

GET OUT SIDE

THE WEST BECKONS

Campfire meals in the redwoods. Kayaking under the moon. Yosemite's sheer awesomeness. Here's everything you need to make the most of it all—and turn even indoorsy types into outdoorsy heroes.



FROM BACKYARD TO BACKCOUNTRY

Camping trips for everyone

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BATTLE GROUND

The politics of our national parks

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TRAILBLAZERS

Recipes for a weekend in the woods

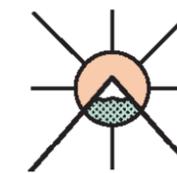
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FROM BACKYARD TO BACKCOUNTRY



The Pioneer's Penthouse in Temecula, CA. For more of our favorite campsites, see page 69.



START HERE

Whatever kind of camper you are, there's a trip within reach to help you relax among nature's finest.



THE

FIRST TIME I pitched a tent, it rained. And not just a gentle pitter-patter to help my 10-year-old self fall asleep. This was a storm of biblical proportions. Trees thrashed about, poles shook in the wind, and water soaked through the seams of my family's flimsy nylon shelter. Finally, my parents couldn't take it any more and we fled to a rental

cabin. Things hadn't gone as planned, but I'd gotten the message: Nature is dramatic and unpredictable. I was hooked.

Over the 20-plus years since then, I've gradually increased the roughing-it factor, going from park-and-pitch to full-on backpacking. But I still mix it up. One weekend I may be relishing a solo hike-in-hike-out through Colorado's Rocky Mountains; another, I'm tossing my gear in my hatchback and pulling into a groomed site with friends.

Other times, I forgo the car altogether and instead load up everything in a kayak, accessing enchanted spots that can't be reached on foot. A few years ago, on a paddling trip through British Columbia's Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, I watched otters pop up out of the still waters near the shore and black bears slink through a primeval, trail-less forest. As transporting as that experience was, I'd just as happily agree to a weekend in an Airstream, where all I'd have to worry about is checking out on time.

Because in truth, camping is not about going harder or faster. It's about experiencing something wilder, quieter, and purer than your day-to-day. On these pages, you'll read about camp experiences that go from mild to wild, along with strategies and tips for planning your own overnigher in the outdoors. It doesn't matter if that's deep in a forest with only a backpack full of essentials, or on your own lawn, where modern plumbing is just a few steps away. It's all camping. And it's all good. —*Elisabeth Kwak-Hefferan*

ICON ILLUSTRATIONS: CASEY FECKO; PROP STYLING: CHARI BIRD



LEVEL ONE

Not sure if you're ready for the long haul? Do a trial run in your own backyard.



AT HOME ON THE RANGE

IT'S SATURDAY MORNING, and the weekend has snuck up on you. The camp stove is in the basement collecting mold spores, the kids are glued to the Xbox, and the roads are already jammed. Instead of taking your chances on finding a first-come, first-served site out of town, open your back door: With a few special touches, your yard can take on a magical new dimension in the dark. —Charity Ferreira

Photographs by THOMAS J. STORY

SET UP CAMP

Enlist kids' help in scouting a flat spot for the tent and stocking the cooler with ice and snacks. Fill up the kiddie pool for splashing during the day, naming the man-made "lake" as you please. Creative kids may like to paint signs on cardboard (THIS WAY TO MURKY LAKE!), or use card stock and craft sticks to make shadow puppets for later on. **GEAR:** Alite Fiesta Cooler 44.3-liter soft cooler, \$130; alitedesigns.com.

ADD CREATURE COMFORTS

Sleeping bags may be one of the best parts of camping in kids' eyes, but lying on the hard ground can have everyone begging to go back to their beds pretty quickly. Find a happy medium by layering bags on air mattresses. Don't forget pillows, toys, and bedtime books. **GEAR:** Coleman Kids 50 sleeping bag (at left), \$25; coleman.com.

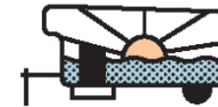
ILLUMINATE THE NIGHT

String lights outside your big top and around the trees. Make sure the tent is stocked with flashlights and headlamps. And just before you turn in, fire up a few sparklers—something you can't get away with in most campgrounds. **GEAR:** MineTom starry string lights, \$11; amazon.com.

STAY CONNECTED

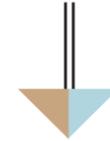
Sure, it's nice to unplug, but since you're a few feet from home, why not tap into the Wi-Fi for some entertainment? Try a storytelling podcast like Story Pirates or The Alien Adventures of Finn Caspian. Or, if you have a projector and a wall for a white sheet, stream summer classics like *The Parent Trap*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, or *Camp Rock* while sipping hot cocoa. **GEAR:** Best Made Company Seamless & Steadfast Enamel Cups, \$32 for two; bestmadeco.com.

S DIGITAL BONUS For even more of the best campgrounds around the West, go to sunset.com/campgrounds.

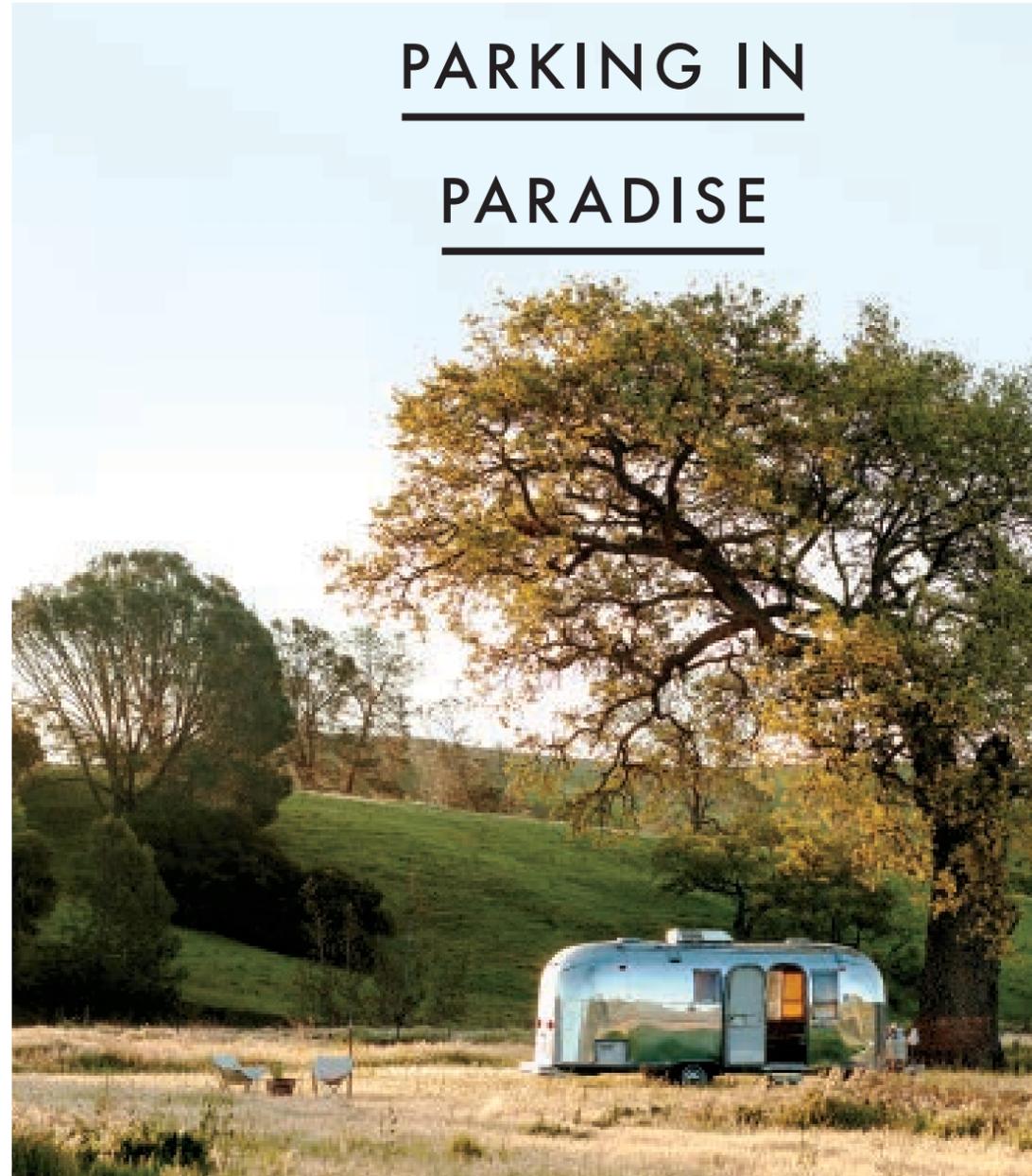


LEVEL TWO

No heavy hiking boots, no aching back, no worries of food spoiling once the ice melts: the case for camping in a trailer.



PARKING IN PARADISE



DRAMATIC OCEAN views ahead, a big bed in the back, a freshly caught fillet of fish sizzling away on the kitchen stove: For a weekend it was all mine with hardly another person in sight. When I'd first started thinking about taking a quick camping trip, my criteria were remoteness and ease—plus a place where my Australian cattle dog mix, Sam, was welcome (many campsites forbid pups).

After a late-night online scrolling session, I found it, in a vintage trailer for rent in Monterey County. When I arrived, the trailer was so hidden that the owner had to mark the turn-off from the highway with orange cones. After I parked, he picked me up, threw the bags in the back of his SUV, and drove us down a bumpy dirt path to our home for the night.

On a hillside overlooking the ridges and ocean below, the solar- and propane-powered trailer was rustic without being monastic. There was a portable speaker for playing music from my phone and a fully stocked kitchen, so I could cook and enjoy afternoon tea. (I always take my mum's fruitcake camping.)

Sam and I played in the woods during the day and stargazed at night. I washed up in the large claw-foot tub, just a few paces away from the trailer in a private bathhouse, with the sounds of crickets and a brook coming from the valley below. And at first light, I looked out the window and saw hummingbirds buzzing around the fuchsias, just a few inches from my head.

Clearly, I wasn't in the comfortable bubble of a hotel room. And that's the best thing about staying in a trailer: You never lose sight of where you are. It was just me and Sam, in the middle of the woods. —Dunstan Orchard

PACKING TIPS FOR PUPS

1. TAKE WATER FOR WALKS

Plan to take as much for your dog as you would for yourself (roughly 0.5 liters per hour), and then top up with a bit more for safe measure. **GEAR:** Ruffwear Quencher collapsible water bowl, \$15; ruffwear.com.

2. USE A HANDS-FREE LEASH

You want something just long enough that your dog can stop and sniff but can't get too far off the trail. **GEAR:** Stunt Runner leash, \$38; stuntpuppy.com.

3. BRING WARMTH

Because dogs get colder than you might think. **GEAR:** Rimpl Jr. Original Puffy Blanket, \$65; gorumpl.com.

S DIGITAL BONUS All the essentials for a backcountry trip: sunset.com/backpackinggear.



LEVEL THREE

With a little planning, you and your partner can bring the romance to car camping.



TENTS FOR TWO

NEITHER CHOCOLATE NOR flowers are the key to this woman's heart. Sleeping under the stars—now *that's* my love potion. Over the past seven or so years with my now-husband, driving up to a site for an overnigher has fanned the sparks in our relationship, from our first outing in Central California—complete with a naughty game of poker—to watching a sunrise over a Utah canyon. Each trip helps us reach new peaks, as individuals and as a team. Of course, outdoor getaways can become nightmares without proper communication and prep. (How many couples have gone off the rails over a stubborn campfire?) But if I've learned anything, it's that tension eventually melts away once the flames are in full force, letting you bond over the beauty of your surroundings. So for rugged romance without regrets, follow this tried-and-tested guide to car camping. Then sit back and let nature do the rest. —Serena Renner

ALEX STROHL



FRIDAY

2 P.M. Leave work after lunch so you can set up before dark. Create privacy by pitching your tent behind boulders, bushes, or a picnic table. Layer a two-person mat with a double sleeping bag so you can spoon yourselves to sleep. **GEAR:** Klymit Insulated Double V, a super-comfy sleeping pad for two, \$160; klymit.com; NEMO Tango Duo Slim down sleeping bag and camping quilt, \$330; nemoequipment.com.

6 P.M. Unless one of you is a former Eagle or Girl Scout, use a starter log, lighter fluid, or petroleum jelly-coated cotton balls (yup) to build a fire in minutes.

8 P.M. Cozy up after dark with a bottle of whiskey or wine (bonus points for a brand from a first date or an anniversary), and admire the galaxies overhead. Surprise your partner by pulling up The Night Sky or Sky-View, two stargazing apps that tell you what constellations you're looking at.

SATURDAY

8 A.M. Get out of bed before the sun turns your tent into a sauna, then make your significant other a cup of pour-over coffee using a mini bean grinder and copper cone. (The

French press is better left at home, away from the wind and clumsy hands.)

10:30 A.M. Study the map together to get on the same page about the agenda for the day, whether it's bird-watching or skinny dipping. Pick a route that's challenging but within your limits. Ample snacks mean no one will go hangry on the trail.

7:45 P.M. Up your dinner game with a dutch-oven stew simmered over an open flame. Afterward, a day of hiking is a good excuse to massage each other's aching feet with lavender oil—just wash 'em beforehand.

SUNDAY

6:15 A.M. Catch the sunrise (the romance factor makes the early wake-up call worth it). Bring a blanket to an east-facing overlook and huddle together while soft pinks and purples break into blinding bright. Top it off with a couple of Irish coffees and toast a trip well done.

DIGITAL BONUS

S Enjoy instant setup at these top spots for camping in trailers, yurts, and more: sunset.com/easycamping. Plus, the best waterproof gear for a beach or riverside adventure: sunset.com/waterproofcamping.



CALM WATERS

IN MY OPINION, Point Reyes National Seashore in Northern California easily wins as the most likely coastline on Earth to inspire poetry. But landlubbers get only a small peek at the goods. The real magic of this 80-mile stretch is on the waters of Tomales Bay, where sea lions nudge your hull, and bioluminescent microbes can transform the waters into an *Avatar*-like wonder. Whatever shore in the West you choose, though, kayak camping is in certain ways easier than hauling a pack along a trail while still giving you access to otherwise inaccessible beaches. By day, you can paddle beneath water birds and above marine life. By night, you can sleep on a deserted stretch of sand that beats any rocky patch of dirt. And it doesn't matter whether you're a first-timer or a seasoned pro. "Kayak camping is safe even for beginners," says Dallas Smith, operations manager and guide at Blue Waters Kayaking in Point Reyes. Here's your plan for getting out there. —*Jaimal Yogis*

PROP STYLING: BIANCA SOTEIRO



LEVEL FOUR

Kayak camping keeps you off your feet and offers a chance to escape it all.



STEP 1
PLAN (WAY) AHEAD
Check the park website for permitting information—most spots require permits for kayak camping, but some also require general camping and boat-in permits. Reserve early. At popular sites like Tomales Bay, reservations open up six months in advance. If there are no permits left, check for guided group kayak camping trips, which may still have availability.

STEP 2
FIND YOUR KAYAK
Most popular kayak camping areas have a rental outfitter nearby. Reserve ahead, and expect to pay \$100 to \$150 a night for single and double kayaks, respectively.

STEP 3
PACK UP
Most kayaks don't include a lot of storage. Pack accordingly: Essentials include a puffer vest with waterproof shell, hat, quick-dry clothing, headlamp, lightweight tent, sleeping bag, backpacking stove,

food (pack in dry bags), and water. If there's no potable H₂O at your site, you'll have to haul all of your own (1 gallon per person, per day). Finding it hard to pack light? Some kayak outfitters will motor out extra gear for you. **GEAR:** Seal-line Baja Dry Bag, from \$20; *austinkayak.com*.

STEP 4
CHART A COURSE
Check your local outfitter's website for a map of launch sites and beaches so that you can plan your route. If you're going on water with a current or waves, the rental shop will prep you on how to handle them before they'll let you go out on your own.

STEP 5
SET SAIL
Wind speeds pick up after noon, making paddling infinitely harder, so plan on an early launch. Break up a 5- to 6-mile paddle to your campsite into two sections, with a hike or beach picnic in between (if you're taking in the scenery

as you paddle, you'll probably average about 2 miles per hour). If you're going out on the ocean, check tidal charts for the area before you go.

STEP 6
DRIFT UNDER THE MOON
After you've set up camp and the sky turns dark, you'll notice that the water gets silky smooth. So before bedtime, it's well worth getting back in the boat. In areas like San Diego's Torrey Pines State Beach and Washington State's San Juan Islands, you'll also get your own light show, with scores of bioluminescent algae doing a disco in the water. Always bring a headlamp for safety.

S DIGITAL BONUS
Tricks and smarts for making your time in the wilderness easy-breezy: sunset.com/campinghacks. How-to's for the perfect camping trip: sunset.com/campingvideos.



LEVEL FIVE

Talk about a sense of accomplishment: Hiking in with only the essentials might just be the ultimate path to self-reliance.



ULTRA-LIGHT BACKPACKING

YOU'RE ON THE TRAIL, with no clearly marked campsites or toilets in sight. The last signs of civilization were hours back at the permit station, and all that's standing between you and the mercy of Mother Nature is what's in your bag. Intimidating, perhaps, but the rewards of this kind of seclusion are huge. Imagine spending a night with your tent set up at near eye-level to Half Dome in Yosemite, or at the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

Of course, to beginners, the idea of backpacking can recall that scene from *Wild*, in which Cheryl Strayed topples over from the weight of her pack before she sets out on the Pacific Crest Trail. As Strayed learned quickly, the key to the most successful hike-in adventures lies in lightening your load. Things like food, water, a sleeping bag and a tent, and a headlamp are all vital. Several changes of clothes, not so much. To save energy and reduce strain on the body, every ounce counts—and so does the distribution of the weight in your bag (see right).

Another tip for beginners: Don't go it alone. Travel with a friend who knows the ins and outs of wilderness survival. Or sign up for a guided trip, like those led by REI Adventures, and hand off logistics altogether. Excursions take place in some of the most epic areas in the West, including this summer's trip to British Columbia's Whistler. There, expert guides lead scenic alpine hikes and make camp at Russet Lake, so all you have to do is show up—though you'd still be wise to leave your iPad and parka at home. rei.com/adventures. —*Elisabeth Kwak-Hefferan*



ORDER OF THE PACK

1. Keep first-aid, water filter, and clothes inside at the top.
2. Food, bear canister, cookset, tent in the middle.
3. Trail snacks, bathroom kit, headlamp, flip-flops outside.
4. Tent poles on the side.
5. Sleeping bag at the bottom inside.
6. Water reservoir down the back and its leash over the shoulder.
7. Air mattress out front.

PROP STYLING: BIANCA SOTELO

31 CAMPS TO VISIT NOW

From tent campgrounds to cushy cabins, our favorite sites offer something for everyone.

KEY TO ICONS ★ New 🚐 Trailers ♥ Tents 🛶 Kayak Camping 🧡 Backpacking

ALASKA

K'esugi Ken Campground
Denali National Park; dnr.alaska.gov.
★ 🚐 ♥

Porcupine Campground
Chugach National Forest; recreation.gov.
♥

ARIZONA

Cave Springs Campground
Sedona; recreation.gov.
♥

Crabtree Wash Recreation Site
Tonto National Forest; fs.usda.gov.
♥

CALIFORNIA

Tinker Tin Trailer Co.
Paso Robles; tinkertin.com.
★ 🚐

Point Reyes National Seashore
Tomales; nps.gov/pore.
🛶

Inn Town Campground
Nevada City; inntowncampground.com.
★ 🚐

AutoCamp Russian River
Guerneville; autocamp.com.
★ 🚐

The Pioneer's Penthouse
Temecula; hipcamp.com.
♥

North Lake Campground
Inyo National Forest; (760) 873-2500.
🧡

Jackson Point Boat-In Campground
Sierraville; fs.usda.gov.
🛶

Sol Mountain Farm Camp
South Fork; hipcamp.com.
★ ♥

Penitente Canyon Campground
BLM Penitente Canyon Recreation Area; (719) 852-7074.
🛶

Anini Beach Park
Kauai; (808) 241-4463.
♥

Namakanipaio Campground
Big Island; hawaii.volcanohouse.com.
♥

Dworshak Boat-In Campground
Dworshak State Park; idahostateparks.reserveamerica.com.
🛶 🧡

Hells Gate State Park
Lewiston; parksandrecreation.idaho.gov.
♥

Little and Big Therriault Lake Campgrounds
Kootenai National Forest; (406) 293-6211.
♥ 🛶

Kintla Lake Campground
Glacier National Park; (406) 888-7800.
♥

Wilson Reservoir Campground
Bull Run Mountains; blm.gov.
🛶

Morphy Lake State Park Campground
Mora; nmparks.com.
🛶

Twining Campground
Carson National Forest; (575) 586-0520.
♥

Keyhole Tree House
Keyhole State Park; wyoparks.state.wy.us.
★ ♥

Conrad Campground
Yukon; env.gov.yk.ca.
★ 🚐

Barefoot Beach Resort
Penticton, B.C.; barefootresort.ca.
♥

Capitol Reef Resort
Capitol Reef National Park; capitolreefresort.com.
★ ♥

Islands in the Sky Canyonlands National Park
National Park; nps.gov/cany.
♥

Long Island Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
Ilwaco; (360) 484-3482.
🛶

Echo Canyon State Park
Pioche; parks.nv.gov.
🚐

Wilson Reservoir Campground
Bull Run Mountains; blm.gov.
🛶

OREGON

The Vintages Trailer Resort
Dayton; the-vintages.com.
★ 🚐

UTAH

Capitol Reef Resort
Capitol Reef National Park; capitolreefresort.com.
★ ♥

Islands in the Sky Canyonlands National Park
National Park; nps.gov/cany.
♥

Long Island Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
Ilwaco; (360) 484-3482.
🛶

Echo Canyon State Park
Pioche; parks.nv.gov.
🚐

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