

USA TODAY TRAVEL | ICONIC SITES DOT U.S. LANDSCAPE

GO ESCAPE

SUMMER 2023

Rejuvenate



THE POWER
OF NO-TRACE
TOURISM

HIT THE ROAD
WITH **RVING 101**
PRO TIPS

RUSTIC RESPITES
AT POPULAR
NATIONAL PARKS

Rollin', Rollin', Rollin'

Road-tested tips and tricks for RVing success

BY KIT BERNARDI



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR RIG

There are two types of RVs: motorized, all-in-one driven units and towable trailers pulled by a separate vehicle, usually an SUV or pickup truck.

RVs vary in size from roughly 13 to 45 feet long, each outfitted with varying degrees of amenities. To determine the right rig for you, factor in how many travelers require beds, their ages, number of seat-belted seats, overall trip budget and

total nights camping.

A lifelong camper and retired RV salesperson, Peyton Marshall has experienced both RV types and currently lives full time in his 31-foot Airstream International. "In a motor home, there is no need to stop for food and bathroom breaks. One disadvantage is that unless you are towing a car, you have to break camp to go to activities away from the campground," says Peyton. "With a trailer, you just unhitch the tow vehicle and leave the RV campsite intact."

If you'd rather rent an RV, perhaps for a one-time trip, you can turn to companies such as Cruise America with locations across North America; CanaDream, operating in six Canadian provinces; and Tracks & Trails, specializing in national parks RV trips in the Western United States and Canada. Outdoorsy, RVshare and Vrbo are RV rental versions of Airbnb providing campground RV delivery and other services.



GET READY TO ROLL

The more you haul, the higher the fuel costs. You can reduce weight by waiting to fill water tanks until arriving at the

campground and saving major grocery shopping until you reach your destination. Rent on-site kayaks, paddleboards and bicycles, and limit clothing to only functional pieces that layer well. A good cast-iron skillet replaces multiple pots and pans.

Kim Foley MacKinnon, executive editor of *Girl Camper* magazine, ventures around the East Coast in her 13-foot Scamp fiberglass egg trailer. She says, "By overpacking, underpacking and forgetting things, I learned the importance of lists.



Kit Bernardi has traveled extensively with her husband in their Airstream Caravel RV, which they hitch to a Ford F-150 pickup truck.

My lists for clothing, outdoor gear, meal prep essentials and documents, such as insurance, save time, storage space and money."

Download maps, directions, reservations, apps, podcasts and e-books before leaving home. My favorite outdoor travel apps are SkyView, NPS, Picture This to identify plants, AllTrails, Rock Identifier and the Audubon bird guide.

Reserve campsites in campgrounds, national and state parks and national forests as far in advance as possible. Park passes and RV camping memberships can reduce campsite costs.



ON THE ROAD

Map the route based on your RV driving confidence. Highways are direct routes with clear signage, rest areas and easy on-off ramps. If taking scenic backroads, know your RV's height and width because low bridges and overhanging tree limbs are obstacles on

rural routes.

I use Google Maps, Waze and GasBuddy. An atlas works when Wi-Fi doesn't. If crossing state lines, check each state's road and traffic laws regulating RV driving and parking.

Mona and Tom Mesereau lived in and ran their public relations firm from their 32-foot Winnebago Vista mobile home while RVing 20 months cross-country. Mona says, "RV travel takes longer. When you arrive at a destination, you don't just drop your bags and head out like you can at a hotel. We learned quickly to slow down and settle into a place instead of doing a little in a lot of states."

Tom says, "We drove no more than 300 miles a day to ensure we arrived at the campsite in daylight." >

PLAN AND PREPARE

Before you head out on the open road to begin your RV adventure, it's best to ensure you pack all the essentials you'll need for a stress-free trip. Here are some items that I and other seasoned RVers recommend:

FOR THE ROAD:

- ▶ Toll transponders, such as E-ZPASS or SUNPASS
- ▶ Jumper cables, flares, traffic cones, spare tire, bottled water, roadside assistance information
- ▶ Cellphone dashboard mount, charging cords, GPS unit (optional)
- ▶ Sunglasses

FOR THE CAMPSITE:

- ▶ First-aid kit
- ▶ Flashlight or headlamp
- ▶ Basic tool kit, duct tape
- ▶ Water filter for drinking and cooking with campground water
- ▶ Matches or lighter
- ▶ Trash bags
- ▶ Comfy camp chairs
- ▶ Cast-iron skillet
- ▶ Portable gas grill or fire pit (optional)

FOR YOUR COMFORT:

- ▶ Closed-toe, water-proof footwear
- ▶ Flipflops for the bath house
- ▶ Rain gear
- ▶ Wool hiking socks
- ▶ Insect repellent
- ▶ Compass
- ▶ Daypack

— Kit Bernardi



AT THE CAMP-SITE

Most campground check-ins start at 3 p.m. Get there as close to that time as possible because it takes time to back into the campsite; hook up electrical, water and sewer (if the site has it); install wheel chocks and leveling blocks; unfurl the awning; and sort out RV switches operating lights and utilities.

Responsible, environmentally conscious campers follow campground rules regulating trash disposal and campfire safety. Reduce paper and plastic waste by using a reusable water bottle and washable dishware. To protect the environment, usually you are required to purchase from the camp store firewood (for cooking and other uses) that has been pretreated for invasive plants or insects. Stay on hiking trails and keep pets leashed.

Gaylene Ore owns a 15-foot, restored 1967 Aristocrat Lo Liner camper. She has been RVing throughout the Western U.S. for 11 years. "Campsite smells attract wildlife, so clean up after yourself and take seriously the campground's guidance on storing food, especially using their bear boxes," Ore says. ■

RV-FRIENDLY ROAD TRIPS

Here's a handful of places RVers love. All offer a broad choice of campsite, outdoor and cultural experiences.



► THE OUTER BANKS, N.C.

A two-lane, flat 138-mile road and multiple ferry crossings connect North Carolina's islands along the Outer Banks Scenic Byway. It flanks towering sand dunes from which Orville and Wilbur Wright launched the world's first airplane flight; tidal marshes where birdlife flourishes; and sprawling, pristine beaches of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore strewn with centuries-old shipwrecks. Museums and historic sites preserve the region's complex Native American, African American, colonial, military and maritime histories.



► GREATER PALM SPRINGS, CALIF.

Blending parts of the Mojave and Colorado deserts, Joshua Tree National Park's 800,000 acres are famous for behemoth boulders, diverse cacti and spiky Joshua trees. Camp, hike, rock climb and stargaze in this wind-sculpted landscape. Nearby Yucca Valley has the Hi-Desert Nature Museum, vintage Western movie set Pioneertown and outsider art galleries. The region's festival-famous Coachella Valley offers agritourism experiences.



► ROUTE 66 IN ILLINOIS

Designated an All-American Road and National Scenic Byway, historic cross-country Route 66 begins in downtown Chicago. Start on Chicago's outskirts, stopping often on the way south toward St. Louis, Mo., for farm-fresh comfort food and to see retro, roadside kitsch. Native American historic sites near the route include Starved Rock State Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site near Collinsville. Visit Springfield's two state Capitol buildings and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. The Route 66 Association of Illinois Hall of Fame and Museum is in Pontiac. Take in Mississippi River views on the Grafton Sky Tour aerial tramway.



► SOUTHWEST IDAHO

Idaho's two-lane, 112-mile Payette River Scenic Byway, State Highway 55, travels north from Boise to New Meadows through two national forests. Hike mountain trails, soak in hot springs, paddle clear lakes, raft whitewater rivers and wander through quaint small towns.

— Kit Bernardi

GETTY IMAGES; OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU; ILLINOIS OFFICE OF TOURISM; VISIT IDAHO; VISIT GREATER PALM SPRINGS