

HOW TO BUY A TENT

SIZE

Most tents featured here are for one, two or three people, based on how many could lie in a sleeping bag inside the tent. The bigger the tent, the heavier it will be.

DESIGN

Tents come in all different designs and shapes. Geodesic designs are the most stable as the poles cross one another, making them ideal for camping in winter or on mountains. Tunnel designs are lower in weight and are quite spacious, so they're best for backpacking where weight is the priority, but they are not so stable. Domes are very spacious but not as stable as a geodesic design, so they are ideal for valley use.

HEADROOM

To be sure you can sit up inside the tent, get a friend to measure your height when sitting and then compare this to the maximum internal height in the specification. Even better, you could try the tent for size in the shop!

PITCHING

Inner-pitched-first designs save weight and tend to be more stable as the inner and outer contribute to stability. Outer-pitched-first designs are better if pitching in the rain as you can put the outer up, get inside, strip off your wet gear and then put up the inner in the dry. When striking (taking down) the tent you can do the reverse – pack the inner away and get your waterproofs on before hauling down the outer in the rain and packing it away. Tents may also be described as 'quick-erect' or 'easy to pitch'. Ask for a demonstration so you can see for yourself.

FLYSHEET FABRICS

The big choice is between nylon and polyester. Nylon is best for small tents, where low weight is important. Polyester is best for large tents where dimensional stability is important. Both fabrics have good UV resistance, but generally the heavier the fabric, the longer it will last. Lightweight nylons are often treated with UV inhibitors to boost performance. Nylon tends to be more expensive than polyester, which is why polyester is sometimes used for smaller tents instead of nylon.

MIDGE NETS

Midge nets should be fitted to the outside of the inner tent doors so that you can open the door for ventilation without opening the midge net which would allow midges in.

PACKED SIZE

Be warned that just because a tent comes vacuum-packed into a tiny stuffsack it does not mean that it will pack into the same stuffsack when the tent is wet and your hands are cold. So try unpacking and repacking a tent before you buy it.

WEIGHT

Size and material quality affect the weight of the tent. When backpacking, the tent spends most of the day in your rucksack, so weight is very important. But if you camp in the valley from the back of the car, you can let the car take the strain.

DOORS

The external doors allow entry to the porch and the inner tent. But they also provide ventilation and act as a windbreak and a canopy when cooking. Ideally all zips should have double pullers so that the top or bottom of the door can be opened.

PORCH

This is the large area outside the inner tent but still under the cover of the flysheet. Your porch is ideal for storing wet gear as well as acting as a kitchen in wet weather. You need to make sure that you can open the door from the top and that there is enough space in the porch for your rucksacks and gear.

PEGS

Most tents come with fairly lightweight wire skewer-type pegs which are fine for general use. But more durable pegs are available for different types of terrain, and these can be purchased separately if needed.

INNER TENT

You sleep inside the inner tent, so it needs to be dry and spacious. There must be a gap between the inner and the flysheet, so that any condensation on the underside of the flysheet doesn't soak into the inner tent. If the inner and outer touch, avoid the tent as the inner will get very wet from condensation. Single-skin tents are very lightweight, but as they do not have a separate inner tent the occupants run the risk of coming into contact with condensation on the inside of the flysheet. Tents that allow you to leave the inner in place when you strike camp will be quicker and easier to pitch.

GROUNDSHEET

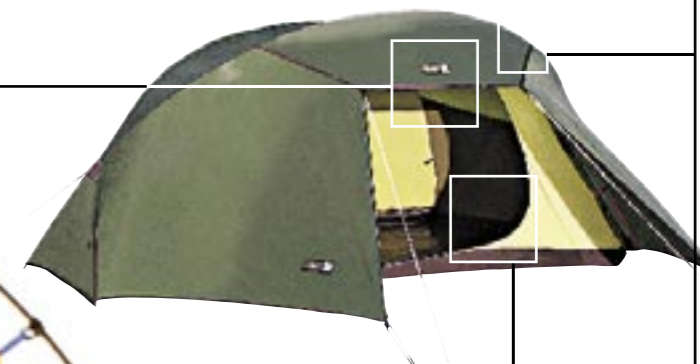
The groundsheet is the part you lie on inside the inner tent. In modern tents it is usually sewn in and seam-sealed to prevent it from leaking. The best groundsheets rise up the side of the inner like the sides of a bath tub.

POLES

Poles give the tent shape and stability, and some tents feature poles that are permanently sewn in place. Most tents have alloy poles with shock cords down the middle that allow them to be easily folded and opened. Hollow glass fibre poles will snap more easily than alloy ones, especially in cold weather, and they are 2.5 times heavier than alloy.

GUY LINES

A set of cords are usually provided to help hold the tent stable in high winds. Some tent designs need fewer guy lines than others, as stability can also be controlled by careful use of the poles.



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