

A GUIDE TO RV WIFI ON THE ROAD



With the right setup and gear, you can have internet access almost anywhere, whether boondocking or relaxing poolside at an RV resort. If you're working remotely or roadschooling the kids, you can power through Zoom calls or stream videos while camping just about anywhere.

First things first: **What is RV WiFi?** As far as the internet goes, WiFi in your RV works just like WiFi anywhere else. You have a phone, tablet, computer, or any other WiFi-enabled device, you connect it to the WiFi, and then browse or stream like you would at home. The biggest difference is where the original signal comes from. Internet solutions for an RV are a little more complicated than for a stationary home and need careful consideration.

There are a few different ways you can stay connected during your travels. The two primary options are using cellular data from a provider, like AT&T, or a signal pulled from a local WiFi network. This guide will explain how these options work, what those confusing internet terms mean, the gear you need to maximize your connection, and which WiFi setup is right for you and your RV.

I How Will You Use the Internet?

The first step in determining the best RV WiFi solution for you is to think about the level of connectivity you will need. Deciding how you're going to use the internet while on the road is one of the most important considerations before you purchase anything.

- Will you just be using your email and checking in with friends via Facebook?
- Will you be working from your RV?
- Do you have obligatory video conferences?
- Do your kids enjoy playing video games?
- Are video calls with family and friends from home a must?

If you use the internet only occasionally, like checking email or online shopping, then you probably only need a minimal internet setup. Depending on where you want to camp and your cell phone provider, you can probably get by with using campground WiFi or using your phone as a mobile hotspot.

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However, if you plan on streaming movies or music, you'll need some more gear—and data—for a reliable internet connection. Checking email, working on business, uploading files, streaming podcasts, recording video interviews, and watching TV shows on a regular basis can add up to about 125 gigabytes of data usage every month. Most people are surprised at how quickly you use data when you're streaming something.

If you're working on the road or need internet access for homeschooling, then you should be prepared to use at least 100GBs of data per month, which is why an unlimited data plan is likely the best option. This way, you don't have to worry about the amount of data you're using throughout the month.

You also need to consider where you'll be camping, as your WiFi needs will vary depending on if you're staying at campgrounds or boondocking.

I Do Campgrounds Have WiFi?

You might be wondering why you can't just use the WiFi network at campgrounds. Most private campgrounds will have WiFi, and many RV parks offer free internet—but getting a strong signal can be a different story. We don't rely solely on WiFi at RV parks. While it can be a bonus if it's free and works well, campground WiFi networks don't have the best reputation.

Campground WiFi is slow for a few reasons:

- The other metal RVs in between your device and the WiFi router weaken the signal.
- The more people who are using the network, the slower the signal.
- Rural and remote campground locations may rely on satellite internet, DSL, or fixed wireless internet which tend to be slower.

Generally, you can expect campground WiFi to be a lot slower than your home WiFi or even other public WiFi sources like coffee shops. If you need a reliable internet signal, you need to invest in a little extra gear.

You can make the most of campground WiFi by purchasing a WiFi extender or repeater. The extender helps by rebroadcasting the campground's internet signal throughout your rig. Most likely the signal weakens before it reaches your RV, so a reliable WiFi repeater will give your internet speed a boost.

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Internet Access While Boondocking

Don't expect to find a public WiFi network when boondocking. Instead, you can stay connected with cellular data.

RV WiFi can vary greatly when you're boondocking. There are a few ways to check your connection even before you pick a campsite, like [Campendium](#) and the [Coverage?](#) app for reviews on cell phone coverage. These resources give an estimation of cell phone signal in a destination. For remote work, you'll generally want at least two bars of signal.

If the signal isn't quite as strong as you need it to be, check the settings of your apps to make sure you're using as little data as possible. For example, with video players like YouTube or Netflix, you can choose a lower resolution. Or if your email client is loading slowly, select the option to load it as basic HTML.

Data usage per screen

- ☒ Auto
Default video quality and data usage
- ☐ Low
Basic video quality, up to 0.3 GB per hour
- ☐ Medium
Standard video quality, up to 0.7 GB per hour
- ☐ High
Best video quality, up to 3 GB per hour for HD, 7 GB per hour for Ultra HD

Save Cancel

Data usage settings on Netflix app.

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Internet Terms You Should Know for RV WiFi Solutions

To help you understand the terminology around RV WiFi, here's an explanation of common internet terms and gear options.

Speed test: No matter the source, how fast your internet is running ultimately determines what you can do on it. Internet speed doesn't necessarily relate to the number of bars of cell phone signal or the level of your WiFi connection, so it's helpful to know how to test it.

Internet speed test

Check your internet speed in under 30 seconds. The speed test usually transfers less than **40 MB of data**, but may transfer more data on fast connections.

To run the test, you'll be connected to [Measurement Lab](#) (M-Lab) and your IP address will be shared with them and processed by them in accordance with their [privacy policy](#). M-Lab conducts the test and publicly publishes all test results to promote internet research. Published information includes your IP address and test results, but doesn't include any other information about you as an internet user.

[About](#)

RUN SPEED TEST

Google has a speed test function. To use it, type "Speed Test" into the Google search bar and click the blue "Run Speed Test" button on the results page. You can also use a speed testing website like [Ookla](#). You'll need 1 Mbps (megabit per second) down for basic internet needs, like checking email, but you'll want between 4 and 5 Mbps down for streaming.

If you're uploading files or doing video calls, you should pay attention to your upload speed as well. Upload speeds are typically slower than download speeds, so don't be surprised if your results say 10 Mbps down and less than 1 Mbps up.

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Hotspot: This is the device that creates an internet connection from cellular data. Just like at home, you'll have a password-protected WiFi network to connect to.

Companies use the term "hotspot" differently: T Mobile refers to its devices as mobile hotspots, Verizon calls its version Jetpack, AT&T uses the term Unite, and Netgear calls its hotspot device Nighthawk. While they have different names, they do the same job of supplying an internet signal. Most of these devices cost \$100 or more.

Your smartphone can also be used as a hotspot. This is often referred to as "tethering." Tethering your phone for WiFi tends to be slower than using a dedicated hotspot device for your internet. It can work in a pinch, but if you're planning on boondocking or streaming regularly, tethering isn't a practical long-term solution and you'll most likely need a hotspot device.

Booster: Typically referring to boosting cellular data, these devices are designed to increase your signal from one bar of service to two. Cell phone boosters enhance a signal and increase internet speeds. This can mean the difference between getting 3 and 5 Mbps down. These devices range from \$30 to upwards of \$500.

Repeater, Extender, or Ranger: These three terms are essentially interchangeable. A WiFi ranger rebroadcasts, by repeating and extending, the existing WiFi signal inside your RV. This solves a common connectivity problem when you're too far away from the campground's WiFi router or there's too much interference between your RV and the router. A repeater device can significantly enhance your internet speeds when using campground WiFi.

Some newer RVs may have these devices already built-in. Our Winnebago Forza came with a King WiFiMax Router and Range Extender installed that comes in handy when camping at RV parks.

Router: Most people use a router and a modem connected to a professionally-installed cable for their at-home WiFi. And while this isn't the typical internet setup you see on the road, you can use a router in your RV WiFi setup as well. WiFi repeaters, for example, use an antenna on the roof as well as a router inside the rig that broadcasts your RV WiFi connection.

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Unlimited Data: If you don't have an unlimited data plan, you have limits on how much internet you can use. Most RVers will find that unlimited data is a more economical option than limited data, where you pay for usage in addition to other fees, like a protection fee that prevents you from going over your data limit.

If you plan on using cellular data as your source for an internet connection, use an unlimited data plan so you don't have to worry about keeping track of your usage. Unlimited plans are relatively easy to find with major cell phone providers.

Throttling: Throttling is when a cell phone provider slows down your signal. This can happen when you've reached a certain data threshold or if a tower is overloaded (for example, when there are a lot of people connected at once, like at a festival or a concert). Throttling can be difficult to avoid. To help alleviate this problem, we use two different carriers—AT&T and Verizon—so we can hop on another network if one slows down.



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I Common RV WiFi Solutions

Once you understand where and how you plan to use the internet, it's time to decide what type of RV WiFi solution is best for you. Let's walk through the different options for getting internet access in your RV.

Cellular Data

This is by far the most popular internet connection option for full-time RVers. For this RV WiFi option, purchase a hotspot from your data provider of choice.

Since Verizon and AT&T are considered to have the best coverage nationwide, consider using different providers for our cell phones and hotspot. That way, if you don't have a signal with one network somewhere, there's a chance that you'll have service with the other provider.

If you plan on boondocking or spending time in national parks and on public lands, you'll need to rely on cellular data. While some remote campsites have decent Verizon and AT&T coverage, other remote areas will not. This is where a cell phone booster, like a Netgear MIMO (about \$30), comes in handy.

The booster has a directional antenna, meaning that it needs to face in the direction of a cell tower in order to boost a signal.

For a higher price, you can install an omnidirectional antenna, like a weBoost 4G-X RV booster. To install it, you have to drill a few holes into the roof of the RV and run cables to the roof. It worked well, but because of the installation process and the cost, it might not be the best option for boosting cell data. You can achieve the same results with a less expensive device, according to the [Mobile Internet Resource Center](#).

BEST FOR:

Boondocking, campgrounds without WiFi, streaming, and staying connected while driving.

CONS:

Unlimited data plans can be costly, but for many RVers, it's worth the price for having reliable connectivity on the road.

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Public WiFi

For basic internet needs, you can use RV park WiFi. Sometimes you'll find a strong enough connection for using streaming services, but it isn't always reliable or predictable.

If you want to use campground WiFi, but need faster speeds, install a WiFi extender in your RV. Installation takes a few hours and the devices will cost a few hundred dollars.

In addition to RV parks, you can often find free, public WiFi in parking lots of businesses like Lowes, McDonald's, and Starbucks. Use the [AllStays app](#) to find parking lot camping and check if public WiFi is available.

BEST FOR:

If you plan on staying in RV parks and campgrounds with amenities.

CONS:

Public WiFi can be less secure and easily hacked, which makes your identity and information vulnerable. If using public WiFi, avoid logging into online banking or any other accounts you wouldn't want to be hacked. Public WiFi is also unreliable, particularly at campgrounds.

Satellite

There are a few satellite options, but they don't offer the high speeds many RVers need.

[HughesNet](#) is one of the best satellite internet options, but it requires a dish to be installed on your RV. If you plan on staying at a campground for weeks or months at a time, this could be a good option for you.

BEST FOR:

Long-term stays where WiFi networks or cellular data is not available.

CONS:

Because of the size and manual setup of the dish at each campsite, this can be a cumbersome option. Compared to cellular data and WiFi, satellite internet is also a slower option.

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Global Internet

If you're planning on crossing borders with your RV, a [Skyroam](#) device might be the best option for you. This global internet plan is similar to a cellular data plan and designed for international travelers. You can buy unlimited data for a 24-hour period, a monthly subscription, or pay per gigabyte of data.

When compared with AT&T or Verizon hotspots, the Skyroam device isn't as powerful. Plus, most U.S.-based cellular networks work in Canada and Mexico.

BEST FOR:

International travelers, particularly outside of North America.

CONS:

Cell phone data plans based in the U.S. offer better coverage and signal than global options.



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I Tips for Installing RV WiFi

Professional installation is available (and sometimes recommended) for any WiFi device you decide to buy. Before you start tackling installation on your own, make sure you read the manufacturer's installation guide and that you have all the required tools and accessories.

Your router and antennae (which may come housed in one unit, depending on what you select) should attach to the roof of your rig to maximize your signal. There will be a few screws, plus you'll need to run a cable inside. That means drilling holes into your roof, so be sure to seal the holes with a manufacturer-approved sealant.

Different WiFi product manufacturers may recommend different mounting locations on the roof. Make sure it has a clear line of sight, as anything that may interfere with a signal will impede your WiFi.

Then there's the power switch. Your product will come with instructions for installing the power switch, but a professional can also install it for you. Also, note that adding the router or antennae to the roof of your RV will raise the height of your rig.

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I How to Stay Connected Anywhere

No single internet option will cover you 100 percent of the time, so to stay fully connected, consider using a combination of the above options for increased reliability.

Here's an example setup:

- Unlimited data on our Verizon smartphones
- Unlimited data on an AT&T hotspot
- A cell phone signal booster
- A WiFi extender to use at RV parks and campgrounds

Mix and match these options to best fit your needs. If you're planning on spending most of your time boondocking, you could skip the investment of a WiFi extender. If you don't need a constant internet connection, you can choose between a cell phone booster or unlimited data on a hotspot device.

Taking the time to properly set up an internet connection makes traveling in an RV full-time possible. In the age of remote work and virtual schooling, the ability to stay connected almost anywhere allows us to see the world and still support our families.

Depending on your needs, your RV WiFi will come with an upfront cost, but it's all worth it when you can take a work-related video call from your hammock while boondocking in a scenic location.

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Resources and Gear We Love

There are plenty of solutions for installing internet in your RV. Here are some recommendations for WiFi gear and apps.

Cell Phone Signal Boosters:



- [Netgear 6000450 MIMO Directional Antenna with 2 TS-9 Connectors](#)
- [weBoost Drive X RV Cell Phone Signal Booster Omnidirectional](#)

WiFi Extenders:



- [KING KWM1000 WiFiMax Router and Range Extender](#)
- [Winegard Connect 2.0 WF2 Wi-Fi Extender for RVs](#)

Travel Apps:

- [Campendium](#)
- [AllStays](#)
- [Coverage?](#)

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