

The best gear for getting outside

By Kari Bodnarchuk

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It's time. Get outside and sleep under the stars, enjoy a change of scenery, and embrace the beauty of the great outdoors — in style. Whether you go car camping or off the grid, you don't have to skimp: Bring a palatial tent, pack a real pillow, even throw in a portable pellet stove and toilet. You'll appreciate the following camping and outdoor gear — much of it new this year — even if you're adventuring in your own backyard.



JON MITTELSTAEDT

GET YOUR GRILL ON WITH THESE STOVES

Whether you're leaving civilization behind, hanging out in a sensitive environment, or in a place without access to a designated firepit, it's best to follow leave-no-trace practices. It doesn't feel like camping without a firepit or grill, though. Snow Peak's **Takibi Fire and Grill** lets you enjoy an open fire for warmth, food prep, and fun without impacting

your campsite. The 31.5-pound Japanese-built stove packs down relatively flat in a heavy-duty canvas travel pouch and assembles in seconds. Unfold the stainless-steel Pack and Carry Fireplace and place it on the 18-by-18-inch steel baseplate, which protects the ground. Light a fire in the fireplace, put the height-adjustable grill bridge in place, and start roasting your favorite campfire treats (\$319.95; www.snowpeak.com).



GINO BARRAZA

Want to add a hint of applewood smoke to your burgers or veggie kebabs? Asmoke's new **TRAVELER WOOD PELLET GRILL AND SMOKER** lets you create your favorite smokehouse cuisine wherever you go. It's perfect for a campsite with an electrical hookup or your vacation cabin. The easy-to-assemble grill, due out in July, tucks into the corner of your truck or SUV for travel yet offers plenty of surface space for cooking: 256 square inches. Plug it in, heat up pellets in the 5-pound hopper, and you can grill, sear, smoke, and barbecue within minutes. The Traveler has a lower and an upper rack, and a dial for setting the temperature between 180 and 500 degrees. It weighs 42.6 pounds and measures 24.4-

by-17.5-by-13.6 inches. Asmoke makes real wood applewood pellets, sold separately (\$199.99 grill, \$24.99/\$49.99 for a 5-/20-pound bag of pellets; <https://asmokegrill.com>).



SCOTT RINCKENBERGER

GOOD PLACES TO CALL HOME

The last thing you may want to do after months of staying at home is cram into a tiny tent with loved ones. Choosing a shelter with some elbow room and head space can make your adventures in the outdoors go more smoothly. Tents are rated for the number of people — or camp mattresses — they can fit when lined up like sardines. Therefore, as a general rule, it's wise to choose a tent rated to fit one or two extra campers — so, a four-person tent for two or three people and a six-person tent for four people.

New this year, MSR's **Habitude** tent comes in four- and six-person versions. The four-person tent offers steep walls and 73 inches of max height in the middle, giving it an airy feel and plenty of standing room for changing in between adventures. It also has 62.5 square feet of floor space and a 23.5-square-foot ves-

Gear that helps you get away from it all

►**GEAR**
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tibule for ducking into and removing shoes during stormy weather, or for someone to comfortably sit and chill. Setup can be squirrely (poles pop out of corners while you secure other sides) so it helps to have two people on the task. The Habitude comes with three aluminum hubbed poles that secure into place with plastic hooks (no tent sleeves). It has only one door, but its vast peaked opening makes for easy entry. The tent also has plenty of interior mesh pockets and a mesh ceiling for dispersing condensation, and it weighs 12.10 pounds. An added bonus: It has a built-in LED “porch light” over the front door that runs on two watch-style batteries (\$499.95; www.msrgear.com).

Sierra Designs’ new **Nomad 6** works well if you’ll be camping in tighter spots that can’t accommodate a spacious vestibule or if you need a roomy tent with two doors. The downside to the Nomad’s smallish, steep-sided vestibules: You may get water in the tent as you enter or exit during stormy weather, but they’re perfect for gear storage, giving you 35.6 square feet total. The vestibule windows also let in great light and let you keep an eye on the weather without unzipping. This freestanding tent is a cinch to set up — just slip the three color-coded poles through the tent sleeves and attach the ends into clever metal tent “feet.” The Nomad offers 84.4 square feet of floor space and 72 inches of head room at its peak, and weighs just 12.13 pounds — amazing for a cavernous shelter (\$474.95; sierradesigns.com).



PHOTOS BY JON MITTELSTAEDT; HEST/MOTOFISH; NEMO

A weather-resistant blanket
REI Co-op has teamed up with West Elm to create a new collection of functional yet fashionable camping and outdoor gear for those embracing staycations or civilized camping. The collection includes 35 products mostly under \$60, such as blankets, chairs, a side table, pillows, and kitchenware. One standout: the REI Co-op **Outdoor Blanket**, a versatile blanket for relaxing on the ground, sitting on a dew-covered camp chair, or wrapping around you in a tent for extra warmth. The blanket has a cozy fleece side and a weather-resistant side that fends off moisture. It covers 70-by-54 inches when spread out, but packs down to a bread-size bundle. (\$49.95; www.rei.com/westelm.com).



The REI Co-op Camp Roll Table works great for games or food prep.
Play cards or cook on this table
Another essential item (not part of the West Elm collection): The REI Co-op **Camp Roll Table**. This ridiculously lightweight 8.8-pound table packs down small but stands 27.5 inches tall and offers a 27.5-by-27.5-inch surface when unfolded, meaning it works great as a card or game table, or for food prep and serving. Setup is a no-brainer — just unfold table legs, attach two cross poles, and then unfold the aluminum slat tabletop and slip it into place. It offers a rigid, heat-resistant surface that can handle hot pots and pans and comes with a handy stow sack with a shoulder strap. (\$74.95; www.rei.com).

Embrace Mother Earth in comfort
Let’s face it: Only some campers actually like sleeping on the ground. Sure, we do it in the backcountry to embrace the joys of wilderness travel. But car or backyard camping means you get to sleep in something like Hest’s **Sleep System**, which will undoubtedly change your relationship with the ground. This heavenly sleep system has a two-layer polyfoam mattress (with a removable and washable mattress cover) over an

inflatable base, providing the perfect blend of rigidity and cushiness. Unroll the sleep system from its stow sack and watch it instantly puff up into shape. Then use the enclosed pump to inflate the base (a two-minute process, max) and it’s bedtime. The mattress provides 7 inches of thickness and an R-value of 11.8. It takes up some car space, but you won’t regret making room for it. Beware, though, it’s tricky to deflate it (best with two people so one can hold the air valve open while the other rolls up the bed) and it will likely never be as compact as when you first opened it (\$399; hestoutdoors.com/products/hest-sleep-system).

A portable mattress-bag combo
If you have a car like mine (a Mini Cooper) space is tight on road trips. Compact and more versatile options — perfect for car camping and backcountry adventures — include Thermarest’s **NeoAir Topo Luxe**, a 4-inch-thick mattress that uses an advanced matrix system to create a warm, stable bed for sleeping. Its TwinLock Valve makes inflating and deflating the mattress quick and easy. Pair the NeoAir with Thermarest’s new



Sierra Designs’ new Nomad 6 is a cinch to set up.



Hest’s Sleep System blends rigidity and cushiness.



The REI Co-op Outdoor Blanket (above left) has a cozy fleece side and a weather-resistant side that fends off moisture. NEMO’s **Heliopolis** (right) is a portable privy and shower tent that sets up in minutes.



The Woolly Bear off-road trailer can be towed by a 4-cylinder vehicle. The **Fold-To-Go Portable Toilet** can support up to 300 pounds.



Questar 32 sleeping bag, which has two detachable and stretchy straps on the bottom that hold the mattress in place, preventing you — or your kid — from slipping off during the night. The Questar offers the warmth of a mummy bag with extra roominess so you won’t feel constricted. The bag’s Hydrophobic Down absorbs less water than traditional down and dries three times faster — a bonus in wet climates. The mattress weighs 1.7 pounds and comes in different lengths and widths, ranging from 20-by-72 inches to 30-by-77 inches, while the bag weighs 2.3 pounds and comes in three sizes (\$144.95-\$204.95 mattress, \$219.95-\$259.95 bag; www.thermarrest.com).

Check out these mobile habitats
Maybe you’re not ready to leap into RV ownership, but you want a more substantial basecamp for your adventures than a ground tent. Texas-based TAXA Outdoors makes the **Woolly Bear off-road trailer** that can be towed by a 4-cylinder vehicle and offers all you may need for your adventures: a full-size outdoor kitchen with a stainless steel countertop, storage space for kayaks and other gear, a bike trailer hitch, a pull-out area for coolers, and an elevated platform for your two- to three-person tent (perfect for no-trace, off-the-grid camping). Add to that electrical outlets (USB and 12V), lights, and storage lockers. At 10 feet long, the Woolly Bear can be stored in your garage during downtime.

For those who want to sleep inside, TAXA also makes “mobile human habitats” such as the new 15-foot-long **Overland Cricket** (also garage size), which can sleep two adults and two kids and has a sink, stove, and pop-up roof for ventilation, and plenty of storage space (TAXA Outdoors’ founder, Garrett Finney, worked for NASA and knows tight spaces). It has fresh- and gray-water tanks, an outdoor shower, and a cafe table (prices start at \$9,800, Woolly Bear; and \$36,900 Cricket; www.taxaoutdoors.com).

Taking care of business on the road
You’re probably thinking this, too: “I’m not going anywhere without a toilet.” With many public restrooms closed at parks nationwide and bathrooms at some rest stops off limits, it can prove tricky finding a clean and safe place to go. Winnipeg-based Reliance makes numerous portable potties, but a top travel one is the **Fold-To-Go Portable Toilet**. This sturdy lightweight toilet has three folding legs that lock into place and can support up to 300 pounds. Set up, the toilet stands 13 inches high (from the ground to the seat), but it folds down to just 5 inches for easy portability. Use with Reliance’s two-layer Double Doodie Portable Waste Bags. Each bag has a double zip-lock system that prevents leaking. The bags come preloaded with BioGel — a non-toxic waste gelatin — that turns blackwater into gel for easy transport and to cut down on stinkiness (\$42.95 toilet, \$17.95 for a box of six bags at REI; relianceoutdoors.com).

Find shelter and privacy in this portable loo
No, of course you’re not going to sit out in the open (although you can enjoy a room with a view). Get NEMO’s **Heliopolis** and create your own private loo. This portable privy and shower tent sets up in minutes. Assemble the lightweight aluminum poles and attach them together, then hang the tent on the aluminum frame using hooks. The privacy shelter has an inside door-lock mechanism, a built-in toilet paper dispenser with a dry bag, a light clip on the ceiling, and an internal bottle holder for your hand sanitizer (or shampoo). Get NEMO’s Helio Pressure Shower (sold separately) and turn the shelter into a full-service shower. The Helio includes a durable 2.9-gallon water “tank” that you can pressurize using the attached foot pump. Hang the 7-foot-long neoprene sprayer hose and voila — a camp shower (\$249.95 Heliopolis; \$99.95, Helio, www.nemoequipment.com).

Wherever your adventures take you — to the backyard or the backcountry — make sure you bring gear that makes for a The REI Co-op **Camp Roll Table**. This ridiculously lightweight 8.8-pound table packs down small but stands 27.5 inches tall and offers a 27.5-by-27.5-inch surface when unfolded, meaning it works great as a card or game table, or for food prep and serving.com-fortable table.

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