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10 great places to slumber under the stars

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By Buzzy Gordon for USA TODAY

*The warm weather of summer makes it the perfect season for sleeping outdoors, and there is no more relaxing vacation than stretching out under a dark sky filled with bright stars and planets. **Stephanie Pearson**, senior editor of Outside magazine, shares with USA TODAY some of her favorite places for camping under clear skies — and possibly enjoying an otherworldly experience.*

Assateague Island National Seashore Maryland/Virginia

This long sliver of an island, famous for its bands of wild horses, has Chincoteague Bay on one side, the Atlantic surf on the other and endless miles of hiking trails between. "There's no potable water," Pearson advises, "so bring your



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own, and you'll have the stars to yourself." 410-641-3030; nps.gov/asis

Canyonlands National Park

Moab, Utah

"This unsung park does not get as crowded as neighboring Arches National Park," Pearson says. "As night begins to fall, watch the sun blaze crimson until the 200-foot red-rock canyons frame the stars." 435-719-2313; nps.gov/cany

Big Bend National Park

Texas

"Right around Labor Day, things start cooling off in southwest Texas," Pearson says. "The guaranteed coolest part of the park, with the biggest views to Mexico and the stars above, are the Chisos Mountains. Camp out in the Class A campground or stay at one of six stone cottages at Chisos Mountains Lodge (chisosmountainslodge.com)." 432-477-2251; nps.gov/bibe

Sequoia High Sierra Camp

Giant Sequoia National Monument, Calif.

"The Sequoia High Sierra Camp, a 36-tent retreat nestled in the majesty of the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, comes equipped with down comforters and serves gourmet dinners — a welcome alternative to tight mummy bags and freeze-dried ice cream," Pearson says. "Plus, at 8,282 feet, there's very little to obstruct your view of the heavens." 866-654-2877; www.sequoiahighsierracamp.com

Loreto Bay

Baja California, Mexico

"There are no private beaches in Mexico, so anyone can spend the night on a sandy stretch on the pristine Sea of Cortez, along the eastern shore of the Baja Californian peninsula," Pearson says. Campers can even pick a spot right behind a hotel. Since there is rarely cloud cover, in summer or winter, the view of the stars is nearly always assured. gotoloreto.com

Nelson's Dockyard

Antigua, West Indies

"When it comes to unadulterated stargazing, a sailboat makes a welcome change from a beach," Pearson says. "On this driest of the British West Indies' Leeward Islands, clouds and rain will be scarce. Charter a boat at one of the island's marinas (Nelson's Dockyard is the most historic) and find your favorite vantage point in the Caribbean." Or simply stay aboard in the harbor and be rocked gently to sleep. www.Antigua-barbuda.org

Denali National Park

Alaska

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There are stars aplenty in the skies of the Last Frontier, plus a possible bonus: the aurora borealis, aka the Northern Lights, the ultimate nighttime heavenly spectacle. The show goes on all year round, but can be faint in the U.S. summer; visibility is better as the nights grow longer and darker. Campers in Denali National Park should check with rangers for the best spots to avoid brown bears. Or, Pearson suggests, "consider bedding down at a place like Susitna River Lodge, a family-friendly resort on the banks of the Susitna River." The lodge (susitna-river-lodging.com/talkeetna.html) is just outside Talkeetna, south of the national park. *907-683-2294; nps.gov/dena*

Chaco Culture National Historical Park

New Mexico

"In the Land of Enchantment, nothing interferes with the night sky," Pearson says. "Perhaps the best spot in the state for sleeping under the stars — not to mention exploring an impressively intact ancient ruin — is Chaco Canyon, 100 miles northwest of Albuquerque. This lonely valley sees only 9 inches of rain a year, which makes for sublime camping, especially when the intense summer heat has passed. Stay at one of the park's 48 designated campsites." *505-786-7014; nps.gov/chcu*

Lake Superior

Minnesota

"Even in the summertime, the Lake Superior air is crisp," Pearson says, "making the Minnesota sky seem even sharper. Camp at one of the many state parks that line the lake's northern shore, or along the Superior Hiking Trail, which features some glorious granite peaks that make you feel as close to the sky as you'll get in the relatively flat Midwest." *For Minnesota State Parks: 888-646-6367; www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/index.htm. For Superior Hiking Trail: 218-834-2700; shta.org*

Singita Lebombo Lodge

Kruger National Park, South Africa

The Singita Game Reserve in the Lebombo concession of Kruger National Park is home to the Singita Lebombo Lodge, which provides guests with beds on their balconies for an incredible experience — and picture-perfect views of a deep sky reaching to other galaxies. "Because this is the Southern Hemisphere, the Southern Cross is visible in all its glory," Pearson says. "Just remember that the seasons of the year are reversed." *singita.com/lebombo.html*

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