



on the open road

Traveling in a Van or RV

With the perfect storm of pandemic travel restrictions and precautions combined with a general lifestyle shift, many have decided to switch gears and live and/or travel in a van or RV. People from all walks of life—from empty-nesters to recent college grads—are taking extended breaks from their homes and apartments to experience the open road. Although it's hard to beat the newfound freedom, adapting to life on the road has its ups, downs, twists, and turns. Let this article inspire your next road trip or between-traditional-housing adventure.



How to Choose.

Your choice of vehicle depends on your budget and how much space you need. If you are traveling solo or as a couple, a conversion van is a wise choice. Prices vary depending on new versus used as well as make and model. One of the most popular conversion vans is the Mercedes Sprinter, with conversion costs ranging from \$5,000 (do it yourself) to \$30,000+ (hiring a professional). If you are crafty, keen on DIY projects, and on a tight budget, a new or used minivan can be easily transformed into a lovely glamping mobile with simple bed and storage for a couple hundred dollars.

If you plan to travel with two or more people, pets, and/or adventure hobby gear (kayaks, bikes, ATVs, skis, etc.), you may want to consider a larger RV. There are a plethora of spacious motorhomes and pull-behind travel trailers and fifth wheels. A popular midrange trailer for those with lots of gear is the toy hauler with a collapsible ramp. Increased demand for domestic travel means new and used prices run the gamut beyond the basic factors of age, size, and amenities.

As with any big purchase, you may want to try a van or RV before you buy. Escape Campervans, Airbnb Unique Stays, and Outdoorsy make it easy to rent a variety of different setups. Prices vary depending on length of rental, type of vehicle, and demand. Campervans start at roughly \$60 per day; whereas, RVs range from \$100 to \$300 per day.

Where to Stay.

One of the benefits of a van or RV is that you can change the scenery as often as you like. Not only can you stay in state and national park campgrounds, but there are many other options ranging from eco- and wallet-friendly to ultra-luxurious glamping sites. For unique stays at farms, vineyards, and more, check out Harvest Hosts. HipCamp and Airbnb also offer off-the-beaten-path stays.

If you are on a budget and are open to the unexpected, boondock in National Forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. Boondocking is a rustic camping experience with no facilities, electricity, or water. Most who elect this route have invested in solar panels and/or a generator. (See sidebar for all things solar.) To locate boondocking sites and more, try the FreeRoam app. Lastly, don't forget that if you are near a Walmart, you can usually park there overnight for free. It's a great, all-around provisioning stop too.

Never have there been more resources available to make van life possible. Don't you think it is time to hit the road? Buckle up!

yhl / Written by Heidi Siefkas.

Going Solar.

To power laptops, cell phones, heat, and air on the road you need a source of electricity. Instead of relying on traditional RV-park hookups, install solar panels on your vehicle so you'll be juiced up wherever you go.

What You Need. For an eco-friendly way to power your adventures, mount solar panels on your van or RV. You will need one to three panels plus a charge controller, battery monitor, inverter, and wire harness. Popular brands of solar panels include Dokio, Weize, and Renogy. Prices range from \$200 to \$400 USD per panel.

Have a Plan B. Seasoned RVers and van campers know that weather can be your friend or foe. Even if you plan to be in a sunny area, a partly cloudy day or a passing front can limit your solar panels' charge for that day. As a secondary power source, many choose to purchase a small generator, which runs on gasoline or propane. Travelers complained of older generators because of the noise and size; however, current models have evolved to be quieter, compact, and lightweight.