

# How to Find a Campground That Fits Your Comfort Zone

These tips will help you find a campsite with your desired amenities and security



*Staying in a campground makes being in nature easier; however, only you can decide your comfort level. Here, an aerial view of Hidden Creek campground in North Carolina.*

COURTESY SPACIOUS SKIES/HIDDEN CREEK AERIAL

By Kit Bernardi, AARP

[EN ESPAÑOL](#) | Published May 14, 2024

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Whether you are an experienced camper and avid RVer like me, or

planning your first camping trip ever, staying in campgrounds makes living in nature easier. They bridge the raw beauty of the great outdoors and the indoor comforts and conveniences of home.

According to IBISWorld, an organization that provides industry research, there are more than 15,000 campgrounds in the country. Each one offers different services and amenities.



## Maximize Your Benefits

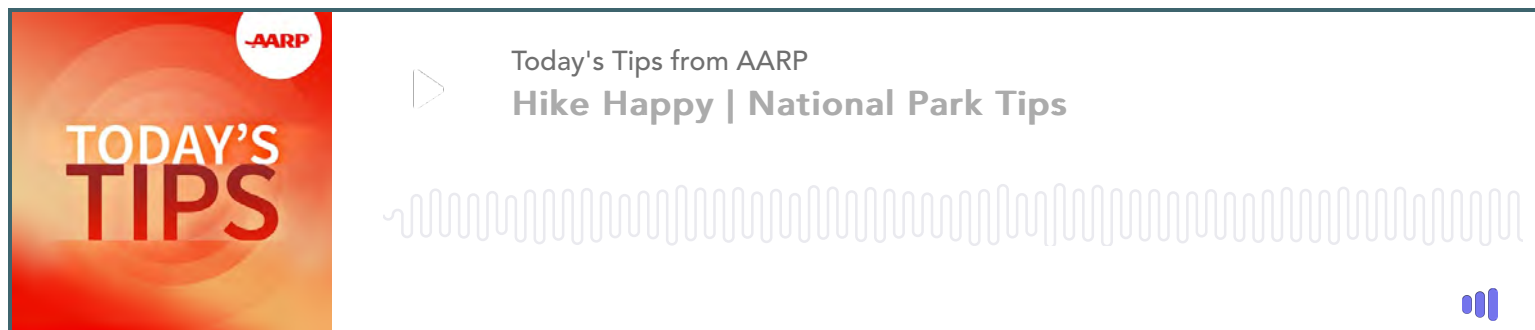
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In the last two decades RV ownership has increased 62 percent, according to a 2021 Go RVing demographic profile of RV owners. Owners are almost equally divided between those over 55 and those younger, the profile notes. The report identified seven types of RV owners. More than half of the RV owners were older than 55 in five of

the seven groups.

The same profile indicated that when RVers are searching for campground accommodations, state parks are the most popular at 63 percent, followed by [private campgrounds](#) at 53 percent, and national parks at 35 percent.



No matter the type of campground, guests usually share not only the starry skies above, but public facilities including bathrooms, bathhouses, laundries, rec rooms and recreational spaces. Only you can determine your comfort using them.

When choosing a campground, first take an honest assessment of your personal standards for feeling at home living outdoors and compare that to what the campground provides.

To help you decide what is right for you, here are campground lifestyle tips and insights into campground operations.

## Booking a campsite

A campground's surrounding natural environment influences what services are available. Before booking campsites, you need to understand descriptions of them. Changing campsites upon arrival can be difficult, especially in busy summer months.

Park Ranger Ryan Koepke oversees the Indiana Dunes National Park's Dunewood Campground's bookings and operations. Explaining campsite terminology, he says "full RV hookup" campsites have electricity, water, sewerage and possibly cable TV. Full hookup campsites at [national parks](#) and [state parks](#) are very limited.

For the term "dry campsite," Koepke says it can be confusing. These may have electricity, or not. "Primitive campsites," often tent sites, generally do not have any services.

All campgrounds have either pit, port-a-pot (portable) or flush toilets. Many campgrounds have pet-designated campsites and [accessible sites](#), often with paved areas.

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Campgrounds use online reservation systems. Recreation.gov is the

U.S. government’s centralized booking system. Websites and apps such as Campendium, Go Camping America, Go RVing, The Dyrt and Roadtrippers provide details and compare public and private campgrounds across the country.

Need more information? Call or email campgrounds. Generally, privately owned campgrounds also take reservations over the phone.



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## Comfort and cleanliness

To feel most comfortable when camping, Koepke says, “Keep your campsite clean and use common sense.”

Preparing meals outdoors naturally attracts critters. “While seeing wildlife is one of the top reasons to camp, do not invite animals into your campsite by feeding them or leaving food and packaging out,” Koepke says. “Store food in the car, trailer, RV or secure cooler.”

For example, I cover my campsite's picnic table with a reusable, washable tablecloth. Always dispose of garbage in the campground's dumpsters. Wash dishes and cookware in hot water, ideally with biodegradable soap, in outdoor sinks attached to park bathhouses.

All well-run campgrounds clean bathhouses and bathrooms daily at designated hours posted on their doors. You can plan your personal hygiene routine accordingly. My bathhouse essentials are rubber flip-flops, a small bathmat and a shower caddy. Often shower stalls lack enough hooks, so I bring an over-the-door one to prevent clothes and towels from touching the floor.

If the more rustic park camping experience is outside your comfort zone, stay at privately owned mom-and-pop campgrounds or national chain campgrounds such as Sun Outdoors, Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park and Kampgrounds of America (KOA). Their services and amenities can include restaurants, swimming pools, arcades, scheduled activities and golf cart rentals.

In addition to RV sites, many private campgrounds rent accommodations such as basic cabins and yurts, even tricked-out RVs and [tiny houses](#). Usually, you bring your own bedding and towels.

## **Safety and security**

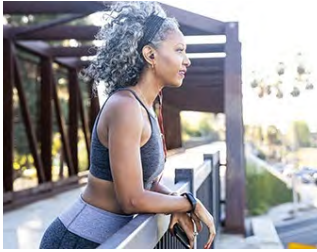
Whether camping with friends, family or alone, everyone wants to feel

safe.

Taking time to familiarize yourself with the campground facilities and natural surroundings helps. Therefore, it's always wise to arrive close to check-in time, usually in the afternoon, so staff is readily available to answer questions and you can easily see the entire operation in daylight.

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Wi-Fi signal strengths vary by campground. If a consistent, strong connection is a must, bring a [mobile hot spot](#) or go into town to use a library or coffee shop connection.

An outdoorswoman living in Granby, Colorado, Gaylene Ore, 60, has backpacked, tent camped and RV camped around the country for a total of 38 years, and still does it all. Some of Ore's favorite camping trips are with girlfriends and fellow members of national, women-only camper organizations Girl Camper and Sisters on the Fly. She joins her RV camping girlfriends at Colorado's Mueller State Park and Wolford Mountain Reservoir, among others.

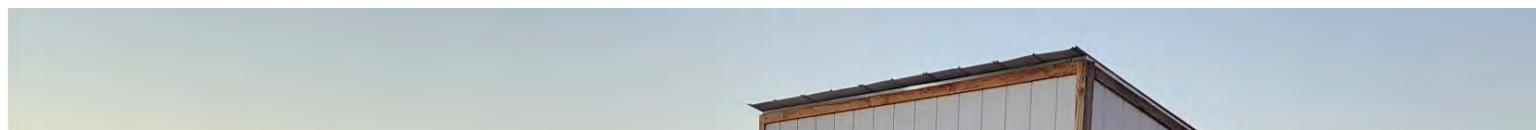
When accessing campgrounds, Ore always looks for clean bathrooms and an easily reachable campground host on site. “I feel most comfortable in campgrounds located within walking distance of trailheads for hiking and near a small town with restaurants and medical services available, just in case.”

National Park System campground hosts undergo federal background checks, Koepke says. “If necessary, hosts work with federal law enforcement park rangers who patrol campgrounds 24/7 and handle issues such as thefts, disturbances and emergencies.”

At private campgrounds, expect more security features, such as well-lit, paved or crushed gravel pathways, larger-sized signage, perimeter fences and security cameras. Lifeguards may be on duty at swimming pools. Night managers stay on site. Bathhouses often have security entrance code keypads and, instead of curtains, locking doors on shower stalls.

## **Community spirit**

Campers are friendly, so it is easy to meet new people. Private campgrounds often plan themed social events, host activities and invite local musicians to entertain guests.







*Private campgrounds often plan themed social events for guests. Marathon Motel & RV Park in Texas hosted a stargazing party.*

COURTESY KIT BERNADI

On a recent RV camping trip out West with my husband, we stargazed with a resident, amateur astronomer at the Marathon Motel & RV Park an hour from artsy Marfa, Texas. While staying at New Mexico's Alamogordo White Sands KOA Journey campground, we joined town residents listening to country bluegrass group The Jammers.

KOA franchise owners Sandy and Kelly Rodwick, 52 and 56, respectively, bought the 8.5-acre KOA campground after working in corporate America. "To stay at a campground is to become part of an instant community of people who love to travel and experience new things," says Sandy Rodwick. "We learn a lot from one another."

Founded in March 2021 by Ali and Eric Rasmussen, Spacious Skies Campgrounds strives to expand the meaning of campground community. Each of the privately owned company's 15 campgrounds in 10 states along the East Coast is designed to reflect distinct regional culture. Guests 50-plus comprise most of their company's camping population. All the campgrounds institute rules ensuring guests of diverse backgrounds and beliefs feel welcome.

"Our 150 staff members undergo diversity training earning the Unity Blaze Certification created by the Black Folks Camp Too organization," says Ali Rasmussen, an experienced camper of Cuban American descent. "We are one of the most vocal companies in the campground space instituting inclusivity policies."

Campgrounds are common ground we share. Determining in advance of a camping trip what makes you feel comfortable in the outdoors helps you and everyone else at the campground be happy campers.

### **Camping health and safety tips**

- **Pack essentials.** Flashlight or headlamp, rain gear, reusable water bottle, energizing snacks, sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, sunscreen, insect repellent, cellphone battery chargers, sunglasses, medications and a first aid kit.
- **Take precautions.** Always be aware of your surroundings. Don't leave valuables like phones and purses out to tempt passersby. At night and when away from the campsite, lock up vehicles and bicycles. At the campground, use only its password-protected Wi-Fi connection. Store an extra set of car

and trailer keys separately from the vehicles. When camping solo, inform someone of your travel plans. Check in with the campground host from time to time.

- **Be a good neighbor.** Respect other campers’ privacy. Do not blast music or televisions. Follow campground quiet hours rules. Keep pets leashed. If you see or experience something concerning, inform campground management. Clean up after yourself.

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*Chicago-based freelancer Kit Bernardi road trips throughout the Midwest in her RV. Her work has appeared in USA Today, Go Escape Magazine, Fodor’s Travel, Girl Camper Magazine, South China Morning Post and other outlets worldwide.*

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