

## **Camping: From roughing it to roughing it in style**

Camping means different things to different people. Maybe your idea of a perfect camping getaway involves a canoe, lots of portaging, a new campsite every night and bannock cooked over a campfire. Then again, you may think parking your RV along Algonquin Park's Highway 60 corridor is more than wild enough.

There is no right way to camp but there may be a right way for you. Before you head out it's a good idea to decide ahead of time what version will ensure that you return home with fond memories and an eagerness for a next time versus saying "never again."

Before you set out, a little bit of research can make a huge difference in the quality of your camping experience. Visit [www.ontarioparks.com](http://www.ontarioparks.com) and click on 'Accommodations' which will tell you all you need to know about car camping, backcountry camping and roofed (including yurts) category by category. The Ontario Parks site will also help you to locate a park by the services it offers. Try [www.CampSource.ca](http://www.CampSource.ca) for links to for profit campgrounds. The Huntsville Lake of Bays Visitor Guide is available on-line at [www.huntsvillelakeofbays.on.ca](http://www.huntsvillelakeofbays.on.ca) with links to parks, campsites and equipment rental.

### ***Decide when roughing it is rough enough***

Camping can generally be broken down into 3 categories: 1) wilderness, 2) camping lite and 3) luxury. Your choice will affect the type of equipment you use and what you need to pack.

### ***Wilderness camping***

Ontario has more than 6,500 backcountry campsites defined as those that are accessible only by canoe or on foot. These are tucked away in 21 different provincial parks and none of them is more famous than Algonquin Park. Wilderness or backcountry campers should expect to find basic bare-bones facilities which may (or may not) include a pit privy, marked tent sites and a rock-lined campfire.

Backcountry camping requires that you get to your campsite. That usually means launching your own or a rented canoe or hiking in on foot. Never assume that because you've decided on a wilderness trip that you can just 'show up' and get a site. Due to the popularity of parks such as Algonquin, even the interior (backcountry) campsites are often full, especially on weekends and during the high summer season. To ensure that you aren't disappointed about being able to camp at the time and place you are counting on, Park officials recommend that a reservation be made in advance of your trip.

If you've decided to try camping for the first time ever, good for you! However, you probably shouldn't try wilderness camping on your very first foray unless you're with other experienced campers who are willing to show you the ropes. It may be best to start off with 'camping lite' and work up to wilderness camping as you get some experience.

If you do decide on wilderness camping, there are more than 2,000 kilometres of canoe routes in the Algonquin Park interior. But not all wilderness seekers opt for waterborne transportation. Some folks like to explore on their own two feet and backpacking trails offer choices with loops ranging from 6 to 88 kilometres in length. Throw on your pack and head out for a few days into real backcountry. Complete information and topographic trail maps are available in the map-brochure 'Backpacking Trails of Algonquin Provincial Park.'

Historic ranger cabins located at various sites throughout the Park Interior are available for rent to people on interior canoe trips. Restrictions apply and you must book well in advance.

Many outfitting services exist both outside and inside provincial parks. If you lack the requisite equipment or are unsure what you need for food and equipment supplies for a canoe or backpacking trip talk to the outfitting experts. Outfitting staff tends to be highly experienced and in addition to getting you outfitted for the trip, they often have words of advice for both novices and experts.

### ***Camping lite***

Camping lite is a safe and fun-filled camping option and it's especially good for families or for newcomers to the wide world of the outdoors. This style of camping is generally what's available at most for profit campgrounds that are run as a business. Basically you make a reservation, arrive with your tent or camper or RV, pay a fee, and pull into your assigned campsite. You then pitch your tent, start your campfire, or hook up your RV and do whatever else you need. Showers and rest rooms are provided nearby and there are often other amenities such as a pool, a games room, laundry facilities, or a convenience store.

It's the perfect way to enjoy the outdoors without sacrificing all of comforts of home. It may sound easy but you are still roughing it to a degree. [www.campgrounds.org](http://www.campgrounds.org) is a good place to find such a campground in Huntsville/Lake of Bays. They represent close to 500 campgrounds throughout Ontario and whether you are looking for the perfect spot in the trees to pitch your tent or somewhere that can accommodate a big rig, they likely have a campground to suit you.

For a camping vacation that is less demanding than a trip into Algonquin Park's interior, there is another Algonquin camping experience which has it's own popular following. Visitors can enjoy camping, swimming, museums, hiking, eco-learning, and picnicking with the comfort of modern amenities along the 56-kilometre stretch of Highway 60 running through the southwest corner of the Park.

Even long-time Algonquin Park visitors may be unaware that the Park has four intimate campgrounds well away from the Highway 60 Corridor. They are located at the ends of sometimes long and dusty roads leading into Algonquin's north, east, and south sides. The campgrounds feature few modern conveniences but they have a slow-paced, old-fashioned charm that has tremendous appeal for those who have discovered them. They can be found on the main Algonquin Park web site by clicking on 'Peripheral Campgrounds'. These four campgrounds – Kiosk, Brent, Achray and Algonquin South – are not directly accessible

from Huntsville/Lake of Bays. However, they are a wonderful way to ease yourself into camping when you have some extra time and don't mind driving considerable distances down an unpaved 30-km. road after you've reached an access point off a highway. The Peripheral Campgrounds in Park offer an easier camping experience with lakeside camping in an incomparable wilderness setting.

### *Luxury camping*

There are those who wouldn't consider luxury camping to be camping at all. Indeed it does seem like an oxymoron. However, so-called luxury camping is perfect when you want to have a rustic vacation in or near a wilderness area without getting dirty or working too hard at the experience. Luxury camping is about relaxing near nature without coming into contact with its grittier aspects. If you like to have people around, but you also like to feel as though you're somewhat removed from civilization, this may be perfect for you and your family.

In Huntsville/Lake of Bays luxury camping involves something of an overlap between 'lite camping' and visiting a rustic resort or lodge. Local campgrounds that have electrical hook-ups can seem like luxury if you own a recreational vehicle with a comfy queen size bed. The same holds true for the five Hwy. 60 corridor campgrounds in Algonquin Park - Canisbay Lake, Lake of Two Rivers, Mew Lake, Pog Lake and Rock Lake Campground - that offer electric sites.

For real luxury, many of Huntsville/Lake of Bays resorts offer just that in a setting that allows guests to get close to nature but retreat to the lodge for a first-rate meal and a bed heaped with luxury linens. For the softest of all soft, green adventures consider a lodge inside Algonquin Park. Along the Highway 60 corridor are three resorts of the lodge variety. One of the most famous is Killarney Lodge ([www.killarneylodge.com](http://www.killarneylodge.com)) which provides private lakeside cabins, tastefully furnished in a comfortable, sophisticated country style. Each accommodation faces the water and includes the use of a canoe, which sits on shore just outside your door. During the day, you can make like a camper by exploring by canoe, by bicycle or on foot and at night return to a comfy bed and wonderful meal. You'll still hear the haunting cry of the loon, watch the sun rise over a mist-filled lake or star gaze late at night but you'll do it from your own private cabin instead of through the flap of a tent.

