

Travel Comfort: Sleeping Pads

/ Travel Comfort: Sleeping Pads

Get a good sleeping pad:

In camping, a sleeping pad is a simple device often used in conjunction with a sleeping bag. Its purpose is to provide padding and thermal insulation. The two vital benefits of sleeping pads are insulation and cushioning.

Cushioning is important because of its ability to insulate your body from cold surfaces by blocking conductive heat loss. A sleeping bag captures air warmed by your body. Beneath you though, its heat-trapping loft is compressed to almost nothing. As a result, you need a pad to buffer you from heat-depleting contact with the cold ground.

/ Types of Sleeping Pads

Closed-cell foam pad

They are usually made of dense foam that provides good insulation but there is not much cushioning. It is lightweight, durable and an inexpensive option for insulation.

Self-inflating air mattress

It is made of a foam core bonded to a waterproof shell that expands upon opening a valve in the corner, filling the internal cavity. They provide insulation against the coldest ground and are also comfortable. It is popular amongst hikers and campers.

Open cell foam pad

It is used in egg-crate mattress pads and is basically worthless for backpacking. It compresses too much to provide good insulation, and is extremely bulky.

Air mattresses

Not recommended. They are so vulnerable to punctures that you are taking chances using them in the backcountry, especially in the rocky, thorny southwestern deserts.

/ Choose a pad suited to your style

Minimalists and long-distance hikers seek out the lightest possible pad. Its low weight and small packaging override all other concerns.

Backpackers who want more comfort can pick from pads with greater thickness and durability with a modest increase in weight.

For family camping, boat or car travel and other situations where size and weight are not the limiting factors, a thicker and larger mattress is an enjoyment-boosting luxury.

Winter camping requires more insulation. It is usually recommended to use two pads: a self-inflating pad atop a closed-cell foam pad. The foam pad adds insulation and offers insurance in case the inflatable pad is punctured.