"10 Essentials" for outdoor trips

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The "10 essentials" is a list of things that you should bring with you on every trip you go on, whether it's planned to be a 2-hour day hike, a weekend camping trip, a multi-day expedition. You shouldn't necessarily plan to use every single one of the items on the list on every trip. But you should have them in case of emergency. There is always possibility that one might get caught outside longer than expected, possibly overnight. You should prepare accordingly. With every item on the list, don't just bring it, also make sure you know how to use it.

The "10 Essentials" list has its roots in mountaineering. The list was originally compiled by The Mountaineers club in Seattle, Washington in the 1930s. The list has been revised and updated many times since, as well as being adapted for many different activities (hiking, camping, survival, etc.). The number of items sometimes varies: 10 -1/+4, but common themes and items remain.

10/11 Essentials List

1.) Map & Compass
2.) Water, and something to purify more water
3.) Matches / Firestarter
4.) Knife
5.) Flashlight / Headlamp
6.) Extra clothing – Insulation & Raingear
7.) First Aid Kit
8.) Signaling Device – whistle
9.) Food
10.) Sun protection – sunglasses & sunscreen
11.) Emergency Shelter / Tarp

What do we mean by each item?

1.) Map & Compass (navigation tools)
A map of the area where you are going to be. Not just any map, bring the right map. Bring a compass. Know how to use it, and how to use the map and compass together. A GPS is an optional supplement, but not a replacement for these items. Batteries may run out, or you may not have a clear satellite signal in your location.

2.) Water, and something to purify more water (hydration)
Bring a water bottle. 1 litre should be considered a minimum. Have the ability to purify more water. This might mean bringing iodine tablets or chlorine dioxide, a water filter pump, or even a metal cup if you plan to boil water to purify it.

3.) Matches / Firestarter (fire)
A lighter is ok. If bringing matches, keep them in a waterproof container, and make sure you have a dry striker pad. In addition bring something to use as dry tinder, a little ball of drier lint, cotton balls, or toilet paper for example.

4.) Knife
A pocket knife or a multi-tool, with a blade.

5.) Flashlight / Headlamp (light)
Bring some kind of flashlight. Headlamps allow you to have both hands free to work. Make sure the batteries are fresh. You may want to bring spare batteries and, if non-LED, bring a spare bulb.

6.) Extra clothing – Insulation & Raingear
Clothing depends on the season. In the summer, a fleece sweater may be sufficient. In winter, bring an insulating jacket (like a synthetic or puffy down jacket). Always bring rain

gear; it can also protect from wind. Always bring spare socks (non-cotton). A hat is a good idea (insulating in winter, sun protection in summer).

7.) First Aid Kit (First Aid)
The specific contents of a personal first aid kit are a separate topic. At a minimum, band-aids, medical tape, anti-bacterial or anti-biotic ointment, and non-latex medical gloves. Put all this in a waterproof container, such as a Ziploc bag.

8.) Signaling Device – whistle (communication / signaling)
A whistle is the most common signaling device. You can blow a whistle much longer and which much less effort than you can yell for help. A non-breakable signal mirror is another option, but it requires sunlight. A cell phone is a supplement, but not a replacement. Often you will not have a cell signal where you are hiking. Also, batteries run out.

9.) Food
Have some extra food to eat. This maybe just a snack. It can be something as simple as some hard candy or chocolate bar.

10.) Sun protection – sunglasses & sunscreen
Bright sunlight reflected off snow or water can be blinding. Sunglasses are part of the original list from its original roots in mountaineering. It still makes sense in today's environment.

11.) Emergency Shelter / Tarp (shelter)
A large garbage bag can be sufficient. A lightweight tarp or reflective emergency blanket are other options.

References:

There are a number of different "10 essentials" lists out there. Here are some examples used in making this list.

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Essentials -- The Wikipedia article is really quite good.
- "The Ten Essentials" By GORP Hiking Expert Karen Berger http://gorp.away.com/gorp/activity/hiking/skills/teness.htm -- GORP is a website with a lot of good camping and hiking info on it.
- "The 14 Essentials – Ten Essentials plus four" http://www.backpacking.net/ten-essl.html -- A list of "14 essentials" with descriptions and commercial products.
- http://tennessee.sierraclub.org/broome/ten_essentials.htm -- The list the Tennessee Sierra Club uses for their trips along with other participant info.
- http://www.twohikers.org/Gear/TenEssentials.htm -- nice descriptions
- http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0403/d-outs.html -- simple list with pictures.
- http://www.daffodilvalleytimes.com/parks/state/essentials.html -- the concise list.
- "The Ten Essential Groups - An Updated Approach to Outdoor Safety" by John Shannon http://texas.sierraclub.org/dallas/page.asp?10essentialgroups -- This article breaks the essentials into groups or themes.
- http://www.wintercampers.com/wintercamperscom-home/gear-reviews/the-10-essentials/ -- A winter specific view of the 10 essentials.