

Camping is back, with fewer people and activities and more cleaning and waiting

By **Danielle Braff**

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Kristi Haight was getting very tired of staring at her four walls. So the Greensboro, N.C., [blogger](#) packed up her family, face masks, hand sanitizer and food — and went camping for the weekend at a beach in South Carolina, [coronavirus-style](#).

The family brought their own food and drink for the trip, avoiding restaurants and gas station stores, Haight said. When they reached the beach, “we spent all of our time at the campground and at our campsite.”

In the covid-19 world, camping might be the hottest getaway around. As of June 1, about 80 percent of campgrounds, RV parks and camping locations on Campendium — a Web app listing about 30,000 campsites throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico — were open, according to Leigh Wetzel, co-founder of Campendium.

Each state has its own guidelines and rules when it comes to camping mid-pandemic. For example, Ohio's parks and recreational facilities just opened at the end of May, while California's state and local parks are still closed, although it has allowed RV parks to continue to operate, said David Strait, an advertising services vendor in the outdoor hospitality industry.

Campers are flocking to any place available. Bookings for RV rentals have doubled week over week since April 20, shortly after states began to announce reopening plans, said Maddi Bourgerie, spokeswoman for RVshare, an RV rental marketplace similar to Airbnb. Arizona and Oklahoma bookings have more than doubled compared with this time last year, while Arkansas, Utah and Wyoming sites have grown more than 50 percent, Bourgerie said.

Because camping provides more opportunities for social distancing than, say, a vacation to a resort or a major city, it's become enticing even for those who wouldn't typically take a camping vacation.

Amie White and her family were supposed to drive from Illinois to St. Paul, Minn., to visit friends for Memorial Day. That was pre-covid. Instead, they snagged campsites halfway between the homes in Wisconsin. “We won’t share food like we usually do, and we’ll try to maintain social distance around the fire pit for the kids to roast s’mores together,” White said before the trip. “We just felt this was the best possible option to see dear friends while minimizing exposure.”

Christine Wang, founder of the blog [TheSkiGirl](#), said that since the ski industry essentially shut down for the season, her team has been exploring other travel avenues to write about and to explore. “Camping has become a big focus,” Wang said.

Still, camping today isn’t going to feel like it did before the pandemic. There will be fewer people to allow for social distancing, some activities will be closed (many pools are shuttered for now), and cleaning and waiting will be more common. Each campground is creating its own coronavirus distancing rules. For example, the Alvarado Campground in Colorado is setting limits of two tents and two vehicles per campsite, with gatherings that don’t exceed eight people.

Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts — locally operated independent franchises throughout the country — are following federal, state and local directives. To that end, guests can expect enhanced cleaning procedures, increased use of disinfectants when the cabins are serviced, and cleaning of golf carts and bicycles between rentals. Some Jellystone pools and splash grounds may not be open, depending on the local social distancing guidelines.

Georgianne Austin, spokeswoman for Escapees RV Club, whose eight RV parks across Southern and Midwestern states have remained open through the pandemic, said the company has implemented many changes. All gathering spaces are closed, including pools, clubhouses and activity centers, Austin said. The park offices are conducting business electronically and are closed to walk-ins. Shared facilities, such as bathrooms, shower rooms and laundry facilities, are open but are cleaned multiple times daily.

Such precautions are a start, but they don't remove all the hazards of covid-19, according to Leann Poston, a pediatrician, assistant dean at Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine and a contributor to Invigor Medical. Camping safely, she said, depends on how you camp.

“If you are a camper with your own restroom and there is enough space in the campground for you to socially distance, then I think it is probably safe,” she said. “If you are tent camping and need to use the campground restrooms, then you are at a higher risk.”

Because it’s unclear whether the novel coronavirus can be spread via feces or aerosolized particles generated when toilets are flushed, it’s important to avoid public restrooms and minimize contact with potentially infected surfaces, Poston said. If you must use a public restroom while camping, Poston suggested avoiding touching any surfaces and door handles and asking in advance how the campground is monitoring the cleanliness of the bathroom.

Campgrounds that cater to a single family or group at a time may be safer right now, said Tyler Weathers, an instructor at [Trail Blazer Survival School](#) in South Carolina and co-owner of a few campgrounds. He suggested looking for campgrounds where you can book electronically and rent the entire campground. If that’s not an option, ask whether you can stay in a campsite that’s farther away from the main camping area of the park, he said.

Sticking to remote areas of dispersed sites (public lands outside designated campgrounds) is just one of the strategies employed by Marissa Lovell of Boise, Idaho, who went camping with her partner in the height of the pandemic and has other camping trips planned nearly every weekend in the near future. She and her partner bring their own water and gas so they can bypass all small towns during the drive. They sleep in their truck or their tent and bring their food and cooking supplies.

“I have noticed that some areas are busier than they normally are, but it seems to be mostly day use with hiking and biking,” Lovell said. “People have been good about keeping distance on the trail, from my experience, and everyone seems very happy to have open spaces to escape to.” She said that she intends to avoid campgrounds even when Idaho reopens them.

No matter how many adjustments campers make, however, the safest option is to stay home, said Diane Vukovic, founder of the website [Mom Goes Camping](#).

“Campgrounds are typically located in remote areas which do not always have access to hospitals,” Vukovic said. “These gateway communities could end up with covid-19 outbreaks because of travelers who used their facilities along the way, such as when buying gas or stopping in a store to buy some snacks.”

Because not all campgrounds are arranged in a way that allows campers to be distant from one another, Vukovic suggests looking for smaller campgrounds, which are more likely to have a good distance between pitches. While these may not have as many amenities as the larger spots, they will be better for a socially distanced vacation, she said.

“Even better, consider going wild or dispersed camping,” she said, noting that it offers another major attraction: It’s free.

Or, try your own backyard.

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