

Solo Full-time RVing On A Budget

Book Sample

Part 2 : RV Selection

2A: Go small, live big

When people think of full-time RVing, what usually comes to mind is one of those Class A bus-style motorcoaches that costs a couple hundred thousand dollars, or one of those three-axle 5th wheels that gets pulled behind a heavy duty or industrial sized truck. When that's the standard folks go by, of course full-timing seems inaccessible to all but the wealthiest people.

I had \$23,500 in the bank when I started this adventure, and know people who had considerably less than that. Being smart with what money you do have and creative about the other resources at your disposal will take you far. My first big not-so-secret to getting on the road sooner rather than later is to **go small**; that is, get a small RV.

Obviously a smaller RV is going to require less savings up front to purchase, and get you on the road faster. But most people never look beyond that to the other benefits. They cost less money to maintain because there's, well, less of it to break. If by some extreme misfortune your small RV were to get totaled in an accident, it would cost less to replace. Small RVs are also going to have better gas mileage on average than larger ones, which saves even more money.

There are other benefits to a smaller RV besides the monetary ones. They're less stressful to drive in big cities or on crowded roadways because you need less room to pass and change lanes if, for instance, you find yourself in an exit only lane. And if the other drivers around you are being particularly rude and not letting you leave the exit lane (you'll have to excuse them, they're still stuck in the rat race you have escaped), it's also easier to find a turn around to accommodate your smaller size to get back up on the highway. Also:

- Many small RVs can fit into standard parking spots, which makes it easier to get into attractions, fill up on gas, and go shopping.
- They require less time and effort to keep clean and organized.
- They're less likely to bottom out on uneven dirt roads, being shorter and with less space between the front and back wheels.

Now, a word or two on what is seen as the most obvious negative of small RVs—less room.

When people find out that I'm perfectly comfortable in 100 square feet of living space, I get a lot of skeptical looks.

Realize that as a full-timer you can choose to follow good weather year-round, and that means your living space includes your porch and back yard too, as well as all the neat parks, museums, beaches, historic sites, shops, restaurants, and everything else you'll visit on your travels. The trick is to live *out of* your RV, not in it. I eat and sit outside a lot. On days off from my various work-camping jobs, I hop in my truck and drive to other locations. I take frequent hikes and walks. I don't often have to worry about cabin fever in the winter, because I winter in places where it's warmer.

It's also true that a small RV requires more downsizing, but there's a beauty to be found in living with less stuff. Everything I own fits in my RV and truck, and no, I never feel wanting for lack of "stuff".

For most Americans, lifestyle inflation is the natural course of life. The more money you make, the more things you buy to show the world your increased status. The more things you have, the bigger the house you need to keep it all in. The larger the house, the more you need to work to afford it, and the less time you actually get to enjoy it all. It's a vicious cycle, and one our consumer-driven economy encourages because it makes the folks at the top more money. Possessions end up owning you instead of the other way around.

Minimalism is the name given to the lifestyle of purposefully owning less, and like full-timing before retirement it's growing in popularity. It's beyond the scope of this guide to cover the whole breadth of minimalism, which is just as common among people who live stationary lives as those who are nomadic, but there are a lot of blogs, forums, and books out there devoted to the topic for those who are curious. Links to two of my favorite minimalism blogs can be found in the appendix.

I am not a strict minimalist, but I do advocate a simpler way of life. Small RVing is about choosing experiences over possessions. You could spend your hard earned money on items that provide only brief gratification until your neighbor trumps you by getting the next big thing, or you could spend it traveling. When you're on your death bed, do you think you'll be remembering with fondness that entertainment center you bought on sale? Of course not, you'll be thinking of the memories you made, the places you went and the people you met along the way.

I cannot count the number of retired RVers I've met in my travels who wished they would have started on the road when they were younger. I've heard it dozens of times by now. Going small is the answer that will get you on the road sooner, allowing you to live a bigger life full of the kind of memories you'll be glad to have when you reach old age.

2B: Picking your perfect small RV

At this point, when a life of travel finally starts to look possible, people tend to jump right into thinking about how much this is all going to cost. But you can't know what it's going to cost

until you do some research on RV options first.

The process looks something like this:

1. Figure out generally what you want in an RV.
2. Look at the sizes, brands, and floor plans available for that type of RV, research and evaluate their usefulness to your unique situation and durability for full-time living—this step will take awhile.
3. Pick the one you like best, and through more research get an idea of what the price tag is generally like.
4. If the price tag is far outside your means, start at step 1 or 2 again keeping that in mind.
5. Finally, if it's reasonable, figure out how to get the money if you don't have it now. We'll cover that later in Part 3.
6. Buy your RV, have fun living the dream.

The easiest way to reach a goal is to make it a concrete, measurable one. Saying "I need to save some money for an RV" is not as powerful as saying "I need to save \$1,000 more for the RV I want." This is one reason why you need to pick the RV you want before asking the money question.

The other is because you might very well be disappointed if you simply pick the first RV you can find and afford now without researching all the options. You could discover after you're on the road that for just a bit more money saved you could have bought one you liked a lot better. This is your future home we're talking about, and it absolutely has to meet your personal needs—whether those needs are cheap or expensive to meet—or you're not going to have a good full-timing experience.

So let's talk a little more about choosing an RV by elaborating on steps 1 and 2 from the list above.

There are quite a few small RV options out there. The first decision you need to make is

whether you'd rather drive your RV (a motorhome) or tow it behind another vehicle (a towable). If you're a complete newbie to RVs, you can find links to my articles on the different types of RVs with their benefits and disadvantages, listed in the appendix. This is also a good time to open up The Perfect Small RV Worksheet, included with this guide.

While you're looking over the different types and weighing their pros and cons (there is no one best type of RV, just the best type for you), you'll want to think on the features and layout of your future home on wheels.

As a full-timer, what amenities are you going to want? It's entirely a matter of personal preference. What you deem necessary is not likely to be the same as the next person, so yes, it's time to put on your thinking cap. Not all types of RV are going to offer everything you may want so this will influence your decision.

As a starting point, here are the amenities my small RV has:

- Toilet
- Shower
- Two sinks
- Gray, black, and fresh water tanks
- Two-burner stove
- Microwave
- A/C unit
- Roof fan
- Awning
- Single, low-clearance axle
- Convertible full-size bed/dinette
- Convertible child-size bed/dinette

And a few things my small RV doesn't have:

- Oven

- Furnace
- Couch
- TV

Whether you decide on a towable or a motorhome, it's crucial that you **take your time deciding** and **be thorough in your search**. Class B's, Class C's, conversion vans, pop-ups, and travel trailers can all make viable full-time living quarters and the best way to figure out which small RV will work best for you is to spend time looking at and touring every kind. Visit RV shows, take a trip to your local RV dealer, and pay attention to the RVs you see in campgrounds. When you're touring them, lie down on the beds, sit on the toilets, and mime taking a shower. Look inside every storage cubby and imagine where your belongings will fit.

Just seeing pictures of the interior or layout and a list of features online is not recommended because it's impossible to get a real sense of scale, but once you've narrowed it down a little by looking in person the internet can be really helpful. Search online for communities and forums dedicated to the RV you're interested in and see what owners have to say about it—do they seem generally happy with their decision? What are the common problems seen with this type or brand of RV? Maybe you can even arrange to meet with someone at a rally to give you a tour of their RV. This is especially handy for harder to come by RVs like my Casita that are built to order and won't be found on a dealer's lot.

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