

Camping season tips and resources for last-minute travellers

There's an app for that, and several helpful websites for last-minute campers

By Lisa Montforton, CBC News Posted: Jul 06, 2016 10:34 AM MT | Last Updated: Jul 07, 2016 11:40 AM MT



Despite a busy season in the Rocky Mountain national parks, it's still possible to get a campsite if you're flexible. (Chris Harris Photography)

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It's shaping up to be a busy camping season amid a banner tourism year in the Canadian Rocky Mountain parks, which means it might be tough to find a place to pitch your tent or park your RV.

But Russell Hannon, the *Eyeopener's* budget travel columnist, says it's still possible. He has some tips to help last-minute travellers navigate some of the online resources and help make them happy campers.

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Hannon, author of *Stop Dreaming ... Start Traveling: The Ultimate Guide to Traveling More and Spending Less*, says many of **Parks Canada's campgrounds** may already be 60 per cent reserved, but if you're flexible and book quickly you have a good chance of snagging a site.

"It's just the beginning of the peak camping season, and that said, you can still go online and book and make a reservation pretty much anywhere in the national parks in the Rocky Mountains today and actually stay there tonight."

Free camping

For first-come-first-served campsites, the trick is to show up early in the day, just before checkout time at 11 a.m., says Hannon.

"At some campgrounds, you'll find people there earlier, often staying in the overflow camping so they're in line first thing in the morning looking to get a secured [site]."

For those who like to camp on the cheap — as in free — there are also many options from Calgary to Vancouver Island.

"If you're an Alberta resident you're allowed to camp for free on a lot of Crown land," says Hannon. The Alberta government [website](#) lists public land recreation areas, and spells out some of the restrictions, such as camping no longer than 14 days in one spot. Camping in these areas also means sacrificing some amenities, such as toilets, showers or firewood.



Free camping is available from Calgary to Vancouver, usually on government land. Services, such as toilets and showers, are not included. (CBC)

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Sherwood Park, AB

Today	Fri	Sat
Mainly sunny	Risk of a thunderstorm	Chance of a shower
21°C	20°C	20°C
Low 12°	Low 12°	Low 13°
POP 20%	POP 40%	POP 40%
Hourly	7 Day	More Weather

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Camping in B.C.

Hannon recommends checking out the book, *Camp Free in B.C.*, which lists more than 350 free campsites, plus 80 campgrounds that cost \$15 a night, including on Vancouver Island. "It's a tremendous resource," says Hannon. Many are Ministry of Forest lands tucked into dense forests, near mountains and lakes.



A few years ago, Parks Canada introduced O-Tentiks, A-frame structures with some creature comforts. (Courtesy of Parks Canada)

Comfort camping

For those who need more creature comforts while camping, Parks Canada, offers **O-Tentiks** in many of its parks. The A-frame structures have bunk beds and a table. You'll have to bring your own bedding and food, but it's a good option for beginner campers or those who don't camp often. Cost is around \$100 a night, and they tend to book up fast, says Hannon.

Other resources and tips

- **Freecampsites.net** - Offers a map that shows all the campgrounds across Canada, plus a brief description and reviews. It also includes shopping centre and casino parking lots that allow camping, plus walk-in sites. Again, many of these do not offer all the usual services of a traditional campground.
- The **Parks Canada website** has a **Learn to Camp** section with tips for new campers, including an app, that includes checklists and even camp recipes.
- **AllstaysCamp And Rvs** - This app lists more than 30,000 campgrounds around the United States and Canada, has downloadable maps, and includes descriptions and reviews. It also lists Walmart and casino parking lots and truck stops for when you just need to stop for the night. It costs around \$12.

With files from the Eyeopener



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