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## Vintage trailers on display in Joshua Tree, Calif

April 27, 2016

JOSHUA TREE — From the gold upholstery covering the booths for their dining table to the bubbled white milk glass for the light above a canary-yellow sink, Larrie and Lynn Follstad are living in the past, at least when they go camping.

The Follstads, whose permanent home is in Yucca Valley are vintage trailer enthusiasts — although “enthusiast” might be too mild a term.

“It’s an addiction,” Lynn said. “It doesn’t go away, it gets worse.”

The two already owned “six or eight” vintage trailers before they bought the 1962 KenCraft that Lynn was offering tours of on April 9, when they hosted a vintage trailer gathering at the Joshua Tree Sportsman’s Club.

Gleaming silver in the sunlight, the trailer is furnished with the original fabric, flooring and lights. “We have this love for keeping these trailers alive,” Lynn said.

Running a vehicle that rolled out of the factory when John F. Kennedy was president isn’t easy, but for the Follstads and their friends, the extra work is worth it.

“You have to search far and wide for the parts,” Lynn Follstad said. “It’s nothing to go 2,000 miles away for something.”

Nearby, Sandra Davis and husband Roger Littell were camping in their 1955 Aljoa. It’s a “canned ham” — a design named for its similarity to the famous Hormel container. The original turquoise and white colors outside give way to an exterior of pink furnishings and the original wood paneling.

“I love the old trailers,” Davis said. “I love the workmanship in them. There’s nothing like them.” She also loves the people in the vintage trailer community, and she’s not alone. The campers have created their own little world at their rallies and campouts — an idealized midcentury paradise where neighbors amble over at sunset to share a beer and a campfire and every

stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet.

It isn't the real 1955. Davis keeps a laminated sheet of paper in her trailer with facts about the year her trailer was born. Disneyland opened. A bottle of Coke cost 10 cents at the new McDonald's restaurants. But there's another fact on Davis' sheet that doesn't seem to belong in this pink and aqua world: On Aug. 28, 1955, Emmett Louis Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy, was beaten and then shot by two white men who claimed he had talked disrespectfully to a white woman. Roy Bryant and John Milam stripped Till's body, tied a heavy fan to his neck with barbed wire and pushed his body into the Tallahatchie River. A jury acquitted them of murder, and the next year, they got thousands of dollars from Look magazine for interviews in which they admitted everything.

That isn't the world recreated by the vintage trailer community. Theirs is the midcentury America of "Happy Days," a nostalgic look back and a mutual commitment to create a better community.

"The people are so friendly," Davis said. "Usually on Saturdays, everybody opens the doors to their trailers and that means 'Come in.'"

"I think for a lot of us, it goes back to our values," said Joe Duprey, of Downey, camping in a 1970 Aristocrat Lowliner with his wife, Karen, and their dog, Marley. "I can trust these people. If someone needs a hand, you give it to them.

"It's kind of what America was built on."

He called the group an adopted family, and it's one that extends across the country. Steve and Cathy Zetterlund, camping out of their 1959 Ideal, remember breaking down on a highway during one trip. So many other vintage trailer drivers stopped to help, the CHP had to break it up because they were creating a road hazard.

In this particular branch of the family, Bob and Cindy Ross are respected elders, not because of their age, but because of their history. Several of the vehicles set up at the Sportsman's Club in April were brokered by the Rosses, who found old, neglected trailers and restored them for several years.

Their life in vintage trailers started when Cindy was working as an animal control officer in Redlands. One afternoon while chasing down a stray dog, she spotted a teardrop trailer parked in a yard. Intrigued, she left a note for the owner and the Rosses were later able to buy the camper.

That was the first one. She later found another teardrop, again while chasing a dog, and bought it. She couldn't resist.

"They're just so dang cute," Cindy said.

Then she bought a bigger trailer she found languishing in a field. "I fell in love with that," she said.

"I think of them as little dollhouses," Cindy said. "It's like a kid playing with dollhouses. You can decorate it and make it how you like."

A few years ago, Cindy had a stroke, ending their life of constant hunting, buying and restoring. They're still important members of the community, though, and at the Sportsman's Club campout, their 1952 Kozy Coach, painted green and dubbed the Pickle, was a focal point of visits from longtime acquaintances and new friends. They all have one thing in common, Cindy said. "If you like vintage trailers, I like you."

She is adamant about what vintage trailer people are like: "Best people in the whole wide world." It's not hyperbole — for her, it's simple fact. "Any one of these people would bend over backward for you." And the Rosses are no different.

"There's people here I've never met before," she said, "but they're friends now and they always will be."

# OPINION: Overweight RVs are an industry issue

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about overweight RVs. Most of the talk centers around RVers cramming too much stuff in their units and exceeding the vehicle's weight rating.

Groups like Escapees Club and FMCA offer the opportunity to have RVs weighed at many events, and most who do have their RVs weighed are surprised at the results.

But, overweight RVs are not entirely the consumers fault. The RV industry shares much of the blame. I recall reading a blog a year or two ago where the writer noted their motorhome was designed to carry everything but people.

I can't put my finger on the post now, but the bottom line was that after weight for fuel, LP gas and fresh water was added into the mix, the family had just 400 pounds available for clothes, dishes — and people.

A few weeks ago, I was approached by Kimberly Travaglino, who is the founder of the nearly 1,150-member Fulltime Families group. She was very concerned about her Heartland fifth wheel after learning some interesting information about the unit.

The fifth wheel is officially rated to hold 18,000 pounds, according to the labels affixed to her RV. However, she has since discovered:

- Each of her three axles are rated for just 5,200 pounds — for a total weight carrying capacity of 15,600 pounds.
- Furthermore, the leaf springs on her toy hauler are rated to carry just 12,000 pounds.

She was rightfully concerned that even if her family was diligent to keep the weight of the entire fifth wheel to just 18,000 pounds — the maximum weight rating — her family was exerting more pressure on the axles and springs than they were designed to bear.

She asked what, if anything, could be done to shore up the structure. I immediately recommended MORryde because their staff has told me in the past they were the experts in RV suspensions, and their website boasts of that claim as well:

“At MORryde, we think of your RV as a house on wheels — one that needs a solid foundation to withstand the rigors of the road. For nearly 50 years, we've been delivering suspensions systems that protect this foundation. Considered the expert in suspension systems, we offer a variety of solutions, for every budget.”

Which is why Kimberly and I are both surprised the company would not even offer the courtesy of a response when we both sought confirmation that MORryde had products to help people in situations like this.

Assuming that this is a very common problem in the industry, I even offered to do a story in RV Daily Report and Let's RV on how effective the products were in addressing Kimberly's weight issue. Crickets — no response at all.

While Kimberly and I were in the process of trying to find a solution to her weight issue, the family moved their RV from Cocoa Beach back down to Delray, Fla. They made it exactly one exit down Interstate 95 when her husband, Chris, spotted white smoke billowing out of the driver's side wheel compartment.

By the time he pulled over, flames were shooting out from the rear wheels, and burning perilously close to the toy hauler's fuel tank.

Because they had been trained by Mac the Fire Guy to have fire extinguishers at each RV exit and in the tow vehicle, Chris was able to suppress the fire with a whole can of extinguisher foam.

The vehicle was towed to a service center where the Travaglinos were told the axle bearings had locked up on the driver's side rear tire. They are left to believe that this whole situation was caused because the fifth wheel toy hauler was rated for a certain capacity — which is why they bought it — but built with components that could not bear that much weight.

Kimberly is, perhaps, one of the RV industry's greatest cheerleaders. Besides her own organization, her Facebook group has nearly 10,000 members. She is responsible for hundreds of people buying new RVs each year, if not for full-time living, then at least so families can experience many of the things her group does on a part-time basis.

However, she is constantly listening to horror stories from RV owners about defective products they bought. The problem has increased in recent years, she told me. She has been at her current campground for only a few days, and three of her neighbors have complained about product quality. One can point to the RV roof peeling away and exposing lumber on a two-week-old travel trailer.

"I think the recession forced several high-quality RV manufacturers with commendable reputations out of business because they couldn't compete against companies who build and sell RVs that are, for all intent and purpose, designed to be bought and stored," Kimberly told me.

If anyone in the industry has a solution to the problem of overrated RV weights, and what can be done to help people who bought these RVs shore up their systems, Kimberly and I would welcome more information. Perhaps an RV dealer has jerry-rigged a solution that could be shared with others?

## 5 Road-Tested Tips From an RV Rookie

A few things might wake you up in the middle of the night the first time you climb under the covers inside an RV. Fearing that you forgot to engage the parking brake and are in danger of rolling down the hill to your death, for one. (You did, and you are.) Thinking someone left the light on in the bathroom and wondering whether that will drain the RV's battery by morning. (They did, but it didn't.) Hearing campers breaking the sacred "quiet after 9 p.m." rule and imagining they'll get busted. (They did.) Wondering if the bacon and eggs you bought for tomorrow morning's breakfast are now, effectively, toast, because you'd been told that the fridge will mysteriously stop working if the RV is parked on even the slightest incline. (They are.)

Funny, I'd spent half my life dreaming about setting off in an RV for parts unknown and maintaining perfectly level appliances never once figured into the fantasy. To me, RVing was simply the ultimate escape route. Maybe that's because my early family vacations revolved around campgrounds and car trips. Or maybe because buying an RV is the landlocked states' version of saving up for a sailboat. It's a vacation home wherever you want it, whenever you want it. It's freedom and security in equal measure. It's Lewis and Clark with a V-8 engine.

Still, in the weeks leading to my maiden RV voyage, my anxiety was rising almost as fast as gasoline prices. The sheer size of the vehicle—and the fact that it would be filled with cutlery and combustible fuels—grew scarier by the minute. To quell the panic, I studied online forums for RV enthusiasts, campground-review sites, and the orientation video on the RV-rental website (twice). And I brought backup: Lindsay and Lola, a couple of friends I've known since college who have a generous way of seeing disasters as adventures. They tried to distract me by focusing on our packing priorities: hiking gear vs. lawn games, SPF 15 or 30. Not that it helped.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #1: "Use an RV-specific route planner on a GPS. It'll factor in overhead clearance and other restrictions, such as which roads, bridges, and tunnels won't allow propane tanks through." —Richard Coon, President, Recreational Vehicle Industry Association**

And yet, when we arrived at the **Cruise America** rental lot in Durham, N.C., I started to calm down, in part because a petite 20-something gal handed me the keys, and I figured that if she could pilot a big rig, then maybe I could, too. We got a few simple pointers from the RV folks: Pull far into intersections before making a turn. Leave lots of room for braking. Always use a spotter when you back up. Drive-through restaurants are just not worth the risk. We learned when to use battery power, propane, shoreline electricity, and our generator; how to restart a dead battery; the necessity of turning off the propane tank before refueling; how to heat water for showers and how to tell when the water supply is nearly depleted; and how to level out the rig with a pair of two-by-four boards if our campsite is on a slant. And we learned the finer points of emptying the holding tanks—a polite way of saying draining the toilet—a task that quickly supplanted merging onto the highway as my most dreaded challenge. "Once you get the hose screwed on—and make sure you screw it on really tight—then open the valves and walk away," said Tommy, our orientation instructor. "Or run. I've gotten wet feet more times than I like to recall." The girls and I made a pact to use the campgrounds' rest areas whenever possible and added latex gloves to the top of our shopping list. Then we took a few trial spins around the parking lot, and with Lindsay in the navigator's seat and Lola on loose-objects duty in the back, we headed into the great wide open.

First came the rattle. With every bump in the road, each cup, dish, and saucepan in our kitchen cabinets shuddered like a beat-up shopping cart being pushed down a gravel road. (I learned later that putting paper towels between the plates helps immensely.) Then came the thuds. Turn left, and one set of drawers would slide open with a thwack. Turn right, and another drawer would do the same. We were already learning that RV trips are all-hands-on-deck endeavors. In addition to navigating, Lindsay was my second set of eyes for lane changes and would become my second-in-command for ticking off setup and breakdown duties. Lola wrangled drawers and cabinets, stood lookout at the rear window for minor back-up missions, and became galley chef for the length of the trip. "This is like a ropes course," Lindsay said after our first refueling stop, with its propane-off, propane-on, secure-all-items drill. "Maybe we should do some trust falls at the beach."

Six hours, three pit stops, and one possible bird collision (none of us wanted to check the grille for confirmation) later, we arrived at **Frisco Campground**, one of four in the area run by the National Park Service. We had just enough time to practice back-in parking before nightfall. That's when I realized my first RV mistake: Anywhere we wanted to go, we'd have to take the RV, repositioning it each time we returned. (The pros either bring bikes or tow a regular car—often referred to as a dinghy—behind the RV.) So we strapped ourselves back in to fetch dinner in Hatteras Village, five miles away, and performed the parking routine again an hour later—this time in the dark, with the girls wielding flashlights like traffic batons.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #2: "We try to bring or rent bicycles to visit nearby areas while camping. It beats packing up the RV to move it to a trailhead for hiking, only to find out there is no room to park a larger vehicle! Many times, you can access a 'bikes only' trail or (at the Grand Canyon, for example) trails for shuttle buses and bikes only." —Debby Schlesinger, BT reader, Grenada Hills, Calif.**

To celebrate—not just the parking but surviving the first day—we split a bottle of convenience-store wine around the RV's dinette, the only spot where all three of us could sit facing each other. "I've had worse apartments than this," I said, looking around. "Definitely worse kitchens." The furnishings were surprisingly modern—navy fabric upholstery and matching window coverings, new-looking appliances and cabinets. And even though I assumed we'd overpacked, there was plenty of unused storage space in the RV's dozen cabinets. More impressive to me was the fact that I could walk around the whole cabin standing at full height, without crouching or hitting my head on anything. That was, until bedtime. I called the bunk over the cab—possibly an unconscious compulsion to stay near the driver's seat. Maneuvering my limbs into the crawl-space-size cubby guaranteed a bumped elbow, knee, or forehead with every entrance and exit. The girls shared the double bed in back, since converting the dinette to a third bed would have required clearing the piles of maps, snack-food containers, and bug repellent cans that had already accumulated on the tabletop. Calling out our good nights and cracking jokes in the dark, it was the closest thing to an adult sleepover I could imagine—more intimate than sharing a hotel room, and sillier, too.

Seeing the Frisco campground in daylight—just after sunrise, in fact, thanks to the chatter of the campground's early risers—provided a fresh perspective after that fitful first night's sleep. Orchestrating our morning routines was easier than I'd thought. The toilet and the shower—one of those flimsy jobs with a handheld sprayer that tumbles readily from its mount—were bundled in one closet-size room, about four feet by four feet, tops. (Its door was inches away

from where Lindsay and Lola slept, another reason to make sparing use of its facilities.) Still, the teensy bathroom sink was just outside the shower/toilet stall; at the slightly larger kitchen sink a few feet away, two people could brush their teeth simultaneously.

Lindsay was the first one out, conferring with the park ranger and plotting the day's activities (hit the beach, visit a lighthouse, find lunch). The ocean's proximity redeemed the transportation issue. After all, who needs a car when you can walk to the beach? The geography of the Outer Banks—a 130-mile stretch of narrow barrier islands, less than a mile wide for much of its length—was the primary reason I'd chosen this spot for my trial run. There are 20-plus campgrounds along the strip, none much more than a mile away from the Atlantic Ocean or Pamlico Sound. At Frisco, \$20 a night buys you peace, quiet, and your own little slice of unlandscaped beachfront real estate. What that \$20 doesn't buy you: heated campground showers or any way to charge a cell phone. Hence, one night would be our limit.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #3: "If you're exhausted and not near a campground, Walmart stores sometimes allow campers to use their parking lots. Just check to make sure there's not a no overnight parking sign, and choose a spot near one of the lot's outer edges." —Kevin Broom, Director of Media Relations, Recreational Vehicle Industry Association**

The 30 miles of road between Frisco and Rodanthe, where we'd camp next, passes through a series of near-identical hamlets with dreamy names: Avon, Salvo, Waves. The longer we drove, the less I worried about all the folks in my rearview mirror who clearly wanted to pass me on the two-lane highway. Rolling down the windows and turning on the radio helped distract me. So did focusing on our next stop, an oasis where water and electricity flow freely and quiet hours don't start until a wild-and-crazy 10 p.m.

As much as I'd been obsessing about life inside an RV, pulling into the **Cape Hatteras KOA** was a revelation. Here, everyone was living *outside* their vehicles. All around us, colorful awnings, canvas camp chairs, outdoor carpets, wind chimes, string lights shaped like Airstream trailers, plastic gingham tablecloths, tiki torches, and dream catchers marked off each site's would-be front lawn. We envied our neighbors, a retired duo from Farmville, N.C., for their old-school, beige-striped Winnebago (our RV was plastered with rental ads) and simple setup: an AstroTurf swatch just big enough for their two folding chairs and a small table.

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #4: "If you're staying parked in one spot for a while, run the RV engine for a few minutes each day to recharge the battery." —Tommy Summey, Cruise America rental agent, Hillsborough, N.C.**

We'd brought nothing—and I mean nothing—to make the outside of our RV feel like home. Alas, the homiest thing we could muster was to try out the RV kitchen. "Grilled cheese sandwiches, everybody?" Lola asked. With no real counter space, she spread plates across the stovetop to prep the ingredients, then shifted the plates to a little sliver of awkward space behind the sink. As the stove (and, soon after, the RV) heated up, she had a change of heart. "Cold cheese sandwiches, everybody?" she asked. The plan abandoned, we carried our sandwiches out to the nearest picnic table. And never turned on the stove again.

Having a place to spread out is crucial—especially when you've crammed a family of four or five into a usable living space the size of a large toolshed. But it would also be a shame to stay inside; an RV park is a voyeur's paradise—people watching at its most reciprocal. Several times, I passed a man with a white ponytail sitting shirtless outside his RV, shelling peas. He asked how I was doing, and when I replied in kind, he said, "I'm just making do, trying to enjoy myself...it's not too difficult." He didn't need to wink—but I think he did anyway. Our favorite acquaintance at the camp was Kilo, a nervous but friendly tan-and-white Chihuahua that accompanied John, a KOA staffer, on all his rounds—showing new arrivals to their sites and helping campers set up. (The explanation for his name? "He's from Mexico." Roger that.)

Judging from all the group activities at the campground, it's safe to say that RVers are very social. Even those campers who'd rather spend their afternoons at the beach—as we did, most days—have ample opportunity for mingling after sundown. One evening, we caught the opening number at karaoke night—Cee Lo Green's expletive-free radio hit "Forget You," performed by a teenage staffer; the next, we watched an outdoor screening of *Kung Fu Panda*. We even organized some social events of our own, enlisting a couple of 30-something Texan guys to help us start a fire to make s'mores. Another snafu: not knowing the proper way to extinguish a fire when you're done with dessert. We poured panfuls of water from our kitchen

onto the flames, sending out smoke signals to the whole campground that we were clueless.

By the last day, we'd had more than our share of screwups, most easy enough to laugh off. But there was one RV task I really couldn't afford to botch. It was time for the Holding Tank. Lindsay followed me outside to offer moral support—and to remind me to run. Fortunately, I didn't get my feet wet, though I did leave a small trail of blue chemicals between our site's dump station and the RV (and hoped no one would notice).

- **ROAD-TESTED TIP #5:** *"Be sure to get a tutorial on how to empty the holding tanks. One time, we forgot to add chemicals to the black-water tank after emptying it—the smell was terrible, and we quickly learned our lesson."* — Laurie Huhndorf, BT reader, San Antonio

The payoff for that 5 a.m. waste disposal came when we finally hit the empty road pointing north toward Nags Head, the sky slowly brightening with each mile. The only other travelers out were sea birds and jackrabbits, and I'd long since stopped fretting over every lane change, left turn, or loose kitchen drawer rattling with dishes. Even shutting off the propane at our last gas-station stop was second nature. Finally, just as we were leaving, I was getting the hang of it. Next time, I may even get up the nerve to grill a cheese sandwich or two.

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## 10 Summer RV Vacations for Retirees

Shake things up and find a new favorite vacation spot with these suggestions from RV travel experts.

"RVers are creatures of habit," says Jennifer Schwartz, vice president of marketing for the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds. "They go back to the same place every year."

However, with so many great vacation spots, there's no reason not to explore new stomping grounds this year. U.S. News talked to three RV travel experts to get their take on where you should travel in your RV this summer.

**Alaska.** The Land of the Midnight Sun is one of Schwartz's top picks for a summer RV getaway.

“We get a lot of people from Arizona who travel to Alaska,” she says. “It’s a great RV destination because highways are in better shape, and [the state] has a different temperature and landscape.”

From whale watching to glacier tours, Alaska offers a number of activities that simply can’t be done in most of the lower 48 states. Vacationers can also stop in Anchorage for museums and art or head out on the open road for scenic drives and unique travel experiences. For Schwartz, the highlight of her Alaskan vacation was staying at an RV park in Valdez that had, hands-down, the most breathtaking view she’s ever seen.

**Yosemite National Park.** “National parks are always very popular,” says Toby O’Rourke, senior vice president of marketing for Kampgrounds of America. “We see a lot of RV business around them.”

And among national parks, none may be as well-known as Yosemite National Park in California. “[It’s] one of the most popular destinations for campers and RVers alike,” notes Dan Perlis, spokesman for Thousand Trails and Encore RV resorts.

If you’ve never been to this national treasure, both O’Rourke and Perlis say it should make your short list. You can camp at the park, but since this is a wilderness area, electrical, water and sewer hook-ups are not available. However, there are RV campgrounds and resorts outside Yosemite, which offer these amenities and may even arrange for a shuttle into the park.

**Los Padres National Forest.** For those who have already been to Yosemite, Perlis says Los Padres National Forest is another wilderness area worthy of a visit.

It’s a choice that may be best for active people who like to hike, as the forest boasts 1,257 miles of maintained trails. Los Padres covers a vast area, which means it is conveniently close to a number of California cities such as Carmel, Ventura and Santa Barbara.

Many campgrounds are located in the national forest, and of these, McGill may be the best site for RVs. However, even there, don’t expect hook-ups or pull-through sites. Instead, you may want to camp outside the forest where RV parks offer full amenities as well as some unique experiences. For example, the Rancho Oso RV Resort near Santa Barbara operates as a working dude ranch.

**Lake George.** Located in the Adirondacks, this is another top pick from Perlis. It’s in a region of northern New York packed with heritage and character.

Head down the Schroon River in a kayak, stop by the Courthouse Gallery to see the latest exhibit and end your day at Shepard Park for Thursday night fireworks. For the grandkids, there are mine tours, mini golf and a Six Flags amusement park nearby.

**Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland.** Don’t limit yourself to the U.S. when it comes to picking a destination. Both Schwartz and O’Rourke recommend Prince Edward Island as another location that is ideal for summer RV travel.

Island highlights include golf, beaches and cultural events. You can hit the PEI Flavours Culinary Trail or try an authentic PEI experience. The latter is supported by the island’s department of economic development and tourism and provides hands-on experiences, typically led by a local artisan, farmer or fisherman.

Nearby Newfoundland offers RVers another unique travel experience. Visitors may be able to see whales and icebergs along the rugged coastline. Much of the province is remote, which is part of its appeal. “You have to put an RV on a ferry to get there,” O’Rourke says of one KOA site in the area. “We get rave reviews from that park.”

## Top 7 Rookie RV Mistakes to Avoid

We’ve all been there. You’re out on the road in your new recreational vehicle for the first time and you commit that huge mistake that announces to the world you’re an RV newbie. It’s embarrassing, and maybe there’s a mess to clean up, but it wouldn’t have been so bad if there

weren't witnesses to see your big fail.

Everyone makes rookie RV mistakes, but you can avoid the worst ones if you do your homework ahead of time. Here are the most common mistakes new RVers make—and how to avoid them!

**1) Drive-off Disasters** The most horrifying mistake a new RVer can make is driving off while you're still connected to water, sewer, or power. The damage is expensive, and it's extremely embarrassing.

Also make sure you take down the TV antenna and pick up the wheel chocks before you leave!

**2) Using Your RV Before Learning How** It's Sunday morning and you've had a terrific camp experience in your brand-new recreational vehicle. Before you leave the campground, you stop at the dumping station...only to realize you have no idea what the routine is. As you flip feverishly through the manual, you realize you've got a line of vehicles behind you waiting to dump.

There are a lot of new procedures you'll need to learn—from simple things, like turning off the outdoor shower properly, to more complex items like using the correct power switches and operating controls you're not familiar with.

Before you leave home, read through your operator's manual and step through a practice run of the big procedures, like leveling, dumping, and extending slideouts.

**3) Not Knowing How Big You Are** Rookie RVers can have a hard time learning how big their motorhome is. Usually, parking and cornering are the toughest tasks, but this happens too, sometimes. Make sure you know how big you are, whether you're driving or parking. We recommend using a spotter every time you park.

**4) Fridge Failure** Your refrigerator is a big deal, and a nasty surprise in the fridge can ruin your trip. Here are a few things to remember:

- **Your refrigerator can get fried.** Make sure you're level or the chemical coolants in your fridge won't circulate. Not only will your food spoil, your refrigerator could catch fire. Don't let that happen.
- **Clean out your refrigerator between trips.** This sounds obvious, but we've heard countless stories of campers who were positive they cleaned out their fridge, only to find out months later that there was a bag of spinach tucked in a pocket in the door. Pro tip: After cleaning it out, prop the fridge door open to prevent mold and mildew—just in case!
- **Pack enough food.** It's easy to underestimate how much food you'll need for your trip. And once you're settled in at camp, the last thing you want to do is disconnect, pull up the anchor, and drive into town for two days' worth of food.

**5) Pre-Trip Prep** Many new RVers make their first mistakes before they even hit the road. The key to success is in the planning. For a smooth, worry-free trip, make sure you consider all of these things:

- **Your budget.** Set aside more money than you think you'll need—especially for food and fuel. Also, be sure to set aside enough money specifically for an emergency.
- **Your route.** Avoid narrow roads, roads with sharp turns, and highways with low bridges.
- **Your reservations.** Many an RVer has been denied entrance to a campground because they didn't have a reservation. Popular camps fill up quickly, and RV sites are limited.
- **Your necessities.** RVs are tiny places, making it easy to overpack. Make sure you only bring what you need.

**6) Not Doing a Walkaround** Make sure you've cleared away any objects that could interfere with extending or retracting your slideouts. Check awning and anything attached to the RV. Check under the RV and top of RV.

**7) Not Using a Checklist!** Every one of these newbie RV mistakes can be avoided by using a checklist before, during, and after your trip. Make sure you update it with every trip—you're bound to learn a lesson or two over the years.

Want a great sample checklist?

Remember—everyone's an RV rookie at some point, and we've all made some of these newbie mistakes. You're in good company, so keep your sense of humor and consider yourself officially a veteran RVer.

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