

No Wrong Way to *Camp like a Girl*



Girl Camper excursions for adult women offer an empowering opportunity for adventure, relaxation, and camaraderie amidst nature. These events can be a rejuvenating escape from the daily grind, providing a chance to disconnect from technology and reconnect with oneself and others. Whether it is a solo journey, a getaway with close friends, or an organized group expedition, the experience can foster personal growth, self-reliance, and a deeper appreciation for the great outdoors.

Anita Kealey started camping at age five with her family on a cross-country venture in a little camper. She learned at an early age to be conscious of your surroundings and even navigate the bathhouse.

As their family grew, her parents upgraded to a larger self-contained trailer, and spent weekends camping at state parks and more extended summer vacations. She has wonderful memories of camping with her family and loved building a good fire with the reward of a perfectly-roasted marshmallows for S'mores.

She was an active Girl Scout with earned badges to show camping and creative activities on the front and up the back of her sash. Her success with cookies sales earned extended camp outs. By high school, she even ventured on bike caravans camping in a pup tent.

Anita headed to NYC to study design weeks after high school graduation in the late '70s. She also spent many years traveling to both coasts and Europe independently, as a single woman in her career as a designer. She added, "I am sure my family worried; they knew I was

independent and had always been conscious of my surroundings."

Her love for camping put her onto the Martha Stewart Show during the centennial celebration of Girl Scouting with her extensive collection of Girl Scout memorabilia and uniforms dating back to 1912.

So how did "camping" re-enter her life? During COVID, she realized it was time to change the way to do business. So, she gave up a larger office setting and put the savings of rent into a mobile office.

Kealey had been in the contract interior design industry for over 40 years and retired as director of the Institute of Design & Technology. Her schedule was full of mentoring, consulting, project management and product development.

Post-COVID, she spends more time on the road, covering six territories representing art and furniture suppliers in the upper Midwest. Her van serves as an office and motel when working.

Since she only stays one night at a location, Harvest Host works the best for her as she enjoys spending the night at their unique locations. Occasionally, she stays at small town parks and even brings a four-legged companion. Staying in a nice campground on a weekend is a special treat, when she hosts or attends Girl Camper weekend events in other states when on the road.

Return to camping fell into place when Anita Kealey became the state guide for Girl Camper for South Dakota. The mission of Girl Camper has created a community of women over twenty-one, helping



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other women gain confidence, knowledge, and new friends in the great outdoors. With their online community, nationwide guides and events, weekly podcast, and award-winning magazine, they inspire, encourage, and lead women to live their dreams aloud.

There is no wrong way to camp like a girl, per Girl Camper organization. “We go places and do things and appreciate other adventurous and curious women. We camp like girls in tents, vans, travel trailers, motor homes, and even cars.” If a participant does not have an RV or camper, they purposely select venues that have creative glamping

settings available or cabins to rent. Most travel solo or in a caravan and meet in safe gatherings large and small. Girl Camper events are open to everyone and if the campground has a site, they will make a space. The only requirement is a one-time \$10 fee, they must register and be safety vetted on the national organizational website. Note: Girl Camper organization is not affiliated with the Girl Scouts.

Many women reach a stage in life while exploring the outdoors and traveling re-ignite a sense of happiness and fulfillment. This resurgence of joy is often linked to a newfound freedom or a desire to reconnect



with nature and oneself. Whether they are widowed, divorced, or simply have a partner or spouse who does not share their enthusiasm for outdoor activities, these women face the unique challenge of finding like-minded companions for their adventures.

One way to overcome this challenge is by joining groups dedicated to women's outdoor activities and travel. Organizations like Girl Camper, Women Who Hike, RV Women, and other various regional meet-up groups offer opportunities for women to connect over shared interests. These communities not only foster a sense of camaraderie, but also provide a safe and supportive environment for exploring new destinations and outdoor pursuits. Social media platforms and online forums also serve as valuable resources for finding travel partners and organized group trips.

Additionally, solo travel can be an empowering experience, allowing women to set their own pace and itinerary. Most find that traveling alone enhances their self-confidence and independence. However, safety

should always be a priority, and thorough planning is essential. Women can consider booking guided tours or participating in organized travel events to ensure a balance of independence and security. Whether traveling alone or with new-found friends, the journey itself becomes a source of immense personal growth and happiness.

One of the key benefits of camping for adult women is the sense of empowerment and self-sufficiency it cultivates. Setting up a camp site, starting a campfire, and navigating trails can build confidence and resilience. These skills not only enhance the camping experience, but also translate into everyday life, fostering a can-do attitude. Additionally, camping encourages physical activity and mindfulness, as the natural surroundings invite participants to hike, meditate, and engage in outdoor hobbies like birdwatching, fishing, or stargazing.

When attending South Dakota events, Kealey brings a historic and artistic experience of the location. Last year when camping in northwest South Dakota, the participants explored and retraced the




steps that trapper Hugh Glass may have taken, as depicted in the movie *The Revenant*. While in Lemmon, they visited the Petrified Wood Park, Grand River Museum and spent time with the sculptor, John Lopez, who created the welded art masterpiece of Hugh Glass and the legendary grizzly bear attack.

Kealey also provides additional craft projects, for those unexpected rainy days or filler activities for those attending her events. She also likes to share hands-on creativity in design and weaving. The repetitive nature of weaving can serve as meditative practice, allowing participants to focus their minds and escape the daily routine. As one creates with their hands, the mind can enter a relaxed state, complete immersion, and enjoyment in the process. This significantly reduces anxiety and promotes a sense of calm, an excellent activity for relaxation. She has even offered weekend retreats with shared experience of creativity in an away-from-home environment that can lead to lasting friendships and a supportive network of like-minded individuals.

In late August, she will be returning from an Alaska small ship expedition, as the guide for a group of women traveling from all corners of the country.

One of Kealey's annual gatherings in late September is the Buffalo Round-up, Custer State Park Arts Festival and the Crazy Horse Volksmarch. Each year, this event provides a variety of opportunities available to participate in such as kayaking, biking, hiking, hot-air balloon adventures, horseback trail rides, unique spa sites, cultural awareness, and historical sites. Each morning there is breakfast to start the day, and after a day of activities, they gather again for a potluck dinner and a relaxing evening time around the fire.

The purpose of Girl Camper is to share the joy of camping and outdoor activities with other women.

Should you wish to learn more about an upcoming activity or Girl Camper organization, feel free to email: anitak@girlcamper.com 

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