When packing for an adventure, space is at a premium, so gear that's light but will keep you warm is paramount. Here are three items for adventurers who want to travel fast and light.

### Thermarest NeoAir Xlite sleeping pad

No matter how light you plan to travel if you want to stay warm while sleeping in rough conditions, a good camping mat is worth its weight in gold. Thermarest really offers the gold standard in this regard. The NeoAir Xlite (£154.95, regular size) is the lightest in the range, offering more warmth and comfort per ounce than any other three-season air mattress available. Ranging in length from 119cm (small) to 183cm (regular) and 190cm (long), they are extremely light (230g, small; 350g, regular and 460g, long) and pack down to about the size of a one-litre bottle, so you'll barely notice it in a backpack – until you need it. A female-specific model features an additional heat-capturing layer and weighs 340g. Made in Ireland, the mattress comes with a stuff sack and a repair kit. Available from or order through Great Outdoors, Dublin 2; 53 Degrees North, Carrickmines, Blanchardstown, and Cornmarket, Cork; Basecamp, Dublin 1; Kerry Outdoor Sports, Killarney; and River Deep Mountain High, Galway and Limerick.

### The North Face Blue Kazoo sleeping bag

If you're looking for a light but warm sleeping bag that doesn't cost the earth, The North Face's Blue Kazoo (£290) is a good choice. While it's not super light, it's light enough (1,120g regular size) and is warm and cozy enough for most people's needs. The three-season bag offers 650+ Hungarian goose down and a baffle construction that keeps the lofty down insulation in place to eliminate cold spots. There is also padding where you need it most at high pressure areas like the head, shoulders and feet. A footbox also keeps feet warm and blood circulating. The down fill is protected from outside moisture and frost by the durable, lightweight, nylon ripstop shell that has a water repellent DWR finish. It comes with a compression stuff sack. Available from or order through Great Outdoors, Dublin 2.

### MSR Hubba Hubba NX tent

MSR's Hubba Hubba NX (£400) super-light two-man tent (1.54kg) is perfect for anyone who wants to shave weight off their backpack. Ideal for three-season backpacking environments, the tent's poles are designed to maximise interior space, allowing ample head and shoulder room. Large doors and vestibules complete the picture by allowing easy access and good storage space. The included side-loading compression stuff sacks make the tents as easy to pack as they are to set up. And it now comes in a camouflage green colour, so is ideal for discreet, wild camping. Available from or order through 53 Degrees North, Carrickmines, Blanchardstown, and Cornmarket, Cork; Basecamp, Dublin 1; see Alpinesports.ie for further information.

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**Get out there!**

Home or abroad, there are plenty of ways to get active this spring.

**Biking Blitz, February 15**

This mountain-biking race series has something for everyone – from juniors to adults for hardcore bikers. Race 2 takes place in Ballyhoura, Limerick, with options to race 17km and 35km in Baggy Shorts and Super PRO categories. bikingblitz.ie

**Mountaineering Ireland Winter Meet 2015, Sunday to February 14**

Taking place again in Onich, near Fort William, Scotland, Mountaineering Ireland's Winter Meet will offer several three-day courses. Whether you are long in case our hands stick to it. Icicles form on my drysuit as soon as I get out, but I am so well wrapped up it never feels cold, just a bit numb on the face. As we walk back through the volcanic landscape, I notice the big cracks in the rocks, all formed by activity during volcanic eruptions. Montira leads us to a place where we can jump off a small, four metre cliff, straight down into the glacial water – a nice end to the adventure for those who need another thrill. Feeling elated after the experience, and grateful that there were no big seismic events during our snorkel between the plates, I later hear Montira saying that data shows there were about 20 earthquakes while we were snorkelling, but that they are pretty common.

“The last big one was four weeks ago, at night,” she says. “It was 4.3 on the Richter scale. We’ve that many earthquakes here, it’s hard to keep track.”
Set along the mid-Atlantic ridge, Iceland is a hotspot for volcanic activity and earthquakes caused by the movement of the tectonic plates. There are more than 200 volcanoes on the island, and volcanic eruptions are thought to have created the landmass itself. Because of this, most of Iceland is made up of lava fields – cooled volcanic lava, some thousands of years old, some just weeks old. Many of these fields are covered by a thin layer of soil or grass, and in winter, a layer of snow. On the way back to base – as the road we’re driving along wanders through the grass and snow-filled lava fields – guide Snorri Sveinsson tells us how hardy Icelanders are, with a story of how he once broke his ankle and waited three days to go to hospital. “We’re a dangerous nation and always have days to go to hospital. ‘We’re a broke his ankle and waited three days to go to hospital. “We’re a dangerous nation and always have days to go to hospital.

Iceland is full of adventure – with everything from horse-riding to off-road superjeep and ATV tours and trips in pursuit of the Northern Lights hunts, and there is an abundance of geothermal pools to soak aching muscles in afterwards. Constant seismic activity keeps things interesting.

As Snorri sums up: “Iceland is just a gigantic playground. Iceland is not just pulling apart because of the tectonic plates, but also lifting up because of the magma underneath,” he says. “It’s getting bigger all the time!”

For snowhelling, glacier walking, caving, lava tubing and other adventures, contact Arctic Adventures at adventures.is or see the activities section of visiticeland.com.

In the past week or two, off-piste conditions have been particularly dangerous. Many resorts enjoyed snowfalls of between one and two metres, sending avalanche risk levels through the roof.

“For the past week, conditions have been super-un-safe,” says mountain guide Nick Parks from mountaintacks.co.uk.

Parks, who runs the company’s Grimwitz Zinal backcountry adventures operation in the Swiss Alps, tells us: “Many areas had no snow for an extended period, which resulted in a very poor snow base. In a situation where temperatures are low, crystals loosen instead of bonding, creating a weak layer. Now, there’s a lot of new snow sitting on that weak layer.”

In addition, there has been a lot of wind, which leads to snow accumulation on slopes, another red flag for off-piste skiers.

“The danger will be reduced in popular off-piste areas that are skied a lot,” says Parks. “The real problem will be in the backcountry, where there are few skiers.”

Earlier in the season, off-piste diehards were at risk of injury from exposed rocks due to poor snow cover. Even now, there’s still some danger from rocks. “We’ve been skiing areas where there’s been a metre and a half of snow and we’re still getting through to rocks,” says Parks.

“The human factor is one of the biggest when it comes to triggering avalanches. If you’re going off-piste, have the necessary safety equipment [transceiver, shovel, probe and possibly an ABS airbag system], know how to use it and practise with it regularly.

“Learn how to suss out your starting point – is there accumulated snow above you? If so, steer well clear. What’s the run-out going to be like? Avoid convex slopes.

“After heavy snowfall, stay well away from steep slopes, anything over 30 degrees, and remember that avalanches can still occur in the trees or in ungroomed snow right next to the piste.

“Above all, learn how to spot the red flags and avoid being caught in an avalanche.”

Ski tragedy

Even before recent heavy snowfalls across the Alps, there had been a number of avalanche deaths, notably in Chamonix where one skier was killed skiing a steep line on the Vallée Blanche, and Patagonia-sponsored skier David Rosenbarger was killed while skiing the Italian side of Mont Blanc (both on January 23).

In a separate incident on the same day, Irish snowboarder Brendan O’Sullivan died following an accident on the Tour Ronde in the Chamonix area. A native of Co Tipperary, Brendan was a talented big mountain snowboarder and well known in the Chamonix skiing community.