Kayaking Tent Buyer's Guide

There is nothing more invigorating than spending time outdoors, doing a little fire-gazing to pass the nights. In order to ensure that the fun goes on uninterrupted, you need to make some key decisions. In the outdoors, the need for shelter is a prime need for man and animal alike. To enjoy all that nature has to offer, a good shelter – specifically a tent – is a necessity. In the event of rain, cold, wind and insect invasions, a reliable tent will keep your camp a happy one.

There are various types of tents on the market, which come in different shapes and styles. How do you choose just one? Among the tent choices out there, the task of choosing one can be daunting. In order for you to make an educated selection, you must first be familiar with tent features and design. Hopefully this guide will help you in making that decision.

Determine When and Where You Will Use Your Tent

When you first venture out to buy a tent, one of the first things you should determine is its primary use: when you will use it and where. Generally, there are four different usage groups for tents, which we have detailed below:

- **Summer and Screen**

Tents of this category primarily provide shade from the hot sun. They are particularly useful for summer outings and family-type camping as they are large and roomy. The roof acts as a covering against drizzle and rains, while the mesh panels along the peripherals are designed to keep a light breeze flowing through the structure. They are also effective in keeping insects out. These types come in many styles and shapes. There are even those that are entirely made of screen, which are ideal as a bug-proof shelter.

Though summer and screen tents provide good ventilation for the summer months, they are rather chilly to use during the spring and fall. Also, models that do not come with a complete fly increase the chances of water leakage during rains and storms.

- **Three-Season**

These types of tents take into consideration all elements of the three seasons: spring, summer and fall. Three-season tents offer multiple ventilation options, including mesh ceiling panels, windows and wall openings. They are usually fitted with a durable rain fly which can be installed quickly in case of sudden rains. These flies are effective in keeping damp winds at bay, and insulate the tent during cold spring and fall evenings.

Three-season tents also feature those that can convert to winter tents. These models include a zippered nylon panel that acts as a block-off on all the ventilation panels. While the three-season tent appears to be the most fully-featured and versatile, it is heavier than a summer tent due to the additional panels and zipper.

- **Winter / Mountaineering**

These types of tents, such as the Eureka K-2 XT Outfitter, are design to keep out harsh weather conditions at high altitudes. These come with an ultra-sturdy rain fly that can be battened down and attached with multiple guy lines. They do not have as many windows and ventilation provisions as the three-season tents, specifically because they are meant to withstand cold temperatures. They also typically come with an assortment of high-strength poles made from aluminum, which are fitted to secure the tent firmly.

When considering the purchase of a mountaineering tent, you should first determine whether you will use it under the severe conditions for which it was

intended. If not, it would be an unnecessary purchase with many superfluous features. Using this type of tent during the warmer months of the year will result in stuffy accommodations, especially with the heavy fly. The tent will mostly likely be damp inside due to insufficient ventilation, which makes it prone to mold. This type of tent is also the heaviest in the lot, being that it has more bulky material.

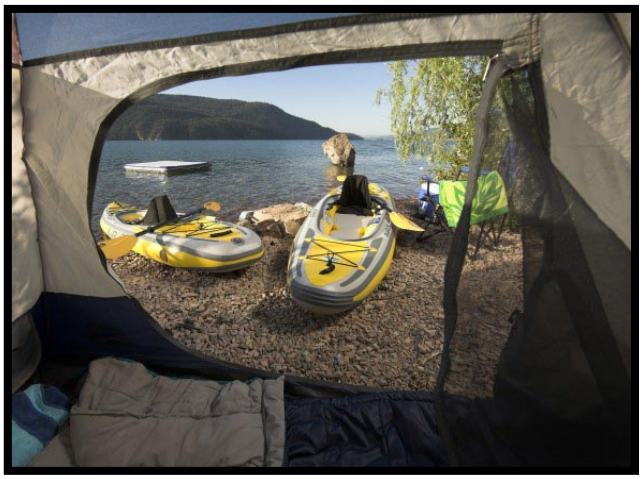
- **Outfitter**

Designed for use as an outback lodge or a hunting expedition base camp, outfitter tents are generally for use in forest, riverside, lakeside or wooded regions. These types of tents will usually feature an internal pole framework, and are chiefly used as a portable cabin of sorts rather than a mere sleeping tent. The guy lines on this tent hold out nearer the vertical side walls, allowing for added headroom. The windows are minimal, but accessories make up for them. These tents may come with removable floor panels to accommodate a wood-burning stove. Among the reputed outfitter tents are the Wall Tents.

Size and Weight

What is your preferred size and weight for the tent? This is important as one of the biggest factors of your tent is portability: You have to be able to carry it to your camp site. Unless you are a car camper, you can't have a tent that's too bulky.

Size



To determine the size of a tent that you need, first determine how many it should house at one time. You must assess the floor dimensions of each model, especially since the “main” ratings vary and are often misleading. (The man system is a rating system based on how many can lie on the full-size sleeping pads that come with the tent. These are typically 20 to 25 inches in width.) Since size is relative to who will actually use the tent, you cannot rely on the “man” system. The system implies that you will be sleeping right

next to your tent mate. In a few models of mountaineering tents, two-man models mean that your sleeping bag slightly overlaps your fellow camper. Unless you are comfortable with this, consider a larger model with a bigger capacity. Finally, assess the tent's layout and floor plan. Some may really only just accommodate sleeping bags and sleeping space, others include built-in nooks and areas for gear storage.

Weight

Unless you are going car camping or have additional help to carry all your gear, you must consider the weight of your tent. If you intend to carry the tent with your backpack and a week-long supply of clothes, food and gear; you will be carrying quite a significant load. In this scenario, an ideal tent would be the XPG Tent, which weighs a mere 5 pounds for the two-man model.

You should compare different tents and determine which offer the best value in terms of weight and size. A lot of three-season models come with multiple doors and convertible windows, but remember that each zipper and piece of material brings with it a couple of additional pounds. While a four-man model looks like it has more ample room, it would be more cumbersome to carry all that extra weight.

Tent Styles and Designs

In the last few years, tents have undergone several modifications and changes. We listed down some of the most popular styles.

- **Umbrella**

An umbrella type tent is generally used for family-type events during the summer. It features a lot of headroom and near-vertical side walls, making them quite roomy. They also make for great for ventilation, especially if you intend to make your tent a cabin-like space.

- **A-Frame**

The A-frame is one of the original designs for tents. It is easy to set up, lightweight, and generally inexpensive. It basically consists of a rectangular floor, sloping sides, and a ridgepole. While highly-convenient to tote around, this design has low headroom and minimal elbow room. A modified version, such as the Boundary Waters, is an improvement on the original A-frame. It features a center hoop pole

or diagonal center poles which allow the side walls to curve outward. This allows for increased interior space within the tent as well as stronger lateral stability, making for a sturdier tent.

- **Dome**

The dome tent is another version that started out as a true dome but evolved into tents with varied curved shapes. These types are made with 2 to 8 tent poles that are flexible and able to cross over one another in order to support the tent fabric. This results in more internal space within the tent, around 50 percent more than A-frame tents. Because the walls of the dome type are curved, they can more easily shed off rain and snow. The increased number of poles likewise increases the structure's overall stability. There are, however, a few three-season tents that have only two poles crossing over each other, and others with a third or fourth pole to increase stability, like the Quad Pole. There are even heavy-duty mountaineering tents that use up to eight poles in a geodesic dome form.

Dome tents are typically free-standing, meaning that they do not need to be staked down at first. This enables you to position the tent in your ideal location before you stake it down. You can stake the tent during mild weather conditions to keep the floor taut; during windy conditions, you must securely guy and stake the tent to avoid it from tipping over and blowing away. One advantage of a freestanding tent is that it is easy to dismantle. All you need to do is pull up the stakes, pick up the tent, shake any dirt off and fold it away.

Vestibules

In camping, vestibules act as front or back porches. They are created by extending the rain fly and they are merely a covering or awning-type feature. They provide extra room for shade, for storing packs, boots and other gear, especially if they are too muddy to bring into the sleeping quarters of the tent. Some vestibules are more elaborate than just an awning, featuring additional support poles as if creation another small second room. Vestibules are convenient as well for ventilation during

rainy days. They provide coverage for tent doors as well so that you can leave the tent door unzipped even during rains and not get wet.

The vestibule should not be used for eating or preparing food, especially if you are in an area that is frequented by bears and other preying wildlife. All food-related items, including your backpack, should be stored away from your tent. If possible, hang these items about ten feet in the air. You should also not eat in the tent, especially in bear country, as you could attract unwanted visitors!

You should also not cook in the vestibule as it poses risks of fire. If ever you need to cook under a vestibule, such as when it is raining, you must provide substantial ventilation. Since you are going to be handling fire, you will want to avoid any part of your tent catching on fire. In the event that you need to cook in your tent, do all priming and lighting of your stove outside your tent first. Remember also that, when cooking fried food, small particles such as oil and debris will attach themselves to the tent fabric. This not only creates a cleaning problem but also a fire hazard.

Poles

In tent design, poles are the foundation that holds up your tent. Most models will use shock-corded poles that enable the tent to be disassembled easily and stored away. In some models, the poles are made from tubular fiberglass. These are not expensive and perform just as well as conventional metal poles. Of course, over time, these become brittle, and pose a problem during severe cold conditions.

Family and cabin-style tents make use of steel poles for their strength and sturdiness. These, however, are heavy, and so are usually common in “car camping” situations so that they can be transported in the trunk.

The most expensive yet lightweight option are aluminum poles. They offer great strength as well. If you are considering going into the backcountry, you would find these types of poles beneficial to you, especially because you can conserve energy in carrying them. It should be noted, however, that aluminum poles are not created equally, and each have varying alloys and strength-to-weight ratios. A 6000 series alloy, for example, is acceptable for most camping situations, but a more severe and harsh camping condition calls for a 7000 series alloy, which provides additional strength.

Tent Fabrics and Coatings

You may find yourself confused at some of the numbers you see on tent specifications. These relate to the waterproof coating on the fabric of the tent. Just what do these number combinations mean? They actually refer to the thickness of the coating on the fabric, but there is slightly more to it than just that. The numbers do not refer to the literal thickness of the coating, but rather the result of a water column test that has been conducted over the polyurethane-coated fabric. During these tests, a section of this fabric is made subject to intense pressure by a column of water. The fabric is given a rating based on the height of the water column where three water droplets form on the fabric surface. In this case, 1000 mm is a modest value in rating waterproofing. However, if you intend to use your tent in wet conditions, opt for a value no less than 1500 mm. Some floors may be rated higher, such as a 3000 mm-floor model. You don't actually need values any higher than 3000 as the material is prone to break down once it has been run through a machine to achieve a value this high.

In brief terms, these are the basic components of choosing the right tent for your needs. The information in this guide hopefully has assisted you in making the best choice from among the many models of tents out there.