

LEARNING MADE EASY



6th Edition

RV Vacations

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Apply handy tips to
navigate your next road trip

Explore RV camping sites
in the US and Canada

Learn basic
RV-travel safety

Dennis C. Brewer

Lifelong RV enthusiast



RV Vacations

6th Edition

by Dennis C. Brewer

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dummies[®]
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RV Vacations For Dummies® , 6th Edition

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Introduction

Congratulations! After looking at all those recreation vehicles (RVs) rolling down the highway and wondering what driving one would be like, you decided it is time to find out. You're probably like us:

Whether you want to travel on vacation for a few weeks, catch a long weekend in the mountains, enjoy your favorite fishing hole, or get on the road full time to fulfill a lifelong dream, you can do no better than to experience it all in an RV. When you travel by RV, you can be close to the ones you love or find a place full of peace and quiet you can have to yourself. RVs provide a wealth of self-sufficiency and control over your life on the road. That is just the beginning of the list of benefits traveling by RV will give you.

On the road, we meet families with children, independent young couples who bring their offices along and work on the road, pet owners who don't want to leave their animals behind, retirees who've been planning for years to discover America gradually, fussy diners who don't want to down *another* fast-food meal, sleepers who don't like to wonder who slept in their bed the night before, and those with disabilities or those with dietary restrictions who know that their specialized adjustments in the RV enable them to travel safely and securely, and on their own terms.

About This Book

In the first chapters of this book, we tell you just about everything you ever wanted or needed to know about RVing, tempered by our own experiences with tents, vans, trailers, Class C, and class A motor homes, with over eight years of that full-time living in one for travel, work, and play.

Then, we give you an insider's look at some all-time favorite preplanned route suggestions, particularly suited for RVs, in what we think is the most diverse, beautiful, and exciting travel venue in the world — the North American Continent, from Florida across parts of Canada to Alaska. And, finally, we offer some practical tips that make all this travel easier on the mind and budget.

Throughout the book's suggested travel routes — 16 in total — we give you the information you need to find your way and point out popular highlights. We share some favorite campground locations with you, and because, in most cases, you're carrying your own kitchen, we steer you to places where you can pick up local produce, regional farm to table foods, or one-of-a-kind takeout meals to pick up and eat later.

There are a few ways to use *RV Vacations For Dummies* as a reference guide. You can start at the first page and read all the way through. If you're a more experienced RVer, you can flip to a favorite travel route, and start checking out the recommended destinations and campgrounds. You can move from chapter to chapter, picking and choosing information that interests you most.

You won't find much in this book about repairing a malfunctioning RV. We learned to leave that to the experts. That said, through the years, we've acquired a few handy preventive maintenance routines, which we pass on to help you and your RV stay in shape and cut down on repair bills.

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time — this is *especially* true of prices. And with an RV, any noticeable change in the cost of gas will make an equally noticeable difference in your budget — your home on wheels has a particularly large appetite for petroleum! We, therefore, suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher can't be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling.

Your safety is important to us, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your ever-changing surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, smartphones, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets. And always lock your vehicle in or out of campgrounds.

Conventions Used in This Book

To keep this book from being longer than the *Great Expectations* tome, we use a number of abbreviations in the driving chapters.

Campground amenities are abbreviated as follows:

CATV: Cable TV hookup

SATV: Satellite TV hookup

Wi-Fi: Wireless Internet connection

Here are the abbreviations for credit cards:

AE: American Express

DISC: Discover

MC: MasterCard

V: Visa

And we use the following abbreviations for road names:

I-#: Interstate highway

SR #: State road

CR #: County road

FM #: Farm-to-market road

We use some general pricing information to help you as you decide where to camp. The following system of dollar signs is meant to be a guideline only and denotes the range of costs for one night in a campground.

Cost	Campground
\$	\$10 or less
\$\$	\$11 to \$20
\$\$\$	\$21 to \$30
\$\$\$\$	\$31 to \$40
\$\$\$\$\$	\$41 or more

Foolish Assumptions

As we wrote this book, we made some assumptions about you and your needs as an RVer. Here's what we think might be true about you:

- » You may be an inexperienced RVer looking for insight and advice about what RVing is all about.
- » You may be an experienced RVer looking for new experiences, new attractions, or new roads to travel, and you don't want to miss a good bet.
- » You're not looking for a directory that provides lists of every campground, attraction, or food venue available to you. Instead, you're looking for a book that focuses on the most important information and integrates that information into the best or most unusual experiences as you travel the highway.
- » You may be an inexperienced RVer seeking to learn information and discover patterns that help you plan your own future adventures.

If you fit any of these criteria, *RV Vacations For Dummies*, 6th Edition, gives you the information you're seeking!

How This Book Is Organized

Although divided into six parts, the book consists of three major sections. Parts 1 and 2 provide the how-to info that you need to get started before you hit the road. Parts 3, 4, and 5 include 16 wonderful trip suggestions, each in a different area of the United States and Canada. And, finally, Part 6 gives you some interesting and out of the way attractions for RVers who want to set up to explore some locations beyond the planned trips in this book and some ten of the bring-along items you will want to have with you.

Part 1: Getting Started

What is an RV and what is RVing? You find out in this part, and you see why we think it's the greatest thing since the invention of the wheel. We tell you where to consider traveling and when, give you helpful tips, fill you in on some best features of RVing, and debunk some RV myths.

Part 2: Paying Attention to the Details

Here you discover the how to budget for a trip. This part includes tips for getting started — what to plan for, how to prepare, and what you need to know about choosing and using campgrounds, accommodating special needs, and more.

Part 3: Exploring the East

In Chapters 8 through 12, we explore parts of the eastern United States by RV. The driving routes in each chapter offer a variety of scenery and activities, and includes scenic roadways, sightseeing attraction, or national parks. Two routes — The Coast of Maine: Lobster Land and The Gulf Coast: Tallahassee to New Orleans — follow along the sea. The Blue Ridge Mountains: Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway brings together two great American roadways with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park — all without the hassle of commercial traffic. Western New York: Cooperstown to Niagara Falls lets you see a museum for baseball greats and witness the grandeur of

Niagara Falls. The Natchez Trace: Natchez to Nashville, takes you through the old and new South, past the birthplaces of such icons as Elvis, and other famous folks from the south. And, of course, we share popular campgrounds and cafes to find along the way.

Part 4: Discovering Mid-America

Chapters 13 through 17 take you through the middle of North America with a choice of five itineraries, at least one of which should be within a reasonable driving time from a Midwestern home base. Texas Hill Country: Bluebonnets and Barbecue tells you about natural wildflower shows and where to find the best barbecue. The Heart of Ohio: A Circle around Circleville carries you on a loop from aviation history to rock-'n'-roll, with a pause in the world's largest Amish community. Northern Minnesota: Paul Bunyan Country visits a classic American icon that delights kids of all ages, takes you to the start of the great Mississippi River, and leads you to North America's largest shopping mall. Lake Superior Circle Tour takes you around the largest surface area of fresh water in the Western Hemisphere and across the border to Canada and back. The Ozarks and Branson: Hot Springs to Springfield lets you in on how to get good deals in an area that is a very popular travel destination for music lovers from North America and from all over the world.

Part 5: Seeing the West

In Chapters 18 through 23, we follow the trail of American icons through some of the world's most incredible scenery. Montana and Wyoming: Tracking Buffalo Bill follows the famous showman through Yellowstone National Park and to the town of Cody, Wyoming, which is named for him. New Mexico: Billy the Kid Meets E.T. lets you visit a notorious real-life cowboy and the alien visitor from the film E.T. (whose space-alien relatives are said to have dropped in on Roswell, New Mexico). The Oregon Coast: California to Washington combines scenery with seafood, taking you beachcombing, kite-flying, and wine-tasting, while California's Central Coast: Malibu to Monterey explores what some people think is the most beautiful place on earth. Route 66: OK to L.A. follows the remnants of the famous road and

digs out some little-known and big-name landmarks along the way. ALCAN Trip: Seattle to Fairbanks takes you through some of the most magnificent scenery in Western Canada and into Anchorage, Alaska as a stayover location for some unforgettable day trips.

Part 6: The Part of Tens

The Part of Tens highlights campgrounds and destinations beyond the itineraries in this book. We know that after RVers get started, they soon want to travel more and more and discover new destination and attractions on their own. This part includes our choices for one of ten best out of the way, hard to find, or often overlooked destinations in every U.S. state and Canadian province. This part ends with the listing of Ten Greatest Travel Gadgets to have along on any trip to improve safety, keeping in touch, and enjoying the stays wherever they may be.

Appendix: Quick Concierge

Here find facts you need to know to complete the last details for your RV vacation, some toll-free telephone numbers and a few websites to explore. We include a list of common RV and campground terms to help with budget planning and choosing a campground.

Icons Used in This Book

In the margins of this book are helpful icons. They are intended to focus attention to certain kinds of information. Here's what the icons mean:



BARGAIN
ALERT

This icon pegs the bargains and money-saving tips for your RV vacation, from where to purchase groceries to campgrounds that represent a good value.



KID
FRIENDLY

This icon flags when something is of interest to the younger travelers.



This icon highlights information worth remembering.

REMEMBER



For hints, tips, or insider advice to make your trip run smoother, look for this icon. Although the point of a travel guide is to serve as one gigantic tip, this icon singles out nuggets of information that may be new to you.

TIP



Accompanying this icon are special warnings for RVers, whether you face a low bridge ahead or a difficult parking situation.

WARNING

Beyond the Book

There is never enough room to cover everything in a book like this. To help fill in the whole picture we render up some more tips for readying the RV for travel. For each region and outdoor environment there are some suggested precautions to follow and details to pay particular attention to. Finally, some low-tech hacks and routine items worth making into pre-travel and travel habits. To access the Cheat Sheet for this book, visit www.dummies.com, enter **RV Vacations For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box on the website, and click the link that appears in the search results.

Where to Go from Here

It's time to enjoy the freedom of the open road! How you use this guide is up to you. You can start from the beginning and read straight through, or dip into the middle and extract information of interest. Think of us as an interested, experienced guide full of helpful suggestions. The information can help you with choices for stocking up with your favorite supplies and deciding when and where to travel. With your RV as home and all the highways of North America on the other side of the windshield, you can feel like the king or queen of the road.

1

Getting Started

IN THIS PART . . .

Getting to know the many benefits of vacationing by RV

Choosing the perfect places to visit

Discovering the best season to visit each region

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Doing things your way
- » Finding something for every RVer lifestyle
- » Saving money
- » Discovering some of the bests of RVing

Chapter **1**

All the Best Reasons to Take an RV Vacation

When we discovered RVing, we couldn't believe how perfectly the experience fit our personality and desire to live a down-sized lifestyle, how comfortable and convenient it is, and how liberating it makes traveling while savoring the rewards of new experiences and meeting new people. There are many reasons why traveling and vacationing by RV is more convenient and pleasant than other methods. Perhaps as you read this book, you'll discover some of your own reasons to add to our list of the best reasons to RV anywhere or everywhere.

To help with my first RV experience, I looked for a book like this one. Because I couldn't find one, I wrote this book for you.

Counting the Reasons to RV

Freedom! If you want to sum up RV travel in one word, that's it. *Freedom*. An RV vacation carries with it a great many benefits, more than you'd get from paying years ahead to take a trip around the moon (if you have enough money) or taking a cruise down the Mississippi River. A few obvious and not-quite-so-obvious-benefits of traveling by RV are a wee bit different from those of other types of travel.

Containing costs

Some budget choices are yours, such as eating on the road versus dining in, or paying \$6 for an overnight stay at a city-run no-frills campground versus paying nearly \$100 a night at Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground. You have little control of fuel prices, however.

My current motor home is a gas-burning big-block V-8 of the highest order; it's called the Workhorse, and it's exactly that. To do its work of pulling my 36-foot Class A motor home and towed car, it delivers an average 7.1 miles per gallon on flat land. Some of the smaller four-cylinder class B and C diesel rigs hit 12 to 18 miles per gallon.



TIP

You can do a few things to economize on fuel. Keep your speed a bit below the speed limit, make sure that your tire pressures are correct, and go easy on the throttle when you're starting again from a stop.

Aside from fuel, you can control just about everything else involving your RV vacation. How far you go, how long you stay, whether to choose a state campground or luxury RV resort, and what you'll eat and drink are cost variables to a large extent. Sometimes, a hot dog and fixings can be as pleasurable an eating experience as an Angus steak-and-lobster dinner, as long as you're eating the hot dog on a nice day in one of your favorite places on the planet. Your RV vacation can take you to the places you most want to be.

Enjoying maximum convenience

When you, your traveling companions, or the children need to use the restroom in an airplane or on the train, the queue can easily get the best of you in terms of inconvenience. On the rare occasions when roadblocks occur while you're traveling in a motor home, convenience is no problem. The restroom is right there; the generator can be turned on to heat a TV dinner in the microwave or brew a cup of coffee, and the fridge is always stocked with a cold drinks and healthy snacks. Convenience is just a few steps or an arm's reach away. Frustration becomes a zero as long as everything you need is at hand.

Controlling the destination

Freedom translates to being in control of your own direction and destiny. Vacationing or living full-time in an RV delivers on the freedom promise in multiple ways. If you like out-of-the-way places, some off-the-grid public lands allow you to boondock (that is, dry-camp meaning no hookups of any kind), offering such permits at low cost. Conserving on resources such as fresh water during a four-day stay near your favorite trout stream is in the realm of possibility with an RV vacation; you and your companion have nothing to distract you from catching trophy trout. If out-of-the-way living is your thing, RVing should be your ticket there, while there, and back again. Should you prefer big-city crowds and live theater, getting there in your RV can be as easy as getting to that trout stream.

Whether you're going to the beach, a museum, or the golf course, or taking the kids to their travel-team soccer matches, there's no better way to get to your destination for the day or weekend than an RV. An RV offers comfort and convenience, and you control the route and the way points. Want to see the Cadillac Ranch on the way to Amarillo or the World's Largest Ball of Sisal Twine in Kansas? If so, your RV will let you pass by those spots on your way to where you're going. You can see all the sights you have time for along the road. You control the route, the way points, and the destinations when you travel in an RV.

Finding your rhythm on the road

RV travel can help you leave the rush-rush of the everyday world behind the minute you turn the key on. Some folks who travel in RVs consider driving 300 miles a day to be enough; others take 600 miles or more in stride. Your route, days for travel, and temperament all come into play when you get on the road. It's a good idea to know thyself when making your travel plans.

It's also good to know your travel companions' taste or tolerance for road miles before you begin your journey. Often, I break a long trip into legs that vary in distance and time. Think in terms of short, long, and medium road legs for each day on the road. You usually have enough to do the night before the journey or on the morning of departure that making the first day's ride a short one often makes sense. Planning your travel tempo can also eliminate the urge to rush.



TIP

When you're making your plan, pay attention to speed limits. Following historic U.S. 41 to Florida is probably going to take much more time than traveling Interstate 75. Always allow enough travel time to stay alert and be safe.

Having room for lug-along stuff

You have to pay attention to gross vehicle weight in an RV, and it's up to you to decide what will roll down the road with you. The only baggage handler involved is you; no tipping or extra fees are required. If you want to take along an extra little black dress for a Saturday night out or a set of golf clubs in case you get a tee time in the off hours, you can probably find places to put them in the RV.

Manufacturers pay close attention to designing to include storage space and making available some weight allowance for necessary goods and toys. Choose your take-along items wisely, and you should have room for the few extras that can enhance your vacation time.

Being close to events

Airplanes and trains get you to the event city, but the right-size RV gets you to the team's tailgate party, with all the comforts of home a few steps away. Whether you're going to a NASCAR race, an NFL football game, college sporting events, the racetrack, or a family reunion at the beach, an RV is a great way to get there and get up close while being "at home" in your own space.

If you or a companion is physically challenged, the ability to get an RV close to whatever's happening is one of many benefits of traveling to events by RV.

Bringing your pets for free

If you prefer to take your puppy on the trip because there are no decent kennels in your neighborhood, or if your cat sitter called in sick, traveling by RV means that your pets can easily go with you. If you simply can't bear to be without them, the right RV will have room for your favorite pet's travel needs.



REMEMBER

Some parks and campgrounds have pet limits and rules that prohibit aggressive dog breeds and wolf hybrids; other resorts limit how many members of your canine family can be with you. But parakeets, parrots, and other caged pets are welcome at many campgrounds. Check the leash, clean-up, and approved-pet rules before you reserve your overnight stays.

Changing your mind if you want to

Not too long ago, while traveling south on Interstate 25 south of Albuquerque on our way to the Rio Grande Valley, I stopped to have lunch at a roadside rest stop. About halfway through lunch, I decided to go to Tucson instead. Changing your mind is as easy as taking a right turn instead of a left turn at the next intersection when you're vacationing by RV. The same thing is difficult and not recommended when you're flying at 30,000 feet or traveling by train.

Keeping it clean

Sure, it can be nice to be in a five-star hotel where all the work is done for you, yet even the best hotels occasionally slip up on maintaining cleanliness to your own acceptable standards. You're the housekeeping department when you're vacationing in your RV, and the cleanliness chores are yours to perfect. Your own cleaning standards prevail, and the ecofriendly supplies are yours to choose. You know with certainty that the sheets on the bed are clean at night and there are no bedbugs to bite you or the kids.

Cleaning, meal preparation, and normal housekeeping tasks such as vacuuming, dusting, and shaking out the rugs might take an average 20 minutes a day in an RV. Maintaining your space to your high standards can make all the difference in your quality of life on the road.

Reaping the scenic rewards of driving

Seeing the USA when you break free of the expressways and taking some historical routes across the country bring to life history, geography, archeology, architecture, engineering feats, and monuments, as well as the natural beauty of whatever state, province, or nation you're traveling through. Some of those majestic sights, sounds, and smells will burn their way into your memory forever. The roar and mist of Niagara Falls (on either side of the U.S.–Canada border) or Tahquamenon Falls in upper Michigan aren't easily forgotten. Getting out of your rig and walking to the first overlook at the Grand Canyon in Arizona can make your heart skip a beat.

One of my favorite things on every drive is crossing rivers and natural divides on the engineering marvels we call bridges, first perfected by the Romans. The United States has some 600,000 highway bridges you could cross; some of them qualify as works of engineering art. Some favorite bridges crossover the Mississippi River and the many rivers along the Pacific Coast in Oregon. Another favorite is the mighty Mackinaw Bridge in upper Michigan.