Outdoor Tip #1:  
How to Choose a Sleeping Pad

Whether you are planning a car camping trip to Tarifa or a backpacking adventure in Germany, one key to staying comfortable is remembering to bring a sleeping pad.

**But why do you need a pad if you already have a sleeping bag?**

Sleeping pads are as important as sleeping bags. All sleeping bags are rated to a certain temperature, however that rating assumes that the person using the bag is wearing long underwear and there is a sleeping pad beneath it. The rating of a sleeping bag might be 20 degrees Fahrenheit but the person sleeping in it will be very cold at that temperature if he or she is not using a sleeping pad.

A sleeping pad provides comfort and insulation from the ground by trapping a layer of air between the person and the ground, similar to the way a wetsuit works but without the water. Comfort might be the reason that most people use them, but insulation is equally important.

**So what kind of sleeping pad should you get?**

The range of pads available is huge. They vary in weight, length, width, thickness, and method of inflation but when you are shopping for your new sleeping pad, the R-rating will be listed. This is a number 1-10 that indicates the level of insulation or heat resistance that the pad provides. For 3-season camping, an R-value between 3 and 5 will provide comfort for most people. If you intend to camp in the snow, a higher R-value is recommended.

If you are taking a trip where weight and space are limited, an ultra-light might be a good option. If space doesn't matter, a big, plush pad that is 4 inches thick would be comfortable and very warm. If you want the least expensive option, it will always be a closed-cell foam pad which can be as little as a few dollars. A good middle ground for price, length, thickness and warmth is a 1.5 inch thick, 6 foot long, rectangular, self-inflating Therm-a-Rest or alternative quality brand for $50-100.

For more information contact Jill at Navy Outdoor Recreation x3101.

Until next time, Happy Camping!