

CW Backpacking Trips: Camper Frequently Asked Questions

What does hygiene look like on backpacking trips?

This is one of the most common questions we receive. Will I be able to shower? How do I go to the bathroom in the “woods?” While it is true that there will be no access to showers for campers in the backpacking program, we teach and encourage maintaining high levels of personal hygiene and cleanliness. On the first day, the backpacking staff will teach and coach all of the campers how to maintain proper care of themselves in the backcountry. This training includes how to dress in layers, keeping up regular habits such as brushing their teeth, brushing their hair, washing their face and body, and of course always washing hands.

Depending on the area of the expedition, some campsites provide backcountry privies or drop toilets; other places require individuals to dig a cat hole to dispose of their human waste. Again, instructors/counselors thoroughly explain these practices at the beginning of the trip and make sure to follow up with campers and ensure they are doing well and staying clean/healthy.

Extra instruction will be given to female campers on how to manage a period in the backcountry while still feeling good and staying clean as well as techniques to avoid any sort of infection. Female campers are encouraged to bring the normal supplies they would use during a period...even if she doesn't think it will occur on the trip.

We encourage *all campers* to bring a small number of face/ baby wipes and/or a spare bandana to aid in personal hygiene. What sometimes is a source of anxiety at the beginning of the trip becomes a laughing matter and small achievement by the end of the trip

How many miles of hiking do groups do in a day? What are the elevation and activity levels like?

The number of miles and terrain covered in a day and throughout the week depends on the group's age, gender, and experience. Much of the route and activity levels are up to the discretion of Camp Wojtyla's staff based on their assessment of the group's abilities. We seek to keep each trip within the balance of giving campers a healthy challenge to find growth and self-actualization while also not being too difficult where anyone feels pushed too far physically. Of course, we want to keep plenty of time for our daily programming of faith and fun along the way. Usually, the groups end up hiking about 3-6 hours a day covering anywhere from 3-8 miles. The camper backpacks will likely weigh between 30 to 50 lbs depending on age, how much personal gear a camper brings, and expedition length (6 or 9 days). On summit attempt days or when going over high mountain passes, groups can go as high as 13,000 feet above sea level but normally the groups camp at elevation levels between nine and ten thousand feet and hike between 8,500 and 11,500 feet. Make sure to check out the trip area descriptions on our website under [“learn more”](#) for more information.

Food and Water - What do they eat out there?

We prioritize nutrition and keeping campers well-fed, happy and energized so they have the ability to hike but also to enjoy the trip. On these backpacking trips, the groups carry all of the food that they need for the trip on their backs, weighed and measured out ahead of time. Most of this food is non-perishable such as rice, beans, pasta, lentils, dried potatoes, oats, flours, oil, nuts, and spices. These get turned into meals such as mac and cheese, loaded mashed potatoes, pizza, pancakes, hashbrowns, quesadillas, granola, and much more! We also send out some vegetables as well as summer sausage, tuna, and other meats and cheeses that can keep well on the trail. Groups receive plenty of high energy snacks to eat throughout the day such as trail mix, granola bars, goldfish, dried fruit, pretzels, and a little candy for that extra boost. We provide mixes for hot drinks such as tea and hot chocolate to enjoy in the mornings or the evenings when it is colder outside, as well as lemonade mix.

Campers do all of the cooking for themselves under the instruction of their camp counselors. Oftentimes campers leave our trips stating that learning to cook and or eating the food was one of their favorite parts. These skills can continue to be used at home! The large groups are split into smaller “cook groups” of 3-5 people that cook over a single burner stove, all in the same “kitchen” area.

As for water, all of the groups get their water from fresh water sources in the mountains such as running mountain rivers and streams or high alpine lakes. Regardless of the water source, the groups ALWAYS treat the water with an industry-standard chemical treatment (iodine or chlorine-based) to remove any potential contaminants.

**If you are concerned about water treatment methods or your child has food allergies, please contact the backcountry programs coordinator: bnadler@camp-w.com*

Will I be able to contact my child/family? What if something goes wrong on the trip or back at home? How do you deal with accidents/injuries/family emergencies?

When your child is on a backpacking trip you will not be able to contact him or her directly until the end of the trip. If you would like to write your child letters, you can give them to the staff at check-in and the instructors will hand these out to campers on a daily basis. The backpacking group instructors DO have contact with our Basecamp staff, medical support, and any necessary outside authorities through the use of satellite phones (our groups travel in remote locations and do not typically have cell service). Our Basecamp staff is able to contact the backpacking groups in case of an emergency; if you had a family emergency we would be able to notify your child’s group and remove him or her from the field if necessary.

While at first in our age of constant communication this lack of direct communication between parent/child may seem a bit strange or cause a little anxiety, in fact, it is a very beneficial and necessary part of the trips. The disconnection from phones and the “outside world” for a few days allows the campers to truly be present and experience the wilderness around them, bond with their group members, and encounter God in His “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). If a camper is homesick the

staff has been trained on how to appropriately respond and walk the camper through their experience. Staff also encourage campers to write letters that they can share with their family when they get home. **Please note that no camper is allowed to have a cell phone on their trip. Staff will collect camper phones at the beginning of trips and return them to the campers at the end on the last day of their camp session.*

What about bears?

Our groups do travel in black bear habitat and make sure to take proper precautions to avoid significant bear encounters. All instructors have experience in “bear country” and receive high levels of training in how to travel and camp in bear country, and how to respond in the rare case of a bear encounter. They share much of this information with the campers. The groups always travel with bear spray as a precaution and make sure to camp in designated camp areas. We store all food and scented toiletries in bear-resistant canisters, and the groups make sure to sleep and cook in separate places at camp. Our staff follow all of the suggested and required practices of the land areas where we operate and are always seeking to stay aware of any new bear research or information on trips and back at base camp.

Photos

The groups go to some truly amazing locations and we hope your child can have pictures of his or her memories to share with others and look back on. We encourage you to send your camper with a small digital camera or a disposable camera to bring home after the trip. **Please note that any sort of cell phone is not allowed to be used as a camera.** The instructors do their best to take photos and share them with camper groups at the end of a trip or the end of the summer season through an online photo-sharing website such as Google Photos; however, we cannot guarantee that this will happen on every trip. The media team from CW’s basecamp attempts to hike out to every group at least once to take some photos of their group in the backcountry; again we cannot guarantee these photos for every trip due to the remote locations these groups travel to but know that we will make sincere efforts to capture photos on every trip.

What does a “day in the life” look like? How about a week in the life of a backpacker?

While every day on a CW backpacking trip is slightly different, most days generally follow this pattern: wake up, cook breakfast and have a time for prayer and reflection, pack up camp and hike on the trail for a couple of hours to the next destination (stopping along the way for breaks, views, activities), get into camp in the afternoon and have time for rest/leisure and group games & activities, cook dinner, share spiritual programming and discussions in the evenings (around a fire when permitted). Some days a Priest is able to hike out to the groups to celebrate Mass and hear confessions, usually once per trip, plus the first and last days in town (check in/closing ceremony). Every day the groups incorporate various ways of praying. Throughout the week some highlights to look forward to are a summit day where the groups attempt to climb a large mountain peak (11,500-13,500 feet), Solo time where the campers have an extended time for prayer and reflection in the wilderness, white water rafting at the

end of the 9-day trips, and a layover day at the same campsite. The campers are encouraged to be active participants and learn new skills such as stepping up to roles of leadership throughout the week, working on their map reading and navigation, cooking and other skills throughout the week.

Do we need special gear? Can I rent gear?

Please refer to the provided [gear list](#) for your camper's backpacking gear needs. The three most important things are: a **good backpacking backpack, warm & compact sleeping bag, and waterproof raincoat**. For the backpack, 65 liters is the minimum size that we require, but you are welcome to bring a larger bag (as long as it fits the camper). We recommend you practice packing before the trip; after putting (stuffing) your personal belongings inside the backpack, there should still be about one-third of the space left in the bag for group gear and food. Another important item is the sleeping bag; this bag should be insulated for temperatures as low as 20°F and should be somewhat small and lightweight so that it can be packed inside a backpacking backpack. Down or synthetic fillings are both fine. Another very important piece of gear is the rain jacket; this needs to be *waterproof* not just water-resistant!

All gear should fit inside a backpack, with the exception of some foam sleeping pads and water bottles that can be stored on the outside of the pack; we ask that you do not plan to pack any other gear on the outside of your backpack. The instructors will give a thorough demonstration and coach campers on the first day and throughout the week on how to properly pack and carry their backpacks. If you're not sure about specific items feel free to contact the backcountry programs coordinator (bnadler@camp-w.com).

Please note that we also offer a new rental option for some of the backpacking staples that you may not have or wish to buy for one trip. Please visit [this link](#) for more information. We ask that rental requests are placed by April 15. You may place requests after this time, but we cannot guarantee them. Please do not show up to check-in expecting to be able to rent gear at the last minute.

What is the group size and guide ratio? Who are the instructors?

All of the camp Backcountry Expeditions go out with **three** experienced guides who serve as both the technical and spiritual guides for the trip. Most have their Wilderness First Responder certification, an 80-hour course on handling emergency response and medical scenarios in the backcountry (we REQUIRE at least one WFR per trip). Most of our guides have served at CW for more than one season and/or have worked for other outdoor education programs professionally. We only hire seasoned guides who have experience leading trips in the wilderness and have undergone training in leadership, risk management, wilderness medicine, emergency response, and of course spiritual and adventure programming. Most are upperclassmen in college or college graduates.

Due to permitting regulations, group sizes are capped at 12 people and so most groups have nine campers making our staff to camper ratio 1:3 max. The campers are split into smaller tent and cooking groups of 3-5 campers, but the entire group stays together throughout the week.