

# Under the stars or in a luxury cabin, camping has it all

By **Jennette Barnes** | Globe Correspondent

May 09, 2013



Rose Lincoln for the Boston Globe

A campsite at Wompatuck State Park in Hingham.

Friends gathered around a fire under the stars, children free to ride their bikes without traffic, and the peace of waking up to fresh air and birdsong — these are some of the small luxuries of camping.

Whether you want a quiet woodland experience or all the activities of a summer camp and more, there's a place south of Boston that could do the trick.

For classic tent or RV camping on public land, Myles Standish State Forest, on the Carver-Plymouth line, and Wompatuck State Park, located in Hingham and neighboring towns, offer more than 600 sites and countless opportunities to get out into nature and play.

Myles Standish, massive at nearly 15,000 acres, has 16 ponds. Most visitors see only a handful, either by driving through the camping areas or passing them on foot or bike. Trails and fire roads wind their way throughout.

## Related

- [If you go camping...](#)

The forest is different from most campgrounds in New England; while you'll see plenty of white pines, it has sandy soil and boasts one of the largest contiguous areas of pitch pines and scrub oaks north of Long Island. If you try the paved bike path, you may encounter cranberries growing wild at the edge.

The ponds and surrounding vegetation are ecologically sensitive, and rangers ask the public to stay on the trails, said Anita Wysocki, camping program coordinator for the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Promising freshwater swimming, the ponds are one of the park's biggest attractions. The park also allows fishing and non-motorized boats.

"The freshwater ponds, I think, are a big part of Myles Standish, in the forest," she said. "They're just lovely."

In 2010, the park added three yurts at Barrett Pond. These canvas, cabin-like structures, built on wooden platforms to keep out the damp, all have central skylights. At Myles Standish, each is furnished with beds (no linens), a table, chairs, and electricity.

Myles Standish is also popular for horseback riding and offers the only horse-camping area in the state-park system.

Closer to Boston is Wompatuck State Park, with its large campsites and close proximity to local attractions, including Boston and Nantasket Beach.

"More and more people from out of state are staying at Wompatuck, because [it provides] access to Boston," Wysocki said. But Wompatuck, at about 4,000 acres, is more than just its location.

Mountain bikers love Wompatuck, and trail users of all kinds — runners, road bikers, dog walkers — enjoy its network of some 70 miles of roads, trails, and paths. The southern part of the park includes a wildlife management area, and if you walk the trails off season, even near the campsites, you may startle a few white-tailed deer, whose wide-eyed blinking turns into a blaze of tails as they bound away.

The park has significant frontage on the Aaron River Reservoir, where fishing and car-top boating are welcome. Wompatuck is also home to Mount Blue Spring, a spot where locals and campers collect fresh drinking water.

Both parks offer ranger-led programs in season.

"They're both beautiful," Wysocki said. "They offer a chance to be outside and enjoy nature and enjoy your family."

For those who like being outdoors, but with a few more creature comforts, private campgrounds are a good option. At the Boston/Cape Cod KOA in Middleborough, campers have their choice not only of RV and tent sites, but also two main types of cabins: rustic cabins with beds, but no linens; and furnished cabins with bathrooms, kitchens, linens, television, and air conditioning.

Some of the furnished cabins have two bedrooms and an upper loft popular with children; some also have a patio with tables, chairs, and lounge chairs. General manager Pat Childers good-naturedly calls this "glamping."

The KOA offers a heated outdoor pool, camp store, two playgrounds, organized activities on weekends, and facilities for basketball, bocce, horseshoes, miniature golf, and volleyball. Children especially enjoy the jumping pillow, which is a curved, bouncy surface, like a bounce house with no enclosure. "The kids love it," she said.

Amenities include an inflatable outdoor movie screen and a fenced dog park with toys, though this spring, the dog park was being reconstructed after it was dismantled to allow some work on the property.

Campers who like a little more quiet, away from the bustle of the playgrounds and pool, can head up a gentle hill at the rear of the property to a spot called the Highlands — four rows of campsites nestled in the woods.

Although the KOA sites have their own place for campfires, guests can also gather around a communal fire in the evening. It's that sense of ease and joy that Childers loves about camping.

"We're in the trees and forest, and it's quiet and beautiful," she said. "Mostly everybody's happy when they're camping."

A few campgrounds are downright resort-like. One of them is Normandy Farms, a family-owned operation in Foxborough for generations. If you call and get placed on hold, you'll hear a slogan that defines Normandy Farms: "Where we take the 'rough' out of roughing it."

The campground boasts four pools, one of which is indoors, plus three hot tubs, a sauna, a wellness center where massages are offered, and a host of activities in the 20,000-square-foot lodge. On the grounds, you'll find a disc golf course, bocce, softball, a bicycle park with terrain course, and a dog park.

Kristine Daniels, marketing director and granddaughter of the founders, said the land has been in the family since 1759. It was a farm in the early days, but her grandparents enjoyed camping, and they had friends who would ask to pitch tents or park their Airstreams on the land, she said. They opened the campground in 1971.

Today, Normandy Farms' accommodations run the gamut, from tent and RV sites to furnished cabins and yurts. The cabins and yurts come equipped with kitchen and bath, fireplace, heat and air conditioning, and flat-screen televisions with cable.

"We're always trying to stay ahead of the curve of other campgrounds," she said.

As someone who also enjoys the state park experience, Daniels said the two are very different; a place like Normandy Farms appeals to people who like to have a lot of things going on.

Rates for campsites vary as much as the accommodations. The state parks start as low as \$12 per night for a campsite for Massachusetts residents. Yurts at Myles Standish go for \$30 a night for a small yurt or \$40 for the lone larger one, which sleeps six.

At the KOA, prices range from \$28 to about \$200 per night, depending on the type of site or size of the cabin, Childers said. At present, the website does not display prices until you go through the first few steps of a reservation.

Normandy Farms' prices fluctuate with the season and start at \$36 a night for a campsite without electric hookups. Full hookups, in high season, go for \$79 a night. Cabins and yurts rent weekly for \$1,650 in summer; midweek and weekend rates are available in spring and fall.

*Jennette Barnes can be reached at [jennettebarnes@yahoo.com](mailto:jennettebarnes@yahoo.com).*