

HIKING trips and gear

Hiking Backpacks Guide

How to choose hiking backpacks that are right for you.

Choosing a backpack is not as simple of a process as you might think. Modern backpacks are designed to offer comfort, balance, versatility and load-carrying proficiency. But you have to do some planning when it comes to choosing a backpack that fits your needs.

There are some questions you must keep in mind when shopping for backpacks. This guide will lead you through each question and offer advice on how to choose the best hiking backpack.

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What is Your Hiking Style?

Depending on what type of hiking you do plus the weight of the loads you will be carrying will determine the type of hiking backpack you will need. Generally your choices will be external frame or internal frame.

Internal frames have a snug fit which allows your load to move with you. This helps with balance and agility on uneven terrain. Though not designed specifically for heavy loads on easy terrain such as external frames, recreational backpackers have also grown to prefer internals, for their comfort and versatility.

Externals frames appeal beginners and the budget conscious because they cost less. They also appeal to people toting very heavy loads because the frame becomes places the weight of the pack squarely on the upper thighs and pelvic region which is well suited to bare the weight of a heavy pack.

[link](#)

Internal Frame Hiking Backpacks

Internal frames are the preferred backpack of:

- Climbers/Mountaineers
- Scramblers
- Skiers
- Off-trail hikers (rough terrain)

Internal frames are narrow and tall. The framework is built inside the pack behind the shoulder harness. The frame is made of flat bars called "stays". Stays are usually made of aluminum and are configured in a V-shape. Stays can also be made of composite materials and be aligned parallel, x-shaped or u-shaped. The stays can be bent by hand to conform to your body or you can let them shape to your body naturally by frequent use.

Advantages of Internal Frame Hiking Backpacks

- Compression straps on internal frames keep your load **stable**. This keeps individual items held tight together keeping them from shifting and throwing you off-balance if you make any sudden moves.
- Internals hug your body and keeps your pack closer to your center of gravity. This helps keep your **balance**.
- Stays allow the pack to move with your body since they are stiff and not rigid. Giving you more **flexibility**.
- Internals frames offer more **manueverability** since they are slimmer in shape, allowing you to swing your arms freely. Great for climbers, skiers and also off-trail hikers who may need to squeeze through tight spots.
- Internals frames shoulder harness and hipbelts **can be adjusted** more so than external frames. For a better fit.

Disadvantages of Internal Frame Hiking Backpacks

- Internal frames can be **less convenient** if you need to find a particular item from your hiking backpack. This is because they usually lack outside pockets and they feature one big storage area that you will need to search through.
- You can count on having a **sweaty back** since it sits right on your back.
- Internal frame hiking backpacks are **more expensive** than external frames.

External Frame Hiking Backpacks

External frames are the preferred backpack of:

- Beginner Hikers
- Hikers hauling heavy loads over easy terrain.

External frames feature a rigid aluminum or molded plastic frame attached to the outside of the hiking backpack. Externals are a great choice for transporting heavy loads along trails since the external hiking backpacks weight sits more squarely on your hips.

Advantages of External Frame Hiking Backpacks

- Externals feature at least **2 main compartments** plus several side pockets making organizing your gear and locating items more easier.
- An external's load sits away from your back allowing air flow to **prevent a sweaty back**.
- External hiking backpacks support heavy loads to **prevent sagging loads**.
- External hiking backpacks allow you to **walk upright** more easily since the center of gravity sits higher.

Disadvantages of External Frame Hiking Backpacks

- Hiking off-trail can be **cumbersome** since the external frame makes you walk more stiffly.
- It is **difficult to transport** your external hiking backpack into your trunk can be a problem since the external frame will not allow you to squeeze it into tight spots.

Extra Features to Look For

- **Adjustable Torso Length** - Some packs feature shoulder straps and/or hipbelts that move up or down on the pack frame to accommodate a variety of torso lengths. However, the movable components can be less stable than you would find on a fixed-suspension.
- **Divider between main and sleeping bag compartment** - A

compartment near the bottom of the hiking backpack to allow you to stuff your sleeping bag in. An outside zipper provides access.

- **Daypack Conversion** - A removable lid or front pocket that converts into a fanny pack or small daypack that you can use when day hiking from a basecamp.
- **Hydration Sleeve** A sleeve to store your water reservoir.
- **Hydration Reservoir Included** - Comes with a sleeve and water reservoir included.
- **Interchangable Suspension** - The suspension system parts come in various sizes.
- **Shovel Pocket** - An open-top panel originally designed to hold a snow shovel. Can also be used for storing rainjackets and other items.
- **Spindrift Collar** - A collar that extends from the top of the pack to allow you to pack more gear into the main compartment.
- **Water-Bottle Holster** - A pocket to store a water-bottle within easy reach without having to remove your hiking backpack.
- **Women's Component's** - Hipbelts and shoulder straps that are designed for women. Including a torso length less than 17", shoulder straps that narrow frames and go around instead of over the chest and countoured hipbelts.

Choosing the Right Capacity

Up to 3,000 Cubic Inches - Good for a winter or mountain day hike when you will need more gear. Or an ultralight overnight pack in warm weather.

3,000 - 4,000 Cubic Inches - Good for a 1 or 2-night trip. Will hold all camp essentials plus warm clothes and enough food for a couple of days.

4,000 - 5,000 Cubic Inches - Good for up to 3 days of overnight camping.

5,000 - 6,000 Cubic Inches - Good for a week of overnight camping. If you only own one backpack and plan on taking a long hiking trip at least once a year this is the pack for you.

6,000 Cubic Inches and Up - For multiweek trips or winter hiking with lots of gear. Also for parents who carry most of the families load.

Determine What Size Backpack You Need

You want to choose a pack well suited to your individual dimensions. You need to customize it to your body shape.

Your torso length, not your height, determines your pack size. Here's how to measure yours:

- You will need the help of another person to do this. Have that person locate the bony bump at the base of your neck, where the slope of your shoulder meets your neck.
- Next, locate the top of your hipbones. Place your hand on your hips and feel where your pelvis protrude from each side. This is where your packs hipbelt grips on to. A properly positioned hipbelt will straddle your iliac crest, about an inch above and below that line.
- Start at the spot you found on the top of your spine and measure down the spine down to a point on your spine even with the top of your hip bones.

This distance is your torso length.

Generally, your measurement will fall into one of these frame-size categories:

Small: Up to 17 1/2".

Medium/Regular: 18" to 19 1/2".

Large/Tall: 20" and up.

If you fall inbetween two sizes it is a good idea to go to a local store and try on different packs to see which is the best fit for you.

How Much to Spend On Hiking Backpacks?

Most internals cost between \$200 and \$300. Externals rarely exceed \$200. You can find some external-frame packs for less than \$100; a few high-end internals sell for nearly \$500.

If you go on at least 1 overnight trip per year, invest in a quality hiking backpack with a capacity that matches your needs. Discount department store hiking backpacks are poorly made, do not last long, have cheap padding that will not keep you comfortable and can ruin a good hiking trip.

Instead I recommend you order [hiking backpacks at Backcountrystore.com](#) They have a huge selection of high quality hiking backpacks to choose from such as **The North Face, Kelty, and Jansport.**

Plus if you have a question you can get answers immediately with their **Live Help.** Their **Gear Experts** will help you select the right gear and answer your technical questions, all without having to make a phone call.

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