

Military OneSource Podcast — Best Kept Secrets

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. We're talking about camping today. We have military installations all over the world, and many of these installations, they have campgrounds for you to enjoy many year-round. My guest today is Ken Sorg, and we'll talk about these campsites and how you can find them and enjoy them for your next vacation.

Ken, welcome to the podcast.

Ken Sorg:

Hey, Bruce. It's good to be with you again.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. Great to have you back. So, we're going to talk about the campsites in a bit, but let's start by talking about how people can find these campsites with something called Best Kept Secrets. So first question to you is what is Best Kept Secrets?

Ken Sorg:

I know, right? Should we let the cat out on the bag here or not?

Bruce Moody:

At your own peril.

Ken Sorg:

Best Kept Secrets is a great online resource to find all the recreational campgrounds, RV parks and cabins located on military properties across the U.S., and so many are in just beautiful locations. Bruce, most of the people don't even realize how many we offer actually. There are 13,683 reservable units coast to coast, 130 properties have vacation rentals, 171 have RV parks or campgrounds and 126 properties have tent camping and more rustic scenting.

Bruce Moody:

You bring up a good point because it's not all about campfires and s'mores and ghost stories and all that. There's a lot of different types. So, let's get into the types of accommodations that are available at these campgrounds. What if people are not into camping? What are the other options?

Ken Sorg:

Yeah. That's the great thing about the Best Kept Secret resource. It provides a summary of the accommodations, like the number of sites and if there's a power or water or even sewer hookups. Some include more detailed information like, is the site wooded or on the beach? So, it really has the information you need to make the decision at the time. If you're not really into camping and you want something a little more rustic, not everybody likes to rough it. Bruce, have you heard of glamping?

Bruce Moody:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'm familiar.

Ken Sorg:

Right? Yeah, of course, who hasn't? But we offer many options like yurts and cabins and cottages and even hotel-style accommodations. Take Fourth Cliff Rec Center as part of Hanscom Air Force Base, for example, just outside of Boston. It has 11 RV sites, 40 tent sites and 19 cottages, and they all have a view of the water. It's incredible.

Bruce Moody:

It is incredible. When you think about California, Arizona, Arizona has eight campgrounds listed in Best Kept Secrets. Hawaii. I mean, it just goes on. And even the states that you wouldn't normally think of, there are some amazing opportunities. Sometimes it's about what the campsite is nearby. It puts you in close proximity to other recreational opportunities. Can you get into that?

Ken Sorg:

Absolutely, and you can find that again on the Best Kept Secret site when you're searching. There are amenities and activities that are located under each of the properties. Some are more detailed than others, but for example, like Redstone Arsenal RV Park in Alabama, they have 42 pads for RV parks, and the amenities include things like access to the beach and the commissary and exchange. They have that on the property. A fitness center, hospital, library, movie theater, museum, picnic area playgrounds, snack bars and other activities like fishing, golfing, hiking and swimming. You can, again, really find everything you need to know about each of these properties right on Best Kept Secrets.

Bruce Moody:

And it really varies. It's amazing. Up in Alaska, I know they have deep sea fishing, and some are on the beach, some are in the woods, what you normally think of, and then some are in just amazing seaside locations. Let's talk about who's eligible for this benefit, and then how they go about using Best Kept Secrets and maybe going ahead and making a reservation.

Ken Sorg:

Active Duty, Guard, Reserves, retirees, basically anyone who has access to a military installation is eligible for this benefit. But it's also important to point out, regardless of your branch of service, you can use any of these accommodations even if they're in a different branch of the service that you're currently serving or that you retired from.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. The other half is how do you use Best Kept Secrets? You find a place that you like. Then how do you make a reservation?

Ken Sorg:

On the website, there is an easy search tool that can narrow the offerings by state. There's also a print option for the entire list. I did this, it's 57 pages. I keep it in the car. It's really handy when you're traveling and maybe your access to the internet might be limited, but you can also save that as a PDF file and keep it on your mobile device or your laptop and make sure it's accessible that way. All of these sites have the phone numbers, so you can call to learn how to make a reservation. Each site is a little bit different on how they manage that, but they all have their phone numbers. And if you're online, there is also a link to their website for additional information, especially on booking.

Bruce Moody:

How busy are these campgrounds and other facilities? Are they typically fully booked?

Ken Sorg:

Some. Not all, but many, and a lot of it depends on the location, the seasonality. For example, Naval Air Station, Key West, that is a very popular location, and at times, it can be very difficult to get in, especially in peak season. If you have some flexibility, that's the key. Or maybe advanced booking, and you can learn what those requirements are on each of their websites. Then we have other locations that rarely get fully booked.

Bruce Moody:

Right, but if you want to go to Key West, understandably, you have to get your reservation in early. So how far in advance are reservations accepted?

Ken Sorg:

Yeah. Generally, it's a couple months out. Some locations may be longer and some may be shorter than that. And each of those details, if you want to drill down in Key West, go ahead and click that link under Key West, and you'll get all the details you need by the location that you're searching.

Bruce Moody:

Are there limits on how long a guest can stay at one of these facilities?

Ken Sorg:

Yeah. These are recreational facilities. It's not housing, so we try to make sure the benefit is there to share as many of our service members and other patrons as much as possible. That really varies by location and demand. Most days are for about a week, but some can stay for several weeks up to a month or two.

Bruce Moody:

I understand that Best Kept Secrets is very popular among service members and military families. To what do you attribute to this?

Ken Sorg:

It's an easy-to-use resource with all the right information to plan an affordable and memorable getaway all year round bottom line.

Bruce Moody:

And you've got yurts.

Ken Sorg:

And we have yurts, people.

Bruce Moody:

That's on my bucket list. Yeah. So final question, because these campsites, they're maintained by people, do you know any of these people? What do they bring to the experience?

Ken Sorg:

When you stay at one of our military properties, you aren't just staying in a campground or resort, you're staying in someplace that feels familiar, even if you haven't been there before, because you're part of that military family. In many cases, you have access to other resources as well. If you don't have a tent or a sleeping bag or even a camper, you can rent that stuff from outdoor recreation. Every site is different in what they have and whether it's checked in or checked out, but they're there to help. You have an incredible experience. If you're trying to coordinate a trip across America, you can do that with our properties from coast to coast with a little bit of planning and have a very affordable, very memorable experience. Get booked today.

Bruce Moody:

Good advice. Thanks, Ken. Always great to have you on the podcast.

Ken Sorg:

Loved it, Bruce. Take care.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. Ken Sorg is with the Defense Department's Morale, Welfare and Recreation Office. I want to remind you all that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department, and we always enjoy hearing from you. Click on the link in the program notes, send us a comment, question, or an idea for a future episode, and be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.