

where do i sleep?

tips for camping in a van in florida & beyond



[@floridavanlife.co](https://floridavanlife.co)



start here

first night jitters?

if you're nervous about sleeping in your van for the first time, *that's normal*.

almost every camper spends their first night wondering:

"am i allowed to park here?"

"is someone going to knock?"

"am i doing this right?"

the truth is that after a few nights, it becomes second nature.

trust your gut.

keep it simple.

remember: you can always drive away.

fort de soto

map & photoshoot location



for best results go during golden hours. respect the rangers when they ask you to leave at sunset

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fort de soto

our favorite location

you do typically have to reserve a campsite ahead of time here, but it's worth calling or stopping by the front office to see if any last minute spots open up.

they have full bathrooms and showers available, electrical hookups, and park rangers on site.

we LOVE fort de soto. this is our guest favorite location, and only 20 minutes from fvl hq.

drive to east beach point to find the location we capture every brand photoshoot. you can drive up on the beach (not too close during turtle season)

be careful not to park too close to the water or you'll get stuck. ask estelle how she knows this...

there is a toll fee required to enter. you will be charged for every time you enter and exit the park. fees added when you return van.



free vs. paid

how to choose



most likely to sleep well and not get bothered

easiest + in nature

- 🏆 paid campgrounds
- 🏆 blm land (western u.s.a.)
- 🏆 national/state forests

unique experiences

- 🏆 harvest hosts
- 🏆 hip camp
- 🏆 private property of friends/family
- 🏆 national forest dispersed camping

travel-day options

- 🏆 truck stops
- 🏆 casino parking lots
- 🏆 rest areas

use caution

- ⚠️ 24 hour gyms/establishments
- ⚠️ walmart
- ⚠️ cracker barrel
- ⚠️ hotel parking lots
- ⚠️ street parking

advanced van life

- ★ nature/off grid stealth camping
- 🔴 urban stealth camping



best apps

to find camping spots



Hip Camp - easiest for beginners

offers places to park overnight at farms, ranches, private properties, etc. (often for free or minimal cost)



iOverlander - our favorite

community-driven database of campsites, boondocking spots, parking spots, and amenities,



Park4Night

shows camping, rest areas, and legal overnight parking (user submitted)



Vanly

lets you find and book safe overnight parking from private hosts.



Harvest Hosts - higher quality experience, at a cost

offers places to park overnight at farms, wineries, and private properties (often for free or minimal cost)



The Dyrty - best campground search

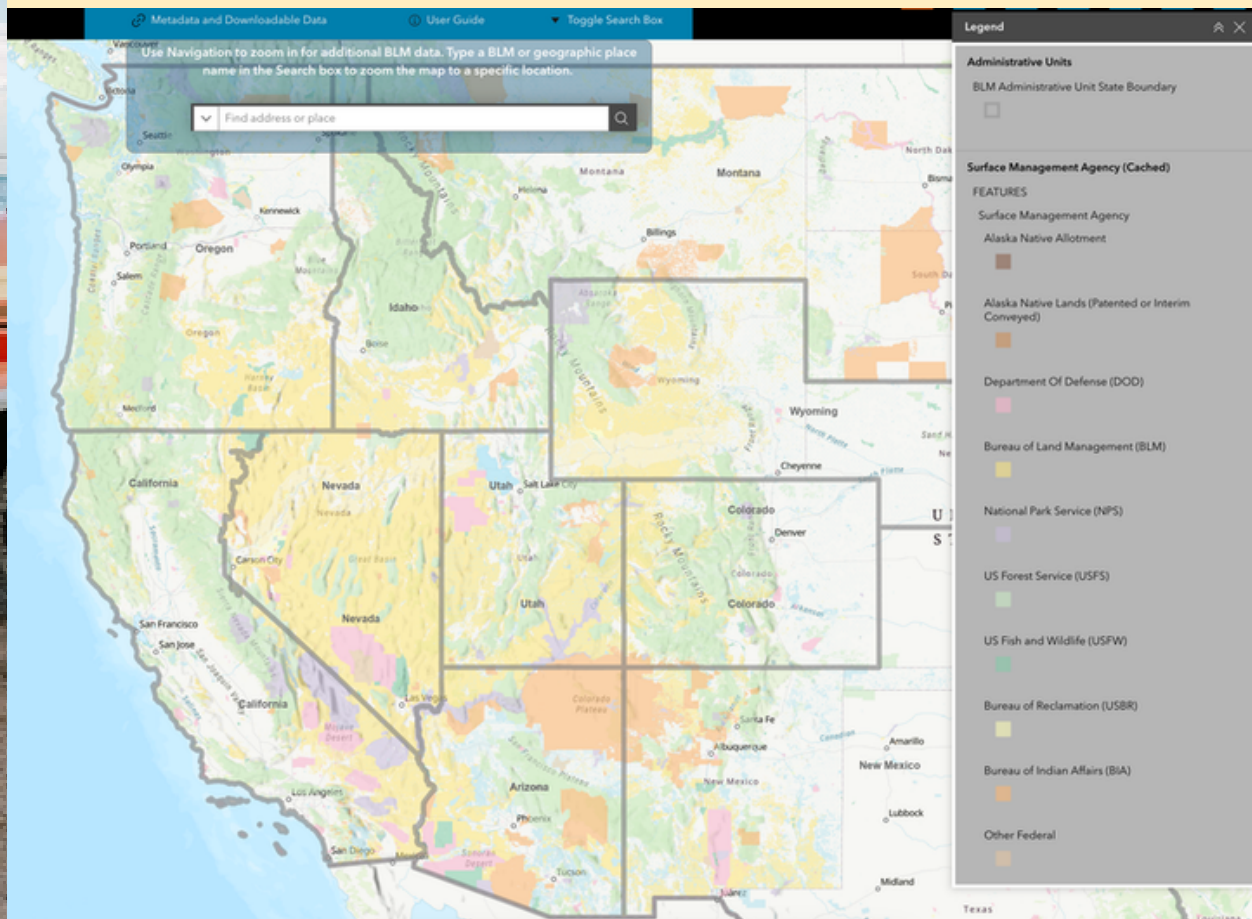
Extensive directory of campgrounds (public & private) with reviews, photos, and filters,

blm land = free camping

public land owned by U.S. government

blm (bureau of land management) land is often open for free dispersed camping. check their website to find exact borders.

- free public land
- mostly western united states
- often beautiful and remote
- usually no hookups or amenities
- leave no trace principles
- one of the best parts of van life

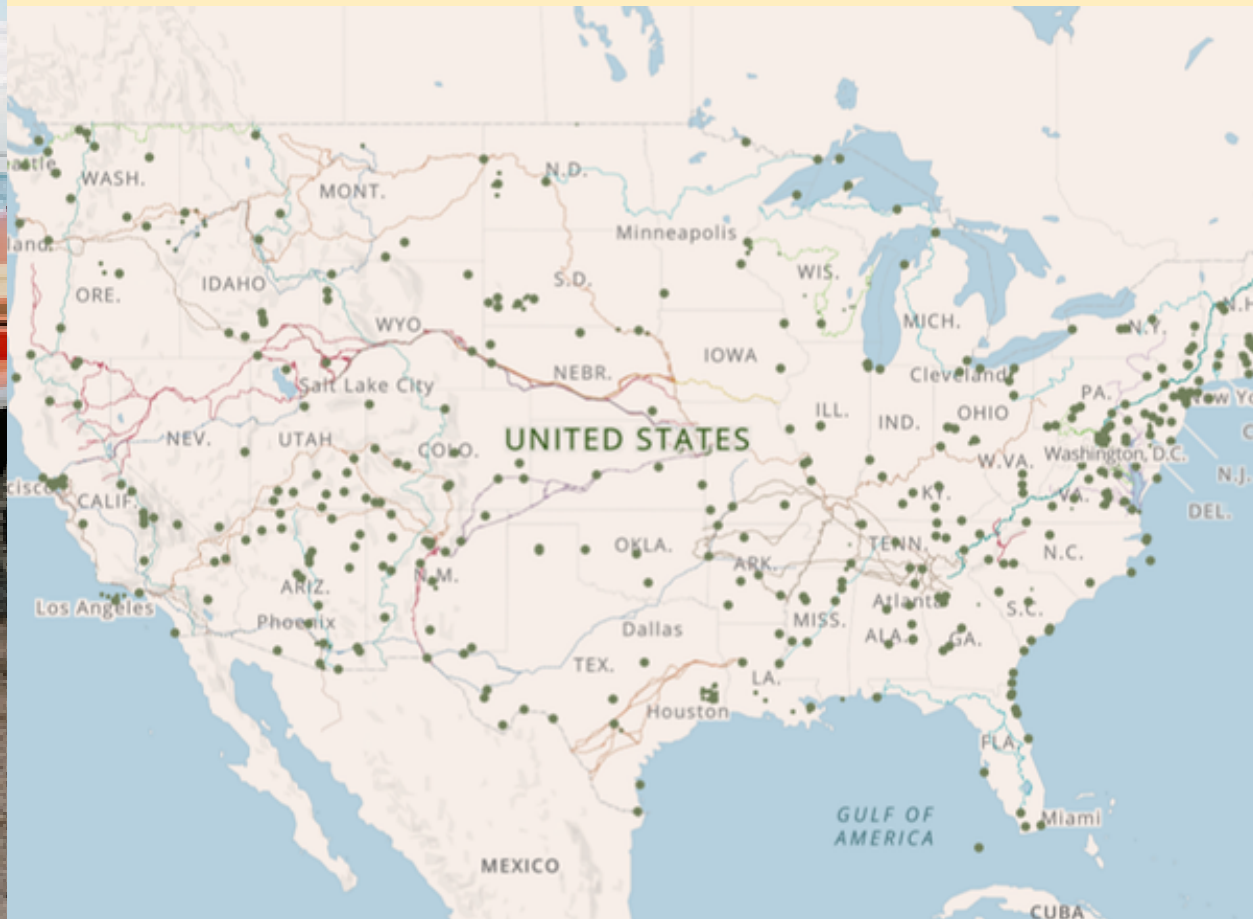


national parks service

america's protected parks + public lands

the national park service (nps) manages some of america's most iconic public lands, including national parks, monuments, seashores, and recreation areas. these protected spaces offer incredible scenery, hiking, wildlife, and outdoor adventures.

- most beautiful and visited locations in the country
- free dispersed camping is usually not allowed
- many campgrounds require reservations and fees
- worth planning ahead as views are incredible



boondocking

free camping for adventurers

- boondocking often means parking for free at places that already expect vehicles overnight. many 24-hour establishments allow this for a limited time — usually one night, sometimes a few.
- always check local laws and ordinances. rules vary by city, county, and even block. when in doubt, ask — and always be respectful to local law enforcement.
- big-name spots like walmart, cracker barrel, and 24-hour gyms are often van-life friendly, but policies change. some locations allow overnight parking, others don't.
- arrive late and leave early. blending in is the goal — not setting up camp.
- if you're stealthy and comfortable with a little risk, quiet neighborhoods can work for a night or two. the average neighborhood won't notice one extra vehicle if you're respectful and discreet.
- don't make noise. no loud music, no generators, no slamming doors. invisibility is kindness.
- avoid staying multiple nights in the same spot. rotate locations to stay under the radar.
- keep lights dim or off at night. interior lights can draw attention fast.
- park legally. don't block driveways, fire hydrants, sidewalks, or mailboxes.
- trust your instincts. if a spot feels wrong, move. the beauty of van life is having that option.
- leave no trace. treat every spot like it's someone's front yard — because sometimes it is.

estelle's strategy

florida van life co. parking checklist

- ☐ enough gas
- ☐ locked doors
- ☐ windows covered
- ☐ phone charged
- ☐ keys easy to find
- ☐ planned exit route
- ☐ trust your gut
- ☐ backup location just in case
- ☐ leave if it feels weird

how to determine what makes a great parking spot

- ☐ recent reviews on apps
- ☐ relatively flat
- ☐ feels safe
- ☐ legal
- ☐ not isolated enough to feel sketchy
- ☐ not crowded enough to draw attention
- ☐ easy exit route

knock protocol

what to do if someone knocks

first: don't panic.

most knocks are employees, security guards, or police simply checking the area.

you can simply drive away if you're nervous at all.

if you decide to engage in a conversation, begin by cracking a window to be on the safe side.

be polite.

be respectful.

move if asked.

remember: getting asked to leave is not getting in trouble. this is part of the adventure.

estelle has personally slept in hundreds of places. being asked to move is rare, and when it happens, you simply drive somewhere else.

stay wild. live free.



trust yourself.

the best parking spot is the one that lets you sleep peacefully.

you'll figure it out faster than you think.

