FREE SAMPLE · CHAPTER 1

Beginner's Guide to RV Life

Step-by-Step Advice to Buy, Equip, and Enjoy the Adventure (Second Edition)

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RV Life Series

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STEP 1

DEFINE YOUR RV LIFE

Early in our research, Val and I each wrote down what we wanted our RV life to look like, then traded papers.

Mine was a map. New state every few days, see everything, keep moving. Val's was a list of places she wanted to stay long enough to find the good diner and the back roads. She calls it exploring like a local.

Neither list was wrong, but they described two different RVs. Mine needed to be quick to set up and easy to move. Hers needed room to live in for a month at a time. We talked it over for weeks before looking at a single floorplan, and that conversation saved us more money than any dealer discount.

Start with the life. The RV comes second.

Start with the life you want to make possible

Picture a trip you could actually take. Where would you go? Who would come? How long would you stay? What would you do there?

Those answers tell you more about the RV you need than a showroom full of features. A beautifully built rig can still be wrong for how you travel.

Two weekends a month, a few weeks near family each year, a season somewhere new, or full time on the road: each is a legitimate RV life. You don't have to sell your house to belong.

Be specific enough to test the idea. "We want to travel more" is a start. "We want several weeklong trips and a month near the grandkids" gives you something to plan around.

Plan for the people who will actually travel

Count regular travelers separately from occasional guests, then think past the beds. Someone may need a quiet place to work, easier bathroom access, or a door to close. Pets need space too.

If you travel with a partner, write your priorities separately before comparing them, as we did. Then have each person describe an ordinary day, including a rainy one indoors. Where will you sit, eat, work and rest? The answers help you judge a floorplan as a place to live, not a display to admire.

Think about moving and staying

How often will you move? How do you feel about driving or towing something big? Will you want a separate vehicle for errands? Where will the RV live between trips? Will you camp without hookups, or in cold weather? Each answer can change the right RV.

You don't need every answer yet, just the ones that could change your choice.

Consider what happens after the purchase

A low price is attractive when you're eager to start, but the purchase begins the relationship. Ask what the rig will need in maintenance, repairs, time and outside help.

We paid for a solid rig and were glad we did. Still, I'd never tell someone with wanderlust the lifestyle is out of reach because their budget is smaller than ours. A smaller budget may point to a simpler RV, a different schedule, or a carefully inspected used rig. What matters is whether the whole arrangement fits your resources, with money left for what goes wrong.

Be honest about your mechanical ability

In our house, Val is the handy one. She ran maintenance at a health club for fifteen years. I spent my career in sales. We planned our rig and repair budget around that.

If you're handy, willing to learn and know your limits, you can do upkeep other owners pay for. If repairs aren't your strength, favor documented condition, a thorough inspection and good service access, and budget for professional help. Either way, knowing when to call someone is part of being a capable owner.

Decide what matters and what can change

Every RV is a compromise. More space can limit where you fit. A smaller rig simplifies travel but can cost you storage or privacy. Features that wow you on a walk-through may matter less than an everyday annoyance you missed.

Name three needs you won't give up and three preferences you can compromise on, and keep the lists separate. A feature isn't a need just because you like it, and a real need shouldn't disappear because of a good price.

Your first year RV plan

Before Step 2, describe the RV life you want to try, with everyone who will travel regularly. Answer separately, then compare.

Purpose. What do we want an RV to make possible?

Travelers. Who travels regularly, and what comfort, mobility, work, pet or privacy needs do we have?

First year. What trips do we expect to take, how long will they last, and how often will we move?

Places. Campgrounds with hookups, public lands without them, or both? Warm weather only, or cold too?

Working. Will anyone work from the road and need a real workspace?

Driving and towing. What are we comfortable doing now, and what training would help?

Ownership. What will we handle ourselves or hire out, and where will the RV stay between trips? How much storage do our hobbies need?

Money. What can we spend on the purchase and still cover preparation, travel, maintenance and surprises?

Priorities. Our three nonnegotiable needs, and three preferences we can compromise on.

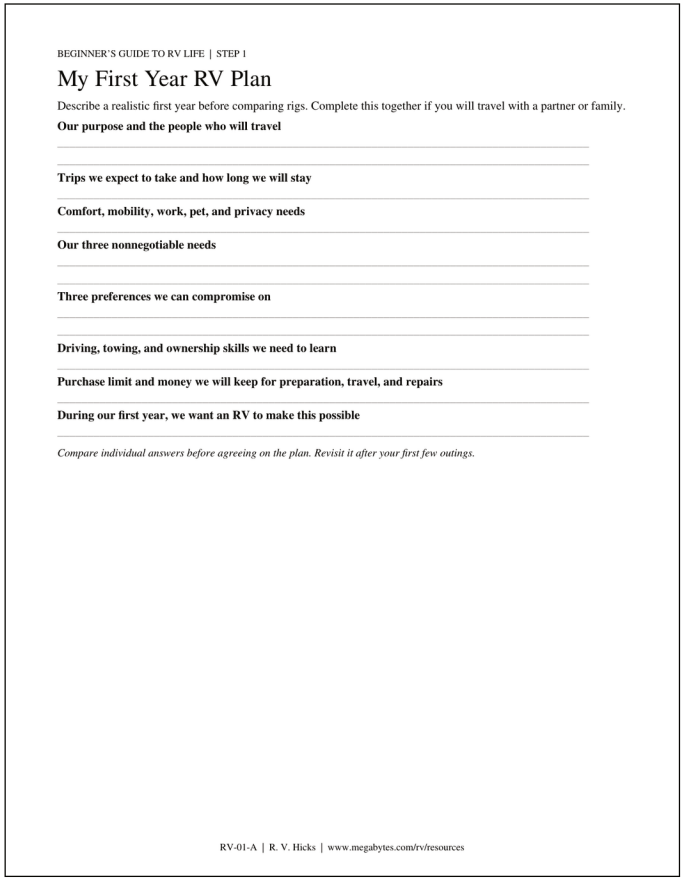
Finish with one sentence: During our first year, we want an RV to make this possible:_____.

Keep your answers. You'll use them in Step 2.

Step 1 Forms

RV-01-A My First Year RV Plan

RV beginners | 1 page



BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO RV LIFE | STEP 1

My First Year RV Plan

Describe a realistic first year before comparing rigs. Complete this together if you will travel with a partner or family.

Our purpose and the people who will travel

Trips we expect to take and how long we will stay

Comfort, mobility, work, pet, and privacy needs

Our three nonnegotiable needs

Three preferences we can compromise on

Driving, towing, and ownership skills we need to learn

Purchase limit and money we will keep for preparation, travel, and repairs

During our first year, we want an RV to make this possible

Compare individual answers before agreeing on the plan. Revisit it after your first few outings.

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