

RV Guide for US Expats in the States



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RVing for U.S. Expats in the States

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Intro

A few years back I wanted to take a year off, drive around the States for 6 months then sail around the Caribbean for the other 6 months. While the trip did not turn out like I drew it up, I have learned more about the U.S. in the last 9 months than I ever thought possible. Do not tell my wife but my goal is to sail back from our next post event though Relationships with my family changed in ways I also did not expect. There are many things I would change, for the most part, I think I have done a fairly good job. As I am writing this, I am sitting in an RV park in Idaho Falls, Idaho. My son and I spent the night in Jackson Hole and visited Grand Teton National Park two days ago. We decided to pass on the hot springs nearby as we have been to several in the last few months. Today, we went to a potato museum, took a bike ride along a beautiful riverwalk, and had a few hours to read and watch a movie. Tomorrow, we are driving our 32' Class C motorhome and tow vehicle to West Yellowstone to meet one of my best friends from my time in the Peace Corps. This has been a pretty good week, but so have all 34 weeks we have been on the road.

Here is a quick intro to our set up. I bought a 2017 Four Winds 31W Class C. It is 32' long and has a ton of nice features that have made this year so much more comfortable than I could have ever imagined. We have a queen-sized bed in the back, a larger sleeping area over the cab, three televisions, a residential fridge, microwave, stove, oven, shower, toilet, four separate areas to sleep, seven seat belts, awning, inverter, solar capability, cruise control, automatic levelers, a 26' slide out, and lots of storage. The engine is a Ford E450 and gets the job done although we only get about 8mpg. We tow a 2013 Chevy Sonic with seating for five and two (well, currently three) bikes. The only thing I really dislike about our set up is the clearance. The RV itself has a super low clearance due to the leveling pads so I am limited to where I can stay.

How to read this guide. I am going to provide a short intro for a bunch of topics. There are literally tons of resources out there, but I never found anything that put it together the way I would have liked it. Here is my attempt.

Looking to Buy

Types of RVs

There are a lot of different styles. This is a brief introduction to each.

Class A: Big rigs, usually at least 35' although they make them much longer. It can be awfully expensive to buy and run. Many are diesel and have air brakes. These are the closest things to an actual home. Some have dishwashers, washer, dryer, etc. The parks you stay in are limited. More expensive, and almost all run on 50 AMP power.

Class B: Smaller rigs that are all the rage right now. The Amazon vans you might see in the DC area, Mercedes Sprinters, #VANlife pics. Prices are ridiculous IMHO. 100,000 to start and it would be easy to spend more than that. Many people buying these work on the road and are singles or couples. They have all the features of a motorhome squeezed into something that can park in a regular parking space.

Class C: Medium-sized rigs that you drive. This is what we have. They can have all the features of a Class A but on a smaller scale. Many have slide outs. Not as expensive as Class A's or Class C's. The engine is attached so you can get in trouble if you have engine problems.

Fifth Wheels: The most popular option for full-time families. These rigs attach to the back of a truck kind of like a trailer on an 18-wheeler. This means you need to have a truck that can pull a ton of weight. These trucks are crazy expensive themselves. The newer ones have just as many features as a house and feel very close to having a real house. These need big spaces and 50 Amp for the most part.

Travel Trailers: These attach to the back of a truck, car, or SUV with a regular hitch. They can be 10' long or almost as big as a fifth wheel. This might be the most popular because you might be able to get away using your current truck/SUV to pull this around the States.

Pop ups: This was my original idea. I have seen about 5-10 of these this year.

Feature to Look For

If you are thinking about this for real, I would start by looking at all types of RVs for sale on the Internet. New RVs have the most recent features but just about ALL new RVs have tons of warranty issues that will need to be taken care of. This can take months as RV dealerships currently have huge waits to get service. One RV dealership just outside Fort Meade told me they stopped taking reservations for RVs that were not bought at their dealership because they had a backlog of service appointments over 16 months long!

Not to worry, there are mobile RV techs just about everywhere. You can expect to pay \$100-\$200 an hour for service.

RV Shows

There are tons of RV shows throughout the States. One of the biggest is in Hershey PA in September. It will have everything you can imagine. There are lots of other events all over the country, all the time. Just look and you will find something.

Renting an RV

There are lots of places that rent RVs. Cruise America is all over the States. I have seen more in the western part of the U.S. than the east. Renting one would give you a good idea of what it is like but the RVs they rent do not have all the features of the RV you are most likely to buy. For example, they do not have slide outs and leveling systems. Finally, they are super expensive. It might be cheaper to rent a car for a year and stay in cabins and hotels.

Internet Searches

I must have looked at over 1000 RVs in our last post while preparing to come back to the States. My first day back, I went to a RV dealer to see one in person. I had never been in an RV in my life. The sites I looked at were RVtrader and Facebook Marketplace.

Repairs

This is a consideration for all RVs. There are going to be repair and maintenance. It is rare to see an RV listed with problems and just as unusual to talk to a RV owner that does not have a short list of problems. Almost everything you can do if you really want. I have resealed everything possible, replaced many of the slide gaskets (rubber seals), giggled the wires in the radio enough that it works 90-95% of the time, and put new awning arms on along with the original awning. This probably would have cost 4-6K to fix at an RV repair shop like Camping Worlds and about half that with an onsite RV tech. Parts can take a few days to special order. Repairs are expensive but necessary. The most common problems I have seen are slide outs that do not slide, leaks with slide outs, hitting something on the roof, and water heaters. No wonder Cruise America does not rent RVs with slide outs.

Inspection: Yes or No?

Many RV techs will also go through an RV over the course of a few hours to test all the systems within the RV. This can cost \$250-\$1000 depending on location. In the DC area, I think it would probably be around \$500. Knowing virtually nothing about RVs, I did not get one. That was dumb although I got lucky, for the most part.

An inspection will take a few hours while the inspector goes through all the systems in the RV. Like a home inspection, the inspector will let you know what is good and what needs to be fixed. Having owned an RV for a year or so I am not sure I would get an inspection, especially in an RV like the one I currently own, however, you will probably find enough issues that it will make it worth it. You can also have a much better idea of what will need to be done. Water damage is the most destructive issue to look for. If you do not know how to assess water damage, get an inspection. Look for wavy walls inside and out, wallpaper that looks like it has water damage due to ripples, soft spots on the floor, and signs of leaks anywhere water passes from one pipe to another. The connections are often plastic and loosen while driving due to vibration.

Price matters

RV prices range from a few thousand dollars to over a million. Class A's, and Class B's will be more expensive. Travel trailers will be the least expensive while Class C's and Fifth Wheels run the gauntlet. RV dealers are always having sales. I do not think anyone buys new RVs for retail price; I think I have heard 15-30% off MSRP is normal. I bought mine used so I am not super sure of the details. There are guides out there with approximate values although there are so many additional features the base price could be tens of thousands of dollars off the listed

price. For example, automatic levelers add several thousand dollars if they are not standard. Solar setups can cost \$10,000 easily. Bottom line, when looking, make sure you do due diligence. Before calling my insurance company and they gave me their insurance value. That was helpful.

Time of year matters as well. Lots of people like to buy in the spring for the summer and others sell in the fall because they do not want to pay storage costs over the winter in addition to insurance, maintenance, winterizing, etc.

From Dealers

I do not have any experience with this. In short, dealers charge more but they might sell at a cost only slightly higher than an individual. You might get some type of warranty or service plan of some sort. The few I looked at have been traded in. They had not been cleaned and did not look even close to the condition of the one I bought.

From Individuals

This worked for me. I looked at hundreds, if not thousands of RVs on RVtrader.com, Facebook marketplace, Camping World's website, and every local shop within 100 miles of D.C., Louisville, and Orlando. (These were the places I was visiting before we started the trip.)

On Facebook I found 32' Class C for sale about 30 minutes from my mom's house in Louisville. When I went to look at it, the RV 'looked' in better shape than any used RV I had seen, and it had been stored its entire 'life' in a barn. We talked and I offered \$9,000 below asking which was about \$14,000 below the bank value. They called me back later that night and said it was a deal but 'as is'. I told them I wanted to look at it outside the barn with the slide out. When going through it outside I noticed a mildew smell, the awning was sitting in the field next to the barn, and the radio was not working. I looked around as much as I could and decided, even with these issues, I was not going to find something better and bought it.

Things to pay attention to:

Water damage, water damage, and water damage. This is the biggest pain in the butt, the most expensive to repair, and will cost you more every time it gets wet. If you find any water damage and you are unsure, I would get an inspection.

Clearance: Find the lowest point on the RV, especially in the back. I knew they were low, but I did not realize how much this would affect our trip. I have to skip some gas stations because they are slightly too steep. I have also hit the ground with my leveling plates about twenty times.

Past Repairs: This could be good. For example, I knew the tires were older and they'd need to be repaired before I sold it. I finally pulled the plug about 1000 miles ago and paid about \$1200 for RV rated tires. This could also be bad. If the last person put off repairs like fixing the water heater or something like that, it could indicate there is a lot more to be done once you buy it.

Slides: Make sure they go out and in like they are supposed to. I have seen more than a few people at campgrounds getting their slide motors replaced. One RV tech even told me to buy

the motors now because they are eventually going to go. Besides the motor, which will be difficult to determine if they are going to break next month, check the rubber gaskets. These can be expensive to buy although it is not super difficult to replace yourself.

Logistics

Insurance

Insurance was easy to get through USAA. I literally had it after talking to the sales rep for about 20 minutes. I did not shop around because it seemed like a good deal. I actually got the insurance through Progressive. It is about \$850 a year for comprehensive. In the grand scheme of things, this a good deal. I have not had any claims.

Tow Vehicle (aka: Toad)

This was a must for us. Vehicles towed by RVs need to be able to be towed. You can find a list on the Internet without any issue. It costs a few thousand dollars to set up a vehicle up to be towed if you include the tow bar, all the cables, and brake you put in the car while it is being pulled.

In a lot of places, we have stayed in a central location and driven the tow vehicle. I cannot think of how we would have done the trip without one. Every full-timer I know has a tow vehicle. We bought a 2013 Chevy Sonic with about 30,000 miles on it and set up for towing. We paid \$9,000. Again, it took lots of time and hundreds of searches to find something that was under \$10,000. I got lucky again.

Internet Options

Starlink is a portable satellite dish we use everywhere. It connects to the internet through the square satellite dish called a dishy. There are lots of options depending on what you want. We got the RV version which allows us to use it all over the country and put it on pause when we are not using it. A word of caution, in populous places with a lot of Starlinks, your speed will be slower. It also needs 100% open sky to get the best reception. The east coast was impossible in a few places. We have been able to use Starlink in the rest of the U.S. It takes less than five minutes to set up, so we set it up even when we are stopping over for one night.

All the major phone companies have cell tower boosters available for a lot less. These work well when the reception is good but do not work at all in remote areas with zero cell reception. This has happened to us a lot, especially when camping in the west, boondocking, or isolated campgrounds.

Many campgrounds offer the Internet, in fact, about all of them do. Sometimes you pay, sometimes you do not. We have not used campground Internet access in many months.

Repairs

This is probably going to happen. You will be driving a poorly constructed house on wheels at 65 miles per hour for hours on end. One RV tech told me he went to pick up his travel trailer from the manufacturer at about 9 in the morning. They asked him about a few things such as the flooring. He replied, "I'm sorry but we are here to pick it up today." They responded by telling him it was currently just the frame, but it would be done in eight hours. Eight hours later he had his completed travel trailer. Like all of them it had issues covered by the warranty.

Most repairs will be minor and only a slight inconvenience. Tightening up a loose connection, replacing a door latch, replacing a piece of plastic, etc. I'd try to do these on your own. Google has videos on everything you can imagine, and they are easy to follow. Many RV parts stores will have the replacement part in stock although the prices can be out of control. I have found Amazon often has the exact same part for 70-90% less than the RV parts shop if you have time wait.

For big repairs, you will need to call in the big guys. I've never had to do this but this may mean an RV tech, a RV service provider, and the vehicle manufacturer. Prevention is the key.

Inspect your vehicle all the time. Not all of it once, but you should constantly be on the lookout for things that have shifted or don't look right. Most importantly, look for possible places for water intrusion.

Gas, Brakes, and Towing

Diesel: Most Class A's I've seen run on diesel and have air brakes. Diesels tend to breakdown less and air brakes are much better on mountain roads in my experience.

Gas: Most RVs besides Class A's are gas and hydraulic disk brakes. At least that is what I've been told and observed. I have not heard of too many people having engine problems in newer RV's although I'm sure it happens. Most seem to have hydraulic disk brakes. These don't do as well in the mountains, but I have never felt any nervousness driving mine. As mentioned earlier, I just replaced the tires and the brakes still had over 80% (10+ cm) after driving over 10,000 miles with the brake the prior owner had on the vehicle when I bought it.

Towing a vehicle: If you are towing a vehicle your RV might have a tow mode. I use this mode all the time. It essentially uses the engine to slow me down on downhills. My son would be rich if I gave him a dollar for every time, we were going down a hill and I told him I wasn't even touching the brakes. On rare occasions it will ramp the RPM's over 4000. Once it gets to this point, I will push down on the brake pedal until it goes down.

You will have to attach your car to the RV somehow. Almost everyone uses Blue Ox or Roadmaster systems. You need a supplemental brake in 46 of the continental 48 states. It is mandatory in all states if the vehicle is over 300 pounds. My tow vehicle weighs less than 3000 pounds, but I have used the brake for 99% of the time it has been attached to the RV. These

systems are expensive to buy and install. Buying a vehicle already set up is probably your best bet.

Taxes

VA garage tax: Virginia has a special tax if you garage your RV in counties surrounding D.C. I have been asked to pay yet. While registered in Vienna, it has only been in Virginia about ten days. I hope I can get around this somehow.

Sales tax: I had to pay several thousand when I bought it. No getting around this.

Property Tax: I am pretty sure I will be asked to pay the rate for a home for next year's taxes.

Some people register their RVs in states like South Dakota, Montana, and Texas to avoid these taxes. As we are only doing this for a year, I didn't bother. As I am writing this, I am thinking it would have been cool to buy an RV in South Dakota, spend the fall in the northwest and be closer to Virginia Now. (I am writing this from West Yellowstone, Montana.)

Storage

Long-term: There are lots of storage places. Around D.C. the prices are \$100-300 a month. Outside the D.C. area the prices drop precipitously. If I were keeping mine longer and needed to store it, I would go outside the VA Garage Tax area.

Short-term: When heading back to visit the wife and daughter we have left the RV in a hotel parking lot using an airport parking app, we have paid for a spot at an RV park, and we've parked it at the airport itself. These have all worked out and we have not had any issues. I would not be comfortable parking it on the street for any extended period of time. The locks are not super strong.

Planning Trip/Route

This is a constant battle. It can and will consume you at some point in the trip. At the beginning of this trip, I planned out a few months in advance. Lately, I've been winging it on a regular basis. I have been trying to find anchor points that I know will be crowded and reserve them well in advance. Unfortunately, a lot of people plan out their campgrounds years in advance. Allstays.com is the app I use to find places I can stay. There are lots of options. For stopovers many people use Walmart parking lots, Cracker Barrel restaurants, Truck stops, pull offs on the side of the road, BLM land, etc. You should always ask the manager before setting up. Some do not want you using your generator, putting out your slides, or putting down the leveling jacks.

Vacations within your "vacation"

As strange as it is, sometimes we take mini vacations. A few nights in a Vegas hotel, a wedding, a visit with family or friends. As much as I love the RV, it is wonderful to take a shower or bath in a house, sleep in a bed with more than one foot on either side, do laundry, eat in a kitchen bigger than a typical bathroom. After a few days, I always miss the RV and want to get back to it. I am not sure how it is going to feel when we move out for good. It will probably take some adjustment.

Travel Time

The RVlife App does an excellent of calculating time from point A to B. Sometimes it will take you up and down a huge hill to avoid something like a main street in a small town. I always look at the whole route to inspect anything that looks suspicious. You can program the app by your RV's height to ensure you do not hit anything.

Google Maps does not have an RV mode, so I rarely use it except to look at elevation. I do this by using the bike map. This does not always work as bikes are not allowed on interstates and I prefer to travel on interstates.

Some people avoid interstates at all costs. They seem to enjoy it more but travel times can be much longer.

Propane

Unlike car camping where we would use propane for cooking, we use it all the time in the RV. Cooking, heat, hot water, and fridges (in many RVs but not ours ☹️) are some of the most common uses. It is incredible how efficient propane is as well. As much as we use it, I have only had to fill the reservoir tank a few times this year.

Finances

The RV and Tow Car

As mentioned before, I bought the RV from an individual and took out a loan, i think the loan is about \$530 a month. In addition to that I pay about 80 to \$90 per month in insurance on the RV. I bought the tow car outright or \$9000 and I think the insurance on the tow car is probably \$50 a month or less. Overall, we spend about \$700 on the loan and insurance for both cars.

In addition to this we spend a couple \$100 each month on maintenance including oil changes car washes, small repairs to the RV itself, changing tires, etc. While this number can vary from one month to the next, I would say on average we probably spend about 150 to \$200 on maintenance each month.

Gas

We only get about 8 miles per gallon while we are towing the tow vehicle. We normally move once or twice a week and I usually have to fill up the vehicle during our drives and it usually is somewhere between 100 to \$175 per fill up. Overall, we probably spend about 800 to \$1000 on gas each month and that also includes the gas for the tow vehicle which is negligible when you're getting 8 miles per gallon with the RV itself.

Starlink

After an initial investment of \$700.00 I currently pay \$135 for the mobile edition of Starlink. Starlink is trying to figure out their pricing plans so it changes quite often in terms of what you can do and how much it costs. For example, the current plan I have is going to change to \$150 in the next month or so and they are starting to limit some of the things that people could do with they are Starlinks. For example, comma some people used to be able to use their residential Starlink when they went camping over the weekends but now that is no longer an option. Your best bet is to go to the website and check it out. I don't believe there are any other competitors right now. When including the \$700 initial investment it looks like we spend about \$175 per month to have Starlink and it is worth every cent.

RV Parks

RV parks can vary in cost from \$20 all the way up to \$150. If you wanted to you could even go much higher than that but we haven't on this trip. I would say the average amount that we spend per night is about 50 to \$60 a day on RV parks. This accounts for some nights staying in BLM lands, staying with friends, and the occasional night at a Walmart parking lot or something like that. We spend about 1300 to \$1600 month on RV parks.

Food and Drink

We tend to eat at home a lot, so we don't spend a ton of money on food and drink. I would say we probably eat out about once a week maybe a little bit more when we are in cities or visiting people. Most of the time we eat in the RV with need to be bought from a grocery store. It is nice having a full-size residential fridge, oven, three burner stove, and a microwave. We spend about \$500 a month on food and drink.

Excursions

We are focusing on history this year so most of our excursions are to national parks, historical places, or places of historical significance. We still sometimes go to things like trampoline parks, Hot Springs or even Universal Studios. These can add up very quickly so we also have a lot of days where we just spend in the RV just like somebody might spend the day in their apartment in Vienna VA on a weekend. Excursions probably average out to be about \$500 per month.

Grand Total per Month

Adding it all up it looks like we spend somewhere in the range of \$3750 to \$4500 per month all in. In reality it's a little bit lower because some of the costs have already been incurred at the beginning of the trip such as the cost of the starlink and some other things.

Hitting the Road

First time

The first time driving the RV was scary. I had driven a school bus as a first-year teacher, and I had some experience with some big trucks and lawn cutting equipment but driving the RV was quite a bit different. The first major difference was when I looked in the rear-view mirror, I didn't see students or lawn cutting equipment, I saw a house. Additionally, the farm I bought this on was in a rural area with narrow roads, so I struggled from the start.

Ten months later I feel completely comfortable driving the RV in just about any condition with the tow vehicle connected in the back. Taking my time on turns and not worrying about slowing other cars down is super important. With the tow vehicle attached to the RV I cannot go in reverse without detaching the tow vehicle so that is something that I'm always looking at when I go into a gas station or something where I might have to turn around. Another thing I learned is that if everything is not secured or latched down, it's going to open. I did not know that the refrigerator had a special latch on it and so that flew open while I was driving and a drawer or two opened as well. Anything that drops on the ground of an RV while you're driving is also going to make a noise so loud you might jump.

Towing another vehicle

Towing a vehicle is not really that difficult especially in a situation like mine where I have a very light and small vehicle behind me. I have a radio with a camera so I can look and make sure everything is OK. The most difficult part is making sure that it is attached correctly when I am moving from one location to another. Some people use checklists, I have my son help check everything with me. When you buy the car, would be a good idea to ask the prior owner how they set their vehicle up to tow. I have not found any issues in making turns with the tow vehicle behind the RV but I'm sure some people have had their tow vehicle go over a curb or something like that.

There are a few things that I've learned along the way from different people. The first is to use zip ties to ensure that the red plug that connects all the electronics is secure. Secondly, you do not need to detach everything from the RV every time you stop. Just keep it connected and check it often to make sure all the lines and wires are secure. If you're driving a long way you might want to turn the engine of the tow vehicle on for a few minutes to let the transmission fluids do their thing. Everything I have seen says that when you're towing a vehicle you should not go over 65 mph. That is what I set as my limit although RV's with tow vehicles or travel trailers pass me going much quicker all day every day. I like to sit in the right lane and enjoy my drive rather than trying to make the best time ever between two places. If I'm in a city I tend to go to the lane just to the left of the rightmost lane to drive a consistent speed rather than having to slow down or speed up for cars merging in and out of the Interstate. As a quick side note, I found driving in Dallas to be the worst city to drive in due to people cutting me off, going around me, etc.

Wind & Weather

Driving in the wind is really scary. In Arizona I spent one day driving in winds that were consistently about 30 mph and gusts were probably significantly more than that. I slowed my speed down to 50 mph average and even less when I was going through a mountain pass or something like that. If you join any of the Facebook groups dedicated to RVs you will find about once or twice a month people will post pictures of an RV or a travel trailer on its side. In my experience this year about four out of five of these incidents happen with travel trailers. Travel trailers are the RV's that attach to the back hitch of a truck or an SUV.

Besides wind, the next most dangerous thing I have been in is rain. I have not driven the RV in snow and don't plan to. For my RV the owners manual says that I should not have it in tow mode if the conditions are slippery. Of course the first time I had to take it out of tow mode I was on the steepest mountains of our trip just outside of San Diego. I decided to slow down significantly and keep the vehicle in tow mode with hundreds of feet between myself and the next vehicle.

In short, I drive quite a bit slower, less aggressively, and I leave myself a lot more space to slow down my RV and tow vehicle which probably weigh together well over 15,000 pounds. It takes a lot more time to slow this RV down than a normal car.

What to do while driving

We tried to keep our driving down to about four hours per day. My son is able to do most of his schoolwork and have some free time to play on the PlayStation, watch videos, or read. About halfway through the trip I got a new inverter which allows us to run the fridge, the TV, and a few outlets. This has made a significant improvement in traveling.

Set up and Take Down

Whenever we arrive at a new campground I like to set everything up immediately. I have noticed other people might set up only the essentials like the electric and they save the rest for later. Here is a quick rundown of everything we do to get the RV set up in order to get the slide out we have to level the vehicle first so that is the first step, leveling the vehicle. My RV does it by pressing one button so it's really not that hard. While I am doing that my son is getting ready to push out the slide which is just one other button. While all of this is going on we also set up the Starlink, connect the electricity, connect the sewer lines, connect cable if we have it, and connect the water. This used to take about 30 minutes but now I think we can do it in under 10.

Taking it down everything is relatively easy. We just do everything in the setup but generally in reverse. There are a few things to notice such as making sure nothing gets in the way of the slide and nothing is going to be crushed when we put the leveling jacks up. Connecting the tow vehicle takes about 5 minutes so from start to finish taking down everything probably takes around 30 minutes or so.

How to use your RV

Each RV is different but they all have a lot of the same features. Even after 10 months or so on the road I am still learning new things about the RV. I should have read the owners manual right when I bought this but I waited a few months and when I did read it, I realized there were a lot more things that I did not know about. If you are buying from a dealer you can ask as many questions as you want. Same thing from a private individual. While these things may not be constructed very well, they do have a lot of great features.

Routes

These are just some suggestions for routes I might suggest based on my experience from the last year. These routes are also based on the fact that you're going to probably be leaving from the Washington DC area and you are going to have to return at the end of your trip.

One month

In one month, I would go to Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and finish the trip by going down the Hudson River back to Washington DC. If you leave in late August or September, you will most likely hit peak leaf season for the whole trip.

Three Months

Same as the one-month trip but maybe slower or adding a trip down the coast to North Carolina or even Florida.

Six Months

This might be a little tricky because part of your trip is going to be through winter if you leave in August or September. If I had to do this trip I would probably go to the northeast and then head down to Florida and explore the south or just head South and maybe go out to Texas or even southern Utah and back.

Nine Months

In nine months, you could go around the entire United States if you wanted to but it would be short visits to a lot of places. One option with this would be to go out West in the fall, head down the coast of California, and return to DC going across the united states [in the South](#).

One year

There are tons of options In one year. My son and I started with the plan I mentioned for one month then we took the coast down to Florida where both of my parents live. The first part of the trip took us about 2 1/2 months so we spent Thanksgiving with my parents. From there we spent about two months getting out to California and we spent about 5 weeks in California. From here we went to Montana via the national parks in Utah and Wyoming and the plan is to sell the RV in Seattle or Portland and drive across the United states in the tow vehicle over the course of about two weeks.

One thing I overlooked was the access to national parks in the northern part of the United states. Another option that I should have explored was going out west in the fall, heading down the Pacific Coast over November and December, and then heading back towards DC in the spring. This would have allowed us to see more in the west and be closer to DC as we finished our trip. Unfortunately, we probably would have had to skip the northeast with this plan.

Passes/Parks/Subscriptions

Good Sam

Good Sam is a membership through Camping World and with their \$39 per year you get tons of discounts on items at Camping World and a lot of campgrounds. This is a no brainer. In addition, you can also purchase warranty plans and roadside assistance.

<https://www.goodsam.com/>

RV Life

This is the app I use to plan our routes. It costs about \$30 a year and is well worth it. The feature I like the most is it shows where there are bridges or underpasses with low clearances. One thing to note, there are some issues with the route including it doesn't tell you where to turn until you are very close and it sometimes takes you on routes that are safe but definitely not the most direct.

<https://rvlife.com/>

All Stays

I use this app occasionally to figure out where we can stay. I think it costs about \$10 and it has tons of different campgrounds and other places you can stay throughout the United states. It tends to be a little bit more encompassing than a search on Google Maps.

<https://www.allstays.com/>

AAA

to be honest I can't remember if I have AAA or not. However, there are a lot of discounts for AAA membership in museums, campgrounds, and lots of other excursions. AAA offers a vehicle and an RV version for their roadside assistance.

<https://mvg.aaa.com/>

KOA

Some people love koalas and some people hate them. I love them, however, they are oftentimes the most expensive option in a town. Most KOA's will have amenities that you will not find in other parks, there are often a lot of kids, and scheduled activities. If you plan on staying at more than one KOA in your trip it's probably worth getting the \$30 per year membership.

<https://koa.com/>

National Parks Pass

The National Park pass costs about \$85 per year and everyone in your vehicle can go to a National Park if you have the pass. My son and I have probably been to 15 or 20 places where we needed the pass and in many of those places, we have gone more than one day. If you don't have the pass, it costs \$20-35 per day to enter a lot of the parks. If you have a child in 4th grade the entrance fee is waived and there are several days throughout the year where entrance to national parks is free as well.

<https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm>

Fulltime Families

We joined full-time families after hearing about an event in California from a family sitting in the Hot Springs in big bend National Park. Fulltime Families provides a bunch of Facebook groups for different types of families that are traveling full time. They also have meetups and reunions and all types of events throughout the United States that brings together several families that are full time the event we were supposed to go to in California ended up being on the Arizona California border with about 55 other families. The thing I liked most about it was meeting new people and my son having a group of friends to play with. In fact, we ended up going to Mexico with one of the families for about a week after the event in Arizona. The cost for a year is under \$100 and you pay for each event.

<https://www.fulltimefamilies.com/>

Republic of Nomads

“To serve and grow our community through experience-based travel opportunities & service. Equipping families to transition from short-term to long-term family travel by creating culture centered around Nomadic family living.” This is another group similar to full-time families but I think it is a little more lax in terms of structure and the families that join it. Yeah

<https://www.therepublicofnomads.com/about>

State Parks

many states require you to join a State Park for the year, but I have found that it has always been worth it. Of special note, the state parks in Texas were fantastic and when I go back to Texas, I will definitely try to book some state parks in advance.

Thousand Trails

Thousand Trails is a subscription camping service that allows you to stay for free in many campgrounds across the United States. The United States is divided into five zones, and you pay for one zone and in different thousand trails campgrounds if you only stay three or four nights and then if you stay longer, you must go out of Thousand Trails campgrounds for seven days before you can go to the next one. They have other subscriptions which allow you to go from one to the next. It's best to look at their website. We decided not to do this for a variety of factors including the distance to city centers and the poor reviews of many of the campgrounds used by 1000 trails. Some are great and some are horrible.

<https://thousandtrails.com/>

Harvest Host

Harvest Host is a service where you pay about \$100 per year and you can stay in unique places like wineries, breweries, and individual's driveways in exchange for buying something from the proprietor. Most people stay just one or two nights, and you generally won't have sewer although you might have electricity and water depending on the location.

<https://harvesthosts.com/>

BoonDockers' Welcome

This is like Harvest Host but there are a lot more individuals rather than companies. It costs about the same as harvest host. Some people have mentioned they really like it while I've also seen reviews from people indicating their spot was a dirt patch at the end of a road.

<https://www.boondockerswelcome.com/>

It looks like Harvest Host and Boondockers Welcome have joined forces. You can pay \$180 per year to join both of them.

RV Parks & Places to stay

Cheap

We often stay at the least expensive option in a town because we hardly ever use the amenities provided by the campground. For example, we don't use the bathrooms, the showers, nor the Internet. These campgrounds tend to be RV parks with a lot of people living permanently. It really depends on location, but they will oftentimes be half the cost of the normal or expensive options in the area.

Average

Campgrounds in this category oftentimes offer a little more in terms of amenities. They might have a clubhouse, a pickleball court, and even a pool. They oftentimes are found in more desirable locations in a city or provide quicker access to excursions. The best campgrounds in this category are wonderful because you get the amenities of a nice campground without having to pay the exorbitant fees.

Expensive

There are lots of new campgrounds in the US and a lot of them fall into this expensive category. These campgrounds tend to be over \$100 per night and provide a lot of amenities from pools and hot tubs to free smores and restaurants serving food. They also tend to have more rules. The KOA campgrounds that include a lot of amenities would fall in this category.

Overnights on the road

If you are traveling a long distance in one day, there are lots of options for staying the night somewhere. Several companies including Walmart, cracker barrel, and a few other national

chains in their parking lots. You can also find truck stops that might let you stay, patches of land next to an intersection on the Interstate, BLM lands, and gas stations such as Loves. Finally, you can oftentimes find RV parks that aren't listed or that have one or two spots available for people traveling through.

Resources/Groups

Facebook

There are literally hundreds of RV groups on Facebook. I started out with groups dedicated to selling RVs and tow vehicles (often called toads.) From there, I joined a few groups dedicated to homeschooling and road schooling.

Fulltime Families

The suite of Fulltime Families' sites is wonderful. Everyone in the group has children and many people have probably visited the place you want to go and can probably help answer your questions. Unlike many other FB sites, you will not get the person telling you to add 'blinker fluid' or telling you they can't believe someone with an RV wouldn't know the answer.

RV Owner's Groups

My RV has a dedicated owner's group. There are people in the group that have owned their RV for many years and can provide a ton of information. While RVs often have the same parts and look similar, this can be one the best resources if you find something you just cannot seem to solve on your own.

General RV Groups

These groups are huge and have people with all types of RVs. The information is general and the groups are so big it can be more of a resource for browsing rather than trying to find specific information. As it comes up in my feed, I often find myself reading answers to questions I do not have.

RVLife Groups

When you join RVLife, you will have the option to join an owner's group for your RV. Like the FB owner's groups, these can be very valuable.

Manufacturer's Website

Just this last week I was trying to find the plumbing schematic for my RV. No luck in any of the groups until I put my VIN number on the Thor owner's page. Low and behold, I found the plumbing schematic as well as a lot of information not covered in the owner's manual.

Planning

What to consider.

Weather, weather, and weather

Weather can make or break a trip. Rain can leak in to you rig, snow can ruin the roof and awning, one gust of wind can rip your awning off, and temperatures below freezing can mean thousands of dollars in repairs to your water lines. And that is while you are stationary. When driving from one place to the next, rain/snow/wind can make a bad day worse.

On our trip we have encountered several weather events that we had to prepare for in advance or just prepare. When never leave our awning out when we leave the RV. To be honest, we rarely use the awning itself. Rain has not really been too much of a problem except driving down I-10 get into San Diego from Arizona. I just drove slow and did not worry about it. I kept the RV in tow mode although some say you should not when it is raining and slippery. I had not had the brakes checked in seven months so I was not 100% how much life they had left in them. Wind gusts, especially in the west, come out of nowhere. A few times I have been driving and all the sudden the RV wanted to move one way or the other. I slowed down and took a few deep breaths.

The biggest issue has been cold temperatures. My RV has a system to heat the waterlines and heat the two dump tanks (gray and black) in cold weather. Even with this, I drain everything when it gets cold. This involves opening the low drain point and clearing the lines with about 45-50 psi of air through the portable tire air pump I bought. I also drain the hot water heater although I do not think I have to if I am connected to electric and close it off from the rest of the water lines. It takes about 20-30 minutes but allows me to sleep. Some people do not do anything until the temperatures are below 26. If the temperatures are only going to be below freezing for an hour or two, I do not bother doing anything except unscrewing the hose from the RV and spigot and draining as much water as I can via gravity.

Where to stay

This can become a fulltime job. There are so many places to stay, places to visit and each one has tons of reviews. I have changed our plans probably 50 times this year. For example, I was going to go through southern Colorado right now. In fact, I have a message to check out a place in Pagosa Springs, Colorado today. I am actually sitting at the kitchen table of friend's house in Bozeman Montana.

If there are places you really want to see, you should think about booking them now. Cancellation fees are often generous but many of the most desirable parks fill up quickly. State and National Parks even quicker.

In the beginning of the trip I tried to plan out at least a month in advance. This worked well but took a ton of time. Over the last few months, I have chosen hub locations, booked them, and winged it from one to the next. This worked out well. Now that we have the option of being off grid using solar and we have some experience with this, I am not planning in advance at all.

This freedom is wonderful but it will probably mean spending a few nights in Walmart parking lots along the way. So be it.

National Parks

National parks are great. They offer some of the most stunning beauty our country has to offer. They can also be super crowded and super difficult with an RV. In general, you need to make reservations well in advance for the best campgrounds. These campgrounds often open up the reservations three to six months in advance of the day you want to go. Some people set their alarms for 8 a.m. (or whatever time they open) in hopes of getting a spot. Some places have lotteries and other places have reservations for entering the park (although if you have a camping reservation, you should be fine. Many of the parks have very limited spaces for RVs larger than 27 feet. Ours is 32 feet.

We have only stayed in two parks. Acadia in September and Joshua Tree in February. In Acadia, we stayed at Schoodic Woods. It is about an hour each way to Bar Harbor and most of the park. While it was great, I'd probably belly up and pay for an expensive campground nearer to Bar Harbor if I went back. In Joshua Tree we stayed in a site without any amenities and it was too small to pull out the slide. There was some BLM land a few miles away that might have been a better option.

In short, staying in national parks is your best option but it will require a lot of planning, the right timing, and good amount of luck. Good luck!

Winter in the northern part of the U.S.

Many of the national parks and campgrounds in the northern part of the United States are closed or very limited. We are heading to Glacier National Park in Montana today and only a small portion is open. Yellowstone had less than 30% of their roads open last week.

Winter camping requires a lot more attention to detail, especially water. When the temperature drops below 32 degrees, you should start thinking about clearing all your lines, draining your hot water, and disconnecting your water hose from the spigot. All these issues can be avoided. For example, there are heated water lines and campers made for four seasons. Mine has a heating system built in and heaters on the gray and black tanks but I still drain it when the temperatures are going to get more than few degrees below freezing for a few days. It stinks doing this repeatedly night after night. For us, it was better to follow good weather unless we could not avoid it.

Retirees

There are millions (??) of retirees that had south for the winter. Almost every park we went to this year had many more retirees than children. In fact, we spent weeks without seeing other children in campgrounds. This was totally unexpected. I think they were all at Thousand Trails

campgrounds or spent the winters in Florida. Just do not expect a lot of children except for the winter holidays and spring break.

What to Bring

Grill

If you do not have an outdoor kitchen, a small propane grill might be useful. I use it to cook bacon and other foods that will stink up the RV. There are some with a little grill and a burner. Of course, I have one, but it is our HHE.

Chairs

We have camp chairs for my son and I and few guests. Besides one loveseat-sized chair, we hardly use any. Weekend campers seem to set up a lot more than fulltimers.

Fire/Propane

This was something I would do differently. I would purchase a propane fire and use it. Wood has been expensive (up to \$17.00 a bundle) and the quality is suspect at best. We had one bundle that must have been soaked in fire retardant glaze or something. We could never get it to burn.

Clothes

We brought clothes for all seasons and it was a good idea. Besides my thickest winter jacket, we have used everything multiple times. If you plan to be gone for a year and traveling extensively, this is probably the route to go. I brought one suit and tie in case I had an interview or had to attend a funeral or a wedding. I wore it once to a wedding.

There are a lot of clothes I was not sure if I should bring or not. Ski gear was high on the list. I am glad we brought them even though we only went skiing once. We have used the goggles and gear for other activities like off-road driving in Moab.

Activities

We have tons of activities traveling with us but do not use nearly as many as I would have thought. We have board games, lots of outdoor activities and sports equipment, game systems, technology, and books. It's nice to have so much but we would probably put most of it in storage if we had the chance. Of course, the second we ditch something, we find the perfect opportunity to use it. We do not use a lot of the outdoor games very much. Moving from one place to the next involves a lot of packing and cleaning up. Adding sports equipment just is not our jam.

Books

Between my son and I we probably have over 100 books in the RV. Both of us like to read and having options is important. With that said, many have been read and just take up space. They

also weigh a lot. I take a Kindle Reader with me everywhere and find it convenient but I still like paperback books better. Unlike the activities above, I am happy to have so many options.

Bedding

RV bedding is a little different. For example, my queen-sized bed is a few inches shorter than normal. I have one set of RV-specific bedding and several sets of normal bedding. RVs get cold at night. We have at least five or six comforters and use all of them regularly. When it gets warmer, we use a few comforters to cover couches. Eleven-year-olds are prone to spill everything.

Dishware

There are lots of options. Bring your own dishware, buy 'cute' camping versions of everything, or go to a big-box store and buy cheap versions of everything. We did the latter and it has worked out great. Our 50 cent plates get recycled when they start to look old. Our pots and pans have withstood the test of time well. Finding a place for everything can be difficult. We store a few pots and pans in the oven and do not have many extras. For example, I have four cups, four coffee cups, and four plates. After hanging out with another family for a few weeks we also use much more paper plates and bowls than I do in my real life. When we don't have water or electricity while camping or when eating salads, we almost always use paper plates. For the record, we never buy individual plastic waters, we always fill up a few gallon jugs at campsites before moving to the next place.

Electronics

As I am working and my son is doing homeschool online, we have lots of electronics. I used a desktop computer I set up on our kitchen table, a laptop, and everything else I used in our last post. This was not an area I was willing to compromise. I do get a little nervous leaving everything for more than a day or so. I use our slideout as a 'safe' by putting expensive or valuable items in drawers that do not open without the slide out being open.

It took a new inverter and a lot of testing but we finally found an outlet that works with our inverter. There are only two. One for the tv in the front and the other in a cabinet just behind the passenger seat. Newer RVs will often have one next to the main bed for people with CPAP machines. There is a good chance your RV has one, you just have to find it.

Bikes

Bikes have been wonderful in providing access to a lot of adventures for us. My son has a mountain bike and I bought a cheap touring bike from Walmart. That was a mistake as it broke almost immediately. I bought another bike and ditched the old one. Never again Walmart! We use our bikes for exercise, getting to the store, taking out the trash, and a million other short trips.

Electric bikes are all the rage but I have heard many stories of electric bikes getting stolen. In tow parks, one in Las Vegas and one in Los Angeles were told to put our bikes inside the RV at

night or they would get stolen. Little did they know even thieves would not touch my Walmart bike!

Lots of thrift stores have good children's bikes. I found my second bike on FB marketplace.

We have two bike racks. One connects to the ladder on the RV and the other to the back of our tow vehicle. This has been well worth the small investment. We always lock the bikes when traveling.

I put a rack and panniers on my bike. This has also been very useful for longer bike rides. Sometimes rides can be in areas of national parks or rural routes without access to bike shops. A decent tool bag with extra tubes and a small pump is a good idea. Also, we put water bottle holders on both our bikes for longer rides.

Working on the road

Workamping

Some people send their time on the road working at RV parks. In exchange for a free place to live, you work about twenty hours a week. Sometimes the locations are amazing and the work might be as simple as checking each site once a day. Others work the office or do maintenance. This probably is not something you would do in one year, but it is an option. Just last night I saw an offer to join their page.

Volunteering

There are many opportunities to volunteer. While we did not formerly volunteer on the trip, we saw many retirees volunteering in their 'new' communities. I would ask the campground, camp host, or your neighbors if you are interested.

"Work from home" Online

Tons of families I have met on the road work remote jobs. I do as well. I generally work in the mornings while my son does his schoolwork. We almost always do some type of excursion or activity in the afternoon. There are lots of resources and ideas on how to make this work. Occasionally the Starlink is in a bad position and the internet is slow but over 95% of the time we have not had a problem.

Workspace matters

Defining a workspace in the RV for working and school is important. While our RV is 32 feet long and there seems to be ample places to work, in reality, it is pretty crowded. I set my desktop up on the kitchen table and my son usually works on the couch with a collapsible tv tray as his desk. We must stow everything when we move.

Everything has its place although this has been a work in progress. My desktop lays flat on the bed when traveling. My son has a bin where he keeps the schoolwork materials he does every day. We have a school supplies cabinet and electronic cords cabinet.

I have read about people taking out a couch, loveseat, bunkbed, or kitchen table and replace them with a desk. This seems reasonable if you are not worried about selling the RV in a year.

Homeschooling

Virginia Requirements

As a certified Virginia teacher, I was able to get permission from the Fairfax County Public School Superintendent's Office to homeschool my son. Once I had permission, I do not need to do anything else. Nothing.

If you are a parent without a teaching license, you will need to do a little more, but not much. I believe you must show a record that your child met the state requirements and may have to take the SOL exams at the end of the year in certain grades.

There are lots of resources. The [Home School Legal Defense Association](#) was very helpful. The site labels Virginia as moderately regulated.

What I did with my Fifth Grader

For my son, I put together a robust year with lots of shorter activities. Without recess, lunch, questions, repeating things, going to bathroom, announcements, and everything that happens at a school, he could finish all his work in about two to three hours. Some days we hiked for eight hours (PE) and other days he read an entire book. While he likes this learning, we did miss out on the social aspects of being in a school. I do not think I would consider doing this for more than a year.

There are many options for a comprehensive programs. Some have all online classes; others have all correspondence. The [State Department Home Study Resources](#) has a good list to get you started. They can be a bit too rote and require too much time in front of screens.

If you want to give it a try, [Accellus](#) is a good place to start. There is a \$25 per month option for parent-led classes and \$79 a month for accredited teacher-led classes. Ashton took six classes but did not last long. When he started dreading school I knew it was time find a program that would work for him.

Our Program

Writing: Institute for Excellence in Writing provides a comprehensive 23-week program in writing. Online lessons twice a week and a formal writing project at the end of the week.

Math: Khan Academy. Free, easy to manage, and good enough!

Science: Middle School Science divided into three courses.

Spanish: Duolingo; two lessons each day

Social Studies: U.S. History for Expats' U.S. History I

Art: Udemy art class on perspective. He loves it.

Music: Yousician piano practice. 20 minutes 3 times a week.

Reading: 30 Minutes every day. He almost always exceeds this
CNN10: Watch and complete a small activity each day.
PE: informal with a log: hiking, biking, sports, camping, and swimming
Journal: Twice a week based on prompts found on the internet.

Internet Accessibility

This is a must for our situation. Please see the section above on internet options.

National Parks Junior Ranger Program (& Passports)

The National Par Junior Ranger program is a series of activities children can complete as they go from one park to another. Once complete, your child can repeat the Junior Ranger Pledge and get a badge from each park. They are repetitive and often have similar activities like which five items would you bring to this park.

We get a stamp in his National Park Passport each time we visit a park or anything in the National Park System. He has probably gotten 70 stamps this year. They are definitely worth purchasing for each child. I wish I got one for myself. Instead, I collect magnets.

Many state parks and museums have caught on. They have similar programs and booklets children can fill out. For some reason, you must ask a ranger or person at the front desk. These booklets are not publicly available.

National Parks, state parks, and museums have lots of programs. I generally do not look ahead, but if I did, I would have realized there are lots of activities for homeschool students at all these places as well as general ranger-led tours. Maybe next time.

Accredited Programs

If your child is in high school, to graduate from a high school, they will generally need an accredited program to get credit for their classes. Our next international school needs my daughter's Grade Nine transcript to be apostilled before accepting her credits.

Middle and elementary school students will not need to be as strict. With my son, I kept a record of his work and summarized it 'as his teacher'. We also created a video (we will probably show at his wedding or something.)

Boondocking

Batteries

Lithium batteries are the best for several reasons. In general, they charge quicker, and you can use 100% of the batteries. On the downside, they are super expensive, and you may need to change all types of things in your RV to get them to work.

Marine/RV batteries are more economical, but they take longer to charge, and you cannot use more than 50% of your batteries before damaging the batteries themselves. I have 200AH of batteries and I can pretty much run a few things with my fridge turned off all day and night. I used 260 watts of solar in the day to keep the batteries charged. This worked relatively well.

Portable Batteries

In the last few years, portable batteries have exploded (on the market, not literally.) I do not have any experience with these but the reviews seem to be good. Most people who use these batteries go from no power to some power. Almost all have a solar option and 'packages' you can buy. The companies I can think of off the top of my head are Ecoflow, Bluetti, and Goal Zero, and Jackery. At the moment, many forums I have looked at say Ecoflow is the best.

BLM Land

The Bureau of Land Management has land all over the western part of the U.S. as well some patches in other parts of the states. In general, you can stay on these lands for up to 14 days for free. In some heavily traveled areas such as Quartzsite, Arizona, you may have to pay a nominal fee. The huge benefit of BLM lands is not paying to stay. However, there are drawbacks. Some BLM lands did not have the most impressive campers or people living in them. I asked one of the hosts about safety at one outside of Lake Havasu. He told me in twenty years of being the host he had not heard of one thing getting stolen.

The big drawback of BLM lands is the lack of resources. Almost all of them do not have electricity, water, or sewer hookups, at least not for free. There are some BLM campgrounds and a few have electricity, water, and a sewer hookup. Most RVs have holding tanks for fresh water, black water, and grey water. These will last anywhere from a few days to weeks. Depends on a lot of factors like how many people are showering a day.

To get around this people do all types of the things. For electricity, some people use generators, either on board or after market. Solar is a popular option. There are lots of resources for finding out how much you need. If you don't have a residential fridge and do not use your air conditioning, solar could be a long-term solution.

I turn my fridge off while we are boondocking and use 260 watts of portable solar during the day and run the generator for about four hours a day; two in the morning and two at night. If you run a propane heater at night, there is probably an electric fan pushing that hot air. This will use some of your battery resources. Finally, Starlink takes electricity to run. I turn off the snow melt feature as it scans for snow all the time if left on. Also, you can shut Starlink off during the middle of the night. These features are found on their app.

We have a 36-gallon holding tank attached to the bumper of the RV. We use this to transport black and gray water to an RV dump station when we need to. Our water tank is huge and we have never come close to using all of it when boondocking.

If you are staying for one to three nights you should be in good shape. You can conserve enough water and battery-life to enjoy your time. Any more than three days and you need to start adding equipment and economizing your limits. Boondockers love to tell stories about boondocking. "We went a whole month without having to empty either tank and only used six gallons of water."

Most BLM lands do not have a place to dump your wastewater. However, people will be able to tell you where the closest place to get water, propane, and dump your tanks. Some places even have people that will come to you!

Solar

We use 260 watts of portable solar when boondocking or when we are in a place that does have electricity. On a sunny day in Arizona, it is more than enough to keep the batteries full. I have not tested them in cloudy weather. They were totally worth it for the few days I used them but I'm not sure I will keep them as they are big, heavy, and bulky. Setting up a permanent solar system on the roof is popular for many full-timers.

Many of the newer RVs have a solar port built into the RV for easy connection to the batteries.

If you are installing yourself, I would make sure you know what you are doing before starting. There are lots of ways to get in trouble or make mistakes, costing you valuable solar power. The biggest one seems to be setting up a system for lead-acid batteries with a lithium battery. Not all components work together. Also, solar energy does not travel well. Straight lines without many turns seems to be the best bet.

Blue Boy/Wastewater

These are portable tanks used to get rid of black (toilet) and gray (sinks, faucets, shower) water. We bought one about halfway through the trip for a huge discount. It has been worth it because we have stayed at about ten campgrounds without sewer connections at the site. One time we stayed for ten days. This would not have been possible without our blue boy.

With a little more experience, knowing the capacity of our tanks and how often we fill them up, I do not think we need our blue boy anymore although it is nice having it onboard. Our tank is 36 gallons. I'd get a smaller one next time too. The 24 gallon one seems like a good option.

Generator

Luckily, our RV has a 4000w Onan onboard generator. We use it sparingly but it is always nice to have it available. As I mentioned before, we use it for a few hours a day when boondocking. We have also used it on the road to cook a meal in the microwave. Some people use their generators a lot more than us. If you do not have an inverter connected to your refrigerator, you might need to turn the generator on from time to time to cool it.

If you do not have a generator on board, you can buy an after market one. There are two main types. The first is relatively inexpensive but loud. They cost about \$500. The other is smaller and quieter but costs about twice as much. In either case, you can probably connect the generator to your normal. Many campgrounds ask you to lock your generators up due to theft. If you buy one, I would buy a heavy duty lock at the same time.

Propane

Propane in our RV is used for the hot water heater when not connected to shore power, the stove, burners, and heat. It is amazingly efficient. We have only had to fill our onboard tank up about 3-4 times this year. Each time it cost around \$35.00 or so. Some RVs have a propane option for the fridge although your fridge will be considerably smaller. To be honest, while I love the size of our residential fridge, I would trade it in today for one that ran on propane.

Vehicle Clearance

This is super important. There are lots of places in the States with low clearance. We use the RVlife app to see where they are. You can set the height of your RV and it will spit out routes with the correct clearance. Sometimes the routes are goofy so I always double check with Google Maps. The Allstays app also gives clearances although you must look each one up individually. Unless your RV is taller than 18-wheeler, you should be fine on most roads. Even so, I have gotten used to looking at the big yellow signs before each bridge or underpass. The scariest was the border city in Mexico, just after crossing the border. There was an underpass in meters and I could not decide if I should go or not. I chose not to but it was something like 20 feet high. Better to be on the safe side. People often hit tree limbs, car wash clearances, and other low hanging things that are not labeled.

What you need to buy

RV bedding

RV bedding is a different size than normal bedding. Amazon sells RV-sized bedding. You can get by with what you already have.

Kitchen

We use a lot of inexpensive plastic we bought at Walmart, inexpensive pans, and a roll up drying rack. We only have four of everything.

Cleaning

We use the same cleaners we would use in our house. Nothing really different.

Bathroom

RV toilet paper is thinner but easier on the system. There are tablets to put in the toilet after you flush it. Odor and 'poop' cones can be an issue. There are lots of methods for cleaning the black and gray water lines.

Storage Bins

If they fit, they are probably worth it. Lots of things move around when driving an RV. We use about twenty bins to store everything from clothes to fruit.

Connections/Electric

Your RV will have normal outlets. The newer ones also have a lot of USB connections and cigarette lighter outlets. This should not be an issue as long as you stay with 110.