



Outside – Buyer’s Guide

Summer 2014

Packs: Overnight

Featuring: Exos 38

Circulation: 688,307

Readership: 2,064,921



OVERNIGHT

1. Deuter AirComfort Aera 30 \$119

BEST FOR: That fine line between minimal overnighter and oversize daypack.

THE TEST: It's rare for a pack to impress both the fast-and-light crowd and the bring-it-all-overstuffers. The former will find that the Aera 30 has just enough room for overnight essentials, as one tester did on a trip to the top of Yosemite Valley. The latter will insist the pack isn't overkill on a big day hike—if you want to hump in a bottle of wine, a picnic blanket, and a grocery bag full of chow for the kids. And everyone will appreciate the plush suspension system, which utilizes a steel frame, mesh to move air, and the best shoulder-strap padding we've ever seen. Deuter also did a nice job on the extras, including a built-in rain fly, roomy mesh side pockets, and trekking-pole loops.

THE VERDICT: As small as you can go for an overnight adventure. 3.1 lbs; deuter.com
COMFORT: 5 / VERSATILITY: 3

2. Arc'teryx Alpha FL 45 \$239

BEST FOR: Alpine minimalists.

THE TEST: Crafted for climbing, ice climbing, and ski mountaineering, the 45-liter Alpha FL (the letters stand for fast and light) is little more than a tube with shoulder straps and a webbing belt. Start using it, however, and the subtle design details, like the unique ice-tool hooks, quickly prove themselves. One pro climber raved about the ability to segment the pack into two chambers by securing the roll-top closure of the inner bag. "I could separate my wet layers from my dry stuff," he explained. The suspension, though sparse, wasn't harsh, and the ripstop nylon, while not waterproof, shrugged off a freak spring snow-and-rain storm in the Cascades and showed zero wear after being dragged over cliff edges on a Utah canyoneering trip.

THE VERDICT: It's not quite as simple as it looks—but it's close. 1.4 lbs; arcteryx.com
COMFORT: 3 / VERSATILITY: 4

3. Osprey Exos 38 \$160

BEST FOR: Lightning-fast backpacking.

THE TEST: The reboot of Osprey's popular Exos series has larger versions (48 and 58 liters), but this top-loading hauler became the bag of choice for testers who carry only the barest of essentials. The standout design feature was the suspension—a mesh back panel and foam hipbelt that offered ventilation while dispersing weight. "I normally don't like ventilating systems, but this one let in air without making the pack feel top-heavy," reported one tester. The ample stuff-it pockets in the back and sides swallowed up the items we wanted handy, and the accessory straps secured trekking poles and a sleeping pad. Going super, super light? Remove the top compartment; an alternate lid flap covers the main body of the pack.

THE VERDICT: If you like spartan camping, this is your bag. 2.2 lbs; ospreypacks.com
COMFORT: 4.5 / VERSATILITY: 3.5



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The **side compression straps** on the Osprey can be routed two ways: (1) cinch the inner load, or (2) run in a zigzag pattern to secure gear on the outside of the pack in tandem with the mesh pocket. They can also be removed completely.

