WHAT TO WEAR FOR ALASKA HIKING

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ALASKA PACKING LIST

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THE BASIC GEAR

The rule of layering applies to hiking too, but there are some extra gear considerations before you take off down the trail. Even on a bluebird-sunny day, we never set off without rain gear, extra clothing, gloves and a hat—because temps can drop fast. Here’s the complete rundown of what you need for a day hike in Alaska:

HIKING BOOTS

• Don’t buy the classic, hard leather boots. They’re too heavy for most day hikers, and hard to break in.
• Your best bet is a pair of lightweight boots with good ankle support.
• Trail running shoes are fine, too, if you’re used to them on uneven terrain.

CHANGE OF CLOTHES

In case your clothes get wet, be sure to have:

• Extra pair of socks
• Extra long undershirt or upper body inside layer

ADVANCED GEAR

Thinking about a more extended hike? Or going off-trail or across tundra? Here are some tricks of the trade we’ve learned through experience.

ZIP-OFF LEG PANTS

• These are a huge convenience. If you get hot or cold, zip the lower pant legs on or off in a snap—no need to find a place to sit down and remove your whole pants.
• Pant legs also protect your calves when walking through brush.

HIKING POLES

First off, don’t think of them as canes. Here’s how any hiker will benefit from them:

• Elevation. When heading down hills, shifting weight to the poles will protect your knees.
• Uneven terrain. Using them on side hills—sloping terrain—can protect your ankles.
• Whacking. Poles are great for helping whack brush aside.
• Water crossings. Probe the depth of a stream before you plant your foot (or whole leg) into it.
• An extra pair of feet. They offer stability so you can look up and watch scenery, rather than look at your feet for every step.
• Shopping for Poles. Aluminum is cheaper and heavier, but carbon might not be as durable. Shock-absorbing tips are great if you’re carrying a heavy load, but overkill for most day hikers. Look for something that can collapse and attach well to your pack. Cost: anywhere from $70 to $150.
GAITERS (more for the hard-core, off-trail hiker)
- These nylon coverings fit over your lower pant leg and strap around the bottom of your shoe or boot.
- Extra protection from water, scrapes and debris that can get into your boots.
- Great if it rains — ground brush and twigs can get mushy and messy fast.
- About $25 a pair.

BEAR PROTECTION
- Don’t bother with bells: your voice is just as much of a deterrent.
- Bear spray (pepper spray) has limited range, but is good to carry. Just remember to shoot downwind.
- Your best bet? Hike with a friend and keep the conversation, and moderate noise, going. Most bear attacks are on people going solo.

WATER
If you’re heading out for a long hike, you’re probably going to need more water than you want to carry with you. The good news: there are streams everywhere. We Alaskans tend to take a bottle for water when hiking, and then just refill it in a stream or river. If you don’t want to, here are your options:

- SteriPen. These UV lights kill bacteria like giardia, but don’t get rid of silt or grittiness from stream water. About $90.
- Filter Pump. They’re low-tech, but they’re your best bet for removing bacteria and bulk. $40 and up for portable models.
- Purifying tablets. Iodine or Chloride tablets are cheap and lightweight, and make a great back-up plan. The downsides: They’re slow (half an hour to four hours), and iodine makes the water taste funny, too. They cost just a few dollars.