

10 Best Stargazing Locations For RVers In 2024

 escapees.com/dark-sky-campgrounds/

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Ah, dark sky camping. Look up into the night sky! Depending on where you are camping in your RV, you may or may not see an awe-inspiring sight of millions of shining stars, constellations, and planets enveloping you from a deep black dark sky.

Those brilliant stars and planets can be mesmerizing...if you can see them clearly.



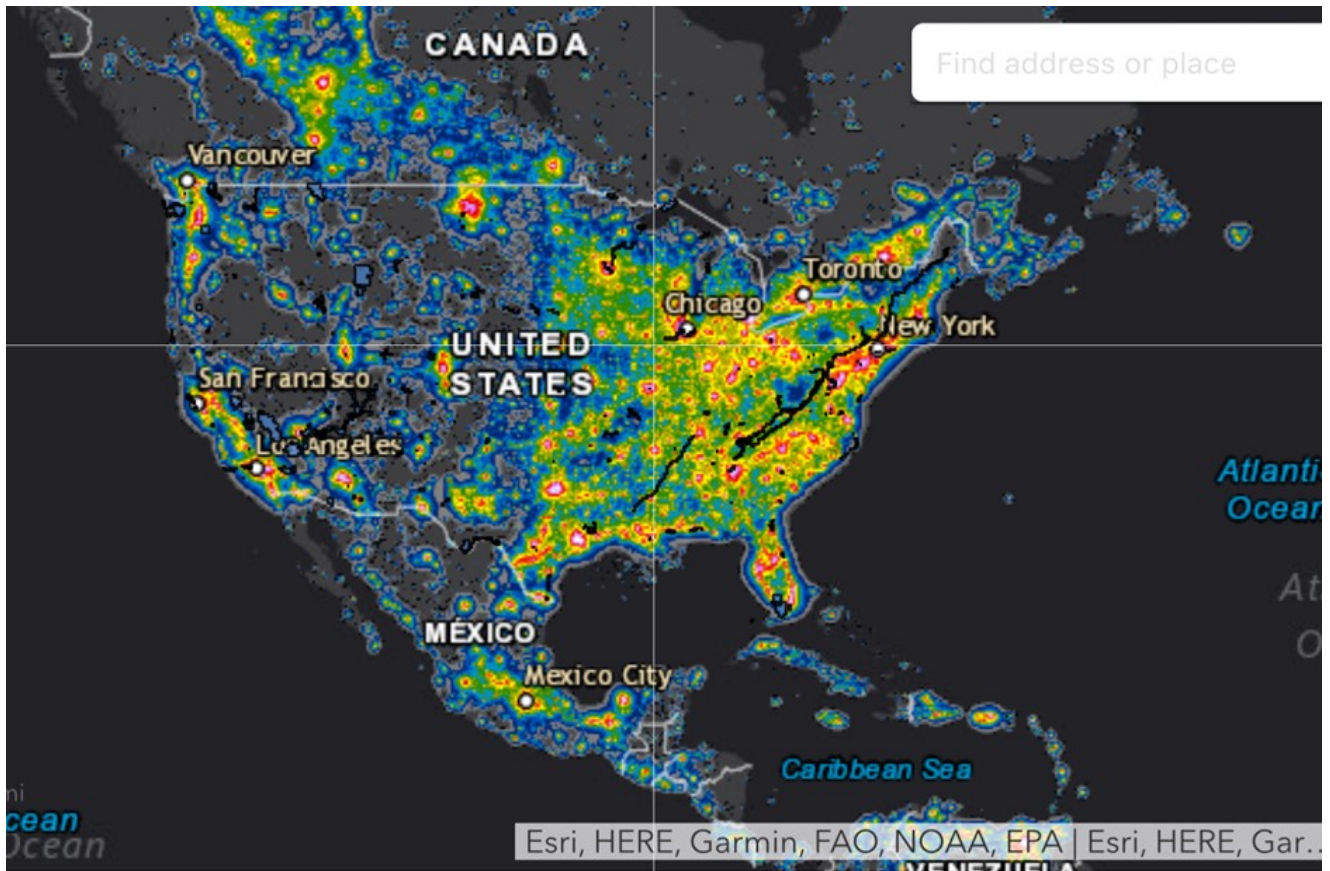
Delicate Arch, Arches National Park, Utah (CC0 non-copyrighted free domain image)

Dark Sky Camping: Avoiding Light Pollution to See The Stars

Sadly, many campgrounds and RV parks, especially those near more highly populated areas, suffer from light pollution, both within and surrounding them.

This can make for limited and poor-quality stargazing. In fact, some estimates suggest that 80% of Americans can no longer see the Milky Way Galaxy from where they live!

However, there are increasing opportunities around the country for RVers and their families to experience the wonders of the same dark skies that our ancestors once viewed, and maybe the same dark skies and twinkling stars of your own childhood memories!



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For over 34 years, the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) has been passionately fighting to reduce and eliminate light pollution around the world, helping to preserve dark skies in 51 countries.

In 2001, the IDA launched its International Dark Sky Places Program (IDSP). As of 2022, there are over 195 places that are officially certified as Dark Sky Places, meeting the organization's strict standards of lighting, education, awareness, and effective protection of dark skies.

An impressive 85 certified Dark Sky Places are found in the United States, so any stargazing RVer should be able to find one as part of their travels.



Link: [Interactive Map of Certified U.S. Dark Sky Places](#); International Dark Sky Association

Anyone, from the smallest child to the oldest RVer, can appreciate gazing up at the dark night skies and losing oneself in the mysteriously beautiful expanse, one which may even produce the thrill of that unexpected shooting star or meteor shower!

So, where are these special dark sky stargazing opportunities?



Night Sky Ranger, NPS/K. Carpenter

10 of the Best Dark Sky Campgrounds for RVers

Lucky for all of us RVers, the list of dark sky RV campgrounds is long. Too long for this article, but let's take a look at a few of these dark sky areas around the U.S., each of which is officially certified as a Dark Sky Park and offers RV-site campgrounds.

Click on the name of the parks below, as well as the additional links, to access their websites for detailed information. Later on, we'll provide some resource links to many more.

1. Antelope Island State Park, Great Salt Lake, Utah

This very large state park encompasses the largest island in The Great Salt Lake and features abundant wildlife (watch out for bison sauntering through the campground!), stunning scenery, and excellent stargazing.

Despite Salt Lake City so near on the eastern side of the island, the western facing shores provide excellent night skies for viewing stars, planets, and galaxies.

Dark Sky Camping at Antelope Island Resources:

[Antelope Island State Park "Dark Skies. Starry Nights" Brochure](#)

2. Arches National Park, Moab, Utah

Along with its famous 2,000+ natural stone arches, this impressive national park is certified as an International Dark Sky Park offering endless vistas of shining stars, planets, and constellations.

If you are lucky enough to get an RV site deep within the park itself, you'll only need to step out your RV's door to gaze up at millions of shining stars! But no worries, as there are many campgrounds and RV Parks in and around Moab, with the Arches entrance only minutes away.

Resources:

[Arches NP Stargazing Resources](#)

3. Joshua Tree National Park, Twenty-Nine Palms, California

Spread across both the Colorado Desert and the Mohave Desert, this expansive park named for its famously shaped "tree", part of the Agave family, is one the darkest night-time locales in southwest California.

Several campgrounds within the park offer excellent nightly opportunities for catching the stars.

Joshua Tree Dark Sky Resources:

4. James River State Park, Gladstone, Virginia

This 1,561-acre state park located along the James River in central Virginia is well-known for its efforts to preserve our night skies.

Its International Dark Sky designation, one of five Dark Sky parks in the state, was the result of an ambitious high school student's (Lora Callahan) project to earn a Girl Scout Gold Award! Local astronomy groups provide visitors with exceptional programs utilizing their state-of-the-art telescopes.

Dark Sky Resources for James River:

[JRSP Annual Star Party](#)

5. Stephen C. Foster State Park, Fargo, Georgia

A small park at 120 acres, but offering up big, dark starry skies, this Georgia gem has been a Dark Sky Park since 2016.

It is located within the vast Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and thus enjoys some of the darkest night skies along the eastern United States.

The park offers several astronomy events throughout the year, including the “Swampers Guide to The Galaxy” events showcasing annual meteor showers!

Resources:

[Swampers Guide to The Galaxy Events](#)

6. Grand Canyon National Park, Grand Canyon, Arizona

Ahh, the Grand Canyon. Not only is this iconic national park a grand sight looking down into it, but looking up from the rims of the canyon provides an equally grand spectacle!

There are several RV camping opportunities in and around the Park. Popular stargazing vantage points include Desert View, Moran and Lipan points on the South Rim, and at Bright Angel Point and Cape Royal on the North Rim.

Grand Canyon Dark Sky Resources:

- [GCNP Annual Star Party](#)
- [Astronomer in Residence Program](#)

7. Big Cypress National Preserve, East Ochopee, Florida

Big Cypress National Preserve is a vast expanse of over 720,000 acres in South Florida just west of Miami.

The Preserve also boasts some of the darkest night skies in the Eastern U.S. which provide great opportunities for ranger-led astronomy programs, “night sky outings”, and various stargazing/planet-gazing events throughout the year.

Big Cypress has several small campgrounds that make great base camps for night-time star searches.

Big Cypress Stargazing Resources:

[Big Cypress Astronomy Programs](#)

8. Cherry Springs State Park, Coudersport, Pennsylvania

An 80-acre park within the Susquehannock State Forest in Potter County, Pennsylvania, Cherry Springs State Park has a stellar reputation as a premium location for casual stargazers and professional astronomers alike.

The park maintains both a Night Sky Public Viewing Area for short-term stargazing, as well as an “Overnight Astronomy Viewing Field” atop the park’s 2,300’ mountain. 360-degree views of the magnificent night sky, featuring superb views of the Milky Way Galaxy, can be enjoyed 24 hours/day.

Cherry Springs Dark Sky Resources:

- [Stargazing and Astronomy at Cherry Springs State Park](#)
- [Cherry Springs State Park Clear Sky Chart – ClearDarkSky](#)

9. Big Bend National Park, Big Bend, Texas

According to the National Park Service, Big Bend National Park is known to have “the darkest skies in Texas” and has the least light pollution of any National Park in the Lower 48 contiguous United States.

Texas is **big**. Big Bend National Park’s night-time dark skies are even bigger, with protected dark skies comprising at least 1,112,000 acres! It has been an International Dark Sky Park since 2012 and its “Gold Tier” status is a standout among only about a dozen other Dark Sky parks worldwide.

The Park Service staff and volunteers at Big Bend offer a year-long schedule of astronomy interpretive stargazing programs, “star parties”, and moonlight walks for visitors of all ages. Big Bend’s four campgrounds offer great RV camping opportunities, though with some length restrictions.

Big Bend Dark Sky Resources:

[Big Bend National Park Nighttime Sky Quality](#)

10. Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, Montana & Alberta, Canada

This spectacular set of parks straddles the U.S./Canada border in Montana and Alberta, Canada. Both parks are amazing places during the day and equally thrilling after the sun goes down.

The NPS says, “*Half the park happens after dark!*” And they walk-their-talk, with a host of night-time programs including the Logan Pass Star Party and nightly astronomy programs at both the Apgar (West) and St. Mary (East) Visitor Centers.

At the St. Mary Visitor Center, the Park Service maintains the Dusty Star Observatory for astronomers to use and host visitor stargazing programs. On the Canadian side, Waterton Lakes National Park provides highly recommended stargazing at Cameron Bay, along the Red Rock Parkway, and at the Bison Paddock Overlook.

The Waterton National Park Service also presents a weekly “Dark Sky Sights” program at the Visitor Center.

Waterton-Glacier Dark Sky and Stargazing Resources:

- [Glacier National Park Astronomy Programs](#)
- [Stargazing – Waterton Lakes National Park](#)



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Stargazing Apps and Charts for Viewing the Night Sky

While simply standing or lying down and gazing up at thousands of shining stars and planets is soothing, mesmerizing and a soul-fulfilling experience, having a little knowledge about what you are actually seeing up there in the heavens makes it even more fun!

There are a plethora of helpful star charts and maps, as well as handy, easy-to-use smartphone apps that can help you identify the stars, planets and constellations. It is fun sharing the experience with friends, family, your children, while pointing out the names of popular constellations, as well as several of our solar system’s planets that are easily seen depending on your location and the time of year. A favorite stargazing app of ours is the free version of SkyView Lite that works well on iOS and Android devices. However, there are many other options out there, too!

- [Star Charts and Sky Maps](#)
- [SkyView Lite](#)
- [CNET Guide to 7 Stargazing Apps](#)

Additional Dark Sky & Stargazing Resources

- [International Dark Sky Association](#)
- [International Dark Sky Places](#)
- [National Park Service Night Sky Program](#)

- [New World Atlas of Artificial Sky Brightness | CIRES](#)
- [Grand Canyon's Night Skies-Tips and Resources](#)
- [Astronomy for Beginners – The Planetary Society](#)

I hope we've piqued your interest in adding some epic stargazing activities to your RV travel and camping adventures! As you see, opportunities abound around the country to enjoy the brilliance of the dark, starry nights.

Now, set up camp, relax, wait for the sun to set and darkness to fall...then get out there and gaze up at that beautiful sky!

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