

Alaska Backpacking and Sea Kayaking

Equipment List

Welcome to NOLS! It's important to choose the right equipment for any outdoor adventure. We fundamentally believe that you don't need to own a lot of expensive gear to live and travel comfortably in the outdoors. We recognize that the process of getting ready for a course can be an intimidating experience, especially if you have never done anything like it before. This list is designed to help you make decisions about what you take on your course and hopefully help you feel confident about entering your course.

When you arrive, your instructors will look through the equipment you've brought and help you decide what to take into the field. You'll then go into our Outfitting Department to rent or purchase any remaining items. We've made every effort to ensure that this equipment list is reflective of what you will need on your course, but your actual needs will vary depending on season and instructor judgment. *We encourage you to keep the tags on all clothing, and the receipt at home, so that you may later return any unneeded items.*

Here are some thoughts to guide you as you pack:

- **First, use gear you already own!** You'll be comfortable in tried-and-true clothing. Bring more clothing than you think you'll need; your instructors will help you choose your best options. You can always leave items in storage at the campus. You may not think you have some of the clothing items on the list, but it is really common for sports and athletic wear to fit the bill. As long as it meets the description of the item, it will probably work.
- **Second, rent what you can from NOLS.** We recommend that you rent items when possible, especially items that tend to be expensive (such as a sleeping bag and backpack). While you are not obligated to rent gear from us, there are several reasons why we suggest it. Our rental gear is high quality, chosen specifically for the heavy use it receives on courses. Rental prices are reasonable, so you can try out gear and make informed decisions on future adventures. After your course, you may purchase any of the items you rented at a reduced cost; this is a great way to begin building your personal system if you intend to keep exploring the outdoors.
- **Third, purchase specific items from our Outfitting Department.** To make shopping simple, we offer camping essentials and personal care items. The items we sell in our Outfitting Department are tailored to what works well on our

courses. Approximate price ranges for the items we sell are listed below - you can use these price ranges to help you decide whether to purchase items ahead of time.

- **Fourth, go shopping before your course.** A few options:
 - **REI or a local gear store:** Pro: Employees often have some sense of what you will need. Con: Gear at these locations is often expensive.
 - **Target, Wal-Mart, and other department stores:** Pro: The active wear and camping sections can have inexpensive options. Con: Employees are unlikely to be able to offer suggestions.
 - **Thrift stores:** Pro: Likely the least expensive option. Con: Can take a lot of time to find what you need.
 - **Online:** Pro: Can find a wide variety of options. Con: The variety of options can be overwhelming to sort through.
- If you're shopping ahead of time, it may be helpful to call someone at NOLS to chat through your plan for packing and purchasing so you can get some guidance. There is contact info at the bottom of this list.

Equipment fees

In addition to your course tuition, you will pay an equipment deposit. This deposit will be applied directly to the charges you incur for gear rentals and purchases or any loss or damage to our equipment. Total charges will vary depending on the amount of equipment you rent or purchase from us; the prices listed below will help you estimate your costs. At the end of your course, you will be billed for any amount that exceeds the equipment deposit, or refunded any balance from NOLS headquarters in Lander, WY.

Questions?

Please contact our staff at NOLS Alaska by phone (907) 745-4047 or email alaska_notify@nols.edu.

How to Use this List

Items under the **Required** heading are items that you must either bring yourself or rent or purchase from NOLS as available. Items under the **Optional** heading are not required, and you may bring them from home, buy, or rent from NOLS as available. If you see an **X** in the price column, that means that an item is not available for rent or for purchase as indicated.

All rental prices are based on a 2-week rental cost. AKX courses are split between 2 weeks of backpacking and 2 weeks of sea kayaking. Therefore, some of these rental items will be rented for both sections of the entire 4-week course. (Example: 2 week rental sleeping bag is \$32.50. The student will need this bag for both sections, so the total rental cost will be \$65 for 4 weeks).

All items with hyperlinks can be purchased at NOLS Alaska.

Upper Body Clothing			
You need at least three insulating layers, a windproof layer, a rain layer and a t-shirt. Make sure your layers fit comfortably over each other. If you get cold easily, we suggest that you take four insulating layers, or three layers plus a vest. You should have two lightweight insulating layers: one to wear on the water, and one to wear in camp.			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base Layer	X	\$25-80	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool T-shirt or long-sleeve top that sits next to your skin. It pulls sweat away so you stay drier and warmer. NO cotton — it stays wet and cold. (1-2) Examples: Patagonia Capilene Cool Daily Long-Sleeve, Helly Hansen Lifa Active.
Mid Layer	X	\$55-160	A lightweight fleece jacket (like a sweatshirt, but warmer and quick-drying) that fits comfortably over your base layer. Examples: Patagonia R1 Fleece, Patagonia Better Sweater, Mountain Hardwear Polartec Power Grid.
Insulated Layer	\$30	\$250	A warm, synthetic-filled puffy jacket that fits over your base and mid layer. Synthetic insulation keeps you warm even when damp — important in Alaska's wet climate. Examples: Patagonia DAS Light Hoody, Patagonia Nano Puff Hoody, Helly Hansen Lifaloft Insulator. (Down jackets are workable but not recommended in Alaska.)
Wind Shirt	\$16	\$80	A featherlight nylon wind shell, roomy enough to fit comfortably over your base and mid layer. Excellent protection in dense brush and against bugs. Example: Patagonia Houdini Jacket.
Rain Jacket + Pants	\$45	X	A lightweight or hardshell rain jacket and matching rain pants for hiking and around camp.

			NOLS rents Gore-Tex shells. Examples to buy: Helly Hansen Odin 9 Worlds + Verglas Pants, Patagonia Torrentshell 3L jacket + pants.
Rubberized Rain Jacket + Pants	\$35	X	(For sea kayaking — optional alternative to the lightweight rain jacket.) Heavy-duty rubberized rain gear in PVC or PU fabric (commercial fishing-style) is more durable and reliable for long days in spray and rain on the water. NOLS rents these. Examples: Helly Hansen Highliner (PVC) or Gale Rain Jacket (PU). You can pair these with your lightweight shells from above — many people use the lighter set for hiking and the rubberized set for paddling.
Paddle Jacket with Hood	\$20	X	A waterproof, breathable pullover designed for paddling, with a hood and adjustable cuffs and neck closures to keep water out. NOLS rents one. Bring your own splash paddling jacket (e.g., NRS High Tide) or a dry suit if you already own one.

Lower Body Clothing

You need two to three lower-body insulating layers that fit comfortably over each other and underneath your wind or rain pants. You should have two lightweight insulating layers: one to wear on the water, and one to wear in camp.

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base Layer Bottoms	X	\$35-65	A lightweight pair of long underwear in synthetic or merino wool — basically tech leggings worn next to the skin for warmth. NO cotton. Example: Patagonia Capilene Midweight Bottoms.
Insulated Pants	X	\$60-200	Fleece or synthetic-filled puffy pants. A nice addition for cold days and around-camp warmth on the water. Your instructors will share recommendations depending on route and time of year. Example: Patagonia Nano Puff Pants.
Nylon Hiking Pants	\$12.50	\$80	Lightweight, quick-drying nylon pants for hiking. They protect your legs from bugs, brush, and scratchy plants. NOLS rents durable NOLS wind pants if you'd rather rent than buy. Example: Patagonia Quandary Pants.

Miscellaneous Clothing

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
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Required Items			
Sun Hat or Baseball Cap	X	\$12-40	A wide-brimmed hat is best — it shades your ears and the back of your neck (important on the open water). A baseball cap also works and fits under a paddling hood.
Fleece or Wool Hat	\$5	\$15-40	Any fleece or wool beanie that fully covers your ears. Example: Patagonia Better Sweater Beanie.
Glove Liners	X	\$10-25	Thin gloves that can layer under heavier gloves for warmth or be worn alone for sun protection.
Fleece or Wool Gloves	X	\$20	Durable gloves made from fleece, wool, or polyester for cold or wet days. Example: Black Diamond fleece gloves or mittens.
Underwear / Bra	X	\$20-45	(2-3 pairs underwear, 1 bra) Underwear and bras made from merino wool or polyester wick moisture away from your skin and dry fast — much better than cotton when you're getting splashed all day.
Neoprene Pogies or Paddling Gloves	\$8	\$30	(For sea kayaking.) Pogies are insulated mitts that wrap around your paddle shaft and your hands at the same time, keeping your hands warm and dry while paddling. Paddling gloves are an alternative if you prefer more dexterity. NOLS rents neoprene pogies.
Buff	X	\$20	A stretchy synthetic fabric tube you can wear as a headband, neck warmer, balaclava, beanie, sun cover, wristband, or hair tie. Surprisingly useful in changing weather.
Rain Hat	\$5	\$60	(For sea kayaking.) A wide-brimmed waterproof hat keeps rain off your face on the water — useful when your paddle jacket hood limits your peripheral vision. Your sun hat may also work for rain, and vice-versa.
Footwear			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Rubber Boots	\$17.50	X	(For sea kayaking.) Knee-high rubber boots are essential for stepping in and out of the kayak at beaches with sharp rocks and barnacles. We highly recommend renting this item from NOLS —

			we stock XtraTuf 16" non-insulated boots, the Alaska standard.
Midweight Hiking Boots	X	X	Sturdy hiking boots or mid-top hiking shoes for the backpacking section — see the Boot Selection Guide at the end of this list. We do NOT sell hiking boots — please get them before traveling to Alaska.
Hiking Socks	X	\$15-25	Wool, merino wool, or thick polyester socks (3-4 pairs). Avoid wool/cotton blends — they stay damp. Darn Tough is a popular, very durable brand.
Camp Shoes	X	\$40	Lightweight, closed-toe shoes for around camp. The ground in Alaska is often wet, mossy tundra. Crocs (without holes) or Totes-style rubber rain boots work well.
Dry Pants and Shoes	\$27.50	X	(For sea kayaking.) Waist-high waterproof dry pants keep you warm and dry while stepping in and out of the water. NOLS's rental dry pants come paired with rubber neoprene shoes attached, which makes a watertight system from your waist down.
Optional Items			
Gaiters	X	\$35-60	Fabric sleeves that cover the gap between your pants and boots — they keep gravel, snow, and water out, and protect your legs in dense brush. Helpful but not always necessary; long pants may be enough on many routes.
Sleeping Gear			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Sleeping Bag	\$80	X	We rent synthetic-filled sleeping bags rated 0°-20°F. Alaska is wet enough that down sleeping bags aren't recommended — synthetic keeps you warm even when damp, while down loses warmth when wet.
Sleeping Pad	\$6	\$45-80	We rent closed-cell foam pads (the dense foam type that rolls up). We also recommend and sell full-length self-inflating pads — they're more comfortable but pricier. We do NOT rent self-inflating pads.

Sleeping Bag Compression Sack	\$5	X	A stuff sack with compression straps that shrinks your sleeping bag down to fit more easily in your pack.
Packs and Bags			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Backpack	\$60	\$250	An internal-frame backpack with a volume of 75-85 liters (about 4,600-5,200 cubic inches). This is a bit smaller than a full mountaineering pack because the kayaking section uses dry bags. If you bring your own, instructors will check whether it's a good fit for you.
Small Stuff Sacks	\$2	\$15-20	(1-2) Small bags to keep gear organized inside your pack. Lightweight dry sacks are nice in wet conditions; non-waterproof ones are fine and weigh less.
Waterproof Bag Liners	X	\$1	(2-3) Thick (3 mil) plastic trash compactor bags that line the inside of your backpack to keep your gear dry in heavy rain. NOLS stocks various sizes — many students find it easier to just buy them at NOLS in the size and quantity they need.
Large Equipment Bag	\$20	X	(For sea kayaking.) A long nylon duffle bag designed to slide into the bow and stern compartments of a sea kayak. NOLS supplies these. Example: Outdoor Products Deluxe Duffle 18x42.
Zip Duffel or Large Stuff Sack	\$5	X	Used to keep clothing and personal gear organized inside the kayak hatches or backpack. Waterproof stuff sacks are convenient on the water; non-waterproof are fine too and weigh less.
Miscellaneous Items			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Bandana	X	\$3	(1-2) Multipurpose — sweat wipe, dry hands, hygiene, sun protection. At least one is highly recommended for hygiene.
Lighter	X	\$2	(1-2) Standard disposable lighters for lighting stoves.

Eating Gear	X	\$5-15	A Tupperware-style plastic bowl (1-2 pints) with a lid that fully seals — so leftovers don't leak into your pack. A plastic or metal spoon or spork.
Eyeglass Retainer	X	\$8	A simple strap that keeps glasses or sunglasses on your face during activity — essential on the water. Good brands: Chums and Croakies.
Mosquito Headnet	\$3	X	A fine mesh net that goes over your head — keeps mosquitoes off your face. Available to rent from NOLS if bugs are expected on your course.
Lip Balm	X	\$2	Stick or cream lip balm with SPF sun protection. Lips burn fast in reflected sun off the water.
Notebook and Pen/Pencil	X	\$6-12	A small spiral-bound notebook — avoid hardcover. NOLS sells a durable journal with waterproof pages (recommended for the kayaking section).
Prescription Glasses and Contact Lenses	X	X	If you wear glasses or contacts, bring a spare set. Even if you wear contacts daily, plan to carry a pair of glasses into the field — wind, salt spray, and grit can make contacts harder to wear on the water.
Sport Sunscreen	X	\$4-8	A 2-4 oz tube or bottle with SPF 30 or higher. A physical sunblock like zinc oxide is strongly recommended — water reflects sun and burns are very easy. Reapply often on paddling days.
Sunglasses	X	\$25-100	Durable sunglasses with 100% UV protection. Polarized lenses help cut glare off the water. Always attach them to a retainer — sunglasses and saltwater don't mix. Good brands: Julbo, Native, Optic Nerve, Smith. If you wear prescription lenses, bring prescription sunglasses or a clip-on.
Toilet Articles	X	\$2-4	Toothbrush, small toothpaste, small comb or brush, moisturizer, and any prescription medications. Sample sizes (about 2 oz) are best. No deodorant or extra products. NOLS sells basic toiletries if you forget something at home.
Menstrual Products	X	\$5-35	Required if you menstruate. Bring the products that work best for you — tampons, pads, a menstrual cup or disc, period underwear, or a combination. Bring slightly more than you think you'll need.

Watch	X	\$25-60	A waterproof watch with an alarm — bring one even if you don't normally wear one. Casio G-Shock models are durable and reliable.
Water Bottle or Water Bladder	X	\$12-25	(1-2) Wide-mouth quart or liter bottles (Nalgene-style) work best. A lightweight bladder system can also work, but for the kayaking section a hard-shell bottle is much easier to refill and clip into the cockpit.
Backcountry Bidet	X	\$5-15	A small squeeze-cap water bottle used to clean yourself after going to the bathroom in the woods — cleaner, more comfortable, and uses far less water (and toilet paper) than wiping. Simplest option: a CuloClean — a tiny silicone tip that screws onto any standard plastic water bottle. A small bike-style sport bottle with a pull-up cap also works. Required for hygiene in the field.
Hand Sanitizer	X	\$3	A small (about 2 oz) bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer for hygiene before cooking and after using the bathroom — especially useful when you can't easily clean hands on the water.
Pee Bottle	X	\$10	(Strongly recommended for cold or buggy nights.) A clearly-labeled wide-mouth 1L Nalgene-style bottle, kept inside your sleeping bag at night so you don't have to leave the tent in storms or cold. Keep it 100% separate from your drinking bottle and label it boldly!
Optional Items			
Camera	X	\$60	Highly recommended! Bring a small, durable, waterproof or water-resistant camera with extra batteries and memory cards. Good options include the Pentax WG-1000. GoPro is also popular but uses a lot of battery — bring at least 1 extra battery per week. Cold and damp drain batteries quickly. No phones are allowed in the field.
Book or E-Book	X	\$10-40	An e-reader or a small paperback for downtime in camp. NOLS has many books to choose from!
Knife	X	\$15	A small pocket knife or multi-tool.
Headlamp or Flashlight	X	\$20	Useful for August courses; not necessary for June or July when Alaska has nearly 24 hours of

			daylight. Lightweight is best. Example: Black Diamond Astro 300.
Trekking Poles	\$5	\$60	(1-2) Single or paired adjustable telescoping poles help with stream crossings, steep terrain, and balance with a heavy pack on the backpacking section. NOLS sells lightweight adjustable trekking poles and rents heavy-duty ski poles. Example: Black Diamond Trail Back.
Umbrella	X	\$30-40	Nice for those really rainy days in camp. NOLS sells the Montbell Trekking Umbrella and large golf umbrellas.
Thermos	X	\$30	Vacuum-insulated bottles are great for hot drinks during long paddling days. Make sure yours is stainless steel and NOT glass. NOLS sells the Stanley thermos with a NOLS logo.
Camp Chair	X	\$25-50	A luxury item for sitting around camp and during classes — really pleasant after a long day on the water. Example: Crazy Creek Hex 2.0 Original Chair.
Power Bank / Battery Charger	X	\$25-50	A small portable USB power bank to recharge your camera batteries or headlamp on longer expeditions. Cold and damp drain batteries fast, so keep it in your sleeping bag or dry pouch at night. Look for something compact and weather-resistant.
Mini Solar Panel	X	\$50-100	A small foldable solar panel pairs with a power bank to keep electronics topped up on sunny days. Examples: Goal Zero Nomad, Anker PowerSolar. Optional and only useful if you bring electronics.
Compact Binoculars or Monocular	X	\$30-80	Small, lightweight binoculars or a monocular are wonderful on a sea kayaking course — great for spotting marine wildlife (sea otters, whales, eagles, bears on shore) and scoping landing beaches and routes.
Earplugs	X	\$2-5	Foam or silicone earplugs help you sleep through wind, snoring tent-mates, or surf right next to camp.
Inflatable Pillow	X	\$20-40	A small inflatable camp pillow. Many people just stuff a fleece into a stuff sack, but a pillow is nicer if you sleep poorly without one.

Pee Funnel	X	\$10-20	A reusable silicone funnel that lets you pee while standing — useful in cold or buggy weather and especially when wearing a drysuit. Examples: Shewee, GoGirl, Tinkle Belle. Pairs well with a labeled pee bottle.
Kula Cloth	X	\$20	A reusable antimicrobial pee cloth used in place of toilet paper after peeing — far less waste than packing out used TP.
Quick-Dry Pack Towel	X	\$10-20	A small microfiber towel — invaluable for drying off after stream crossings or unintended swims, wiping condensation out of your tent, or cleaning gear.
Personal Repair Kit	X	\$5-10	A tiny kit with safety pins, a needle and thread, and a few feet of duct tape wrapped around a pencil. Instructors carry shared repair gear, but a personal kit handles small clothing tears in camp.
Foot Powder or Anti-Blister Tape	X	\$5-15	Foot powder helps keep feet drier in damp boots; leukotape or moleskin can prevent hot spots from turning into blisters.
Lightweight Sit Pad	X	\$10-20	A small piece of closed-cell foam that's nice to sit on when the ground is wet or cold (and a great backup if you misplace your sleeping pad).
Insect Repellent	X	\$5-10	A small bottle of DEET or picaridin repellent for areas with heavy bug pressure on the hiking section. Travel size (1-2 oz) is plenty.

Shared Group Equipment—NOLS will supply

Expedition members share both the use of and the responsibility for the group gear that NOLS issues. NOLS charges only for group equipment lost or damaged. Keep in mind that NOLS evaluates gear from several perspectives beyond those that an individual user might consider. Performance, durability and simplicity are all contributing factors towards our gear selection.

Tents
Compass
Trowel or Shovel
Stoves, Fuel Bottles and Fuel
Maps
Bear Spray
Fishing Gear
GPS

Repair Kits
Reference Books
Cooking Gear/Spice Kits
Soap and Hand Sanitizer

First Aid:

Our instructors carry adequate first aid kits. There is no need to bring your own.

Boot Selection Guide

NOLS has been outfitting people with boots for many years and our priorities have remained the same: We want you to have footwear that provides adequate protection for your feet, that is durable enough to withstand weeks of rugged wear and that provides reasonable comfort. Many boots and shoes available on the market do not meet these criteria.

Backpacking footwear is sturdy and durable, but there is a large range within this market. Be aware of the differences between the terms “boots” versus “shoes,” as well as “hiking,” “backpacking,” and “mountaineering.” “Shoes” and “hiking” tend to refer to more lightweight footwear, while “boots” and “backpacking” are more rugged. Either can be appropriate for you depending on your backpacking experience, ankle strength, and pack weight.

When considering footwear, remember that your course will travel mostly off-trail, and your feet will get wet. You could be in snow for days. You will cross rivers and boulder fields.

If you have little or no backpacking experience in this type of terrain, we recommend a more supportive “backpacking” boot.

- Examples: Asolo TPS Series, Garmont Rambler, Lowa Renegade Series.

If you are comfortable with your experience hiking with a heavy pack and footwear with less ankle support, it may be appropriate to use a midweight, mid-top hiking shoe.

- Examples: Keen Targhee Mid, Salomon X Ultra Mid.

Avoid footwear associated with the labels “mountaineering” (example: La Sportiva Trango), which is too rugged, and “day hiking” (example: Merrell Moab), which does not provide enough support.

With all of the footwear choices on the market, we highly recommend you visit your local sporting goods or footwear shop, use the following guidelines, and try on a selection of shoes or boots. Comfort is the most important feature. Remember to give yourself several weeks to properly wear in your footwear before arriving in Alaska.

Some features to look for in hiking boots:

- A sole that provides good traction like Vibram or other lugged sole.
- Mid-top or high-top ankle coverage.
- Durable outer material, such as leather or thick nylon, that will withstand hiking among sharp boulders and dense vegetation. Full mesh is not appropriate.
- A Gore-Tex liner is fine, but unnecessary. Your foot will get wet when the river comes in over the top of your boot. A Gore-Tex liner will also slow drying time once the boot is wet.
- A comfortable fit with your preferred hiking socks. Boots that are too small are a common cause of blisters. Please see the “How to prepare for your course” link on your course dashboard for more boot-fitting information.