



Photos by Animax

Come! Sit! Stay!

Call of the Wild! Ruffing It...

Taking your dog(s) out on a camping trip, hike or other sports adventure takes planning and packing extra gear. Whether backcountry skiing with a small dog in a backpack, or bushwalking and camping through forest and over mountains, there are a variety of preparations that need to be undertaken.

Like you, your pet needs to be in condition for the trip and not be subjected to excessive exercise and rough terrain if it's not used to it. Before heading off to the bush, make sure your dog can easily follow and keep up with you by taking it to a more local park. And also check where you are going to be certain dogs are allowed as national and some state parks forbid it.

Most important is the dog's feet. In winter, snowballs can form in between the paws while in spring, it can be mudballs or abraded pads climbing rocks in the summer that bring a dog to a halt. In these cases, shoes are the answer and there are a variety of dog booties that do the job.

They're not meant to be fashionable but protective and you may need to consult an outfit that specialises in ruff wear for advice to match the foot protector to the environment to be encountered. Generally ballistic nylon is best because it moves with the foot instead of heavier rubber booties, but the pads of the shoes should be substantial enough not to wear down and insulate.

Matching the pet to the clothing needed for the weather is important too. Whereas cooler climbs and climes suggest a coat is needed, hotter hikes may need more than a wet bandana to cool off the dog. So you may want to look at cooling vests that retain moisture, but some of these can add weight, retain smells and foster mould.

Canine backpacks may look as dorky as doggie raincoats but they have their purpose. Taking a dog along on a camping trip or day hike requires you carry food and water for them. Some of the better backpacks can easily accommodate this minimal extra weight. But we don't suggest you use them to carry your adult beverages!

Though a collar may seem suitable-with the appropriate tag with phone numbers including state codes-harnesses are often best to take, even as a spare in case the collar gets lost, chewed, torn or hooked off a tree limb. That way too, you can have a rope for tie-out when picnicking, lounging or play time without the dog going astray or charging after wildlife without getting necked. A harness also serves double duty in restraining a dog while driving. But take an extra leash just in case of breakage.

Think bedding, towelling and clean up in ticking off the boxes of what to bring. Your mutt mate will need some comfort for sleeping and you don't want it clawing an air mattress so think light blanket that will dry out easily. A towel for drying off your pal or cleaning it if dirty is a godsend. And when it comes to cleaning up poo, it's a lot easier to use small paper sandwich bags to scrape up the remains and dispose of them environmentally by burying.

Toys and treats are a must. Something to alleviate boredom and fetch-like a Kong stuffed with treats-can make the trip a joy, especially if it floats to toss into lakes or the surf. And with treats, it's best to bring a variety of larger biscuit type bones

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for energy as well as smaller bits for rewards, both packed in ziplock bags.

For water and feed bowls, the easiest space-efficient way to do this that also allows watertight storage of food is to take two identical plastic milk cartons-at least two litre size, and cut them so that they can be flipped over to form a cube that can have kibbles packed within them.

You'll never think of it in advance but always pack a first aid kit for your pet. It's the small cuts, abrasions and insect bites that, unless cleaned and covered, can infect easily. And if you are going to an area that you are not familiar with, it's a good idea to slip a note inside the kit with the contacts and addresses of nearby vets with after hours numbers, just in case. And it may seem extreme, but a snake identification chart will not go astray and packs easily. Know the symptoms of snakebite and be prepared.

Your pet should already be prepared for ticks with either medication or spray and collar, but you might want to take some extra spray along in case of excessive rain or swimming.

Last things to remember are copies of registration papers, pet id and inoculation or medical records to stash in the car. Temporary tags with your mobile number and phone number of where you are staying is also a good idea.

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