

YURTS

*Unwind,
Relax,
Transcend*

Ah, the sound of serenity that seems always to accompany the sight of a yurt as it nestles into its natural setting. Maybe it is part of a quest for nature after being plugged into a cell phone, computer or television, or seated in a car or office for too many hours a week. A quiet retreat in a lovely setting—that is what a yurt promises.

Yurts are tents used for centuries by Mongolian nomads living on the grassland steppes of central Asia, and are still used by many on Asian plateaus. Their beauty and functionality invite one to be in rhythm with nature.

As more park campgrounds are opening for business—or working to draw visitors to existing ones—yurts are becoming a wonderful and economical choice for owners and managers. More people are becoming environmentally conscious, and yurts are an attractive alternative to traditional cabins because they are usually built on decks with minimal environmental impact. They are warm in winter and cool in summer.

In the world of eco-tourism, yurts are becoming popular. Initially constructed around a wood frame covered with wool, modern yurts are still made of wood, but covered with vinyl or a combination of polyester and cotton.

A standard yurts use the following basic structure:

- Deck
- Frame
- Lattice
- Door
- Window(s)
- Tension cable
- Center ring
- Top cover
- Dome skylight

These structures can be primitive or upscale, depending on preference and use.

Options can be purchased to increase the high-wind and snow-load capacity, as

well as other amenities, such as ADA-accessibility. A variety of companies provides the basic yurt. The differences include cost of shipping, use and availability of “green” building materials and company-provided installation. All the yurt manufacturers contacted for this article are in the western, northwest, and the extreme northwest United States.

COLORADO YURT CO.

Known first as Earthworks, Dan and Emma Kigar’s business began in 1977 with their first shop located along the Blue River near Breckenridge, Colo. The first yurt was built in 1983, and remains in use on a mesa in southern Colorado.



At Colorado Yurts, the Kigars also make tents, including the tipi, which now bears the Earthworks name. The philosophy that makes this internationally known company a success is the belief that “success comes from making a quality product and treating people right.”

NOMAD SHELTER YURTS

Lee and Jess Tenhoff built their first yurt in January 1987, after losing everything in a house fire. Winter in Alaska and a newborn son were the driving factors in starting their own yurt company. The yurts were built the traditional way,

lashing poles together to form the lattice work that comprises the walls for the dwelling. Construction was completed within a month.



Over time, the Tenhoffs have experimented and developed a yurt that can withstand the harsh Alaska climate. According to the company’s Web site, it has a test bed on the Bering Sea Coast where many yurt design challenges are addressed and solved. Their yurts come standard with climate-protection features, which are options with some of the other yurt sources.

Jess Tenhoff says Nomad Shelter Yurts is a family-run business—she does the fabric work, Lee builds the wooden framework, their son helps with set-up, and other family members help with the business. They also maintain nine rental yurts on trailheads accessible only by water in Alaska’s Kachemak Park. Because the yurts are rugged and durable, they are primarily used in expedition camps.

OREGON YURTWORKS LLC

Oregon Yurtworks LLC offers a complete yurt package—floors come already insulated, sheathed and framed; walls are finished to the outside and windows are pre-installed; the cedar siding is stained and installed; ceilings are finished inside and out with roofing materials, also



installed. All that is left for the owner to do is to bolt the materials together and run shingle hips. The building is then waterproofed and ready for the interior finishing. Included with this yurt is the hardware package necessary to complete the exterior application.

The amount of “completed at the factory” construction can be a real time- and money-saver for the owner. The benefit of having a wood mill nearby reduces the cost of raw materials, decreases transportation costs, and increases further time, energy and money savings.

The company’s knowledge and availability of “green” building materials are above most builders’ common usage.

Yurtworks does take and fill requests to build entirely “green,” which adds to the cost of the yurt, but is well worth it.

PACIFIC YURTS

Alan Bair, the original manufacturer of the modern lattice-wall yurt, started Pacific Yurts in 1978 in an old Oregon dairy. Its products are now sold throughout the world.

Along with a quality product, the company has a strong presence in the community and a deep commitment to a minimal impact on the environment. Part of that commitment includes donating the small “end” pieces of wood to



local crafters and sawdust from making yurt components to local gardeners for compost and mulch. Bair has also been a featured speaker at national and international eco-tourism conferences because of his commitment to the environment.

RAINIER YURTS



Rainier Yurts’ origins date to 1896 as a supplier of fabric camping accessories and tents for prospectors heading for the Klondike Gold Rush. In March 2004, Rainier purchased Nesting Bird Yurts—a company started by Jenny Pell and Will Hays in 1994—and moved its operations to its Seattle facility.