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Newsletter

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What is an RV?

- An RV is a vehicle that combines transportation and temporary living quarters for travel, recreation and camping.
- The two main categories of RVs are *motorhomes* (motorized) and *towables* (towed behind the family car, van or pickup).
- There's an RV for every taste and budget. Prices for new RVs are typically \$6,000-\$22,000 for folding camping trailers; \$6,000-\$55,000 for truck campers; \$8,000-\$95,000 for conventional travel trailers; \$18,000-\$160,000 for fifth wheel trailers; \$60,000-\$150,000 for Type B and C motorhomes; and \$60,000-\$500,000 for Type A motorhomes.

What is the RV industry's economic impact?

- According to a 2015 economic impact analysis, the RV industry has an economic impact of \$50 billion.
- The RV industry includes more than 22,000 businesses, provides nearly 300,000 jobs, and paid wages of \$15.8 billion in 2015.
- RV shipments are at record highs, surpassing 500,000 units for the first time in 2017, and are projected to reach 506,000 in 2018.
- More RVs are manufactured in the U.S. than in the entire world combined. More than 80% of RVs are made in Indiana, 60% of which are manufactured in Elkhart County alone.

Who is the RV traveler?

- U.S. ownership of RVs has reached record levels, according to a 2011 University of Michigan study commissioned by the RV Industry Association. Approximately 10 million households now own an RV.
- The typical RV owner, according to the 2011 report, is 48 years old, married, and has an above-average annual household income of \$62,000. RV owners are likely to own their homes and spend an average of 3-4 weeks annually, industry research shows.
- The upswing in RV ownership is driven by strong interest from both younger and older buyers. RV ownership rates now extend across a 40-year span from age 35-to-75, the Michigan study found.
- More RVs are now owned by those ages 35-to-54 than any other group, according to the University of Michigan study.
- More than 11% of U.S. households headed by 35-54-year-olds own an RV, exceeding the 9.3% ownership rates of those 55 and over. The 35-to-54 age group posted the largest gains in the 2011 Michigan survey.

- New demographic research will be published later in 2018.

Where do RVers travel?

- With more than 18,000 public and privately owned campgrounds nationwide, RVers are free to roam America's roads for a weekend — or months at a time.
- Privately owned RV parks and campgrounds are found near popular destinations, along major tourist routes and even in metropolitan areas. These campgrounds appeal to travelers by offering a variety of activities to keep the whole family happy, including swimming pools, game rooms, playgrounds and snack bars.
- RV travelers seeking a resort atmosphere are attracted to the growing number of luxury RV resorts with facilities such as tennis courts, golf courses, gourmet restaurants and health spas.
- Facilities at public campgrounds tend to be simple, but offer great scenic beauty. Public lands are popular for hiking, fishing, white water rafting and many other outdoor recreational opportunities enjoyed by RVers. The RV Industry Association is working with government agencies to modernize publicly-owned campgrounds to accommodate today's RVs.

What does the future hold for the RV market?

- Changes in the frequency and duration of vacations favor the RV industry. Americans are traveling shorter distances and on weekends with less planning, according to recent studies. For RV owners, this is a convenient travel pattern.
- Both families with children and empty-nesters are strong potential RV buyers, and promising prospects are emerging among younger, ethnically diverse consumers, reveals a Harris Interactive study commissioned by the Go RVing Coalition. Interest in joining the RV lifestyle is strong across the ages from 30 years old and up.
- RV manufacturers are innovating to give consumers an array of product choices. Manufacturers are producing lightweight towables and smaller, fuel-efficient motorhomes. Green technologies such as solar panels are appearing on an increasing number of RVs.

RV in Winter

If you think RVing is just for the summer months, you're not just mistaken. You're missing out! Camping in your RV in the winter time is one of the most unique vacation experiences you can imagine. From testing your skills on America's finest ski slopes (tips up — don't forget your poles!) to cuddling up on the couch with your sweetheart under your favorite toasty blanket, once you take a winter RV trip, you'll be a total convert. (Good thing, too, since there are so many amazing destinations to see during the chilly season!) But when you're traveling by trailer through a winter wonderland, there are a few extra preparations to make that will help ensure you stay cozy and comfortable. In fact, you may have been wondering about that as soon as you clicked the link to this post. "Will my RV pipes freeze? What extras do I need to pack for a winter RV vacation?"

Don't worry. You've come to the right place. We're going to explain exactly why we love winter RVing so much — and what you need to know to enjoy some winter RV adventures of your own.

How to Camp in Your RV in Winter RV camping in the winter can be a bit more challenging than it is during summer months. After all, a house on wheels isn't quite as sturdy or well-insulated as most foundation-built houses, and unless you choose a warm destination, chances are it's pretty cold outside! But just because you need to take a few extra steps doesn't mean winter travel trailer camping is impossible. In fact, it's pretty simple... especially since we're here to guide you through the whole thing! Here's our post on how to winterize your RV, including how to use RV antifreeze and other additives to keep everything in ship shape. We've also written this post on some of the most common problems you might face during your winter camping trip, and, of course, solutions for how to deal with them. Need even more tips for RV living in the winter? Check out this post, which covers the tips and tricks you need to know to figure out how to keep a camper warm in the winter. We've even covered how to celebrate the holidays in your rig, from cooking up a winter feast to entertaining a big family.

(Yes, it's doable, even in your small space!) As long as you've got a four season motorhome built with winter camping in mind, and especially if you supply a little bit of extra heating help by way of small internal space heaters or insulating RV skirts, your yuletide camping trip is bound to be incredible. Just make sure you're extra-careful on those slippery roads.

Where to Spend the Winter in an RV So — ready to learn why RV living during the winter is wonderful? Here are just a few reasons.

1. It's a great way to visit your family.

Don't get us wrong, we love spending quality holiday time with the members of our family we don't get to see every day... but it's equally nice to have a private space to retreat to after all the hullabaloo. With an RV, you get all the quality time you could ask for without having to spend your evenings in the guest bedroom. Win-win!

2. And you have the perfect excuse to get snuggly.

Straight-up honesty time: It's probably not going to be as warm in your RV as it is in your house. But that's okay! What better excuse to get cozy with your favorite warm blankets, fun Christmas pajamas, mug of hot cocoa — and, of course, cuddle partner?

3. Bad weather? No problem — just pull over.

The cold weather outside can be *truly* frightful if you're using air travel to get to your holiday destinations. That silvery snowfall could cause massive delays or cancellations that can wreck your vacation plans and leave you miserably stranded. But when you're traveling by RV, you're in control of your route and itinerary. And if the weather should get too bad to drive in, well... just pull over and set up camp. It might not have been your original plan, but it sure beats trying to nap in the airport!

Warm Places to RV in the Winter Where to this winter? In an RV, it's all up to you!

4. Escape someplace warm... or enjoy the stark beauty of winter.

Want to spend Christmas with your toes in the sand? Or maybe you've been meaning to see what the Grand Canyon looks like after a snowfall? When you're traveling by RV, the best place to spend the winter is totally up to you. And goodness knows there are lots of good places to choose from! (Need some inspiration? Grab the latest copy of the Rand McNally Road Atlas, which has all sorts of fun information about destinations you haven't considered yet.)

5. Save money on your winter journey!

It's not news that travel is expensive, especially during the popular holiday season. But if you play your cards right, RVing can be a whole lot more affordable than a traditional airplane-and-hotel stint, even if you're renting an RV in the winter! One of the best ways to save money on your winter camping trip is to join Passport America, a discount camping club that gets you a 50% discount on your campsite accommodation fees at almost 1900 campgrounds across the country (and a few in Canada and Mexico, too!). With a yearly membership fee of less than \$50, it'll likely pay for itself the very first time you use it.

RV Parks Open in Winter One last tip: Keep in mind that not every RV park stays open throughout all four seasons, so be sure to call ahead and make plans before you set out to your favorite resort. One of our favorite RV park franchises, Jellystone Parks Camp-Resorts, have several locations that stay open 365 days per year — click here to find one near your favorite winter destination. Happy holidays, and stay warm out there!

Written by Jamie Cattanach, for RVShare.

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Tech Tips

Trailer-Tire Balance

Q: I took two new tires to a tire-service store to have the old ones dismantled and the new ones mounted, as well as having them balanced. This was not my first time having this done on wheels and tires, and no one had ever tried to explain what they did until now. Here is what went on, and I find it a bit confusing.

The wheels are aluminum, so I can understand them not wanting to put wheel weights on the outside and damage the finish, but here is the confusing part of the explanation. As the spin balancing was being done, the store manager told me the rims come static balanced to the trailer manufacturer, and even though the spin balancer was calling for weights to be added to both inside and outside beads, the only way he would balance the tires was to "static balance" them.

He changed the machine to a new setting, which told him where to place a weight, and if the reading on the machine was under 20, it was considered balanced. One wheel-and-tire assembly came in at 11, and the other was 7, as I remember.

What does the customer do? I have never, on any form of vehicle or trailer, been told the rims come static balanced from the manufacturer. Do I believe this guy, or should the wheels and tires be pulled off and rebalanced? I am not against using stick-on weights, as a properly balanced tire saves both the tire and the trailer. I would appreciate your feedback on this.

Bill George | Bloomfield, New York

A: "Static balanced" likely refers to the use of an old-style bubble balance device once used as the standard wheel-balancing system. It's possible your trailer tires and wheels were checked at the factory, but unless you saw some type of weights on the wheels at the beginning of this process, it's possible your tire dealer led you astray. If the dealer meant it was just the rims that came "static balanced" from the factory, that doesn't take into account any imbalance by the tires, so they should still be rebalanced. You may want to check with a different tire dealer for follow-up service.

There's no reason the tire dealership can't do a spin balance on the wheels and tires, just as they'd do for a passenger vehicle. It isn't necessary to have the stick-on weights on the outside of the wheel. The balance can be achieved with the weights added on the inside, or back side, only.

More on Axle Greasing

Q: I read your response to Robert Lauzon's "Axle Greasing" comment in the May issue with interest. I have a 2014 Keystone Montana Big Sky fifth-wheel. We pulled it to Soldotna, Alaska, this past May with our Ram 3500 dually diesel. When I stopped to refuel in Tok, Alaska, I noticed accelerated wear on the outside bead of the right-forward tire on the trailer. I put the spare on and continued our trip.

I didn't notice any suspension/shackle problems, so I contacted Kenai Diesel & Marine with suspicions of a bent spindle or axle. John inspected the tires and suspension, and found a broken spring bolt on the left side of the fifth-wheel. This allowed the left axle to creep forward. The end of the bolt that remained showed a lot of wear. I suspect the bushing is missing or badly damaged. The inside bead of both left tires showed serious wear.

These bolts have Zerk fittings for a reason, and I had the wheel bearings repacked before we left Arizona. On inspection, the fittings on these suspension bolts showed no indication that they had been greased. This is a reminder to me that I need to be more specific when getting my "home" prepared for the road.

I'm having all of the bolts and bushings replaced and greased on both sides before we begin our return trip. I'm also considering replacing the shackle assemblies with the Roadmaster Comfort Ride system.

Doug Gold | Sioux Falls, South Dakota

A: Wheel-bearing and spring-bolt maintenance are two different jobs, Doug. If the dealer doing the wheel-bearing repack wasn't told to also grease all available fittings, that would explain why they appear dry, although the original installer should have greased them as part of that project. Greasable spring and shackle bolts are terrific safety and durability additions to a trailer suspension, and they're always worth installing. It's a good reminder for all towable RV owners to include those fittings in a regularly scheduled maintenance program.

Generators vs. solar panels – Which is best for your RV?

Many RV campers enjoy the freedom to explore state and regional parks as well as more remote locations, where hookups are often nonexistent. However, unless dry camping or boondocking stays are limited to no more than a couple of days, an ancillary electrical power supply is essential. There are really only two choices: generators and solar. We'll briefly examine both in this article.

Generators have the advantage that you can have your power wherever and whenever you want it. In practice, however, many parks and campgrounds limit the amount of time that generators are allowed to be operated. The problem is noise. Newer models are well muffled, but still very audible to any nearby campers who are outdoors or just have their windows open. Older contractor-grade generators are not recommended – too noisy.

Other negatives: Obviously generators require fuel and if you use them extensively, you either need to carry a lot or make fuel runs when you run low. The exhaust fumes they produce can also be objectionable to folks trying to enjoy the wonders of nature.

To get the most out of a generator, plan on expanding your battery capacity so that you can store power for the hours when you don't or can't run it. And if you want to use AC appliances during those off hours, look into an inverter. You'll need to size the battery bank and the inverter to your needs.

Solar power

For those who relish complete independence in the outback or who just want to avoid the noise, exhaust and fuel issues of generators, solar may be the answer. **Solar panels** have continued to increase in efficiency over the years, and they are now a viable option for RV electrical power sources. As long as the sun shines, they silently capture the sun's abundant energy. Panels in 80 and 120-watt sizes comfortably fit on the roof of your RV and in pairs or

as a set of four you can build systems up to 240 to 480 watts or more.

The other essential for a solar-powered RV is a bank of **deep cycle batteries**. You need to size the solar array and the battery bank to your anticipated needs. Many solar retailers provide worksheets to help you size your system. As with generators, an inverter added to your system will allow you to run AC appliances.

Even in the sunniest climes, it is possible to have several days of limited sun. For the solar-powered RV, this could spell trouble: Time to head for home or at least a hookup. Also, in some shaded locations it may be difficult to find a campsite with full sun all day. For ultimate power independence, you can't beat a solar-equipped RV with a generator for backup.

When Solar DOESN'T Make Sense

Solar is an investment.

It requires planning, substantial upfront expense, and a sizable chunk of physical roof and/or storage space devoted to the cause.

And if you're not going to be able to take advantage of sucking power from the sun often enough, going through the effort may not be worth it.

As much as we would love all our neighbors to be dependent on solar (and thus silent) – running a generator on occasion isn't the end of the world.

So let's start with some scenarios where installing solar just doesn't make sense:

- **You'll be sticking mostly to electric hook-ups anyway.** To be honest, you can perfectly enjoy an abundant RVing lifestyle while staying in places with RV electrical hook-ups, thus having little need for solar (or even a generator). There's a plethora of options out there ranging from traditional commercial RV parks to absolutely amazing state and national parks. If you focus on hookups and your only dry camping tends to be a night here or there while in transit (such as blacktop boondocking in a rest area or commercial parking lot), then solar probably doesn't make a ton of sense.
- **If you are a "special event" boondocker.** If the only time each year you are away from hookups is for a single week or two to attend a special event (like Burning Man or the Balloon Fiesta) – a solar system might not make sense. A week of heavy generator use once or twice a year won't cost you much at all. Even us solar enthusiasts understand that when we choose to attend such events, there will be lots of generator noise (but please do keep it to a minimum).
- **You'll frequently be in places with extreme climates.** Especially if you'll need air conditioning a substantial part of the year, you're more than likely going to be best off finding a place with hook-ups. Trying to be off-grid and comfortable with just solar on roasting summer days is not fun. It takes an extreme solar & battery setup to keep up with air conditioning – whereas most generators can run an AC with ease.
- **You'll be sticking to more populated areas.** Unless you're embarking on some urban stealth camping, the areas where off-grid boondocking spots are most plentiful don't tend to be near cities or populated areas. The east coast and midwest have fewer options – and most campgrounds in these areas offer hook-ups. Go out west however, and the opportunities for solar boondocking and dry camping are endless.
- **You're more of a weekend warrior than extended-time RVer.** If you'll just be going out for short trips a few times a year, the investment in extensive solar may not be worthwhile. It's easy enough to find campgrounds with hook-ups, or to learn to live without much energy – supplementing with a generator (please get a quiet one however!) when necessary. Or you can get a simple solar setup to meet your minimal needs, instead of investing in a larger system.
- **You're not otherwise setup for dry camping.** If you don't have large enough waste holding tanks or don't care to conserve other resources – then solar alone isn't going to make extended boondocking magically feasible.

Solar is a Lifestyle Change If you've gotten comfortable in your RVing lifestyle going pole-to-pole – you of course have to step back and ask yourself if you're avoiding solar because you

don't go places you need it, or if you're not going to those places because you don't have solar?

It is a Catch-22 that way. Installing solar can be a complete RV lifestyle change.

Once you have solar, you start thinking differently about the variety of places you can go. You have a new freedom where you don't have to plan around hook-ups, and energy usage & collection becomes quiet and passive.

Here's some of the changes that solar can create:

- You can seek out more remote locations with amazing vistas, privacy, getting further out in nature. There's an abundance of free dispersed camping options available on public lands, especially out west. You can go entire seasons moving between them, hardly ever hooking-up – having priceless experiences almost for free.
- There are many campgrounds that have developed campspots that don't offer hook-ups, and staying in these campgrounds (or dry loops) will become an option for you. Often the camp areas without hookups have better views, lower prices, easier availability, and increased privacy over their hook-up alternatives.
- You can take advantage of 'driveway surfing' options to stay with friends & family without worrying about plugging into their house and potentially tripping circuit breakers.
- If you have a mechanical break-down while on the road or you need to wait in a parking lot for a while – you have magical power still flowing in that can make the wait a little less stressful.
- If you are in a developed campground with hook-ups, and the power goes out – you can keep on ticking while your neighbors may have to resort to a generator or going without.
- If you install solar on your roof, while in motion or parked, your house batteries are getting charged whenever there are sun's rays are hitting your cells.

If you're on the fence about solar for your RV, we recommend giving some scenic boondocking or dry camping a try first. See if you even like it before investing in solar. Try conserving power and minimizing generator time as best you can to get a feel for it. Budget out your water usage, and really get to know your tank capacities.

It's particularly helpful if you have boondocking savvy friends you can join up with for a couple days to show you the ropes. We've certainly enjoyed introducing friends to the lifestyle.

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