



Photo : Claude Isabel

Winter backpacking on skis or snowshoes involves certain risks. This activity takes place in natural settings, which are consequently farther away from emergency services. This can cause delays in the event of incidents requiring immediate care or an evacuation.

Be sure you have the necessary skills and abilities and the appropriate equipment for practising this activity. You must be aware of the potential risks, which include the possibility of material damages and injuries. We advise you to read this document attentively.

You should always choose an excursion based on your abilities, fitness level in relation to outdoor activities, the area's topography and snow conditions. A trail's level of difficulty is classified in three levels: Easy, Intermediate and Difficult. You must take these classifications into consideration when choosing a trail.

For general information about the trails and maps, call 1 800 665-6527. For preparation tips, contact the Fédération québécoise de la marche (FQM), at 514 252-3157, toll-free at 1 866 252-2065, or visit their Web site at www.fqmarche.qc.ca.

It is important to note that winter backpacking on skis or snowshoes is not a guided activity, and that you are responsible for your own safety. There are no patrols on the trails. Expenses for search and rescue operations are your responsibility (make sure that your insurance covers these risks before leaving on your trip).

We suggest that you read the Careful by Nature brochure, available at our reception offices, and give a friend or relative a copy of your itinerary, making sure to let this person know your return date, with instructions to call emergency services (911) if you do not arrive on the expected date. To prevent false alarms, call this person as soon as you get back.

FORMALITY

Before setting off on a backpacking trail, get information about the characteristics of your hiking project (length, difference in height, services).

Read the documentation that comes with your reservation to become familiar with the details about the activity.

You must register at the facility's reception office and have your park entry fee pass and stay authorization on hand when you arrive for your trip. The circuit you take must respect the itinerary indicated on the reservation confirmation.

SECURITY AND COMMUNICATION

You must carry your backpack wherever you go. For safety reasons and to protect the natural environment, it is important to stay on the marked trails.

Tip

- *The isolation of certain territories limits the use of portable phones. Despite this fact, we recommend that you bring a communications device with you.*

WEATHER CONDITIONS

During the winter, weather conditions can change quickly from fair to difficult, especially in mountainous areas where it can get very windy. Temperatures may vary greatly in the same day.

The cold weather may increase the risk of hypothermia and death.

Tip

- *Before your departure, it is important to check snow conditions and the weather forecast for the area you will be visiting.*

CLOTHING

Make sure to wear appropriate clothing. Keep some dry clothing on hand for rest periods and for when you arrive at your place of accommodations.

The symptoms of frostbite are a pinching sensation and progressive numbness. Then there is a gradual loss of feeling until there is no sensation at all. The skin becomes white, icy and waxy. The first symptom of hypothermia is trembling. Heed the warning signs! If these symptoms appear, dry clothing, a warm, non-alcoholic beverage and food are effective remedies.

Tips

- *Take the multi-layer approach and avoid cotton clothing.*
- *Be sure that the wrists of your undergarments and your socks are not too tight to avoid restricting blood circulation to your hands or feet.*
- *Choose loose-fitting clothing that offers good protection for your lower back.*
- *Avoid putting your gloves on in the snow or putting your wet hands into dry gloves.*
- *Don't tie your shoes too tight, because physical effort can make your feet swell, and as a consequence they can get cold more quickly.*
- *Wearing gaiters not prevents snow from getting into your shoes.*
- *If your glasses get fogged up, this is usually a good indication that your body temperature has increased quickly. If this happens, you can reduce your speed, the number of layers of clothing, or simply ventilate your clothing to let some cool air in.*

DURING THE TREK

Itineraries of several days require a great deal of preparation. You must be ready to go in all kinds of conditions. A change in weather conditions or your physical condition can greatly affect the level of difficulty and your speed. In ideal conditions, an experienced group of skiers or snowshoers rarely goes faster than 2 km/h, including rest periods for meals, for example.

Itineraries are usually indicated with signs or markers. However, vegetation and snow cover can make them less visible. It is therefore essential for one person in the group to be familiar with reading topographical maps and using a compass and/or GPS.

Slopes that are comparable or superior to those of a stairway in a public building could be unstable, even in wooded areas. Watch out for avalanches.

Tips

- *Be sure to have the skills and fitness level required for the circuit you have chosen.*
- *Leave early, hike only in the daytime and with a group (min.2 people).*
- *Stay on the trails, don't take shortcuts. If you are not sure of your route, retrace your steps until you find a reference point (building, trail intersection, sign, marker, etc.).*
- *Check the map each time you come to a signalled intersection, a shelter or any spot that can be precisely located on the map.*
- *Respect your rhythm, stop or reduce your speed to appreciate your surroundings.*

- *Once every hour, take time to stop in a comfortable place to remove your backpack, eat and drink. Wear a down or fleece jacket while you snack.*
- *If you must travel on fresh snow, take turns opening the trail.*
- *Designate an experienced member of the group to close the path. This person will be responsible for staying with the slower group members.*

FOOD

If you eat well and stay hydrated, it will be easier to maintain a comfortable body temperature. This way, you will have more energy for your trip and be more alert when facing the unexpected.

Tips

- *Be sure that your food and beverages are easy to reach while you are backpacking.*
- *Drink a minimum of two litres of water per day.*
- *You can get water from various lakes, rivers and streams, but be aware that the water has not been checked for purity. For your safety, we recommend that you boil, treat, or filter the water. Sometimes water that seems good can contain harmful micro-organisms, which can cause gastro-intestinal problems.*
- *Access to a body of water can be hazardous. Always go with a friend and take the time to check the snow so that your feet will remain stable and dry.*
- *Never eat snow to hydrate yourself without boiling, treating or filtering it.*
- *Never take or be under the influence of drugs or drink alcoholic beverages while doing the activity.*

EQUIPMENT

No matter what the brand name, model or price of the technical equipment you use during your excursion, it is important to familiarize yourself with them before your trip.

You should choose your backpack based on the volume and weight of your baggage and your physique. Take the time to adjust your backpack, fitting it to the clothes you will be wearing during your trek.

Tips

- *A few days before leaving for your trip, simulate a departure by putting everything you are planning to take with you into your backpack. This is a good way to find out if everything fits into the backpack and how much weight you will have on your shoulders. This way, you can adjust your backpack and reduce the weight or volume if necessary.*
- *Ideally, a backpacking trip should be preceded by one or more day trips so that you can better assess your fitness level, and most importantly, make sure that your equipment is well adjusted.*
- *Don't leave with new shoes. Do a few day treks to break them in.*

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

You must bring all of their garbage out with them. This rule is in effect along the trails and in the huts.

The forest environment must be preserved, so do not cut down or mutilate trees.

During your trek, you will be travelling through the habitats of a number of wildlife species.

These animals are normally not very aggressive, but if you try to get too close to them, their survival instinct could translate into dangerous behaviour.

Tips

- *Avoid bringing useless packages that increase the weight and volume of your backpack, or baggage that could be transported by motorized vehicle.*
- *Use biodegradable soap and rechargeable batteries.*
- *Be sure to make the least possible impact on the environment during your stay.*

ACCOMMODATIONS

Huts are insulated buildings usually equipped with the following: beds, mattresses, tables, chairs, woodstove and firewood.

When a wooden platform is available, you must install your tent directly on top of it. The tent must be self-standing. You may need to tie down the tent with rope.

Fires are prohibited near huts, primitive camping platforms and along the trails.

WHAT TO BRING

FORMALITIES

Stay authorization	
Park entry fee pass	

SAFETY AND COMMUNICATION

Sound-signalling device or appliance (whistle)	
Communication device (Cellular or satellite telephone)	

FOOD

Bring enough food for the trip	
Canteen for drinking water	
Thermos for hot liquid	
Camp stove and fuel (naphtha recommended)	
Water filter	
Kitchen utensils and mess kit	

FOR THE TREK

Topographical map specific to your itinerary (in a watertight cover)	
GPS, extra batteries, instructions for use	
Compass with magnetic declination of the area visited	

ACCOMMODATIONS

Tent	
Insulating ground mattress	
Sleeping bag for temperatures below -15 °C	
Candle lantern (hut)	

METEROROLOGY

Thermometer	
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CLOTHING

Pants and jacket (external shell)	
Practical clothing (favour synthetics and multi-layering)	
Shoes for the camp, slippers	
Gloves and mittens	
Down jacket	
Tuques, balaclava	

TECHNICAL MATERIAL

Sun glasses	
Sun screen	
Lip balm	
Multi-purpose knife	
Expedition backpack	
Flashlight or headlamp and batteries	
First-aid kit	
Waterproof matches	
Survival kit	
Personal items (toilet paper)	
Poles	
Skis or snowshoes	

ENVIRONMENT

Biodegradable soap	
Bags for carrying out your garbage	
Rechargeable batteries	