

The Ultimate Guide to Free RV Camping

Your go-to manual for preparing for, finding, and selecting the most beautiful campsites across North America.



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Welcome!

Traveling in an RV is an experience like no other. All over the world, more and more people are purchasing RVs and hitting the road to seek out adventure and exploration in the ultimate road trip mobile. Within the world of RVing, there are so many different ways to travel. Some people travel in vans, while others travel in enormous motorhomes, and others in more compact fifth wheels and travel trailers.

Likewise, there are many different ways to camp. Some people prefer to camp mainly in five-star resorts, while others camp in parking lots, and many more in national, state, and county park campgrounds. Some people travel solo, others as couples, and others as entire families. Furthermore, some folks travel full-time, while others travel for part of the year, and others for just an occasional weekend trip or yearly vacation. There is no wrong way to enjoy this lifestyle, and the variety and possibilities are some of the main factors that make the RV lifestyle so appealing.



Despite all the differences and possibilities within the world of RVing, one thing remains constant: no matter who you are or how you travel, the cost of traveling in an RV can quickly add up. Between paying for gas, lodging, food, recreation, activities, and more, it's easy to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars on a single vacation. To combat this, many RVers seek out free methods of camping.

Believe it or not, there are many ways to camp in your RV at absolutely no cost to you. And the best part is that these free sites are often just as appealing as paid sites, if not more so! In fact, there are even some RVers who travel full-time and rarely paying for campsites at all. It's totally possible to do, and even if you do not plan to travel entirely for free, the occasional free campsite can save you money over time.



In this guide...

We will discuss all the details behind free RV camping. We will define all the slang and jargon that go along with these concepts, as well as tell you why free camping can be fun. Then we'll discuss how to dry camp, since free RV camping is almost always done unplugged. We'll teach you all about how to conserve water, generate electricity, empty your tanks, dispose of garbage, and connect to the Internet, sans hookups.

Next, we'll go over the best tools used to find free RV camping sites, as well as the factors you should consider when selecting a site. Then, we will review the many free places at which you can camp and how to best utilize each of these types of places. Finally, we will conclude with a list of dos and don'ts, general free camping etiquette, and some frequently asked questions. So without further ado, buckle up and cruise along with us as we discuss the vast world of free RV camping and all that it entails.

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What is free RV camping?

Within the realm of free camping, there are many terms with which you may be unfamiliar. Here, we'll define all the particular words you'll see mentioned in this guide so that you can follow along with ease.

Dry camping: refers to camping without any exterior hookups, including water, sewer, electric, cable, or Internet. Most forms of free camping require dry camping.

Boondocking: refers to dry camping for free, oftentimes "in the boondocks." Many people use this term interchangeably with dry camping, but for the purpose of this guide, we will only use the term boondocking to refer to free, dry camping done on public lands.

Dispersed Camping: another term used to refer to boondocking. The term "dispersed" refers to the public lands on which you can camp anywhere.

Blacktop Boondocking: refers to dry camping in parking lots. This can be anywhere from Walmarts to rest stops, Cracker Barrel, mall parking lots, and so much more.

Moochdocking: refers to free camping with family or friends who allow you to park in their driveway or backyard. Hookups may or may not be included.

Wallydocking: a slang term often used ironically to refer to dry camping specifically in Walmart parking lots.

Off-grid: refers to camping in the wilderness without access to hookups or most other conveniences of civilization.

Public land: refers to the roughly 640 million acres of US land collectively owned by the general public. This land is managed by four different federal agencies (USFS, BLM, FWS, and NPS), and can be used for a variety of activities, including camping, hunting, fishing, sports, and more.

USFS: an abbreviation that stands for the United States Forest Service. This federal agency manages the 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands spread out over 193 million total acres of US public land.

BLM: an abbreviation that stands for Bureau of Land Management. This agency oversees the 247+ million acres of public land across the US.

FWS or USFWS: an abbreviation for Fish and Wildlife Service or United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The FWS oversees the National Wildlife Refuge system, fish hatcheries, endangered species programs and more.

NPS: an abbreviation that stands for National Park Service. This agency is responsible for 391 areas of nationally-recognized land, including national parks, monuments, memorials, historical parks, historical sites, parkways, preserves, reserves, seashores, lakeshores, recreation areas, rivers, and more.

Be sure to refer back to this glossary if you stumble upon a term you don't know later on in this guide!

Why should I camp for free?

Now that you are up-to-speed on all the lingo, let's dive in and discuss the many reasons why you should consider free camping. Here, you'll also find a few testimonies from full-time RVers on why they love free camping and their general thoughts on its main benefits.

1. You can't beat the cost

Let's state the obvious: nothing beats free! Saving money on camping costs will allow you to spend more on food, fun, and activities. Saving on campsites may even allow you to plan more frequent RV vacations.

2. It can be very convenient

This does not apply to every type of free camping site, but camping in parking lots can offer some major conveniences. When shopping for groceries or supplies, it's extremely practical to be able to park your home outside and stay the night before moving on.

When actively traveling from one place to another, it is also convenient to stay overnight for free at a rest stop along the way. Here, you can often fill up on gas, propane, water, and more, prior to parking for a night's rest. As an added bonus, you can also stop at rest stops or rest areas when you need a break from driving. This is not possible when only staying at campgrounds and RV parks where reservations and planning ahead are usually required.



3. The views and closeness to nature are unbeatable

This perk mainly applies to camping for free on public lands (boondocking), but many free camping sites offer superior views and proximity to nature. In many campgrounds, you can expect to wake up and look out your window, only to be greeted by another RV parked just a few feet away. Out in the wild, you will often find yourself surrounded by nothing but views of forests, mountains, desert, ocean, and more.

In addition to offering excellent views and closeness to nature, boondocking often places you closer to opportunities for hiking and other outdoor activities. Accessing these right from your campsite is unbeatable.





4. Free camping offers more privacy

This is not true for every type of free campsite, but many offer superior privacy. Crowded campgrounds tend to pack RVs in close together, and, at these, you will usually be required to accept whichever site you are given. Camping on public lands allows you to select your own spot, at whatever distance from others you prefer. Some boondocking spots can be a bit crowded, but you will almost always have at least a few hundred feet to yourself, which is infinitely more than you can expect at a campground.

Likewise, even in parking lots or other free camping sites, you can select your own site and try to park as far off by yourself as you can. This is not even an option in most RV parks.

5. Greater variety of options

Adding free campsites into your repertoire of site potentials really expands your options. Instead of only being able to jump from campground to campground, you will have the option to camp in a variety of additional places. Even if you prefer campgrounds, there is not always one located in every area you may wish to visit. But the chances that there are no parking lots, public lands, Harvest Hosts, or more are slim. Camping for free can really broaden your horizons and open up the ability to visit many more places.

RVer Free Camping Testimonials

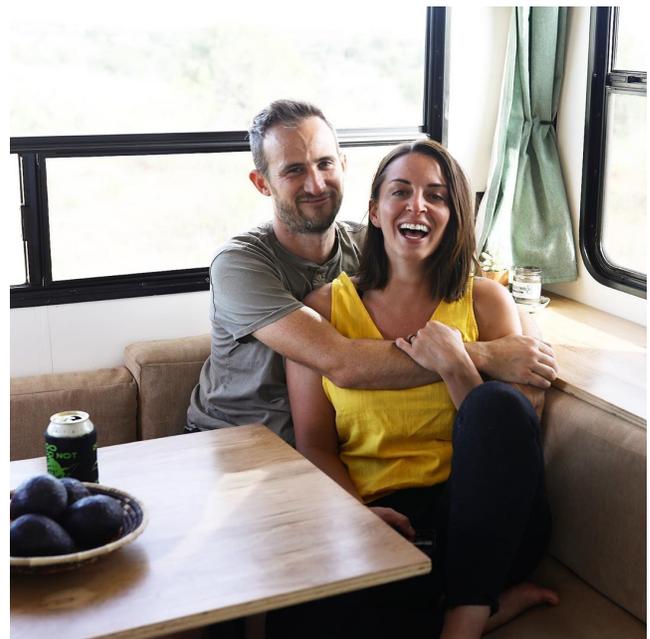
As mentioned previously, some full-timers even prefer free camping. Here, we asked five RVers to explain why they love free camping and what they feel are its greatest benefits.



"Everyone boondocks for different reasons and looks for different elements in their chosen locations but for us, the benefits are the views and the solitude. Sure, it's great that it's free but I'd pay for the spots we pick every time. The cost savings is the obvious benefit, but other benefits include the freedom to spread out beyond the boundaries of a campsite, solitude as I mentioned, and hands-down the adventure aspect of finding a spot off the beaten path, claiming it for a time, and then leaving it better than you found it (pack it out, folks!). The views will always be more epic out there!"

-Mallory of @wheres.mal.now

"My husband Justin and I enjoy boondocking because it's *usually* in a more private location and has a slower pace than camping in a campground or RV park. We look for pretty remote locations where we can't see any neighbors at all, just 360° views. Out there we can kind of breathe it all in and relax, but also get work done if we need to. One of our favorite spots in Arizona, where we spent almost two weeks, we woke up every morning and took a walk down the gravel road through the foothills, usually with coffee in hand. We did yoga on the grass in *our* front yard and then sat and listened to the birds and watched the wind blow the wildflowers. I guess what we love most about it is uninterrupted wilderness."





“One of the things I love the most about my camper is the windows, so I always want the best views out of my windows. Boondocking is how we accomplish this! The never-ending views energize me.

There are also so many benefits! Some of our favorites include that our dogs can roam freely under our supervision. With a German Shorthaired Pointer this is VERY important to stay sane in a small space. We can walk around outside in our PJs and don't have to worry about someone watching, very important. ;) Last, but not least, I really enjoy living by using solar and our water tanks. There is something remarkable about being able to move your comfy home into the middle of nowhere and being able to live your life in such beautiful places.”

-Mandy of @188sqft-

“For my husband Gerrit and I, boondocking is a great way to get close to nature, but still have the comforts that your RV provides. We enjoy the quiet, tranquil experience of boondocking to just relax and appreciate the outdoors. One of our favorite things about boondocking is that, often times, the places we stay are very dog-friendly and we can let our pups explore to their hearts' content.

Boondocking also gets us closer to, or right in the middle of, the outdoor activities that we enjoy most, like rock climbing and mountain biking. It is often free camping as well, which is a major plus!”

- Lindsey Vanderlugt of @lindsevandgerrit adventure



“When my family and I first began RVing, I was super uncomfortable with the notion of just sleeping in random places. As time went on, I fell in love with the freedom that boondocking provided us. I had spent so much time, energy and money trying to plan out where we were going to be when I realized that the freedom of full time travel is exactly that - freedom. I didn’t want to be stressed out about rushing through a spot we loved because we had reservations somewhere else to be and vice versa, if we didn’t love a spot why stay there? We learned what to look for with boondocking like spots where we felt safe and welcomed. I’m a huge proponent of boondocking and hope all travelers have the opportunity to experience freedom at its best.”

-May Jewell of @thejewelledlife



“My first time boondocking was incredible. I remember being a bit unsure of what to expect, but that very first morning, waking up to the sound of birds chirping outside and stepping outside with coffee to enjoy the freshness of the morning... it was an experience I’ll never forget. After that, I was hooked and didn’t usually want to camp anywhere but the wild. I love telling people all about the amazing experiences they can have dry camping, and you can’t argue with the fact that it’s completely free!”

-Brendan Binger of @lifeamongpines

How to Dry Camp

Now that we have discussed the what and the why of free camping, we can dive into the logistics of HOW to camp for free. As mentioned previously, free camping often requires dry camping without the use of hookups of any kind. For many, this can be quite a learning curve. Here, we'll share all the best tips for camping without hookups in hopes that your first time will be incident-free. In addition, we'll share all the best tools you can use to locate and find free campsites, as well as how to select the best free campsites out of all your potential options. By the end of this, we hope that you know exactly how it's done!



Margaret Treese

Managing Your Own Utilities while Dry Camping

Camping without hookups does not come naturally to most RVers. Connecting to endless water, shore power, and sewer disposal is certainly convenient and offers a travel experience comparable to living in a traditional home. Factor in that many campgrounds offer free WiFi and cable services, as well as convenient trash disposal, and you are probably wondering why anyone would even want to dry camp. However, if you want to be able to camp for free and enjoy the beauty of boondocking and host camping, then you are going to need to learn to camp without hookups. Here, we'll explain all the best tips and tricks as told by seasoned campers and RVers.

Water

This is probably the trickiest element of dry camping. Without water hook-up access, you must limit the amount of water you use while camping. This is especially relevant if you are planning a longer stay (10-14 days is typical for many boondockers). Large RVs boast larger fresh water holding tanks, with the biggest holding up to 150 gallons. This may not sound like a lot, but it is significantly more than many other types of RVs that often average 30-40 gallon capacity tanks. That being said, even 150 gallons is not that much water when you consider that the average American family uses up to 300 gallons of water in a single day. In order to make off-grid living possible, you will need to learn to cut back on your water usage. Follow these tips to know where to begin.

1. Determine your tank size.

Start by figuring out the exact size of your fresh water holding tank. This information can be found in your owner's manual or written on your holding tank. This will give you an idea of exactly how much water you have to work with. Then you can begin to implement water conservation tactics, as highlighted below.

2. Use less water.

The best way to conserve water is to simply use less. This means washing and rinsing dishes under a trickle. When washing your hands, you will also need to practice turning the water off between wetting, lathering, and rinsing.

You will also need to learn how to take short "military" showers. This is where you turn the water off in between wetting your hair and body, soaping up, and rinsing. It takes a little getting used to, but after some practice, you will eventually get the hang of it. For many, limiting water usage is a small price to pay for the solitude and beauty offered at many of the best free sites.

3. Know where to refill your fresh water tank.

Knowing where to fill your tank is another challenge that comes with managing water while dry camping. When moving from site to site, you must find places to fill your tank before moving on to a new location. There are many establishments that offer free, potable water, and it's never too difficult to find a spot to fill up. Free places include gas stations, travel centers, rest areas, fairgrounds, and state parks. As a last resort, if you can't find another place to fill your fresh water tank, you can pay a fee at a private campground (sometimes \$5 but up to \$10) to fill your tank.

The best travel centers with potable water are Love's, Flying J, and Pilot. These places are a magical one-stop-shop for boondocking RVers, typically providing free water and even a dump station in the same lane as a single gas pump, which are all designated for RVs. They often have propane available, as well, all with easy access and plenty of space for big rigs. It's typically easy to find at least one of these centers on the way from one place to another.

4. Carry extra jugs of water if you plan to camp for awhile.

Many RVers also carry six-gallon water jugs in case they run out of water before they're ready to move to a new site. In this instance, you can add a bit of extra water from the jugs to your tank to buy some more time before you can fill up again. If you need even more water, you can fill these jugs at one of the above-mentioned fill-up stations for free, or even at a Glacier water station for \$1.25 per jug. This can essentially supply you with an "unlimited" water source while boondocking, or at least one that is easily replenished. Do keep in mind that you still have a limited gray water tank capacity, so you still can't use that much water overall.

Sewer (gray and black tanks)

Another boondocking hassle is dealing with gray and black water. Gray water is wastewater from showers, dishes, and hand-washing, while black water is waste water that comes from your toilet. When you are at a campground, you typically have a sewer hook-up, and your waste goes directly into the sewer. When boondocking, all waste and wastewater is emptied directly into your respective gray and black water tanks and stored there until it is emptied. Follow these tips for black and gray water tank capacity tips.

1. Determine your gray and black tank sizes.

Similar to your fresh water tank capacity, it's important to know how much gray and black water your respective tanks can hold. Your gray tank is typically smaller than your fresh water tank to account for water that you drink. Knowing your tank capacities can help you to determine when it is time to empty them and when to cut back on water usage if they are filling too rapidly.

2. Conserve black and gray water capacity the same way you conserve fresh water.

If you are conserving water, you will also be conserving gray water holding tank capacity, since this is where used water is stored. If you add additional water to your water tank before you are able to utilize a dump station, keep an eye on the tank fill levels to avoid overflowing.

In the same way, if necessary, you can conserve black tank capacity by using public restrooms whenever possible. This will allow you to dry camp for longer without filling your back tank as quickly.

3. Determine where to empty your tanks.

When moving on from a dry camping site, your gray and black tanks will need to be emptied at a proper dump station. Similar to finding places to fill water, finding dump stations is not too difficult. Many RVers use gas stations and travel centers for dumping their tanks, and this is often free (or at most \$5-10). As mentioned above, Love's, Pilot, and Flying J are some of the best places to stop before boondocking, because they have everything you could need available in an easy-access lane.

The [Sanidumps website/app](#) is also perfect for dump station scouting. If all else fails and you cannot find a gas station or rest stop dump station, you can always pay a nominal fee to dump at a private campground or state park. Be sure to call ahead and make sure this is okay before showing up.

4. Consider using a composting toilet if you plan to dry camp often.

Some folks who mainly dry camp or boondock will swap out their regular RV toilet for a composting toilet. A composting toilet is a dry toilet that separates liquid and solid waste. Having a composting toilet instead of a standard toilet can ensure that you are not forced to move early due to a full black tank. It also lessens the urgency of finding a dump station immediately. A full gray tank is not necessarily a desperate situation, but a full black tank should be emptied immediately.

Composting toilets can be a bit pricey and are definitely not necessary for boondocking. In fact, if you plan to do a mix of boondocking and campground camping, a composting toilet may not even be the right choice for you. However, it is definitely something to consider if you plan to do lots of extended dry camping throughout your travels.

Electric

One of the biggest dry camping conundrums is the power situation. How does one acquire electricity when not hooked up to residential or RV shore power?

First, you will need to gain a basic understanding of how your RV's electric works when not plugged into shore power. Just like in any other vehicle, your RV has an automotive battery that allows you to start the car and recharges while you are driving. In addition to the automotive battery, RVs also have a house battery (or multiple house batteries). These are used to power lights, outlets, and appliances when you are not connected to shore power. In order to power your RV when you are not plugged into electricity, you will need to find another method to recharge these batteries. Below are the main methods that most campers use for power when not plugged in.

1. Charge batteries ahead of time and conserve charge

If you only plan to dry camp for an occasional night here or there, you may be able to store enough power for a short amount of time in your house batteries. This means all you have to do prior to heading out to camp is plug your RV into shore power for twenty-four hours or more. Depending on the quality and capacity of your house batteries, they may be able to hold enough power for basic electrical usage, such as powering low-voltage lights and maybe charging cell phones.

If you plan to dry camp for more than twenty-four hours at a time, you will want to look into utilizing one of the following methods.

2. Set up a generator

The most common way to charge your batteries is by using a generator. This also seems to be the most accessible off-grid power source. Many motorhomes come equipped with an on-board generator, which can be incredibly useful. However, even if your RV does not have an on-board generator, you can always purchase an external one and connect it to your batteries. These can cost anywhere from \$150-500+ for a decent one. They also require gas fill-ups and some regular maintenance, but this is still significantly off-set by the money saved at campgrounds and RV parks.

3. Install solar

Solar power is the third most common method used to garner electric while dry camping. Installing solar is a big financial commitment, but if you plan to do a lot of dry camping, it is worth researching and looking into. Solar power works by collecting solar energy on large panels that are typically installed on your RV's roof and sending that energy directly into your house batteries, where it is stored for later use. The larger your batteries, the more power you can store.

If installing solar, the amount of panels you decide to install is completely dependent on how you plan to use them. If you plan to dry camp full-time or part-time, you may want to invest in a large set-up with some high-capacity batteries. If you are only planning the occasional unplugged weekend trip, a single panel may suffice.

A simple solar set-up can cost around \$1,500 by the time you purchase panels, an inverter, a charge controller, upgraded batteries, and all the necessary wiring and other minor parts.



However, when you factor in that this is the same price as 1-2 months of campground stays, you may see it as a worthy investment. Still though, one could easily spend much more on a solar set-up if their budget and needs allowed. Again, solar is not a necessity, but something to consider if you plan to do lots of off-grid camping.

Propane

Many RV appliances run on propane, so you should be sure to top off your tank before unplugging for a while. When you are not plugged in at a campground, you will want to run your hot water heater and refrigerator off of propane exclusively. If you want to limit your propane usage, simply turn on the hot water heater for about thirty minutes before a shower or doing your dishes, and turn it off immediately afterwards.

Your stove, oven, and furnace also run on propane. If you plan to do lots of cooking, you will want to keep your propane full so that you do not run out before you are ready to move to a new site. Likewise, if you are dry camping in the winter, you will want to keep your propane full to make sure the RV interior stays nice and warm.

Refilling your propane tank is quite simple and can be done at many gas stations and most truck stops. In most US states, you will need to call an attendant and have them fill it for you. They will usually require all humans and animals to exit the vehicle while the propane is filling in case of emergency.

Internet

Many full-time RVers rely on the Internet for work, and even if you are just on vacation or part-timing, you may not want to unplug all of the time. If you want to dry camp but still plan to use social media, Netflix, or any applications needed for work, you will need to learn to harness your own sources of Internet. Consider these tips when you find yourself in need of connection while dry camping.

1. Check coverage levels before selecting a site.

The first is to be aware of the coverage provided before showing up to a site. There are some excellent apps and websites that allow you to check the reception of any area from a distance. These include “Campendium”, “Open Signal”, and “Coverage?”. Each of these is a great tool that you should look into if you need Internet while off-grid.

- **Campendium:** This is generally a fantastic resource for discovering dry camping locations. Yet specifically, its location reviews feature allows other users to share their reception experiences across all major carriers for every location in the Campendium database. You should use this as your first stop for locating places to dry camp with reliable reception. (more on this later)

- **Coverage?:** Occasionally you may find a location on Campendium which looks amazing or is nearby something that you would like to see but does not yet have reception data from other users. In these cases, your next step should be to consult the [Coverage? app](#) to reference what the reception in the area might be like. This app overlays a colored layer representing coverage for each of the big four carriers (AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint) over Google Maps. You can simply search the location for which you want to see coverage data, select which carriers to display, and then see what you find.
- **Open Signal:** A third reference RVers often use is the [OpenSignal app](#). OpenSignal has a similar coverage map feature, however, theirs is user-aggregated. This means that their coverage maps are built directly by the signal that OpenSignal users have received in the area. This also means that their coverage maps are created in real-time and better reflect changes in coverage, should towers go up or come down. Another handy feature of the OpenSignal app is their cell tower map. With this, you gain visibility into where exactly cell towers for each carrier are physically located. This can come in handy for determining if you will be able to have reception or not.

2. Use hotspots

Many cell phone providers offer data plans for hotspot devices, as well as phones. These allow you to connect a phone, laptop, tablet, or any other device to the Internet in the same way that you'd connect to a home WiFi network in a traditional home. And while many plans are referred to as unlimited, the truth is that most companies start to throttle your devices, or rather slow them to almost unworkable speeds, at around 22GB of usage per month.

Depending upon the amount of monthly data you truly need to work, consider utilizing both a hotspot and/or a phone or two for as much data as you can garner. Having multiple sources of Internet is your best bet for utilizing the amount of data per month that you will likely need to work from home.

3. Diversify carriers

Another tip is to diversify carriers. Many full-timers have unlimited cell data on both AT&T and Verizon. This is not a necessity, and one could certainly do fine traveling with only one or the other. Yet, having both goes a very long way in providing you with as many options as possible when choosing dry camping locations.

Having the two carriers usually ensures that you will have enough coverage to work in most locations. Many locations have service for each carrier, but you may also encounter some areas that are a dead zone for one carrier but not for the other. Having both will open up your options for sites.

4. Utilize boosters when necessary.

A third common tactic is to always have a signal booster handy. This device cannot create reception where there is none, but it can turn a weak connection into a strong one, allowing you to stay in that perfect dry camping site with weak signal. Again, this is not a necessity, but it is certainly useful for camping in places with suspect reception.

Using a booster has a bit of a learning curve, so, if you are a novice data booster, apply these tips for best results:

- WeBoost models: If any of the bands on your booster begin flashing red, instead of a solid green, shut it off, and then move the signal antenna, the unit, and the broadcast antenna further from each other before power. Additionally, make sure that neither of the antennas is facing each other or the unit.
- WeBoost models: In the case of some boosters, performance is best when the device being boosted is in close proximity to the broadcast antenna, or optimally resting directly against it.
- Mind the heat of your unit. The process of boosting signal generates a lot of heat waste. It's important to manage this heat to prevent your unit from overheating, which will burn out its internal circuitry. If you permanently install your unit, be sure that it is against a surface which allows adequate airflow around and behind the unit, and that it will not receive direct sunlight on it.

5. Head to a coffee shop if all else fails.

Even if you have planned ahead and done all your research, you will still occasionally encounter sites without signal. If this happens and you are not able to move onto a nearby site, head to the nearest coffee shop (with WiFi) to get some work done. Be sure to patron the business in exchange for the fast Internet.

The most important step to maintaining connection on the road is simply good preparation. It may seem obvious, but it really is so important to plan ahead when you rely on signal for work. Plan to do a fair amount of research before moving to an area, and then only plan to stay places where you are sure that you will have workable reception to avoid dead zones and frustration.

Connection on the road can be a real struggle, but if you follow the tips outlined here, you should find yourself having an easier time maintaining consistent connection. In reality, connection struggles are a small price to pay to have office views like these.

Trash

Disposing of trash is another boondocking challenge. At campgrounds, there are nice, handy dumpsters provided, which allow for convenient waste disposal. When dry camping, you must drive your trash to another area to dispose of it. Many RVers throw their trash away at gas stations when they are filling up or at grocery stores where they are shopping. If you are unsure of what is and isn't allowed, it is best to check with the business and make sure it is okay to toss your trash. In most cases, businesses are fine with this, especially if you are spending money at their location.

Another trash disposal tip is to try to minimize trash as much as you can. Removing excess packaging at the grocery store, burning cardboard or paper when possible, and eating mostly fresh foods all help to minimize your trash accrual. This certainly helps with less disposal but does not eliminate the need to find a place to toss your trash once in a while.

Finally, when dry camping in the wild, it's important to ensure that all your garbage stays inside the RV. This way, you will avoid potentially dangerous interactions with wildlife attracted by trash.



Laundry

The final (minor) dry camping hassle is laundry. At campgrounds, you can often expect to have an on-site laundromat, where you can wash your clothing and bedding for a set price per load. While dry camping, you will have to rely on laundromats in cities and towns to wash your garments.

If you prefer to go really rustic, you can always hand wash your clothing (there are several tools that you can use in conjunction with a bucket) and line-dry it outside while camping on public land.

Where to Dry Camp

Now that you know HOW to dry camp, it's time to discuss WHERE to dry camp. There are so many different places and sites available, so let's dive right in and introduce you to the many places across the US where you can camp for free.

Membership Programs

There are a few excellent membership programs that allow members access to a catalog of amazing free campsites in exchange for a nominal yearly fee. These include Boondocker's Welcome and Harvest Hosts.

Boondocker's Welcome

[Boondocker's Welcome](#) is a program that allows those with self-contained RVs to park in hosts' driveways and on their private land for just \$30 per year. With over 1800 locations across North America, there are so many different places to choose from! These sites can be in the middle of a city, on a large acreage in the country, in the suburbs, by the beach, and more.

Each host has different standards and rules. These include RV length limit, the amount of time you can stay with a host (1-7 days in total), the amount of advance notice needed, pet-friendliness information, and more. Some hosts even have hookups (usually for a small nightly fee), and their site listing will give you this information and more when you go to book.

Boondocker's Welcome offers a personal RVing experience at no cost to the member, besides the yearly membership. Some hosts and members even become friends and share meals and travel stories together. This is a nice break from camping in the wild and offers a sense of community to RV travel lovers from all different places and all different walks of life.



Harvest Hosts

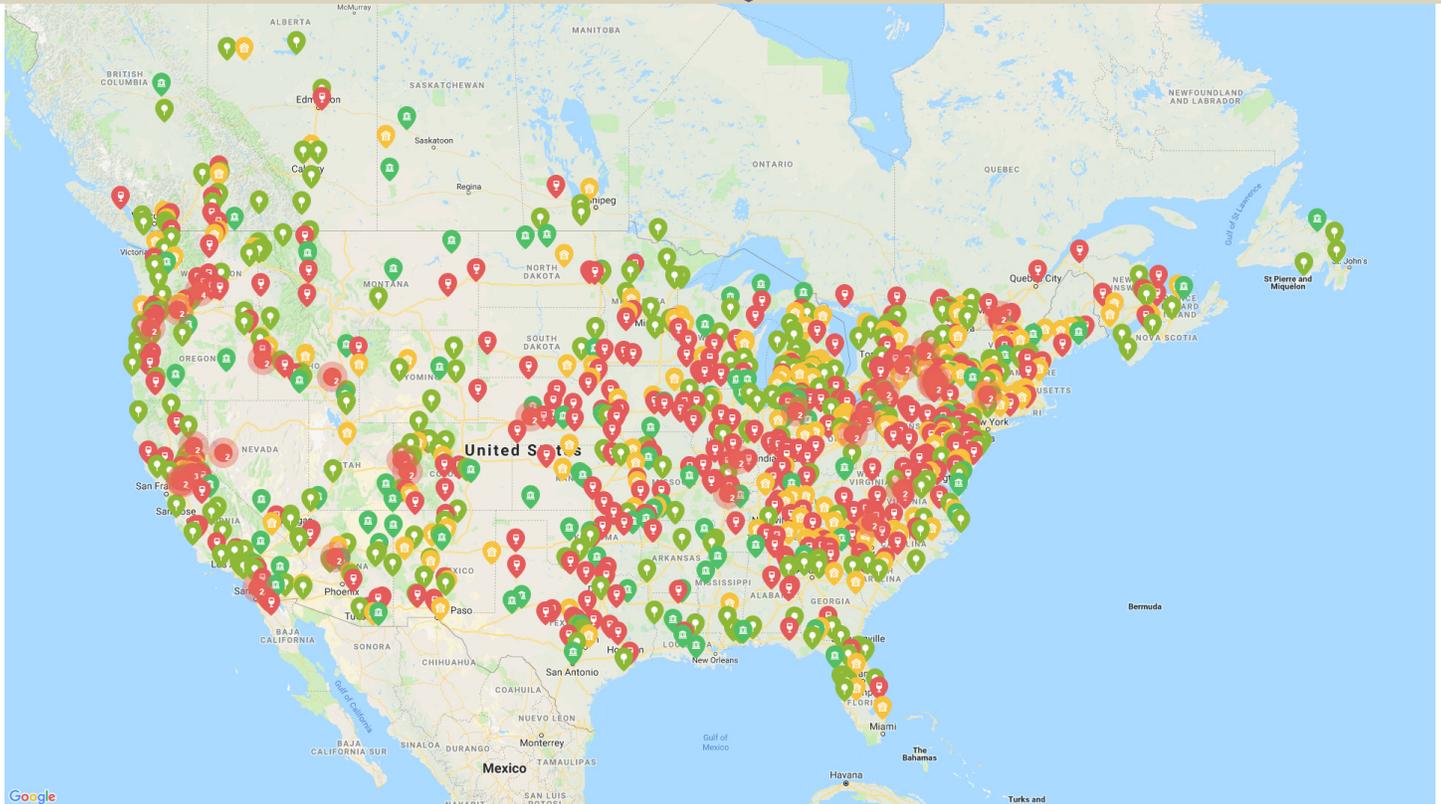
[Harvest Hosts](#) is an excellent membership program that allows self-contained RVs access to over 800+ sites across North America for free overnight accommodations. These sites include a myriad of vineyards and wineries, breweries, distilleries, farms, markets, museums, and other unique attractions. For a low annual price, members gain access to all of these amazing and beautiful sites. Members can also upgrade their plan to gain access to over 350 additional sites at golf courses and country clubs. Many of these offer discounted games and amenities, making this the perfect program add-on for avid golfers.

Most of the Host locations are friendly to leashed pets and offer experiences that the entire family can enjoy. When searching for the perfect Host location, members can see all the restrictions and amenities offered, such as maximum rig length, unique offerings (pumpkin patch, restaurant offerings, picnic area, etc.), pet friendliness, and the occasional availability of electrical hookups or water offerings.



Harvest Hosts overnight stays come at no additional cost to the member and offer a variety of off-the-beaten path experiences. Members are encouraged to support the business that is hosting them with a small purchase. This is typically not difficult to do when avoiding the cost of an overnight campground stay and, instead, stocking up on delicious wine. Since it is not uncommon for members to befriend and/or learn about their Hosts' winery or farm, these stays offer the exact type of sought-after experiences that tend to convince RVers to hit the road in the first place.

The beautiful views, personal look at some of the nicest small businesses in America, and peace and quiet found at these locations are what keep thousands of members returning every year. This is certainly an excellent addition to your repertoire of free camping possibilities.



"We spent last year traveling full time in our RV, and some of the best memories were from Harvest Hosts stays. We even got to stay three nights in Oregon and help a vineyard with harvest - amazing!"

-Jason Keeton, Harvest Hosts member



Blacktop Boondocking

Casinos

Did you know that there are many casinos across the US that allow RVers to park for free? In fact, casinos are many RVers' top choices when looking for a free place to stay, especially if they want to be near a city. These tend to be found closer to metros and/or desirable vacation towns and cities and are located all over the US, but mainly in the Western half of the country.

Most of the casinos out West are Native-American-owned and run, and they are typically in pristine, immaculate condition. Even if you are not big on gambling, it is easy to appreciate a well-run and classy establishment. This is all said to stress that there is no shame in casino camping and nothing to worry about in regards to the cleanliness of the facilities, as they are typically organized and up-scale. If you want to camp at casinos, there are some rules/tips you should follow for the best overall experience.

1. Check in with security.

Some casinos want each RV staying with them to register, but others simply require you to roll in, choose a site, and park. Call ahead to see what each particular casino requires and, if applicable, where they want you to register. This will ensure a smooth arrival. They will also tell you where the casino wants RV guests to park.

Just because the casinos have huge lots does not mean they want their primary car parking filled with gigantic motorhomes. Typically, there is a designated area where the casino will want you to park, so if you don't visibly see the area where all the other RVs are parked, be sure to ask at the front desk or call security. Either way, be sure to get the answer before parking and setting up your site.

2. Respect max stay rules.

Figure out the max number of days allowed to stay at the casino you want to visit. Typically, the max stay can be found on the casino's website, but it never hurts to double check with the casino security and make sure you are not overstaying your welcome. There are some casinos with a 1 or 2-night limit, and there are some casinos with a fourteen-day limit.

3. Spend money.

If you are enjoying a free overnight stay at a casino, why not spend a little money there to make it worth their while? Even if you are not into gambling, there are typically restaurant and shopping opportunities available. In the spirit of reciprocity, it's nice to spend some money and eat a meal at the restaurant or buffet.

4. Follow other politeness rules (as outlined later on).

Lastly, there are some etiquette rules you should follow as a guest in a casino parking lot. We will go over basic free camping etiquette later in this guide, but basic rules here include not setting up camp outside of your RV, parking out of the way, and being considerate with generator usage.

Cracker Barrel, Bass Pro Shops, Cabela's

Among RVers, these three are generally seen as equals. As nationwide establishments, Cracker Barrel, Cabela's and Bass Pro Shops allow RVers to stay free in their lots. Overall, these tend to be great experiences. Cracker Barrel tends to be a bit louder and busier than the two outdoor gear stores, but they are all pretty good places to stay for a night's stopover. Be sure to grab breakfast in the morning to thank them for the site.

Cabela's and Bass Pro Shops will typically allow you to stay 2-3 nights. Also, they are typically located in or near cities, for convenient access. Some even have water and a dump for RVs, as well as a dog run. Don't be afraid to stay at one of these for a night or two somewhere along your travels.

Walmarts

It is a well-known fact that most Walmarts allow overnight RV camping for one night, or maybe even two with store permission. Certain counties do not allow overnight parking in non-campground locations, and in these counties, you will find no-overnight Walmarts. [This list](#) details which Walmarts do not allow overnight parking. If you aren't sure if overnight parking is allowed at a certain Walmart, you can typically tell by the signs posted. Walmarts that do not want you to stay will make it very clear with signs posted every few feet in their lots.

As with casino camping, be respectful of these places that allow you to stay for free by parking politely, not setting up camp outside, not blasting your generator in the middle of the night, and buying something. Purchases aren't totally necessary, but, again, it's best to follow the rule of reciprocity when it comes to free camping.

Home Depots

Although it is not commonly-known, many Home Depots will allow RVers to stay a night or two in their lot if they call and get the go-ahead from a manager. One perk of staying in Home Depot lots is that you can rent tools to work on DIY projects and easily return them when you are done. These lots tend to be quiet and private and are a great option when you are traveling in cities

Other business parking lots

Aside from Cracker Barrels, Cabela's, Bass Pro Shops, Walmarts, and Home Depots, there are also some other businesses that will allow you to stay overnight so long as you are quiet, respectful, and out of the way. These include Targets, Kmart's, Sam's Clubs, Lowe's, Costcos, Meijer, Menard's, and some mall parking lots. As with other blacktop boondocking sites, you should never just show up and expect to be allowed to park overnight. Always call ahead and get the okay from a manager first to avoid potential issues later on.

Rest areas and truck stops

These are the least ideal places to spend a night, and many RVers avoid them at all costs. They are typically loud, brightly lit, and a tad unsavory. However, they are also usually convenient, right off the highway, and perfect for a quick stop when you are driving all hours of the day and night to make it to a far-away location quickly.

The following truck stops are great for a quick night's stay: Flying J, Love's, Pacific Pride, Petro, Pilot and TA. Here, you can also fill gas and water, empty your sewer tanks, and top off your propane.

Public Lands

This tends to be most people's favorite type of free campsite. Free camping on public lands is typically called dispersed camping or boondocking, and these sites can be found on BLM land, national forest land, or any other designated, publicly-owned federal lands. There are so many reasons why boondocking is simply the best. In addition to being free, you can expect incredible beauty, perfect views, privacy, solitude, and nature just steps out your front door.

There are amazing boondocking sites all over the US, but the most popular ones are typically found out west. Many RVers' favorite areas to boondock include sites near Joshua Tree in Southern



California, Sedona, Arizona, the Rockies of Colorado, Northern Wyoming, Southern Utah, and the Pacific Northwest. The options are countless, and they are spread out all over the most beautiful lands of the US. Continue on to learn how to find and choose the perfect boondocking spots.

Tools for finding free sites

Now that you know how to supply your own utilities and where to look for the best free camping sites, you may be wondering how exactly to find all these excellent dry camping sites. Here, we'll highlight the five main resources used to find and locate boondocking locations, the pros and cons of each service, and some RVers' experiences using these.



1. Campendium

Campendium should be your number one go-to resource for finding free campsites. This is a website and app that allows users to search for all the sites in an area that they are looking to visit. If you are seeking free sites, select "free" under the price drop-down menu, and the free sites will show up in green.

When you click through to examine a certain site, you will find a short description of the site, as well as a collection of photos, cell data information, and reviews left by others who have visited the spot before. The site's description typically includes the official name of the site and its street address, a phone number to call for more information, a website link (which usually leads to a BLM or NFS site), the price (in the case of dry camping, \$0), GPS coordinates (which link to Google maps navigation), elevation, the max RV length allowed, whether or not tent camping is allowed, and the max number of days allowed to stay (usually 14, but it could be as little as 4 or as many as 21).

This information is invaluable to those trying to decide where to camp. In these reviews, you can almost always find details about the condition of the road from which the site is accessed, the relative busyness of the site, more in-depth data and cell coverage information, and nearby amenities and resources. At the end of a review, the reviewer must select whether or not they would recommend a certain site, and this specific detail can save you from going out of your way to visit sites where you likely would not have stayed. These reviews can save you gas, time, and overall frustration by allowing you to avoid sites that are less than ideal.

Below the site description, you can sometimes find icons which indicate additional factors about the site. These indicate details such as whether or not a permit is required, if the site is best-accessed by vehicles with 4x4 capability, if it is open seasonally (usually summer-only for areas that experience harsh winters), and if the sites are only suited for small rigs. Again, this is invaluable information for choosing a site to visit.

Occasionally, you may come across a site that you would like to try but that has no reviews or photos. In this instance, you may wish to try your luck with the site and then we will leave a review for others who may be interested in camping in this site. A site without reviews could be a less-than-ideal place, or it could be your version of paradise. You never know unless you are willing to try.

Lastly, it should be noted that Campendium is a great resource for choosing all types of camping, not just dry camping. On Campendium, there is an extensive list of RV parks, national park campgrounds, national forest campgrounds, and more, all with the same information as the free campsites. It comes highly recommended as a resource for all of your camping needs.



2. Freecampsites.net

If you strike out finding a free campsite on Campendium, [freecampsites.net](https://www.freecampsites.net) is where you should search next. It has many of the same sites as Campendium, albeit typically with fewer reviews and data coverage information than the former. However, many find that, for whatever reason, there are more sites listed on freecampsites.net than on Campendium. The quality of the additional sites found here is typically not as great as the sites found on Campendium, which could be the reason for their choice to not include the sites on their website. Or, it could also be because freecampsites.net allows users to add their own free sites to the website for others to experience as well. Either way, freecampsites.net can definitely provide valuable information and campsite data when you are unsure where to camp for free in a certain area.

3. Allstays

AllStays is a huge series of apps which detail various places to park, similar to Campendium. Here, you can find a variety of campgrounds and RV parks, as well as some boondocking on national forest and BLM land. Allstays has an excellent [Camp and RV app](#) (available for \$9.99) with all their camping information, including boondocking, campgrounds, Walmarts, rest areas, gas stations, dump stations, travel plazas, military family campgrounds, and much more. They also offer individual apps with specific categories of information, such as:

- an [Overnight Walmart app](#) (not all Walmarts allow overnight parking – \$2.99)
- a [camp and tent app](#) (this is basically their dispersed camping app – \$5.99)
- a [truck stops and travel plazas app](#) (\$2.99)
- a [military campground app](#) (free)
- a [rest stop app](#) (\$1.99)
- an [RV dump station app](#) (\$2.99)

While [Campendium](#) is still a crowd favorite, AllStays has some extremely valuable information for RVers, especially the information on overnight-friendly Walmarts and rest areas. While not exclusively dry camping, this information has helped many RVers to find campsites in a pinch and should be considered as another valuable resource.

4. iOverlander App

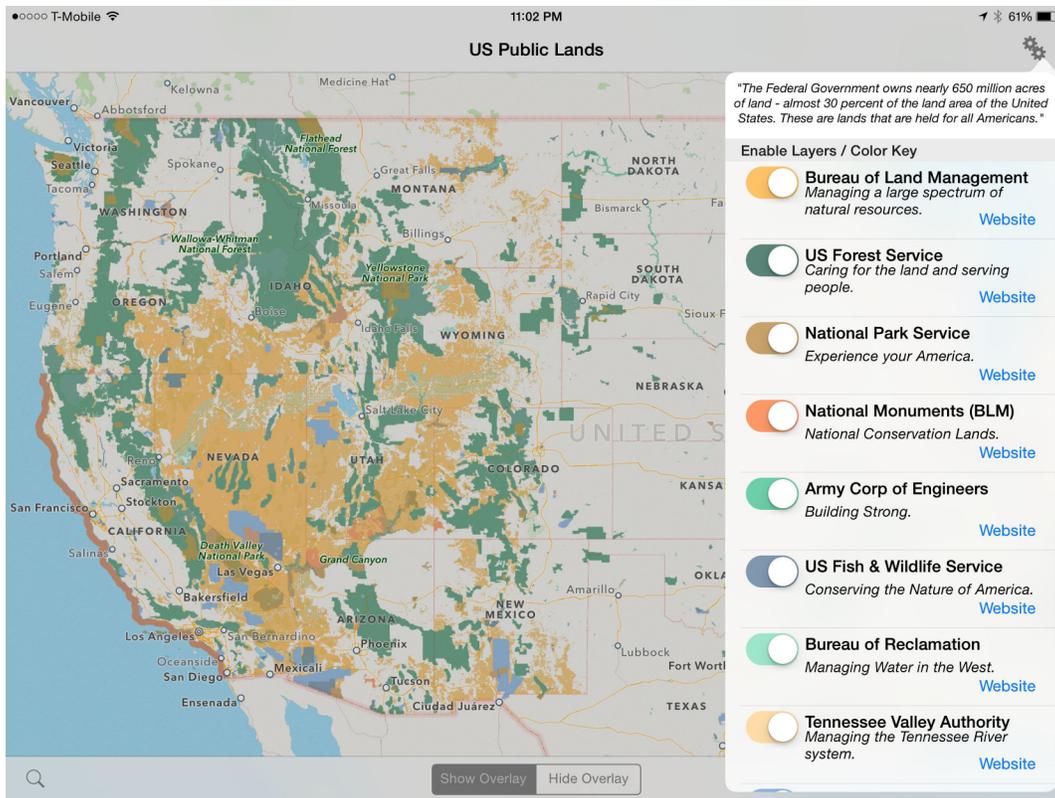
[iOverlander](#) is a relatively new app that lists a catalog of campsites and other useful information for RVers. Here, you can find a ton of information about public lands camping, as well as lots of blacktop boondocking. There is some information given about each site, along with short reviews by people who have visited. Like [freecampsites.net](#), users can add sites that they have enjoyed for others to experience as well. To further diversify your free camping information resources, this app comes highly recommended.



5. NFS and BLM maps (US Public Lands App)

This method of boondocking site scouting is fairly difficult. It involves utilizing National Forest Service (NFS) or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) maps to find your own sites. Technically, most NFS (National Forest Service) and BLM land is open to the public for camping, so this is a viable option for finding sites. It's also a great way to ensure that you are most likely unbothered while out camping, but it could also lead to lots of time researching and planning with potential dead ends.

Although this method of finding sites is more difficult, it may lead to more private and rare sites that others do not know about. If you plan to scout your own sites, consider investing in the US Public Lands app, which allows you to plug in coordinates and see exactly what type of land the coordinates are located on. This is a great way to double check that you are, in fact, staying in a location where camping is allowed.



There are surely other ways of finding free campsites, but these are the five tools most discussed in the RVing community. This is a great starting point for finding your dream campsites, and with time, you may even love free camping as much as campgrounds.

How to Choose a Boondocking Site

Now that you know how to dry camp, where you are allowed to dry camp, and how to find dry camping sites, you must learn which factors to consider once you are finally ready to select a site. This section mainly applies to the best selection of boondocking sites on public lands, so if this is something you want to learn to do, consider these factors for a seamless first try.



1. Location

Location is the primary factor to consider when deciding where to stay. When selecting campsites, you should naturally look in places where you are interested in spending time and visiting. Consider making a map of all the places you want to visit, and then try to find a free campsite near those places, using the tools listed above. For instance, if you have decided to visit the five national parks in Utah, you would want to research sites along the route to see these five parks. This will give you a starting point for where to begin your search for the perfect site.

2. Reception

For many, cell service is the most important factor in determining where to dry camp. Unfortunately, the need for connection does eliminate a lot of great boondocking spots, but without remote work, many would not be able to live this lifestyle at all. It's a small price to pay for the amount of beauty otherwise found. See the above section on tips for locating boondocking sites with excellent reception.





3. Accessibility

Another important factor to consider is accessibility. This refers to the conditions of the roads that lead to boondocking sites. Most boondocking sites are accessed via a dirt road, and, while some of these are well-maintained, others can be rather tricky. If you travel in a large class A motorhome, roads that are excessively rocky or graded are not possible for your rig. Likewise, towing a trailer down a super rocky, washboarded road sounds like an unnecessary challenge. Be sure to choose only sites which are reasonably accessible by your RV.





4. Views

Another factor to consider when choosing a site is the view provided. This is the main reason many boondock in the first place. Waking up in an amazing place and looking out your windows at mountains, desert, ocean, or forest is, for many, preferable to waking up and looking outside at another RV. While this is not the most important factor in choosing a location, it is definitely something to consider. For example, if you are considering two comparable boondocking spots in the same area, you should opt for the one with the better view.





5. Privacy

This is a less important factor in choosing a site, but still, one that is of significance. Some boondocking locations are very popular, and, as a result, can be rather crowded, especially in the busier summer months. If you want to visit a specific area, and there are multiple sites to choose from, try to choose the less-crowded sites. This will give you the opportunity to be completely surrounded by nature, with nothing but you, your home, and your family.



6. Proximity to Amenities

This is the least influential factor in choosing a boondocking site, but one that exists nonetheless. Most RVers become very good at restocking all the necessary supplies and food before heading out to the wild so that they need to be very close to a town. However, it is nice to be within 20-30 minutes of a town in case you need to mail something, get gas, or pick up some items you forgot at the grocery store. For these reasons, many try to be at least somewhat near a small-sized town. While this is not always possible if given the choice between a site that is a bit closer to town and a site that is a bit further away, it is best to choose the closer site for convenience's sake.



Setting Up Camp

Once you have used the above-mentioned tools and criteria to select a campsite, it's time to learn exactly how to access and set up your campsite. This selection mostly applies to accessing and settling into boondocking sites. Follow these tips to boondock like a pro even on your very first try.



1. Scout out your site

You need to be sure to scout out a boondocking site before driving your rig there. If you are driving a motorhome with an attached tow vehicle, consider detaching the RV and driving just the tow vehicle to select a site. You can park the motorhome at the beginning of the road and come back for it after you have selected a site. Likewise, you can also detach a trailer or fifth wheel and drive just your truck to scout sites. This sounds inconvenient, but it is certainly less inconvenient than not being able to turn around if you accidentally end up in a tight area without a good place to camp.

Scouting a site also gives you the opportunity to check out all that is available and figure out exactly which site you want without the added pressure of parking your large rig as soon as possible. It can also give you the opportunity to see any low-clearance areas or other issues that could hurt your RV ahead of time. Of course, if you have a nice compact rig, you can simply disregard this step.

2. Test potential sites

Once you think you have found a site that works for you, pull your car or truck in and test the connection. There is nothing more frustrating than finding your dream site, only to have your hopes crushed when you realize the signal is weak. However, testing the signal can help you to avoid the additional frustration that would ensue had you already parked and set up camp.

If you don't require signal while boondocking, simply disregard this step. You will also want to determine which spot within the site is the best place to park your RV. This will help determine exactly how to enter the site and park once you have your RV in tow.



3. Enter your site

Now that you have selected and tested your perfect boondocking site, you will need to drive back to your motorhome and trailer, and bring the rest of your rig to your new site. Be sure to leave a couple camp chairs or something behind to claim your new site, especially in popular areas. Go slow maneuvering your rig into your new site to avoid issues. Once you've pulled in and parked in the most level site, you are ready to begin setting up.

4. Level and open slides

One of the first challenges that comes with boondocking is leveling your site. When you stay in a campground, you are typically camping on pavement or gravel that is very level, and obtaining rig stability is pretty easy. When boondocking, you are almost always staying on dirt or sand, and the sites are not nearly as level as the sites you'd find in a campground.

To combat this, try to choose the most level spot you can, which also fulfills all of your other requirements. If you end up staying in a less-than-ideal, sloped or slanted site, you can utilize a combination of wood boards and plastic jack pads to level your rig. This makes cooking and walking easier, but is also very important for the longevity of a propane-powered refrigerator.

Once your RV is level, you can open your slides, lock your steps out, and begin setting up camp.



5. Set up camp

Once you are parked, it is time to get your site situated as you like it. Set up your camp chairs, outdoor tables, decor, area rugs, fire pits, hammocks, awning, string lights, and anything else you have that makes your RV feel like home.

If you like to set up and decorate your indoor space as well, now is also the perfect time to do so.

Get it all situated exactly as you like it, and then crack open a few cold beers and enjoy the beauty and solitude of your new campsite!



Dos and Don'ts

DO: Keep noise to a minimum

Whether you are camping in the wild or in a crowded lot, you should be considerate about your volume. Many people especially love the silence and solitude that comes along boondocking, and this sense of peace and quiet is not entirely possible if you have noisy neighbors. While boondocking sites are typically incredibly spaced out and private, at times, you may end up just a few hundred or thousand feet from nearby neighbors. Be considerate of everyone around you by not blaring your music, letting your dogs bark excessively, or revving your ATVs in the middle of the night. Essentially, just be polite. Of course, you can have fun and treat your site as your own, but just remember to do so while also remaining respectful of your neighbors.



DO: Be polite with your generator usage (if others are nearby)

This goes along with the noise tenet, but it deserves its own category. How do you power your RV when not plugged in? Some people have solar, but the majority of folks use a generator. Since generators are typically loud, blasting them in the middle of the night is not very polite. Most RVers tend to follow an 8am-10pm rule, meaning that you should avoid usage before 8am and after 10pm.

If you are staying on someone else's property, be sure to check with them before running your generator at all.



DO: Ensure your dogs are not encroaching on others

One of the other great things about boondocking on public lands is that dogs are not required to remain on-leash. Many people like to let their dogs run and play in the open space outside, which makes the experience much better and more enjoyable for them. However, the lack of leash laws does not mean you should allow your dog to roam freely without supervision. Other campers (and their dogs) may not be thrilled about a visit from your pooch, and, more importantly, it may not be safe to allow them to wander without watching them. If your dog is not off-leash trained, keep them on a long lead so they can still sniff and play outside without bothering others or potentially being harmed themselves.

Likewise, if you are camping on private property, keep your dogs on leash and out of the way. Try to keep the barking to a minimum and do not leave your dogs tied up outside. Ask your host where they would like you to take your dog outside to use the bathroom, and be sure to always clean up after your pooches.



DO: Clean up after yourself

This is another basic principle that some, sadly, ignore entirely. There is nothing worse than pulling into a gorgeous boondocking site only to find it filled with trash. The worst sites can even be covered in broken dishes, old tires, car parts, broken bottles, beer cans and much, much more, all left behind at camp simply because the previous campers did not feel it necessary to clean up after themselves. The basic rule of “pack it in, pack it out” certainly applies to boondocking as well.

In addition, keep your site neat and clean. Spreading out all of your belongings outside will make your site look extremely messy. If the forest service feels that the land is not being cared for, they could potentially close the free sites that everyone loves. Clean up after yourself to avoid ruining all the fun for others.

DO: Clean up after others

As a way to reciprocate free use of public land, it’s common to do a campsite clean-up at the end of each stay. While this is not necessarily required, it is a nice way to give back to the land and the services (BLM and NFS) that allow RVers to camp in these spaces for free.

Cleaning up after others is a thankless job, but it also goes back to the principle of reciprocity mentioned previously. Furthermore, if the sites aren’t being cared for, they could eventually be closed, so, if you can, do your part and help out.

DO: Properly extinguish campfires

Everyone loves a good fire while boondocking, but abandoned and improperly extinguished campfires are one of the biggest causes of wildfires. Follow the forest service's rules for campfire safety by building a fire ring out of stones in an area at least fifteen feet from your camp and ten feet from grass and brush. Clear all surrounding twigs and other flammables, and enjoy your fire. When you are done, be sure to drown your fire with water and bury it in sand and dirt to extinguish it. Feel your fire to ensure it is cool to the touch, and remember, if it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.

DON'T: Disrespect burn bans

Throughout the year, there are often burn bans in effect for places that are extremely at-risk for wildfires. If you are not sure whether or not campfires are allowed, do your research. National Forest websites typically indicate if there are any fire restrictions currently, and, if you are really unsure, it never hurts to call your local forest service station or BLM office to double check. Remember that seeing others' campfires is not necessarily an indication that fires are currently permitted, as others may not know the rules or may be ignoring them. It's best to know for sure before breaking the rules.

DON'T: Overstay your welcome

Be sure to respect the max length stay limits. For most boondocking sites, the limit is 14 days, but as little as four days or as long as twenty-one is permitted in certain areas. If you are unsure, as always, call the local BLM or NFS office. It's not uncommon to occasionally see people who have clearly been in their site longer than permitted, and this is not okay for a variety of reasons. Don't make a ranger have to come and remove you from your site. Fourteen days is plenty of time to enjoy a beautiful area.

If you are staying at a Harvest Hosts, the stay limit is one night, unless otherwise noted. For Boondockers Welcome and casino lots, the stay limits are different for each site, as indicated on the listings on the website. For all other parking lots, your stay is limited to one night or maybe two with prior permission.





DON'T: Plan a long dry camping stint as your first attempt.

When you are attempting to dry camp for the first time, don't expect to immediately be a pro. Instead, plan a few short trips to get the hang of things before attempting a longer dry camping trip. This will allow you to work out all the kinks before going all in and may lead to a better first-time experience.



DON'T: Treat blacktop boondocking sites like a campground.

Blacktop boondocking is a privilege that is afforded to RVers. When people abuse that privilege, it can easily be taken away. When you are staying for free overnight in a Walmart lot, at a rest area, or in any other public parking lot, park far out of the way to avoid encroaching on other shoppers or campers. Keep your slides in, and don't set up anything outside, including camp chairs and such.

As stated above, keep noise to a minimum, and keep your dogs inside when they are not being walked. Just be generally polite to others and respect the business that is hosting you. This will ensure that others who come after you are also able to enjoy free camping there.

Whether you are new to free camping or pride yourself in being a seasoned pro, with these basic principals, you are sure to have an enjoyable time. Many RVers use boondocking as a time to unwind, recharge, and relax, and we hope you enjoy similar experiences while camping. As always, if you have any questions about the rules and regulations, do not hesitate to contact your local forest service or BLM office. The rangers there are always willing to help answer your questions and always appreciate your checking with them when you are unsure about certain rules. Boondocking etiquette ensures a better time for everyone, and, with so few rules in place, it shouldn't be difficult to keep these principles in mind during your next camping trip.

Miscellaneous Boondocking FAQs

With all of this information at your disposal, you are now likely ready to head out to your first boondocking site. Here, you will find an assortment of miscellaneous frequently asked questions that you may be wondering about.

Can it be unsafe to camp in the middle of nowhere, away from others?

Staying out in the middle of nowhere can be nerve-racking to some, especially if you've never tried it before. Many RVers are often a bit nervous at their first few boondocking sites, simply because they are likely unsure of exactly what to expect. However, safety issues while boondocking are extremely rare, especially if you take practice safety measures.

If you are boondocking in the wild, use simple precautions such as closing your largest windows and locking your door at night if you are nervous. Try to stay in areas with workable cell reception, and keep the coordinates of your site handy just in case. After you have a few boondocking trips under your belt, you will likely feel confident and brave when camping in the wild.

How do you leave your campsite behind if you need to run to town?

It seems among RVers that there is an assumption that, while boondocking, you cannot leave your campsite at all. However, you may find that you need to occasionally leave your boondocking site to run to the grocery store or post office, go for a hike, explore a nearby town on a day trip, and so much more. If you are nervous about leaving your site due to the potential solitude of the area, start with just leaving for an hour or two until you get more comfortable.

And, as always, use common sense by locking your door and large windows and not leaving valuables outside or within view inside. If you use the proper precautions, you will most likely have safe, enjoyable stays while boondocking as well.

How do you deal with surrounding wildlife?

While wildlife certainly abounds out on public lands, most wild animals prefer to keep to themselves and leave humans alone. In the mountains, where bears and mountain lions are native, keep food inside to make your campsite less desirable. In the desert, where rattlesnakes, coyotes, and scorpions thrive, watch your step and wear closed-toe shoes. Simple precautions should keep you safe from harm if you do encounter any wildlife.

Be smart and use caution (for both you and your pets), but do not let the fear of certain animals hold you back from finding some of your best campsites yet.

How do pets fare while boondocking?

Many domesticated pets seem to enjoy boondocking much more than staying in campgrounds. Cats will typically find more wildlife outside to watch, which adds interest and stimulation to their day.

Dogs especially benefit from boondocking, as they are able to run and play outside for hours a day off-leash. In campgrounds, there are typically leash rules for the safety of everyone around, but on BLM and national forest land, dogs can roam freely outdoors (with human supervision of course). If you plan to allow this with your dog(s), definitely train them to listen to your voice and return on command to ensure a safe and fun experience for everyone, and, as mentioned above, be sure that they are not spontaneously visiting your neighbors.

How do you regulate your interior temperature without shore power?

The best way to camp unplugged is to travel with the seasons, going north in the summer for the cooler weather and south in the winter for warmer temperatures. However, even if you follow this rule, the weather outside will occasionally be too hot or too cold due to poor timing or even just hot and cold weather waves.

If this happens, you can run your propane furnace to warm up the RV on chilly days. You can also run your generator to blast the air conditioners when it is hot. If the weather is only mildly warm (upper 80s), you can run fans off of stored battery power and open your windows, which should keep your RV cool enough. Even on a very hot day, the evenings are always considerably cooler, which works in your favor while RVing.

If the weather is really too unbearable in a certain area, remember that your home is on wheels, and you can always migrate to the better weather, which is one of the biggest perks of this lifestyle.

Happy Camping!

Many RVers crave the wide-open spaces and feelings of silence and solitude to be found in wide open spaces, rather than in campgrounds. Coupled with the fact that boondocking is totally free, we definitely think this camping style is idyllic. But don't just take our word for it. Get out there and try it yourself, and be sure to keep this guide handy to utilize all the tips and tricks highlighted here.



[Harvest Hosts](#) is a unique membership club that offers overnight accommodations for self-contained RVs at 800+ locations across North America. These include farms, wineries, museums, breweries, distilleries, and other exciting attractions. For a low annual price, members have access to all of these locations for free overnight accommodations, in exchange for supporting the local business. Members can also upgrade their plan to gain access to 350+ more sites at golf courses, country clubs, and more. Join Harvest Hosts today to begin creating fun memories at diverse locations all over the US!

