



# How to Live in a Yurt

A yurt (ger) is a very basic, traditional tent-like structure favored over centuries by nomadic Mongol-Turkic peoples stretching from Mongolia to Central Anatolia. The yurt has traveled well over time from basic living quarters for nomads and soldiers, to hippie or recluse housing, to very modernized versions today that are used often in the recreation industry for "get-away" experiences.

And yurts can also be places of residence for people who want to live without too many encumbrances and yet still be comfortable, have access to power and technology (if wished), and remain budget-conscious. If you want to know if yurt-living might be for you whether for a season or for life, consider the following suggestions.

## Steps

**1 Bear in mind the point of *your* yurt.** There are many reasons why you might choose to live in a yurt, ranging from affordability to living a sustainable, nomadic lifestyle. What you will find in the literature is that many yurt-dwellers are not keen on the idea of "permanency" of a yurt, such as sinking in foundations and living in the same spot for many years. However, it is like most lifestyle choices in life, entirely up to you whether or not you're adding a yurt for permanent or nomadic reasons, or anything in between such as your annual summer retreat. Buy or build your yurt for *your* needs and reasons, and settle your own preferences for running the yurt sustainably, nomadically, permanently, etc. It is probably a good idea to read about yurt [history](#) and current yurt culture in western societies to get a feel for what's the current trend in yurt lifestyles, so that you can choose your own approach in an informed way.

- Note that living in a yurt does not equate to "roughing it" unless that's a personal choice. You can be tech-connected, electricity using, and [IKEA](#) furniture filled in your yurt if that's your preference.

**2 Pick your yurt.** Are you going to build it from scratch or [mail-order](#) it? Look for patterns online to see if it's too hard for your skills or if you'll relish the challenge. Otherwise, look for yurts for sale - either brand new or used. Some companies in North America and Europe are renowned for making good quality, comfortable, and well proportioned yurts – do an online search.

- Yurts tend to cost around US\$2000 to \$6000 to purchase in kit form, and take about two days to assemble.<sup>[1]</sup>

**3 Place your yurt.** Obviously, put it somewhere legal, such as your own land. [Squatting](#) is not really an option for yurt living because shifting a lived-in yurt is a lot more effort than shifting a normal tent and camp set-up. In addition, by placing a yurt on land and deciding to live in it permanently, you may be changing the land-use or require planning permission, so check with your local municipality on the ins and outs of part-time or full-time yurt living.<sup>[2][3]</sup> Other considerations when preparing your yurt include situating it where it won't be buffeted by [wind](#), directly in the path-way of flash flooding, or situated at the end of a possible avalanche of snow during winter. Check out the lay of the land with care and assess all the potential hazards before siting your yurt.

- Setting the yurt below the brow of a hill can protect it from winds.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Take care of where water gathers on the land. If it's likely to run straight to your yurt space, it'll enter the yurt, making things messy.

**4 Prepare the base of the yurt.** Dirt and grass are not ideal under your feet when it's your living quarters, so yurts tend to be built over or with decks, concrete surfaces, cinder block piers, or some other sort of structure that shifts you and your belongings away from the earth and up a bit. Decks bolted together and deck pads provide a suitable surface for placement of your yurt.<sup>[5]</sup> The advantage of doing this is that you also gain a deck around the edges of the yurt where you can sit, barbecue, hang clothes, etc.

- Find mats, [rugs](#), and other suitable coverings for the floor to add to the warmth and comfort levels. Better still,

put in a floating [wooden floor](#) or series of floor boards, with rugs over the top, to finish it off nicely.

- Try to [build a deck](#) that is portable. That way, when you get the nomadic itch, the deck can also come with you.<sup>[6]</sup>

**5 Fill your yurt with home comforts to create your perfect living space.** Before you add furniture, think about how to divide up the room. A round room can be difficult to [furnish](#), especially when it's a single room that you're trying to turn into a [little kitchen](#), bedroom, and living space. However, with the use of "dividing" furniture you can make distinct spaces within the round. For example, placement of a [bookcase](#) in the middle of the yurt can serve as an excellent divider between different areas and you can build out from it with other furniture items such as the bed, fridge, and desk.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Add a table and chairs, bookshelf, comfortable reading chairs, desk and chair, and a heat apparatus, such as a pot-belly [stove](#). If you don't want to add a real bed, use a camp stretcher bed or even a foldaway or inflatable bed usually used for guests.

**6 Add cooking apparatus.** You'll need to eat, and even if much of your food is from the result of foraging, you'll need to cook. Find a suitable gas or wood fueled stove that can double up as a heating item in the yurt, such as a pot-bellied stove. Be sure to [vent](#) it outside through one wall of the yurt as it will create dangerous fumes within the yurt otherwise. You might need a professional to help you install this part of the yurt.

- Find cast iron pans and a [cast iron kettle](#) for the stove top. Or, find other equally suitable cookware; look in thrift stores, camping or outdoor stores, or ask friends for items they no longer need.
- For the sake of cooking and cleaning, be sure to have your yurt situated near a [clean water](#) supply or you risk lugging water all day. A small rainwater tank might be a good option, especially if you're nowhere near mains supply. Water can also be collected from the yurt's roof if you install an appropriate system for collection.<sup>[8]</sup>
- If collecting wood for heat and cooking, be sure to do so sustainably, to minimize your impact on the local environment. Expect to get through about 3.5 cords of wood if living in your yurt through a Vermont-style snowy winter.
- Having a propane [barbecue](#) as an additional source for cooking is a wise investment; it will cost around US\$600 a year to run.<sup>[9]</sup>
- You may find that a wood stove produces less condensation than a gas one.<sup>[10]</sup>

**7 Provide somewhere for bathroom needs.** You will need a shower or bath area and a toilet; some people even [plumb](#) their yurts but for the most part, it's outdoor ablutions and cleaning. The toilet can be of a [composting](#) type and some yurt-dwellers compost human waste using the Humanure method. For a shower, this can be a simple contraption rigged up from a tree using a bucket or plastic bag, and using solar power to heat the water. You'll need to do some research into what's best for the property on which you're situated.

- For winter bathing, you will need to work out alternative, tolerable options.
- It's advisable to locate the toilet downwind from the yurt or some distance from it so that the odor and flies don't enter your yurt (although a well-maintained compost toilet should not have flies hanging around in any great number or an odor). On the other hand, you don't want it so far away that a trip in the rain to relieve yourself turns into a major expedition.
- Bathe in a stream if it's warm enough during the warmer months.
- It's also a good idea to have a general washing area for dirty gear and items.

**8 Add your source of energy.** [Electricity](#) can be provided by the usual means by running a line from mains supply to your yurt (the least advisable given a yurt is about living sustainably), or by use of a generator. If you have [solar](#) or wind energy set up, this might also be able to supply you with electricity if you get some storage batteries (these should be sheltered somewhere nearby) and have the know-how to connect it.<sup>[11]</sup> You'll need electricity for your [fridge](#), lighting, and any other electrical items you're keeping in the yurt.

- For lighting, find suitable gas, battery, or other fueled lamps that are safe to have inside tents. Have some candles for emergencies. LED lights are a very good investment.<sup>[12]</sup> The dome at the center top of a yurt will allow plenty of light in during sunlight hours.<sup>[13]</sup>
- Consider how you're going to wash clothes. Do you want a mini washer or will you trek into town to use the local [laundromat](#)? Do what works best for you; most items can be washed by hand until they're heavily soiled,

so you could choose to do say, monthly very soiled washes in the laundromat and hand wash the rest of the time.

**9 Get connected.** Even in a yurt you should be able to surf online. There are a number of possible ways, including cable, [satellite](#), rural broadband on an FM signal, or 3G Wi-Fi; select what works best for where you're located. Some people use the internet for downloading films too, so you can still keep up with your favorite latest movies!

**10 Consider [growing vegetables next to your yurt](#).** This can be a partial or even complete food supply for you and your other yurt residents and you might like to consider a few animals as well, for milk, eggs, and even meat.

- Compost all your kitchen and food scraps and use the compost on your garden.

**11 Enjoy your time living in the yurt.** Whether you're yurt-living for a season or a lifetime, you'll discover that you become one with nature in a yurt, as the weather impacts you more obviously, the wildlife lives around you undisturbed, and the necessity for being self-sufficient and resourceful bring home both how simple life can be, and how hard it can be sometimes too. You should discover the joy of living with less in your life but also finding you get a lot more out of everything you do have and everything that you notice. And while you may love the plot you've placed your yurt upon, some yurt-dwellers advise that it's important to try not to leave it there too long, because the original purpose of a yurt is to be a nomad, to move about and to discover new places. While that may not work for you, shifting could very well be the beginning of an amazing new [adventure!](#)

- People living in yurts report a sense of coziness, safety, and homeliness from being in a yurt even though you can hear and feel the full brunt of nature outside. This is a big part of why people absolutely love yurt-living and it's not something you'll discover without trying it.

### Can you answer these readers' questions?

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On [How to Reset a Lost Hotmail Password](#), a reader asks:

I never had a mobile ending in 75 so I don't receive or can't get any texts with the code. How can I sort this to my own number or email?

Your answer...

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On [How to Get a Job in Australia](#), a reader asks:

Can I get a job in Australia?

Your answer...

Reply

On [How to Trace the Owner of a Phone Number](#), a reader asks:

How can I know his phone number when he sends me messages by WhatsApp?

Your answer...

Reply

### Tips

- Keep plenty of batteries on hand.
- Have plenty of rugs, blankets, and warm items to keep you warm. The better yurts have insulated walls and if you're

planning on living in one all year round, don't skimp on this aspect! Pets can also help increase the warmth, as well as making it homey.

- It is probably a good idea to have a shed or garage to house woodworking gear, chainsaw, gardening gear, and any vehicle you have. It won't be comfortable having such items in the yurt with you and if you need them to live off the land, a garage or shed is a good investment.
- If you don't have electricity, invest in a wind-up radio.
- Family grown? It is possible to add more yurts and connect them by means of pods or other connections.
- Rely on a solar-charged cell phone for your telecommunications.
- Fill with books and notebooks, pens and pencils. Yurts cause you to want to reflect a lot, as well as read. There isn't much else to do. If you're an artist, have all your art needs there too.
- In most cases, snow will slide off the roof of a yurt during winter months, after a few inches (centimeters) have accumulated.
- Millions of people in Central Asia spend their entire lives in yurts; it's not unusual and it is perfectly achievable.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Some yurts even come with air-conditioning, but you need to decide if that fits in with your reasons for living in a yurt.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Warnings

- Consider the risk of fire in, or of, your yurt and multiple ways to escape from it.
- Obey all relevant planning laws or you might find yourself being asked to disassemble your yurt.
- Some of the downsides of yurt-living include: storms can rip them up, depending on how severe they are; yurts can heat up incredibly fast and stay hot inside; noise travels in them and there is a lack of privacy to consider if you're living with others; cabin fever can set in during winter if you can't get out for weeks on end; and yurts require constant maintenance to keep them safe and workable.
- If you live in your yurt through winter and it rains a lot, expect to traipse in mud; it's unavoidable.<sup>[16]</sup>
- Take down your yurt if you're not living in it over winter and it is placed in a damp area such as a forest. Without the constant heat from you and your appliances keeping it dry, the yurt is prone to mold and rot and won't last the winter.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Things You'll Need

- Yurt
- Furniture
- Floor coverings
- Heating
- Compost toilet
- Solar power shower
- Garden tools and plants
- Optional shed/garage

## Sources and Citations

1. <http://planetgreen.discovery.com/home-garden/ready-live-yury.html>
2. [http://www.woodlandyurts.co.uk/Woodland\\_Yurts/yurt\\_living.html](http://www.woodlandyurts.co.uk/Woodland_Yurts/yurt_living.html)
3. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1150311/Yurt-live-Council-tells-couple-eco-friendly-tent-dont-planning-permission.html>

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