

## Planning an RV trip? Here's what you need to know before you go.

By **Danielle Braff**

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RVs look like the perfect vehicle for the pandemic — you can go on vacation and still socially distance. Which may explain why RV dealers across the country are seeing a significant increase in sales, some as much as 170 percent from a similar period last year, according to the RV Industry Association, based in Reston, Va.

Rentals are even hotter: RVshare, a peer-to-peer rental website, reports a 1,600 percent surge in rentals since April, the height of the pandemic — and it has already tripled bookings from the entire year of 2019.

Because social distancing “will likely be around in some form for the foreseeable future,” said Monika Geraci, senior manager with the association, it’s comforting that recreational vehicles “allow the freedom to go where you want, when you want — but also the ability to control your environment and how you interact with other people.”

But if you buy one, be warned: You can’t just hop inside and enjoy the ride.

“RVing is a whole new experience,” said Megan Buemi, RVshare spokeswoman.

### Equipment

The first step is stocking up on essentials, said Kelly Beasley, co-founder of Camp Addict, an RV education [website](#).

Surprisingly, Beasley said, new and used RVs don’t come equipped with many necessary tools (rentals should supply everything, but check before you drive off the grounds).

Nearly 90 percent of last year’s RV sales were towable, rather than motorized. Beasley suggested that all new RV owners purchase a sewer hose, chocks (chocking involves securing the wheels when you’re at your destination so the rig doesn’t roll or move unexpectedly); a water hose (to connect your RV to a water supply at the campsite); a power cord (to connect your RV to a power supply at the campsite); refrigerator bars (to keep the contents of your fridge from spilling out); and more (she has a full list at [campaddict.com/must-have-rv-accessories](http://campaddict.com/must-have-rv-accessories)). While motor homes have a parking brake, trailers don’t — and Beasley recommends putting chocks on a motor home anyway in case the parking brake fails. If you plan on connecting a trailer to your vehicle, you’ll need a hitch, though you won’t need one on a

Backup Camera System, which typically cost between \$200 and \$500.

## Maintenance

Maintaining your RV may feel like a second job at first, but it should become less daunting once you figure out what you're doing.

“Maintenance on your RV is much like the maintenance on your personal vehicle, only supersized,” said Cindy Baker, a travel adviser with IntelTravel, part of Ensemble Travel Group, a consortium of more than 700 independent travel advisers.

Before you venture out on any long trip, you'll need to inspect your tires to make sure they have the correct amount of air to carry the weight of your load, Baker said.

It's easier than it sounds, since you can purchase a tire pressure monitoring system. Place the sensors on your tires to monitor their pressure and temperature as you drive. They warn you of changes that can lead to a dangerous blowout, said Julie Chickery, a Virginia-based RV enthusiast with a blog called Chickery's Travels.

She suggested joining an auto roadside service, as many offer plans that cover your RV and your car simultaneously.

## Driving

Once you've got everything you need, you may think you're all set — but you need to practice driving first, especially going backward.

There's a learning curve when backing up a trailer, Beasley said. Because trailers have a hitch connection point, the back of the trailer will go in the opposite direction of the back of the vehicle when you back up.

Nearly every campsite will require you to back in, so before you get on the road, find an empty parking lot to practice.

“Also, if you have a lot of RV behind your rear wheels, you have to watch out for tail swing,” Beasley said, when your back end swings out when you turn.

“Plenty of newbies have damaged property and their own RV because they didn't understand the mechanics of how their back end juts out when they make a turn,” she said.

Before you head onto the road, you need to memorize the height and weight of your RV, which is essential knowledge for going under bridges. Some roads are completely inaccessible for RVs, so it helps to use a GPS navigator specifically for RVs. You can configure it for the length, height and weight of your vehicle, said Jer Goss, Atlanta-based chief executive of Goss RV, a luxury motor coach rental company.

## Parking

When you're ready to venture out, you'll need to determine where you'll park your RV.

Many RV adventurers choose to join membership-based clubs to save money on campground nightly fees as well as other camping services, Baker said.

For example, [Escapes RV Club](#) offers between a 15 and 50 percent discount at more than 800 commercial parks throughout the United States, Mexico and Canada for \$39.95 annually. Membership also includes seven of the club's own parks throughout the United States, where RVers can stay for the short term or even on deeded lots.

Alternatively, for \$44 annually, [Passport America](#) offers discounts that are about 50 percent off, and they have more than 1,800 participating campgrounds within their network.

There are also memberships that offer free boondocking (off-grid, sans utilities) to their members at locations across the United States.

When you're researching campgrounds and memberships, be aware of the various options, Chickery said. There are very simple campgrounds that will provide a safe place to park for the night — and there are destination RV resorts with activities and swimming pools.

Once you've defined your needs, you can search for the best fit at your desired location by using apps such as [AllStays](#) and [RV Life](#). Chickery likes them because they provide user reviews of the campgrounds.

Keep in mind, however, that a discount on camping sites is only as valuable as how often you will be using that discount (the more you use it, the more you save).

## Speed

When you hit the road, you'll need to slow down. An RV is a large, heavy piece of machinery that can be dangerous if driven too quickly, Chickery said.

Towable tires aren't made to go faster than 65 miles per hour, she said. However, even with a motor home, you could make a case for driving more slowly for safety purposes.

"The faster you go, the longer the distance it takes to stop," she said. "When you add the weight of these motor homes and large towables to the equation, driving at slower speeds and allowing additional distances between vehicles will improve safety."

Plus, because RVs weigh between five and seven tons, driving is going to feel different from driving a 3,000-pound car. You'll accelerate slowly and break even more slowly, said Diane Vukovic, owner of the blog [Mom Goes Camping](#).

"You have to plan turns well in advance: It takes a while to come to a full stop in an RV, so you'll need to leave lots of room to brake," she said.

Wind can also make driving an RV tough, so if it's windy, you should go more slowly.

A common mistake for rookie RV owners is the "drive-off disaster," said Paul Johnson of Minnesota-based [North](#)

Outdoors, a website detailing outdoor activities.

This occurs when you drive away from the site without fully unhooking everything. The utilities need to be fully unhooked, and anything that could come loose while driving — such as the sewer hose — needs to be securely stowed. The windows and hatches should be shut.

“The worst part about a drive-off disaster is that you often don’t know you did it until you make your first stop, several hundred miles down the road,” Johnson said.

But at least it’ll make for some interesting Instagram pics.

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