



Home Free

Platforms like Harvest Hosts, Hipcamp, and The Dyrft empower landowners to host short-term campers, glampers, and RVers on their farms, vineyards, and private properties, opening up more of Colorado for you to explore.

REDEFINING SUMMER CAMP

Summer beckons you to the mountains. Colorado has you covered with over 13,000 campsites, ranging from rustic to ritzy. The challenge? Choosing which luxury lodging fits your fancy. After all, in Colorado, venturing into the wilderness isn't a choice—it's a lifestyle. The question is, how rough do you want it to be?

by Stephanie Wilson

I camp for the s'mores.

No joke. I'm certainly not drawn to camping because of any prowess I might possess. Case in point: I managed to bend a pole the first time I tried to pitch a tent solo as an adult. This despite the kind soul who had lent me the tent after giving me a set-up tutorial before I took off for Mumford & Sons' Gentlemen of the Road pitstop in Salida, summer of 2015. I, unfortunately, had been less than attentive.

Even with the initial setbacks, I learned some valuable lessons, so it wasn't a total wash: 1) Don't borrow anything you can't afford to replace; and 2) REI can fix a bent tent pole—especially if you turn up looking suitably panic-stricken and manage to convince the generous guy at the counter to sort it out during his lunch break.

That was shortly after I'd made Colorado my home, almost eight years ago now. My tent-pitching abilities haven't improved much, but I do now own two of them. The first, an eight-person behemoth requiring two

people for setup—a process that feels akin to wrestling an octopus that I've attempted only once. The second is a two-person pop-up, an impulse buy en route to Piñon Flats that magically assembles itself in three seconds flat.

While having a portable pop-up tent is handy, it isn't enough. Like most outdoor activities, camping requires considerable gear, which can pose a significant barrier to entry. The REI camping essentials checklist includes 10 must-haves (tent, sleeping bag, etc.) and eight optional items (firewood, a camp rug)—and that's before you consider the 20

necessities and 11 more to consider to set up your outdoor kitchen. A DIY glamping getaway comes with a hefty price tag and results in a whole lot of stuff you've gotta find a place to store during the off-season.

You may expect this to be where a narrative twist turns this article into an ode to outdoor adventures, a saga of gearing up and getting down because that's what it means to be a true Coloradan. Except that's not where we're headed. Primitive camping is not for everyone. Some among us want to have an outdoor experience but have no taste for roughing it; others are just looking for a different kind of nonurban adventure—a way to explore someplace new in a manner that's more than superficial and does not involve pitching a tent. And some of us, as I've mentioned, camp solely for the s'mores.

So what's the solution to the discomforts of camping and what do we need to make better campfire treats? A dash of glamour, of course.

Buckhorn Cliffs Hipcamp

Book a stay in the revamped RV on a 42-acre private slice of paradise on the Buckhorn narrows. You'll be the only guests on site so you're free to enjoy the outdoor kitchen, star gazing area, hot tub, and access to a secluded creek with waterfalls, a swimming hole, and more.



LEFT: COURTESY HIPCAMP; RIGHT: UNSPLASH/LISHA RIABININA

Best of the Best: Piñon Flats

Snagging a site at the only campground within Colorado's Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve requires some planning and some luck. With just 88 sites (and three group sites), Piñon Flats is one of the most elusive campgrounds in the U.S., ranking sixth on The Dyr't's list of the 10 hardest-to-book campgrounds in the United States in 2023. It's at capacity for 97.6% of the year. It offers a front-row seat to the incredible spectacle that is the sun setting behind the Dunes, so it's no wonder. If you want to see for yourself, set a reminder for January now to try to book a site there next July—it's worth the effort, especially if you land loop 1, site 22. Best spot in the park.



GLAMOROUS CAMPING

It's an unfortunate word, glamping—feels like it's trying to hard to sound cool, like an uncharismatic cousin of fetch. Love it or hate it, the term is here to stay, as is the luxe camping-adjacent experience that glamping denotes.

The concept of high-end camping that's more luxe than rustic isn't new—camping in the wild with all the comforts of a deluxe hotel has been around since the Turkish Ottomans set up extravagant tent cities as mobile palaces for the sultan. The term, however, a portmanteau of “glamour” and “camping,” was only just introduced to the modern lexicon in 2005. By 2016, it warranted an entry in the Oxford English Dictionary, a noun defined as “a form of camping that involves accommodation and facilities more luxurious than those associated with traditional camping.”

Which is rather vague, isn't it? Certainly open to interpretation. For some, glamping could mean anywhere with easy access to running water; for others, it's only glamping if there are plush mattresses, Pendleton blankets, and enriching outdoor activities involved. It could be a primitive cabin at New Sky, an old settler's homestead in the San Luis Valley being reimagined as an experimental eco-retreat; could be parking your own Class A rig at Palisade Basecamp RV Resort and waking up in your own Sleep Number bed amid the fruit orchards and vineyards along the river. Could be both and everything in between—tree houses, tiny homes, and tipis, oh my! Cabins, canvas tents, yurts, covered wagons, Airstreams, and bubble domes too. Basically, as long as it's not a dispersed campsite with nary a bathroom to find, some would argue that you could call it glamping. However you define it, there are more ways to experience it than ever before.

[See “Glamp Like You Mean It” on p. 64 for some of Colorado's abundant high-end camping options.]

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Booking Blitz: The Art of the Last-Minute Snag

Scoring a campsite in 2022 was like finding a needle in a haystack, according to The Dyr't, an app that's an encyclopedia of camping intel. With campsites five times as rare to find in 2022 as they were pre-pandemic, vehicle campers in RVs, trailers, campers, vans, trucks, and cars faced 20% more booking challenges than their tent or hammock camping peers. But don't fret. The Dyr't's latest feature, The Dyr't Alerts, offers a lifeline. Sign up to receive real-time notifications when there's a cancellation at a booked campsite so you have a chance to claim that coveted open spot.



All-Star Attraction

At Camp V, a boutique camp in Naturita combining art, history, architecture, and nature, the open air water tower has been repurposed as a place to stargaze, meditate, take a sound bath, and soak in the history and the vibes.

Glamp Like You Mean It

Trade your conventional camping tent for a plush haven where the best of nature meets the pinnacle of comfort—it's time to explore the uncharted territory of Colorado glamping.

Collective Vail

Immerse yourself in a blend of comfort and wilderness at Collective Vail, a sprawling luxury camping retreat nestled in 1,000 acres of Colorado's natural beauty. A stone's throw from the sophisticated resort town of Vail, this retreat gives you the best of both worlds. Wake up on high-thread-count linens, sip coffee on your private deck, then mount up for a horseback trail ride or sample the region's finest wines. Evenings are an event: dine under the stars on local trout and caramelized onions, then cap the night with a smoked old-fashioned or a DIY boxed BBQ experience.

collectiveretreats.com/vail

Black Tree Resort

Find tranquility and adventure at Black Tree Resort, a thoughtfully curated glamping experience tucked away in Lake George. Conceived by former banker Nabil Saweeres, Black Tree offers more than just a stay—it provides a soulful journey. Solar-powered lighting and wood-burning stoves underline the commitment to sustainable luxury. Take the wheel of your personal golf cart and explore the sprawling 80-acre property. And don't forget about the food—Saweeres himself cooks up meals that can be savored right in your tent. Remember, there's no Wi-Fi or cell reception here—just you, the great outdoors, and a s'more or two.

blacktreeresort.com

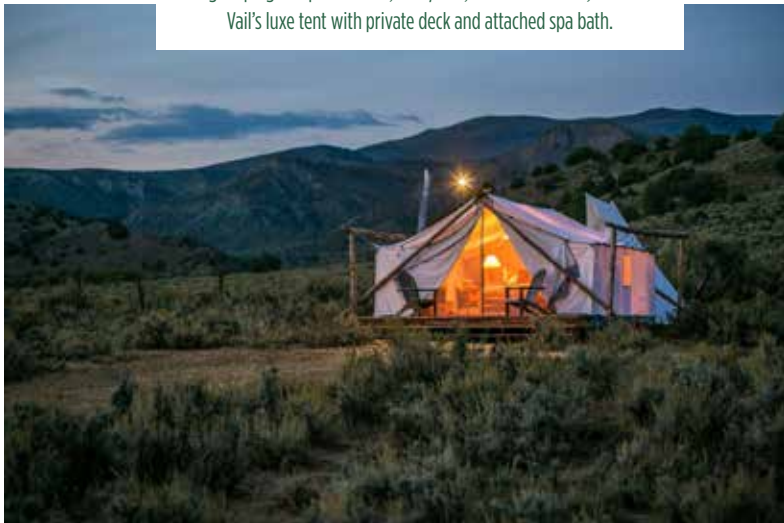
Camp V

More than just a high-end campground, Camp V is an eclectic blend of art, history, architecture, design, and outdoor recreation. Nestled in Naturita, Colorado, Camp V is strategically positioned between Telluride and Moab, offering a blissful escape from the crowds. Choose from a range of unique

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Falkor Ranch's Alpacas Use Hipcamp's search filters to find campsites and glamping setups on farms, vineyards, and more. *Below*, Collective Vail's luxe tent with private deck and attached spa bath.



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HIP GLAMPING

Whether supply is driving demand or the other way around, the pandemic is credited with causing a rapid rise in glamping numbers over the last three years. According to that KOA report, an estimated 17 million households took at least one glamping trip in 2021, a 155% increase from 2019. And platforms like Hipcamp, The Dyrt, Tentrr, and Harvest Hosts are stepping up to meet the ever-rising demand of people who want more than just a place to set up camp.

Think of Hipcamp and the others as Airbnb's outdoorsy cousins. The experience they offer is not just about finding a place to pitch your tent on public or private land (although

Hipcamp, The Dyrt, and Tentrr offer that too). These platforms are about outdoor experiences of all kinds, from RV parks to cabins, treehouses, luxury safari tents, and yes, glamping grounds. With the global glamping market projected to reach \$4.62 billion by 2027, these platforms offer a ton of high-end options.

But these booking and research platforms aren't just expanding the outdoor-adjacent options for campers of all types, they're also playing a pivotal role in bolstering the local economy and supporting land conservation. By welcoming short-term campers onto their private properties on these platforms, farmers, ranchers, vintners, and other landowners can generate new revenue streams for themselves and for the communities.

MAKE A GREAT ESCAPE

I first turned to Hipcamp in 2018 when I found myself in an empty apartment after saying goodbye to not one but two tiny furry loves of my life in as many months, one of whom had been my faithful sidekick through 17 years, 12 apartments, and five roommates, the other whose murmur caused her heart to stop beating while she slept. I had to get away. The plan? Run away to the woods, pitch a tent, and cry. Reality check? That giant octopus of a structure was all I had, and a woman cannot live on nylon alone. I found myself on Hipcamp.com, booking a stay at a well-appointed camp in a part of Colorado I hadn't yet explored.

North Fork Tipi Haven (now under new ownership and called Old Moon Acres) in Hotchkiss welcomed me to its 22-acre expanse, nestled at the base of Sunshine Mesa. More than just a pre-pitched tent, the campsite boasted an outdoor kitchen, a solar shower, composting toilets, and hill-sides blanketed in wild sage. Instead of a thin blow-up pad on the cold, uneven ground, I slept on a queen mattress in a 16-foot canvas abode. From my bed, I watched the sun rise from behind Mt. Lamborn's 11,402-foot peak. The haven provided the solace I sought, and I continue to return there at every chance. When the mood strikes, Hipcamp can illuminate the path to a great escape.

And with its abundance of inventory, it can do so even at the very last minute. As we put the finishing touches on this article, Memorial Day is one week away. Hipcamp shows 220 campsites still available near Denver. Over the past decade, Hipcamp has facilitated more than 7 million nights under the stars across North America and beyond.

You don't need to master the art of tent-pitching. You just need to open yourself to new experiences. After all, when you've got gourmet s'mores in hand under a blanket of stars, every campsite is a glampsite, no matter how you define it. **OLD**



Sage Advice

"Too old to drive your car? Tow it behind your RV!" My dad has wanted that bumper sticker ever since he saw it on the tail-end of an automobile hauled into an RV park somewhere in the West. He had rolled into the RV park in his 42-foot Winnebago Tour towing a Chevy Colorado behind. He laughed when he told me about it then grew serious and said this isn't a laughing matter. When you see an RV on the road, he said, just move out of the way.

Why? "Because," he said, "the driver is probably older, unfamiliar with the roads, not entirely sure where they're going, and stressed out while driving a massive rig that you don't need a special license to operate. Best to just give them all the space you can—they need it."



App Happy

Looking for somewhere to camp? Try **Hipcamp**, the Airbnb of camping. **Airbnb** is the Airbnb of cabins, yurts, domes, and other unique stays.

The Dyrt also offers all of the above, plus cancellation alerts for campgrounds that are all booked up. **Tentrr** offers safari-style tents on private land, and **Harvest Hosts** is a membership program for RVers looking to stay someplace different, like on a farm, at a winery, or by a golf course. The Colorado-centric **Campin** app can guide you to free and dispersed car camping in the state and also let you know if there's an active fire ban. Need to rent gear?

Try **Outdoors Geek**, a local brand that can set you up to DIY a glamping trip. If you'd rather buy than rent, **Feral** is an indie outdoor gear shop in Denver and Idaho Springs selling both new and used items from top brands. Need a pet sitter? Try **Rover**, which connects you with insured, trusted people to watch your pups (although I'm pretty sure they'd prefer to go with you). If you need someone to watch your offspring,

Seeking Sitters is kinda like the modern incarnation of *The Baby-Sitters Club*.



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accommodations—from modern restored cabins and stylish Airstreams to futuristic jupes, luxury canvas tents, and riverside campgrounds. Get cozy by the fireplace, cook a meal in your kitchenette, or lounge on custom furniture. Whether it's the exclusive amenities of the cabins, the chic comforts of the Lotus Belle Onion tents, or the convenience of the RV sites, Camp V is an invitation to reconnect with nature—with a stylish twist. campv.com

The Dunes Desert Camp

This is the only private location near this extraordinary National Park that provides you with privacy within the pristine landscape as well as hosted, catered, and guided services offered by a team of adventurers and professional safari experts. Co-hosted by a team of professional adventurers, including Levison Wood, Dave Luke, and Chris Mahoney, The Dunes offers a breadth of experiences—from yoga retreats to survival itineraries. Beyond this, explore on horseback, hot air balloon, or dune buggy, before returning to luxury Safari Tents for a rejuvenating rest. If you're chasing a tailored adventure with endless possibilities, this new spot—opening in June—is your go-to place.

dunesexperiences.com

Bubble Dome Near Cripple Creek

For those who dare to be different, the Bubble Dome near Cripple Creek awaits. This two-room marvel offers air-conditioned comfort with a view like no other. Enjoy the serenity from the king-size bed, furnished with privacy curtains



Stay in Style Overlooking the banks of the Arkansas River, the Royal Gorge Yurts' location at the heart of the adventure action is one of its many amenities. *Above:* The bubble tent in a private forest is one of three unique accommodation options at the dreamy Runaway Ranch in Beulah Valley.

for peace of mind. The dome boasts a 55-inch smart TV, mini-fridge, microwave, and coffee pot—all you need for a cozy stay. booking.com

The Royal Gorge Yurt Rental

Discover the charm of yurt living at The Royal Gorge Yurt Rental. This is where comfort meets convenience in the heart of the riverside action. Come home after a day of exploration to a unique and cozy haven that promises a memorable stay. It's ideal for those seeking the thrill of adventure combined with a distinct glamping experience. royalgorgeyurts.com

The Runaway Ranch

At the romantic Runaway Ranch, reconnecting with nature is both serene and exciting. Set in Colorado's Beulah Valley, the ranch offers three unique glamping sites: a tipi, a safari tent, and a bubble tent in a private forest. Craving something more conventional? Opt

for the vintage travel trailer with a continental breakfast option. Each lodging offers a private camping toilet, while a communal bathhouse delivers the perfect outdoor hot shower, not to mention soft beds, fire pits, and starry skies. theromanticrunawayranch.com

Beyul

In the Frying Pan River Valley outside of Aspen, this relatively new luxury getaway offers 13 cabins and seven lodge rooms set amid stunning natural settings. The property hosts a range of retreats designed to help you reconnect with yourself and with your surroundings. The summer 2023 event lineup includes mindful getaways of varying length and focus, from silent and nocturnal meditation meditation, and dream yoga programs to multiday workshops focused on women's empowerment, neuropsychology and performance, and mushrooms. beyulretreat.com