

# NATIONAL PARK CAMPGROUNDS



## I Chapter Outline

1. Exploring the Range of National Park Campground Options
2. National Park Campground Guide
3. Build Your National Park Campground Bucket List



### Key Chapter Takeaways

- National parks are a category of public parks and share many of the pros and cons of camping in state and county parks.
- Since national park campgrounds are managed by the NPS, there is some continuity across parks; however, there are a range of campgrounds even within this category.
- Knowing how to find and reserve NPS campsites and understanding what to expect can help you make the most of this type of camping experience.

## I What's the Big Idea?

National parks are a glorious part of the U.S., preserving some of the most beautiful landscapes and powerful historic and cultural sites. NPS campgrounds put you right in the center of the action.

Much of the information about public state and county parks from the previous chapter also pertains to national parks. However, this chapter will help you learn more about national park camping, in particular, and give you tips for finding and reserving NPS campsites.

# PART I:

## Exploring the Range of National Park Campground Options



### I Do All National Parks Offer Camping?

No. While there are over 400 NPS sites, only 130 have campgrounds.

You'll find campgrounds at many of the 63 official national parks, as well as some of the national monuments, seashores, scenic riverways, and other points of interest.

### What Can You Expect at a National Park Campground?

- Many national parks have multiple campgrounds within the park boundaries with a wide range of options for sites and amenities.
- You'll find a wide variety of customer service, care, and upkeep. Some national park campgrounds are run by concessionaires instead of the NPS.

### What Hookups Are Commonly Found in National Park Campgrounds?

- Many national park campgrounds don't have any hookups.
- Some have water and electric hookups.
- Only a handful have full hookups.

### Which National Park Campgrounds Have Full Hookups?

- Fishing Bridge in Yellowstone NP
- Trailer Village in Grand Canyon NP
- Colter Bay in Grand Teton NP
- Rio Grande Village in Big Bend NP
- Furnace Creek, Panamint Springs, and Stovepipe Wells in Death Valley NP

*This list may not include all of the parks with full hookups.*

# PART I:

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### What Amenities Are Commonly Found in National Park Campgrounds?

- Some have restrooms and shower houses with running water, but some don't. You may find vault toilets or no restrooms at some campgrounds.
- Some have laundry facilities (for an extra cost).
- While you won't find pools or other additional recreational facilities, you'll have access to the park (which may include hiking trails, marinas, and more).

### What Else Do You Need to Know About Camping in a National Park Campground?

- Many national parks have multiple campgrounds within the park boundaries with a wide range of options for sites and amenities.
- You'll find a wide variety of customer service, care, and upkeep. Some national park campgrounds are run by concessionaires instead of the NPS.

### Can You Reserve Campsites at National Parks in Advance?

- Some campgrounds allow reservations while some don't.
- Many NPS campgrounds are first come, first served.
- You'll often find one or two campgrounds within park boundaries that allow reservations.

### How Much Does a Campsite Cost at a National Park Campground?

While costs vary, expect to pay as little as \$15 per night for a basic tent campsite with no hookups and up to \$75 per night for an RV site with hookups. Most RV sites cost between \$25 and \$50 per night.



*Even if you pay for a campsite at a national park campground, you still need to pay the park's entrance fee. An annual national park pass can save you money if you spend several days in national parks throughout the year.*

# PART I:

## Exploring the Range of National Park Campground Options



### What Are the Pros of Camping in a National Park Campground?

- Easy access to the park (will not have to drive in and out each day).
- Located in some of the most beautiful landscapes in the U.S.
- Immersion in the national park experience (including ranger-led evening programs).
- Lots of wildlife viewing opportunities.

### What Are the Cons of Camping in a National Park Campground?

- Need to plan in advance to get a reservation; many RV sites fill as soon as the reservation booking window opens.
- Many campgrounds do not accept reservations, which means you risk showing up and not having a campsite.
- Lack of hookups.
- May have fewer amenities.
- Little to no WiFi or cell phone service.
- May be located far from restaurants and stores.
- May be difficult to navigate—or have no campsites—for large RVs.

### What Do You Need to Know About the Wildlife in National Park Campgrounds?

Many national parks are located in bear country.

Special precautions must be made to safely store food and toiletries, so you don't attract bears.

You must be bear aware when walking around the park.

Other parks may have elk or bison that traverse the campground. While these animals look calm and slow, they can quickly become aggressive and are surprisingly quick.



## Can RVs over 30 Feet Fit into National Park Campgrounds?

As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a common concern.

While 30 feet is not a hard cutoff for national park campgrounds, the larger your rig is, the fewer campsite choices you'll find.



**If you have a large rig and can't find an appropriate spot, don't try to "squeeze" in. If you end up not fitting, you'll be out of luck. Also, your oversized rig may make it more difficult for others to navigate the park. Your best bet is to find a private campground outside of the national park.**

# | What If National Park Camping Isn't for You?

If the cons of national park camping outweigh the pros for you, or if you can't snag a site at an NPS campground for your trip, don't worry. There are often private campgrounds located near national parks.

Some are situated right outside of the park gate, while others are a bit farther away.

The bottom line is that you can still enjoy national parks without camping in them.

## Additional Notes:



# I What's the Big Idea?

One of the most challenging parts of national park camping is knowing which national park campgrounds allow RV camping and how to navigate online reservation booking systems. We've developed a national park campground guide that helps you navigate reservation booking windows, campground amenities, pet policies, and more. You can download the guide for free with this course.

## | Additional Notes: