

# Consumer Corner

## Shopping Smart: Get Outdoor Gear Online

(NAPSA)—For saving money, spending time together and educating children about the great outdoors, few trips can beat taking your family camping.

How does the amateur outdoorsman know what gear to get?

With a growing variety of outdoor equipment, accessories and information available online, it's becoming even easier for families to prepare for planned and last-minute fun. As with the offline world, the key is to gather as much information as possible and when buying gear, stick with brands you know and trust. Shops such as Kmart's BlueLight.com ([www.bluelight.com](http://www.bluelight.com)) have an extensive selection of brand-name outdoor equipment.

Of course, safety is primary and the key to any successful trip is preparedness, especially when traveling with youngsters. Here are some basic tips:

### Get the right gear:

Equipment designed for adults or backpacks made for school can make camping miserable for tots. One way to ensure a fun trip is to make sure kids have the most comfortable gear possible. The best backpack has a sturdy frame and hip belt that distributes most of the weight onto your hips rather than your back. Check out established camping brands like Coleman which offers smaller framed backpacks and kid-sized gear.

### Lighten your load:

Luckily, now it's easy to replace old, heavy, hard-to-carry camping equipment with lighter, more compact gear. In backpacks, look for sturdy foam frames and straps, at least one aluminum stay and internal packing rather than an abundance of outside pockets. Most importantly, pack wisely.

### Know the terrain:

Traveling with guidebooks and maps make trips—especially those that involve long drives or



**Coleman's Camping for Kids Backpack can be worn as a regular backpack while hiking and also unfolds into a convenient stool for resting.**

hikes—much more fun and educational for kids. Many of the national parks have topography and wildlife maps available online. The National Parks Conservation Association even has virtual tours of Yosemite and Yellowstone at [www.eparks.org](http://www.eparks.org).

### Safety first:

Two essential items for any camping trip are a basic first aid kit and a portable water filter. For example, a Coleman's Camping for Kids First Aid Kit retails for around \$6 and contains everything you need for a basic camping trip in an easy-to-carry pouch. Items such as a water filter should be light and easy to use. Filters that are compact, rely on gravity and require little maintenance and cleaning are the easiest for a weekend trip.

### Shop around:

Online retailers are increasing their inventory to assist shoppers in filling their virtual carts with the gear they need to fully enjoy the great outdoors. Online stores often have more choices and better prices and allow you to ship hard-to-carry products such as tents, backpacks and equipment, directly to your home.