

Council Approval: Required



Certificate of Insurance (COI): Required from vendor if providing lodging/campsites for this activity for Council Approval. Visit [GSNI's webpage](#) for information on requesting a COI from the venue. Troops can notify GSNI about backpacking outings by completing the [GSNI Troop Trip Travel Request Form](#).

Activity Permitted for: J C S A

Not Recommended for: Daisies and Brownies

GSNI Training: One adult must receive GSNI's Outdoor Overnight training for the outing. In addition, one adult volunteer must be trained in Adult and Pediatric First Aid/CPR/AED AND Wilderness and Remote First Aid or Wilderness First Responder.

About Backpacking

A backpacker's primary mission is to explore on foot, while carrying all their gear in a backpack and being a good steward of the land. These checkpoints focus on preparing for backpacking in remote areas, but the recommendations can be used in urban areas too.

Backpacking is not recommended for Daisies and Brownies because of the equipment used in backpacking trips (see below) and the longer duration of the activity. [Hiking](#) is recommended for Daisies and Brownies to prepare them for the adventure of backpacking at the next grade level.

When choosing a destination, connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions, such as Girl Scout camps.

Learn More

- [AmericanTrails.org](#)
- [Backpacker.com](#)
- [LeaveNoTrace.org](#)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities. Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the location and/or local, state, or national parks to inquire about their accommodations for people with disabilities. To learn about accessible trails, visit [Trail Access Project](#); find tips on gear selection and planning at [Pack Your Tent](#).

Equity. Consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity. Check out [Melanin Base Camp](#) and [Diversify Outdoors](#) for resources and inspiration. See the Equity section of the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for general advice about expense,

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before starting any activity and review it so all are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury, missing person, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

Backpacking Checkpoints

Encourage resource sharing. Have your troop make a list of needed gear and supplies and determine which items can be shared. This way your group is not bringing more supplies than you need. For communal items, spread them across backpacks or have troop members rotate carrying them so the load is shared equitably.

Choose an appropriate backpacking route. The route chosen needs to be within the abilities of every person in the group and the pace needs to be set by the slowest backpacker. Determine the length of the trip by the backpackers' grade levels, level of experience and ability, physical condition, nature of the terrain, and weight of the load to be carried as well as the season and weather conditions, the water quantity and quality, and the activities planned along the way.

Assess the safety of backpacking sites. The route needs to be known to at least one of the adults or a report should be obtained in advance to assess potential hazards. Ensure that a land-management or similar agency is contacted during the trip-planning stage to help with available routes and campsites, recommended group size, information about water quantity and quality, and permits (if needed).

Assess backpack quality and do a trial run. Check the gear! Troop members should try on the clothes and shoes they plan to bring to make sure it all fits. Ensure that backpacks and all equipment (including food and water) weigh no more than 20 percent of each person's body weight, with a maximum of 35 pounds. Guide troop members in choosing backpacks, adjusting straps, and taking them on and off. Have them plan and conduct a series of hikes to practice and build up endurance before the backpacking trip.

Ensure backpackers have a comprehensive understanding of the trip. Group members need to be trained to be observant of the route, the surroundings, and the fatigue of individuals. Instruction should be given on the safety rules for backpacking, such as staying together in a group, recognizing poisonous plants, biting or stinging insects and ticks, respecting wild animals, and behaving effectively in emergencies. Ensure that hikers know how to read maps, use a compass, navigate a route, and estimate distance.

Prepare for emergencies. Ensure the presence of a waterproof first aid kit. All troops should provide one adult volunteer certified in Adult and Pediatric First Aid/CPR/AED AND Wilderness Remote First Aid or Wilderness First Responder certification, who is prepared for extremes of temperature, such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, frostbite, cold exposure, and hypothermia, as well as sprains, fractures, and altitude sickness. Ensure that emergency transportation is available, if possible. The designated adult should have a working cell phone or satellite messenger for emergencies.

Take safety precautions. Create a trek/risk management plan with the group. Search and rescue procedures for missing persons should be written out in advance, reviewed, and practiced by youth and adults. Methods of communication with sources of emergency care, such as police, hospitals, and park and fire officials, should also be arranged in advance. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans that cover any foreseeable situation. File your plan with local authorities, a trusted contact at home, and troop families.

Practice safe backpacking. Progressively challenging treks build skill, experience, and endurance. Backpackers should successfully complete entry-level hikes before moving on to the next difficulty level. Hiking after dusk is not recommended. Off-trail hiking must be done with an experienced leader. The group must hike away from the edges of waterfalls, rock ledges, and slopes with loose rocks. Girl Scouts are never allowed to go on high-altitude climbs.

Safety Gear. Backpacking requires various equipment dependent on the length of the trip, location, and weather, such as:

- Lightweight, layered clothing and outerwear appropriate for weather conditions
- Water bottle or hydration pack (each person should carry at least one quart—or enough to get to the next resupply point)
- Non-perishable, high-energy, lightweight foods such as dehydrated meals, fruits, and nuts

- Whistle
- “Ten Essentials” emergency survival kit, including a flashlight, first aid kit, extra clothing (including a waterproof jacket), snacks, tablets for purifying water, emergency shelter, matches in a waterproof container, knife, map, compass or GPS, and a water bottle
- Backpack appropriate for size and experience of user
- Sturdy hiking/trail footwear with thick soles (optional: soft-soled shoes to wear at campsite after removing hiking footwear). Wear socks designed for hiking; use either a liner with a thicker sock or high-tech socks to keep moisture away from feet
- Map and compass or compass and GPS
- Sleeping bag, preferably a mummy or lightweight sleeping bag; closed cell sleeping pad.
- Potable water or water purification supplies (e.g., iodine tablets) to remove potential contaminants from natural water sources; use water filters designed to remove Giardia Lamblia. See [Outdoor Cooking Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for purification tips.
- Unbreakable, lightweight knife/fork/spoon combo, with a bowl and cup
- Portable cook stove and fuel whenever possible (to reduce the use of firewood)
- Waste management supplies (toilet paper, garbage bag, plastic trowel to dig a cat hole, hand sanitizer)
- Food storage (check local regulations to find out if a bearproof canister is required)
- A working cell phone for emergencies (in the hands of an adult) or a specific backup plan.
- Hat or bandana