



Rainy day camping survival guide

'How to make camping in the wet fun'

A bit of preparation is the golden rule to surviving a few wet days. While none of us expect rain on our holiday, it's worth having a few things up your sleeve just in case. Especially when children are concerned. Books, playing cards, a bag of plastic animals, flour and a cooking pot and plenty of firelighters. These are the things that make a wet day a fun day anyway.

The first thing during a bout of wet weather is to ensure there's a big sheltered area to play under. Tents and camper trailers are great for sleeping but too confined for all day use. Big plastic tarps are cheap and light and always worth having along. Add a few ropes, a couple of adjustable poles (branches or trees will do) and it's easy to construct a large covered area. One way of doing this is to string a rope between two trees, making the peak of the shelter when the tarp is spread across it evenly, and then peg, tie or use rocks to hold the edges down on two sides. Build it with your tent or camper trailer nestled under one end and it'll be even more useful.

Plastic tarps are pretty strong but they do rip easily. Regular campers place an old tennis ball with a hole in it on top of the poles to protect the sheet as it flaps up and down with the breeze. Use a folded shirt or rag or something if you haven't any tennis balls. One of the best accessories any camper can carry is elastic ('ocky') straps. These can be used to hook down the sides of the sheet or tie the padding in place.

Once the shelter is erected it's usually necessary to dig a shallow trench around the perimeter to drain the rain away. The plastic 'roof' doesn't have gutters so when the rain's coming down hard it'll need somewhere to go without little trickles forming.

Even if the ground was wet to start with, once the rain is deflected, it'll soon dry out. Especially if there's a fire pit nearby. Fire? But it's raining!

Keeping the fire burning

A fire is possible even on the wettest days as long as there's a supply of firewood. However it's necessary to get a big heat build up and unless there's some dry firewood around the camp site (try digging deeper into the wood pile) one of the best methods is to use a bag of barbecue fuel and plenty of firelighters. If you can choose a place for the fire, make it pretty close to the shelter but away from the tent. Build up a dirt base (or

timber if there's enough) rather than digging out a hole, surround it with rocks and build the fire a bit higher than the surrounding ground. Then place the wet wood around the fire so it's drying as the barbecue beads build up heat.

Building a shelter, finding wood and getting a fire going can take most of the day but it's well worth it. Attitude is everything. Treat getting comfortable despite the rain as a challenge rather than a chore and it'll soon be fun.

Cooking in the rain

Rainy camping days are perfect times to practice camp cooking. For the children, this is an excuse to mix flour, salt and water and play at making bread. A camp oven is invaluable for damper and biscuit making once that fire's happening but damper can be made in anything from a biscuit tin to a billy, especially when there's enough time to get it wrong. Now's the time to experiment so a packet of raisins, chocolate chips or anything you can think of can be used to create a unique damper. And the best thing is that the dirty dishes can be put outside, in the rain.

Popcorn is another camp favourite because it takes no space and can be made in almost anything. For something really different, and a superb snack with a drink, try using fresh garlic and butter in the mix.

Whether cooking or setting up camp, imagination is the key to surviving a few wet days camping. Try wood carving, there's plenty of time. Some small boats with leaf sails can keep the kids amused for hours, especially if they're racing in the trench next to the shelter. Bamboo is wonderful stuff if there's any handy. Try making a flute, or a water pendulum or even a blow pipe for tissue pellets.

Kids love playing with twigs, leaves and pebbles. Under that shelter it's possible to build a whole mini village, complete with tunnels, huts and fences. Then create stories around the scene using twig people or small, carved figures. Paper mache - flour, water and newspaper - can be used to make almost anything.

Although we're conditioned these days to staying inside when it rains, the fact is playing in the rain is fun. Don't let the rain put you off a Country side walk, a stroll down the beach or a spot of fishing. With some rain gear, an umbrella or draped in plastic bags, there's nothing you can't have a crack at - for a few hours at least. And with a good fire pit burning and a dry sleeping bag to cuddle up in, getting warm again is part of the fun.

This modern world rarely gives us time to do absolutely nothing. Embrace a rainy day camping and enjoy it for all it's worth. Chances are it'll be the least hectic part of the whole holiday! And if all else fails, try going for a drive.