

Choosing a Backpack

The Standard:

An internal frame pack with 4,000 to 5,000 cubic inches of capacity offers good versatility. Make sure the torso fits, then look for a firm hipbelt, curved shoulder straps that end just below your armpits, and enough clearance for your elbows and thighs.



Lid Pocket	Detaches and doubles as a hipsack or daypack.
Heavy Duty, Coated Fabric	Turns back thorns and raindrops. Stress points reinforced with super strong ripstop cloth.
Storm Collar	Extends the size of the pack for extra big loads.
Compression Straps	Nylon webbing belts around the sides and bottom compartment of an internal frame pack that cinch the pack's contents tight to provide a smoother, more stable ride and eliminate load-shifting. Also, good place to store trekking poles, tripod, or hang extra clothes.
Mesh Pockets	Give you quick access to snacks and water bottles.
Wicking Synthetic Fabrics	Fabric that typically lines the back panel (padding), hipbelt, and shoulder straps to move perspiration away from skin.
Load-Lifter Straps	Webbing straps connecting the top of a pack and the pack's shoulder straps that pull your load higher for a closer fit, more load control, and better balance.
Shoulder Straps	Curved anatomically so they don't slide or pinch neck.
Built-in Bladder	Many hikers have forsaken water bottles in favor of a hydration system, a water bladder with an attached drinking tube that hangs near (or clips to) a shoulder strap for easy sipping while you hike. Some pack makers incorporate hydration systems into their pack designs. These packs feature special pockets to hold the bladder and small, reinforced holes through which to feed the drinking tube.
Canted Hipbelt	The padded belt--usually well-contoured and a bit stiff--that lashes the pack to your hips. Canted belts adjust to several different angles to match hip shape and pivot or mimic wearer movement.
Back Padding	A contoured sheet of foam padding, often with a mesh lining, that forms the soft, breathable cushion between your back and the frame of an internal frame pack.

Variables:

Do you want water-bottle pockets or a bladder-ready pouch? This and other decisions about features will help you design the perfect pack.

For This Terrain	Frame Type	Look For These Features
Smooth trails	External	Adjustable torso, well-padded hipbelt
Bushwhacking	Internal	Narrow profile, minimal straps, larger capacity
Vertical	Internal	Squat profile, minimalist hipbelt

For This Trip Length	Size (cu. in.)	Look For These Features
Overnight	2,500 to 3,000	Single-stay or hoop, minimal harness and hipbelt, external lash straps for sleeping pad
Weekend	3,000 to 4,500	Stays and/or hoop, padded hipbelt and shoulder straps, compression straps on larger models for cinching small loads
Weeklong	4,500 to 6,000	Framesheet and stays, firm hipbelt and shoulder straps, load-lifter and lumbar straps, extension (or spindrift collar) on packbag, daypack-conversion lid
Expedition/ winter	6,000 +	Framesheet and stays, wide hipbelt with winter stiffener, panel- and top-loading access, large lid with daypack conversion, extra-large sleeping bag compartment, multiple lashing options

For These Uses and Preferences	Look For These Features
Tote skis, snowshoes, or tools (like a tripod, ice axe, shovel, ice-axe loops, and a shovel pocket/panel or fishing rod)	Ski or gear loops, side-compression straps, ice-axe loops, and a shovel pocket/panel
Need organization	Outside pockets, panel- and top-loading access, sleeping bag compartment