

# PRIVATE CAMPGROUNDS

## Chapter Outline

1. Exploring the Range of Private Campground Options
2. Private Campground Chains, Franchises, Timeshares, and Memberships
3. Build Your Private Campground Bucket List



### Key Chapter Takeaways

- Private campgrounds range from simple “mom-and-pop” parks to over-the-top camping resorts.
- Price points, amenities, and campsites all greatly vary across private campgrounds.
- Private parks are great, but they do have some drawbacks.
- Some RVers enjoy visiting campground chains and franchises since they offer some predictability from park to park.
- Timeshares and memberships can help you save money and find reliable parks.

## What's the Big Idea?

Let's go back to that budget motel vs. resort hotel idea from Chapter One. As we pointed out, travelers are familiar with those names and brands and know which option to pick that meets their needs.

The same can be true for campgrounds. One thing RVers like about private parks is that, as you become familiar with the various types of parks within this category, you can start to identify parks that might fit your preferences.



# PART I:

## Exploring the Range of Private Campground Options



### | What Are the Types of Private Campground Options?

- Small, independent campgrounds
- Large, privately owned campgrounds
- Franchises
- Chains

### | What Can You Expect at a Small, Independent Campground?

Simple sites with simple amenities.

May be a family-owned “mom-and-pop” business.

May primarily be good for short stays.

### | What Can You Expect at a Large, Privately Owned Campground?

Wide range of site types and amenities.

May be a family-owned business—or not.

### | What Can You Expect at a Franchise Campground?

Independently owned but operates under a franchise agreement (such as KOA or Jellystone).

While some amenities are found across each franchise, others vary.

Generally offer a similar ambiance across campgrounds.

May have campgrounds labeled within the franchise to designate a certain level of service.

# PART I:

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### | What Can You Expect at a Chain Campground?

A larger company owns and operates multiple campgrounds (such as Sun RV Resorts and Adventure Bound Camping Resorts).

Offers a more consistent level of amenities, service, and experiences from park to park.

### | What Should You Know about Private Campgrounds?

As you can see, there are various **types** of private campgrounds.

Even within each type, there is a **range** in amenities, services, and experiences.

### | What Should You Know about Private Campgrounds?

You'll find everything from roadside parks set up for overnight stays to high-end resorts, with pet services and deluxe recreational spaces.

*This leads us to the next point...*

### | How Much Does It Cost to Stay at a Private Campground?

Prices vary between the types of campgrounds.

Prices often correlate to the level of amenities, services, and experiences offered.

Expect to pay somewhere between \$30 to \$100 or more per night.

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### What Else Affects the Pricing at a Private Campground?

#### Pricing often correlates to the location:

- Parks in big cities or near tourist attractions are inevitably more expensive.
- Parks in certain regions cost more (such as the Northeast versus the Midwest).

#### Pricing may correlate to the date or season:

- Peak season costs more than non-peak.
- Weekends and holidays may be more expensive.

### What Is Surge or Dynamic Pricing?

Surge pricing is a relatively new practice. A campground will not have advertised rates. Instead, rates will fluctuate based on the items already discussed as well as park capacity and other variables. The pricing model is similar to booking airline tickets.

### What Should You Expect to Pay at a Private Campground?

Type of Park	Range of Estimated Prices
Small, independent campgrounds	\$30 to \$50 per night
Large, privately owned campgrounds	\$40 to \$70 per night Can cost more in certain regions/locations.
Franchises	\$50 to \$80 per night Can cost more in certain regions/locations.
Chains	\$60 to \$100 per night Full-fledged resorts may cost as much as \$150 per night in prime locations, like near national parks.

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### What Are Some Sample Prices for a Private Campground?

- KOA Journeys are located near an interstate and designed for overnight stops. The Goodland KOA Journey in Kansas costs \$40 to \$50 per night depending on the site type. This is typical for a KOA Journey.
- Normandy Farms is a privately owned camping resort near Boston. Expect to pay \$55 to \$132 per night, depending on the type of site, the day of the week, and the season.
- Disney's Fort Wilderness in Florida is located in the park's Magic Kingdom. A tent or pop-up site may run \$100 per night, while a premium campsite will cost upwards of \$200 per night during peak season.

### What Other Fees Might Not Be Included in the Nightly Rate at a Private Campground?

In addition to paying for your campsite, there may be extra fees for the following:

- Additional people (many park rates are based on 2 to 6 occupants)
- Access to amenities (which could require tickets, wristbands, etc.)

### What Amenities Are You Likely to Find at ALL Private Campgrounds?

- Developed campsites (may be gravel or concrete)
- Hookups (though you'll not always have full hookups)
- Comfort station (restrooms and showers with running water)
- Laundry facilities (for an extra cost)
- Office
- Dump station (may cost extra to use)

# PART I:

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### What Amenities Are You Likely to Find at MANY Private Campgrounds?

- Playgrounds
- Pool
- Developed camp store
- Paved roads
- Activities for children (i.e. crafts, movie night)
- Online reservation booking system
- Groundskeepers, campground hosts, etc.
- WiFi (connectivity level and speed can vary)

### What Amenities Are You Likely to Find at Resort-Level Private Campgrounds?

- Developed recreational facilities (game room, gym, indoor pool, bike rentals, etc.)
- Multiple pools or water features (sprayground, hot tub, etc.)
- Manicured campsites and grounds with more flowers and foliage
- A schedule of hosted activities (games, exercise classes, etc.)
- Places for groups/families to gather (i.e. pavilions, fire pit)
- A variety of restaurants, bars, and snack shacks

### What Are the Pros of Private Campgrounds?

- Ease of booking
- Customer service and support
- Hookups
- Amenities
- Possibility of seasonal camping
- Convenient location



## What Are the Cons of Private Campgrounds?

- Cost
- Size of site
- Lack of privacy
- Less natural ambiance
- May be busier/noisier
- Lots of kids (while not a con for families, this may be a drawback for those who aren't traveling with children)

## Additional Notes:

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## PART II:

### Private Campground Franchises, Chains, Timeshares, and Memberships



## | What's the Big Idea?

Some private campgrounds are part of chains, franchises, timeshares, or membership programs. Some of these require RVers to join a program or pay for a membership, which may cost as little as \$30 per year or upwards of thousands of dollars to join.

Sometimes, membership is required to camp at specific campgrounds. Other times, membership gives you access to discounted rates.

This section will break down several of these options, so you can decide whether any of these options are right for you.

## | What Are Some Well-Known Campground Franchises?

- KOA
- Jellystone

## | What Do You Need to Know about KOA?

KOA = Kampgrounds of America. There are over 500 KOAs spread across the U.S. and Canada. The KOA Rewards program is inexpensive and provides discounted rates and free nights.

## | What Can You Expect at a KOA?

KOA has designations to help you know what to expect:

**KOA Journey:** Great for short stays, located near a highway, and usually have onsite amenities (but they may not have a full suite).

**KOA Holiday:** An ideal basecamp for vacation destinations, offer an array of onsite amenities and activities, as well as deluxe campsite options.

**KOA Resort:** Best for when you plan to spend most of your time at the campground, offer tons of onsite amenities and activities, as well as deluxe campsite options.



## PART II:

### Private Campground Franchises, Chains, Timeshares, and Memberships



## What Do You Need to Know about Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts?

Yogi Bear is the face of the franchise.

There are over 75 Jellystone locations in the U.S. and Canada.

It's free to join the Club Yogi Rewards program, which allows you to earn free nights and merchandise based on your stays.

## What Can You Expect at a Jellystone?

This franchise is family focused.

While some parks offer more amenities and recreational opportunities than others, you'll find that all Jellystones have an array of offerings.

## What Makes a Chain Different from a Franchise?

Franchises provide consistent marketing and common features, while being independently owned by franchisees.

Campground chains are collectively owned by the same person or organization.

## What Are Some Well-Known Campground Chains?

- Sun RV Resorts
- Highway West Vacations

## PART II:

### Private Campground Franchises, Chains, Timeshares, and Memberships



## What Should You Know about Campground Chains?

Many focus on the high-end resort experience.

Some parks are all-ages, while others are for those 55 and older.

Some chains may focus on motorhomes, while others offer parks for all kinds of campers.

## What Is an RV Timeshare?

Like regular timeshares, you pay to “own” a piece of a park. You’re usually allowed to stay a limited number of nights per year. You may have access to one park or to a chain of parks.

## What Are the Pros and Cons of RV Timeshares?

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sense of community.</li><li>May be able to store rig onsite.</li><li>Dedicated campground.</li><li>Have a sense of ownership.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Limited nights and locations.</li><li>Additional fees and taxes.</li><li>May get tired of camping in the same places.</li><li>May be hard to sell.</li></ul>

## What Should You Know About Campground Memberships?

Some campground memberships get you premiere access and deep discounts for campgrounds and campsites you would not have access to otherwise. For example:

- Thousand Trails
- Passport America
- Harvest Hosts

Some campground memberships give you a discount at parks open to the general public. For example:

- Good Sam

## PART II:

### Private Campground Franchises, Chains, Timeshares, and Memberships



## | What Is the Good Sam Club?

- A Good Sam membership gets you discounts at a network of parks, at Camping World stores, and more.
- Good Sam's network of parks is not a franchise or chain.
- Instead, these parks are rated and assured to meet minimum quality standards.
- The network includes over 1,000 parks in the U.S. and Canada.
- You can access ratings and reviews on the Good Sam website.
- Membership costs less than \$30 per year.

## | What Is Harvest Hosts?

- A network of almost 1,000 non-traditional campsites.
- May be located at small businesses, like wineries and farms.
- Inexpensive to join (currently \$99 per year).
- Stays are free, with the expectation that you buy something from the businesses.
- Limited amenities and hookups at campsites (be prepared for dry camping).
- No central reservation system or guarantee of openings.

## | Are Campground Memberships Worth the Cost?

This is a popular question.

There is no one answer. It really depends on what type of camping you plan to do.

The more you pay for membership, the more likely you are to get free nights. However, these may be limited.

You'll have to balance the cost with the amount of camping you'll do at the included parks.



***Gain some camping experience before joining any expensive membership program. That way, you'll really understand your needs, typical expenses, and camping style.***