add-ons

- Tent or tarp
- Sleeping bag (temperature rated appropriately)
- Sleeping pad
- Stove, fuel, pot, utensils
- Drybags for electronics and anything that needs to stay dry

What to Leave at Home



- Cotton clothing (uncomfortable to wear while trekking)
- More than 2-3 pairs of clothes for a trip
- Guidebooks (download digital versions)
- If you don't think you'll use it, leave it at home!



12. ON THE GROUND

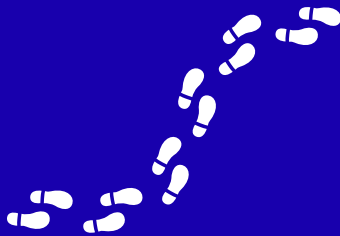
You're out there. Here's how to navigate, travel responsibly, and engage with local communities.

Navigation Basics



- Always carry a paper map as a backup, often found at the site visitor center
- Identify landmarks and terrain features as guidance
- Use AllTrails or Google Maps
- Check your position regularly

Leave No Trace Principles



Leave No Trace is a common ethical framework for outdoor adventures. The principles are:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp near water and on durable land
3. Dispose all trash

4. Leave what you find (but take photos if you want to preserve the memory!)
5. Minimize campfire leftovers
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other adventurers

Local Customs and Etiquette



In many adventure destinations, you will find people of a different culture. Whether it's abroad or in a local, rural community, respectful engagement makes experience richer for everyone.

- Greet people in their language (for example, if you are in Thailand, greet others by putting your hands together while bowing and saying “sa wa dee ka”)
- Ask permission before entering private land
- Tip if it is encouraged
- Follow rules around sacred sites, wildlife areas, and cultural practices

Digital Detox and Presence



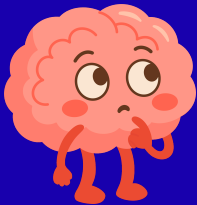
One of the greatest gifts of adventure travel is disconnection. Turn on airplane mode to not receive notifications. Be present in the landscape, the social media posts can wait.



13. AFTER THE TRIP

The adventure does not end when you get home. The period after a trip is important for learning, processing, and preparing for your next one.

Debrief with Yourself



- What went well? What would you do differently?
- What gear worked well and what didn't?
- Do you feel that you prepared effectively?
- What did the experience teach you about yourself?

Document Your Experience



- Write a trip report while the information is fresh in your head. Great to use as a reference for future adventures and to share with your peers
- Save your route to share with others
- Keep a packing list for future reference

Building Toward Bigger Adventures



Each trip is a building block. Here's a simple progression framework:

1. Local day hike-Overnight local backpack
2. Local overnight-3-5 day domestic trip
3. Domestic multi-day-First international adventure
4. Guided international-Self-guided international
5. Self-guided trekking-Adventure objectives (summiting mountains, etc...)
6. Don't rush the progression. Spending a season doing similar trips is not a waste of time-it's smart training



14. RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY

You don't have to figure this out alone. The adventure travel community is one of the most welcoming and generous there is.

Essential Apps



- AllTrails-trail database, reviews, offline maps
- TripAdvisor-reviews, photos, recommendations
- Google Maps-offline maps
- National Park Service-all information and updates regarding U.S. National Parks
- Google Translate + downloaded offline language packs
- Any offline weather app
- onX Maps-downloadable offline maps for hiking, hunting, fishing, offroading, and backcountry

Books Worth Reading



- [Lonely Planet USA's National Parks](#)
- [Adventure Awaits: The Beginner's Guide to the Great Outdoors by Ky Furneaux](#)
- [Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer \(teaches you what NOT to do while adventuring\)](#)
- [Lonely Planet Women Travel Solo: 30 Inspiring Stories of Adventure, Curiosity and the Power of Self-Discovery](#)
- [Lonely Planet Epic Hikes of the Americas](#)
- [Hiking the Grand Canyon, Revised and Expanded by John Annerino](#)
- Any National Geographic Book

Online Communities



- Reddit: r/hiking, r/backpacking, r/travel, etc...
- Facebook Groups: Women who Hike, US National Park Travel, local groups, etc...
- Outdoors StackExchange: Q&A for outdoor skills

Courses and Training



- NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School)-wilderness medicine and Leadership
- REI Outdoor School-beginner skills workshops
- First Aid: Wilderness First Responder or Wilderness First Aid Certifications
- [GIVE's Wilderness International Leadership Development \(WILD\) Course-learn](#)

Wilderness First Aid, EpiPen training, and real-world leadership skills. All taught in the backcountry of the Cascade Mountains

Gear Retailers Worth Knowing



- REI
- Decathlon
- Cabela's
- GearTrade.com
- Backcountry.com



THE BEST ADVENTURE IS ONE YOU ACTUALLY TAKE

Stop waiting for perfect circumstances, perfect gear, and perfect fitness. Start with where you are. Every expert adventurer began exactly where you are now—curious, nervous, and ready to break out of the comfort zone.

Go Explore. The World is Waiting.



Love, Ashley and Patrick

