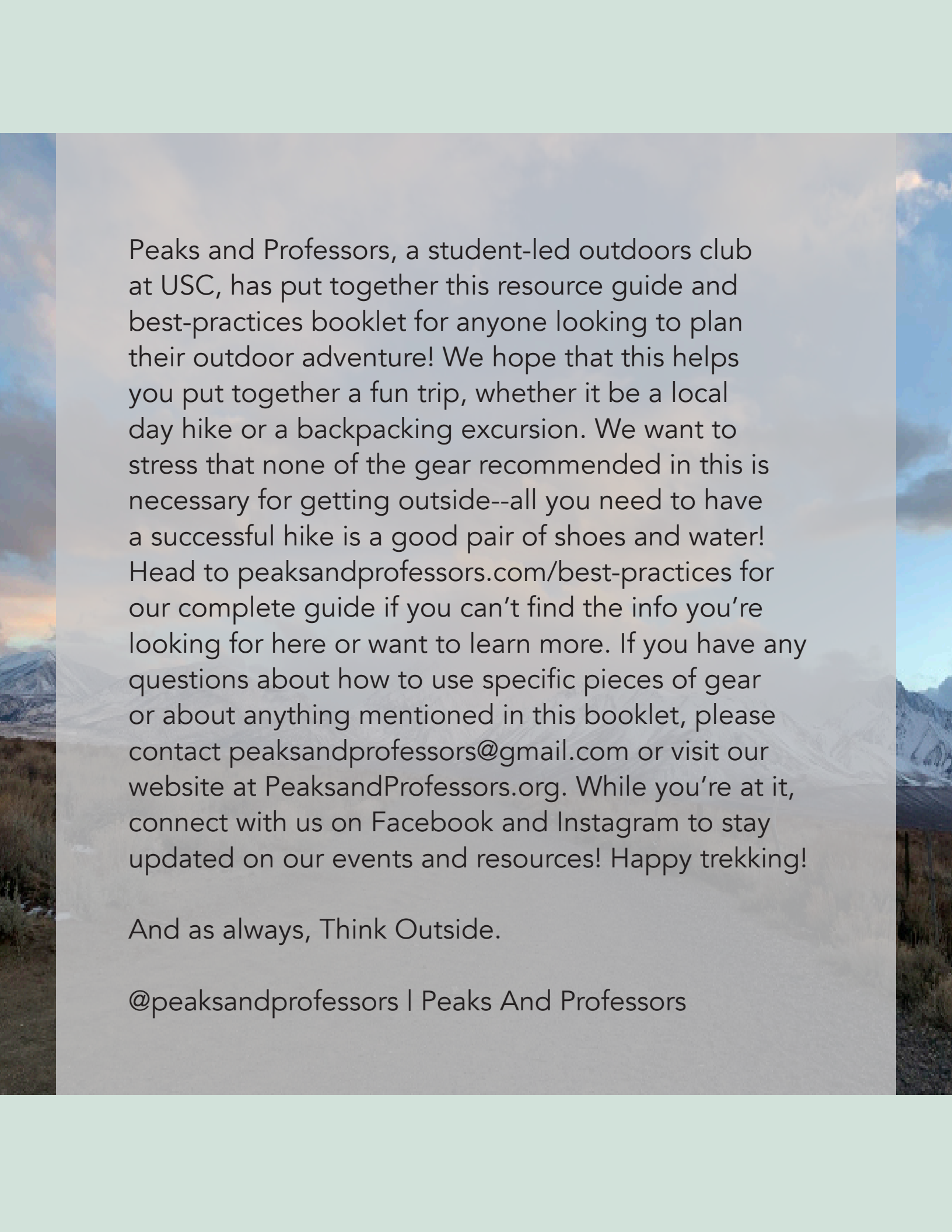




PEAKS & PREPAREDNESS

What To Know When Thinking Outside

By USC Peaks & Professors



Peaks and Professors, a student-led outdoors club at USC, has put together this resource guide and best-practices booklet for anyone looking to plan their outdoor adventure! We hope that this helps you put together a fun trip, whether it be a local day hike or a backpacking excursion. We want to stress that none of the gear recommended in this is necessary for getting outside--all you need to have a successful hike is a good pair of shoes and water! Head to peaksandprofessors.com/best-practices for our complete guide if you can't find the info you're looking for here or want to learn more. If you have any questions about how to use specific pieces of gear or about anything mentioned in this booklet, please contact peaksandprofessors@gmail.com or visit our website at PeaksandProfessors.org. While you're at it, connect with us on Facebook and Instagram to stay updated on our events and resources! Happy trekking!

And as always, Think Outside.

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Best Practices

Hiking Tips

Finding a Trail

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Finding A Trail

It's important to consider how much time you have to do a hike, including transit time to/from the trailhead. The average hiker's pace is around 2 miles per hour, but this depends on steepness, elevation, difficulty, and your fitness level -- honestly assess your physical fitness abilities so that you can enjoy your hike while staying active and improving your health.

Other factors to consider when choosing a hike are distance and elevation gain, which significantly affects a hike's difficulty level. For reference, if the elevation gain is 1,000 feet in one mile, that is considered quite steep. Also, a general rule-of-thumb is that for every 1,000 feet of elevation gain, you should add about one hour to your trip. Our website archive of past trips has many popular trails rated by difficulty, so check it out if you're worried about difficulty!

Additionally, it's crucial to consider the time of year and weather when picking a hike. Some hikes, like Sandstone Peak or Eagle Rock in Topanga, CA are extremely exposed and not advised during hot weather. Other trails, like Mt. Baldy, may be covered in snow during early spring. Always check the weather forecast ahead of time for the trailhead location, and look at recent AllTrails.com reviews to see if there are any updates on trail conditions. If you have any doubts, it's best to play it safe and call the local ranger's office.

Great sites for discovering hikes near you:

AllTrails.com
Modernhiker.com
Hikespeak.com

REI has a great resource for building your hiking endurance!

Our Favorite Day Hikes Near LA

Runyon Canyon: 2/5 difficulty, 2.7 miles
Runyon Canyon Park

Malibu Lake Trail: 2/5, 6.6 miles
Malibu Creek State Park

Eagle Rock via Munsch Trail: 3/5, 4.4 miles
Topanga State Park

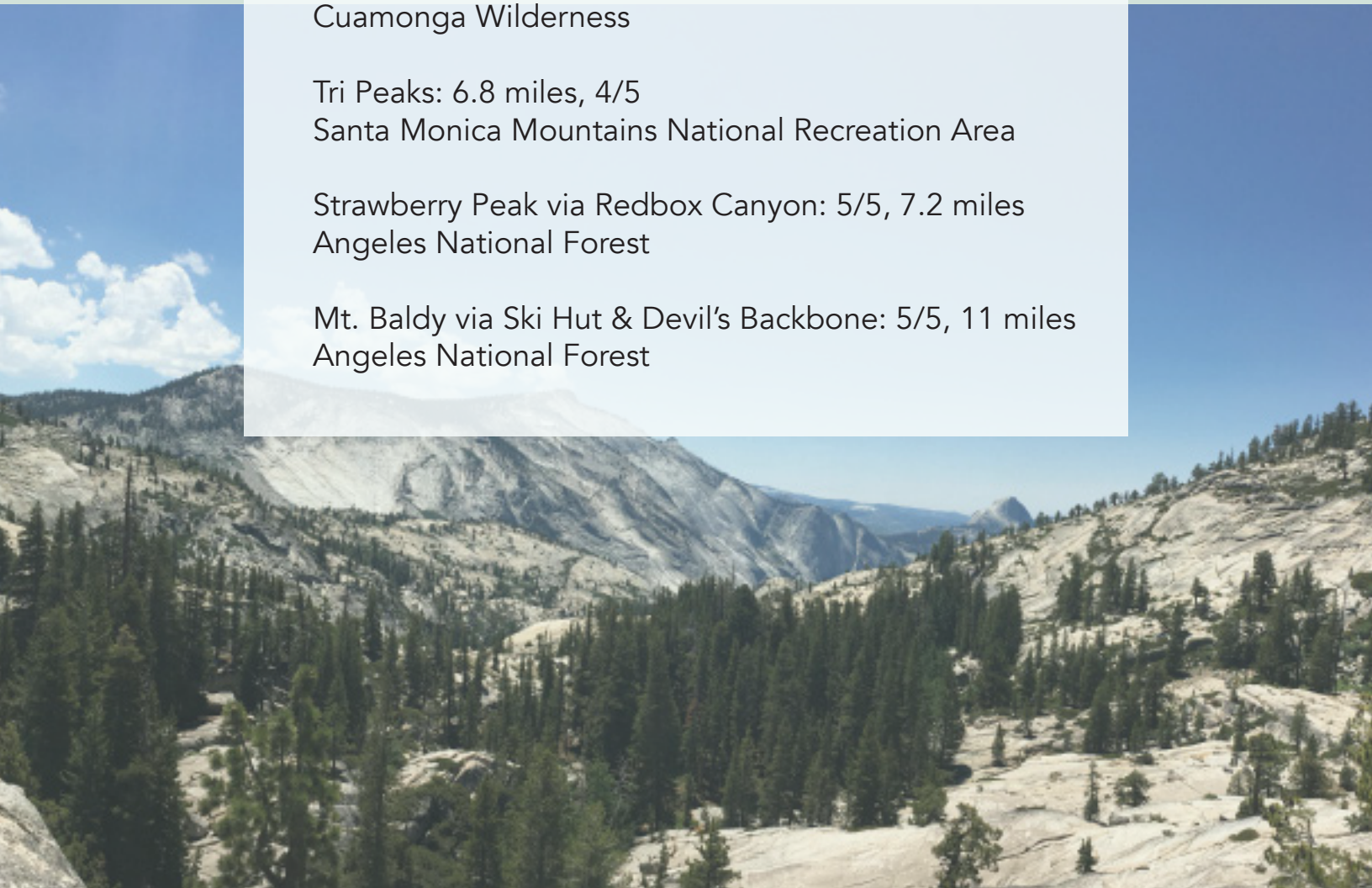
Switzer Falls: 3/5, 3.6 miles
Angeles National Forest

Ice House Canyon: 4/5 difficulty, 9.8 miles
Cuamonga Wilderness

Tri Peaks: 6.8 miles, 4/5
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Strawberry Peak via Redbox Canyon: 5/5, 7.2 miles
Angeles National Forest

Mt. Baldy via Ski Hut & Devil's Backbone: 5/5, 11 miles
Angeles National Forest





Hiking Etiquette

When in doubt, treat others as you would want to be treated. Hikers coming uphill have the right away, so if you are descending step aside and give space. Bicyclists should yield to hikers and horses, and hikers should also yield to horses. When yielding, please be mindful of plants or animals near the trail.

When you are hiking, make yourself known with a friendly “hello” or head nod and stay on the trail at all times. Going off trail can damage or kill species and hurt ecosystems. Be aware of your surroundings, be mindful of trail conditions (Is it too wet and muddy? Is there a fire warning?) and read our section on what to do when encountering a bear!



Gear checklist:

- Pack - A good size for a 2-day trip is 30-50 liters. If you're backpacking, our favorite brands are Osprey, Deuter, Mountain Hardware or anything from REI! If you are car camping, a small duffel also works.
- Tent - Our camping kit comes with a 2-person or 4-person tent. Please watch our video for guidance on how to set it up! If you're feeling adventurous, put down a tarp and "cowboy camp" with no tent under the stars! (Make sure the weather doesn't call for any rain or storms.)
- Sleeping Pad (a yoga mat also works!) in a pinch
- Footwear: Be sure to test yours out on a day hike before taking them on a multi-day excursion! Most modern boots don't require breaking in, but make sure yours fit properly and won't give you blisters. Our favorite hiking boot brands: Keen, Merrell, Salomon or Oboz; typically, go up by ½ a shoe size from your normal size (REI has a great warranty and return policy).
- For those prone to blisters, the issue may be your socks! Thick wool socks can be too abrasive in hot climates, so opt for a thinner kind. (REI Merino wool works wonders, and classic tube socks also do the trick.)
- "Mess kit" for eating: this can be lightweight tupperware and silverware from home
- Headlamp or flashlight
- Trash bags: a must!
- Camping or backpacking stove: see our video for help on how to operate!
- Fuel -- backpacking stoves use isobutane, while camping stoves usually use propane.
- Cooking utensils: knife, cutting board, pot and pan, and a cooler if you need to keep your food cold.
- Water filtration device (be sure there will be water on the trail before you go! If not, pack enough for your trip - approximately 3L per person per day.) Bring water even if you're prepared to filter.
- Snacks - Be sure to fuel up with foods high in protein and sugar, like granola bars, nuts, trail mix, or a candy bar to keep yourself motivated.
- Camping chairs or stools (a cooler also functions as a chair!)
- Clothes: make sure to check the weather where you're headed, and when in doubt, bring layers! During the winter, down jackets and windbreakers, hats, and gloves are advised.
- TP & a shovel if you're camping somewhere without bathrooms
- Wag Bag: A must have for emergency poops: includes a sealed bag with cat litter enzyme concoction and TP. Crucial for certain desert environments and protected areas where you cannot dig a hole.

Finding a Campsite

On [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov), [ReserveAmerica.com](https://www.reserveamerica.com), and [ReserveCalifornia.com](https://www.reservecalifornia.com), you can search for and reserve campgrounds and other recreation opportunities in our national parks, state parks, and other public lands. The search features allow you to filter by location and type of recreation while easily seeing the availability of different campgrounds. These websites generally offer the most up-to-date information on policies and restrictions for a safe and environmentally conscious trip.



How to use BLM land:

Having trouble scoring on a reservation near your favorite national park or need a last-minute local camping getaway? Don't despair! There are a multitude of FREE dispersed campsites out there where you can simply pull up, pop your tent and stay the night -- no reservation necessary! This means no bathrooms (see our section on bathroom best practices), no running water, and no fire pits, but the isolation and beauty of these sites will make it worth your while! You can find sites all around the country, ranging from Wal-Mart parking lots in LA to breathtaking forest roads in Yosemite, on [freecampsites.net](https://www.freecampsites.net). Plus, Outly (a free startup service) has great info on all types of public land. You can also do a quick Google search of "dispersed camping" or "BLM camping" with the name of the area where you are headed. Don't rely on cell service as many of these sites are off-the-grid, be sure to leave no trace, and if you choose to build a fire, purchase wood from a nearby area or gather it from around the site (and don't forget to bring your fire permit!) Make sure there's enough drinking water nearby, or pack it in if necessary!



Fire Safety Tips



- Have a bucket of water nearby before you start your fire.
- Get a California Campfire Permit: <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/permits/campfire-permit/>
- Making sure your fire stays within the confines of your fire ring, which should be already established in the campsite. Don't make new campfire rings, as this excessively impacts the environment. The flames of your fire should be no higher than you ring is wide.
- Be sure to check local directives to make sure a fire is legal on the date of your trip, or ask a park ranger.
- Get your firewood from the nearest town to where you are camping at a gas station or convenience store to minimize spreading invasive species or bacteria between ecosystems. Don't gather firewood unless explicitly allowed, and even then only pick up wood that is already dead and fallen.

How to start a fire:

You will need to be in a non-windy place. Light paper or bark, then place on the smallest, most flammable twigs possible and slowly build up to bigger sticks and then logs. Blowing on the fire gently or fanning it may give it more oxygen, which can help it grow.

How to put out a fire:

(Be thorough! A small ember can light a whole forest on fire.)

Pour water on your fire. Flip over any logs that could hide still-burning embers. Your fire should be cool to the touch and no longer smoking to be considered out.

Be Bear Aware

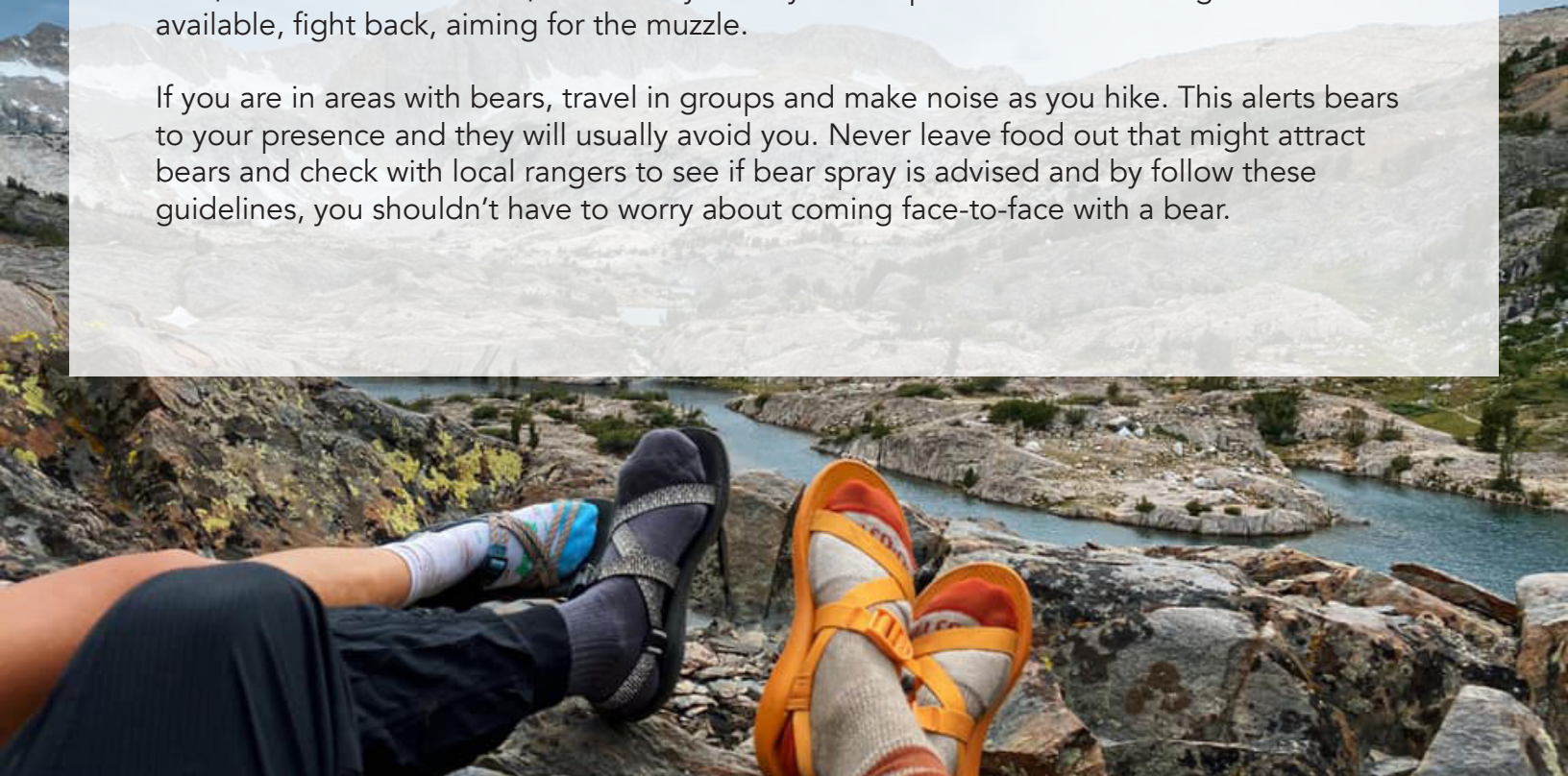
In almost every situation a bear does not seek out human interaction, so letting the bears know we're around will help them to keep their distance. While hiking, yell out "Hey Bear" or other calls to make sure bears can hear you. This may be a bit extreme for most California hikes but if there are bear concerns this is a great way to avoid an interaction.

If you do see one, identify what type of bear you are dealing with. Despite their names, color is not a good indicator! Grizzly bears are generally larger and have a pronounced shoulder hump, while black bears are smaller and do not have a hump. Grizzlies also have short, rounded ears and black bears have tall, pointy ears. Finally, black bears have short claws while grizzly bears have much longer claws.

So you know what type of bear you're dealing with - great! Now what? The first move is to stay calm and identify yourself to the bear by talking slowly and not yelling so as not to startle it. As you back away, make yourself large by either T posing on the bear or moving to higher ground. If the bear is stationary, move away slowly in a sideways motion - this is least threatening to bears. Always leave the bear an exit route so that it does not feel cornered. Be especially careful if you encounter a bear with cubs; new mothers are protective, so avoid getting between a mom and her cubs.

If the bear seems likely to attack, your next moves will depend on what type of bear you have on your hands. If it is a grizzly, leave your pack on a PLAY DEAD while holding your neck with your hands and splaying your legs so you are harder to turn over. Fighting back against a grizzly usually makes the attack worse, but should playing dead not work you are encouraged to fight back and aim for the snout. If you are being attacked by a black bear, DO NOT PLAY DEAD; move away and try to escape to a car or building. If none are available, fight back, aiming for the muzzle.

If you are in areas with bears, travel in groups and make noise as you hike. This alerts bears to your presence and they will usually avoid you. Never leave food out that might attract bears and check with local rangers to see if bear spray is advised and by follow these guidelines, you shouldn't have to worry about coming face-to-face with a bear.



A Few FAQ

Can I poop outside while camping or hiking?

If you have to poop while camping or hiking (we've all been there, trust us!), again make sure you're off the trail and 200 feet from water. Then, dig a hole about 4-5 inches wide and 6-8 inches deep to poop in and bury your poop (a camp trowel can help with the digging, but your shoe will be just fine! The poop doesn't touch the shovel.). If you use toilet paper, bury it in the hole but preferably bring with you to throw away.

Is it OK to hike alone?

Hiking alone can be a great experience for self reflection and adventure. However, it is considered less safe than hiking with a partner or group of people. If you do plan a solo hike, make sure to tell a trusted friend where you are going and how long you plan to be gone so they know when to contact emergency services in the event that you lose contact or do not return home on time. As with any other hike, make sure you are well prepared in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and trail knowledge. You should also seek out highly populated trails and avoid wearing headphones to be as aware of your surroundings as possible. If you are new to hiking - consider working your way up to a solo hike first!

Why is Hiking So Hard?

Getting into hiking can be hard! Steep climbs, hot days, slippery surfaces, and unclear trails can throw a wrench in what seemed like a great plan to go for a hike. Trails aren't always flat or easy to travel by so the extra precaution in a slower hiking speed can make a big difference. If you find yourself out of breath, struggling to push ahead, this is even more reason to take it slow. Don't be the hare, be the tortoise. It's better to build up your stamina, take it easy, and make it back in one piece.

Like any skill, getting better at hiking takes time and practice. Start with more moderate trails and work your way up as you grow more comfortable with the sport. With patience and time you will get stronger, better, and have more fun!

How can I prevent blisters when on long hikes?

Make sure your boots fit right -- your toes should not be hitting the front so that they have room to breathe when walking downhill, but not too loose so that your feet won't slide around and create more friction! Take your time when being fitted for hiking boots, and ask sales reps at REI or any outdoors gear store to help you out. Most stores have great return policies, so do a short practice hike in new boots or wear them around the house before taking them on longer trails or to the backcountry.

Additionally, use breathable socks -- thick wool, though it seems cushiony, can create sweat that makes your feet prone to blisters in warmer climates. Merino wool works wonders! If you notice "hot spots," or the beginnings of a blister beginning to form, use moleskin, blister pads or rock tape to keep them from worsening.

Local Ranger Stations

If you have any questions about trail conditions, fire restrictions, road closures, or just need advice, call the local rangers office!

Angeles National Forest
701 N. Santa Anita Ave.
Arcadia, CA 91006
(747) 322-6574
M-F 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m

Joshua Tree National Park
74485 National Park Drive
Twentynine Palms, CA
92277-3597
(760) 367-5500

San Bernardino National Forest:
602 S. Tippecanoe Ave.
San Bernardino, CA 92408
(909) 382-2682

Topanga State Park
20828 Entrada Road
Topanga, CA
(310) 455-2465

Mt. San Jacinto State Park
54270 Pine Crest
P.O. Box 518
Idyllwild, CA 92549
(909) 382-2921

Visit peaksandprofessors.com for more info, including:

- Our favorite gear recommendations, from boots to water filters
- How-to videos on tent construction and stove operation
- Hiking and backpacking FAQ
- More of our favorite trails & campsites around the country
- And more!

