

RV LIVING

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



The call of the open road is one that many people hear each year. Have you ever dreamt of more than just a road trip – of living a life free from the confines of an office, able to travel wherever you like? You’re not alone. Full-time RVing, though nothing new, is a growing lifestyle for thousands of Americans. Jobs are becoming more mobile, and society’s idea of the American dream is shifting. People are trading in their “white picket fences” for white pavement markings – the road is a new version of home.

Millennials make up a large sector of the RV crowd. Thanks to the internet and job mobility, you no longer have to be a retiree to RV full-time. You can still make an income while you travel. In fact, many people find that living in an RV is much more affordable than renting an apartment or buying a house. If you’ve ever wondered how you can pull up your roots and join the RV lifestyle, this guide is for you.



PREPARING TO RV – WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

RV life takes some preparation; you can’t just pack up your things and go. I mean, you could, but you would quickly start running into issues without the proper knowledge to address them. Here are a few basic things you’ll need to know.

STEP 1. UNDERSTAND HOW RV'S WORK

RVs that are fit for full-time living are fully self-contained, meaning your water, electricity, sewerage, and heating systems travel with you. But it comes at a price: you're responsible for maintenance. You'll need to learn how to maintain each system:

- The electrical system is made up of two batteries, the vehicle battery (like you'd have in a car), and the house battery (that powers the lights, fridge, etc.).
- You'll have a generator for high-powered appliances, like the air conditioner. The generator is great for dry camping when you don't want to plug into shore power. It runs off of your gas tank, though, so don't use too much or you'll end up stranded!
- Your water system includes a freshwater tank, a gray tank, and a black (waste water) tank. Get familiar with these, as you'll be dumping your tanks quite often.
- Many of your appliances run on propane, which is stored in the "basement" of the RV. Your stove, refrigerator, and heater all use propane, so you'll need to keep an eye on your usage.

If you want a more in-depth look at RV systems and how they all work together, [Wand'rly](#) has a very thorough article on the subject.

STEP 2. RESEARCH RV'S AND RV TYPES

Just like our homes, RVs are as unique as we are! Though two models may come out of the factory the same; customizations, mods, and your own touch of character make your RV, well, yours. Choosing a rig for full-timing can seem like an arduous task, but it really just comes down to your family size and travel style. There are four main types of RV:

- **Class A's:** the classic, bus-style RV, ranging in length from 25 to 40 feet. They have one bedroom in the back and a few convertible sleeping areas throughout the living space. They're the most luxurious of the motorized bunch. Larger ones can be tricky to drive and may not fit into some campgrounds.
- **Class B's:** Converted vans that are usually around 17 feet long. They're not typically ideal for RV living unless it's just you. Class B's have a bed, cooking area, and in some cases, a toilet and shower.

- **Towables:** There are two types of towable motorhomes; travel trailers and fifth wheels. Travel trailers can be anywhere from 9 feet to 40 feet in length. They attach behind your tow vehicle, so they're easy to unhitch if you need to run to the store. Fifth wheels attach over the axle of your vehicle, not behind it. It makes for an easier drive with more stability. Generally, fifth wheels are on the larger side, ranging from 25 to 40+ feet in length.



Class A Motorhome



Class B Motorhome



Class C Motorhome



Travel Trailer



Fifth Wheel



Toy Hauler

STEP 3. DECIDE WHICH CLASS IS RIGHT FOR YOU

By this point, you probably have tons of images of RV types swirling around in your mind, and you're trying to figure out which one is the right option. The best thing to do is narrow it down to one or two types, then tour a few! Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you want a towable or a motorized RV? Towables offer a little more flexibility, but you'll need to buy a tow vehicle, and they can be an issue if you've never towed before. Motorized RVs come with drawbacks, too. If you break down, you'll be without a house while it's in the shop!
- How many people are traveling with you? Do you want separate bedrooms with more privacy? Class C's tend to offer the most privacy in less space. Larger travel trailers and fifth wheels may also have two bedrooms.
- How big do you want your RV to be? Of course, it's tempting to go as big as you can, but keep in mind that large RVs are more difficult to drive and may be turned away by some campgrounds. A good middle-of-the-road size is between 25 to 30 feet.

- How do you plan on camping? Do you want luxury features because you'll be spending a lot of time at high-end RV parks? Or do you want an RV that's ready for wild camping and lots of outdoor adventures? The more luxurious RVs will cost you a hefty sum. If you want an RV that's fit for boondocking, look for solar panels and features that are easily customized.



STEP 4. DOT YOUR I'S AND CROSS YOUR T'S

The dreaming and research stage is coming to a close. Now it's time to focus on the (not as fun) logistics of preparing to RV. How will you pay your bills? What will you do if you have an accident or get sick? These are all things you need to plan for before you start traveling. Start brainstorming plans for the following:

- Your budget**, which is the most important aspect of RVing – it'll be the basis for every decision you make while you're on the road. You'll need to account for RV payments, gas, campground fees, food, cell phones, and more. Check out [Technomadia's](#) sample budget for help.
- Insurance** is imperative if you're a full-timer. Full-time insurance is different from other types of insurance in that it's a bit of a hybrid policy. Part car insurance, part homeowner's insurance - it protects you, your RV, and everything in it. You'll also want to get a flexible health insurance plan that allows you to see doctors outside of your "home state." [This article](#) has an array of information on insurance for full-time RVers.

- **Income** is another critical component of RVing since, let's face it, most of us can't live off our savings. Thankfully, working while RVing is entirely possible. If you work online, you'll want to look into [mobile internet options](#) like cellular data and Wi-Fi extenders. [Workamping](#) is another way to make money. You can find odd jobs across the country, many of which are at campgrounds and include free site hookups, plus a small wage.
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- You may be more than happy to say goodbye to your mailbox full of junk mail and pre-approvals, but you still need to get the important stuff somehow! Thankfully, there are plenty of **mail forwarding services** for full-time RVers. However, you'll still need a permanent address for things like vehicle registration, bank accounts and credit cards, and other necessities. [Axe Addict](#) has an in-depth tutorial on how to choose your domicile state.
- Finally, there's the painstaking task of **downsizing**. Going from a one or two bedroom house to an RV is more than just tossing extraneous stuff – it's a full-on test of your Tetris skills. You need to strike a balance between what you'll need to be comfortable, without going over the spatial or weight limitations of your RV. [This blog post](#) offers some expert advice, along with a sample checklist.

STEP 5. CONSIDER JOINING AN RV CLUB

RV clubs offer some of the biggest benefits to full-timers. In fact, many of them make up the cost of membership within one or two campground stays! RV clubs let you connect with like-minded RVers, in addition to saving you money at campsites. Some even provide discounted insurance, coupons for camping and RV gear, and savings on dining and entertainment. There are more than 100 RV clubs in the United States, but some of the most well-known are:

- [Good Sam Club](#) – One of the biggest RV clubs in the nation, with roughly 2,100 campsites and savings of up to 10%. They also offer benefits like gas discounts, insurance, savings on pet products, coupons for Camping World, and more.
- [Passport America](#) – If you're looking for significant savings, Passport America is the way to go. You'll save up to 50% at 1,900 campgrounds throughout the U.S and Canada. You can get discounted mail-forwarding through them as well.

- **Escapees** – This club was established by and for full-timers, though anyone can join. You'll find benefits that are perfect for full-timers, like mail forwarding, insurance, and a job center. They also have a large camping network for long-term campers.

Keep in mind, you can join as many RV clubs as you want! Since their membership rates are usually around \$40-\$50 per year, it might be worthwhile to join two or three to get well-rounded benefits and triple your discounted camping choices. If you want to learn more, check out our [**ultimate guide to RV clubs.**](#)

ON THE ROAD - THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE ON WHEELS

Your months (or years) of planning have finally come to fruition, and now it's time to take off on your adventure! Unfortunately, the hurdles don't stop there. You'll face many setbacks along the way; some will only be minor annoyances; others will be complete game changers. But such is life, right? The following sections will help you adapt to living in an RV.

STEP 1. MAP YOUR ROUTE

One of the best things about living in an RV is the freedom to go anywhere, at any time. However, that doesn't mean you should travel without a plan. If you start driving without an itinerary, you'll end up wasting money and getting lost. The first step in planning your route, is picking your destination and setting your budget. This will determine how many miles you'll travel each day and where you'll camp. You can use an app like Roadtrippers to plan your route, calculate costs and mileage, and find interesting stops along the way.

STEP 2. CATCH SOME Z'S

Planning your campground stays is just as important as planning your route! What a nightmare it is to pull into a campground, exhausted after a long day of driving, only to be turned away because you didn't make a reservation! Since you've already figured out your route and daily mileage, finding campsites shouldn't be difficult. There are plenty of ways to camp:

- If you're feeling fancy and have some extra money saved up, you can spring for a luxury RV park. You'll find high-end amenities like pools, spas, golf courses, and more.
- If you're just looking for a basic campground with hookups, check out the [**Allstays**](#) app for a massive list of campgrounds by state and town. Each listing has information on campground amenities and costs.

- If you want to save money and get closer to nature, dry camp! You won't have to pay for water and electric hookups, and you won't have to deal with campground crowds. [**Boondockers Welcome**](#) has a map of boondocking locations throughout the U.S. You can also look for dispersed camping in National Forests.
- If you're sick of driving all day and you're in a pinch, there are many Walmart's and KOA's that allow overnight parking. The [**Walmart Overnight Parking Locator app**](#) will help you find a nearby lot.



STEP 3. GET SOME GRUB

Just like with everything else RVing, a good meal calls for a carefully crafted plan. Unless, of course, you don't mind spending money dining out all the time. It's not difficult to save money on food and still eat healthy while living in an RV, it just takes a little forethought. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Write down a list of the quick and easy meals you make at home. Include meals that you can make in batches and freeze ahead of time. Can't think of ideas? [**GO RVing**](#) has a list of (delicious) RV-friendly recipes.
- Try to limit your meals to one or two dishes, so you don't waste water cleaning up after dinner. Stews, stir fry's, burritos, and pasta dishes are all good choices.
- Stock up on tin foil! It'll end up as your go-to way to cook and reheat food over the campfire. You should utilize the campfire as much as possible – save your propane and generator.

- Make a big box of trail mix and keep it handy for when you're driving and get the munchies, or for days outside exploring.
- At the grocery store, stick to mostly dry foods, like pasta, canned food, and rice. You can pick up fresh produce and meats at local farmer's markets. You'll save money and storage space.
- If you have under-floor storage, you might want to invest in a few large Tupperware tubs. You can keep dry food and miscellaneous kitchen items in the tubs, leaving more room in the cabinets for other items.
- You absolutely need to buy some **refrigerator and cupboard bars!** Everything inside your fridge and cabinets will shift around while you're driving. The bars keep items from spilling out all over the floor and making a huge mess.
- If you dry camp a lot, you should buy several jugs of water at the grocery store, so you don't use up your fresh water tank as quickly. If you like Gatorade and iced tea; buy the powdered mixes and make your own. It'll save you a ton of space (and money).
- Join rewards programs at major grocery stores in each region like Stop n' Shop, Kroger, Save-On's, etc. Aside from savings on food, many rewards programs also offer gas points.

STEP 4. KNOW YOUR EMERGENCY PLANS

Just because you're living the RV dream doesn't mean that trouble can't find you. From tire blow-outs to tornado warnings, any number of emergencies can happen while you're out exploring the country. The key is to have a plan in case such a thing occurs. There are several types of emergencies, for each of which you should have a plan and supplies:

- **Severe weather while at a campsite** - Whenever you arrive at a campsite, you should check out their map and/or evacuation plans. In the event of a tornado or severe storm, you'll need to leave your RV and head to the campground clubhouse, bathrooms, or office. Make sure everyone in your family knows where you'll meet.
- **Accidents** - If you have full-time RV insurance, your policy may have a hotel reimbursement clause. Treat the accident like you would any other; get lots of documentation and exchange insurance info with the other drivers.

- **Medical emergencies** – You should keep your insurance paperwork and medical cards somewhere they're easy to find, in a waterproof bag or container. You should also have a first aid kit, in addition to a personalized kit with medications and other items specific to your family.
- **Miscellaneous** – Always keep an emergency supply kit somewhere in your RV. Fill it with flashlights, canned food, water tablets, batteries, maps, a wind-up radio, road flares, and other supplies you might need. Don't forget about pet supplies if you have a furry traveler with you!



STEP 5. STOCK YOUR ARTILLERY OF APPS AND GADGETS

Thanks to modern technology, full-time RVing has gotten a lot more convenient and comfortable. From money-saving gadgets to time-saving apps, these are must-haves for full-timers:

APPS

- **Gasbuddy** – Plug in your location and find the cheapest gas nearby, verified in real-time, by real people.
- **Sanidumps** – Full black tanks? Don't panic! Sanidumps helps you find the nearest dump station.
- **Allstays** – Find camping at more than 29,000 campsites throughout the United States.

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- **WiFi Finder** – Need to get some work done? WiFi finder shows you the nearest public WiFi spots.
- **Roadtrippers** – Plan your route, calculate mileage, and find cool places to stop!
- **Ultimate Campgrounds** – Find public campgrounds and free camping at more than 29,000 sites in the U.S., and more than 4,000 in Canada.
- **State Lines** – A list of travel-related laws for each state.

GADGETS

- **A roof vent cover** – Trust us, you're going to need one. You'll be able to leave your vent open, even if it's raining, which is a godsend on a humid day or while you're cooking.
- **Duh, a GPS** – Obviously, you're going to want a GPS system, but did you know there are some designed specifically for RVers? They have helpful information like lane guidance, overlaid weather maps, bridge heights, and more.
- **A cell signal booster** – A booster could mean the difference between no signal and two bars; a big difference when you're camping in the middle of nowhere!
- **LED light bulbs** – Switch out your RV lights and install LED lights instead. They'll last longer and save you money and energy (perfect for avid boondockers).
- A crockpot, or better yet, an **Instant Pot** – This powerhouse version of a crockpot does it all, including pressure cooking, rice cooking, and steaming! Think of all the time you'll save on cooking and cleaning.
- **A NOAA Weather Alert Radio** – It's critical to have a weather radio that works without a cell signal. This radio covers most of the United States and will alert you if there's severe weather headed your way.



THE FINAL STEP – NEVER STOP EXPLORING!

You've made it to the finale, the best part of being a full-timer; the never-ending adventure that lies ahead! Once you've set the foundation that we've outlined in this guide, you'll have the freedom (and preparedness) to go anywhere. So, welcome to the world of full-time RVing, and happy trails!