

Prepping for your Orange River trip with Gravity Adventures

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You've decided to take the plunge and book an Orange River rafting trip with Gravity Adventures. Welcome to the Gravity family! We know that this trip will allow you to disconnect completely from the stresses of modern living and that you'll have experiences that you'll remember forever. Here are some pointers to help you prepare – by understanding what to expect and how to stay safe and comfortable, you'll be able to make the most of it!

Choose the trip that suits you best

Gravity runs trips on two different sections of the Orange River in the Northern Cape – the Orange River Gorge, near Pofadder, and Thunder Alley, near Hopetown. Both are run as self-contained expedition style trips, where everything you'll need is carried by boat and you'll make camp at a different spot each night. The two sections are different in character, so make sure you've read the trip information and have chosen the best option for you and your family and/or friends.

The Orange River Gorge is extremely remote and incredibly beautiful, but it can be quite a challenging trip at various levels, while Thunder Alley is a more relaxed section of the river in terms of rapids and portages. You will cover more distance and have more river time with lots of small fun rapids. We recommend this to families with younger children.

This article focusses on our Group and Premium packages where our guests bring along their own camping gear (or hire a tent and roll mat from us). We also have the "River Safari" package which is fully inclusive of all equipment and has sit down meals and guides who set up camp each evening.

Pack Light!

You really need very little for an Orange River rafting trip, especially in summer, when it's very hot. You'll live in your swimming costume most of the time! Some key items include: Sun protection – you'll be spending 24 hours a day outside so protection from the elements, especially the sun, is vital. A **sunhat** with a wide brim and a chin strap is best but it's also worth bringing a **peak cap** for when it's too windy for a wide brim hat – just pack a **Buff** to protect the back of your neck as well. A lightweight cotton collared **shirt** will keep the sun off and keep you cool when it's wet, but a long-sleeved **rash guard** also works well, especially for kids. Quick dry **shorts** are useful and a **kikoi** or sarong is vital to keep the sun off your lower legs and as an all-purpose towel, wrap, scarf and sun-shade! You'll need 2 pairs of shoes – a pair of **river sandals** or water shoes (no slip-on shoes please) and pair of **closed shoes** for in camp for protection from thorns, stones, and scorpions both in camp and on walks. In camp, shorts and a t-shirt or a light dress is often all that's needed. Just bring one set for the whole trip. A change of warm clothes and a light rain jacket complete the clothing list.

You will be packing your clothes and sleeping bag into a roll top dry-bag that we will supply. Bring along some strong black bags to provide an extra later of waterproofing. It's also useful to bring a small, drawstring mesh or cotton bag or two to organize your clothing and make it easier to find things – I like to pack my underwear and socks separately, for example.

We always recommend packing a lightweight, **2-person tent** – it's better to pack a tent and not use it than wish you had packed one. Pop up tents are a winner, especially for children, but make sure that you have practiced how to pack the tent back into its bag. A small **ground sheet** is always useful, either for under your tent or, if you're sleeping under the stars, for under your camping mattress. For open-air sleepers, a **mosquito net** is great for bugs and to keep a bit of the dew off. A basic closed cell foam **roll mat** is fine for kids to use to sleep on but for those who would like a more comfortable night's sleep, a **ThermaRest** self-inflating mattress is the best choice as it is relatively small and easy to pack but incredibly comfortable. There are also super small, light and easily inflatable mats available. The choice of mattress depends largely on your budget and preference – there is a lot of choice out there. Two things to bear in mind – firstly, make sure that your mattress fits into your tent! Secondly, choose an outdoor mattress and bring a repair kit for inflatables.

Keeping it Clean

In terms of toiletries, all you really need is **sunscreen**, **insect repellent** and your **toothbrush** and **toothpaste**. A dip in the river will take care of the rest. Zinc based sunscreen is effective and planet friendly and don't forget lip protection and a soothing **lip balm** for the end of the day. **Moisturizer** that can be used on face and body is also useful. You are, of course, welcome to bring along other toiletries, but please make sure that whatever you pack is wilderness friendly.

Life carries on as usual, even on a rafting trip, and that means that you may need to deal with your period. I can recommend using a menstrual cup – they are widely available nowadays – as this means MUCH less admin. Try it before the trip so you're familiar with how to use it. If you'd rather use tampons, pack them in a double layered ziplock bag and keep them in the access barrel (we provide this) in the front of your boat. Also pack a an extra ziplock bags or two and a small drybag for the used ones when the group rubbish bag is not available.

“Answering the call of nature” is a subject that worries many people. Your guides will explain clearly how our system works during your briefing on the first evening or morning of your trip. Basically, we usually use the ‘cat hole’ method – this ensures that human waste is the only thing left behind to degrade naturally. We pack out all loo paper and you do not have to burn it yourself. It's simple and effective and much less of an issue than you think it will be.

Personal Medication

We'll provide a comprehensive First Aid kit but it is used for first response only, so if there are certain products you know you use often, please bring your own supply. Of course, this includes prescription and allergy meds. On that subject, if you are allergic to anything, please tell your guide and inform them of what treatment you may need. It's also worth packing some **FABRIC plasters** (not plastic ones as they come off too easily) in case of blisters from paddling.

Drinks and Cooler Box Management 101

Sjoe, we could write an entire blog post on this subject (and maybe we will). Briefly – each boat will have a heavy-duty cooler box so generally, there is one cooler box for 2 people. Each cooler takes 48 cans (2 cases). The trick to keeping your drinks as cold as possible for as long as possible, is good cooler box management. Arrive with your drinks cold in your own cooler. On river, remember that

each time you open the cooler, hot air enters and coldness escapes. Know what is in each cooler (you can ask for tape and marker pen to help with this) and decide what you want before you open the cooler. Plan your packing so you keep one cooler packed and sealed for the last night on river. Finally, keep your cooler in the shade or protected from the sun. We recommend bringing as much as possible in cans as these are easy to crush and recycle after the trip. During the day, you'll be drinking mostly from your water bottle – we recommend bringing Game or another energy drink concentrate. Dehydration is a real concern so you'll need to drink more than usual – we provide purified water at each stop so that you can keep your water bottle full.

Recommended Extras

A lightweight fold up **camp chair** is worth packing, especially for adults – it makes that sundowner drink a more comfortable experience. Children can easily do without a chair but beware – they will probably steal yours! **Sunglasses** are highly recommended but please bring along your oldest pair and make sure that you have attached a strap to minimize the risk of sacrificing them to the river gods. Finally, bring a **book** and a **headlamp** (and your reading glasses).

If you're worried ...

We know that leaving one's comfort zone can be scary. Our guides are well trained and very experienced - we have been running these types of trips for 25 years. If you find yourself feeling anxious about something, it's important to make a conscious decision to stay calm and remind yourself of this. If you're unsure of anything, just ask us and we will do our best to answer your question and set your mind at ease.

We can't wait to see you

One of the favourite things about my job is that I get to help people have the best holiday possible – low environmental impact combined with a high personal impact. Thank you for choosing Gravity Adventures – we really can't wait to have you experience our world.
