



After doing some of the hardest treks in Australia and in Europe, I would not leave home without a pair of gaiters in my pack. If you anticipate rivers, snow, mud, scrub or rocky ground - then you probably need some protection in the form of gaiters. Think of them as armour for your legs!

Gaiters are panels that seal the vulnerable upper section of your boots from the unwanted entry of water, snow, pebbles, or debris. They also protect your footwear, clothing and legs against scratches and abrasion.



Lace on a pair of gaiters if you know you'll need some extra protection on the trail. Image: Daniel Gorman

I have seen fellow trekkers with ravaged legs and waterlogged feet that would have swapped their last packet of two-minute noodles for a pair of gaiters. Modern designs are typically light, tough and definitely worth packing for that first, or fiftieth big trek.

The benefits of gaiters

1. Protects your boots from waterlogging

It's not nice to have to trek in soggy, squidgy boots. Gaiters will assist with preventing waterlogging of those new (or old) boots and socks.

2. Keeps out debris

Trudging along with a stone in your shoe isn't the most comfortable or pleasant way to enjoy a hike. A pair of gaiters will help to prevent the entry of stones, pebbles and sticks from getting kicked up into your boots when you're on the trail.



3. Mud protection

Gaiters are pretty much mandatory for wading through deep mud - like the kind you find on the South Coast and Overland tracks in Tasmania.



You'll need some help shielding your legs if you're crossing water and mud. Image: Sea to Summit

4. Prevents scratches and abrasions on your legs

They'll protect your legs from things sticking out along the path, and will also increase the longevity of your footwear and pants as they won't get damaged as easily.

5. Barrier against snakes and leeches

Unfortunately, snakes and leeches can be prevalent in some areas, but wearing a pair of gaiters will provide a barrier that will help protect you against bites.

6. Good for use on snow slopes

Gaiters are also excellent for wearing in the snow, and when descending down scree slopes.



Gaiter styles

Attaching gaiters properly and comfortably can take a little practice. It also depends on the footwear and clothes you have chosen, for example, I prefer thicker more protective designs because I hike in shorts, so they're a little different to put on.

When paired with good quality footwear, you should be able to power through river crossings and deep mud without getting swamped.

Trail ankle length gaiters

Ankle length trail gaiters are best suited to hiking or trail running in warm conditions when you need lightweight protection to keep debris out of your shoes.

Mid-calf length gaiters

For drier conditions, there is also the option for mid or ankle length gaiters which are less restrictive and cooler while still offering most of the benefits of full-length designs.

Knee length gaiters

This style of gaiters cover the length of your shins up to just below your knee and are made from thicker more durable fabrics such as waterproof canvas for protection. They're worn primarily for walking through scrub, in the snow and in wet conditions.

How to fit gaiters properly

Step 1

Attach the lace-hook onto your front lace crossing (the one closest to your toe).

Step 2

Put your heel into the strap so it sits in the instep and not under your heel.

Step 3

Carefully seal up the Velcro® front or sides and adjust the heel strap so the base fits snugly against your boots (fit here is the key to a good seal).

Step 4

Adjust the top leg girdle so they are snug but not too tight as you don't want to cut off



circulation.

Note the fit will vary depending on your footwear (more strap needed to go around boots vs. runners) and the thickness of your clothing (summer gaiters won't go over as many layers as those required for snow).



When your gaiters are fitted properly, they'll comfortably protect your legs. Image: Sea to Summit

What to look for in a pair of gaiters

1. Gore-Tex®

Gore-tex is a fabric that is designed to be waterproof, plus it offers extra durability. Choose this kind of fabric when your itinerary involves rivers, wet ground, rocks and snow.

2. Canvas material

Canvas provides good protection and is a more breathable option for general summer hiking and hot weather. I've had a pair of Sea to Summit Quagmires that have lasted for years!



3. Polyurethane coated nylon

This material is lightweight and durable so it's good for when you're planning a lot of rock scrambling and scrub bashing. The [STS Grasshopper Gaiters](#) are a good example of this.



Look for quality features and materials when choosing a pair of gaiters. Image: Sea to Summit

4. Metal fastening points

Metal fastening points won't wear or break when you scuff them against rocks. I've found plastic clips can break easily, so metal is my preference.

5. Tough instep straps

Look for tough and hard-wearing instep straps that won't wear when you're trekking over hard ground (e.g., rocks and gravel). Also, consider if they are easily replaceable.

6. Adjustable velcro and elastic

Adjustable Velcro or elastic leg girdles are great because you can easily tighten them or loosen when needed. They also prevent slippage and increase air-flow.



Whether it's a snowy mountain hike or a desert adventure, don't overlook a good pair of gaiters to get you through the journey!

Do you wear gaiters when you hike? If so, what are you waiting for?