

The "Ten Essentials" You Should Never Leave Home Without

1. **Map and Compass**
 - Obviously these are must-have items. Getting lost is no fun, and it can be very dangerous. A map and compass are priceless. However, they are useless if you don't know how to use them. Make sure you know how to use them by reading a book, taking a class, joining an orienteering club, etc.
2. **Extra Clothes**
 - Always take at least a little more clothing than you think you'll need no matter how long your trip is. At the very least you should always take rain gear and a hat and gloves. An extra fleece jacket is also nice to have. And you may want to consider taking an emergency "space blanket". It weighs next to nothing and takes up very little room, but it could save your life.
3. **Water Bottle and Means of Purification**
 - You can go weeks without food, but only a few days without water. You can either take a small filter/purifier pump, or you can take iodine tablets or drops.
4. **Extra Food**
 - Take at least one extra meal on day hikes and at least one day's worth of food for 3 to 7 day trips. You never know when you might be stuck out there because of weather, injury, getting lost, etc. The food should require very little or (preferably) no cooking.
5. **First Aid Kit**
 - This might seem pretty obvious, but it can be forgotten easily. You should take a basic first aid course before you go, because a first aid kit is almost useless if you don't know how to use it. Check with your local Red Cross, Hospitals, and Universities for classes.
6. **Fire starter and Waterproof Matches**
 - It seems like you really NEED to build a fire when it is the hardest to do so (lost in the middle of nowhere, 50 degrees, windy, and raining). That's why having some fire starter and waterproof matches are a must. You can buy commercially made fire starters, or you can very easily make your own..
7. **Pocket Knife or Multi-Tool**
 - A pocket knife has virtually unlimited uses on a backpacking trip. With a knife you can cut the cheese, spread peanut butter, cut medical or duct tape, cut rope down to size, cut moleskin for blisters, whittle wet sticks down to get to the dry part for a fire, and so on and so forth... A multi-tool can be even handier, since it has more tools. The choice is yours.
8. **Flashlight or Headlamp**
 - It's extremely difficult to do anything in the dark without one. A headlamp has the advantage of offering you hands-free lighting, so that is what we recommend, but a flashlight will do just fine. Be sure to check the batteries before you leave.
9. **Sunglasses and Sunscreen**
 - This might not seem like an "essential", but it is to us. Good sunglasses are even more important when traveling on snow. The snow can reflect a lot of harmful UV radiation and can cause a very painful condition called snow-blindness, so make sure your sunglasses protect your eyes from UV rays. And a bad sunburn can make any trip unbearable, so take some sun block.
10. **Means for Signaling**
 - If you ever get lost or injured (I hope you never do, but it's bound to happen if you backpack a lot), then you will need a way to signal for help. A high pitched whistle is a great way to call of help, and it can be heard a lot more easily than even the most desperate screams. Three short blasts is commonly known as a cry for help. You should also consider carrying a small signaling mirror to signal to planes, boats, or anyone far away. Be sure to learn how to signal with one before you leave.