Day Hike Preparation Checklist

A day hike starts before you reach the trailhead. Use this checklist to plan your route, check conditions, pack essential equipment, and leave your trip details with someone you trust. Adjust your preparations to the terrain, weather, daylight, and everyone's abilities-and carry enough to manage an unexpected delay or overnight stay.

Plan Before You Leave

- ☐ Choose a route that suits everyone's fitness, experience, and mobility. Check distance, elevation changes, terrain, and available exit routes.
- ☐ Check the weather forecast, trail conditions, closures, and daylight hours. Adjust or postpone your plans when conditions warrant.
- ☐ Set a departure time and a firm turnaround time, allowing enough daylight for the return journey.
- ☐ Leave your route, trailhead location, companions' names, and expected return time with someone you trust. Agree on when they should seek help if you have not checked in.
- ☐ Download an offline map and carry a paper map and compass you know how to use. Do not assume cellular coverage will be available.
- ☐ Check permits, parking arrangements, and local rules before setting out.

Use this checklist

Review your plan before leaving home, check your equipment, and complete the trip plan on page 3. Give that page to someone you trust and carry a copy with you.

Print on US Letter paper. Checkboxes and writing lines are intended for handwritten completion.

Pack the Essentials

- [ ] Carry enough drinking water for the route, conditions, and possible delays. If you plan to refill, confirm water availability and carry a suitable treatment method.
- [ ] Pack food you can eat without cooking, plus extra for an unexpected delay.
- [ ] Wear suitable footwear and carry weather-appropriate layers, rain protection, and spare socks. Keep spare clothing dry.
- [ ] Bring a headlamp or flashlight, with spare batteries or sufficient backup power-even for a daytime hike.
- [ ] Carry a first aid kit suited to your group, blister supplies, and any personal medications you may need.
- [ ] Pack a whistle and a compact emergency shelter, such as a bivy sack or emergency blanket.
- [ ] Carry sun protection and insect repellent appropriate to the conditions.
- [ ] Bring a charged phone and a small power bank. For remote routes, consider a satellite messenger or personal locator beacon.
- [ ] Carry a small repair kit or multitool, and know how to use the equipment you bring.
- [ ] Pack out your trash and bring appropriate supplies for personal hygiene and waste disposal.

Final Checks at the Trailhead

- [ ] Read trailhead notices and confirm your planned route against the map.
- [ ] Check that everyone has their essential equipment, water, food, and appropriate clothing.
- [ ] Confirm your turnaround time and agree to stay together, moving at a pace everyone can maintain.
- [ ] Make sure everyone knows what to do if separated: stop, avoid wandering, and use a whistle or communication device to attract help.
- [ ] Send any last-minute route changes to your trusted contact before leaving cellular coverage.
- [ ] Reassess conditions before setting off. Shorten, change, or cancel the hike if the weather, trail, or anyone's condition makes the plan unsuitable.
- [ ] After returning, promptly tell your trusted contact that everyone is safely back.

Your Day Hike Trip Plan

Complete this plan before leaving. Give a copy to someone you trust and carry a copy with you.

Hike date:

Hikers' names and phone numbers:

Trail or destination:

Starting trailhead and parking location:

Vehicle description and license plate:

Planned route, direction, and alternate exit:

Departure time / Turnaround time:

Expected return time:

Check-in deadline - date and time:

Trusted contact's name and phone number:

Local ranger or emergency contact number:

Relevant medical needs or other information for rescuers:

Instructions for your trusted contact: If we miss the agreed check-in deadline and you cannot reach us, contact the appropriate local emergency service and provide this trip plan. If you have reason to believe we are in immediate danger, seek help immediately.

Once everyone is safely back, notify your trusted contact.