

Lifestyle Feature
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Camping for all shapes and sizes

The bright blaze and deep crackle of the campfire, the never-ending hiking trails and portages, or the twist of a cooler-fresh beer cap. In every person there is a camper and for every camper there is a campground.

Camping doesn't have to mean squatting over a man-made hole in the ground after gutting, filleting and cooking the bass you just caught. It can consist of cooking Kraft Dinner on a camp stove, playing a game of volleyball on a sandy beach and flushing your troubles away.

Ontario has more than 100 provincial parks and over 400 private campgrounds.

Mike Douglas, a public relations student at Guelph-Humber, says camping gives him a chance to relax and spend time with friends minus the background noise of everyday life.

"It's a chance to be with your friends and enjoy who they actually are," Douglas said. "We're not playing video games, or going to a bar, or watching a movie, it's just me and them making our own fun."

Many Ontario campgrounds offer all the basic amenities of home like flush toilets and comfort stations with electricity. A few big names include Six Mile Lake in Coldwater, Arrowhead in Huntsville, Blue Lake in Dryden and McRae Point in Orillia.

Since her teens, Lauren Sattler, a 24-year-old interior design student at Humber College has looked forward to camping every summer with a big group of friends and a big cooler full of drinks.

"One time one of my friends decided it would be a good idea to put his beer on a rock at the top of a waterfall. He must have really wanted that beer, cause as soon as the water grabbed it, he went right along with it."

Although many of her memories involve her being under the influence, Sattler sees camping as more than just a party.

"It is one time, where you can just step out of reality for once and really take a look at how beautiful nature really can be," she said. "It is a time to really let go and just be a bum for a couple days and hang out with your best buds."

Sattler and her friends camp at Arrowhead Provincial Park most summers but they have also been kicked out for excessive noise. Some areas of the park are radio-free.

Make sure to do your research when booking a campsite because some places don't allow alcohol on group sites or any sites during the month of May. Some favourite party grounds are Sauble Falls in Wiarton, The Pinery in Grand Bend and the Sandbanks in Picton.

Some campgrounds have pools, as well as lakes, rivers or bays nearby. These campgrounds generally attract families with small children. Bronte Creek in Oakville has one of the largest man-made swimming pools in North America.

Many of these places run educational programs and activities that include guided hikes, nature talks and movie nights. Some places even have museums on site.

Adventurous campers, who enjoy roughing it in the wilderness might prefer to head to Algonquin Park, located four hours north of Toronto.

With thousands of lakes, ponds and streams to explore, Algonquin is the largest and most popular campground in Ontario. It boasts over 140 km in backpacking trails and over 2000 km of canoe routes. Much of the campground is only accessible by foot or canoe.

Not far from Algonquin is Killarney Park and it also won't leave the interior camper disappointed.

Whether your most prized possession is your hand-whittled hiking stick or your hairdryer, there's a camper in you somewhere and a campground worth visiting this summer.