Installing a Hammock Outdoors- the Basics by RafaelHaney

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Whether you're setting up your hammock for the first time or you've got a few hangs under your belt, it's a good idea to refresh the basics. Stringing up a hammock is simple, and when done right, it not only improves your comfort, but protects outdoor resources and reduces equipment failure. These basic principles are not hard and fast rules. Understand the basics, and adapt the principles for your own conditions.

Anchor Points

Non-stretching polyester webbing straps that are 1-2 in. (2.5-5 cm.) wide work best for creating anchor points around trees because they help distribute the weight without cutting into the bark. Loops that are sewn or tied on the webbing make the process easier.

To set your straps, reach about head-level (roughly 6 ft. /1.8 m. high or higher) and wrap the straps around the tree to create an anchor point. You can wrap the webbing multiple times to adjust the length.

Suspension Lines

Attach the suspension line to the anchor point using climbing-grade carabineers, S hooks, or other hardware options. Adjust the hammock so it is evenly hung between the anchor points and at the same relative height on uneven terrain. You want to make sure that it is centered between the anchor points and at the same relative height on uneven terrain. This allows hammocks to be set up in areas where tents would not work. When you get in the hammock, it should come to rest at about chair height (20 in. /50 cm.). You may need to set it a few inches higher if the material stretches.

Weather and Bug Protection

A tarp is used for weather protection and bug netting for insect protection. You can use any kind of tarp for a hammock as long as it is big enough to cover you and your gear. An 8 x 8 ft, (2.4 x 2.4 m.) tarp, turned to 45Â°, makes an excellent diamond shape. Lightweight backpacking tarps designed and sewn specifically for hammocks are available from gear manufacturers. Some hammocks come equipped with sewn-in bug netting that makes setup easier. After-market bug netting is available to fit most hammocks.

Staying Warm

To sleep through the night, you'll need some insulation, especially when temperatures drop below 70Â°F (21Â°C). A regular sleeping bag will keep you warm on top, but you'll need insulation beneath to stay comfortable. When you lie in a sleeping bag - in a hammock or on the ground - the insulation gets compressed beneath you, rendering it useless. This is why pads are used in tents - in part for comfort, but more to prevent conductive heat loss. In a hammock, you'll have convective heat loss from the air circulating around you. Lying on a pad inside the hammock will keep you warm (you'll want a wide pad that can wrap around your shoulders too). Most hangers use a sleeping bag or quilt inside and an under quilt beneath to stay warm.

Getting In and Getting Cozy

To enter a hammock, spread the fabric wide, take a small step back, and sit down in the center.

Swing your legs in and adjust your body so you lay on the diagonal (the Brazilian way) and not in line with the suspension. By lying on the diagonal, you can achieve a nearly flat, ergonomic position. Move around until you find a "sweet spot" where you drop in place.

Typically, a larger, wider hammock is more comfortable than a narrow one. Adjusting the height, hang angle, and anchor distance all have an effect on the lay.

Two People in One Hammock?

Many people wonder if more than one person can sleep comfortably in a single hammock. The short answer is a definite "maybe." Yes, large hammocks can fit more people, but no, it isn't very comfortable for sleeping. Most hammocks, regardless of size, are designed for a single occupant. For some, the desire to double is to remain close, while others want to share gear, maybe saving some pack weight in the process.

Think of a hammock more like an upgraded individual sleeping pad. It naturally wraps and conforms to your body; this is one of the reasons why they are so comfortable. Adding more people creates awkward ridges and minimizes the comfort for those inside. To work well, occupants must move and turn together, like synchronized swimmers.

Thatâ€™s all, folks. Happy hanging, and have a ball!

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