

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!