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Motor Home Away From Home

by Lisa Arcella

There's something truly liberating about piling the kids, and the dog, into a recreational vehicle (RV) and hitting the open road. Perhaps it's the freedom of leaving the world behind but yet bringing some of it with you too—sort of, I surmise, a security blanket for grown-ups; and, unlike any other travel experience, the vacation begins the minute you climb inside and turn the ignition key.

One of the pleasures of RV-ing is going on a holiday where you do not have to wait in airport lines. On an RV adventure, you only have to take your shoes off when you decide—not because a security officer is telling you to do so.

Robert DeNiro's character in the film *Meet The Fockers*, Jack Byrnes, might have explained the joy of an RV best when he muses that "airline travel being what it is these days...so unreliable...I'll feel much more comfortable knowing I have my own posturepedic bed, my own thermostat, my own lavatory facility." It was a joke many loyal RV fans had a private chuckle over.

Whether renting or owning an RV, you certainly do not have to give up most of the benefits of home, for many of today's models feature state-of-the-art kitchens, flat-screen TVs, GPS systems, even fireplaces. Some might feel that the presence of such creature comforts distracts from

the principal joy of camping-style vacations, that is, being close to nature, but I for one have slept both in a leaky tent and in a dry RV, and I'll take the RV any day; and let's be real, would you really want to take your moody teenager on a camping vacation that didn't have access to the Internet?

One of my fondest childhood memories is of the RV trips my family took to Assateague Island, which covers parts of both Maryland and Virginia. It wasn't simply that we were going to stay right on the beach amid the wild horses that roam free here. My brothers and I were equally excited that the RV's table could be converted into a bed and that we could actually play and have fun on the trip while not being crammed next to each other in the back seat of a hot car.

I want my own child to have similar recollections, so while not in the market quite yet to make a major RV investment (although Columbia Northwest has a \$32,000 model with a deck, fireplace and entertainment center that I am coveting), I decided to rent one to visit the Walt Disney World Resort.

There are basically two styles of RVs to rent: "cabover" or "bus." We chose a cabover, which many experts believe is easier to handle and uses less gas.

Traveling in a RV is an even better idea when also considering that we would have to haul tons of toys and all the particular foods my 5-year-old son Tyler (aka Mr. Picky-eater) demands. By transporting our own food, I estimated we saved at least \$750. Yes, much of that probably did get spent on gas, but being on wheels also meant that we could take Joey, our Yorkshire terrier, with us. (He is an important part of the family and doesn't really believe he's a dog anyway.)

After making sure we were fully stocked and that everyone was buckled in, we hit the highway. Tyler started his vacation off with a coloring book and a smile and exclaimed with all of his pre-school enthusiasm that "this was going to be the best vacation ever!" Heading south on I-95 and the New Jersey Turnpike, we were already anticipating our first overnight stop, and since we knew we had a comfortable place to stay, we decided to spread the 19-hour journey over two days. Our first stop was a little off the direct path, but heck, we were taking our time and wanted to experience both the beauty of nature and the wonders of the Magic Kingdom.

About 10 hours into our trip, we pulled in to Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park, a camping and RV site nestled in the

Renting a recreational vehicle for a vacation puts you fully in control to go where you want and at what pace

The road is truly open,
for you and the family, in an RV.





Shenandoah Valley, right on the James River. The site (one in a chain of 60 or so parks of the same name, mostly east of the Mississippi River) accommodates any size RV, and since our primary driver (Mr. Dad) is a huge fly-fishing fan, we chose a spot by the river. However, it was our night under the stars that remains a special memory. We turned on the radio, set up a campfire and folding chairs and ate dinner. As the night breeze came calling, we grabbed our sweatshirts and gazed at the thousands of stars above us. We had a TV handy, but this "show" was better than any we could have found with a remote control.

By midday we were back on the road and after sharing driving duties, finally arrived at Disney's Fort Wilderness campground (rates run from \$46 to \$91 per night). We were able to hook to water, electricity and a sewer system, and while Tyler couldn't have been more thrilled to see Mickey Mouse in person, Fort Wilderness was a close rival, especially with its great lakeside beach. We took our bikes (also along with us on the RV) out for long rides, hung out at the children's park and even (memories of Assateague Island) rode horses for the first time together as a family. The only problem was having eventually to tell our little guy that it was time to take our makeshift home back to our real one.

CBT

For RV-Ready campgrounds and directions with AAA's TripTik Travel Planner, visit AAA.com/directions

For more information on where to rent RVs, visit www.gorving.com or www.rvia.org

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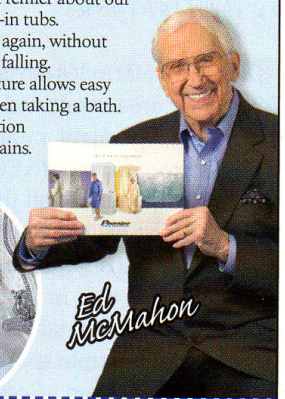
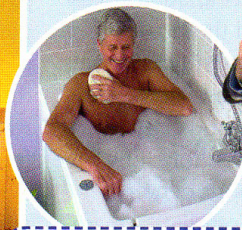
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