

# **Boston Hospitality Review**

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## **Camping Amidst COVID-19**

By Dr. Suzanne Markham Bagnera

Special Edition: COVID-19 Crisis



The current Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has dismantled the hospitality industry. With the increase demands for social distancing, camping, could very well be this summer's best vacation plan. A better understanding of current practices and recommendations for new campgrounds protocols will be addressed. Camping provides many benefits, consider getting outside and enjoying the disconnect from the traditional busy world.

### **Impact of Covid-19**

Many infectious disease experts claim there is no exact timetable to put a halt to the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) (Grady, 2020). As the confirmed virus cases increase daily, the amount of social distancing and reduction of social density must continue to be adhered to in order to halt the spread. In such an effort to do so, several national parks have closed their gates (Frazin, 2020). Since no federal mandate exists, for national or state parks, each state is therefore handling their closures individually (Cleveland, 2020).

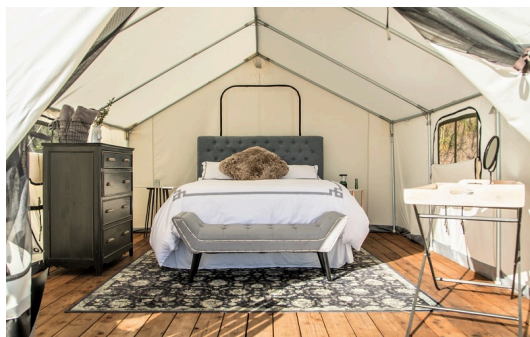
The National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds (ARVC) is presently engaged in discussions with government authorities to promote the fact that campgrounds and parks often provide permanent residences for individuals and temporary lodging for those traveling, due to necessary work (The National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds, 2020). Campgrounds and RV parks are better suited to allocate, social distancing, since the units are in sectioned spaces. Additionally, the campgrounds that

provide propane, grocery services and other food services, are considered essential business services (The National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds, 2020).

One way to avoid airports or the close confines of public transportation is to vacation at a campground (Reynolds, 2020). Camping gets you out of a dense city and provides a chance to spend quality time outside. The great aspect about camping, is you can control your level of socialization.

### Owners Perspective

Concepts like 'glamping' have taken a significant hit to their upcoming season. Owner of [TerraGlamping](#), Rebecca Martin, from East Hampton, NY, has been forced to temporarily shut down her business, due to the state's 'stay-at-home' order and the shuttering of the Suffolk County Parks Department, which is where her business is located. Between the cancellations for May and June, and the lack of additional reservations, for the rest of the summer, her ability to fund the ramp up for opening is unlikely going to happen.



Source: TerraGlamping Gallery



With the increased level of uncertainty, as to when America will open again, it makes it more challenging to figure out how to operate. Presently, NY Governor Andrew Cuomo is forecasting that April will be bad, May will be worse, and June is not well understood (Villarreal, 2020); this leaves so much uncertainty for when a recovery effort can commence. As a small business, Rebecca notes that, "as an owner, all of the financial resources have been placed into the business so there isn't a slush fund to tap into." Her 'ramp up money' comes from the reservations booked for the season to hire her team to set up the tents, the 200 beds, and dressers.

While some places will not be able to open for this season, Rebecca of TerraGlamping is confident that "next year is going to be amazing, as guests will want to experience the luxury she can offer in an outdoor setting, to help establish the digital detox that everyone will be so desperately be craving." She is already working on her 2021 marketing strategy. The hardest part is determining when is the best point in time to deploy that strategy since so much is left unknown at the present moment.

In these unprecedented times, owners Wayne and Bob Charest of Friendly Beaver Campground in New Boston, New Hampshire, have made the difficult decision to close

their facility between March 17<sup>th</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Now, the Governor has placed a 'stay-at-home' order until May 4<sup>th</sup>. Wayne is in constant contact with the Fire Chief and Board of Health to determine if the state will allow him to be considered an essential business. Another challenge they brought to light, "despite the effort to open the campground so guests can self-isolate at their campsites, there is also the burden those guests place on the town resources." Wayne says, "it's more than just a cleaning and activity protocol to consider."

### **Current Challenges**

Bathrooms are an issue. Unlike in a hotel room, these showers are not cleaned after each guest use. This will be a unique challenge as many campgrounds presently have limited staff. However, it is possible service is provided only twice daily.

A campground will accommodate seasonal and transient campers. It is typically, the transient camper, who would use the public bathroom facilities more than a seasonal camper. Campgrounds, which are RV focused, are likely to have the largest increase in business volume, as RVs have their own facilities; thus, reducing the dependence on the public facilities.

DIY Shower



Source: Google Images

Many campgrounds offer social activities. The recreation space is not normally very large, so individuals tend to be together in tight quarters. Outdoor activities tend to include close contact sports.

### **New Practices**

While many aspects of the Covid-19 experience is making people stressed out, concerned and worried, this too shall pass. Despite concerns for cancellations and refunds, an aspect that campground owners must resolve, is the aspect



of around cleanliness and activities. Campground owners need to devise a new strategic plan to address Covid-19 protocol.

### **Cleaning**

Campground owners and operators will need to redefine their bathroom cleaning protocol.

According to the strict disinfect CDC recommended guidelines, bathrooms that are unable to be maintained will be unable to open. Once a campground establishes a policy indicating the procedure, it must be adhered to. Hence, if the bathrooms can't be reached hourly for sanitization because staff would be stretched too thin, then closure of certain bath houses is recommended (The National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds, 2020).

### **Social Activities**

It is likely that these events need to be eliminated or redesigned with a restriction in the numbers of people and increased social distance between individuals. Indoor crafting activities could be organized to have one person at a table and restrict the number of people in the room. Instead of accommodating one large group at the same time in one room, camps could offer the activity to smaller groups of people in shorter shifts of time, with cleaning in between.

Outdoor activities can be restricted to have less person-to-person contact (i.e. no flag football, soccer, basketball, football); be more creative with the playing rules around such games as dodgeball (wearing gloves) or kickball (only ball outs and no person to person outs, while wearing gloves). They could also have advanced registration and limit the numbers of attendees.

### **Playgrounds and Water Features**

Depending on the campground's location, state laws will dictate what public space is able to be open. It is suggested that the campground shut down facilities, such as the playgrounds, or swimming pools, to prevent the spread of the virus. Consider camping near a natural waterway to stay cool and have fun. Pack your own outdoor games, such as crochet, corn hole, and giant Jenga!

### **Laundry Rooms**

Laundry rooms should have the same cleaning procedures as the bathroom. If they are not able to be cleaned, then they should be closed. Another aspect to the laundry room is that it will typically require quarters for operation. This brings us to cash handling.

### **Cash Handling**

Cash can transmit and contains bacteria and pathogens so following the CDC recommendations is critical. Cash collectors must wear gloves to handle cash. It is recommended to keep one person restricted to handling cash so they can keep the same gloves on. Then, have another person do the other transactions. If cash is handled without gloves, hands must be washed to avoid a significant risk of contamination. Try and pay cashless when possible. But, if you have to pay in cash—place in an envelope, then to give to the attendant.

## **Benefits to Camping**

As a reminder, for those who go camping and for those who are considering the option, there are some amazing benefits to camping.

### **1. Fresh Air & Sun**

Your mood can be enhanced by an increased level of oxygen, which in turn produces additional serotonin. Sunlight provides vitamin D, something lacking after being kept inside for so long. The increased exposure to the air will actually promote better sleep.

### **2. Unplugged in Isolation**

Some sites will offer electric, some will offer wifi in certain locations – otherwise you are going to be unplugged and disconnected from technology. Connection with the people you are camping with is going to happen much easier without the electronics. Play a card or board game. Pack games into labeled ziplock bags instead of keeping them in the original boxes, allows more games using less space. While the campground may offer activities, you don't have to take part in them, you can simply remain on your campsite and self-isolate with your own pack around the fire pit!

### **3. Exercise – be one with nature**

The options are endless, hiking, walking, biking, fishing, and getting out on and in the water – swimming, canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boating. In addition to the calories you will burn from all of the working out you will do, the movements you make when camping will get you using different muscles. You can finally enjoy a sunrise or sunset or star-gaze at night. Maybe even have the chance to observe the wildlife!

### **4. Eat Healthy**

Food you make at home is typically a healthier option than when you dine out. Camping will offer you the chance to cook in a simpler, more healthy manner, such as grilling. It's not like you will be making pizza for dinner, so enjoy the fresh grilled food.

## **Camping this summer? Will you go?**

Between the need to get out of your house, a need to have a technology detox, and a desire to get outside to be in natural surroundings, camping might very well be the best way to vacation this summer. The hospitality industry is in desperate need of business to aid in the recovery. Also keep in mind that most campground owners are small business operators who certainly need your business to keep their business afloat.

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Suzanne Markham Bagnera is Associate Clinical Professor and Chair of the Undergraduate Programs in the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University, where she specializes in teaching hotel operations and human resources. She has held positions as General Manager at Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, Staybridge Suites, and Holiday Inn Express. She is a member of the International Council of Hotel, Restaurant, & Institutional Education (I-CHRIE) and serves as Immediate Past President for the North East North American Federation. She holds numerous certifications in hospitality training: Certified Hotel Administrator (CHA) and ServSafe. Suzanne earned her M.B.A. in Management and B.S. in Hotel/Restaurant Management from Johnson & Wales University her doctorate from Iowa State University in Hospitality Management.



Suzanne and her family started tent camping in 1998. Finally, in 2017, they started camping with a 32' travel trailer. She and her family (son, John and husband, Ronny) now own a 40' travel trailer and spend their summer at their seasonal campground.