



## Boat Camping Hotspots.

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Here are four of the country's hottest boat camping destinations, just in time for the July 4th holiday

One of the pleasures of owning a trailerable boat large enough to sleep on is, well, actually sleeping on it. Overnight. As in camping. It doesn't count if the only shut-eye you've enjoyed upon your boat was an afternoon nap after a hearty lunch, when you dozed off for the better part of a warm afternoon. We're talking spending the weekend -- or longer -- aboard your boat, allowing it to serve as the primary sleeping quarters for you and however many friends and family members it can accommodate. In fact, the extended Fourth of July weekend offers the perfect opportunity to try boat camping.

If you've got a V-berth, full bunks or simply fold-down seats to serve as beds, and protection from the elements, be it a fully appointed stand-up cabin or a mere Bimini top, you can comfortably camp afloat. If your boat simply isn't large enough to accommodate everyone in your camping party, you can always base your boat-camping adventure at a waterfront campground, sleeping in tents or under the stars ashore, while enjoying your days on the water aboard the family watercraft.

Two of the destinations in this story offer just such "surf and turf" camping for boaters. The bottom line: If you're not using your boat to serve double duty as a floating RV, you're not getting the most out of your craft.

Now that you've developed the itch to sleep aboard, here are four great places to spend the Fourth of July weekend camping and cruising aboard your boat.

### BAHIA HONDA STATE PARK, FLORIDA

Boaters have been overnighting on or near the gleaming turquoise waters off Bahia Honda State Park since the 16th century, when Spanish sailors exploring the Florida coast found a rare deep water anchorage protected by adjacent islands; they named the spot Bahia Honda or "Deep Bay."

Now a popular state park located three-fourths of the way down the Overseas Highway between Miami and Key West, Bahia Honda Key has some of the best beaches and sunset views in the entire Florida Keys.

It provides easy access to America's only living coral reef system, which is a six-mile boat ride due south across Hawk Channel. Surrounded by grass and sand flats teeming with gamefish such as tarpon and bonefish, the place is pure heaven for boaters who like to fish, dive or simply soak up the sub-tropical scenery.

The entire 524-acre island is owned by the state of Florida, which operates an 80-site state park campground, with many sites located directly on the water between the old and new Bahia Honda bridges. Campers using land sites have their own boat basin in

which to moor their watercraft, and some campsites are located steps from the boat docks. Campers sleeping aboard boats, rather than at campsites, use the park's main boat basin, where there is a two-lane launch ramp. Boat campers tie up in one of 18 spaces along a cement seawall, where there are electrical and water hookups.

There is a 22-foot minimum size for boats used for overnight camping at Bahia Honda, and a maximum of six people may occupy a boat overnight. Rates run \$1 per foot per night, plus a \$2.50 per night Monroe County surcharge.

There's no charge, however, to pull into the calm waters between the old and new Bahia Honda bridges, toss the hook into the rock-and-sand shallows just off the public swimming beach and sleep aboard your boat in one of the country's most beautiful settings.

For more information about boat camping at Bahia Honda State Park, call 305/872-2353. For more information about travel and boating activities in the lower Florida Keys, call 800/FLAKEYS.

#### RACE POINT, MASSACHUSETTS

One of the nation's most unique camping opportunities for trailerboaters is offered at the Cape Cod National Seashore, a 40-mile stretch of sand and dunes between Chatham and Provincetown, along the "forearm" of the famous Massachusetts cape.

While not a true boat-camping destination (in that you are required to sleep in a self-contained tow vehicle equipped for camping), die-hard boaters have been known to sneak down to the sea to snooze on the sand in the shadow of their craft, which are beached for the night just above the high-water mark at Race Point.

Campers launch their boats from the beach, often from trailers coupled to hitches mounted on the front of their tow vehicle for better traction in the gently sloping sand. Some campers dump their boats from the trailer right onto the beach, and push the craft into the surf with tow vehicles that have padded bumpers or are rigged with a special "pusher" panel for the purpose. At the end of the day, the boats are run up onto the beach and winched across the sand to the high-tide mark.

We're not talking aluminum car-toppers here, either. Fully rigged fiberglass, deep-V fishing boats in excess of 20 feet can be found beached like whales along Race Point, awaiting a nudge from a 4WD to become waterborne.

Race Point's radical style of boat camping isn't for everyone. For one thing, the number of self-contained camping vehicles, whether they are towing boats or not, is limited to 100 per night at the stretch of sand designated for surfside camping. No tents, towable campers or personal watercraft are allowed on the beach.

Each vehicle must register at the Race Point Offroad Vehicle Inspection Station to be inspected and given a special offroad permit. To receive the permit for overnight camping, vehicles must be fitted with permanently mounted waste holding tanks, for there are no toilets or showers available at the Race Point camping sites. Each vehicle must also be equipped with a shovel, jack and jack-support board, tire pressure gauge that goes down to 5 psi, and a spare tire the same size as the tires mounted on the vehicle.

The owners of vehicles meeting these requirements are charged \$110 for an annual

permit that allows them to camp at Race Point from April 15 through November 15. Between July 4 and Labor Day there is a 21-day limit to the number of nights any permitted vehicle may be used for camping at Race Point.

The payoff is a rare surfside campsite with your boat by your side, both within casting distance of some of the best striped bass and bluefish angling in the nation, and the real likelihood of seeing -- and hearing -- whales as they migrate within earshot of Race Point. With Provincetown just two miles up the sandy coast, a quirky tourist port that's easier to get to by water than by land during the busy summer season, campers have a great place to get a good seafood meal or stock-up on boating and camping supplies.

For more information about boat camping at Race Point, contact the Cape Cod National Seashore's visitor's center at 508/255-3421, ext. 200; the permit office at 508/487-2100; or the information line at 508/487-3698. You can visit the visitor's center website at [www.nps.gov/caco](http://www.nps.gov/caco).

#### LAKE McCONAUGHY, NEBRASKA

Many boat owners in America's heartland head for the famous sandhills of southwestern Nebraska when the camping bug bites, and launch their craft at 36,000-acre Lake McConaughy. The major draw of Big Mac, as it is called, is the fine sand beaches where boaters are free to land their craft and set up camp just about anywhere along the lake's 105 miles of shoreline. At only \$3 per night per boat for the privilege, plus a park entry fee of \$2.50 per vehicle per day, which includes unlimited boating launchings, the primitive camping at Big Mac is a bargain. If you'd like more creature comforts, several state park campgrounds with electrical-serviced sites are available, as well.

Every watersport activity imaginable takes place in and around Big Mac, where there are no horsepower limits and speeds are regulated only within the bays. White bass and walleye fishing is excellent, and brown and rainbow trout are plentiful.

Nebraska's Game and Parks Commission manages Lake McConaughy and it offers a dozen launch ramps, several campgrounds and a dump station for boats in Spillway Bay, near the dam. The lake also hosts five privately operated, full-service marinas.

The most popular places for pulling the boat ashore for the night are the broad, sandy beaches located on the lake's east end, and along the north shore between Martin and Arthur bays. The nearest town to Lake McConaughy is Ogallala, population 8000, located six miles south of the lake on Nebraska State Route 61.

For more information about camping with your boat at Lake McConaughy, contact the state park office at 308/284-8800; [www.lakemac.org](http://www.lakemac.org). You can also contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Division at 800/826-PARK; [www.ngpc.state.ne.us](http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us).

#### LAKE NACIMIENTO, CALIFORNIA

Located halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, California's Lake Nacimiento hosts its share of campers with boats in tow. Although you can't legally sleep aboard your boat overnight anywhere on the lake, there are a half-dozen public campgrounds along Nacimiento's 165 miles of shoreline where boaters can beach their craft and set up camp.

The lake is tucked into the Santa Lucia Mountains in northern San Luis Obispo County, about 17 miles northwest of Paso Robles. Nacimiento's 5700 acres of water are

controlled by the Monterey County Water Resources Agency. The public campgrounds, three launch ramps and marina are operated by Lake Nacimiento Resort, located at the dam on Nacimiento's southeast shore, on County Route G-14.

Summer rates for camping at Lake Nacimiento's 350-plus full-service sites run \$27 per vehicle per night, and there is no limit to how many campers may occupy a single site. Many of the campsites are located right on the waterfront, but any registered camper may beach a boat for the night along the campground's shoreline. Boat launching is free, but there is a \$5-per-boat, per-day user fee charged by Monterey County, payable at a facility located at the top of the main launch ramp on the resort grounds.

On the water, campers can enjoy waterskiing and wakeboarding, as well as fishing for white bass, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass and catfish. There are no speed or horsepower restrictions on the main lake, but most bays are designated wakefree. Ashore, there are horseshoe pits, picnic areas and plenty of beachfront for relaxing between boating activities.

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