



Happy Campers

Recreational Vehicle (RV) travel is beyond a moving experience. The real magic happens when you're standing still. BY COLIN W. SARGENT

That's it! I've had it.
I'm renting an RV.



ROAD WARRIOR

Tired of airport gropings and luggage searches by overzealous members of the TSA? The whole sense of air travel has lost its charm, its Chanel No. 5 fragrance. As a former Navy pilot, I used to love the miracle of flying so much... Eastern, TWA, Pan Am. Do you remember when Delta was Delta? Now that Southwest is the one herding us into the new economy, you'd better laugh when the flight attendants do their insult-comic routines, unless you want a Diet Coke spilled on your lap.

Well, I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore! Happily, I'm not alone.

As airports continue to tighten security, "Consumers cite the freedom and flexibility of recreational vehicles (RVs)," says Bill



Previous page: "We run the whole gamut, from newlyweds to the nearly dead," says Laura Bamford of Mt. Desert Narrows luxury campground, nine miles from Bar Harbor. "They run from rustic campers pitching a tent to people looking to be pampered. The photo (previous page) shows one of our 33 direct oceanfront sites at Mt. Desert Narrows, with views across the water to Trenton. Those 33 sites are \$77 to \$85 a night during the high season, from June 15 to Labor Day. From May 15 to June 14, they cost \$44 to \$46 a night. Same for after Labor Day to Columbus Day." In all, there are 232 managed sites at Mt. Desert Narrows. "People love our canoe launch, where we have rental canoes and kayaks." Mt. Desert Narrows is part of a luxuriant portfolio of recreational destinations, "including Narrows II, which has resort-cottage rentals as well." * Just the spot for pan-fried brook trout on a bed of baby spinach with lemon butter and capers and a bottle of Cloudy Bay sauvignon blanc.



Above: Cape Neddick Oceanside Campground, above, 63 Shore Rd., Cape Neddick, 363-4366. This endave is handy to Ogunquit and York beaches, and 10 miles to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. * But you can stay put and make it pasta night—linguine with fresh dams steamed open in a garlicky wine saute, crusty bread, and a local lettuce salad. A bottle of icy cold Italian Kris pinot grigio and you're good to go.

Baker of the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, Reston, Virginia. "With an RV, you're really the captain of your destination. You can stop where you want, change your itinerary. Airlines are costly, and the experi-

ence is a hassle. They're oversold, overbooked. The trend toward luxury RVs has been building for a long time."

BEGINNINGS

My new life takes off when I first start driving my rented Sunseeker 24. As I take a few spins around the parking lot of Seacoast RV on Route 1 in Saco to see what I'm in for, my preconceptions drop away. The amazing thing is, with every inch you drive, the size



Above: Gray Homestead Oceanfront Camping, 21 Homestead Rd., Southport, 633-4612. "We're just across the bridge from Boothbay Harbor," says Suzanne Gray. "We have a beach and a pier. It's \$50 a night to park right on the ocean." Also, "we're just eight miles from Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens." Talk about a visual double whammy. * For our dinner-wine pairing, we recommend Maine free-range chicken with new potatoes and steamed chard from a farmer's market. Open a bottle of Cloud Line pinot noir from Oregon and fire up the grill for the chicken.

of the vehicle—at first enormous in your mind, almost Grand Canyon large—gets smaller and smaller.

Behind me is a king-sized bed; a generous cherry kitchen with oven, microwave, gas burners, and refrigerator that's open 24/7; and best of all, banquette dining beside luxury observation windows as large as an Amtrak dining car's.

Exploring Maine's coast during our week-long (\$1,235) get-to-know-you session with our moving living room, we feel a thrill of freedom as we pull up to any number of incredible ocean views, a prelude to candlelit dinners (sirloin steak, mushrooms straight out of *Mastering the*

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ROAD WARRIOR

Happy Campers (continued from page 53)

Art of French Cooking, asparagus tips, and red wine, along with rashers of bacon and eggs and heavenly fried red tomatoes with orange juice), parked in front of astonishing vistas we've never really gotten to see before. Not like this. There's seeing and then there's really seeing—on our terms, not somebody else's.

Now this is more like it!

What's the value of lavishing time on yourselves and letting your dreams just float over lakes and ocean views while you rediscover



Bar Harbor Campground, 409 State Hwy. 3, Bar Harbor, 288-5185. "They're the closest campground to downtown Bar Harbor," says the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce's Ron Robel.

Stunning sunrises and mystical sunsets bookend perfect Acadia days from 25 oceanfront RV sites. Arrive early to pounce on the perfect spot since all are first-come, first served. Beyond the Frenchman Bay view, swimming pool, indoor plumbed bathrooms, hot showers, and laundry, the campground has a free library and video-game arcade for travelers waiting to take the Island Explorer into town or to hike or bike Acadia. Mainly Meat BBQ and Udder Heaven Ice Cream Retreat are next door, and Pirate's Cove miniature golf across Route 3 channels your inner Jack Sparrow. * If you visit in late July into August, blueberries are literally ripe for the picking along the walking paths meandering through the campground's numerous fields. This is the place for a blueberry pancake breakfast with real Maine maple syrup.

Below: Moorings Oceanfront RV Resort, 191 Searsport Avenue, Belfast, 338-6860. "We have 8 oceanfront sites for \$67 a night," says Susan Varisco. "Ocean view is ten dollars less. The campground is also situated so you can go anywhere [in Maine] and come back in a day." Special events occur on the campground as well as Papa J's and the Lobster Bar restaurant on the grounds. There are lobster bakes and "every Friday from 5pm to 6pm we have happy hour with beer and wine for free!" * Freshly caught and picked crabmeat from the cold waters of Penobscot Bay can't be beat—how do crabcakes with homemade tartar sauce and fresh picked sugar-snap peas sound with a glass of Blanco Nieva Spanish verdejo?



real time? Slow down and enjoy a second cup of coffee, because you're not going to miss your plane.

Driving this trend toward RVs is the notion that there's something retro about RV travel (think Airstreams, or luxury Class B Road-Trek Agiles), not to mention romantic (with imaginary set designs from the movie *Niagara*), with no one telling you your Canon D-3100 is a neutron bomb or your shampoo bottle is too big.

You might ask, don't you get honked at, driving this gigantic thing? Across 1,200 miles of travel, I was only honked at three times in my RV (well below my average—for commuter jaunts I have a bumper sticker, "Honk if you like my driving").

Another gush of freedom, and that's what the zen of RV travel is all about: the



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