



COOKING UNDER THE STARS:

ENHANCING CAMPGROUND
STAYS WITH MEMORABLE
FOOD EXPERIENCES

Conducted by



**MODERN
CAMPGROUND**



**CAIRN
CONSULTING
GROUP**

LETTERS FROM THE CEOs

I am thrilled to introduce you to the latest MC Hospitality Highlights report. This June report, created in partnership with Cairn Consulting Group, focuses on food and dining experiences, providing campground owners and operators with crucial data and actionable insights to enhance operations and improve guest experiences.

Our goal at Modern Campground is to support the outdoor hospitality industry by offering meaningful insights that empower you to make informed, impactful decisions. Understanding your guests' diverse dining preferences is a significant step towards enhancing their overall experience and creating lasting memories at your campgrounds.

In this report, we explore how food and meal preparation shape camping adventures and provide practical strategies to cater to your guests' culinary needs. From the gourmet outdoor cooks to those who prefer quick-and-easy meals, recognizing and embracing these preferences can significantly enhance their stay.

To ensure these insights are actionable, we have included specific ways to integrate the data into your campground operations. At the end of each report, you will find tips and strategies tailored to help you implement these findings effectively. Additionally, the actionable insights will be live on the Modern Campground website, complemented by ten blog articles and bite-sized social media posts highlighting key takeaways throughout the month.

We believe that by using this information, you can elevate your guests' adventures under the stars. Every meal, whether by the campfire or under the open sky, is a chance to create unforgettable experiences and stronger connections with your guests.

We are excited to hear your feedback. If you have any suggestions on how to improve future reports or specific data you would like to see, please reach out to me directly at brian@insiderperks.com.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Here's to happy camping and delicious dining under the stars!



Brian Searl

Founder & CEO
Insider Perks & Modern Campground

Welcome to the latest edition of MC Hospitality Highlights, "Cooking Under the Stars: Enhancing Campground Stays with Memorable Food Experiences." I'm Scott Bahr, President of Cairn Consulting Group, and I'm excited to share our findings from this month's report, which delves into the rich and delightful world of dining experiences at campgrounds.

At Cairn Consulting Group (CCG), we help businesses make data-driven decisions with clarity and confidence. Our focus on illuminating the market, connecting critical points, and guided research ensures that the information we gather is comprehensive, actionable, and impactful.

Food is an integral part of any camping adventure. For many guests, the food experience is as memorable as the campfire stories or scenic hikes. Whether your campers are passionate about gourmet outdoor cooking, quick-and-easy meal preps, or enjoying prepared meals, food plays a vital role in creating unforgettable campground experiences.

In this report, we explore how campgrounds can embrace the wide spectrum of dining preferences

that guests bring with them. By understanding these diverse culinary styles, you can ensure an extraordinary stay for every type of camper, fostering deeper connections and enhancing overall satisfaction.

Our findings are based on extensive research, including a survey on dining preferences, a detailed CCG study on food choices and camping behavior, and thirty in-depth interviews with campers across the U.S. and Canada. We hope these insights will guide you in making impactful decisions that elevate your guests' adventures under the stars, creating lasting memories and stronger connections.



Scott Bahr

President
Cairn Consulting Group





COOKING UNDER THE STARS:

ENHANCING CAMPGROUND STAYS WITH MEMORABLE FOOD EXPERIENCES

For the most recent iteration of MC Hospitality Highlights, the focus is once again on how campgrounds can embrace and understand how guests are approaching their dining experiences during their stays. Guests at campgrounds and outdoor resorts bring with them a varied sense of expectations on food and the food experience.

Anyone who has camped knows that the food during the trip is and can be a memorable—if not—obsessive part of the trip; whether it's planning the meals, purchasing of the ingredients, how

to best prepare, having the right equipment, or none of the above for those who rarely cook while camping.

What is important to keep in mind is that the way a guest (or group) approaches their dining, can present an opportunity for the operator to ensure that the guest has an exceptional and unforgettable experience when it comes to their food. Whether it's the hard-core outdoor chefs, the casual quick-and-easy preparation, the cast iron junkies, those who prefer to let others do

the cooking, or a combination of the above, food lies at the heart of camping, and embracing all of these types of guests and their

(sometimes quirky) preferences deepens the relationship with the guest.

METHODOLOGY

The information provided in this report is based on a variety of resources that has been compiled into some background and guidance for the park owner/operator/manager in what it means to understand dining preferences. It is a compilation of both quantitative and qualitative information. The primary resources that were utilized include a survey of campers on

dining preferences (and gear), a study by Cairn Consulting Group that offers information on preferences for types of food and camping behavior, as well as a series of long-form interviews with campers and park guests representing the different regions of the U.S. and Canada (a total of 30 interviews were conducted in May 2024).



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KEY INSIGHTS

Personalized Experience:

Providing facilities that align with guests' dining preferences ensures a more personalized and enjoyable experience, leading to higher satisfaction.

Enhanced Amenities and Services:

Offering various dining options, such as campfire cooking areas, BBQ grills, and communal kitchens, can cater to a wide range of preferences.

Additional Revenue:

Providing amenities like a camp store with cooking supplies, rental equipment for grilling or cooking, and even pre-packaged meals can create additional revenue streams.

Health and Safety Considerations:

Ensuring guests have access to clean cooking and dining facilities can improve health and safety standards. Providing guidelines and equipment for safe food preparation and storage can help prevent foodborne illnesses.

Enhanced Community and Social Interactions:

Creating communal dining areas can foster a sense of community among campers, enhancing the overall camping experience. Hosting cookouts, potlucks, or food-themed events can encourage social interaction and create memorable experiences.

Increased Off-Season Appeal:

By offering robust dining amenities, campgrounds can attract guests during the off-season, making the campground a year-round destination.

On-site Dining Options:

If guests are not prepared, don't have the time, or simply want to avoid the hassle, they will seek alternative dining options. Having an on-site option keeps the guest at the campground and provides an additional point-of-service for the operator.

BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING GUEST DINING PREFERENCES

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING HOW GUESTS PREFER TO DINE?

Embracing how guests prefer to dine while camping can offer several significant benefits to a campground owner. Here are some key advantages:



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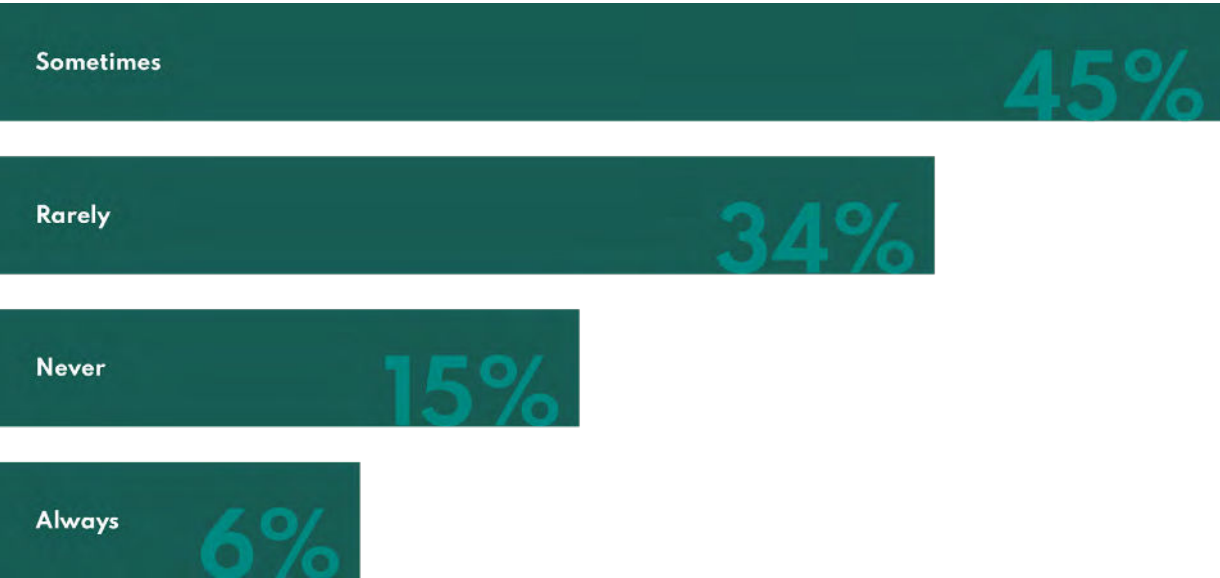
If guests are not prepared, don't have the time, or simply want to avoid the hassle, they will seek alternative dining options, and having an on-site option keeps the guest at the campground, and provides an additional point-of-service for the operator.

DINING HABITS OF CAMPGROUND GUESTS

HOW OFTEN ARE GUESTS LEAVING THE CAMPGROUND TO DINE?



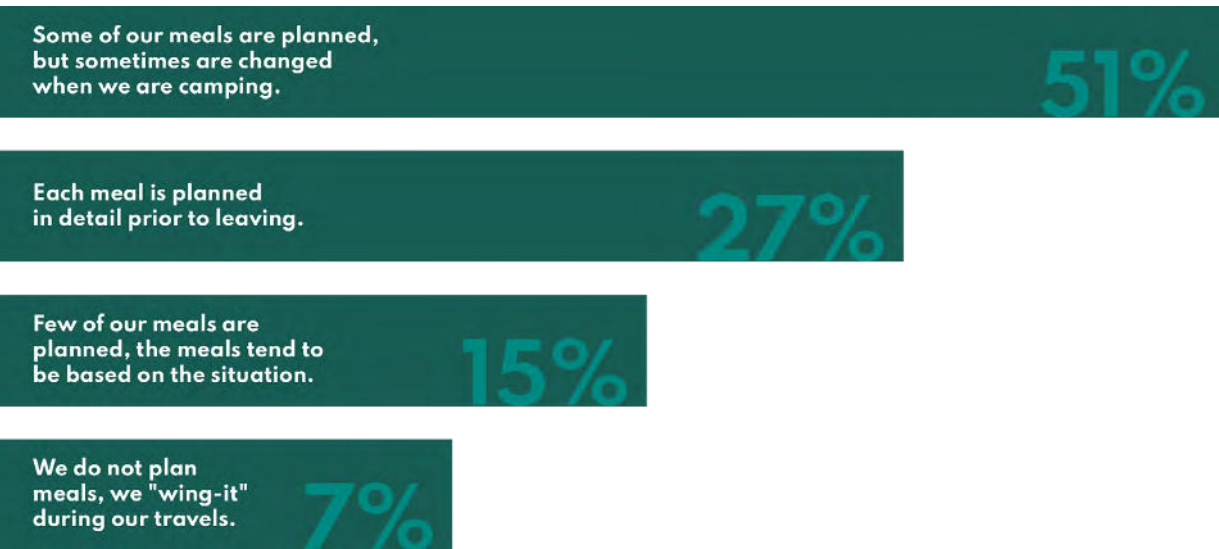
Overall, more than half of all campers leave the campground for meals, including almost nine out of ten who do so at least occasionally. Still, it is important to consider that most campers dine at the campground, whether it's for meals they plan and prepare, or use on-site facilities.



ARE CAMPERS PLANNING THEIR MEALS IN ADVANCE?



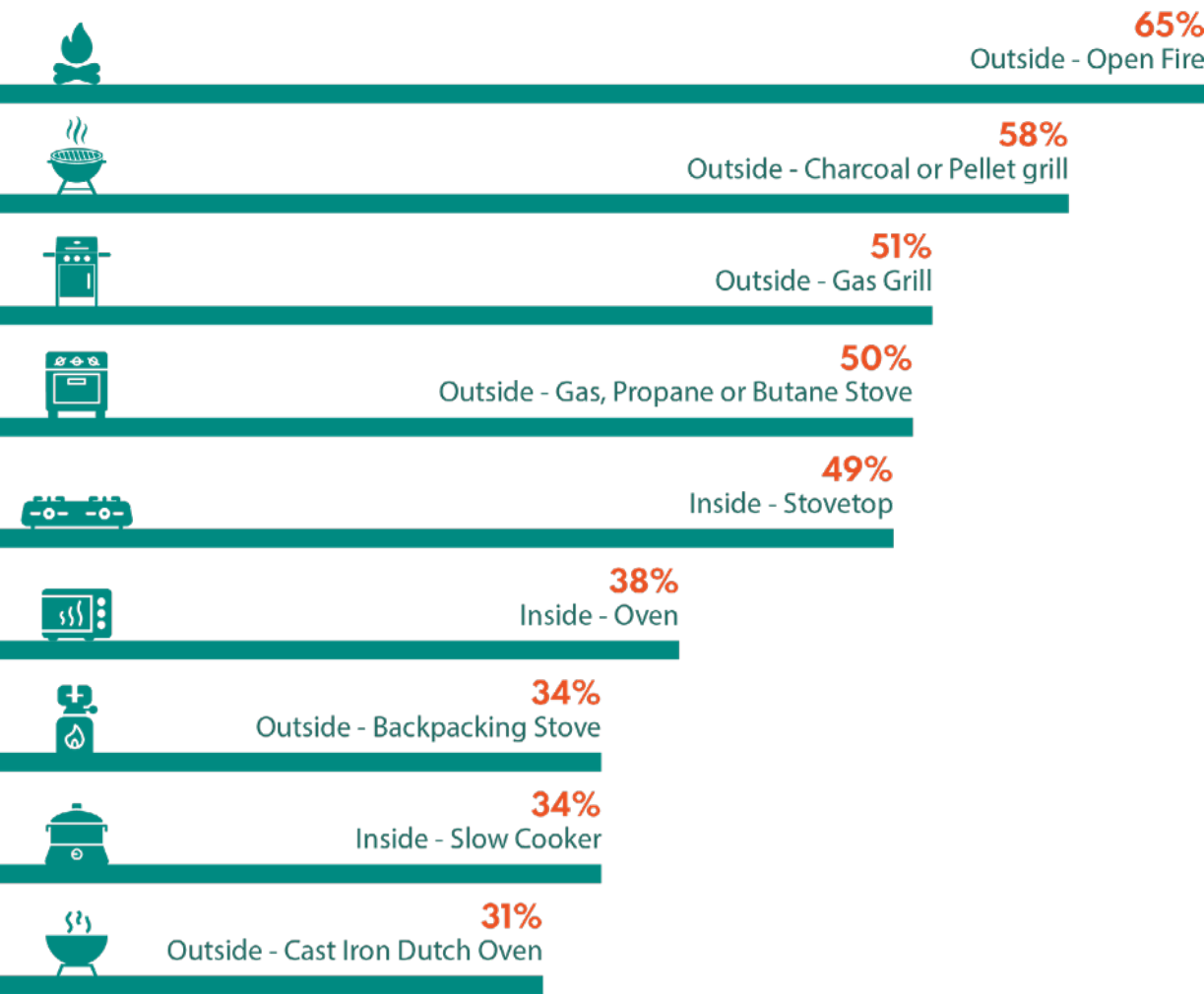
It is notable that only one-fourth of campers are planning each of their meals, in detail, prior to leaving for their trips. Indeed, a vast majority of guests are likely to either not plan many of their meals in advance, or allow themselves the opportunity to change based on their own personal circumstances.



HOW ARE GUESTS PREPARING THEIR MEALS WHILE STAYING AT A CAMPGROUND?

While camping, there are several popular ways to prepare food, each offering a unique experience and accommodating different types of meals. The most common include outside over the fire while others use grills.

It is also worth considering that many guests use “cold prep” methods, which simply means that they are not cooking their meals, but eating foods such as sandwiches or salads versus heated items.



Among campers who plan and prep their meals at their campsites, close to half (47%) include just a single person. About one-third (34%) include a sharing of the tasks among others in the group, while the remaining 19% include a spouse/partner/significant other, children, or other family members or friends.

ENHANCING THE CAMPING DINING EXPERIENCE

WHAT CAN A CAMPGROUND OPERATOR PROVIDE TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE?

A campground owner can assist guests in planning and preparing their meals in several ways, enhancing their camping experience and ensuring they have the resources needed for enjoyable and hassle-free dining. Here are some effective strategies:



Supplying Cooking Equipment:

🔥 Rental Services:

Provide rental services for essential cooking equipment such as portable stoves, grills, Dutch ovens, and cooking utensils.

🔥 Shared Facilities:

Set up communal kitchen areas equipped with basic cooking amenities like stovetops, microwaves, and sinks.

Providing Information and Resources:

🔥 Meal Planning Guides:

Offer downloadable meal planning guides or pamphlets with easy and popular camping recipes, grocery lists, and cooking tips.

🔥 Cooking Classes and Workshops:

Organize on-site cooking classes or workshops where guests can learn campfire cooking techniques, Dutch oven recipes, or other outdoor cooking methods.

Stocking Essential Supplies:

🔥 Camp Store:

Operate a camp store that stocks basic groceries, pre-packaged meals, snacks, cooking supplies, and firewood.

🔥 Local Produce:

Partner with local farms or markets to offer fresh produce and local specialties, enhancing the meal options for campers.

Creating Convenient Cooking Areas:

🔥 Designated Cooking Sites:

Establish designated campfire pits or grilling areas with safety measures and clear instructions on their use.

🔥 Picnic and Dining Areas:

Provide well-maintained picnic tables, shelters, and dining areas for comfortable meal preparation and dining.



Offering Pre-Made Meal Options:

🔥 Meal Kits:

Provide pre-packaged meal kits with all necessary ingredients and cooking instructions for easy, no-fuss meals.

🔥 Food Trucks and Vendors:

Partner with local food trucks or vendors to offer a variety of meal options directly at the campground.

Encouraging Outdoor Cooking Practices:

🔥 Campfire Cooking Demos:

Host live demonstrations of campfire cooking, showing guests how to prepare different types of meals over an open fire.

🔥 Recipe Sharing:

Create a platform or bulletin board where guests can share their favorite camping recipes and cooking tips.

Providing Storage Solutions:

🔥 Cooler Rentals:

Offer cooler rentals to keep perishable food items fresh.

🔥 Bear-Proof Storage:

Ensure that guests have access to bear-proof food storage lockers to protect their food from wildlife.





Promoting Sustainable Practices:

Eco-Friendly Products:

Stock and promote eco-friendly and biodegradable cooking supplies and utensils.

Waste Management:

Provide clear guidelines and facilities for waste disposal, recycling, and composting to help guests manage their food waste responsibly.

Facilitating Meal Prep Convenience:

Water Stations:

Ensure there are accessible water stations for washing food, cooking equipment, and hands.

Lighting:

Provide adequate lighting in cooking and dining areas for safe meal preparation after dark.

Offering Digital Tools and Apps:

Mobile Apps:

Develop or recommend mobile apps that help with meal planning, grocery shopping lists, and cooking instructions tailored for camping.

Wi-Fi Access:

Provide Wi-Fi access so guests can easily search for recipes and cooking tips online.

ADVICE FOR NOVICE OUTDOOR COOKS

WHAT ADVICE CAN BE OFFERED TO A NOVICE OUTDOOR COOK WHO WANTS TO HAVE A BETTER EXPERIENCE AT THE CAMPGROUND?

For inexperienced outdoor cooks, the **Fresh Off the Grid** website offers a wealth of practical advice and simple recipes to make camp cooking enjoyable and stress-free. Here are some key tips and recommendations:



Plan and Prep at Home:

Preparing ingredients at home can save time and reduce the complexity of cooking at the campsite. Chop vegetables, marinate meats, and pre-mix spices before leaving home.

No-Cook Options:

For those who want to avoid cooking entirely, no-cook meals like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, hummus with veggies, and trail mix are easy and require no preparation on-site.

Use One-Pot Meals:

One-pot meals are a beginner's best friend. They simplify cooking and cleanup. Recipes like chili mac, pesto pasta, and red lentil sloppy joes are perfect examples.

Dutch Oven Cooking:

A Dutch oven is incredibly versatile and can be used for baking, stewing, and even frying. Learning how to use it effectively can expand your camp cooking repertoire significantly.

Keep It Simple:

Start with straightforward recipes that require minimal ingredients and steps. Simple grilled chicken tacos or foil packet meals can be both delicious and easy to prepare.



PRACTICAL ADVICE



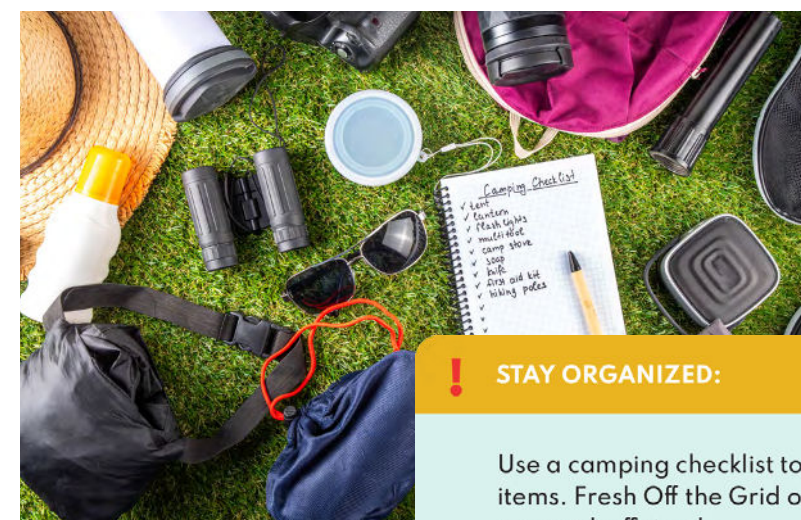
! PACK A COOLER EFFICIENTLY:

Keep perishable items cold by packing your cooler correctly. Place meats at the bottom and items you'll use frequently at the top.



! BRING THE RIGHT TOOLS:

Essential tools include a good knife, cutting board, a cast iron skillet, and a Dutch oven. These will cover most of your cooking needs.



! STAY ORGANIZED:

Use a camping checklist to ensure you don't forget essential items. Fresh Off the Grid offers a comprehensive list to help you pack efficiently.

BASIC RECIPES FOR CAMP COOKING

WHAT ARE SOME BASIC RECIPES TO HAVE THEM TRY?

The website **Fresh Off the Grid** has a great deal of information and advice for camp cooks, including a solid library of recipes. Some basic recipes to try:

Camp Stove Chilaquiles:

Use store-bought tortilla chips, jarred spicy tomato sauce, and eggs to create a flavorful breakfast or brunch dish.



Grilled Chicken Tacos:

Marinate chicken in a citrus blend before your trip. At the campsite, simply grill the chicken and serve with tortillas and your favorite toppings.



Pineapple Chicken Skewers:

Pre-chop and marinate chicken and pineapple at home. Assemble skewers at the campsite and grill for a tasty meal.



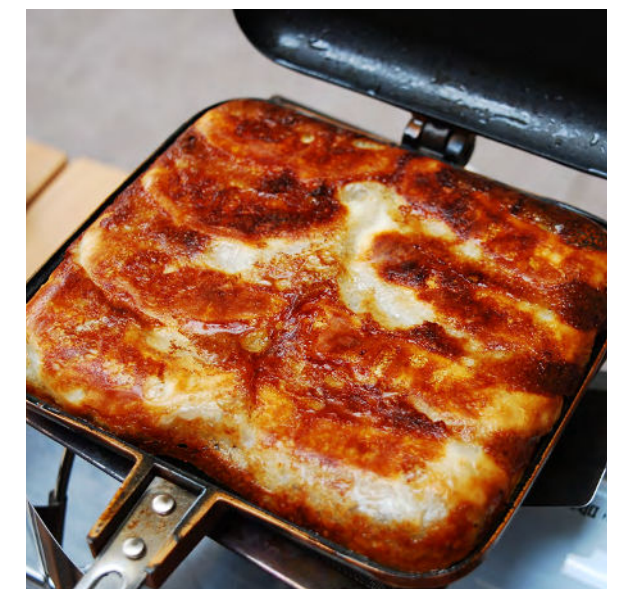
French Toast Sticks:

These are easy to make and fun to eat. Prepare the mix at home and cook on-site for a sweet breakfast option.



Pie Iron Pizzas:

Using store-bought pizza dough, these can be customized with various toppings and cooked over the campfire for a fun and interactive meal.



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAMPGROUND OPERATORS

OFFERING ON-SITE FOOD SERVICE

To enhance the camping experience and cater to diverse guest needs, consider providing on-site food services.

This can include:



Food Trucks or Pop-Up Cafes:

Partner with local vendors to offer a variety of food options, ranging from breakfast burritos to gourmet coffee.

Campfire Cooking Classes:

Host sessions where guests can learn to cook simple and delicious meals using campfire techniques. This adds value and encourages novice campers to participate.

Pre-Prepared Meal Kits:

Offer meal kits that include pre-portioned ingredients and easy-to-follow recipes. This can simplify cooking for guests and ensure they have everything they need.



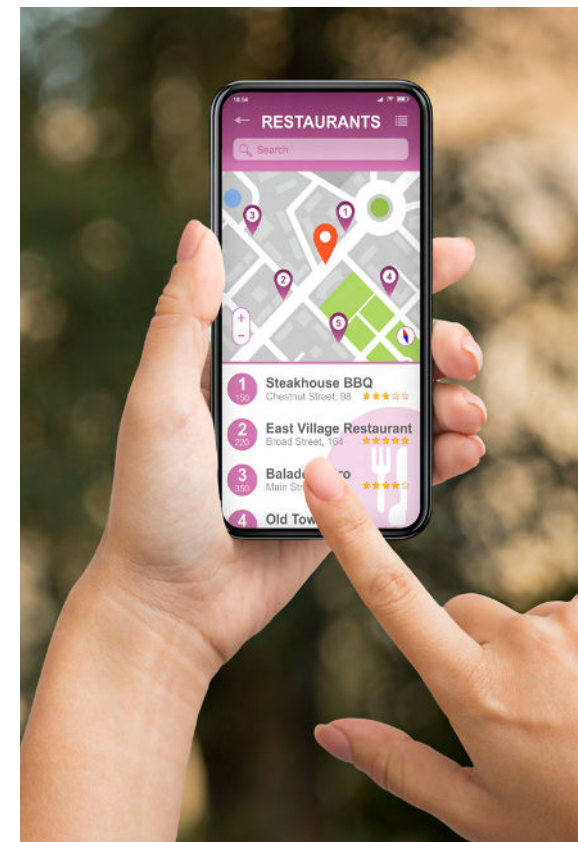
GUESTS DINING OFF-SITE

Provide information about nearby dining options to guests who prefer to eat off-site.

This can include:

Local Restaurant Guides:

Create a curated list of local restaurants, cafes, and diners that offer a variety of cuisines.



Maps and Directions:

Provide maps and clear directions to these dining locations, possibly highlighting those that are family-friendly or have unique local flavors.



Discount Partnerships:

Negotiate discounts with local eateries for your guests. This not only promotes local businesses but also adds value for your campers.

ASSISTING NOVICE CAMPERS WITH COOKING

Many guests may be inexperienced with outdoor cooking.

To assist them:

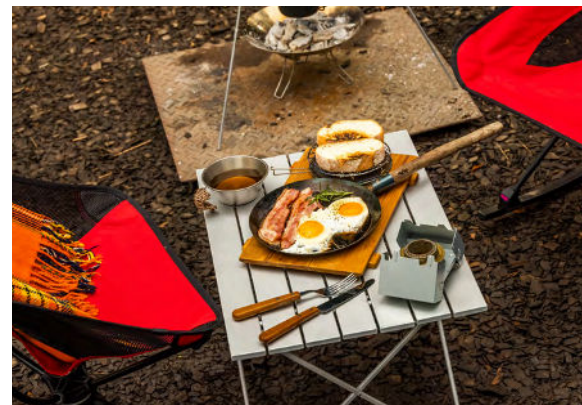
Cooking Equipment Rentals:

Offer rentals for essential cooking equipment like camp stoves, Dutch ovens, and grilling tools.



Beginner-Friendly Recipes:

Distribute simple, easy-to-follow recipes that require minimal ingredients and equipment. Examples include foil packet meals, one-pot dishes, and no-cook options.



On-Site Support:

Have staff available to provide quick cooking tips or demonstrations. This can help build confidence among novice campers and enhance their overall experience.



PRE-ARRIVAL CAMPER INFORMATION

Gathering information from campers before they arrive can help tailor their experience and ensure their needs are met. This can provide the operator with another touch point, and reinforce the level of hospitality that the guests can expect during their stay.

Consider asking:

Dietary Preferences and Restrictions:

Knowing this can help you recommend suitable meal options or ensure your on-site services can accommodate them.

Preferred Activities:

Ask about their interest in activities like cooking classes, guided hikes, or other events you may offer.

Special Requests:

Inquire if they have any specific needs or requests, such as assistance with setting up camp or renting specific equipment.

Cooking Experience Level:

Understanding their comfort level with outdoor cooking can help you offer appropriate resources or support.

FROM REPORT TO REALITY: TURNING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION

As a campground owner, you have the opportunity to enrich your guests' experiences and differentiate your campground by integrating the insights from this report into real, actionable steps. Here are several ways you can implement the findings from "Cooking Under the Stars: Enhancing Campground Stays with Memorable Food Experiences" to benefit your business:

Develop Comprehensive Meal Planning Resources

🔥 Offer Meal Planning Guides:

Create downloadable guides or pamphlets that feature easy and popular camping recipes, grocery lists, and cooking tips. Providing this at booking or upon arrival can assist guests in planning their meals and reduce their stress.

🔥 Host Cooking Classes:

Organize on-site cooking classes or workshops to teach guests campfire cooking techniques, Dutch oven recipes, or other outdoor cooking methods. Classes can be included as an added value service or could be a premium offering.

Provide Essential Cooking Equipment and Supplies

🔥 Rental Services:

Introduce rental services for essential cooking gears like portable stoves, grills, Dutch

ovens, and cooking utensils.

This is especially beneficial for novice campers who might not own such equipment.



🔥 Camp Store Stocking:

Operate a camp store that stocks basic groceries, pre-packaged meals, snacks, cooking supplies, and firewood. Additionally, partner with local farms or markets to offer fresh produce and local specialties, providing guests with a taste of the local fare and enhancing the meal options for campers.

Create and Maintain Convenient Cooking and Dining Areas

🔥 Designated Cooking Sites:

Establish designated campfire pits or grilling areas equipped with safety measures and clear usage instructions. Well-lit and well-maintained picnic tables, shelters, and dining areas will also provide comfortable and safe spaces for meal preparation and dining.

🔥 Communal Kitchens:

Set up communal kitchen areas with basic cooking amenities, like microwaves, stovetops, and sinks, catering to different cooking preferences and enhancing the sense of community among campers.



Offer Various Dining Options and Support Services

🔥 Food Trucks and Pop-Up Cafes:

Partner with local food trucks or vendors to offer a diverse range of meal options right at the campground. Additionally, introduce pop-up cafes or seasonal dining services to cater to guests who prefer not to cook.

🔥 Pre-Prepared Meal Kits:

Provide meal kits with pre-portioned ingredients and easy-to-follow recipes. This will simplify the cooking process and ensure that guests have everything they need for a hassle-free meal.

Enhance Support for Novice Campers

🔥 On-Site Support and Demonstrations:

Have staff available to offer quick cooking tips or run live cooking demonstrations to assist novice campers. Provide beginner-friendly recipes that require minimal ingredients and equipment to boost confidence and enjoyment in cooking.

🔥 Information Sharing Platforms:

Create platforms like bulletin boards or digital apps where guests can share their favorite recipes and cooking experiences. This will not only foster a community spirit but also provide inspiration to other campers.

Promote Sustainable and Safe Practices

🔥 Eco-Friendly Supplies:

Stock and promote eco-friendly and biodegradable cooking supplies and utensils. Provide clear guidelines for waste disposal, recycling, and composting to encourage responsible food waste management among guests.



🔥 Bear-Proof Storage Solutions:

Ensure guests have access to bear-proof food storage lockers and cooler rentals to keep perishable food items fresh and secure from wildlife.

By implementing these strategies, your campground can offer a superior dining experience that caters to a wide array of camper preferences, enhances guest satisfaction, and creates new revenue opportunities. Transforming the insights from this report into reality will not only benefit your guests but also position your campground as a premier destination for memorable outdoor experiences.



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