

Tips for Hiking in the Spring and What You Need

Springtime often gets a bad rap when it comes to hiking. Cold, rainy weather mixed with muddy trails tends to keep many hikers indoors, wishing and waiting for summer to roll around so they can dust off their trekking poles once again. But in reality, spring is one of the best seasons to catch a glimpse of waterfalls, embrace cool weather to fight fatigue, and enjoy your surroundings without too many people around. That being said, it's important to dress appropriately and pack a few essentials to combat unpredictable weather and trail conditions, the latter of which may include puddles, slippery mud pockets, and flowing creek banks.

It may sound daunting to befriend the harsh and often gloomy aesthetics that Mother Nature offers for springtime months, but many hikers tend to utilize these circumstances to bring out their inner sense of childlike wonder and play. Hiking is, after all, synonymous with life itself, as it's less about reaching the final destination and more about enjoying the journey itself, even if it means trekking through a little rain. So with that, let's walk you through some important tips for safely hiking during the spring season below.

Dress and Pack Accordingly

Choosing a proper pair of warm socks, hiking boots, and layers of clothing cannot be overstated. Spring weather can be very changeable so dress according to the weather forecast and always come prepared for the unexpected.

Fortunately, conditions like rain, snow, and heavy fog are no match for some of the following types of clothing options:

- Waterproof jacket
- Insulated jacket
- Lightweight windbreaker
- Waterproof hiking boots
- Waterproof rain pants
- Wool socks and one extra pair just in case you get wet feet
- Rain cap/hat

And speaking of warm layers, here's an important tip: Try to avoid wearing cotton, as it holds moisture (like sweat), which could bring your body temperature down. Instead, opt for moisture-wicking fabrics like nylon, rayon, and polyester.

In terms of gear, we recommend some, if not all, of the following to make your hiking journey beneficial and as smooth as possible:

- Extra water bottle and snacks
- Headlamp
- Bug spray
- Trekking poles
- Leg gaiters
- Sunscreen
- Backpack with waterproof pack cover

So remember, when it comes to packing for a spring hike, it's always better to overcompensate than to feel miserable in chilly weather due to improper clothes and "under packing" essential gear.

Check Weather Forecasts and Trail Conditions

Some people don't like surprises, especially when it comes to the weather. Springtime can be very unpredictable, so it's important to stay up-to-date when it comes to particular conditions on the day of your hike. Worst case scenario, just skip hiking for the day if Mother Nature is particularly emotional.

Watch For Trail Hazards During Your Hike

Exploring new and familiar trails may be scenic, but each one of them also comes with its fair share of hazards during the spring season. Here's what to watch out for to make your hike as safe and enjoyable as possible:

- **Slippery Patches:** Proceed with caution and take your time. It's best to take slow and careful steps rather than rush up or down a trail. Awareness is also key here, as it's important to keep your eyes open for slippery surfaces so you can mentally prepare yourself for the next steps you're about to take. (Pro tip: Wear those hiking boots!)
- **Streams and Creek Banks:** Assess the crossing to find the safest place to cross. Having and using your hiking poles are very useful for balance. If the waters are higher than your knees, it's better to be safe than sorry and avoid crossing.
- **Pesky Insects:** This is where that bug spray comes in handy! Be sure to spray this on clothing like shirts, pants, and socks, but read the instructions first, as some bug sprays are not suitable for fabrics like rayon and spandex. In addition, tuck your pants into your socks and opt for light-colored clothing so you can spot any pesky bugs on you. For ticks, avoid tall grass, use a DEET-based bug spray, and check yourself for ticks as often as you can, especially after you arrive home from your hike. A bug net is helpful if the bugs are unbearable.
- **Rattlesnakes:** Most activity occurs during mid-day when the temperatures are closest to ideal. As temperatures warm up, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for rattlesnakes especially on exposed rocks where they love to bask in the sun. Give them a wide berth and just take pictures. If you do end up getting bit by a snake, whether it's venomous or not, be sure to quickly identify its color, shape, and size, and seek medical attention right away.

No matter what the season brings, be sure to enjoy your hike and have fun! It is, after all, an activity that promotes exploration and adventure. Just be sure to pack accordingly, and keep your eyes peeled for hazards on the trail, as well as within the sky. A greater sense of awareness will not only create a safe environment for hiking but throughout life as well.