

What Kind of RV is Right for You

| Your Camping Style

Now that we've run through the different types of RVs it's time to dive into a more personal topic—camping style. In order to find the RV that fits your lifestyle, you have to understand what kind of traveler you are (or would like to be) and what kind of campgrounds appeal to you.

From the occasional camper to the part- or full-time RVer, there are many ways to explore and camp. We've created a checklist below to help you assess what sort of camper you may be.

It's important to remember that you may not be able to make all your needs a reality and that compromises will have to be made, but hopefully these questions give you a place to start.

| Camping Style Self-Assessment

How often do you plan to travel?

- Occasionally: A few weekends and maybe one longer trip each year
- Regularly: Most weekends during the travel season and more
- Often: Every chance I get
- Seasonally: Months at a time
- Full-time

If you don't plan to travel often, you may want to consider an entry-level travel trailer or motorhome—one that has all the comforts you need for short trips away from home, but doesn't have you paying extra for amenities that you really don't need for a weekend away. If you'll be camping a bit longer, you may want to look at RVs that are going to offer a few more comforts and conveniences.

Seasonal travelers and full-timers might appreciate floor plans that allow them to spread out on rainy days, or RVs that come with a larger fridge for fewer trips to the grocery store. They'll enjoy enough storage to bring along clothes for all sorts of weather, and dedicated sleeping spaces for everyone instead of having to convert a sofa or table into a bed.



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How far do you plan to travel?

- Locally, within a day's drive of home
- Regionally, not usually more than a quick overnight to get to our destination
- Cross-country

The distance you travel is relevant to your fuel tank size, how comfortable you are driving down the road, and how easy it is to set up and break down camp. Motorhomes are great for people who stop a lot of nights, but that doesn't mean it isn't often done in a trailer.

What type of campsite do you prefer?

- Resorts with all the amenities
- Federal, state, and local parks with nature and space
- Boondocking—off the grid on public land
- Whatever is cheapest and closest to my destination
- A mix of all the above

If you like resorts with amenities, you probably like an RV with lots of bells and whistles, too. And you won't be so concerned about tank sizes or battery capacity because you'll be hooked up to water, electric, and sewer. Public campgrounds, like state parks, usually don't have sewer hookups, so large waste tanks can help you extend your stay without visiting the dump station. Sometimes public campgrounds don't have water either, so a large freshwater tank can be helpful. Boondockers benefit from large tanks, too, along with additional electrical upgrades like solar panels and a generator.

The type of camping you prefer can affect the size of your RV, as well. Resorts can usually accommodate big rigs. Quite a few federal and state parks can, too, but some are very limited in space. A shorter RV will give you access to more available campsites and definitely more boondocking gems.



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What climates do you plan to camp in?

- Mild-temperature summer destinations
- Hot summers
- Freezing winters
- A mix

Most RVs can handle mild to warm temperatures pretty well, but freezing temperatures require additional insulation and heated water components. You'll also want larger propane tanks. Hot summer destinations can also benefit from a little extra insulation, as well as multiple A/C units. More expensive RVs are going to be better insulated with thicker walls and enclosed, heated underbellies. Multiple A/C units can make a large difference in a big RV during hot spells. Lots of windows are great for scenery, but they're terrible for temperature control in both the hot and cold. Some RVs are quicker to winterize than others with water heater bypass kits and antifreeze pick-up tubes. This can make quick winterizing when traveling between climates easier.

Will you travel with others?

- Kids
- Pets
- Occasional guests

The more people you have around, the more there is a need for dedicated places for trash and laundry. You'll need more dishes and food storage. Everything increases, not just sleeping space. If you're only considering occasional guests, maybe they'd be better off staying in a cabin at the campground with you. Where does the dog's crate and food go? If you're traveling full-time, you'll want space for school supplies and a workspace for school and work. If you have kids who need to be in car seats, not every motorhome has forward-facing car seat locations.

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What level of comfort do you or your traveling companions require?

- We're happy to use pit toilets, campground showers, and cook outside.
- We want a certain level of comfort, but we're easy-going.
- We like all the comforts of home. That's why we want an RV.
- We want the full luxury experience. Bring on the dishwasher and marble floors.

Obviously, your comfort needs are going to affect the size, quality, and cost of your RV. Some RVs have two bathrooms, double sinks, marble countertops, multiple TVs, and more. Just remember, the more amenities you have, the more complicated maintenance and repair can get. Smaller RVs are going to sacrifice space for the items you want to keep you comfortable and may have you ducking in the shower or prepping dinner on the kitchen table. Some very small RVs may not even have a bathroom or will have a wet bath.

Conclusion

Your answers to these questions should give you an idea of how you'll use your RV and help you better select one. Take your time, enjoy the dreaming, planning, and research phase, and don't worry if you don't have the answers today. That's what this course is for. One way to get some hands-on experience and figure out your travel style is to rent an RV. Check out a peer-to-peer RV rental company, or look into rentals at your local dealership.



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I Motorhome vs. Towables

Hopefully you're beginning to get an idea of the benefits of the different types of RVs, but let's dig a little deeper into the difference between motorhomes and towables.

I Motorhomes

Motorhomes are often a joy to travel down the road in, with expansive windshields and ample room for passengers. Motorhomes can be a bit easier to drive than larger towables, primarily because trailer sway on the highway is not an issue, and turns are a bit simpler.

Motorhomes can offer some incredible amenities, too, but they will come at a price. The average diesel Class A is in the \$300,000 range.

Unless you tow a vehicle behind you, you will have to break down camp to visit sites or go to the grocery store. That means unhooking the power and water, bringing in slides, stowing things that fall off shelves and tables, and unleveling—then repeating the whole process when you get back.

That said, if you intend to be the type of camper who packs everything you need for your trip, drives to a location, and stays there, then you may not need a towed vehicle. Bicycles, motorcycles, golf carts, rental cars, free campground shuttles, taxis, and ride-share options are other methods that motorhome owners employ to avoid towing a vehicle, but frequent travelers often find that type of planning tedious. Many motorhome owners don't plan to tow a vehicle but end up changing their minds pretty quickly.

Options for towing a car include flat towing, where all four wheels are down, or dolly towing, where two wheels are on a tow dolly and two on the ground. Only a select few vehicles can be towed four-down, and it can cost \$3,000 to \$5,000 to prep them to tow. Most front-wheel drive vehicles can be towed on a dolly, but dollies can be a bit of a hassle to maneuver around a campground. A flat-bed trailer to drive the car up on is possible, but they are very difficult to stow at a campground. If you are planning on towing your vehicle behind an RV, carefully research the options for your make and model in advance.

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Motorhomes are great for people traveling with pets. There's plenty of room for them to wander around, and places for crates.

When it comes to car seats for children, all need to be strapped into a forward-facing seat, and while newer motorhomes have seatbelts in the living area, sometimes there isn't a forward-facing seat or enough of them. Most newer models incorporate the "latch" system for car seats, but older used units won't. It's a debated topic whether car seats should be used in motorhomes at all, as they are not crash tested, so this is a decision you and your family can make.

Motorhome advantages:

- The driver's area is readily accessible to the rest of the vehicle, allowing passengers to quickly access the kitchen and bathroom while traveling.
- Motorhomes tend to be easier to drive than a trailer, since highway trailer sway is not an issue, and you don't have to worry about how the trailer tracks behind you when turning or backing up.

Motorhome disadvantages:

- You have to break down camp and stow anything that can bounce around each time you need to leave the campsite, unless you tow a car behind you for getting around.
- Only certain cars can be easily towed, and towing a vehicle is an added hassle for backing up and leaving or arriving at camp.

Towables

Towable RVs are drastically less expensive than a comparable motorhome, which is why more than 90 percent of RVs sold are trailers. Besides cost, the second major advantage to a towable, especially if you already own a truck or capable SUV for towing, is that you bring your own vehicle with you, allowing you ease of access to areas outside of the campground.



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This can also be the biggest disadvantage for some. You need a serious truck to pull the bigger towables, and if you have to pay \$60,000 or more for enough truck to haul your trailer, there might not be much in the way of cost savings. With a towable, you will generally use less fuel on travel days than you would with a large motorhome, but it's a wash when you consider what you may spend driving around exploring in a big dually truck compared to a smaller towed vehicle.

It's hard to understate the importance of making sure the tow vehicle you own or buy can haul the trailer you're looking at. Do your research and know before you go to a dealership what you're working with.

Only the smallest travel trailers, pop-ups, and teardrops should be pulled behind a typical SUV or minivan. If you want a trailer, you more than likely need a truck to tow it. We'll talk about towing considerations in Chapter 4.

Towables come in all shapes and sizes, allowing for all types of floor plans to meet all types of camping needs and budgets. Motorhomes don't get quite as big as trailers and are much more limited in floor plan options, especially bunkhouses for families with kids.

Towables are drastically less expensive than a comparable motorhome, making them more popular. They range in size from the smallest teardrop trailer to massive 45-foot trailers with multiple slide-outs and spacious living areas.

Towable advantages:

- You bring your own vehicle with you automatically. You can easily day-drive and you are only traveling with one engine to maintain.
- Towables are much more affordable than comparable motorhomes.
- Loads of floor plans and options are available.

Towable disadvantages:

- A serious truck is required to pull most towables.
- You may experience highway trailer sway.
- You need to stop and sometimes extend slides in order to use the restroom or kitchen.

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I Budgeting

It's important to figure out what kind of money you want to spend on an RV before you shop, otherwise you might be tempted to spend more than you can afford.

Start with what you have. Perhaps you already own a truck or a second vehicle that can be traded in for a truck. Or maybe you own a vehicle perfect to tow behind a motorhome.

We'll talk more about financing in Chapter 5, but if you want a loan, you'll need a down payment of at least 10 percent, or sometimes 20 percent. Figure out what you can handle for a monthly payment and use a [loan calculator](#) to see how much that may cost you over the term of a loan. Remember, RVs depreciate in value, and you don't want to get stuck owing tens of thousands of dollars when you're ready to trade in.

You'll also want to look at what your vacation and travel expenses will be, especially if you're trying to find the point where an RV makes more financial sense for your family than airlines and hotels.



A good starting point for fuel and maintenance is to expect to spend around 60 cents per mile traveled as the true cost of owning your RV.

You'll also want to budget for gear and upgrades. This part is often more costly than people expect. While you can use things like your household dishware and cleaning supplies, you'll likely want to buy a second set for your RV. You'll need hoses, a power cable, a surge protector, a water pressure regulator, and more. Plan on spending at least \$1,000 to get your new RV fully equipped.

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New vs. Used

One way you can save money is by buying a used RV.

Used RVs are generally sold as-is—even if they're still under warranty, often that warranty isn't transferable. Some are very well taken care of, others have never had any maintenance done. But new RVs can also have issues. They're hand-built and you shouldn't expect to drive your new RV off the lot in perfect condition like you do when you buy a car. Things bounce around and need to be fixed.

You'll take less of a depreciation hit buying a used RV, which can be another big saving, but they're a bit more challenging to get loans for. Buying a used RV may also require you to get new tires, which can cost thousands of dollars on a big motorhome. Tires should generally be less than 5 years old.

We'll talk more about the process of buying a used RV in Chapter 5.

Related Reading

[Should You Buy a New or Used RV?](#)

[What RV Can I Buy With My Budget?](#)

[Is Owning an RV Worth It?](#)

[Do RV Parks Enforce a 10-Year Rule on Rigs? 78% Say Maybe](#)

[Affordable Travel: How to Take a Budget-Friendly RV Trip](#)

[Everything You Need to Know About Financing Your RV](#)

