



Camping in (relative) comfort

Parks Canada strives to take the backache out
of the backwoods

by Janet Wallace

I love camping, or parts of it at least, such as falling asleep to the sounds of mating frogs and wind in the trees. Waking in the night, I am captivated by the stars punctuating the night sky; the blackness is the backdrop to intricate constellations, glowing planets and the occasional streak of a meteorite. I awake to birdsong—hearing a solo performer build into a crescendo of morning chorus. I love breakfast cooked on a campfire—the aromas of bacon, coffee and wood smoke merging into one.

What I don't appreciate, however, is trying to sleep on bumpy, rocky ground. Crawling into a tent hurts my knees. I get frustrated that, for one night in a tent, I spend hours packing and preparing ahead of time, and hours afterwards doing laundry, re-washing dishes and airing everything out.

Parks Canada now makes it possible to enjoy the best parts of camping with minimal discomfort or work. When “glamping” (glamour plus camping), you can hike during the day, cook over a campfire and sleep in a bed (of sorts).

The flagship of the program is the oTENTik (think authentic), which is like a huge tent trailer. An A-frame with walls of heavy vinyl, the oTENTik has a sleeping area, kitchen table with chairs, and shelves of cooking utensils. It's airy, spacious and inviting. You can stand up straight and even have enough floor space to do yoga.



Relaxing on the steps of the oTENTiks at Cheticamp Campground, Cape Breton Highlands National Park.



Parks Canada



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Top: Parks Canada is experimenting with novel designs such as Fundy Park's Goutte d'O, a tiny shelter shaped like a water droplet. Below: The incredible views from the verandah of our rustic cabin in Fundy Park.

An "equipped campsite" is slightly more rustic. The large, tall tent contains bunkbed-style cots. Outside, there is a picnic table, two-burner propane stove and bug shelter.

For a more exotic accommodation, try a yurt—a circular dwelling with futon frames, bunkbeds and tables made of logs. The yurts are well insulated and have propane heaters.

Parks Canada is experimenting with novel designs such as Fundy Park's Goutte d'O, a tiny shelter shaped like a water droplet, and Cape Breton Highlands' Cocoon Tree Bed, a spherical structure suspended in the trees.

All the structures are in campgrounds among tents and RVs. But what if you want to get away from it all? If being alone in the wilderness is your dream, you have several options. They involve a bit more energy but are worth every step.

"Primitive campgrounds" lack flush toilets, showers and dishwashing facilities. These conveniences are replaced by a stronger connection with nature, less human traffic and greater privacy. For more isolation, try a backcountry campsite.

You carry in everything you need—tent, sleeping bags, cooking equipment, food and water. The hike in might be short or could take days.

I'm saving the best for last.

A "rustic cabin" is surrounded by beauty and wilderness but with the comfortable of a woodstove, table and chairs, and bunkbeds. There's a bit of a hike to get there but you just need to bring bedding, food and water—no tent or cooking equipment.

My partner and I spent a night in a rustic cabin in Fundy Park. "Heavenly" is the best word to describe it. Much of our time was spent soaking up the incredible views from the verandah. Although the cabin is in the interior of the park, far from other cabins or campsites, it has a panoramic view of the Bay of Fundy. We could see two lighthouses to the east. Facing south, we could see the park's woodlands with the bay as a backdrop. We watched dusk fall, the moon rise and the stars emerge. With an owl calling in the distance, I saw a shooting star enliven the night sky. It was hard to fall asleep because, throughout the night, I got up to look at the sky. The only real incentive for sleep was my desire to wake early enough to see a spectacular sunrise.

Spending a night in a national park seems so, well, Canadian. It takes us out of our routines and into a new setting, closer to nature. With these Parks Canada innovations we can now do this a bit more easily and comfortably. 🐾

The three beds (sturdy but comfortable double-bed mattresses encased in vinyl) are on platforms, two next to each other and one above, accessible by a ladder. Vinyl "curtains" attached by Velcro or metal snaps provide privacy from the outside and between sleeping spaces.

To enjoy aspects of the traditional camping experience, you can cook outside on the fire pit and eat on a picnic table. If the weather is poor, you can cook on the propane barbecue then eat inside. In cold weather, you can use the propane heater. The contents of the oTENTiks vary slightly between campgrounds but generally have dishes, dish towels, pots, pans and cutlery.

Washrooms, (not outhouses) are nearby with flush toilets, hot water and showers. Even washing dishes is easy—just take them to a nearby building with stainless steel counters and sinks with hot running water.



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