

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

CAMPGROUND FOR ALL ‘CAMPERS’

Bear Creek offers cabins and tepees for those who prefer to stay out of the dirt



**By Ellen Albanese**  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**B**RISTOL, CONN. — Much as I love the great outdoors, I don’t really love down-and-dirty camping. So it was a treat to settle into a one-bedroom cabin (with four walls and indoor plumbing!) at Bear Creek Campground. Our comfortable abode had two double beds, a full kitchen, a spacious bathroom, air conditioning, and a small flat-screen TV.

Meanwhile, just across the way, there was a group of soon-to-be sixth-graders celebrating their graduation from Northeast Elementary School in Stamford, Conn., who do love camping. They were happily ensconced in Bear Creek’s tepees, which provide picturesque but more primitive lodging.

One of the nicest things about Bear Creek Campground on the grounds of Lake Compounce Family Theme Park — besides the fact that the park is just a short walk or tram ride away — is that it accommodates “campers” of all stripes and comfort levels.

Rose Wong and Carla Bautista, mothers of two of the graduates who were chaperoning the girls, said the tepees provided a good middle-ground accommodation — more economical than a hotel and less of a hassle than tents. “It’s a fun camping experience without having to do too much work,” said Bautista. The

surprisingly spacious tepees are set on a wood platform and come with cots, a small refrigerator, and a fan. The girls’ number one tip for sleeping in a tepee? Place the cots around the edge, so if it rains no one will get wet when the rain comes in through the opening at the top.

In addition to one- and two-bedroom cabins that sleep up to 10 and tepees that sleep up to five, Bear Creek offers tent sites, RV sites, and “cub huts,” cozy Quonset-like structures that sleep four. “Deluxe” tent sites come with an eight-person preassembled tent, a great option for families who want to try tenting without investing in all the equipment, noted Michael Cordani, campground manager. Those staying in tents, tepees, and cub huts use restrooms and showers attached to the camp store. In cabins and cub huts, sheets and pillows (but not blankets) are provided. And while the cabins have modern kitchens, campers are responsible for bringing their own dishes, cutlery, and cookware.

Every lodging has its own picnic table and fire pit that doubles as a grill, and the smell of wood smoke fills the air.

Cordani said the RV sites are “big-rig friendly,” meaning drivers can pull large RVs through (no backing up) even if they are towing a car. Water, electric, and cable hookups are available, and

the whole campground has Wi-Fi. The campground attracts primarily families planning to spend a few days at the theme park, Cordani said, adding that it’s also a convenient stopping place for snow birds making the trek south in the fall.

Handicapped accessibility is a priority for the campground, Cordani said. Several cabins are accessible, and there is an accessible tram running between the campground and the park.

If you are used to camping in wooded areas, the openness of Bear Creek may come as a surprise. Now in its third season, the campground began as an open field, Cordani said. Lake Compounce brought out sewer, water, and electric service, and each year adds new features. This year the flower beds are new. The flip side of the wide open space is that it encourages sharing and getting to know your neighbors. At RV sites across from our cabin, campers gathered in small groups to cook and chat into the early evening.

Despite my best sleuthing, I was never able to find a creek on the property, so I asked Cordani to show me Bear Creek. “There’s no creek,” he admitted, then added with a smile, “And no bears either!”

*Bear Creek Campground (lakecompounce.com/bearcreek) is open through October.*

THE TIP

Phobia rises over theme park



The Phobia Phear Coaster.

**BRISTOL, Conn.** — It towers over the amusement park, dwarfing the Ferris wheel just visible through its slender, serpentine contours. Reaching and arcing, curving and twisting, soaring and looping, it looks like a gigantic purple and orange spider web shimmering against a blue sky.

It’s the Phobia Phear Coaster, the newest ride at Lake Compounce Family Theme Park. The triple-launch coaster features an inversion at 150 feet and speeds of up to 65 miles an hour. Triple launch means that the set of cars moves forward and then back before shooting forward again to launch the ride. “Inversion” (also called a cobra roll) is a gentle way to say that the track rolls over 360 degrees, so riders are momentarily upside down with nothing securing them to the car but a lap bar.

Phobia uses state-of-the-art linear synchronous motor technology, which applies the principles of magnetism to allow the train to reach a high speed quickly, said Sara Frias, the park’s marketing director. The name addresses many popular “phobias,” including the fear of heights, speed, enclosed spaces, and of course the fear of roller coasters, she added.

Alex Mitchell of Southington, Conn., is apparently not familiar with any of those fears. Riding Phobia for the second consecutive day at Lake Compounce, the 15-year-old said the coaster was his new favorite ride.

ELLEN ALBANESE

HERE

FANS VISIT STARS HOLLOW THIS FALL

Those lucky enough to get tickets will meet cast members from the hit TV series “Gilmore Girls,” and take part in a weekend of festivities in Washington Depot, Conn., the rural setting that sparked inspiration for the show’s fictitious town, Stars Hollow. The Gilmore Girls Fan Fest, produced by fans Jennie and Marcus Whitaker, takes place Oct. 21-23 and includes events drawn from the show, such as a tea at the inn, coffee at the hardware store, a staged knita-thon, and a Friday night dinner. Kristi Carlson, who wrote the “Eat Like a Gilmore” cookbook (due out in late October), will host an event that includes a recipe from Luke’s Diner, Sookie’s inn, or one of the Gilmore’s Friday night dinners. Numerous cast members are expected to attend a panel at Town Hall, Oct. 22, including Biff Yeager (Tom), Kelly Bishop (Emily), Rini Bell (Lulu), Ted Rooney (Morey), and Vanessa Marano (April). [www.gilmore-girlsfanfest.com](http://www.gilmore-girlsfanfest.com).

LIVELY FESTIVAL SALUTES SUMMER’S END

Sample lobster claws, fried calamari, and other delicacies from more than 50 local restaurants at the Hampton Beach Seafood Festival, Sept. 9-11. The event, which serves as the unofficial end to summer in this swinging seaside community, also includes local products from more than 80 arts and crafts vendors, and some screaming deals

from merchants along Ocean Boulevard. Stop by to watch chefs’ demonstrations, take part in a lobster roll-eating contest, and see 15 bands and orchestras perform on two stages, including the Journey tribute band The Great Escape. Don’t miss the fireworks Saturday night and skydiving demo on Sunday. Admission: \$5-\$10, depending on day; children 12 and under free. Free parking and shuttles at 13 sites around town. [www.hamptonbeach-seafoodfestival.com](http://www.hamptonbeach-seafoodfestival.com).

THERE

SOAR OVER VEGAS AND BEYOND

Stay at the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas and enjoy a luxury helicopter tour that takes you to private landing spots in the Grand Canyon and Valley of Fire. Vegas-based Maverick Helicopters has teamed up with the AAA Five Diamond hotel to offer guests the three-hour Natural Wonders Experience. Your private chopper will whisk you from Maverick’s Vegas terminal to the highest peak in the Valley of Fire, considered one of the southwest’s most remote destinations, where you’ll have clear views of the surrounding red sandstone formations. Then fly 3,500 feet below the Grand Canyon’s West Rim to a private landing site on Hualapai Indian Territory. From this spot, just 300 feet above the Colorado River, enjoy a champagne lunch prepared by the Four Seasons’ culinary team. Back onboard, you’ll swoop over Lake Mead, Fortification Hill, and Hoover Dam before

buzzing over The Strip and Downtown Las Vegas. Starting rate: \$7,495, includes two-night stay and airport transfer. 702-632-5300, [www.fourseasons.com/lasvegas](http://www.fourseasons.com/lasvegas).

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS FOLK CULTURE AND SHEEP

Watch herders move 1,500 sheep through Ketchum, Idaho, in an annual tradition that dates back more than 150 years. The Trailing of the Sheep Festival, Oct. 5-9, includes five days of festivities that highlight the history, heritage, and cultures of Wood River Valley in central Idaho. The award-winning event features championship sheepdog trials, music, storytelling, folk and traditional arts, lamb cuisine, and a Wool Festival with classes, workshops, and a quilt show. It culminates in an authentic migration, following the tradition of moving sheep (called trailing) from high mountain summer pastures through the valley to winter grazing areas. Most events free. 208-720-0585, [www.trailing-ofthesheep.org](http://www.trailing-ofthesheep.org).

EVERYWHERE

KEEP CONNECTED TO YOUR PETS

What does your furry friend get up to when you’re away? Find out with the Petcube Camera, an interactive wireless pet monitor that also lets you communicate with your dog or cat while you’re on the go. The stylish cube comes with a 138-degree field of view, and can stream high-definition video to your Apple or Android device. Download the Pet-

cube app, and then set up the camera and connect it to your home Wi-fi network. Use the camera to check on your pets — you can even hear what they’re up to and talk to them using the two-way audio connection — and take a photo or video from your smartphone. The best feature: The built-in controllable laser beam, which lets you interact with your pet while traveling. Just move your finger around your smartphone screen to direct the laser beam around your room at home. \$149. [www.petcube.com](http://www.petcube.com).

BRING YOUR ENTERTAINMENT ON THE ROAD

Pack Camp Chef’s Outdoor Entertainment Gear Big Screen 92 for your next camping adventure, family reunion, or business trip, and you can show movies and slideshows on a high-quality viewing surface. The screen is made with a durable oxford nylon material, and lightweight (4 pounds) yet sturdy aluminum poles. Purchase a handy leg and tie-down kit so you can stand the screen up on a grassy or sandy surface and stake it down securely. Otherwise, easily tie the screen with its aluminum frame to tree branches, or attach it to a fence or other sturdy structure. It’s light and easy enough for one person to set up and maneuver. The screen comes with a 16:9 wide-angle viewing ratio, and offers a crisp and super clear view. \$159.99 screen; \$69.99 Big Screen Leg Kit. 800-650-2433, [www.campchef.com](http://www.campchef.com).

KARI BODNARCHUK



CAROL WALLER