

# HIKING GEAR SELECTION GUIDE





# The Hiking Gear Selection Guide

Get the essentials on where to spend vs. save for your hiking setup!

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## **Welcome, fellow hiker!**


This free guide will give you a quick-start framework for choosing hiking gear wisely. We'll cover the core principles of when to invest in high-quality gear and when you can opt for budget options.

By the end, you'll know the key areas to focus your money on (for safety and comfort) and where you can save without sacrificing much. Let's gear up smartly!

## **Why Trust My Gear Advice?**

I've spent 34 years hiking across some of the toughest and most remote trails, from Tasmania's brutal wilderness to high-altitude alpine terrain. I've guided multi-day expeditions, tested hundreds of gear items, and learned, sometimes the hard way, exactly what's worth investing in and what's just expensive hype.

This guide is designed to help you avoid costly mistakes and build the perfect hiking setup that balances durability, weight, and value. Whether you're planning a weekend trek or a serious multi-day adventure, you'll find clear recommendations on where to spend and where to save.

 **Upgrade Opportunity:** Love these tips? The **50+ Page Hiking Gear Guide Ultimate Edition** offers an in-depth breakdown of specific gear recommendations, brand/model picks, and advanced money-saving knowledge and tips. If you find value here, then grab the full guide to supercharge your gear! It's available [here at https://www.mowser.com.au/gear-selection-guide-ultimate](https://www.mowser.com.au/gear-selection-guide-ultimate)

## Spend vs. Save: The Core Principles

Not all gear is created equal. Some items can make or break your adventure, while others have affordable alternatives.

Use these **Spend vs. Save Principles** to guide your decisions:

### **Prioritise Safety & Comfort:**

Spend more on gear that keeps you safe and healthy on the trail.

For example, your footwear, backpack, and sleep system directly impact your comfort and well-being.

- High-quality footwear that fits well can help prevent blisters and injuries – definitely worth the investment.
- A reliable backpack that sits comfortably on your hips will save you back pain over long miles.
- Likewise, a good sleeping bag/quilt and pad that keep you warm at night are crucial for recovery.

These core items form the foundation of enjoyable (and safe) hiking.

### **Don't Overspend on "Nice-to-Haves"**

Save your money on gear where budget options work almost as well as premium. A prime example is clothing and rain gear. You don't need a \$500 jacket when a \$100 one will keep you dry in most conditions.

- Focus on function over brand: a basic moisture-wicking shirt or fleece can perform just like an expensive one.
- Another area to save is cooking gear – a simple stove and pot set-up for \$30 can boil water just fine. There’s no need for a fancy gourmet camp kitchen unless you have specific needs. Identify items that are “nice but not essential” or where mid-range gear provides 90% of the benefit for a fraction of the cost.

### **Invest Over Time**

You don’t have to buy everything at once. In fact, it’s wiser to build your gear gradually. Start with the absolute essentials (good shoes, basic rain protection, etc.) and test the waters.

- As you take more trips, you’ll learn which upgrades will make the biggest difference for you. This staggered approach means you can save up for high-quality items you really need, and avoid wasting money on gear you might not end up using.

**Example:** you might borrow or rent a tent for your first overnight hike. If you love it and plan more trips, then invest in a tent of your own. This principle ensures you spend money when you’re sure it’s something that will enhance your adventures.

### **Use Second-Hand & Sales**

A huge money-saving principle is to tap into used gear and sales. You can find barely-used quality gear for cheap on platforms like eBay, Facebook Marketplace, Gumtree (here in Australia) or local used gear sales or swaps. Also, watch for seasonal sales or clearance events at outdoor retailers – often

last year's model of a backpack or jacket will be discounted heavily, even though it works just as well as the latest version. I now make a habit of regularly checking places like Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree (an Australian used goods website) to find good deals on used gear.

By being a savvy shopper, you can often afford a higher tier of gear at a lower price. (Why pay full price if you don't have to?)

**In a nutshell:** Spend where it truly counts – on gear that protects you and keeps you comfortable – and save where the differences are minor. Now, let's apply these principles to the major gear categories.

## Where to Invest in Quality Gear (Spend Here 💰)

These are the categories where paying for **better quality or performance** will pay off:

### **Footwear**

Invest in high-quality hiking footwear that fits well. Whether you prefer traditional hiking boots or the increasingly popular trail runners, the key is choosing the right option for your terrain and hiking style.

- **Hiking Boots** (e.g., Salomon, Lowa, Scarpa): Offer superior ankle support, durability, and weather protection—ideal for rough, wet, or rocky trails. A well-constructed boot can last for years.
- **Trail Runners** (e.g., Altra, Hoka, La Sportiva, Nike): Lightweight, breathable, and comfortable for long distances—great for well-maintained trails and fastpacking, but they wear out faster and offer less protection.

If you're hiking in harsh conditions (mud, snow, rugged off-trail terrain), boots are usually the better investment. If you're prioritising speed and comfort on well-formed tracks, trail runners might be a great choice. Either way, fit is king—blisters and foot pain can ruin a hike faster than almost anything else.

## **Backpack**

A reliable, comfortable backpack is worth spending on, especially for multi-day trips. Look for packs from reputable brands (Whippra, Osprey, Hyperlite, etc.). A well-designed pack distributes weight so your shoulders aren't bearing it all and are built to last. Cheaper packs might have weak stitching or poor support, which can literally be a pain. If you're carrying 10-18kg (22-40lbs) of gear, you'll immediately feel the difference a quality pack makes.

### **Hot Backpack Tips:**

1. If possible, get fitted for a pack in store – proper fit is as important as price here. If this isn't an option, ensure the supplier has a returns policy so that you can exchange the pack for a different size.
2. Take your time choosing the right backpack—it's one of the most important decisions you'll make. I always recommend buying your pack last because by then, you'll know exactly how much gear you need to carry. **Instead of forcing your setup to fit a pack, let your pack fit your setup.**

## Shelter (Tent)

If you plan to undertake overnight hikes frequently, splurge on a solid tent. Quality tents (MSR, Slingshot, Durston, Big Agnes, etc.) use durable fabrics and poles that withstand wind and rain. They are also lighter to carry. A cheap tent from a department store might leak or break in tough conditions, which is not what you want when you're miles from civilisation. For regular hikers or anyone facing variable weather, a good tent is a smart safety and comfort investment. (If you only camp occasionally in fair weather, you can go cheaper – see the Save section.)

### Caring for Your Tent

A quality tent is an investment, and proper care will extend its life:

- **Always dry it out completely** before storing to prevent mould.
- **Use a footprint** or groundsheet to protect the floor from wear and moisture.
- **Avoid prolonged UV exposure**—set up in the shade when possible.
- **Check for small rips or seam damage** and patch them before they become major issues.

A well-maintained tent can last for **years** and save you from costly replacements.

## Sleeping Bag (and Pad)

### **Cold, sleepless nights? No thanks!**

A high-quality sleeping bag or quilt (down or synthetic fill) keeps you warm without needing to bulk up. This is critical if you camp in cold or shoulder seasons. Brands like Western Mountaineering, Sea to Summit, Zenbivy and

Katabatic gear offer bags and quilts that are warm for their weight – ideal for hiking.

Combine this with a decent insulated sleeping pad (Therm-a-Rest, for example) so you're cushioned and not losing heat to the ground. Waking up well-rested and warm is worth a bit extra. If you'll only ever camp in summer, you can choose a lighter/cheaper bag, but for 3-season use many hikers splurge here early.

### **Safety Gear**

Anything that could save your life is worth the money. This includes a **personal locator beacon or satellite messenger** (especially if you hike in remote areas out of mobile phone range), a trustworthy headlamp, and a first aid kit.

You hope to never need emergency gear, but when you do, it must work. For example, a Garmin inReach device is expensive but it allows you to call for help anywhere – that's priceless in an emergency.

At a minimum, don't skimp on a good headlamp (you don't want it dying on a night hike) and navigation tools (quality compass, etc.).

### **Where to Save Money (Budget-Friendly 👍)**

Here are areas where you can get away with spending less without much compromise:

## **Clothing Layers**

You don't need designer outdoor apparel to be comfortable. **Save on base layers, mid-layers, and even outer layers** by choosing budget brands or on-sale items.

- A synthetic wicking t-shirt from an outlet store will perform just like a fancy branded one. Fleece jackets are inherently inexpensive to make, so a \$30 fleece can be as warm as a \$150 one (it might weigh a few grams more – not a big deal for most).
- Even for insulating jackets (like down puffy or synthetic jackets) or hiking pants, many affordable options exist that are durable and functional. Shop sales or consider brands like Macpac, Uniqlo or Decathlon for budget-friendly yet effective clothing and always keep an eye out for sales.

## **Rain Jacket**

This is one piece of clothing to have, but you don't need the top-tier model. A mid-range rain jacket in the \$100-300 (AUD) range will keep you dry during typical rain showers on the track. The super expensive jackets are geared towards mountaineers or hardcore use – most hikers won't notice the difference. So, save here.

BUT, ensure your jacket is waterproof (look for terms like “2, 2.5 or 3 layer” or “Gore-Tex Paclite, H2NO” or similar tech) and breathable enough, but it doesn't have to be the newest elite fabric. Even an inexpensive coated nylon jacket or a poncho can work in a pinch for short day hikes.

## **Cooking Gear**

**You can go low-budget on stoves and cookware.**

Many hikers get by with simple pocket-sized gas stoves (often \$15-\$40) and a basic aluminum pot. This setup boils water for your coffee or dehydrated meal just fine. High-end stove systems (MSR, Jetboil, etc.) are faster and more fuel-efficient, but the budget ones are perfectly fine. If you're mostly doing boil-and-eat style meals, a cheap stove is okay (e.g. BRS).

As for cookware; store-brand pots or army disposal aluminium pots also work – no need for ultralight titanium unless you're optimising every gram. Save money here and use it for more critical gear.

### **Trekking Poles**

Good news - affordable trekking poles are great! You can find aluminum trekking poles for a fraction of the cost of fancy carbon fiber ones. They might weigh a few grams more, but they are often very durable. Unless you're an ultralight enthusiast, an \$80 AUD set of poles (Macpac, for example) will help your knees and balance just as much as a \$300 carbon fiber set.

If you're new to using poles, start with a budget pair; you can always upgrade later if you feel the need. Many hikers never feel that need and stick with their trusty cheap poles for years.

### **Accessories & Extras**

Little things like dry bags, stuff sacks, water bottles, etc., are easy places to save.

- Use reusable plastic bags or zip-lock bags as organisers instead of buying specialty waterproof stuff sacks. A large garbage bag or thick plastic pack liner available at outdoor stores work well too.
- A regular **Nalgene bottle** or even a **recycled plastic water bottle** carries water as well as an expensive hydration bladder (some people, like me, do prefer bladders for convenience, but it's not mandatory).
- Generic sunglasses, hats, bandanas – all can be obtained cheaply.

As you can see, many gear items have perfectly good low-cost alternatives. By saving in these areas, you free up the budget for the gear where paying more really counts (as we listed in the spend section).

## **Putting It All Together**

To optimise your hiking setup without overspending, remember these key points:

- **Make a Priority List**

Identify which gear upgrades will improve your hiking experience the most. Maybe your hand-me-down pack is uncomfortable – that should be high priority to replace. Maybe you're fine with your current rain jacket – then you can save that money. Focus on weaknesses in your kit first.

- **Mix and Match**

It's totally normal to have a mix of high-end and low-end gear. You might end up with premium boots and a backpack, but

bargain-basement clothing and a stove. That's a smart mix! It means you spent where you needed and saved where it didn't matter as much. When I started it out it took me over ten years to build up my full kit of gear!

- **Test on Short Trips**

Before a big multi-day adventure, test your gear strategy on a day hike or overnight. Ensure those cheaper items perform as expected and that the expensive ones are worth it. This shakedown will boost your confidence that you have the right gear, and you'll avoid surprises.

- **Take Care of Your Gear**

One often overlooked tip – **maintenance**. Even budget gear can last a long time if you treat it well. Clean and dry your tent and jacket properly, store your sleeping bag uncompressed between trips, sharpen that budget knife, etc. This prolongs the life of your investment (whether it was \$20 or \$200). I still have stoves, sleeping bags and rain jackets that I have been using for over 20 years! If you look after them, they will last the test of time.

Lastly, keep the big picture in mind: the **best gear** is the gear that gets you outside and enjoying nature. You don't need the most expensive stuff to make amazing memories when you're hiking. With the spend/save framework, you'll be able to gear up wisely, stay safe, and have fun **without draining your bank account**.

Happy hiking, and may your gear be ever in your favour!

⚡ **Ready for More?** If you found this guide helpful, the Hiking Gear Selection Guide Ultimate Edition. It offers a **deep dive into**

**each category**, with recommended gear lists, links to products, and advanced tips. It's the ultimate companion to take your gear knowledge to the next level. Upgrade now for less than the price of a cup of coffee and hike with confidence, knowing you have the best info at your fingertips! It's available [here](https://www.mowser.com.au/gear-selection-guide-ultimate)  
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