

Surviving Ithaca Winters



The Weather

Ithaca winters are typical of those elsewhere in the northeastern United States— in general, extremely cold! When the strong winds combine with low temperatures it becomes harder to keep warm. For example, if the temperature is 20°F (-7°C) but the wind is blowing at a speed of 35 mph (56kph), then the wind chill temperature is -20°F (-29°C). The snow can make winter uncomfortable. Ithaca can get as much as 125 inches (316 cm) in one winter. To complicate matters, the weather is very changeable, producing freezing rain or “sleet” (wet snow). Also, there are usually one or two days each winter when brisk winds combine with very low temperatures to produce potentially dangerous conditions. Here are some general tips for dealing with the weather:

- 1. Make a habit of listening to weather forecasts on TV or on the radio so that you can be prepared.**
- 2. On days that are bitter cold, limit the length of time that you are exposed to the cold.**
- 3. Dress appropriately for a wide variety of weather conditions, as it may be raining when you leave for the morning, but snowing when you head home.**



The Terrain

You will be doing a lot of walking while at Cornell. The winter snow and ice, combined with the hilly terrain, make it very difficult to walk, so a good pair of boots is essential. Be especially careful of “black ice,” which is pavement that looks dry but is very slippery. Allow yourself extra time to get to your destination so you are not hurrying over icy walkways.

How to Keep Warm

1. Layering = WARMTH:

Wear many layers of loose clothing, as this ensures that there are pockets of air between the clothing layers that insulate your body from the cold. For the upper body, a long sleeved shirt worn over an undershirt and topped with a sweater and coat is best. For the lower body, a pair of long underwear underneath a pair of pants will keep you warm. Underwear made from silk is very comfortable, and polypropylene is good for outdoor sports, although both of these materials tend to be expensive. Pants need to be loose-fitting remembering that the idea is to keep warm air close to your body. Tight fitting pants and jeans don't keep you warm. Dressing in removable layers allows you to take off or put on clothing as you need it.

2. Keep your head covered:

Many people are surprised to learn that 60% of the heat lost by the body is lost through the head. Wearing a hat to cover your head is therefore very important for keeping warm. A wool hat is a necessity; if you really feel the cold buy a sheepskin hat—this will give you full protection against the icy winds that blow across campus. Do at least wear a pair of earmuffs to protect your ears.

3. Close “gaps”:

Neck and wrist openings are potential sites for heat loss. Wearing a scarf around your neck and long gloves or mittens can help you close these gaps.

4. Ventilate to cut down on perspiration:

Because you exert a lot of energy walking all over campus, you are likely to perspire and overheat. If you become overheated, loosen, remove or open your outerwear. Remove your hat first and then loosen the neck opening for a *short* period of time.

5. Make use of your body heat:

Wear mittens instead of gloves. Since mittens expose a smaller surface area to the cold, your fingers will stay warmer.

What to Buy:

Here is a checklist of some necessary items to keep you comfortably warm for Ithaca's cold (and often erratic!) weather:

- A good coat that is insulating and water-repellent
- A hat that will cover your ears
- A scarf (wrap and tuck the ends into your coat)
- Glove "liners" for dexterity without exposure
- Mittens over the liners for warmth
- Cotton socks to let feet "breathe" and absorb perspiration
- Thick wool socks over the cotton socks provide warmth
- Silk or cotton long underwear (for top and bottom)
- Good wool sweaters
- Chamois, flannel or cotton long-sleeved shirts to layer
- Loose-fitting jeans or pants or some other dense fabric
- Hiking boots, or boots with "lug" soles and low heels

"Bundle Up" for the cold, and peel off layers once you get to your destination!

Where and When to Buy:

You can find the best quality (but most expensive) winter clothing at an outdoor supply retailer such as **Wildware Outfitters Ltd.**, or **Outdoor Store**, both of which are located on the Commons, or **Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS)** on Route 13 South. For moderately priced but good quality clothing, try stores at the Shops at Ithaca Mall like **Old Navy**, **The Gap**, **Dicks Sporting Goods**. **T.J. Maxx** at the Cayuga Mall offers good quality items at discount prices. The least expensive (but often of poorer quality) winter clothing can be found at **K-Mart** (Route 13 South), **Target**, or **Sears** (also at Shops at Ithaca Mall). **Cobblers Cottage** (222 Elmira, across from K-Mart) carries sheepskin boots and hats.

The best time to shop is during a sale. Some stores have pre-season winter clothing sales in October, and most have sales with substantial

Reductions right after Christmas or when spring clothing is being stocked. Don't think that this will be too late— January and February are Ithaca's coldest months and it can snow well into March and even April!

Many Americans buy used clothing which is often of good quality and very inexpensive. For used clothing, try **Trader K's** (on the Commons), the **Service League in the Women's Community Building** (West Seneca Street near DeWitt Mall), or the **Salvation Army Store** (Elmira Road/Route 13 South; T-Cat route 15 or 67).

You can also shop online or through a catalogue. Some retailers to check out include **L.L. Bean** and **Land's End**.

Tips on Buying Outerwear

Your comfort depends on the quality of your clothing. All clothing is required to have a label which describes clothing fiber content and clothing care, so you can always find out exactly what you are buying.

1. Coats

Down jackets and full-length down coats are warmest, and since most of them already have a nylon outer shell, they provide the best protection against the wind. Even though down garments are costly, they are a good investment. Wool is the next best insulator and, although not effective against the wind, it is the warmest even when wet. Leather is very effective against the wind, but it is a poor insulator and inadequate for Ithaca's winters.

2. Sweaters

You may be tempted to buy cotton and acrylic sweaters, since they tend to be cheaper than wool. Cotton and acrylic have very little insulating value, so these will not keep you warm enough. It's worth paying a little more for a good wool sweater.

3. Footwear

Your feet will become wet and cold if you do not wear good foot protection. It's best to buy leather hiking-type boots with insulated lining and thick rubber soles with lots of tread. These will keep your feet warm and will make walking on the ice easier. However, they will not keep your feet dry unless you waterproof them yourself with silicon spray (buy at shoe store). Vinyl boots are waterproof but will not keep your feet warm. Avoid wearing boots that have high heels or smooth soles.