

# The Arvee Gazette

News of the funny side of life on the road!

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## Survey Shows RV Owners Are Adjusting to Higher Fuel Costs

Despite high fuel prices, 82 percent of RV owners say RV vacations cost less than other types of vacations. This is one of the reasons why so many RVers plan to travel this spring and summer. Most RVers are simply adjusting to fuel costs rather than not traveling in their RVs, according to a new study.

The latest biannual Campfire Canvass survey of RV owners, conducted by the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA), reveals that 76 percent of RV owners intend to use their RVs at least as much this spring and summer as last year.

Of those who said their plans would be affected, 58 percent said they'd travel to destinations closer to home, 35 percent said they'd travel fewer miles and 34 percent said they'd stay longer at one destination.

"Because there are more than 16,000 campgrounds throughout the country, RVers have the flexibility to cut costs by staying closer to home," says Richard Coon, president of RVIA. "Whether they travel five or 500 miles, they can still have a great outdoor experience."

Surprisingly, one-third of RV owners say fuel costs won't affect their travel plans, according to the study. Their travel intentions reflect research by international travel and tourism experts PKF Consulting. They found that even as fuel prices increase, RV trips remain the most affordable way for a family to go because of the significant savings on hotels and restaurant costs.

Many families are taking shorter, more frequent weekend trips in their RVs. According to the survey, nearly 75 percent plan to spend at least five or more weekends in their RVs.

John Bargo, a computer operator from Milwaukee, Wis., says that the price of fuel isn't going to stop him and his wife, Nora, from traveling this spring and summer, including spending two weeks in Gettysburg, Pa. "Most of our trips will be closer to home, and on our one long trip to

Gettysburg, we'll spend more time at that location and not move around as much," says Bargo.

In addition to turning off home utilities to save energy when traveling, RV owners also take additional measures to be more energy efficient while vacationing in their RVs. For example,

- 66 percent say they drive or tow their RV at 55 mph
- 76 percent minimize the use of air conditioning by opening windows
- 74 percent turn off lights in their RVs
- 68 percent turn off water when bathing
- 15 percent use solar panels on their RVs

According to the survey, RV owners appreciate the recreational and health benefits associated with RV travel:

- 86 percent say RV travel provides them with the opportunity to spend more time enjoying outdoor activities
- 78 percent say RVs allow them to escape everyday stress and pressure
- seven out of 10 RV owners say that they are more physically active on RV trips than they are at home and other types of vacations

RVers enjoy an array of activities during their RV vacations. Favorites include: camping (86 percent); sightseeing (80 percent) hiking/walking (71 percent); biking (43 percent); grilling/cookouts (66 percent); and visiting friends/family (65 percent).

The Internet is another boon for RVers, who can access online maps, travel information and weather reports while on the road. According to the survey, 56 percent of RV owners access the Internet, while 63 percent have laptops in their RVs.

## **RVIA Meets with CDC, Related Industries on Formaldehyde**

There were important developments on the formaldehyde issue last week, as RVIA hosted a series of productive meetings that included sessions with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as well organizations and businesses outside the RV market that produce or use formaldehyde.

### **“Industry Part of Solution” CDC Says**

A team of CDC officials met with RV manufacturer and supplier members on April 24 in South Bend, Ind. to provide an update on their testing of FEMA temporary housing units (THU), for studies focusing on occupied units, unoccupied units, and children’s health issues.

“In conducting the testing, the CDC was not trying to harm any industry. There was no hidden agenda. Our mission is to provide the best scientific data,” said Michael A. McGeehin, Ph.D., Distinguished Consultant at the CDC and Director, Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects of the National Center for Environmental Health.

“Nobody designed these units to be lived in for two and a half years,” he noted. “‘Toxic Trailers’ might make a good headline, but it is not appropriate to apply to trailers what may cause some symptoms in some sensitive individuals.”

“The results from the testing of THUs do not represent scores for the overall RV, park trailer or manufactured housing products,” added McGeehin.

Other key discussion points during the meeting included how CDC and other agencies could continue working with the RV industry on the formaldehyde issue beyond the testing of FEMA units.

The CDC offered to work with industry members to identify the primary sources of formaldehyde in RV components and to examine mitigation strategies. This includes CDC-testing of room air cleaners and air quality monitors for industry use that are cost-efficient and provide accurate and immediate results.

There are also plans for a comprehensive intergovernmental policy project that would examine indoor air quality in all residential and commercial occupancies. With RVs and manufactured housing expected to be included, the CDC said the RV industry could have a role in the effort. “We need to work together toward a resolution of these issues,” said McGeehin.

The CDC is also planning to test the building materials in unoccupied trailers against the California Air Resource Board Or maybe even “I don’t want to end up like Robin Williams,” who not only had trouble driving one in the movie “RV,” but also had a run-in with the septic tank.

But RV dealers and rental companies are not going to hand you the keys without some preparation. I rented an RV for the first time last summer, and I didn’t head out on vacation

(CARB) standard for wood-product emission levels, which RVIA recently announced plans to adopt, to determine what the likely ambient air levels would be under these new guidelines.

During the briefing, agency officials discussed their plans to share all testing results with FEMA, other federal agencies and industry, publicize them on CDC’s website and release them to scientific journals. Final results of the occupied trailer tests are expected in late May, and the unoccupied trailer testing is scheduled to begin shortly. The children’s health study will begin a year from now, and will include children who reside/have resided in THUs.

“This was an opportunity to continue our dialogue with CDC, discuss the questions and concerns our industry has about the testing, and examine how best to work together moving forward,” said RVIA President Richard Coon. “CDC indicated that our presentation raised reasonable points that they will take back to the agency. I thought it was a very productive meeting.”

### **Coalition Building Meetings**

In addition to the meetings with CDC, RVIA also hosted two organizational meetings to explore forming a broad-based coalition of companies, associations, and others who share a common interest in promoting better media and public understanding of the health effects of formaldehyde.

The sessions were held on April 22 in Washington, D.C. and April 23 in South Bend, Ind., drawing representatives from the RV, chemical, textile, furniture, manufactured housing and wood product industries.

The goal is to organize a coalition to promote sound public policy on formaldehyde and encourage scientifically accurate and non-sensational media coverage on the issue.

“We were encouraged by the participation at the meetings and the interest among attendees about joining together to form a coalition,” said Coon. “This new group will work together to encourage the media and government to consider the science of formaldehyde when examining the issue, and not let politics and emotion rule the day.”

## **Sure they’re big, but you can do it!**

By Tom Zoccolo      Associated Press

If you’ve never vacationed in a recreational vehicle, your first reaction might be “I can’t afford to rent an RV” or “They’re too large to maneuver.”

Even with high gas prices, renting an RV can be an economical means of family travel.

not knowing what I was doing. A tutorial before you drive the RV off the lot is the norm.

And while gas prices have made it more expensive to take road trips in any kind of vehicle, RVs do come in many different models and sizes -- from truck campers and towable trailers to motor homes and even sport utility RVs. There's

one for every budget and family type. Winnebago Industries Inc., the largest maker of motor homes, unveiled a 2009 ERA (a class-B motor home model) that gets 22 miles per gallon, while the largest motor homes get about eight miles per gallon, according to industry data.

Courtney Robey, public relations manager for the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, says RVs can also be a good deal for families. Despite gas costs, "a family of four can travel much more cheaply in an RV than by flying, where you'd have to buy four tickets. And you're not going to be eating out at restaurants three times a day. You're going to be cooking in the RV. You also don't have to pay for a hotel room. So a family can save money in the long run."

Cruise America is the largest RV rental chain in the U.S. Expect to pay about \$1,000 a week for a class-C motor home that sleeps up to seven. Class-C motor homes may also have a queen-sized bunk over the cab that sleeps two more.

Luxury rigs run \$90-\$200 per day; more modest travel trailers run \$28-\$85. Multi-day deals are usually available. You pay gas plus a fee for the number of miles you drive (some companies sell miles as a package). Most rental companies also offer inexpensive packages with sheets, towels, dishes and pots and pans so you don't have to pack all that.

As with summer house rentals, RV rentals often go early. Many dealers have their fleet rented by early spring for summer travel. The RVIA Web site can help you find dealers, manufacturers, campgrounds and general information.

The tutorial you get before driving away will likely include how to use the generator, water pump, water heater, furnace and liquid-propane tank; how to fill the freshwater tanks, dump the black-water (toilet) and gray-water (sinks and shower tanks); when to start electricity and which modes (battery or AC) to use; and when to run the refrigerator on gas or electricity.

Bob Caldarone, a spokesman for Cruise America, says rentals do not usually include a test drive, but he stressed that if you've rented a U-Haul or something similar in the past, "driving a class-C motor home is no different since the truck chassis are the same, except all rental RVs have auto transmission."

I booked a Midwest trip through Kampgrounds of America. Some RV camps charge a family overnight rate; others charge per person or per child. I found a campground in South Haven, Michigan, near Lake Michigan. We paid \$42 a night to stay there, and stored our RV at the campground for \$5 a night, while taking a sightseeing trip by rental car in South Bend, Indiana, and Chicago. We called the KOA campground with a return date and time, and the owners not only removed the RV from storage but set it up at a drive-up campsite complete with hookups, folding chairs and campfire ready to go.

There are more than 450 KOA franchises in the U.S. and Canada. Most sites cost \$25-\$40 per night. You can order a KOA Directory (P.O. Box 30558, Billings, Mont., 59114, \$4 shipping, or online) or pick one up free at any KOA.

The KOA Value Kard Rewards program (\$24 for a year) saves you 10 percent on KOA stays, provides a Web site where you can track your travels and rewards points, and mails you a KOA directory each spring.

Other resources for finding RV campsites include Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts, \$30- \$50 a night, about 70 locations; <http://www.reserveamerica.com>, which lists private and government park campsites; and <http://www.recreation.gov>, which lists campsites in federal recreation areas. Camping in a national park typically costs less than \$20 a night, not including park admission fees.

Woodall's North American Campground Directory lists over 14,000 private, independent campgrounds, service centers and attractions, including maps and rules of the road for each state and Canadian province. Go Camping America also lists private parks and campgrounds nationwide. A business called Tracks & Trails prepares customized self-drive itineraries for the Western U.S. and Canada that include RV rentals and reservations.

I also used the Automobile Club of America for mapping out my trip, and planned the least expensive gas stops through <http://www.gasbuddy.com>.

A few things to keep in mind before you go:

**DRIVING:** Get directions for the straightest, easiest route, and practice parking. Don't speed; you'll need extra room to stop. Learn to use your side-view mirrors (and rear camera if there is one). Most motor home generators automatically turn off just before the fuel tank is completely empty. There will still be some gas left to drive on, but you should gas up immediately.

**ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE:** Lower the jacks when you arrive at campsites to balance and stabilize your RV, and raise the jacks before departing. Also, when leaving campsites, lower the TV antenna and close outside door steps, the canopy and slide-outs (walls). Apply the parking brake when stopped and release it before departing.

**INSIDE:** When the RV is in motion, all passengers should be belted and you shouldn't try to cook. Bring a 30/15-amp electric adapter and an outdoor long heavy-duty extension cord, plus a cable wire for the TV. Bring marine toilet paper, which degrades easily, and disinfectant for the toilet. To conserve water, shut the shower off while soaping up.

**THE SEPTIC:** Don't be intimidated! The black tank (sewer waste) and gray tank (water waste) are located beneath the RV. A panel in the galley displays tank levels. Wait until tanks are at least three-quarters full before you empty them; otherwise they won't drain properly. Dump contents of the black tank first so the soapy water from the gray tank can clean out the hose. Put a tray of ice cubes down the toilet into the black tank after pumping out, but before hitting the road. The jiggling ice can help clean the tank.

## **Editorial**

**Jim O'Dell**, President, Arvee, Inc.

I just thought for the first issue of the Arvee Gazette I would talk about the one thing we all hate about buying (or selling) an RV. The negotiating!! Is there anyone who really likes this? Is there anyway around it? And who started it. My guess is there are a few RV salespeople who actually enjoy the negotiating. They are good at it and make money because their skills are fine tuned. I doubt, however, that many customers enjoy this part of the sale. If you are thinking about buying an RV in the near future, I would recommend that you find out about the fine art of negotiating before you do. Take a look at our favorite links page and you can find some places to start. Remember you may think you are good at it, but beware; you are up against a formidable foe, the RV salesperson. The salesperson negotiates hundreds of deals a year. How often do you do it? Is there anyway around it? A lot of people are shopping on the internet today and at least they don't have to negotiate face to face. Other than that I can't think of anyway around it if you want your best price. Who started it? Well I know you don't want to hear this but all this negotiating was started by the buyers!! No matter what price a dealer puts on his product the buyer always attempts to get it for a little less. No problem, they just mark it up and negotiate it down. The problem is how do you know when you are getting the best deal? A few dealers have tried "one price" no negotiating type Dealerships and every one to my knowledge failed and went back to the old, tried and true method of letting the consumer negotiate to get the "best deal." GOOD LUCK