

# Essential Camping Tips For Beginners and Experts

*By Linda Lin*

FIRST, TOTAL ESSENTIALS for comfortable camping (in state parks):

- Know that camping inside a state park is no safer than camping or living anywhere else in the country.
- So, security, health and safety should be on your mind before you begin your trip.
- As a beginner, you will do well by first calling the state parks office and asking for a map of the place and any or all brochures of the campsites. You can find this information online also at the park's websites.
- IF this is your first time camping out, take a buddy, and also choose a campsite that is closest to the park office (if there is one) and closest to the bathrooms, showers or soda machines. (Some sites have those).
- Look at the map and note whether there are bathrooms or outhouses (Yes, there are some that still have outhouses, i.e. in Pennsylvania and in Ohio). Choose what you like and then select your park or campsite.
- Research the temperature of the climate that you will be visiting; check for upcoming storms and bad weather . PLAN your trip.
- INQUIRE about the park's regulations on animals. (You can find out if you can bring a pet or not).
- Do not bring any pets, even if allowed into certain country campsites (where there might be wildlife). You risk your pet getting diseases and you risk your pet getting eaten, maimed or killed. You also attract bears by bringing pets into the campsites. (Some campsites have bears because they are in the middle of game lands or in the middle of vast state parks).
- IF you must bring a pet, bring a kennel, minimal wet food, and bring gear to dispose of the food and waste. (Leave no trace)!
- If you want a campsite that has it's own library (in camp season), visit Wildwood State Park in New Jersey.
- If you want a real wilderness experience, visit most of the Pennsylvania state parks.
- If you want "civilized" camping, (with real showers, restrooms, electricity to charge your phones, water spigots at campsites) try Hecksher State Park in Long Island, New York.
- If you want to feel like you have been to HEAVEN-on earth- make your reservation nine months in advance and reserve your spot at Hither Hills State Park in the Hamptons, New York. This place is every bit worth the wait and the preparation. (Bring zip lock bags and waterproof bags because this is the wettest campsite around - just a few feet from our ocean). We woke up in the morning and found EVERYTHING damp - money soaked, etc, even though we camped 30 feet from the ocean and the ocean never touched out campsite. The moisture in

this place is unbelievable. (If you bring electronics here - your phone, etc, bring a water bucket and store your electronics in there to keep them dry.

Those, listed above, are just the basics.

Other things to prepare for. What if it rains? You can buy a small tarp at the dollar store or at any hardware store. Place this tarp over your tent if it rains. Most tents are not waterproof and even the ones that advertise that can be a little wet in a bad storm.

### **THINGS TO KEEP YOU DRY:**

1. Old, clean shower curtains.
2. Tarps.
3. Old, clean plastic table cloths.
4. Rain ponchos (as opposed to rain coats). Ponchos , large ones can double as tent cover.

### **IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- **Keep food OUT of the tent at all times.** This gives you good camping background training. Even if you are camping out in a place where there is no wildlife, get into the habit of eating OUTSIDE and far from your tent. Then when you do camp out where there are bears, you already have good camping habits. Besides, keeping food out is the same as keeping uncovered food out of your bedroom. You do not want to attract bugs or other creatures that might be hiding anywhere in the building or anywhere outdoors.
- At **Hecksher State Park**, you might find unwelcome visitors (little people) trying to come in your tent when you are gone (to the pool, etc), so bring along "cable ties" and use them to lock your tent up while you are away . Cut the ties with a manicure scissor or small wire cutter when you return. You can purchase cable ties anywhere in most cities. This cable tie lets you know if anyone has "visited" your campsite while you were away. If the cable tie is broken when you get back, fully inspect your tent for rips, bugs and other creatures that might have entered while your tent was being visited. It is important to check for spiders in this campsite. Spiders are rampant all over Hecksher. You see them when you take the fly off of your tent before leaving. You will view unbelievable collections of spiders under and near your tent.
- **When camping with kids or camping and using 'gear" - baseballs etc.** Set up a tiny 'gear tent". You can buy a child's tent for under twelve dollars. By storing gear in this separate tent, you save wear and tear on your regular tent's zipper and also keep the tent CLOSED to all the insects and other things around the campsite. You will sleep better at night knowing that your main tent zipper was only opened a few times as opposed to having the door opened continuously all day to get "gear" out. This saves the floor of your tent also.

- If you are determined to have a dry tent in a very rainy season or wet campsite. Put a large TARP on the floor of your tent. This will keep most of the floor dry and will make you happy.
- **Many people use TARPS on** the outside of the tent, under the tent, so they have no messy mud on the bottom of the tent when they are ready to pack up. (YOU can have mud on the floor bottom, underneath, even if it is not raining outside; so use the tarps). IF You use the outdoors tarp under your tent, the tarp must be SMALLER than the bottom of the tent. You do not want any of the tarp sticking outside the tent on the floor. If that happens, all the rain will pool in the small bits of tarp that show and the rain will seep underneath your entire tent.

### **VITALLY IMPORTANT:**

If you are camping at a NEW place for the first time and you have children or babies that you are bringing on this camping trip - PLAN a trip BEFORE your regular camping trip and go there without the children or babies. Camp there alone first.

We did this once, just as a precaution. We didn't know anything about Hecksher and we went camping there first before we planned to take children there. Good Plan!!

What we discovered is that this particular state park is the QUEEN of Mosquito Heaven! Within less than 20 minutes that we were there, we had mosquito bites all over our body. (This doesn't happen at all parks. Hecksher is notorious for mosquitoes and spiders.

So, on the regular trip with the kids, we took lots of repellent and we knew what to do .

So, when camping ANYWHERE with children, visit the site yourself first--without bringing the kids, just in case there is something that you should know about that particular camping site.

Wherever you camp, these things are essential:

- water-tight bags, water proof bags
- flashlights, batteries, or solar flashlights
- plastic bucket or pail
- soap and disinfectant
- bug spray
- tarps/ tent /tarp
- and other camping basics (Read our other articles about camping)
- Water and or the ability to find or locate water (pack iodine water-purifying pills if you can)

We hope you enjoyed this article about camping. In future articles, we will focus on senior camping, camping at the beach, and camping with wildlife -yes, there are many state parks that have bears, and pesky raccoons. Some of our other camping articles

feature topics such as how to choose a tent and even which tent to choose. You want to know where the BEST tent is? We have the answer.

**Best Tent (In My Opinion):** I have tried many different brands of tents, including one brand that had no name. I do have my own opinions about tents. I have been using tents since before 1998. I have tried and tested larger family-type tents, smaller tents, backpacking tents and even beach tents. I have found that my most favorite ones are Eureka tents. (You can get these tents very reasonable at the end of camping season. Try not to pay full price for camping equipment because it is available in larger sporting goods stores and in some department stores. If you wait until end of season to purchase your tents, you will get great discounts.

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