

# Safe Parking & Resting Guide

For people living in vehicles in Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties  
Prepared for Red Bird resource coordination | Updated May 2026

**Purpose: This guide helps people ask safely and legally for a temporary place to rest in a vehicle. It does not guarantee that any location will allow parking, and it does not replace local laws, posted signs, or property-owner permission.**

## Start Here: The Safest Rule

The safest place to rest in a vehicle is a place where the person has direct permission from someone authorized to say yes. Parking rules can change by city, county, property owner, manager, posted sign, time of day, and safety conditions.

- Ask first whenever possible. Get the name of the person who gave permission, if they are willing to provide it.
- If security, law enforcement, staff, or a property owner asks you to leave, leave calmly and respectfully.
- Do not set up camp unless you are at a campground that specifically allows it.
- Do not put chairs, grills, tents, belongings, or trash outside a vehicle in a business lot, rest area, church lot, or travel center unless you have direct permission.
- Keep the vehicle quiet, clean, and low-profile. Avoid repeated stays at the same place unless permission was given for more than one night.

## Good Places to Ask First

Option	Use For	Important Limits
Places of worship	One-night or short-term permission from church/temple/synagogue staff.	Do not assume it is allowed. Ask an authorized person first.
Walmart / large retail	Possible overnight vehicle/RV parking if the specific manager approves.	Most lots do not have electric hookups, water, or waste disposal. Manager permission and local rules control.
Cracker Barrel	Possible one-night courtesy parking at some locations.	Not guaranteed. Call the specific restaurant and ask the manager.
Truck stops / travel centers	Short-term rest or overnight parking where staff allows it.	Ask inside. Do not take tractor-trailer spaces unless staff says it is okay.
Rest areas	Short-term rest break when tired or unsafe to drive.	Not campgrounds. Follow posted signs. Do not set up outside the vehicle.
College/university support	Enrolled students living in a vehicle may ask about hardship or safe-parking resources.	Varies by school. Do not assume a parking permit allows sleeping overnight.
Paid campgrounds	Most legal option when affordable.	Call first for car, truck, SUV, van, or truck-bed tent rules.

## 1. Places of Worship - Permission Only

Some faith communities may be willing to help with short-term parking or may know of a safer option. This must be handled respectfully and by permission. Do not assume a church or place of worship allows overnight parking just because the lot is empty.

Ask:

Hi, I am currently living in my vehicle and need a safe, quiet place to park and rest for the night. I will not set up camp, leave trash, use drugs or alcohol, or disturb anyone. Is there anyone authorized to give permission for one-night or short-term parking?

## 2. Walmart / Large Retail Lots - Ask the Store Manager

Some Walmart or large retail locations may allow overnight parking, but it varies by store, manager, local law, posted signs, and parking-lot conditions. Walmart-related guidance commonly says overnight RV parking is allowed only where the individual store can permit it. Do not rely on old online lists.

Electric hookups: Assume no electric hookups. Most Walmart and large retail lots do not provide RV hookups, electric, water, dump stations, or camping facilities. If a store allows overnight parking, it is usually parking only, not camping.

Ask:

Does this location allow overnight vehicle parking? I will stay inside my vehicle, park where you tell me, avoid setting up outside, and leave in the morning. Do you have any restrictions, posted rules, or towing policies I should know about?

## 3. Cracker Barrel - Real Option, But Not Guaranteed

Cracker Barrel has a long traveler/RV courtesy-parking reputation, but not every location allows it. Some locations may have small lots, local restrictions, or manager policies against overnight parking. Call the specific restaurant before going.

If allowed: stay one night only, park where directed, do not block customers, do not set up camp, buy something if possible, and leave the lot clean.

Ask:

Does this Cracker Barrel allow one-night vehicle or RV parking with manager permission? I will stay quiet, park where directed, and leave in the morning.

## 4. Truck Stops and Travel Centers

Truck stops and travel centers are generally safer than random gas stations because they are designed for travelers and commercial drivers to stop and rest. If commercial trucks are allowed to park overnight, passenger vehicles may be more likely to be accepted too, but it is still private property and staff permission matters.

- Ask inside before staying overnight.
- Park only where staff tells you to park.
- Do not take tractor-trailer spaces unless staff says passenger vehicles may use them.
- Do not set up camp or leave belongings outside.

## 5. Rest Areas - Short-Term Rest, Not Camping

South Carolina rest areas and welcome centers are official traveler stops where drivers can pull in, use facilities, and take a break. They are not campgrounds. The safest guidance is to use them for short-term fatigue rest only and follow posted signs at that location.

- Do not set up tents, chairs, grills, or belongings outside the vehicle.
- Do not treat a rest area as a long-term parking location or campground.
- If signs list a time limit, no overnight parking, or no camping, follow the sign.
- A rest area is different from a gas station. A gas station is private property and requires permission for more than a short customer stop.

## 6. Colleges and Universities - For Enrolled Students

Some colleges and universities in the U.S. have begun safe-parking or emergency-housing support for enrolled students living in vehicles, but this is not yet common and varies by school. A regular parking permit usually does not mean sleeping in the vehicle is allowed.

Students should contact Student Affairs, Student Support Services, Campus Police, Basic Needs, Financial Aid, or the Dean of Students and ask about safe parking, emergency housing, temporary parking permission, shower access, meal support, and student hardship funds.

Ask:

I am an enrolled student and I am temporarily living in my vehicle. Does the school have a safe parking program, emergency housing, temporary parking permission, shower access, or student hardship support?

## 7. Campgrounds - Call Before Booking

Campgrounds are usually the most legal overnight option if a person can afford them, but the rules are not the same everywhere. Many campgrounds allow traditional tent camping but may not allow sleeping directly in a car, truck, SUV, or van unless it is listed as vehicle camping, van camping, RV camping, or a truck-bed tent setup.

- Car/truck/SUV sleepers should call before paying.
- Van campers should ask whether vans are accepted on tent sites or RV sites.
- Truck-bed tents may be allowed at some campgrounds, but not all.
- Some tent sites have no electric. Ask whether the site has electric, water, bathrooms, showers, and charging options.

Ask:

Do you allow car camping, van camping, SUV camping, or truck-bed tent camping? Do I need a traditional ground tent? Is electric available at tent sites? Are bathrooms and showers included?

## Places Not Recommended Without Direct Permission

These are not safe referral options unless the person has direct permission or is using the property for its intended purpose:

- Hotel or motel parking lots unless the person is a registered guest or has permission.
- Apartment complex parking lots, private neighborhoods, or residential streets with parking complaints/towing risk.
- Beach access lots, public boat ramps, and tourist lots with posted restrictions or nighttime patrols.
- Industrial parks, closed businesses, office lots, school lots, and construction areas.
- Random gas stations or convenience stores. These are private property and are different from official rest areas or travel centers.
- City parks at night. Parks may be useful during posted open hours, but this guide does not recommend city parks for overnight vehicle sleeping.

## Quick Safety Checklist

- Call first when possible; ask for a manager, office staff, security, or an authorized person.
- Keep the vehicle legally parked, registered, insured if possible, and not blocking traffic or entrances.
- Park away from doors and high-traffic customer spaces unless staff directs otherwise.
- Keep lights, noise, pets, trash, and belongings under control.
- Do not start arguments with staff, security, or police. Leaving peacefully protects future options.
- Have a backup plan. Permission can change by shift, manager, event, weather, or safety concern.

## One-Sentence Explanation for Resource Workers

Use this wording when giving the guide to someone:

This is not a guaranteed parking list. It is a safe-permission guide. The safest places are places where you have permission, official rest stops for short-term rest, travel centers that allow it, or campgrounds that confirm your vehicle/tent setup is allowed.

## Sources Checked

Sources were checked for current public guidance as of May 2026. Final permission must still be confirmed with each location.

- SCDOT Rest Areas & Welcome Centers page: South Carolina has official rest areas and welcome centers where travelers can pull in and take a break.
- Walmart overnight parking guidance: overnight RV/vehicle parking is commonly treated as a store-manager and local-law decision, not a universal guarantee. Assume no hookups unless the store specifically says otherwise.
- Cracker Barrel overnight parking guidance from current RV/traveler resources and reporting: some locations allow one-night courtesy parking, but policies vary by location and manager.
- SCDPS commercial truck parking page: South Carolina recognizes the need for commercial drivers to rest, but passenger vehicles should still ask travel-center staff before using overnight parking areas.

Prepared for Red Bird resource coordination. This document is informational only and is not legal advice.