



Snow Leopard

MOUNTAIN SPORTS

PICKING THE PERFECT TENT

Selecting the perfect tent can be a daunting, overwhelming task if you're not quite sure where to begin. If you don't know what you are looking at, the price tag hanging on that amazing tent in the middle of your favorite outdoor shop can make you cringe. But take heed, avid campers and backpackers, there is a very logical way to wade through the huge selection and pick out the perfect tent for your needs.

The first, easiest way to narrow down your selection is to determine the size of tent you will need. Tents are designed to accommodate a certain number of people. So, a solo backpacker, and a family camper will be looking for two very different tents. Most tents come labeled with their capacity in the description. Other tents have a number next to the name, indicating the number of people the tent is designed to hold. If you are not interested in having more than one tent in your outdoor gear collection, it is best to determine the maximum number of people you think will ever sleep in your tent at one time. If you are doing a solo trip this summer, but usually hit the trail with one other person, it is best to select a two-person tent.

The next step is determining when and where you will be using your tent. Are you spending a couple weeks on a volcano in Mexico, a month on the Pacific Crest Trail, or an evening in Rocky Mountain National Park? Tents fit into different "season" categories, which are usually labeled "Three Season," "Four Season," "Convertible," and "Lightweight." For the most part, these are generic terms that may change from one manufacturer to the next. The terms generally encompass similar features, regardless of the manufacturer.

A Three Season tent is designed to function during every season but winter. Not to say that you couldn't use this tent during the winter, but for all intensive purposes, the tent would not be ideal during a winter storm. A Four Season tent, on the other hand is designed to function during the harshest winter conditions. If you end up stuck on a high peak, during a three-day blizzard, for example, this tent will keep you dry, warm and comfortable. The downside to this tent, however, becomes apparent in the summer months, when you are carrying a heavy tent, lacking the ventilation of a Three Season tent. Convertible tents, designed to bridge the gap, include the weather blocking features of a Four Season tent, but come equipped with removable ventilation panels for the warmer months. Lastly, the Lightweight tent category features tents that often have the most technical fabrics and newest designs which allow the tent to be functional and roomy, but most importantly, lightweight.

After you have decided when and where you will use your tent, you can further narrow your selection, by considering weight. An important aspect to many tent shoppers, tent weight will be listed in the primary description. Weight is oftentimes, (but not always), closely related to size. Generally, the larger the tent, the heavier the overall weight. An important detail to note, while looking at tent weight, is the three weights that most manufacturers list in the tent description. This detail is most important for individuals who plan to carry their tent. "Maximum weight" indicates the weight of the tent when you take it right off the shelf.

This includes the weight of the tent, fly, poles, bag that it comes in, instruction manual, stakes, and anything else that comes with the tent. "Packed weight" indicates the weight of the tent when it is packed for a trip. This may vary from one manufacturer to the next, but usually includes the tent, poles, fly, bag and stakes. The "minimum weight" again varies from one manufacturer to the next, but usually includes only the tent, poles and fly. For backpackers concerned with weight, the minimum weight of a tent is an important comparison factor while shopping.

Tent materials are another important consideration while tent shopping. You can easily become bogged down by the technical details, but there are some basic components that will indicate the inherent value of the tent you are considering. Unique, technical, and innovative fabrics and materials are found in the poles, fly, floor, tent body, windows and zippers. Different manufacturers pride themselves on the materials they choose for each aspect of the tent. Some materials are better than others, but for the most part these technical aspects will be more or less necessary depending on your intended use and specific environment.

Looking for a tent that is easy to set up and take down? Interested in a tent with multiple entrances? How about an extra large vestibule? These are all important considerations when you are narrowing down your tent selection. Design features furnish a tent with its individual flare. While many add on accessories are available, the unique, built in features make a tent more or less perfect for an individual with specific needs. Some features to keep in mind while shopping are the number of poles, number of doors, size and shape of vestibule, size and shape of tent floor, and staking options, to name a few.

Finally, most of us usually shop with a budget in mind. If shopping for all of your outdoor needs at one time, it will be important to determine where