



2023

State of the Industry Report

The Great Outdoors in the Digital
Age: An In-Depth Look at Millennial
& Gen Z Campers





Navigating the Future with RMS

As the first digital native generations, Millennials and Gen Z are characterized by their deep relationship with technology. With Millennials now making up the largest segment of campers and more Gen Zs camping every year, their technology preferences will strongly shape the camping industry.

At the same time, camping has always been about connecting with the natural world and “getting away from it all.” So, how will these conflicting ideas coexist in the future? Will these generations’ preferences for convenience and connectivity rewrite the rules of the camping industry? Or will the industry become a place of refuge for its opportunity to allow people to disconnect?

RMS North America conducted independent research in search of answers and insight into how these digital natives like to camp. Surveying a sample of Millennial and Gen Z campers, we asked about their current camping preferences, what changes they would want to see in the industry, and what they think the future of camping looks like.

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The future of camping and RVing – as well as the development of these properties – significantly depends on younger generations of outdoor loyalists and enthusiasts. It’s not lost on anyone in the industry that we’ve gone through major shifts in the last three years. However, we now find ourselves on the cusp of another turning point: how do we mobilize a new generation of campers and RVers?

— Fred Dominioni, Chief Revenue Officer, RMS North America

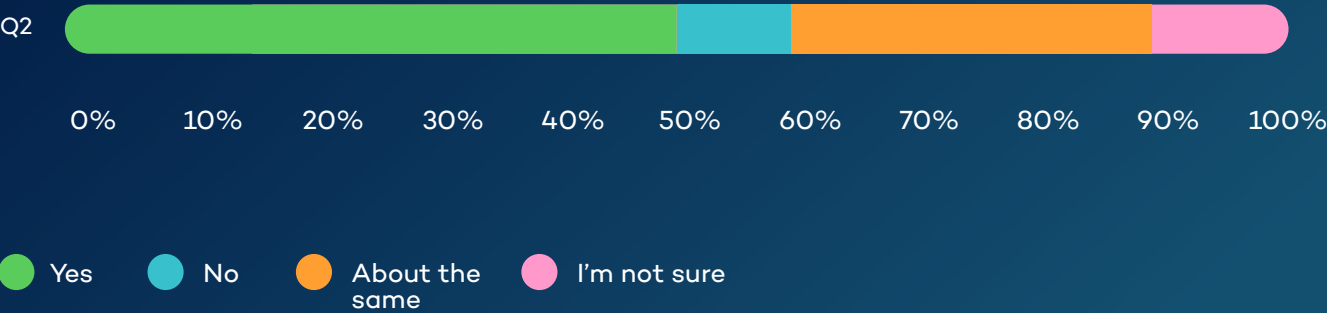
Camping Preferences of the Young and the Digital

Experience and Frequency

Though Millennials and Gen Zs are often berated for their perceived technology addiction, combined, they make up over half of all campers, according to the latest data ¹.

Our survey found an overwhelming 83% of our audience had experience with camping, while only 16% identified as camping for the first time within the past three years. Over half identified as having camped as children and getting back to the hobby as adults. This history correlates with the significant increase in campers that arose during the pandemic.

Do you plan to do more camping or RVing in the coming year?



¹ Statista, Age distribution of campers in North America from 2015 – 2021, by generation

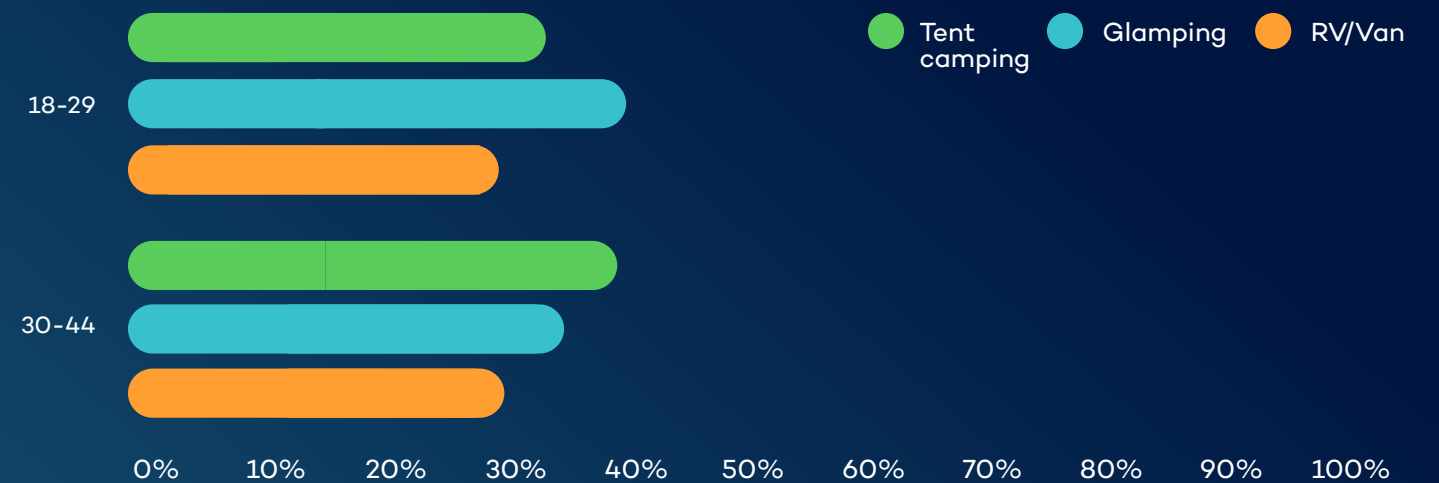




Type of Camping

When asked how they liked to camp, the answers were split almost evenly between options. Glamping was the most popular (36.4%), followed closely by tent camping (35.1%). When divided by generation, Millennials were more likely to prefer tent camping, while Gen Z stuck to glamping.

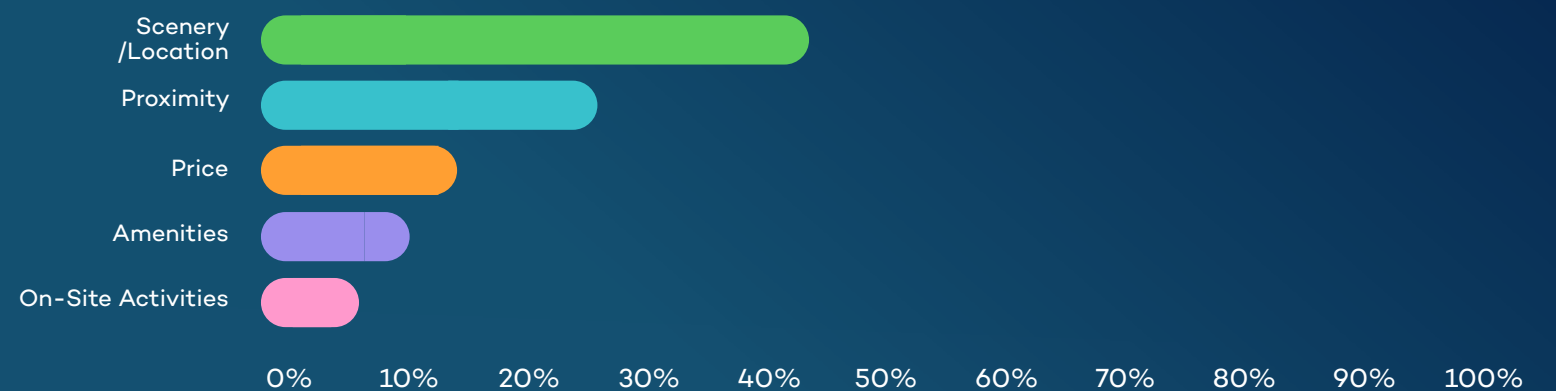
What kind of camping do you prefer?



Influencing Factors

Real estate is all about “location, location, location,” and campsites are no exception. 45% of respondents listed Scenery/Location as the most influential factor when selecting a camping destination.

What influences you the most when choosing a camping destination?



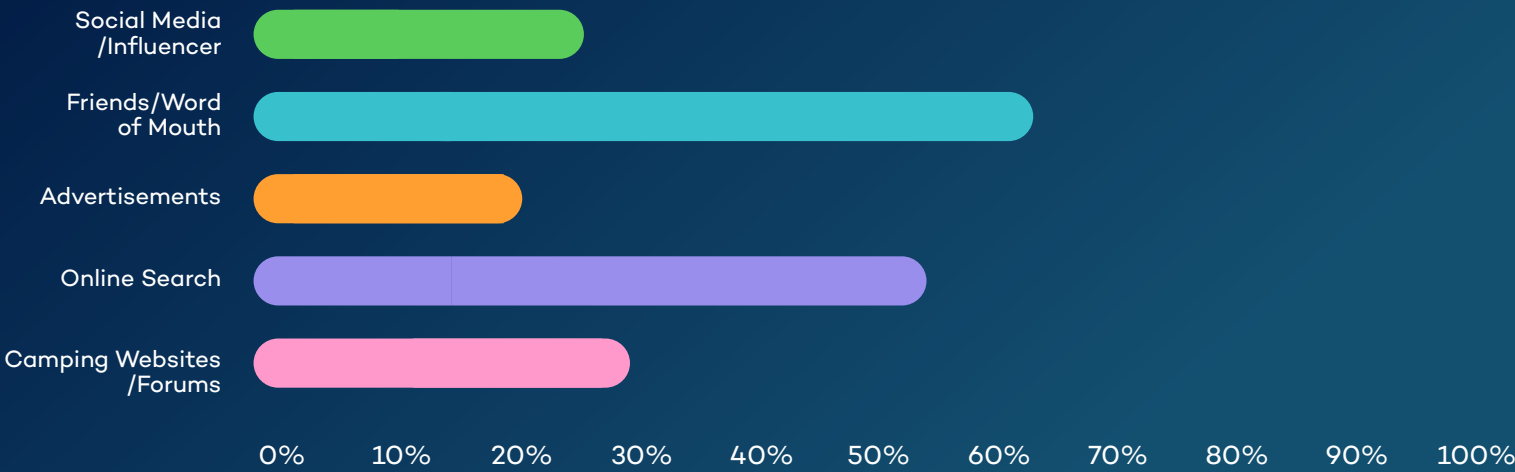
Researching and Planning

How Did You Hear About Us?

As expected, Millennials and Gen Zs took a tech-centered approach to booking their campsites and communicating with staff. However, word-of-mouth was the top answer when it came to how participants learned about new camping spots, surpassing even online search.

Despite heavy smartphone use, Millennials and Gen Zs don't actually want to call anyone. Direct booking was the reservation method of choice at 63%, followed by booking apps and sites at 21%. This strong preference for going straight to the source suggests that a convenient onsite experience would go very far with this audience. As for communicating, the written word will do just fine, with email and text taking preference.

How do you usually learn about campsites?





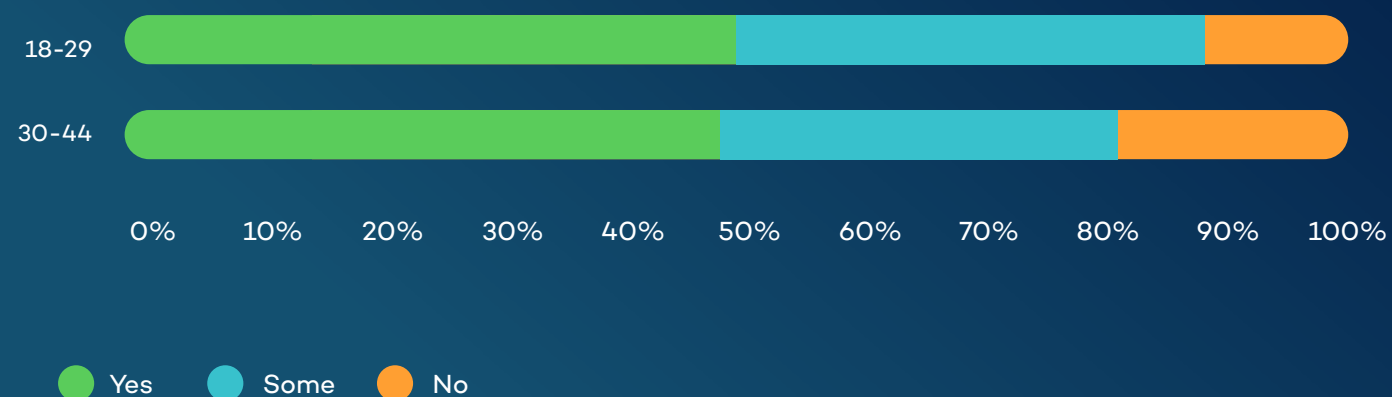
Technology Sentiment

When asked if they wanted to see more technology at campgrounds, 85% of participants said yes. But there's a catch. Responses were divided over how much technology to incorporate.

About half of the participants favored integrating a high amount of tech, including digital amenities like Wi-Fi and Augmented Reality (AR) experiences. But the remaining tech-positive responses (34.77%) leaned toward slightly less technology, focusing mainly on business operations such as contactless payments, online booking, etc.

When divided by generation, Gen Zs were more likely to favor some technology, and Millennials were more likely to prefer integrating no technology.

Do you think campsites should incorporate more technology/technical amenities?



Future of Camping

At the end of our survey, we asked respondents to answer an open-ended question about the future of technology in camping, “Looking ahead, how do you think the camping industry will change as the world becomes more technically advanced?” Most participants agreed that the industry would undoubtedly change as tech continues to grow and evolve, but what that change would look like varied.

Going through the responses, we measured them according to three different areas: technology sentiment, technology amount and technology as a driver.

Technology Sentiment

Responses were either tech-positive or tech-negative. Tech-positive responders believed that including more technology in camping would increase convenience and accessibility, making it easier for more people to camp. Tech-negative responders thought that more technology would detract from the adventure of camping or change it into an experience more like that of a hotel or resort.

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I believe that the camping industry will incorporate technology to give campers an elevated experience.

– Gen Z, male

I think it will have newer technology that, in my opinion, takes away the point of disconnecting from the world.

— Millennial, male





Future of Camping

Amount of Technology

There were three distinct points of view on how much technology would enter the camping space. Most responses saw a large increase in technology, for better or worse. At the same time, a second group believed the tech increase would be minimal, sticking primarily to business operations like online booking and contactless payment. The third and smallest group felt no technology would enter the camping space because it ran counter to the purpose of camping, which was to get back to nature and enjoy the outdoors.

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The booking services and websites will become more automated, along with security and tech for the campsites themselves, but the camping experience will remain relatively the same.

– Millennial, male

Technology as a Driver

One of the most interesting divisions arose from whether or not technology would be a reason for camping more. Like the tech-positive sentiment, one group believed that technology would make it easier for more people to go camping. But a second group thought that as our daily lives became more entrenched in technology, this would make camping more appealing for its lack of technology.

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I think there will be more demand for camping as a holiday activity to get in touch with nature.

– Gen Z, female

The Future is Digital – If You Want It to Be

Over the next few decades, Millennials and Gen Zs will be the dominant influences in camping. Knowing how they use and perceive technology will be key to ensuring the industry's future.

Overall, our research suggests a strong desire for more technology in camping, but within certain limits. Convenience is a driving factor in consumer behavior, so the ability to reserve, manage and pay for a camping trip using modern methods found in other types of consumerism is high. However, the sentiment that camping is a very nature-driven, outdoor-centered experience is almost universal.

Moving forward, campground owners must walk a cautious line between modern convenience and preserving the nature-centered camping experience. One sentiment echoed a few times was the idea that people could use as much or as little technology in their camping experience as they'd like. This desire for individuality suggests campgrounds should keep their options open and, much like we've seen with hotels, provide their guests with the ability to build the experience they want.



I think the industry already has a wide variety of technological use and won't change too much as the world advances. Instead, it will become easier to pick the exact amount of disconnect from the world you desire as a camper.

– Gen Z, male





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