

BASIC CHECK LIST BEFORE LEAVING ON AN EXTENDED RV TRIP

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Dream to R.V. on extended trips or become full timers? We will explain what is involved and what preparations one should take. A checklist will be handed out after this presentation

Our Experiences: Have camped all our married life, starting out with a hardtop tent trailer, Motor home and two 5th wheels. We worked our way into full time RV'ing gradually. Our first trip we went with another rig for about 3 weeks to the Lloydminster Provincial convention and to parks in Saskatchewan. June 12th of 2002, along with two other rigs, we headed east to attend the National Square Dance Convention in Saint John New Brunswick. This trip took us to Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. We have spent three winters in Arizona, one in Mesa and two in Yuma. We enjoy this lifestyle so well that in August 2003 we rented our home and went full time RV'ing.

PLANNING:

There are a few questions you have to ask yourself before deciding upon extended RV trips.

1. How much time can you take? Is it a factor?
2. What are you going to do with your house? If you Plan to leave your house vacant you must have someone check it every day, or a family or friend live in it. Rent it out or sell it.
3. Deciding where you wish to travel.
 - a. You can consider staying in Canada or,
 - b. You can consider heading south to U.S.A., Mexico or further south.

Pros and Cons - both ways

Pros of Canada - there are no currency problems and there is much to see and do.

Cons - Most RV are not designed for winter camping without using lots of propane and power. Drains freeze up etc.

When heading south there are lots of Pros but there are a few major concerns you must be aware of. There is more planning involved.

1. CURRENCY - The exchange rate must be considered. Two years ago we paid 67 cents on each dollar. Last year 33 cents on each dollar. Gas is sold in U.S. gallons - more difficult to compare.
2. Today it is advisable to have a current passport and to be aware what you can and cannot take with you. It is very advisable not to take meat and fruit with you. We know people who filled their freezer with meat before going south, and lost it all at the border. Last trip we went over with an empty fridge. When we crossed the border at Del Bonita three inspectors and a dog inspected our rig from one end to the other. Fortunately they found nothing wrong.
3. When you return to Canada keep track of all your purchases made in the US. You are entitled to \$ 750.00 Canadian per person in merchandise when you are out of the country 7 days or more. Either 1.14 litres liquor or 1.5 litres wine or 24 bottles or cans of beer. Also, you can bring 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars.

PLAN AHEAD:

Start making plans at least 6 month in advance of your trip. If you have special places to go that are very popular, it is wise to book your spot up to a year in advance to avoid disappointment. To start with roughly map out where you would like to travel, what you would like to see and do, how long you wish to be away and approximate date of departure. If you wish to stay at a certain resort, or go over a certain ferry at a certain time these must be booked well in advance.

If you are planning extended traveling in the USA, one must keep track of your days south of the border. CANADA allows travelers to be across the border 6 months & 1 day in a calendar year.

If you extend this you are prone to health insurance & income tax problems. U.S.A. has a different set of rules for their income tax. They need to know if you have done any work in the U.S.A. Any income such as golf course marshalling or any other type of compensation through a barter system is deemed to be income

earned and subject to their tax. Time wise they allow 183 days before there is a major concern BUT it is figured as follows.

Add all days in USA. in current year, plus 113 of all your days in previous year plus 116 of all days in year previous to that.

NOTE. There is a special form # 8840 which you must carry on you when crossing the border if you fit into the above category.

It all boils down to you are not allowed to earn any income in the states without paying tax on it. NOTE: More information on form 8840 is available from IRS Center, Philadelphia PA. 19255.

HANDLING MAIL:

Another major concern is how to handle your mail. Keep in mind that when traveling you may be required to write your address on a receipt or document, therefore a home address is important.

Four major avenues to collect your mail while traveling are:

1. Via Canada Post. Presently Canada Post rates for personal mail are \$60.00 for 3 months forwarding and \$10.00 each additional month. Business mail is \$150.00 per month. If the post office holds your mail they will charge \$6.00 for every two weeks otherwise mail will be returned to sender.
2. Private companies such as FEDEX or UPS, usually in conjunction with R. V. clubs, set up a mailbox and forward your mail to you when you phone them. Example: Using a four pound parcel sent from Calgary to Arizona; FEDEX (overnight service via air) will cost \$67.00. UPS (one week service via land) will cost \$20.00.
3. Many who full time R. V and have sold their house direct their mail to a family member.
4. In Calgary there is a mailbox service available to extended RV travelers. The phone No. 248-7454. You rent a post box for \$11.00 per month. There is a charge of \$4.00 every time your mail is forwarded, Plus the UPS or FedEx charges applied, your choice.

PAYING BILLS:

You also have to decide the best way to pay your bills each month. The three most common ways are pay direct, direct bank debit or by computer.

1. When you pay directly you have to have someone open your mail and write cheques for you, or make arrangements to have your mail forwarded to you. Disadvantages are if you move around chances are great that you will have late paid bills.
2. Paying bills by computers are getting more popular all the time. You have control of your books but there are a few problems RV'ing.
 - a. You have to get the statements to enter them into the computer
 - b. The majority of campgrounds as of yet are not computer friendly. It is hard to find a computer hook up that will work via satellite is still very expensive. In the near future wireless Internet hook up will be available in many campgrounds but for now very few.
3. The one which suits our needs best is that all our accounts are Paid by direct bank debit. We have never had a problem and I know there will not be any late charges. It helps of you know someone at the bank who you can phone and clarify entries of you have forgotten what are they are.
4. What will happen to your business or Personal affairs if you should become seriously ill or have a major accident while traveling? Do you have a current will? Have you assigned "signing authority" at the bank so your business can carry on?

HANDLING MONEY:

Another major concern when traveling in the States is finances. How much money to carry - cash or Travelers cheques? How much money you need at your disposal?

1. You need a nest egg set aside for unexpected expenses that may arise, e.g. Blow a fire, motor troubles, transmission problems etc. Camping Guides suggest you set aside money every month - they recommend a \$5000.00 nest egg.

2. When doing extended trips, or full timing, it is important to keep track of your finances. It is easy to spend more money than you planned on. Joyce & I carry a laptop computer with us. We put a financial spreadsheet in it. This way we keep close track of our finances. We average \$3000 to \$3500 per month. This figure does not reflect larger trips such as cruises, trip to Australia, New Zealand etc. You need to figure out a method that you are comfortable with and stick to it.

3. Along these lines, how much cash to carry with you? Your choices are Cash, Travelers cheques, Visa or Debit card you must carry some cash with you as many camp grounds, flea market vendors or street vendors will only take cash. Travelers cheques are like cash BUT we have found in many places no one will cash them and some will charge a high cashing fee. Visa and debit cards are the easiest way to go but you have no control over what banks & money machines charge. Every transaction could very easily charge between 5 to 10 dollars. On debit cards you get nicked when you take money out of ATM machines and then your bank will charge you a hefty fee to process it. Some travelers have found it convenient to have a U.S. VISA account, but there may be additional hidden bank charges for this service. We usually leave on an extended trip with \$500 Travelers cheques, mostly in 20's. These are tucked away and used for unexpected expenses. Also we carry about \$400 cash. When we are in Yuma Arizona we have set up a U.S. bank account with Wells Fargo (strictly bank location- many U.S. cities have Wells Fargo) NOTE, If you write a cheque on a Canadian bank and write in U.S. funds the bank will charge you \$10.00 to process it. We also have an account with Custom House Currency Exchange. This works great for transferring Canadian funds to U.S. funds. They give you a U.S. bank draft which you can deposit in your U.S. account and they charge less than 1% for this service.

When traveling in Mexico you must carry some Mexican Pesos to purchase gas and personal needs, especially if you get off the main highways.

Now that your pre planning is done. A few days before leaving you should walk around your rig and do a visual inspection. Make sure that everything is in top shape.

1. Tires and spare tires are in good shape with correct air pressure.
2. Motor is serviced - oil, grease, Air filters etc.
3. Determine if you need to leave home with a full tank of water or 1/4tank. This depends whether you are dry camping or using full hook up services.
4. Propane tanks topped up.
5. Are windows closed and locked. Some RV magazines recommend leaving a top vent open half an inch so you eliminate a vacuum inside your rig that draws dust in while traveling. We leave a small roof vent open a little. This vent has a plastic cover over to keep rain from coming in.
6. Remove and store inside all external conveniences that you placed on outside of rig. Outside thermometer, leave a note pads. Etc..
7. If you have a free standing table or chairs be sure they are well anchored,
8. Any drawers that have a tendency to open in motion should be tied down.
9. Most RV magazines recommend putting up your window blinds before traveling so they will not bang around while in motion. The disadvantage of this is fabric-fading in direct sunlight.
10. Make sure your T. V. antenna is in.
11. Aft lights and your water pump are turned off
12. Hot water tank and furnace are turned off.
13. Your-fridge is your choice BUT it must be turned off when you go on a ferry. They give you seals to make sure it stays off while on the ferry. A big majority of rigs travel with their fridges on propane - very illegal but it is done.
14. Be sure nothing is left loose or lying around as it will be on the floor and rolling around when you stop.
15. When you stop be sure to open all cupboards & doors carefully, especially your fridge door. Contents have a habit of working near the front and fall out when doors are opened.

16. Lock exterior door and all exterior compartments. Steps should be in and secure and your handgrip is tucked in.
17. Make sure your truck or motor home mirrors are clean and properly adjusted.
18. Leave home with a full tank of gas and decide whether you need to carry extra gas with you.
19. Be sure to take extra locking devices with you – club for steering wheel plus a locking device for your trailer. You should have content insurance. Have you a list of all your RV contents and their value? More and more vehicles are being stolen.
20. Bring an extra set of keys with you in your wife's purse or in a secure place. Keys do get lost.
21. A good idea is to carry an extra 20 feet of sewer pipe and an extra 25 feet heavy extension cord. Also you should carry a means to keep the sewer pipe off the ground, as many campgrounds will not allow sewer pipes on the ground. Also you will need a good selection of blocking for leveling your rig. I use a heavy duty surge protector on my 110 power input line. These newer rigs will not take a heavy power surge without doing mega damage.
22. Another good idea is to carry a pressure regulator for your fresh water inlet. Some resorts have very high water pressure that may break water lines.
23. Make sure you have enough insurance on your vehicles before leaving home. We carry CAA with the RV plus rider.
24. Before leaving be sure you have your route mapped out and that you have a set of current maps with you. AAM or CAA supplies all of these plus they will give you a TRIP TICK that maps your trip out for you. These maps are at no cost to their members.
25. Tell someone your plans; leave phone numbers with them where you can be reached. This way if there is a problem back home you may be contacted within a few days.
26. Make sure you have an adequate supply of prescription medicines with you along with copies of your prescriptions.
27. If you are heading south and plan to be back in March you should take RV antifreeze with you so you can winterize your unit before arriving into Canada's colder climate.
28. If you are planning on doing wilderness dry camping a good generator as well as a solar system is recommended if the sun isn't shining or you are parked in the trees solar systems will not keep up, therefore a backup generator is a good idea.
29. DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT; Tool Box, 12 volt tester, Axe, Shovel, Jumper cable, Duct tape, Black electrical tape, Clothes line, Bungee cords, and a First Aid Kit.

PARKING YOUR RIG:

For the newer RV'ers, particularly ones who pull a trailer, a few suggestions before you make your first trip. When you get to the campground, look over the site that the attendant has assigned to you very closely before accepting it. There are many sites out there that you physically cannot park in. Don't even try. AM you will do is give bystanders a free show and you will get upset.

1. Are there low tree branches to worry about? You don't want a branch scratching on you rig all night.
2. How level is the site? Have you enough blocks to level your unit.
3. Is there a tree or an obstacle where you want to put out your awning?
4. Is there enough room to put your slides out?
5. Do you have enough water hose to reach your rig from the water source?
6. Can you reach the power? Will you need an extension cord? Check to make sure there is power to the box.
7. Where is the sewer outlet? Can you reach it?
8. How close to the outdoors toilets is your site? Do they smell?
9. Are there a lot of dogs & kids in the next site?

Once you have determined this is the sight for you, now you have to back your rig in. We use CBs or walkie talkies to help us. Joyce stands at the back to watch for hazards that I may have missed. When she says stop you stop to see what was missed. Once you are on the site, if you are lucky it is level but usually you will have to put a block on a low side. Next block your unit so it cannot move forward or backwards. You can buy a wedge that squeezes against your tandem wheels so they don't move, or we use two wooden

blocks cut in the shape of a triangle to lay on the ground, If the front of your rig is high you must lift the front legs up-pin them- and then crank them down. After your truck is unhooked lower your front legs down till your unit is level. Now you can lower your back stabilizer jacks. Make sure both sides are hand tight. This will raise the rear of your unit slightly. Now go to your front jacks, crank them up slightly (this takes a little tension off the springs until level or a touch over level. This way your head is higher than your feet for sleeping. If I am staying more than a couple of days I will install a tripod under the hitch pin. Then I tighten the screw as tight as I can. Now your unit is secure and you are ready to push the slide out. I try to have my power, water & sewer hooked up before pushing my slide out.

Motor Homes are leveled different to trailers. Most Motor Homes have two levels in the driver's area that you level with. The newer units have automatic levers which all you do is push buttons to level with. Our older motor home was the trial & error method with blocks.

Before I use a trailer (new or used) I take it to a level sheet of concrete. With the tire up to full pressure I level the unit. I then fasten a level on the 5th wheel hitch large enough to view from the seat of the truck. I then fasten a stick on level to the side of the rig close to the place where the front stabilizer legs adjustment is -either crank or electric. With these in place leveling your rig is quite easy.

We enjoy full time RV'ing and will be doing it for a few more years. There are many places we have yet to explore and visit.

We hope you have found this presentation valuable and we will now welcome any questions you may have.