



One of the many great things about camping these days, is the availability of options outside the standard campground.

With the popularity of outdoor exploration and boondocking, various sites have popped up with camping of a different nature. One of my favorites is Harvest Hosts. They are a gathering of hundreds of farms, wineries, distilleries, attractions, and now, even golf courses, where you can camp for a night for free!

One annual membership fee, about \$75, gets you a year of free camping, and the opportunity to meet new friends, have some fun, and maybe enjoy an experience you would not have otherwise had. (There are discounts available through Airstream and member referrals.)

This month alone, I have stayed at a lovely farm in Florida, where I saw tiny goats, beautiful sheep, and a flock of other birds such as chickens, guinea fowl, ducks, and even tiny baby peacocks. The location had a wonderful gift shop full of homemade jams, pottery, knitted goods, natural wool yarn, and more. The owner was a doll and made us feel like family.

At these locations there are no services such as water, electric or sewer, you simply make a reservation (24 hours in advance please) show up and the host tells you where to park. In the case of this farm, our spots were under beautiful old shade trees next to the goat pasture.





We relaxed and enjoyed the fresh air and natural beauty of the place. The deal is they expect you to participate at each location. This can mean, make a purchase, dine in the cafe if there is one, do a wine tasting, etc. in the morning you hit the road refreshed and relaxed and knowing you helped a small business grow a little more.

One spot I stopped at had a staffing emergency while I was doing a tasting. I asked if I could help and ended up waiting tables and pouring tastings til they closed. Then I enjoyed wine and food with the grateful owners (they paid me in wine!) I made sure all the tips were diverted to the real waitress and I'm pretty sure I made new lifelong friends.

I have stayed at small farms where the hosts deliver fresh veggies and eggs to your camper, and family run distilleries where the dining room food was as good as any fancy city restaurant, maybe better. I can walk back to my camper (or stagger depending on how good a time was had) then relax and rest and not have to drive until the next day is pretty special. There are small attractions, busy city parking lot locations, some spots only a mile or two off the highway, others a bit of an adventure to get to. Most I add to my favorites (there is an app) and try to find ways to add them to a future trip.

Trust me when I say my membership in Harvest Hosts is among my prized possessions. Go to their website [www.harvesthosts.com](http://www.harvesthosts.com) and check it out.