

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For decades, thru-hiking has captured the imaginations of people everywhere—and it's easy to see why. Just picture it: spending consecutive months hiking end-to-end on one of the world's many coveted long trails, traversing hundreds or thousands of miles of remote wilderness in pursuit of an achievement so epic that it can feed your soul for the rest of your life. Such an adventure can leave you with not only memories but also the skills and confidence to enjoy backpacking as a hobby for years to come.

Every trail is unique in scenery and character. Each one holds secret beauties—hidden away beyond high mountain passes and thundering streams—that the rest of the world will never know. But all long trails share the same tight-knit hiking community, the same spirit of adventure and self-determination, and the same opportunities for physical achievement, introspection, and spiritual development.



In a fast-paced world scarred by political, environmental, and public health crises, thru-hiking offers an enticing chance to slow down and reflect. Whether you crave the solitary company of the natural world or a deep bond with fellow hikers, the trail can provide that.

Yes, thru-hiking is pretty dang wonderful. The only problem? It can get stupidly expensive. Money (or lack thereof) is one of the biggest [reasons](#) people fail to complete, or sometimes even start, their thru-hikes. According to the PCTA¹: “Running out of money is one of the most commonly cited reasons for why people quit the trail.” It’s amazing how much cold, hard cash it takes to finance a lifestyle in which all you do is hike and sleep in the dirt.

¹ Thru-hiker FAQ. (2019, June 07). Retrieved August 31, 2020, from <https://www.pcta.org/discover-the-trail/thru-hiking-long-distance-hiking/thruhiker-faq/>

For one thing, you'll need enough money to cover your basic living expenses back home *and* on the trail while you're gone. It takes a while to thru-hike, and you have to, you know, *actually leave your house and go live on the trail for a few months*. That means you'll be out of work and probably without income for at least a chunk of the year.

On the financial bright side, that means no rent or utilities—woo-hoo! Unless you're a homeowner with property taxes and a mortgage payment to contend with, in which case...yikes. Meanwhile, other living expenses, like loan payments and insurance premiums, will keep piling up while you're gone. All of this is on top of trail expenditures like your hiker hunger-fueled, 4,000-plus-calories-per-day grocery bill. So yeah. There's that.

Also, you're definitely going to need to set aside additional funds in case of an emergency. Unforeseen family crisis on the other side of the country? Better make sure you can afford bus fare to get back home. Stuck in a motel room for a week because [insert random injury/natural disaster here]? That bill can skyrocket fast. Did a marauding band of chipmunks chew up your tent last night? Yay, get ready to fork over a few hundred for a replacement.

Finally, you're going to want to have enough money to make your journey comfortable and fun. For most people, thru-hiking is one of the most physically and mentally challenging endeavors they'll undertake in their lifetimes. It's already hard enough without extreme financial pressure making it even more difficult.

It's nice, after all, to have enough money to get out of the elements every now and then, grab a hot shower, eat a square meal, and sleep in a real bed. Small material comforts like these can make a big difference in your emotional state during a thru-hike, because—other than your friendships with other hikers—they're just about the *only* comforts you'll have out there.

And speaking of friendships, picture this: you've scraped together *just* enough money to get yourself started on the long trail of your dreams. It's everything you ever wanted it to be, and you think you can swing it financially, as long as you're careful. Sure, you might be destitute by the time you finish—but that's a problem for another day.

Along the way, you form a close bond with fellow thru-hikers who share your passion for the trail. They're more than just friends: they're tramily (trail family). Everyone in your cozy little group seems to have more financial wiggle room than you do. They spend money freely, not thinking twice about going out to dinner or the movies while in town. They're comfortable renting a hotel room for a break from trail life from time to time.

Every time a member of your tramily suggests some expensive town escapade, you're faced with a choice: go along with the fun and watch your limited financial resources dwindle, or stay behind feeling lonely and sad while all your friends go out for a good time without you. Bottom line: it sucks to be the broke-est hiker in the group.

The moral of this story is that having plenty of funds available while on trail is a really big deal for a thru-hiker. Sure, it's true that money can't buy happiness, and it also can't buy you the grit and determination you'll need to make it as a thru-hiker. But it *can* make your hike safer and more enjoyable, and it can buy you the tools that will set you up for success.

Because there's another, often overlooked expense that we haven't even talked about yet. I know what you're thinking. *What the heck?!* Unfortunately, it's true.

On top of all the other pricey nonsense we just discussed, you'll also need to budget for gear. It takes a surprising amount of *stuff* in order to survive on the trail for months on end, and that

stuff comes with a hefty price tag. Before you even set foot on your trail of choice, you'll need to put together enough cash to invest in crap like a tent, pack, sleeping bag, and water filter.

Most people spend between \$1,000 and \$3,000 to completely outfit themselves with gear for a thru-hike—and that's not even counting the cost of on-trail gear purchases. That's a lot of cash to fork over before the adventure even properly begins. For many people, it poses a significant barrier to the pursuit of thru-hiking.

Fortunately, it *is* possible to do it for less. You can absolutely get all the gear you need without compromising on quality, *and* without bankrupting yourself in the process. You can successfully complete an entire thru-hike on a shoestring budget if you play your cards right.

Gear is a big and important piece of the puzzle. It makes up for a big portion of your total budget and is crucial to the success of your hike. There's an art and a science to budget gear buying, and it's important for aspiring thrifty hikers to master it. It's the subject of this book.

Think of this e-book as a \$7 investment in your future. By following the advice in these pages, you'll be able to save hundreds of dollars on gear. In the following pages, we'll discuss how to keep your budget *and* pack weight under control by embracing the spirit of minimalism, how to get top quality stuff without breaking the bank, and even how to save money once you hit the trail.

Bonus Alert!

At the end of this book, we're giving you access to a private list of discounts from some of the most respected brands in backpacking. We're confident you'll get more than your money's worth

in the form of tried and true tips for saving money before, during, and after the trail, but even if you know everything there is to know already, these discounts are worth the price of admission.

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