

What 17 Things Should You Know To Avoid Getting Soaked When Choosing Your Next Camping Tent?

"A truly terrific tent tutorial. You can either invest a few minutes of time upfront to learn what makes a quality tent, or pay every time you use a cheap one..."



Not all great tents are expensive, but you do have to invest a little time to find the best one for you. This tutorial will cut that time down to minutes, instead of hours...

Your tent is arguably the most important gear you will invest in. It should keep you dry, comfortable, and repel the creepy-crawlies. Also, if you do any type of camping or backpacking off-the-beaten-path, it's a good idea to consider how well it will serve you in an emergency. If you're ever caught in inclement weather or injured and have to wait for a friend to get help, it's nice to have the best quality

equipment possible. Does it happen every day? No, but it's better to be prepared and never have to use it to its full potential than be stranded somewhere with poor quality gear. Having something you can rely on is always a good idea, besides, how many times has high quality gear ruined your trip? ;-)

This tutorial will teach you the difference between great tents and mediocre tents so that you'll find a tent to meet your needs and wants. It will also point you toward the best tents I've found and reviewed.

I've pulled together my best information and created this tutorial to make finding your next tent as easy as possible. I even debated about charging for it, but at least for now it's yours with my compliments. :-)

So what does this tutorial cover?

1: Basics And Tent Terminology 101- Tent basics and learn what parts are important. Why are standard screens a bad idea in tents? What are taped seams and why are they important?

2: Tent Design- What design features make a tent great? What style of tent do I recommend? What type of tent should you get?

3: What's Important In A Tent- What 3 tent features are important to keep you dry? What should you do to prevent premature tent floor wear? What small detail can help to inform you about the quality of a tent?

4: Tent Set-up And Location- Where should you set your new tent up? Why is shade important and when should you avoid it? Why is it a good idea to know where an animal trail is in relation to your campsite?

5: Care, Cleaning And Maintenance- What can you do to make your tent last longer? How can you temporarily fix a zipper that's lost its zip? Where should you store your tent?

6: Camping Tent Tips, Tricks, Ideas... And Bob- Some pre-planning to help keep yourself dry in a pinch. Two simple items that can come in really handy. Who is Bob?

7: Camping Tent Wrap-up- Recommendations and the best tents for different uses. Does a certain brand name guarantee quality?

Since we're all different... some of us backpack, some camp with a buddy, and still others camp with a large family, we all have different needs and wants. This of course means that each one of us is going to have different ideas about what type of tent is best for us. This tutorial and the links provided will cover the information you need in order to make an informed decision.

Armed with this information you'll only need to apply it to which type of tent it is that you want. That said, not all tents are created equal, and just because they might have all the features mentioned doesn't mean that the tent you're considering is a quality tent.

Much like the fact that just because a car has a steering wheel and an engine doesn't mean it's a great car. Tents are the same way, just because it might have a bathtub floor and aluminum poles doesn't mean it's great or even acceptable for that matter. So I've also sorted through them and found the best of the best that are being offered. Let's get started...

Contents

- 1: Basics And Tent Terminology 101
- 2: Tent Design
- 3: What's Important In A Tent
- 4: Tent Set-up And Location
- 5: Care, Cleaning And Maintenance
- 6: Camping Tent Tips, Tricks, Ideas And Bob
- 7: Camping Tent Wrap-up

Let's start with tent basics and learn what's important, why standard screens are a bad idea, and why taped seams are a good idea in Chapter 1...

In a hurry? Here are [the best camping tents I've found](#) (about 1/4 the way down the page). ;-)

<http://www.hiking-gear-and-equipment-used-for-camping.com>

Chapter 1: Basics And Tent Terminology 101

What to look for...

Air vents- Screened areas that allow for ventilation. Ventilation is important in a tent to help prevent the build up of condensation from breathing and perspiring. Since most of the time the outside of the tent is cooler than the inside, water vapor will have a tendency to condense on the inside walls if there isn't enough air to carry it away. Air vents allow the tent to breath and the water vapor to escape.

Bathtub floor- A bathtub floor is a tent floor that has high sides. Instead of the floor being flat, the floor turns up and becomes the beginning of the wall. Since the floor is usually more water-resistant than the tent walls, this helps to keep you dry. A bathtub floor usually rises about 6 inches or so off the tent floor.

Canopy- A canopy is the covering, or roof of a tent.



The canopy above consists of white fabric panels and triangular no-see-um mesh vents.

Guy lines- Tent guy lines are small ropes that tie down and provide support to the tent. They also can help to pull the rainfly away from the tent to keep an air space between the two for ventilation. Guy lines are important because they provide structural integrity to the tent.

No-see-um mesh- Tent windows used to be covered with regular screen-type material like you might

find at home in a storm door. But the screen had a problem. While it stopped the mosquitoes and deer flies, it didn't stop the tiny no-see-ums or sand flies. Sand flies are nasty little biting flies that are small enough to fit through standard screening, so you might as well have left the door open. No-see-um mesh is small enough to keep them out, but open enough to let the cool breezes blow through.

Rainfly- A cover that stretches over the top of a tent to shield it from the weather. It's usually secured by clips and tie-downs to hold it in place.



This is the same tent with the full rainfly installed. Notice how the rainfly almost reaches the ground. Also the rainfly is pulled taught so that rain can run off easily instead of getting trapped in folds of material. This rainfly also has a flap over the zipper to further enhance water resistance.

Taped seams- It used to be tent seams were just sewn together, and that might be fine if you never camped in the rain. The problem is that regular sewn seams can leak through the needle holes. This can be fixed though by "taping" the seams. Seam taping stops water by sewing a barrier tape into the seam that in theory should prevent water from leaking in through the seam and needle holes. As you might guess, some tents do a better job at this than others.

Tent footprints- Tent footprints are essentially a ground cover or tarp that your tent sits on top of to protect it from dirt and moisture. Their job is to keep abrasion and wear to a minimum, which means your tent stays newer longer.

Tent poles- Tent poles are usually made of fiberglass or aluminum and are what prop the tent up off the ground. The poles should be strong and flexible in both warm and cool to cold weather depending on what type of camping you'll be doing. High quality aluminum poles use to add a lot to the cost of a good quality tent, but now you can find good quality aluminum tent poles over a range of prices. Fiberglass poles tend to become brittle in cold weather and can snap more easily than high quality aluminum poles, especially in the winter.



The tent pole above is made of sections of fiberglass connected by elastic shock cord. The shock cord helps to hold the poles together when they're connected. This section was pulled apart for the photo.

Tent stakes- Tent stakes are usually made of plastic or aluminum. A lot of tent manufacturers have a tendency to provide cheap stakes with their tents. From plastic stakes that break or mushroom, to cheap aluminum stakes that bend the first time you attempt to push them into the ground. Quality stakes can make pitching a tent a lot less frustrating.

Windows- Windows are usually made of mesh to allow for ventilation without the nuisance of biting bugs. The windows can usually be opened or closed by zipping or unzipping an inner panel. Although some tents do have screenless plastic windows that enable you to see out.

These features will be covered more in depth as we progress through this tutorial.

In Chapter 2 we'll cover what design features make tents great and what style/type of tent I recommend...

Chapter 2: Tent Design

Color- When considering tent color decide if you want to blend in with your environment or stand out. Neutral natural colors like green or tan blend in with the surrounding environment. Some areas even require tents to be of a certain color to minimize their visual impact.

If you're into extreme sports like climbing or extended backpacking trips, bright colors like orange or yellow might be a good idea however. In an emergency, bright colors can make it easier for a search team to locate you.

Ease-Of-Use And Set-up- When it comes to camping tents, simple is usually better. The mark of a well-thought-out tent is one that you can put together easily the first time without directions. Maybe it's just me, but great products should be intuitive to use, just like an iPod. No it's not 'the' most important thing, but it can make a definite difference in your overall experience. The easier it is to use, the better you will like a product.

Ease-of-use also includes how many people a tent requires to set-up. All else being equal, which of these two tents would you choose? One that only requires a single person for set-up, freeing their buddy to make them dinner, or one that requires two cranky people with growling stomachs? Besides, if you ever decide to solo, it won't even be an option. Simple is almost always better.

Materials Used- Tents can be constructed from everything from canvas (cotton fabric), to nylon, to polyester, to Gore-Tex® or other breathable materials. Older style tents were usually made from cotton canvas which is heavy in comparison to new materials, especially when canvas gets wet. Canvas is probably my last choice when it comes to tent materials unless you plan on being outside in the sun for extended periods of time, or you're hunting and need a good quality wall tent.

Nylon and polyester are lightweight and can be made very water-resistant when manufactured correctly. (I hesitate to call anything truly waterproof as it implies an absolute barrier that can never be penetrated, and this really doesn't exist. After all most scuba diving watches are only water resistant to 100 meters.) The challenge though is to keep them out of the sunlight because UV (ultraviolet) light can break them down.

Some of the more expensive tents are made from breathable fabrics. The supposed advantage being that they only require one-wall construction to keep you dry, while at the same time they breathe to let the moisture inside the tent escape. One-wall translates directly to lighter weight which is always nice. Like anything though, design and construction can either make a product great or downright bad. Just like anything there are good products, and not so good products.

Size- One of the first questions to ask yourself is how much room do you want. Notice I said want, and not need. Usually you can get by with what you need, but you won't be as happy as if you got what you wanted in the first place. It's like buying a mini van for its practicality, when secretly you want or even lust after a sports car. The difference with a tent though is that it's **not** going to cost you thousands of

dollars more to get a better tent.

Personally I like to have a lot of room to get comfortable. I don't enjoy feeling like I can't move around, especially if I keep bumping into things. I also like keeping a small amount of gear inside the tent so I have it close at hand if I want it.

Keep in mind the advertised "person" rating of a tent is usually an ideal that most people won't be happy with. For example, the average two-person tent rating means that you and a close-friend (I mean this literally) that you hopefully like very well, will be able to fit with not much room for anything else. That means, no gear, no moving around to find a comfortable position, and not much stretching out either. If you're like me and like extra room simply double the capacity of what the manufacturer claims the tent will fit. That means if you mostly camp with just one other person, get a 4-person tent for the two of you. Unless you're a backpacker, you'll be glad you did.

Style/Type- There are a few different types of camping tent. The type of the tent you get should reflect what you plan to use it for. My advice is to somewhat overestimate what it is you will use your tent for. For example, if you plan on doing early and late summer camping, I'd make the jump from a strictly summer tent to a 3-season tent. This way you should be OK if the weather ever surprises you at some point. As I just mentioned above having a little extra room is nice too. That way if you have to stay inside because it rains for a straight week, it might even prevent things from getting ugly. ;-)

There are several different styles of tent. For most people I'd recommend either a dome or cabin tent.

Dome tents are nice because they tend to hold up to the elements better. Their shape lets the wind blow over and around them much more easily than a stand-up cabin tent. Where I've had a cabin tent collapse on me twice, once at 3 am. in moderate rain, I've yet to have a dome tent collapse. The flexible poles make the tent free-standing, which simply means the tent will stay up without the benefit of guy lines, which can't be said for a cabin-type tent. Some dome tents add more poles to the mix which serve to strengthen the tent because it takes on a more geodesic design, this is nice in high-wind or snowy conditions. Again make sure to get one with a good rainfly.

Cabin tents are nice if you want to stand upright fully, though there are dome tents that offer 6 and half feet of peak height (remember peak height just refers to the center of the tent). Cabin tents can offer a little more vertical storage area near the walls, but to me it doesn't out-weigh the drawbacks. Since cabin tents usually have a single wall (i.e. no rainfly) by design they're more likely to leak. That alone is enough for me to look toward dome tents with a rainfly.

Tunnel tents usually require guy lines for support to keep them upright. They get their name because of their shape which usually requires 2-4 hoops to prop them up. Tunnel tents can offer a little more room, and are pretty stable in the wind especially when compared to cabin tents.

As you may have guessed my preference lies with geodesic dome tents. A couple of other things to consider...

Time of year- What time of year you'll be camping will also play a major factor in what tent you select. If you camp mostly in the summer or camp in hot locations, then you're going to want as much ventilation as possible. Look for tents that offer plenty of built-in screens and windows.

If you camp from spring to fall, then look for something that offers a happy medium between

ventilation and solid panel construction. To me that means a tent with plenty of windows that can be zipped shut as needed, and maybe a few small ventilation screen panels.

If you do a lot of winter camping, you're probably going to want a dedicated winter tent that can shrug off the winter winds and snow with a smile. So what exactly does a smiling tent look like anyway... if you've got a picture, I'd like to see it. ;-)

Use- Another big consideration to think about is what you're going to actually use your tent for. Do you backpack, camp mostly out of your car, or are you going to use it for winter hunting? As each of these all have very different requirements.

If you're going to be backpacking you're going to want something light and compact that's easy to set-up on a daily basis, maybe even in the dark.

With car camping, a larger heavier tent will be easier to take with you because you won't have to carry it. But if you have a small vehicle, trunk space may be a deciding factor in what tent you get. If this describes you, take a look at the tents overall packed dimensions, to see how it measures up.

If you're planning extended winter hunting trips, then you're going to want to look at sturdier wall tents. Some of which can be equipped to handle a wood stove to keep you comfortable when the temperature drops below zero.

In Chapter 3 you'll learn what 3 tent features are important to keep you dry, how to avoid premature tent floor wear, and a small detail that can tip you off to the quality of a tent...

Chapter 3: What's Important In A Tent

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, a rainfly is designed to protect your tent. It's the primary barrier to keeping the weather outside, and you comfortable inside. Now that you know what a rainfly is, let me explain a little more about it.

Old-style single wall canvas tents were notorious for leaking if the walls or ceiling were accidentally touched when it rained. Rainflies help to eliminate this because they are suspended above the tent and do not touch it. So it could be raining cats and dogs but the rainfly repels the rain, and keeps you dry.

Even though some rainflies may be water-resistant enough to touch and not cause a leak, I'd still avoid touching them in a storm. But this really shouldn't be an issue as long as the tent doesn't get pushed out several inches to bump into the rainfly. Although I'd probably avoid spirited games of in-tent racquetball on those rainy days. ;-)

Large rainflies are also extremely handy for storage. If you've got a lot of gear or like to bring your mountain bike camping having this extra storage can definitely make things easier. This area can also double as a sleep area for your dog if he/she has a tendency to sprawl out while they're sleeping and claim the whole tent for him or herself. :-)

Rainflies come in various sizes. They range from full flies that shield the whole tent, to so-called rainflies that really don't do much of anything because they only cover the top portion of the tent so that any rain that falls on them ends up running down the side of the tent anyway. And if the rainfly isn't shielding your tent what good is it doing really?

The conditions you camp in will determine what size of rainfly you are going to want. If you camp where it rains a lot, the longer the rainfly the better. With a full rainfly more water that splashes off the ground will land on your rainfly too, which means less of it will get your tent wet. The longer rainfly also helps to stop a majority of wind-driven rain.

If you only camp in areas that don't get much rain, then you may want to go for a half-fly. A half-length fly will help to keep the rain off your tent while at the same time providing more ventilation.

If you're concerned about getting a full rainfly because you also want as much ventilation as possible when it's nice outside, then make sure to get a tent that has a fully removable rainfly. This way you can get the best of both worlds. Here are a few other things to consider when you're looking for your next tent...

Bathtub floor- Does the tent you're considering have a bathtub floor that is thicker than the wall material to ensure longevity? Is the floor material treated to make it even more water resistant? Is the floor one piece (not as common), or if not are the seams taped effectively (more common)?

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