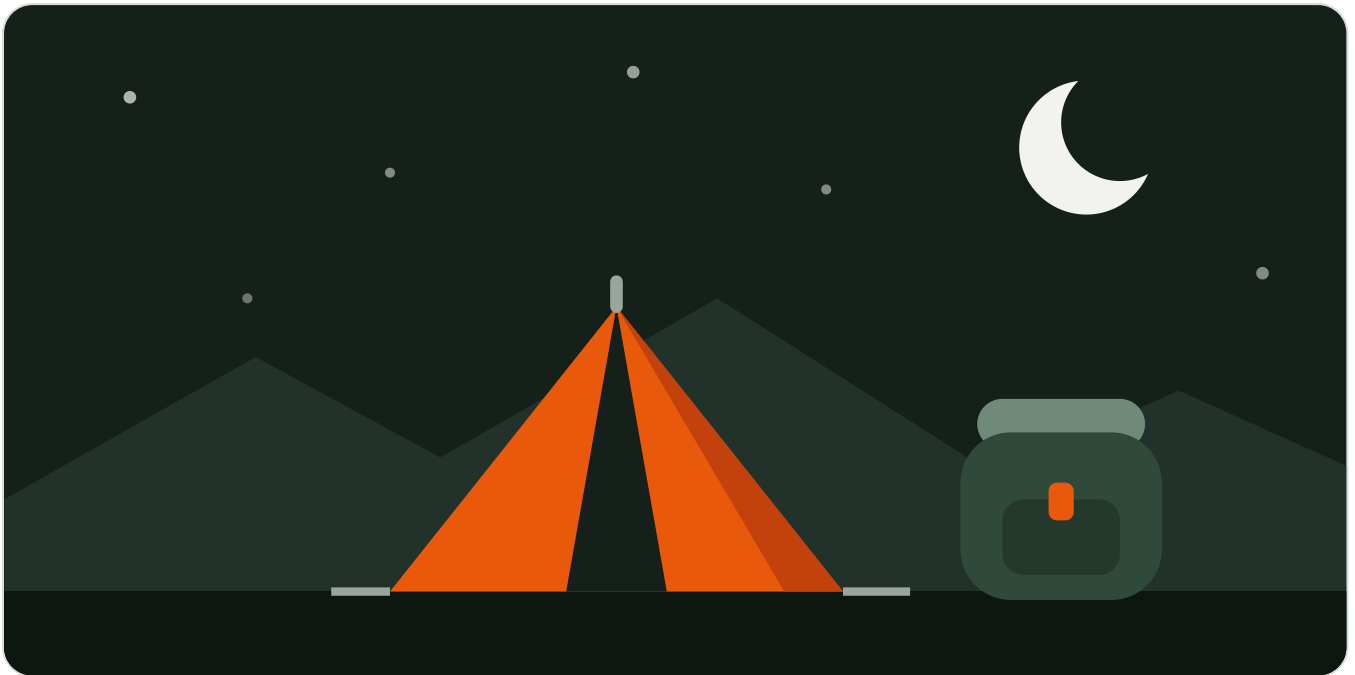




OUTDOORS • 000 • START HERE — 72 HOURS OUTDOORS

# 72 HOURS OUTDOORS

A free field checklist — what to carry, who to tell, when to turn back, and what to do if night catches you outside

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

# OUTDOORS, A CRISIS DOESN'T ANNOUNCE ITSELF

A hike that runs late into the dark. A car stuck in the snow on a mountain pass. The night after an earthquake, when nobody wants to sleep inside the building. An evacuation, with shelter available only two days later. In all of these, an ordinary day turns into a few hours or days outdoors — without a house, without power and often without a signal.

This guide is not about wilderness survival. It is a simple plan for people who go out into nature, drive in winter or live where the ground shakes: what to always carry, who to tell where you are going, how to stay warm and dry, and what to do when you realize you won't make it home before dark. When you finish, you will have a day pack, a trip plan and a few rules that save lives.

IN SHORT

- **Tell someone** where you are going and when you'll be back — this is the single most important thing in this guide.
- Always carry the **ten essentials**, even for a short hike: light, warmth, water, food, first aid, navigation, shelter.
- **Cold and wet are a bigger danger than hunger** — dry clothes and insulation from the ground come first.
- If you get lost: **stop, think, observe, plan** — and stay put if you left a trip plan.
- **Fire only when it is allowed** and safe — in fire season, outdoor fires are often banned.

**72 HOURS**

covered by this guide

**2 WEEKS**

**3 MONTHS**

**1 YEAR+**

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## APPENDICES — PRINTABLE WORKSHEETS

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01 · CHAPTER

# WHEN 72 HOURS HAPPEN OUTDOORS



**3 hours**

without shelter in cold, wind and wet



**3 days**

without water



**72 h**

until help reaches everyone

This is the old mountaineering "rule of threes" — a guideline, not a law. But it shows the order well: outdoors, the cold threatens you first, then thirst, and hunger only much later. That is why a pack starts with clothing and shelter, not food.

## Three Situations We Prepare For

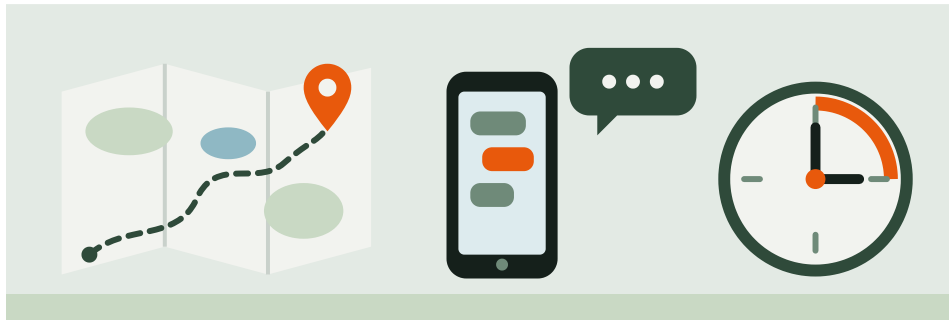
| Situation                                          | What usually happens                       | What helps most                                |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| A hike or mountain walk                            | injury, fog, late return, darkness         | trip plan, light, warm layers, first aid       |
| Car on the road in winter                          | traffic jam, snow, breakdown far from town | blanket, water, light, charger, CO rules       |
| A night outdoors after an earthquake or evacuation | sleeping in a park, yard or car            | tent or tarp, sleeping pad, warm layers, water |

### FROM EXPERIENCE

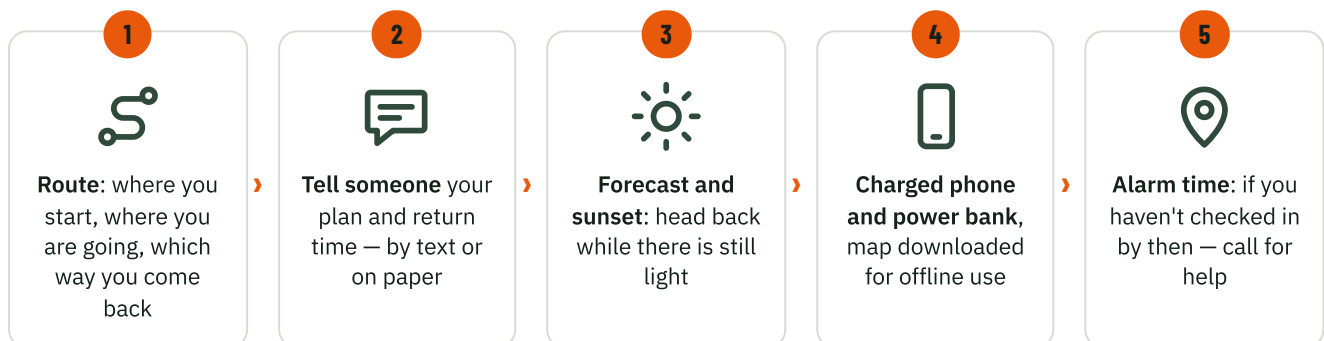
After the 2020 earthquake in Petrinja (Croatia) and the 2023 earthquakes in Turkey, thousands of families spent days and weeks in tents, cars and containers. Those who had a sleeping bag, a pad and a tarp had much easier first nights than those who ran out in their slippers.

## 02 • CHAPTER

## BEFORE YOU GO: MAKE A PLAN AND TELL SOMEONE



Most mountain searches take a long time because nobody knows where the person went. A trip plan left at home shortens a search from days to hours.



## What to Write in the Trip Plan

- Who is going (names, number of people, phone numbers) and how experienced the group is.
- Where the car is parked (place, license plate).
- Route and backup route, mountain hut or shelter along the way.
- Latest return time and **the time to call for help** — e.g. two hours after the planned return.
- What you are wearing: color of jackets and packs (makes you easier to spot and describe).

The form is in the appendix ([Appendix B • p. 16](#)). Take a photo of it and send it to the person staying at home.

## TIP

Turn back in time. Agree on a "turnaround time" in advance — the hour when you head back whether or not you've reached the summit. Most accidents happen on the way down, tired and in the dark.

## 03 · CHAPTER

# THE TEN ESSENTIALS



Hikers around the world carry the same list of ten items — even for a three-hour walk. Not because something will happen, but because if it does, there is no store.

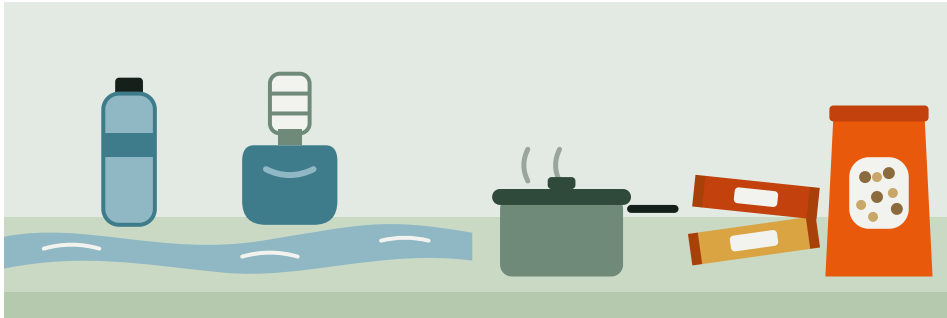
| Item               | Why                                  | Minimum                                                |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Navigation         | fog, darkness, dead battery          | map + compass or an offline map on your phone          |
| Light              | darkness comes faster than you think | headlamp + spare batteries                             |
| Sun protection     | sunburn, heat stroke, snow glare     | hat, sunglasses, sunscreen                             |
| First aid          | blisters, cuts, sprains              | small kit + personal medicines (ch. 09 · p. 11)        |
| Knife or multitool | repairs, food, first aid             | small pocket knife                                     |
| Fire               | warmth and a signal, when allowed    | lighter + matches in a bag (ch. 07 · p. 9)             |
| Emergency shelter  | wind, rain, night                    | emergency blanket or bivy bag                          |
| Extra food         | longer route, waiting for help       | one meal more than planned                             |
| Extra water        | heat, exertion                       | 0.5–1 L more + a way to treat it (ch. 04 · p. 7)       |
| Extra clothing     | rain, wind, night                    | one layer more than you think you need (ch. 05 · p. 7) |

## TIP

Pack your bag once and keep it ready — just add water and food. What lives in your pack permanently, you never forget.

## 04 • CHAPTER

# WATER AND FOOD OUTDOORS



## Water

When hiking, an adult needs **2–3 liters (about 2–3 US quarts) a day**, more in the heat and on climbs. Thirst is a late sign — drink a little and often.

- Carry at least 1–1.5 L per person even for a short hike; for a full day, plan where you will refill.
- **Always treat water from nature** — even a clear stream can carry bacteria and parasites. Filter, tablets or boiling (details in the guides *Water* and *Water Outdoors*).
- Melt snow and ice first — eating snow chills your body.

## Food

Outdoors, food is fuel for warmth. Choose food that is light, doesn't spoil and can be eaten without cooking: nuts, dried fruit, energy bars, chocolate, crackers, and cheese and cured meat in the colder part of the year.

### FROM EXPERIENCE

Besides the food for your plan, bring "waiting food" — a few bars you don't touch. If you are waiting for rescuers or for morning, that is the difference between shivering and sleeping.

## 05 • CHAPTER

# WARM AND DRY



Hypothermia doesn't only happen in winter. Rain, wind and wet clothes can chill your body even at +10 °C (50 °F), especially when you are tired and hungry.

## Three Layers

| Layer                   | Job                         | Material                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Base (next to the skin) | wicks away sweat            | wool or synthetic — <b>not cotton</b>          |
| Mid                     | keeps you warm              | fleece, wool, a light down or synthetic jacket |
| Outer                   | protects from wind and rain | jacket and pants with a hood                   |

Add a hat, gloves and spare socks — even for a summer hike in the mountains. Cotton stays wet once soaked and keeps chilling you.

## Signs of Hypothermia

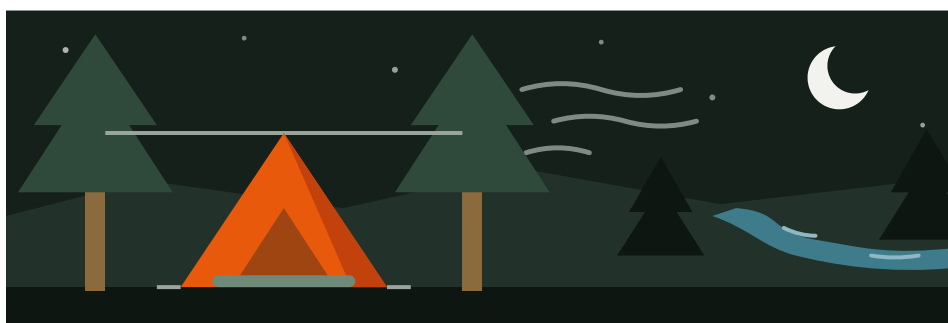
- **Mild:** strong shivering, cold hands, clumsiness, bad mood.
- **Severe:** shivering stops even though the person is cold, confusion, slurred speech, drowsiness, cannot walk.

### WARNING

If a person stops shivering but is still cold, confused or drowsy — it is an emergency. **Call for help.** Until help comes: shelter from the wind, dry clothes, insulation from the ground, wrap them in a blanket or sleeping bag. A warm sweet drink only if they are fully conscious and can swallow. Don't rub them, don't give alcohol.

## 06 • CHAPTER

# A NIGHT OUTDOORS



Sometimes it is smarter to spend the night than to walk in the dark over unfamiliar ground. If you have warm layers, water and left a trip plan, a night outdoors is unpleasant but survivable.

## Choosing a Spot

- Shelter from the wind: behind a rock, in dense forest, on the lee side of a hill.
- **Not** in a stream bed or gully (water can rise suddenly), not under dry or broken branches.
- Flat, dry ground, away from edges and steep slopes.
- After an earthquake: open space, away from buildings, walls, power lines and trees that could fall.

## Insulation from the Ground Matters More Than a Cover

The ground draws heat away faster than air. First a layer underneath — a pad, your pack, dry branches and leaves, cardboard — and only then a cover. An emergency blanket around your body, a hat on your head and dry socks for sleeping.

### TIP

A 3 × 3 m (10 × 10 ft) tarp and a few meters of cord weigh less than half a kilo (1 lb), and in five minutes they make a roof for two. Details in the guide *Shelter*.

## 07 · CHAPTER

# FIRE — ONLY WHEN ALLOWED AND SAFE



Fire warms, dries and signals. But every year, wildfires start from exactly that "small fire".

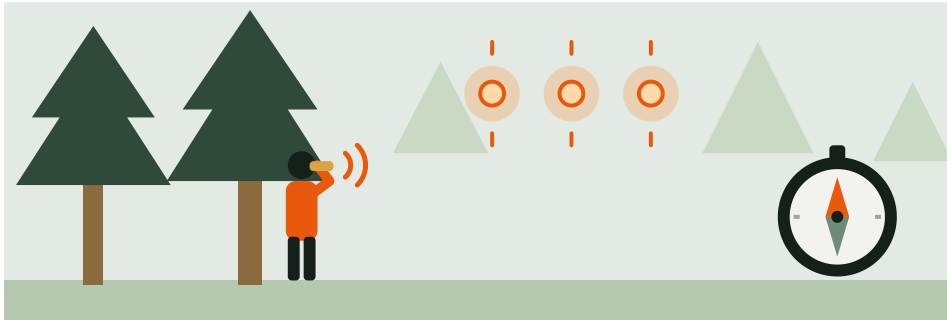
- **Check for bans.** In fire season, open fires are banned in many areas, and the fines are high. In national parks and protected areas, fires are usually allowed only at designated fire pits.
- **The spot:** bare ground or a stone fire ring, away from trees, roots, grass and tents. Don't light a fire in strong wind.
- **Always next to the fire:** water or soil to put it out.
- **Putting it out:** drown it with water, stir, drown it again — until the ashes are **cool to the touch**.

### WARNING

Never use a fire, gas stove or grill in a tent, car or enclosed space — carbon monoxide has no smell and kills in your sleep.

08 · CHAPTER

# IF YOU GET LOST



1

✗

**Stop** — don't keep walking at random

2

🕒

**Think** — where were you last sure of your position?

3

📍

**Observe** — trails, markers, a stream, sounds, lights

4

📡

**Plan** — go back the way you know, or stay and call for help

## Stay or Go?

If you left a trip plan, **stay where you are** — rescuers search along the route first. Move only if you are sure you know the way back and there is enough light.

## Call for Help

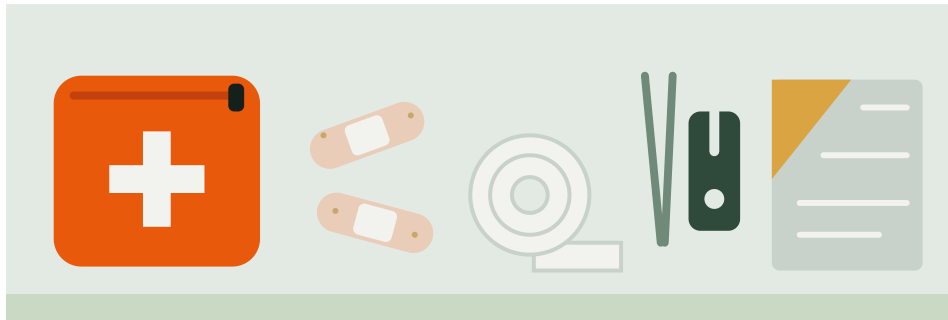
- **Call the emergency number** (112 in the EU and most of Europe, 911 in North America — [Appendix E · p. 19](#)). Say where you are, what happened, how many of you there are and what condition you are in.
- Send your **location** by text (coordinates from the map on your phone).
- **Save the battery:** brightness to minimum, airplane mode between calls, check in at agreed times.

## Distress Signals

| Signal                 | How                                                                          |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alpine distress signal | <b>6 whistles or flashes per minute</b> , then a minute's pause, then repeat |
| Rescuers' reply        | 3 signals per minute                                                         |
| Anything "three times" | 3 whistles, 3 flashes, 3 piles of stones — means trouble everywhere          |
| Visibility             | a bright jacket or emergency blanket spread out in the open                  |

## 09 · CHAPTER

# FIRST AID OUTDOORS



A small kit in your pack solves most problems on the trail: blisters, cuts, sprains and ticks.

- **Blister:** as soon as you feel rubbing — stop and apply a blister plaster. Don't wait for it to burst.
- **Sprain:** rest, cooling (a stream, a cold bottle), an elastic bandage, leg up. If you can't put weight on the foot — call for help.
- **Tick:** remove it as soon as possible with tweezers or a tick card — grab it close to the skin and pull out slowly and steadily. Don't smear it with oil, don't burn it. Clean the spot and note the date.

**WARNING**

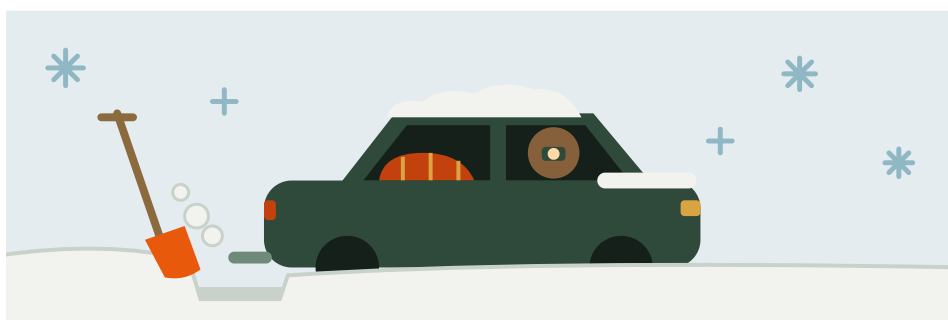
If a spreading redness appears around the tick bite in the following days, or you get a fever and aches — see a doctor. Lyme disease and tick-borne encephalitis are present in many parts of Europe; ask your doctor about the vaccine.

## Mini Kit for the Pack

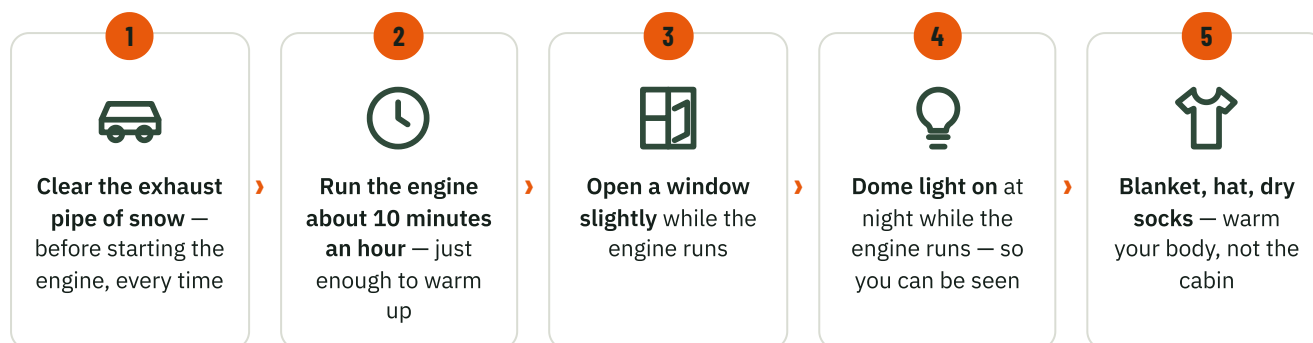
Plasters and blister plasters, sterile gauze, an elastic bandage, tape, tweezers or a tick card, disinfectant, painkillers and allergy medicine, personal medicines for 3 days, an emergency blanket, gloves. A fuller list is in the guide *First Aid*.

## 10 · CHAPTER

# WINTER DRIVING AND SLEEPING IN THE CAR



A car is a good shelter — if you know the rules. If you get stuck in snow far from town, **stay in the car**: you are easier to find and protected from the wind.

**WARNING**

A blocked exhaust fills the cabin with carbon monoxide within minutes. Never sleep in a car with the engine running unless you are sure the exhaust is clear.

**Winter Car Kit**

A blanket or sleeping bag, hat and gloves, water and food for all passengers, a headlamp, a car phone charger, a small shovel, jumper cables, a tow strap, a safety vest and warning triangle, grit or sand. Details in the guide *Car as Shelter*.

## 11 · CHAPTER

## THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES

✗ Nobody knows where you went or when you'll be back.

✗ Setting off late without a headlamp — "just to the top and back".

✗ A cotton T-shirt and jeans in the mountains in rain and wind.

✗ The last of your water gone halfway, with no way to treat more.

✗ Phone at 30% battery, no power bank and no downloaded map.

✗ A fire in fire season, or one left to "burn out on its own".

✗ Engine running in the snow with the exhaust buried.

✗ Kids without a whistle and without a plan for what to do if they get lost.

## 12 • CHAPTER

# PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

You don't need everything. What matters is having a **basic plan** and **one backup option** in case the basic method doesn't work.

## Essential — the Basic Plan

- ☐ Trip plan left with someone, including the time to call for help (ch. 02 • p. 5)
- ☐ The ten essentials in my pack, even for a short hike (ch. 03 • p. 6)
- ☐ Water for the trip and a way to treat more (ch. 04 • p. 7)
- ☐ A warm, waterproof layer more than I think I need (ch. 05 • p. 7)
- ☐ Charged phone, power bank and a map that works offline

## Backup Option — Choose at Least One

Choose something that is **not** your basic method. If you rely on your phone — your backup is a paper map and compass. If you count on a mountain hut — your backup is an emergency shelter.

- ☐ Paper map and compass
- ☐ Emergency blanket or bivy bag
- ☐ Whistle and headlamp with spare batteries
- ☐ Water tablets or a filter

## Expansion — Once You Have the Basics

- ☐ A pack for 72 hours outdoors (Appendix C • p. 17)
- ☐ Tarp, cord and sleeping pad (ch. 06 • p. 8)
- ☐ Winter kit in the car (ch. 10 • p. 11)
- ☐ A first aid course or a mountaineering course

## Knowledge

- ☐ I can use a map and compass without a phone (ch. 08 • p. 10)
- ☐ Everyone in the group knows the alpine distress signal (ch. 08 • p. 10)
- ☐ I can recognize hypothermia (ch. 05 • p. 7)
- ☐ I know how to put out a fire safely and where fires are banned (ch. 07 • p. 9)

## APPENDIX A

# I'M LOST – WHAT FIRST?

Print it, fold it and keep it in the lid of your pack. Work through it in order — each step points to the chapter with details.

- 1**  **Stop.** Don't keep walking at random. Sit on something dry. **ch. 08 · p. 10**

---

- 2**  **Put on another layer and eat something** — cold and fatigue spoil decisions. **ch. 05 · p. 7**

---

- 3**  **Think:** where were you last sure of your position? How long until dark?

---

- 4**  **Is there a signal?** Call the emergency number, send your location, then save the battery.  
**Appendix E · p. 19**

---

- 5**  **Observe:** trail, trail markers, a stream, sounds of a village.

---

- 6**  **Decide:** a known way back with enough light — or stay where you are.

---

- 7**  **Signal:** 6 whistles or flashes per minute, a bright color in the open.

---

- 8**  **If you spend the night:** shelter from the wind, insulation from the ground, emergency blanket, hat. **ch. 06 · p. 8**

**WARNING**

Don't cross a swollen stream, don't descend a steep slope in the dark and don't split from the group. Rescuers search along the route in your trip plan first.

## APPENDIX B

## TRIP PLAN

Fill it in before every trip, leave a copy at home or photograph it and send it. When you get back — check in with the same person.

Who is going (names, number of people)

---

Participants' phone numbers

---

Starting point and parking (place, license plate)

---

Route there and back

---

Backup route / mountain hut along the way

---

Departure (date and time)

---

Planned return (time)

---

Time to call for help

---

Color of jackets and packs

---

## Who Calls for Help, and When

| Who              | Phone        | When they call                     | Whom they call                         |
|------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Example: brother | xxx xxx xxxx | if we haven't checked in by 8 p.m. | emergency number, then mountain rescue |
|                  |              |                                    |                                        |
|                  |              |                                    |                                        |

## APPENDIX C

# DAY PACK AND 72-HOUR PACK

Check off what you have. The first part is for every trip; add the second when you might stay out overnight or longer.

**For Every Trip (Day)**

- ☐ Map and compass / offline map on the phone
- ☐ Headlamp + spare batteries
- ☐ Hat, sunglasses, sunscreen
- ☐ Mini first aid kit + personal medicines
- ☐ Pocket knife or multitool
- ☐ Lighter and matches in a bag
- ☐ Emergency blanket
- ☐ Water 1–1.5 L per person + tablets or filter
- ☐ Food + a spare meal
- ☐ Warm layer, rain jacket, spare socks
- ☐ Whistle
- ☐ Phone + power bank + cable

**Extra for 72 Hours Outdoors**

- ☐ Sleeping bag and pad
- ☐ Tarp or tent + cord
- ☐ Stove, gas, pot, mug (ch. 04 · p. 7)
- ☐ Food for 3 days (no-cook or quick-cook)
- ☐ Water containers, 3–4 L per person
- ☐ Spare clothes and underwear for 3 days
- ☐ Hygiene: wipes, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, bags
- ☐ Cash and copies of documents
- ☐ A radio or another way to get news
- ☐ Medicines for 3 days and prescriptions

## APPENDIX D

# EQUIPMENT BY PRIORITY

Don't buy everything at once. Start with the first level — move to the next only once you have it.

## 1. Basics — Anyone Who Goes Outdoors

- ☐ Headlamp and whistle
- ☐ Emergency blanket or bivy bag
- ☐ Rain and wind jacket
- ☐ Mini first aid kit and tick card
- ☐ Power bank

## 2. Useful Expansion

- ☐ Compass and paper maps of the areas you visit
- ☐ Water filter or tablets
- ☐ Wool or synthetic shirt and a fleece
- ☐ A 3 × 3 m tarp and 10 m of cord
- ☐ Winter car kit

## 3. For the Night and Special Situations

- ☐ Sleeping bag and pad
- ☐ A family tent (also for the night after an earthquake)
- ☐ Stove and gas
- ☐ A flashlight for the car, and a spare hat and gloves for everyone

## APPENDIX E

# LOCAL INFORMATION CARD

Fill it in once for the area you visit most often, print it and keep it in your pack and in the car. Check the numbers on the official websites of your country.

Mountain rescue service — number for your country

Hiking club / mountain hut — phone

Forestry office or park — fire bans (where to check)

Mountain weather forecast (website or app)

Local radio station (name and frequency)

Contact person at home

Nearest health center or emergency room

Your local emergency number

## Emergency Numbers

| Where                                      | Emergency number       | Note                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| European Union and most of Europe          | 112                    | Works from any mobile phone, free of charge           |
| United States, Canada                      | 911                    |                                                       |
| United Kingdom                             | 999                    | 112 also works                                        |
| Australia                                  | 000                    | 112 works from mobile phones                          |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro | 112 only in Montenegro | Ambulance 124 / 194, police 122 / 192, fire 123 / 193 |

## APPENDIX F

# WORKED EXAMPLE — A HIKE AND A NIGHT IN THE CAR

Two real plans with exact items. Adapt them to your group in the trip plan ([Appendix B · p. 16](#)).

## Day Hike, Two Adults and a Child (10), 6 Hours of Walking

| What        | Amount                           | Who carries it     | Note                                     |
|-------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Water       | 3 × 1.5 L + 1 filter             | adults             | refill at a spring with the filter       |
| Food        | sandwiches + 6 spare bars        | everyone their own | the bars stay untouched until we're back |
| Warm layers | fleece + jacket for each, 3 hats | everyone their own | even when the morning is warm            |
| Light       | 2 headlamps + batteries          | adults             | the child has a whistle                  |
| First aid   | mini kit + tick card             | dad                | tick check in the evening                |
| Trip plan   | sent to grandma at 8 a.m.        | mom                | alarm if we haven't checked in by 7 p.m. |

## Car in Winter, Mountain Pass, Two Passengers

| What                    | Amount                  | Where in the car | Note                                |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Blanket or sleeping bag | 2                       | back seat        | not in the trunk under other things |
| Water and food          | 2 L + 4 bars per person | cabin            | so it doesn't freeze in winter      |
| Shovel and grit         | 1 + 5 kg                | trunk            | for the exhaust and the wheels      |
| Light and charger       | headlamp, car charger   | glove box        |                                     |
| Hat, gloves, socks      | one set each            | bag in the cabin | dry socks = warm feet               |
| Fuel tank               | always above half       | —                | in winter, don't drive "on reserve" |

**TIP**

Two minutes before you leave: a text to someone at home — where you are going and when you'll check in. It's the cheapest piece of gear you own.

## SOURCES

- The Mountaineers — *Ten Essentials* (the basic mountain gear list); U.S. National Park Service — *Ten Essentials*.
- Wilderness Medical Society — guidelines for the prevention and treatment of hypothermia; CDC — *Hypothermia and Winter Weather: Staying Safe in a Car*.
- International Commission for Alpine Rescue (ICAR-CISA) and alpine clubs — the alpine distress signal (6 signals per minute, reply 3).
- ECDC and national public health institutes — ticks, Lyme disease and tick-borne encephalitis.
- European Commission — *Preparedness Union Strategy (2025)*, recommendation on 72 hours of self-sufficiency; Ready.gov (FEMA) — *Winter Weather*; mountain rescue services and fire protection authorities in your country for local numbers and fire bans (check them for your area).

Expert content review

[DATE] • [EXPERT / INSTITUTION, e.g. mountain rescue service]

The fields and checkboxes in this PDF can be filled in and saved in Adobe Acrobat Reader (desktop and mobile). Filling may not work in some browsers — in that case, print the page.

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STAYSAFE72

THE FIRST 72 HOURS MATTER  
MOST.

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