

Opal Creek Expeditions: Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL INFORMATION

Q: I want more information about how my expedition will look! I have general questions.

A: Please reach out if you have any questions to expeditions@opalcreek.org or by phone at (503) 832-7340. We will call two weeks before every expedition to personally answer any of your questions and go over any pertinent medical information or social/emotional concerns.

Q: I just graduated from middle school, what trips can I sign up for?

A: You can sign up for both categories! If you feel like you want to be on a trip with middle school youth, then the middle schoolers category is for you. If you want to be on a trip with older youth but with your peers in the upcoming school year, then the high schoolers trip might be the better choice.

Q: How does early bird registration work?

A: Early bird registration will be open from January 6th to 31st, 2026. Come February 1st, all Expedition prices will rise.

Q: How does waitlist work?

A: Once a trip is fully booked with 10 participants, we close registration and open up the waitlist. Waitlist will be a first come, first served basis. Those who sign up first will be notified first and down the line.

Q: I have to cancel at the last minute, can I transfer my trip credit to next year?

A: Unfortunately, no. We do understand that life happens, and sometimes you cannot make your expedition. We have a 60-day refund policy and recommend you get trip insurance if this is a concern. Currently, we do not have the capacity to transfer funds to next year's programming.

Q: Is drop off at the same location as last year?

A: No! Upon registering for our trips, you will be sent a series of documents of which are directions to our new drop off location within Salem, at [Minto Brown Island Park](#). A shuttle will be offered from Portland to our drop off location at Minto Brown Island Park.

For trips in the Malheur or Wallowa-Whitman (Strawberry Mountains & Elkhorns), we will offer a shuttle from Salem to Portland for departure. The details will be in your confirmation email.

Q: Should I bring some spending money?

A: Spending money is not necessary on our expeditions.

GEAR AND FOOD

Q: What do I bring on the expedition? Can I bring my phone for photos?

A: Please view our [youth packing list](#). Phones are not allowed on youth expeditions, but digital cameras are welcome! All similar technology (smart watches) should stay home as well.

Q: What meals are provided?

A: Drop off timing has changed from last year. Participants are dropped off on Tuesday and must come fed with breakfast. Lunch and dinner will be provided on Tuesday as well as all three meals and snacks are provided onward. The day of pickup, lunch will be provided and dropoff/pick up depends on if you are being picked up in Salem or Portland.

Q: I have a food allergy! Can I come?

A: Yes! Make sure you fill out the intake questionnaire as completely as possible. We will follow up with a phone call to further discuss how we can accommodate.

Q: I am a picky eater and only eat a few things, will I starve?

A: No, you will not starve!! Our meals have many options for picky eaters. Make sure you fill out the intake questionnaire to the best of your ability, stating the foods you absolutely cannot eat. Otherwise, most of our meals have simple versions of themselves filled with staples like rice, pasta and tortillas.

Q: My pack is sooo heavy!! What should I do?

A: A rule of thumb for backpacking is that active participants can carry up to 20-35% of their body weight. Participants can expect to carry 10-15 lbs of gear provided by Opal Creek which is gear the group will utilize as a whole such as water filters, pots, group food, tents, etc. Make sure when you meet up with us on the first day of the expedition, you leave enough space for group gear. If you are having trouble fitting everything you

need, our experienced guides will help you to remove some unneeded items from your pack and free up space for food and group gear. Some good suggestions would be not bringing excessive recreational items (books, games, etc), only bring 1-2 pairs of clothing (if the weather is nice you only need 1 or 2 shirts!). If you are still having trouble, don't worry the first day of the expedition we go through packing backpacks as a group and can make some decisions then.

Q: How big should my backpack be?

A: You can expect to carry between 30-45 lbs, depending on your pack, your size/strength, and the length of the trip. We recommend a backpack between 50-65 liters depending on your size.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND PARTICIPANT HEALTH

Q: Who are the guides? What are their certifications?

A: We staff every expedition with two professional guides. All our guides are certified to a minimum of WFA (Wilderness First Aid) standard and at least one guide per trip has a WFR (Wilderness First Responder). All guides are CPR/AED certified and lifeguard trained. On all our trips there will be at least one guide who is a woman. We pride ourselves on employing guides from all backgrounds!

Q: What happens if my child needs to be evacuated from a trip?

A: If your child needs to be evacuated from the field, guides with the group will communicate with our admin staff to organize a pickup from the closest trailhead to their location. Admin staff will call the emergency contact listed on your reservation and work together to see what's best for the family. Our staff is available to assist in a pickup to later meet up with families.

Q: What happens if there is a wildfire in the area? Will I get a refund?

A: There is always an on duty person monitoring conditions and communicating with our guides in the field. Our on-call staffer monitors weather, fire conditions, and other hazards from multiple sources and checks for communications from our staff every hour. In addition, the US Forest Service is in regular contact with Opal Creek Expeditions, and they make us aware of any wildfire threats to our course areas. Should the US Forest Service advise that we reroute due to wildfire, we will move the expedition to a comparable wilderness area and inform you of the change via email. In the rare case of a wildfire starting while on the trail, we would evacuate our course area and return to Salem, with all parents contacted.

For all previous wildfire incidents, we've been able to reroute to an unaffected National Forest. We try to communicate reroutes as soon as possible. Refunds will not be issued in case of a reroute.

Q: What happens if there is smoke in the area?

A: Another occurrence could be the rerouting of a trip due to hazardous levels of smoke or high AQI levels. If there is consistent poor air quality in the operating area of an expedition, we will reroute to another part of Oregon that is experiencing better air. Luckily, we operate in 6 wilderness areas all across the state, so a reroute is almost always possible. In the situation where we have an expedition in the field and smoke suddenly onsets and doesn't clear, we would evacuate the trip and reroute to another area. Research has shown that masking in hazardous levels of smokey air quality does little to reduce the impacts, so evacuation is our best precaution.

Q: I take medication, how does that work?

A: Please label all medication with the participant's name, dosage, and frequency. When you arrive at drop-off, you'll have an opportunity to speak with the guides about the medication and protocol. On trail, all youth medication will be carried and administered by guides, except for prescribed epinephrine and albuterol inhalers which can be carried by the prescribed participant.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Q: I have rafting included in my expedition, what should I bring?

A: For all our expeditions, participants need water shoes with a closed-toe and heel strap. We would advise rafting participants to bring a spare change of clothes they can leave in the van during the backpacking portion of the expedition, available to them after rafting. During rafting, due to the temperature of the water, all participants will have access to water booties, a wetsuit and a dry top.

Q: Can I request a private expedition for me and my friends?

A: Send us an email! We are happy to work with your group, workplace, school, or organization to plan a custom trip. We are always be open to big ideas or small objectives. Send us an email and we can book a short consultation.

Q: What do I do if I have a question not answered in this FAQ?

A: You have many opportunities to connect with us! We will call primary contacts two weeks prior to the expedition for last minute questions and concerns. There will be

several pre-season opportunities to connect with our staff on an orientation call and ask any questions you may have. Also, as always, you can reach out to us by email at expeditions@opalcreek.org or phone at (503) 892-2782 ext. 1.