

# Alaska Outdoor Educator - 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.

## Feedback?

NOLS is trying to update this list to be more welcoming and effective. If you are willing to provide some feedback to help our effort please take this [survey](#).

## Questions?

Please contact our staff at NOLS Alaska by phone (907) 745-4047 or email [alaska\\_equipment@nols.edu](mailto:alaska_equipment@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.

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
<b>Required Items</b>			
T-shirt	X	\$40-80	A lightweight wool or polyester top is a great next to skin layer. No cotton. We have Ibex wool & Patagonia Capilene for sale.
Long Underwear Top (1-2)	X	\$35-110	Mid- or expedition-weight synthetic or performance wool is best. For sea kayaking, you'll want one to wear on the water and a dry one to wear in camp. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Extend, Patagonia Capilene, Ibex wool, Icebreaker wool)
Fleece Jacket	X	\$55	Light- to mid-weight fleece jacket that fits over your base layers. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Microchill, Patagonia R1)
Insulated Jacket	\$60	\$190	A warm, synthetic-filled jacket that fits over your long underwear and fleece layers. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Compressor, Patagonia Nano Puff Hoody)
Wind Shirt	\$32	\$75	Nylon wind shell, roomy enough to fit comfortably over your t-shirt and long underwear top. Excellent protection in dense bushes and from bugs. (Example: Patagonia Houdini)
Rain Jacket	<b>VERY LIMITED AVAILABLE</b>	X	We highly recommend bringing your own Gore Tex rain jacket for hiking. We have a <b>very limited stock</b> of jackets available to rent. Your rain jacket should be roomy enough to fit comfortably over all

			upper-body layers. We found that <a href="#">PVC</a> or <a href="#">PU</a> fabric (fisherpeople jackets) works best for sea kayaking.
Paddle Jacket with Hood	\$45	\$380	We rent a waterproof breathable pullover with hood. If you bring one it must be waterproof and have a hood.

**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
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**Required Items**

Long Underwear Bottoms (2 pairs)	X	\$35	Mid- or expedition-weight synthetic or performance wool is best. (Examples: Mountain Hardwear Extend, Patagonia Capilene, Ibex wool, Icebreaker wool).
Insulated Pants	X	\$55-200	Fleece or synthetic-filled pants are usually only needed on early-season courses when the weather is especially cold. Expedition weight long underwear bottoms are also acceptable. (Examples: Sherpa Jaaro Microfleece Pants, Mountain Hardwear Compressor Pants)
Rain Pants	<b>VERY LIMITED AVAILABLE</b>	X	We highly recommend bringing your own Gore-Tex rain pants for hiking. We have a limited stock available for rent. We highly recommend bringing your own rain pants. We found that <a href="#">PU</a> fabric (fisherpeople pants) works best for sea kayaking.
Nylon Pants	\$20	\$65-75	Nylon hiking pants are recommended for protection from bugs and dense vegetation. We rent durable nylon shell pants.

**Miscellaneous Clothing**

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
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**Required Items**

Sun Hat or Baseball Cap	X	\$20-25	Should be wide-brimmed to protect from the sun.
Fleece or Wool Hat	\$8	\$30	Any fleece hat that will fully cover your ears. A wool ski hat is fine.

Glove Liners	X	\$10-25	Lightweight polypropylene gloves may be layered with heavier gloves for warmth or worn alone for sun protection.
Fleece or Wool Gloves	X	\$20	Durable gloves made from fleece, Ragg wool or mid-weight polypropylene.
Underwear/ Bra (2-3 pair underwear, 1 bra)	X	\$35-40	Undergarments made from merino wool or polypropylene wick moisture away from your skin and are highly recommended.
Rain Hat	\$5	\$65	We rent Sou'wester type rain hats. Optional; your sunhat might work fine for rain.
Neoprene Pogies or Paddling Gloves	\$5	\$40-50	We rent neoprene pogies.

### Footwear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
<b>Required Items</b>			
Rubber Boots	\$20	\$120	These rubber galoshes will be your primary footwear during the course. Since the boots take a real beating from the sharp rocks and barnacles along the beaches, we recommend you rent this item from us. We rent XtraTuf brand 16" Non-insulated Boots.
Mid-weight Hiking Boots	X	X	Please read the Boot Selection Guide at the end of this list. <b>We do NOT sell hiking boots. You will need to obtain them before traveling to Alaska.</b>
Hiking Socks (3-4 pairs)	X	\$15-20	Must be 75 to 100% wool, merino wool, heavy ragg type, or thick polypropylene. No wool/cotton blends.
Camp Shoes	X	\$35	During the hiking section, the ground around camp is often wet, soggy tundra. A lightweight, closed-toe waterproof shoe is ideal. A light pair of sneakers can be waterproofed with a plastic bag-sock and will also work. Crocs Specialists are available for purchase at NOLS.
Gaiters	X	\$60	Full gaiters provide good leg protection while bushwhacking. We sell Outdoor Research Verglas. (Low gaiters are also acceptable, such as Outdoor Research Flex-tex.)

Optional Items			
Neoprene Socks	X	\$25	Neoprene socks may be worn with camp shoes or as hiking socks when conditions are wet and cold. (Example: NRS Hydroskin)
Sleeping Gear			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Sleeping Bag	\$80	\$220	We stock synthetic-filled sleeping bags with a temperature rating of 20 degrees F or colder. Due to Alaska's extremely wet environment, down and feather bags are not recommended.
Sleeping Pad	\$12	\$60-100	We rent closed-cell foam pads; however, we recommend and sell full length self-inflating sleeping pads. We do not rent self-inflating pads. (Example: Therm-a-rest Pro-Lite Small or Regular)
Sleeping Bag Stuff Sack	\$8	\$28-35	A compression stuff sack makes your sleeping smaller to pack (example: OR Ultralight Compression Sack) A no-compression stuff sack is fine too and weighs less (example: Granite Gear Air Compressor Stuff Sack).
Packs and Bags			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Internal Frame Pack	\$60	\$350-400	Internal frame backpack with a volume of 75 to 85 liters is ideal (4,600-5,200 cubic inches).
Small Stuff Sacks (1-2)	\$2	\$5-15	Used to organize items in your pack. Lightweight drysacks are convenient (example: eVent Sil DrySack). Non-waterproof are fine too and they weigh less (example: Outdoor Research Ultralight Stuff Sack).
Waterproof Bag Liners (2-3)	X	\$0.75	3mm durable, sturdy, plastic trash compactor bags. We have a variety of sizes, and many students find it easier to purchase the size and quantity they need here.
Large Equipment Bag	\$15	\$75	These nylon bags are made especially for NOLS paddling courses. (Example: Outdoor Products Deluxe Duffel 18x42)

Zip Duffel or Large Stuff Sack	\$5	\$35	Used to keep clothing and personal gear organized. Waterproof stuff sacks are convenient; non-waterproof are fine too and weigh less.
<b>Miscellaneous Items</b>			
<b>Equipment</b>	<b>Rent</b>	<b>Buy</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Required Items</b>			
Bandana (1-2)	X	\$3	For multiple uses. 1 is highly recommended for hygiene use
Lighter (1-2)	X	\$1.50	Used to light stoves. Do not bring a zippo.
Eating Gear	X	\$5-15	Tupperware-type bowl, 1-2 pints, with a lid. Lexan/plastic spoon or metal spork
Eyeglass Retainer	X	\$6-10	Good brands are Chums and Croakies
Insect Repellent	X	\$6	A small bottle, 2-3 oz
Mosquito Head Net	\$5	\$12	You can rent this if bugs will be a problem on your course.
Lip Balm	X	\$2.50	Stick or cream with sun protection.
Notebook and Pen/Pencil	X	\$6-12	A small spiral notebook is fine. Avoid hardcover. We sell a durable notebook with waterproof pages.
Prescription Glasses and Contact Lenses	X	X	If you wear prescription glasses or lenses, you should bring a spare set. Even if you wear contact lenses daily, plan to carry a pair of glasses into the field.
Sport Sunscreen	X	\$5-7	A tube or bottle of 2-4 oz. should be plenty. A sun protection factor of 30 or greater is necessary. A physical sun block such as zinc oxide is strongly recommended for people who burn easily.
Sunglasses	X	\$40-120	Durable with 100% UV protection. If you wear prescription lenses, bring your own prescription sunglasses or look for a quality pair of clip-on shades. We sell Optic Nerve. (Other good brands: Julbo, Native)
Toilet Articles	X	\$3-6	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb/brush, moisturizer, prescription meds, tampons. Sample sizes of 2 oz are preferable. No deodorant or excessive items. We have basic toiletries for sale if you forget something from home.

Watch	X	\$50	Bring a waterproof watch with an alarm even if you do not normally wear one.
Water Bottle or Water Bladder	X	\$12-25	Wide-mouth quart- or liter-size. A lightweight bladder system also works well. We sell Platypus SoftBottle and Nalgene hard bottles.
<b>Optional Items</b>			
Camera	X	\$50-100	Bring a small, durable camera with plenty of extra batteries and memory cards.
Book	X	X	A small book for pleasure reading.
Vitamins	X	X	Some folks prefer to supplement their diet with a multi-vitamin.
Knife	X	\$25	A small pocketknife or multi-tool.
Headlamp or Flashlight	X	\$35	Good idea for August courses, unnecessary for June or July. Should be lightweight.
Trekking Poles (1-2)	\$6	\$65-80	Single or double telescoping poles are best. We sell adjustable trekking poles and rent heavy-duty ski poles.
Umbrella	X	\$35-40	Nice for those really rainy days. We sell Montbell Trekking Umbrellas and large golf umbrellas.
Thermos	X	\$30	Vacuum bottles are great. Be sure it is stainless and not glass. We sell ½ Liter thermos's with the NOLS logo on them.
Camp Chair	X	\$40	A luxury item for sitting around camp and in classes. (Example: Crazy Creek Hex 2.0 Original Chair)

### 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 a number of 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.