

Chapter 1

Top Reasons to Take an RV Vacation

In This Chapter

- ▶ Doing it your way
- ▶ Finding something for every RVer
- ▶ Saving money
- ▶ Discovering some bests of RVing
- ▶ Divining your RV personality

When we first discovered RVing, we couldn't believe how perfectly the experience fit our lifestyle, how comfortable and convenient it is, and how liberating it makes travel. After less than two weeks on the road, we began plotting ways to buy and keep the motorhome we'd rented. (To be honest, we also didn't look forward to unpacking when we got home.)

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

Being Your Own Boss

Freedom! If you want to sum up RV travel in one word, that's it. You're freed from fighting the battle of airports, from arriving at hotels only to find that your reservation was lost or your room isn't ready, and from waiting an hour past your reservation time at a restaurant or tipping the host to get a better table. In your RV, you're the boss. You go where you want to go, when you want to go, and at whatever pace you please. That's *FREEDOM!*

Discovering Something for Everyone



For **families with children**, the drives include a wealth of show-and-tell and how-I-spent-my-summer-vacation material, from discovering how baseball was invented at the **National Baseball Hall of Fame** in Cooperstown, New York (Chapter 13), to seeing curious rock formations underground

at **Carlsbad Caverns National Park** in Carlsbad, New Mexico (Chapter 22), and finding out why President William McKinley always wore a red carnation at the **McKinley Museum** in Canton, Ohio (Chapter 18). Kids remember the McKinley story because they hear it from the animatronic version of the man himself. Families who want to explore beyond the drives in this book can seek out factory tours showing kids such wonders as how **Crayola crayons** and **Jelly Belly jellybeans** are made (Chapter 27).

Hikers and bikers can pinpoint state or national parks with great walking and bicycle trails. The **Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area** (Chapter 23) is just one of the many parks in that state with hiking trails that skirt the coast. Cyclists can take advantage of 45 miles of carriage roads in Maine's **Acadia National Park** (Chapter 12) or wooded roads regularly closed to traffic in **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** (Chapter 14) on the Tennessee–North Carolina border. Best of all, after a day of breaking a sweat, you can return to a comfortable RV bed instead of an air mattress on the ground.

Do you want to settle into the driver's seat and **just cruise**? We have the roads for you. Scenic highways such as the **Blue Ridge Parkway** and **Skyline Drive** (Chapter 14), **Natchez Trace** (Chapter 16), and California's **Pacific Coast Highway** (Chapter 24) were built for slow, easy driving and frequent stops to admire the view or set out a picnic. For a slice of Americana, drive what remains of old **Route 66** between Oklahoma and California (Chapter 25).

For more of **what makes America unique**, look no farther than the country's colorful icons. New Mexico brings Billy the Kid to life again along the **Billy the Kid National Scenic Byway** (Chapter 22), while **Buffalo Bill Center** in Cody, Wyoming, celebrates yet another figure from the American West (Chapter 21). From folklore and the imagination comes Minnesota's **Paul Bunyan** (Chapter 19), who pops up in living color by the side of the road in Bemidji and Akeley.

For **delicious tastes of America**, sample fresh-from-the-sea **Maine lobster** with melted butter (Chapter 12), **Texas barbecued brisket** smoky from the grill (Chapter 17), **Santa Maria barbecue** along California's Central Coast (Chapter 24), succulent **shrimp and oysters** around the Gulf Coast (Chapter 15), **Virginia country ham** on a fresh-baked biscuit (Chapter 14), or **New Mexico's spicy chile** dishes (Chapter 22).

Music lovers can tap their toes to the rich sounds of America. Enjoy authentic mountain music at the **Ozark Folk Arts Center** or pop/country music productions in **Branson** (Chapter 20), hear funky blues and soul at the **Alabama Music Hall of Fame** or visit the birthplaces of **W. C. Handy** and **Elvis Presley** (Chapter 16), and listen to rock in all its forms at Cleveland's **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum** (Chapter 18).

Good sports find great entertainment in Cooperstown's **National Baseball Hall of Fame** (Chapter 13) with its gloves, bats, and uniforms from famous players; the **Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Museum** (Chapter 16),

where you can make like a sports announcer and tape your own play-by-play commentary; and the **United States Hockey Hall of Fame** (Chapter 19) where you can take shots at an electronic goalie.

Ten Ways to Save Money in a Campground

1. **Never pay for more park than you'll use.** Posh playgrounds with swimming pools, spas, tennis courts, and miniature golf are usually pricier than simple, clean, mom-and-pop campgrounds. The latter are adequate for an overnight stay. If there is a charge per hookup, take the electric and water hookup and forgo the sewer unless you really need it.
2. **Remember, you can camp without hookups comfortably for several nights** as long as you don't insist on using the RV air conditioner, or microwave, which will require an electrical hookup. Read a book or listen to a tape or CD for entertainment, and cook on your gas cooktop or outdoors on a grill. You'll still have running water, lights, refrigeration, heat, and hot water for dishes and shower.
3. **If you're on a tight budget, watch out for campground surcharges** such as extra fees for running your air conditioner or hooking up to cable TV, a surcharge for 50-amp electricity, or "extra person" charges for more than two people when you're traveling with your kids. Some of the campgrounds that accept pets may also levy a fee on Fido's head.
4. **Join membership clubs that offer a discount to member campgrounds**, such as **KOA** (Kampgrounds of America) and **Good Sam** which usually discount 10 percent. KOA promises the discount whether you pay by cash or credit card; some Good Sam campgrounds usually grant the discount only if you pay cash. In most cases, you can join up right at the campground when you register.
5. **Take advantage of age.** If one of you is over 62 and applies for a free **Golden Age Passport** with proof of age at a national park visitor center, your vehicle enters the park, national monument, recreation area, or wildlife refuge free, and you get a 50 percent discount on overnight camping areas administered by the federal government.
6. **Look for free campgrounds**, such as those in the southwestern desert, administered by the Bureau of Land Management.
7. **Invest in a current campground guide** (such as *Frommer's Best RV and Tent Campgrounds in the U.S.A.*) or request a state tourism office's free campground listing. County, city, and national forest campgrounds range from free to considerably less expensive than most privately owned campgrounds, although they do not often offer the luxury of hookups.
8. **If you arrive late at a campground, ask about staying overnight self-contained in an overflow area at a reduced price.** Some owners are amenable, some are not.

9. **Stay longer than a week and you can negotiate discounts**, usually from 10 percent to 20 percent or more, depending on the season and length of stay.
10. **Consider volunteering as a campground host** if you're interested in staying a long time in one area. You can camp free and may pick up a bit of pocket change for performing specified duties on the premises. (See "Becoming a Campground Host" next.)

Becoming a campground host

Energetic retirees and full-timers on a budget can camp free and sometimes pick up a little extra income by becoming campground hosts. You find hosts in many campgrounds, both public and privately owned; they double as troubleshooters when the office is closed or the rangers are off duty. They're usually camped in a conspicuous spot near the entrance with a sign indicating that they're your hosts.



In theory, being a campground host is a great idea — you live in your RV in a lovely campground with free hookups, maybe even with your choice of sites. In practice, however, veterans of the job seem to either love it or hate it. Some mutter darkly of being treated like migrant labor, while others describe the experience as a highlight of their lives. Much depends on how thoroughly you check out the campground and its management ahead of time and how realistic you are about doing hard and sometimes unpleasant chores, such as cleaning toilets and showers or telling noisy campers to turn down their music.

If you already have a **specific campground** in mind, contact them with a resume that includes personal and business references; you may also be asked for a recent photo. Many campgrounds prefer a couple to a single host, or require a single person to work 30 to 40 hours a week as compared to the 15 or 20 hours a couple would work.

If you want to volunteer in a **national park or forest service campground**, contact the National Forest Service or the National Parks Service. (See the Appendix for addresses.)

Good Sam Club members can apply through that organization to work as hosts in Good Sam member campgrounds, which require a 60-day minimum stay. In contacting Good Sam, tell them the size and type of your RV; the first, second, and third choice of the states where you'd like to be; and the months you're available for work. (See Chapter 5 for contact information.)



If you get a positive response, before making a commitment, ask the campground manager for references so you can interview people who previously worked for them.

Best New England lobster spots

Nunan's Lobster Hut, Cape Porpoise, Maine. At Nunan's, the crustaceans are steamed to order in a little water rather than boiled in a lot. A bag of potato chips and a hard roll with butter fill out the dinner tray. Finish off with a slice of homemade apple or blueberry pie. It's located at 11 Mills Rd., and is open evenings from 5 p.m. No reservations or credit cards (☎ 207/967-4362).

Beal's Lobster Pier, Southwest Harbor, Maine. Beal's serves soft-shelled lobster, steamer clams, corn on the cob, and onion rings. You sit at picnic tables at the end of the pier and feast. Located at the end of Clark Point Road (☎ 207/244-3202).

Lobsterman's Co-op, Boothbay Harbor, Maine. On Atlantic Avenue, near the aquarium, you'll find a wooden pier with outdoor picnic tables and a choice of hard-shell or soft-shell lobster (defined on a hand-printed sign as SOFT SHELL = LESS MEAT, SWEETER TASTE). To that definition, we can add "easier to crack open." While fat gulls perched on the rail look on, you can devour lobsters with melted butter, a bag of potato chips, corn on the cob, onion rings, steamed or fried clams, and jug wine by the glass or pitcher. Open mid-May to Columbus Day, lunch and dinner (☎ 207/633-4900).

The Gloucester House, Gloucester, Massachusetts. At the Gloucester House, waitresses call you "dearie" and serve an inexpensive assembly line clambake with lobster, clam chowder, corn on the cob, and watermelon at long wooden tables out back. Located on Rogers Street (☎ 978/283-1812).

Harraseeket Lunch & Lobster Company, South Freeport, Maine. Harraseeket is at a pier on the harbor, and the town won't let RVs access the quarter-mile residential street down to the pier. If you really want a lobster, park along South Freeport Road, send one member of the party to walk to the lobster company while the other stays with the RV in case you need to move. Go around back at the lobster company, place your order, and take a number. About 20 minutes later, you'll have your freshly cooked crustaceans. If you have a legal parking space, you can both walk down and eat on the premises, if you can find a seat. Open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (☎ 207/865-3535).

Abbott's Lobster in the Rough, Noank, Connecticut. Abbott's serves fresh boiled lobster with coleslaw and its own label potato chips at outdoor picnic tables by the water. You can get clams on the half shell or in chowder or a lobster roll, if you'd rather. Weekdays are less crowded, and there is adequate RV parking. Located at 117 Pearl St. in Noank (just south of Mystic on Route 217; ☎ 860/536-7719).

The Lobster Shack, Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The Lobster Shack occupies an incomparable setting by the sea at the end of Two Lights Road by the lighthouse in Cape Elizabeth. A local landmark, it encourages you to “come as you are” and offers “eat in or take-out” service. You can also choose between eating indoors or at picnic tables above the rocks at seaside. Open daily from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. from April through mid-October (☎ 207/799-1677).

Mabel’s Lobster Claw, Kennebunkport, Maine. Mabel’s, at 124 Ocean Ave., where George and Barbara Bush indulge in the peanut butter ice-cream pie, has soft-shell lobster in season (July–Sept) and lovely lobster rolls to eat in or take out (☎ 207/967-2562).

The Lobster Pot, Provincetown, Cape Cod. This funky but pricey restaurant in a two-story clapboard house serves classic clam chowder along with local clambake dinners, and has take-out chowder and lobster. You can sit inside or out on an open deck on the upper level, called Top of the Pot, but you can’t drive or park an RV in P-town. Located at 321 Commercial St. (☎ 508/487-0842).

Prince Edward Island’s Famous Lobster Suppers, Prince Edward Island. All summer long the island holds lobster suppers as fundraisers, special events, or daily occurrences. Watch for the signs as you walk, bike, or drive around. St. Ann’s Church in Hope River, for instance, has served them every summer for 35 years daily except Sunday from 4 to 8:30 p.m. (☎ 902/621-0635). New Glasgow Lobster Suppers serves from its own pound on Route 258, 10 minutes southeast of Cavendish; open daily from 4 to 8:30 p.m. It’s \$27.95 for a lobster dinner (☎ 902/964-2870). Check the Web site at <http://peilobstersuppers.com> for more information.

Best campgrounds around the USA

Disney’s Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground has 694 full hookups close to the Disney World action with transportation to the park. The bay lake offers boating and fishing, or you can golf or relax in the pool. (Lake Buena Vista, FL; ☎ 407/939-2267.)

The Great Outdoors RV, Nature & Golf Resort offers 150 full hookups, a lake for fishing, a spa, an 18-hole golf course, tennis courts, and a heated pool. (Titusville, FL; ☎ 800/621-2267.)

Traverse Bay RV Resort has 130 extra-wide, paved sites with patios and full hookups. The park is restricted to motorhomes and fifth-wheels that are 24 feet or longer and not older than 10 years. (Acme, MI; ☎ 231/938-5800.)

Petosky KOA & Cabin Resort provides 145 full hookups; wide, paved sites and patios; and a heated pool. (Petoskey, MI; ☎ 800/933-1574.)

Outdoor Resorts Palm Springs RV Country Club is a luxurious resort with permanent sites; some are available for rentals. Lush atmosphere with a spa, heated pool, and a minigolf course. (Cathedral City, CA; ☎ 760/324-4005.)

Havens Landing RV Resort is a Good Sam Park with 239 full hookups, handicap access, wireless Internet access, a stocked fishing lake, tennis courts, and the “Dawg House” for Coneys and burgers. (Montgomery, TX; ☎ 866/496-6370.)

Harbortown RV Resort has 250 paved sites; 130 of them are full hookups. They also have an 18-hole golf course; fishing; and a kids’ fun center with minigolf, an arcade, go karts, and batting cages that augment the heated pool. (Monroe, MI; ☎ 734/384-4700.)

Kiesler’s Campground and RV Resort features 200 wide sites; only 80 are full hookups, but there is a 2,000-square-foot pool with a 48-foot water slide, minigolf, and wireless Internet access. (Waseca, MN; ☎ 507/835-3179.)

Prizer Point Marina & Resort is surrounded on three sides by Lake Barkley and 72 acres of woods. There are only 50 sites, 39 of them have full hookups — means less crowds. Rates under \$30. (Cadiz, KY; ☎ 800/548-2048.)

AAA Midway RV Park is three blocks from the ocean, convenient to town, and has 59 full hookups, wireless Internet, and easy access to great seafood restaurants and markets. (Coos Bay, OR; ☎ 541/888-9300.)

Best museum visits

Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, ME: This complex of three buildings consists of the Farnsworth Art Museum and the Wyeth Center in town, as well as the Olson House (celebrated in Andrew Wyeth’s painting *Christina’s World*) in the nearby countryside. See Chapter 12.

National Baseball Hall of Fame, Cooperstown, NY: Baseball fans can spend several days perusing artifacts from Ty Cobb’s sliding pads to bats used by Mickey Mantle and Mark McGwire. See Chapter 13.

Biltmore Estate, Asheville, NC: This is a pricey museum but worth the expenditure. The massive 250-room Biltmore mansion and gardens gives an extensive picture of how the other half once lived. See Chapter 14.

Alabama Music Hall of Fame, Tuscumbia, AL: Although the museum only contains the work of musicians who were born or lived in Alabama, the list is extensive, including Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington, Lionel Richie, Toni Tennille, and many others. It’s a seeing and listening museum. See Chapter 16.

Admiral Nimitz Museum and Museum of the Pacific, Fredericksburg, TX: The most extensive coverage of the World War II battles in the Pacific is located in the restored Nimitz Steamboat Hotel and Gardens. See Chapter 17.

Museum Center at Union Terminal, Cincinnati, OH: The restored 1933 Art Deco railway station has become home to three excellent museums: the Cincinnati History Museum, Museum of Natural History, and a hands-on Children's Museum. See Chapter 18.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, Cleveland, OH: A modern glass building designed by I. M. Pei houses a huge collection of artifacts such as life-size mannequins of John Lennon, Alice Cooper, and Michael Jackson plus many of their instruments. See Chapter 18.

Ozark Folk Arts Center, Mountain View, AR: The center was created in 1973 to preserve the music, dance, handicrafts, and folkways of the Ozarks. You can wander among artisans and craftsmen at work and eat some down-home Ozark food. See Chapter 20.

Buffalo Bill Center, Cody, WY: Five world-class museums are set in a sprawling complex containing the Buffalo Bill Museum, the Plains Indian Museum, the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Cody Firearms Museum, and the Draper Museum of Natural History. One can easily spend an entire day or more here. See Chapter 21.

Hearst Castle, San Simeon, CA: Built over the years from 1919 to 1947, the building was never finished. Four different tours are offered covering the interior and exterior of "The Ranch." See Chapter 24.

Best national parks along the way

Acadia National Park, ME: This park has a 27-mile Park Loop Road which makes a circle out of Bar Harbor and gives a good overview of the gardens, beaches, cliffs, and Cadillac Mountain. See Chapter 12.

Shenandoah National Park, VA: Skyline Drive begins in this park and heads south into the Blue Ridge Parkway. Three RV campgrounds are located within the park. See Chapter 14.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, NC & TN: Located at the end of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the park has an 11-mile, one-way, loop road off Newfound Gap Road that is a must see. See Chapter 14.

Vicksburg National Military Park, MS: This is the site of one of the most decisive battles of the Civil War. A 16-mile auto tour runs through the park and its monuments. See Chapter 16.

Lyndon B. Johnson National Park, TX: The park is divided into two parts with the visitor center located in Stonewall. This is the only way you can enter the ranch. See Chapter 17.

Ten personalities ideal for RVing

So is RVing for you? See whether you fit any of these personality types:

Garbo Gourmets: Alone together luxuriating in the best that life can offer, these epicures carry their own wines and food, sleep in their own beds, and select their own surroundings by serendipity.

Sportsmen: Skiers, fishermen, surfers, golfers, and mountain bikers get into the heart of the action with all the comforts of home.

Weekenders: The stressed-out get out of the rat race and into the countryside to delete the pressures of the workweek from their hard drives.

Families on Vacation: Offsetting the pricey amusement park, these families think of their motorhome as their own budget hotel and round-the-clock self-serve restaurant. For the kids, RVing means no more “Are we there yet?” or “I have to go potty!” or “I’m hungry!” Everything is here.

Eco-Tourists: Getting back to nature the easy way, eco-tourists bird-watch at dawn and spot wildlife during twilight. Photography and hiking lay fewer burdens on Mother Earth than heavy hotel and resort infrastructures.

The Ultimate Shoppers: Hitting all the antiques shops, estate sales, and the world’s biggest swap meets, shoppers enjoy comfort and style with room to take home all the treasures easily in the RV.

Pet Lovers: Taking Fifi and Fido along for the ride and enjoying their company, animal lovers avoid facing rebellious and destructive pets after a spell of boarding them in a kennel.

Disabled Travelers: A customized RV can open up the world with familiar and accessible surroundings.

Special-Events Attendees: Tailgating for a football game or hitting a jazz or arts festival on the spur of the moment, RVing fans sidestep overbooked hotels and restaurants and invite friends in for a meal.

Relatives: Visiting family and friends, RVers can take along their own bed and bathroom. When parked at home, RVs provide an extra guest room with a bathroom.

Yellowstone National Park, WY: With an abundance of attractions from Old Faithful to bubbling hot springs, this national park can have problems from overcrowding and poorly maintained roads, but it is worth the frustrations. See Chapter 21.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park: A variety of caverns offer exciting and colorful underground tours. Join the evening crowd to see the Bat Flight of 300,000 bats soaring out of the cave for their evening meal. See Chapter 22.

Grand Canyon National Park, AZ: This spectacular attraction can be crowded in summer; a good way to visit is to take the Grand Canyon Railway for a round-trip train ride out of Williams, Arizona. See Chapter 25.

Petrified Forest National Park and Painted Desert, AZ: Stop in the visitor center at the entrance to the Petrified Forest to get a map and then take the loop road through both areas. See Chapter 25.