



On the Front Lines
Of Mexico's Deadly
Drug War

Robert Baer: Why
Waterboarding
Doesn't Work



Can *Star Trek*
Go Where It's
Gone Before?

TIME

100 DAYS

Behind the Scenes
Photographs

BY CALLIE SHELL

Education of
A President

BY JOE KLEIN



Camping for the Hotel Set. Cheap outdoor options that let you sleep in a queen-size bed after a round of mini golf



Not-so-roughing it Many campgrounds now have free wi-fi, like this KOA in Cloverdale, Calif.

size inflatable beds with a pump that plugs into a car's DC outlet. Modern family camping "isn't a canvas tent, mosquito bites, a cot and rain dripping on your head," says Ted Manning, EMS's general merchandise manager. Stores today have everything from self-inflatable pillows (\$17-\$40) to collapsible marshmallow-roasting sticks (\$13).

Meanwhile, Kampgrounds of America (KOA), the largest system of private campgrounds in the U.S., is cashing in on the spike in family camping by touting its array of cabins and lodges. And yes, there are still places to pitch a tent. The company reported that 21% of its campers last year were first-time KOAers, the highest percentage in 18 years. Its campgrounds, where cabins start at about \$45 a night, offer amenities that might turn off purists hoping to commune with nature; on a recent Saturday at a KOA in Newburgh, N.Y., a hay wagon full of kids singing "Bingo Was His Name-O" cruised past two swimming pools, a video arcade, a mini-golf course and an on-site store that sells beer. Like most KOA campgrounds, Newburgh also provides free wi-fi.

Carolyn Wright, the campground's "ambassador," was driving a golf cart, waving to campers she knew from years past and stopping to answer questions. "Camping is a cheap way for people with kids to explore new things," she said. "Kids have as much fun here as they do in Disneyland." At least the lines for the restrooms are shorter. ■

GEARING UP

\$29

Cost to rent a four-person tent for three days from Lowergear.com

90%

Percentage of KOA campgrounds that have pools

4 MILLION

Number of campsites reservations booked in advance each year on ReserveAmerica.com

BY KATE PICKERT

YOU GET THE CITY PEOPLE who don't know how to make s'mores. Then there are the overconfident ones who think they can sleep soundly on the bare ground like Clint Eastwood. And let's not forget the twitchy types who are certain they will be eaten by bears. This is the world of first-time campers.

Dave Saylor, a camping specialist at the Seattle flagship store of REI, one of the country's largest outdoor-gear companies, has fielded all manner of ridiculous questions from rookies. "I try to keep a straight face," he says. "I've been asked if a tent will keep bears out." (For the record, the answer is no.)

Given the economy, chances are good that the level of anxiety will be higher than usual this summer at campgrounds across the country. One step above a staycation, camping is

a cheap way to get your trip on. ReserveAmerica.com, which works with more than 4,000 campgrounds nationwide, set a record in February, booking some 20,000 reservations in a single 24-hour period. And during these tightfisted times, companies like REI and Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS) are reporting an uptick in the sale of family tents.

But for those passing on a trip to a pricey theme park, the idea of sleeping outside can be daunting. For starters, there are the ever present bears, not to mention worries about staying warm, dry and comfortable. Plus, the cost of getting outfitted can quickly add up.

Newbies in the know, however, can rent equipment from REI, EMS, locally owned camping stores or Lowergear.com, which ships via UPS. As for comfort, outdoor stores are catering to first timers by stocking items like queen-