



RV ADVENTURE VACATIONS

RV Having Fun Yet?

A Beginner's Guide to Hassle-Free RVing

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Introduction

Congratulations! You have just begun to explore one of the most enjoyable – and most misunderstood – vacation options in the world of travel. Each of us, sometime in our past, has cursed a slow-moving “Win-a-bay-go.” Those first impressions can last a long time, and many people can’t imagine themselves actually choosing to spend their precious vacations in “one of those things.”



But, as you have already figured out, RV travel has changed a lot in recent years. Today’s motorhomes are more powerful, roomier, safer and better appointed than in the past. If you doubt it, stop in at an RV dealer or rental center in your town and take a look around inside one of the new units. It is hard not to be impressed.

In fact, a new generation of discerning travelers with the resources to go just about anywhere they please is finding that RV vacations suit them and their families perfectly. The only downside to this sort of vacation: It is not as simple as booking a stay at a resort or a week at the beach. In order for your trip to be the adventurous yet relaxing experience that you are imagining, there are a lot of things you will need to figure out:

- Where should we go?
- How long will it take us to go that far in an RV?
- How long should we stay in each place?
- Which campground is the best for us? Do we need full hookups? What is a pull-through site?
- Is there somewhere that we can take a whitewater raft trip? With our four-year-old? Which company is most reputable and the best with children?
- If we are only going to take one or two short walks at the national park, which ones will give us the biggest bang for our buck?
- What kind of motorhome should we get? Do we need to bring our own towels? What is this pedal under the toilet for?

In spite of all the details, more people than ever before are discovering the joy of wandering the open road without giving up the comforts of home. It is easier than hopping from one hotel to the next. You do not have to pack and unpack all of your belongings every day. You can save money on eating out by cooking. You have a warm refuge when it suddenly turns chilly, or a place to cool off when it is hot. You are instantly part of a friendly campground community, not prisoners in a hotel room. (For some reason, campgrounds just seem to attract friendlier people than hotels do.) You settle into places that were chosen for their natural beauty and peacefulness, not for their proximity to the busiest streets and

intersections. You eat, sleep and take potty breaks whenever you feel like it. You retire to the same bed every night. You become part of the places you visit. It is *the* only way to see the West.

In summary, perhaps the biggest advantage of an RV vacation is the ability to plan a world-class trip to anywhere in North America in a heartbeat. Fly into a major city, pick up a fully-furnished RV, buy some groceries, and hit the road. The information in the personalized Adventure Kit portfolio prepared by Tracks & Trails provides all the guidance needed for a hassle-free vacation. **Remember to book a vacation with us early for the best availability of RVs and campsites.**

What makes us so smart? Eighteen years ago we quit our big city jobs, sold most of our belongings, bought a small RV, and hit the road full-time. Two years and 40,000 miles later, two things were apparent: 1) We could never go back to working for someone else, and 2) Planning an itinerary that maximizes enjoyment and minimizes stress takes time and (here is the catch) an intimate familiarity with the place you want to visit. In other words, **it is hard to make the most of your trip if you have not already been there.**



With this contradiction in mind, an idea began to take shape: We could help others avoid all the mistakes we made in the beginning by sharing everything that we learned. It seemed natural: Fate made us intrepid travelers. Our previous jobs made us good communicators. Our experiences on the road made us enthusiastic advocates for RV travel and for getting out there and experiencing the varied and endless wonders of the American and Canadian West. Tracks & Trails is here to help you maximize your enjoyment of your time on the road, be it five days or five months.

Now enough about our company and ourselves. Here is the free advice that we promised you! (Do not be surprised if you come across a shameless plug for our services here and there!)

Is This Really for Us?

We have covered the advantages of RV travel. Now, let us look at a few situations where it may not be the best choice.

If complete, uninterrupted relaxation and vegetation are what you have in mind for your vacation, this may not be for you. Sure, you could drive to a beautiful place not far from where you began, park the RV, and just sit there. But for most people that defeats the whole purpose of the RV: having a comfortable home that follows you around while you see explore a variety of interesting and beautiful places. And any outing that involves navigating unfamiliar territory is likely to produce a few stressful moments. If that risk is not one that you are willing to take, you may want to consider a cruise or a stay at an all-inclusive resort.

Likewise, if your idea of roughing it is sleeping on embroidered silk sheets, rather than your customary Egyptian cotton ones, you may have difficulty adjusting to

the less luxurious accommodations available in most rental motorhomes. Of course, the fact that you have come this far in the planning process suggests that you are not the silk sheets type.

Conversely, if you believe that the hard work and moderate discomfort of tent-camping is a valuable part of the experience, and if you believe that it's not really camping unless you are a LONG way from the nearest road, traveling by RV may not be for you.



But there is a growing group of baby-boomers who, once veteran backpackers and car campers, are discovering that they can enjoy the outdoors and still have the convenience and comforts of home - a hotel room on wheels, if you will. There is no escaping the reality that car camping with kids is a lot of work, (especially for us boomers who do plenty of work when we are at home) and for some folks, sleeping on the ground is not an option.

Under such circumstances, camping in an RV makes perfect sense.

Choosing Your Home on Wheels

RVs come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Tracks & Trails can help you decide which one best suits your particular needs (shameless plug #1). Here is a look at the types that you are most likely to rent and their unique features and benefits.

Class C (Van-style)

These units are built on a heavy-duty version of a full-size van chassis, like those used for airport shuttle buses, ambulances, and smaller moving vans. (You know you are looking at a Class C if there is a section of the camper that extends out over the driver's compartment.) Usually produced by Ford and Chevrolet, they are solid, reliable and serviceable just about anywhere. The driver's compartment has had the rear wall removed and is mated to the camper body, which sits just behind the cab. You will see them offered in overall lengths of anywhere from 19 feet to over 30 feet. In general, each increment in length buys you a little more space in each of the primary living areas: seating area, kitchen, bath, and bedroom.

These models make up the majority of most rental fleets because of their versatility, economy and reliability. They are particularly well-suited to families with smaller children because of the large bed above the cab that does not need to be converted back to seating space during the day.

Class A (Bus-style)

These larger motor homes feature driver's and passenger's seats which are on the same level as the main living area. Some also have slide-out sections that significantly increase the dimensions of the living area when parked. The driving experience takes more getting used to than it does in a Class C because you are further from the ground and you are sitting right over the front wheels looking

straight down at the ground. After a few miles, though, you will get used to it and will appreciate the “trucker’s eye” view you have of the road ahead.

Even though they are generally more expensive to rent, you may want to consider a Class A if:

- You need the extra storage space afforded by the “basement” storage in some units.
- You like the idea of the driver being in the same “room” as the rest of the crew.
- You want the extra space provided by the slide-out available on some models (a few Class Cs have these, as well).
- You are willing to pay for the slightly higher quality interior furnishings.

These units are less common than the ubiquitous Class C and are unavailable at many rental centers. Also, remember that these units do not have the bonus bed above the driver’s compartment like the Class C, so the dinette and/or sofa will need to be converted into a bed for sleeping.

Pickup Camper (Pickup truck fitted with slide-in camper)

For two people who want to get off the beaten path and save a few dollars, this can be a good alternative. There is a trend towards downsizing, with sleek models offering clean, fuel-efficient, turbo-diesel engines. The downside is that the space inside is somewhat cramped. After all, the floor area is limited to the 4’ x 8’ bed of a pickup truck. Also, you must get out and walk to the back of the vehicle to enter. The advantages are:

- You have the mobility of a standard pickup. Many have four-wheel drive; giving you access to remote areas on BLM land and in National Forests that Tracks & Trails will be happy to tell you about if you become a client. (shameless plug #2)
- You will probably get better fuel mileage than in the larger units, and be able to cover more ground in a day.

Where to Go - What to See



Once you have decided that you want to take an RV trip, the next step is to decide where you will go. Have you always wanted to visit Yellowstone? Do you want to see Mount Rushmore? Keep in mind that traveling by RV is a very different experience than traveling by car. The pace is much slower, with more stops along the way, and distances traveled each day are generally less than by car. We recommend driving 200 miles or so every other day. If you try to see too much, you will feel as if your entire vacation was spent driving. Instead, plan to *fully* experience a few great places.

We can help you plan your trip, providing an itinerary that will allow you to make the most of your time, with driving routes (we provide you with the most scenic and RV-friendly roads), maps, recommendations for a variety of activities as well as must-see attractions you might otherwise miss. We will also make sure you steer clear of local tourist traps. We make all of the reservations for you, choosing the best campgrounds in that area and using only experienced, reputable guides (shameless plug #3).

Packing for Your Trip

Space is a premium in a motorhome, so packing correctly is very important. You walk a fine line in bringing appropriate clothing to be prepared for every weather condition without over packing. There are washers and dryers at commercial campgrounds, and most towns have a Laundromat as well. Certain things should not be forgotten – a first aid kit, flashlight, or prescription medication. If



we arrange your trip (here comes another shameless plug!), you will receive detailed travel tips that address exactly what you should bring, along with helpful hints on stocking the RV, including checklists and tried-and-true tips that will alleviate stress before and during your trip. We also include some of our favorite recipes that will keep you out of the galley when you should be enjoying the great outdoors and

make you feel like a real RV pro!

Basic RV rentals include personal kits, which consist of a blanket, sheets, pillow, hand towel, bath towel, wash cloth, dish towel, coffee cup, cereal bowl, dinner and salad plate, and silverware for each passenger. Vehicle kits contain necessities such as a can opener, peeler, corkscrew, pots and pans, various cleaning supplies, clothes hangers, and a vinyl tablecloth. Some companies also rent mountain bikes.

Kids, Pets, and RVs

When traveling by RV, it is advisable to be on the road early on travel days. Kids may complain about rising early, but they can always sleep on the way (seatbelts are required while the vehicle is moving. You may want to bring your child's car



seat as well, since rentals may not be the quality you would like.) Leaving early allows for frequent stops without feeling rushed while getting to the next destination. Having that “safety cushion” allows you to take extra time to explore to your heart's content and still have ample daylight to get situated once you reach your campground. Our travel tips also include a full section on

traveling with young ones.

We are often asked about traveling with pets. Many destinations are not dog-friendly, so you have little choice but to leave them in the RV, which (like a car) can become very hot inside. Most national parks do not allow pets on the trails, and some state parks do not allow dogs in at all. Over the years we have accepted the fact that pets do not enjoy the RV lifestyle nearly as much as we do.

Campground Wisdom

If you book a trip through Tracks & Trails, we will use both public and private campgrounds, based on our experiences at each stop along your route. As a rule, private campgrounds offer amenities not found in public campgrounds, such as swimming pools, rec rooms, laundry rooms, computer hookups, etc. but you pay the price for these services, in both privacy and peacefulness.

Public campgrounds may be more crowded, but the park lands are at your doorstep to enjoy. Usually more scenic, there are more trees and you can have a campfire (barring fire restrictions). Your chances of seeing wildlife nearby are also much better. These campgrounds may not have hookups or showers, but offer guided nature walks or campfire talks. You can see the stars, smell the juniper, and even hear coyotes howl. Public sites allow you to enjoy the national parks with less driving time factored in, and to most of us, time is a precious commodity!

Speaking of time, your RV is completely self-contained, so lunch can be whenever you like, and wherever you find a place to pull over, whether it is a rest area, a state park, or a scenic turnout inside a national park.

Driving Your “Rig”

Although you do not need a special license to drive a motorhome, it will take a little getting used to. Remember that you are considerably wider/higher/larger than a car. You will need to take these factors into account, and get accustomed to using the mirrors to improve your visibility. It also helps to be a confident driver. Although most modern motorhomes have very predictable road manners, this is no Honda. It will not accelerate as quickly, maneuver as nimbly, or stop as short as the car you drive every day. You just have to think a few seconds further ahead and be aware that when you make a sharp turn, the rear wheels track further towards the inside of the turn than the front ones that are under your feet. Most people adjust very quickly and have no problems at all. If you have ever driven a moving van, you have the basic idea (although RVs are much more nicely appointed). If you are a very nervous driver, you should consider a smaller RV or perhaps a van conversion.



The Nitty Gritty of RV Living

When traveling by motorhome, you will enjoy many conveniences of home, but you need to be mindful of certain things. There is a limited amount of water, and not every campground will have a dump station where you can empty and refill. Each tank of fresh water will fill the gray-water holding tank, so each time you fill your water tanks you also need to empty the gray water tank. In addition, many fresh water fill stations are heavily chlorinated; you may want to consider purchasing drinking water.

If you are at a campsite with no electric, sewer, or water, conservation of energy and water is a must. If electricity is not available, the battery is used to power the fan on the heater and to pump water to the sink and toilet. You should have no problem camping for a day or two without utility hookups. If the batteries do start to run low (the monitor panel will tell you), running the generator for a few hours will recharge the batteries. Just be aware that most campgrounds have policies on the use of generators, and you will not make a lot of friends if your generator is going non-stop!

Running out of water will require an unplanned trip to a dump station, and can be a real inconvenience (i.e., you have just lathered up in the shower!) You may



also want to empty the black-water (toilet) when you fill your water tank. This is not as difficult as you may think and when you pick up your RV you will get a training session.

RV FAQs

RVs have TVs, right?

Even if you cannot imagine a week or two without a TV, give it a try. Almost without exception, families tell us that they seldom, if ever, watched TV and that this accounted for much of the family "magic" that took place during their trip.

How far can we drive in a day?

You may think you should be covering more ground. But many of these roads are steep and winding, so you will not be cruising along at 70 mph. We have driven these roads, and know how far you can really drive in a day, including stops for the great views. Trust us! Less is more.

Isn't traveling with kids a hassle?

Infants are wonderfully portable. The trick is to take it easy. We will help you plan a route that meanders through some awesomely beautiful places at a very leisurely pace, maybe only moving the RV every two or three days.

Will my kids get bored?

They might surprise you (and themselves) once you get out here. Digging for dinosaur bones, riding on steam trains, wading in streams, peering into huge canyons, driving a Jeep along a rough road, building campfires, roasting marshmallows...It is a rare child (of any age) that does not think that is pretty cool.



Can I charge my camera or laptop batteries in the RV?

Yes, and you do not have to be connected to "shore power" or start the generator to do it. Just buy an **inverter** for under \$50 at Big-Box-Mart. It converts 12V cigarette lighter current into 110V juice.

What can we expect for mileage and fuel consumption in an RV?

Fuel mileage will be between 8-15 mpg, depending upon the vehicle you rent. Tank size varies from 25 to 75 gallons. Recommended RV travel mileage is 200 miles every other day.

Tell me about generators at the campground.

Keep in mind that generators are not meant to run for hours on end – especially not all night. And you would not want to – they are noisy not only for you, but also those around you. Campgrounds generally require that they be shut off by early evening. The din of internal combustion engines can spoil a serene campsite!

Should we take scenic drives in our RV?

We try to route you on the prettiest roads. Some roads are just not suitable for RVs, and we usually mention these in your itinerary. We can reserve a car or jeep rental for you to drive some of the scenic byways and backcountry roads.

We have a month or two to spend. Can we keep ourselves entertained for that long?

Absolutely. You will have time to visit a wide assortment of places, and the luxury of being able to stay long enough to really experience them. Longer trips are wonderful. You will have the luxury of “slack-time”, which is so important to being able to actually relax and enjoy your journey. While the people with only one week of vacation are getting up early and roaring off to the next place, you will sit and sip your coffee, watch the sun rise over the mesa top, perhaps take a little walk, and then start your leisurely drive to the next heart-stopping spot. It is a completely different experience. You will love traveling and living this way.

We live in the eastern half of the US/Canada. Should we rent an RV in our home town or fly out West?



In most cases, you will be much happier if you fly to a western city and spare yourselves the interminable interstate driving at the beginning and end of your trip. RVs are at their best cruising the backroads and acting as a comfy stationary base camp. Highway cruising is easier in a car. By beginning your trip right in the middle of the “good stuff”, you will add 6-10 days of real vacationing to your vacation. Even if you have a month, you will barely scratch the surface. Use all of your vacation time for vacationing. You will not have to pass up quite as many places and you will be able to spend more time at each stop and experience everything it has to offer. Finally, the money you save in excess mileage charges and fuel will go a long way towards covering the cost of the plane tickets.

What about Meals in the RV?

You can usually plan on eating breakfast in the RV. It is easier than loading up the whole gang and trying to get a spot to park the RV in town so you can wait to get a table and have breakfast. We usually suggest picnic style lunches so that you can be out on the trail with lunch in your backpack instead of waiting in line to have lunch. Do not plan on food concessions within the parks. They are virtually non-existent.

Grilling at the campsite is great at dinner, or just cook in the RV and eat outside at the picnic table. We list some restaurants in towns, but it can be a heck of a drive out of Yellowstone or Yosemite just to get to a restaurant.



The Adventure Kit provided by Tracks & Trails will have a list of items you might not think to bring, and some ideas for cooking in the RV (what kind of meals are easiest, other ideas for food to buy).

Glossary of RV Terms

Full hookups: Includes water, electric, and sewer attachments for the RV at your campsite. At a water and electric site, you will need to stop at the dump station rather than having the sewer attachment at the site.

Dump station: A facility for dumping or emptying your black water (toilet) and gray water (sink, shower) holding tanks.

Boondocking: This term refers to dry camping (no water, electricity, or sewer), or, camping without hookups, in a remote spot. This term is used by campers who want to enjoy nature at its fullest, and avoid paying campground fees.

Pull-Through: A campsite that allows the driver to pull into the site to park, then pull out the other side when leaving, without ever having to back up.

House Battery: The battery in a motorhome that is responsible for operating the 12-volt system within the motorhome, which is separate from the battery that starts the engine.

Personal Kits or Convenience Kits: Items to equip an RV for daily living that can be rented at nominal cost from rental firms. These include bed linens, pillows and blankets, bath towels, pots and pans, kitchen utensils and cutlery.

Slide Out: Additional living space that “slides out” either by hydraulics, electricity, or manually, when the RV is set up for camping. Not to be confused with a slide-in, which is a camper that “slides into” the truck bed!