



SELECTING THE
RIGHT RV

FINDING
SITES

TRIP
PREPARATION

ON-SITE
ETIQUETTE

CARING FOR YOUR
RV AFTER THE TRIP

Tips for Camping

Off-Road & Off-Grid





Contents

- 3 [Selecting the Right RV](#)
- 6 [Finding Sites](#)
- 8 [Trip Preparation](#)
- 10 [On-Site Etiquette](#)
- 12 [Caring for Your RV After the Trip](#)

Modern RV owners have more choices for camping than ever before, and every state in the lower 48 has a wide range of options, from RV Resorts, to [KOAs](#), to [Jellystone Parks](#), to state and national park campgrounds. But many of today's RV owners are choosing to forgo traditional campgrounds altogether, or at least mix it up a little bit and get off the beaten path when they are feeling adventurous.

For some, that might mean camping near the edge of a cliff at "Nomad View" (aka The Wall) in South Dakota and looking out at stunning views of the Badlands, and for others that

might mean simply pulling a few feet off the road at a [Harvest Hosts](#) location and camping next to rows of grapes that will be harvested for local wines. Many RV owners will also do both — and sometimes while on the same trip.

If you are looking to start camping off-road and off-grid and don't know where to begin, this guide is a great tool to help you get started. Let's review some quick tips for finding the right RV to take you off-road and off-grid, locating sites, preparing for your trip, observing proper etiquette during your stay, and taking care of your rig when you get home.

Finding the Right RV for Off-Road & Off-Grid Camping



Before you even book the site and make the trip, you're going to need to make sure your RV has the right equipment for off-road and off-grid adventures. Some manufacturers build these features into the unit right from the factory, but many don't, leaving it up to you to add them on your own or go without the added features and functions.

When looking for an RV that's ready for off-the-beaten path adventures, here are some things to consider:

01 SUSPENSION

What type of suspension does your RV have? If it only has a leaf-spring or torsion axle(s), you're going to want to be extra careful to avoid any truly off-road vacations. An RV equipped with a dual-shock, trailing-arm independent suspension will be the best option for adventures off-road. Take a look under the RV and see what kind of suspension the rig is riding on before purchasing to be sure the suspension can handle the rough and tough landscapes you plan to venture across.

02 TIRES

Does the RV come with off-road ready tires? Look for tires that are durable and strong to tackle the paths you'll take that don't include pavement. You can always upgrade your tires in the aftermarket, but some manufacturers will provide off-road tires straight from the production line.

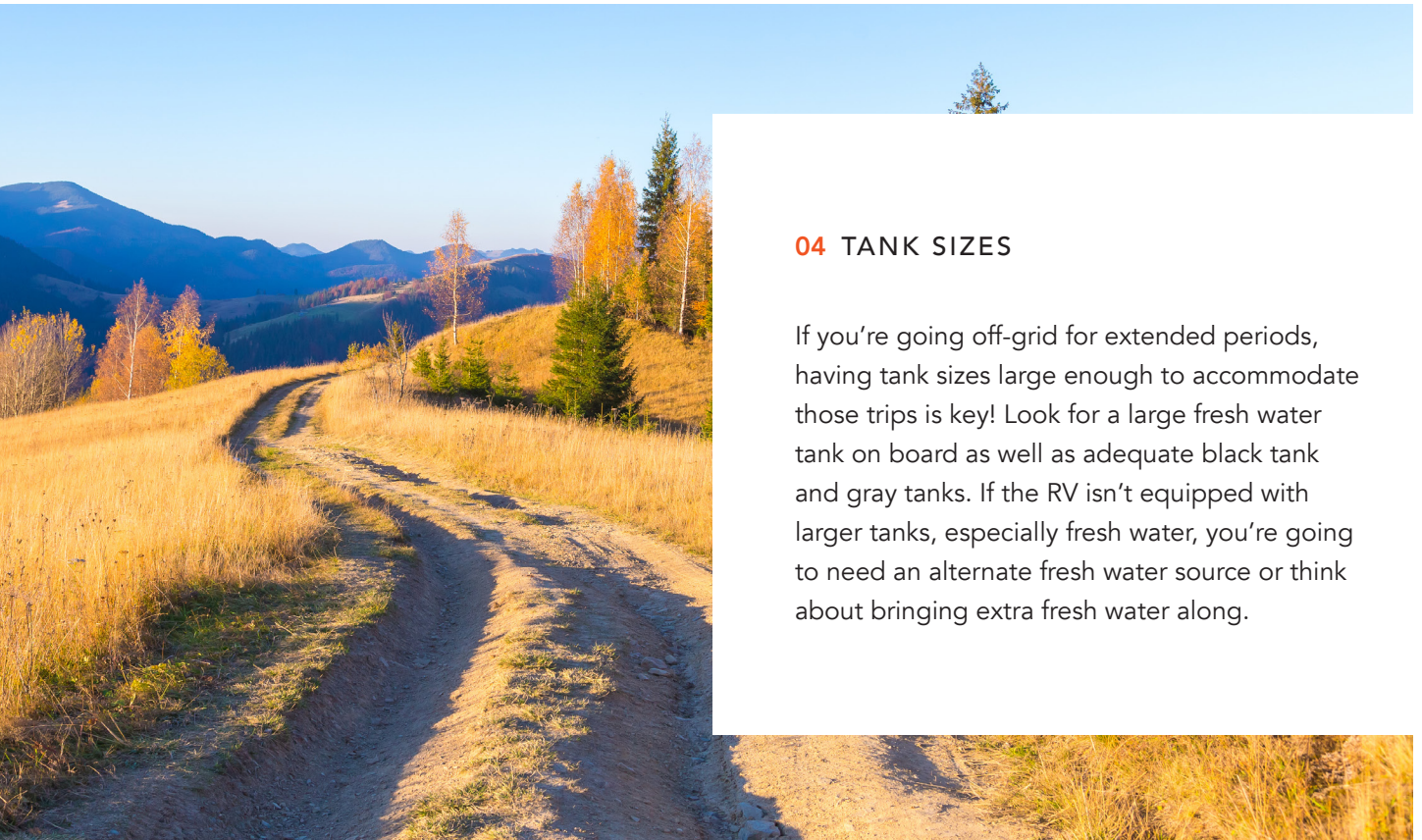
You'll also want to check if it comes with a full-sized spare. Taking your rig off-road means there's more chance of needing a spare. If the unit comes with a spare that matches the tires already on your RV, you'll be in a much better position if you need to use it!

And lastly, having a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS) for your tires will give you extra peace of mind as you venture out, alerting you to changes in pressure or temperature in your tires so you can address the issue before it's too late.

03 SOLAR

Does the RV come standard with at least a basic solar package from the factory? It's a bonus if you're able to upgrade that standard solar package right from the factory too for max solar capabilities! Many RVs these days offer "solar prep," but that will leave you adding the different components such as solar panels, inverter, wiring, and batteries after you buy the RV. Not all RV electrical systems are easily modified, so it's definitely easier to buy an RV that already has what you need to go off-grid rather than having to worry about adding what you need after the fact.

Also, make sure that the appliances in your unit are made to run on solar power. Standard 12V appliances and components are best for low-power draw and larger inverters may be needed depending on your needs.



04 TANK SIZES

If you're going off-grid for extended periods, having tank sizes large enough to accommodate those trips is key! Look for a large fresh water tank on board as well as adequate black tank and gray tanks. If the RV isn't equipped with larger tanks, especially fresh water, you're going to need an alternate fresh water source or think about bringing extra fresh water along.

05 WATER HEATER & FURNACE

Depending on where and how you go off-road and off-grid, you're going to appreciate having the option to keep your RV toasty warm on chilly nights or enjoy a hot shower after a long day of adventures outside. Using the Truma Combi in mixed mode will allow it to use either onboard propane (LP) or 12V to power your water heater and furnace, whichever is the most efficient for the situation, so be sure you have plenty of LP capacity (which is also a plus for cooking). The Truma Combi eco plus is a great way to achieve both of these things off-grid! The Truma Combi has a small footprint in the rig and is highly functional, giving you the heat and hot water you'll want.



[Ember's](#) Overland and Overland Micro Series will look great at any RV Resort or traditional campground, but each camper is built from the ground up to go off-road and off-grid and to do what is often called "dispersed camping," or camping on public lands outside a designated campground.

It all begins with a stronger foundation and a trailing-arm independent suspension paired with Goodyear Wrangler Off-Road AT tires,

plus a spare, and standard TPMS to help you easily traverse the rougher terrain. The large tank sizes on the Overland series will help you stay out longer, while standard and max solar options invert your outlets and provide power no matter where you are camping. The Truma Combi (standard on the Overland Series, optional on Overland Micro) will ensure that your rig stays toasty warm on chilly nights, while also providing hot water for showers after a long day spent outside.



Finding Sites

01 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT SITES

Dispersed camping on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land is one of the primary locations for off-road camping in the United States, but locations are primarily limited to 22 states in the west. The BLM's website has excellent tools for locating free places to camp and guidelines for how to camp in those locations. Check out [the website](#) for a wealth of resources and a search tool that will help you find locations.

One key point to remember is that many of the rules vary from location to location (allowability of campfires, etc.) based on local conditions. The allowable duration of your stay, and timelines for returning are also listed on this website.

02 NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE

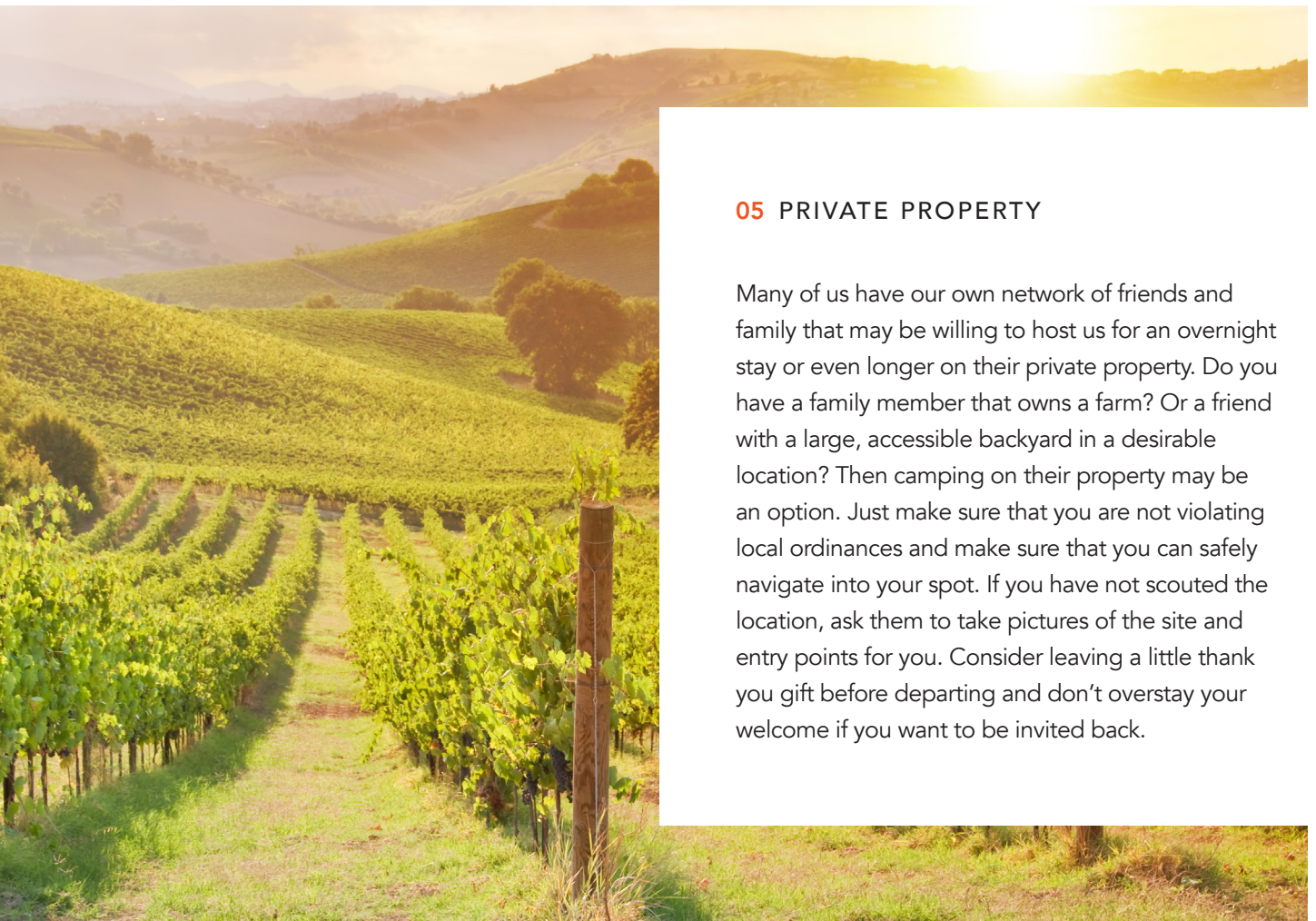
The National Forest service, like the Bureau of Land Management, allows dispersed camping in many locations. Both also offer traditional campgrounds as well. The National Forest Service recommends calling its relevant district offices to find locations where camping off-road is allowable. Their [website](#) also offers useful information about the rules for dispersed camping in our National Forests — such as their directive not to camp within 150 feet of a roadway, and to set up at least 100 feet away from any stream.

03 HARVEST HOSTS

An annual Harvest Hosts membership opens up a world of non-traditional camping opportunities for RV owners. Their network of free camping sites includes over 3,000 wineries, breweries, farms — and other quirkier locations like churches and sculpture gardens. Many of these locations will only take you a bit off-road and many are firmly on the grid. But there are plenty of sites that offer up a sense of adventure and will get you off paved roads and out of parking lots. If you are interested in developing your off-road camping chops, then Harvest Hosts may be the perfect training ground. They recommend spending at least \$20 on your host's products in exchange for your free overnight stay.

04 BOONDOCKERS WELCOME

A Boondockers Welcome membership can be added to your Harvest Hosts membership for an additional annual fee. They offer almost 3,000 locations for members to camp on private property, many of which allow you to get off the beaten path. About 30 percent of these locations do not offer hookups of any kind, a situation for which larger fresh water and holding tank capacities — along with off-grid power capabilities (solar panels, batteries, and LP) — will be necessary. Some hosts charge campers a nominal fee if they hook up to water or electric, so be sure to ask before you hook up.



05 PRIVATE PROPERTY

Many of us have our own network of friends and family that may be willing to host us for an overnight stay or even longer on their private property. Do you have a family member that owns a farm? Or a friend with a large, accessible backyard in a desirable location? Then camping on their property may be an option. Just make sure that you are not violating local ordinances and make sure that you can safely navigate into your spot. If you have not scouted the location, ask them to take pictures of the site and entry points for you. Consider leaving a little thank you gift before departing and don't overstay your welcome if you want to be invited back.



Preparing For Your Trip

01 SCOUT LOCATIONS IN ADVANCE

Whenever possible, scout locations in advance. Make sure your rig can make any tight turns and clear obstacles that may be in the way. Higher ground clearance and independent suspension may help you navigate these off-road locations.

In both BLM and National Forest Service settings, you are asked to camp in areas that have already been used by other campers and you are asked not to disturb the ecosystem in other spots. This can take a bit of looking around. Some veteran campers will often unhitch their trailers first, exploring spots in their tow vehicles so they do not get their RV stuck in an unmanageable situation.

02 HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

If you are planning to camp off-road on BLM or National Forest Service land, it is wise to have a backup plan. You should know where traditional campgrounds are in the region and whether they have availability, just in case weather conditions like flooding or high winds make dispersed camping difficult or undesirable.

03 CHECK THE WEATHER BEFORE YOU GO

Because you are not going to be camping on a paved site at a campground with services and hosts to help you, it is even more important to check the weather and make sure you are visiting during agreeable conditions. It may be wise to bring warm layers even if the daytime temps are warm, and always pack rain gear even if rain is not in the forecast.

04 KNOW WHERE EMERGENCY SERVICES ARE LOCATED

No one wants to get hurt on any kind of camping trip. But if you are camping alone on public land, there may not be anyone nearby to help you find emergency services. Always know where the nearest hospital or emergency medical center is located. If you are camping off-grid, you will also need an atlas or road map of some kind to navigate there. Don't count only on your phone's GPS to get you there.

05 FULL-SIZE SPARE AND JACK

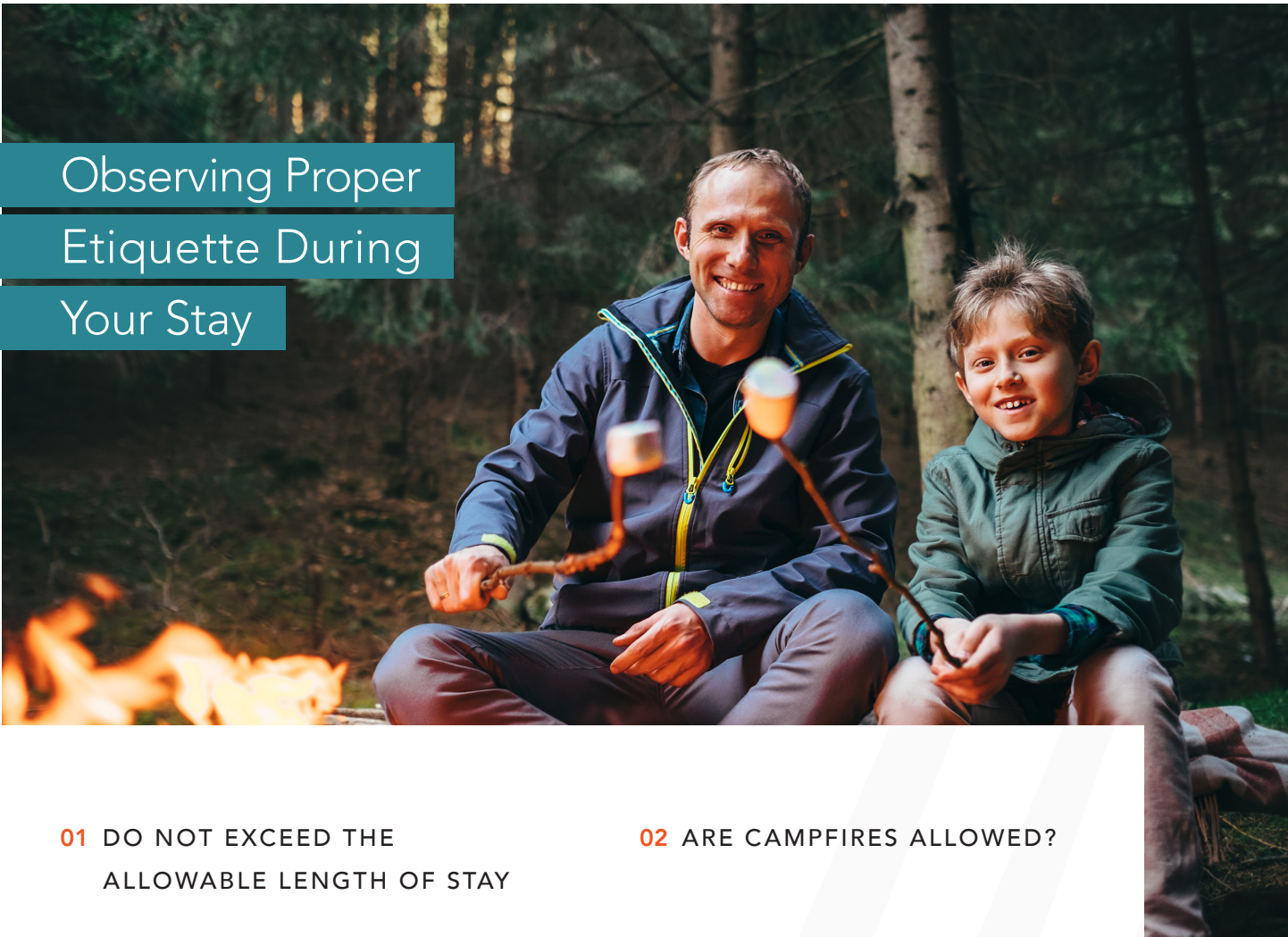
You can get a flat tire or have a blowout no matter where you are driving. But taking your rig off-road certainly increases the odds of having these issues. An RV equipped with a full-size spare is a smart choice. If the unit didn't come equipped with a spare from the manufacturer, it's something to add to your packing list. Don't forget to include the correct equipment to change a tire, and make sure you know how to use it.

06 FILL UP TANKS AT HOME OR NEAR YOUR LOCATION

When camping off-road, it's essential to bring enough water for the duration of your stay. In fact, we recommend bringing extra water or finding an RV outfitted with a large fresh water tank. If you fill up your fresh water tank at home and drive with a full tank, it can adversely affect your vehicle's fuel economy and your cargo carrying capacity. So, fill up near your location if possible. If you are uncertain about where to fill up your tank with fresh water, then please do so at home. Also make sure to use your water sparingly while you are camping and never dump it on the ground after use.



Observing Proper Etiquette During Your Stay



01 DO NOT EXCEED THE ALLOWABLE LENGTH OF STAY

Stays on BLM land are strictly limited to no more than 14 days during a 28-day period. These days may be consecutive or over several separate visits.

Stays on National Forest Service land also max out at 14 days at most locations — but that can vary from location to location.

Harvest Host stays typically last one night, but some owners may allow you to stay longer — especially if you have camped with them before without causing any trouble.

02 ARE CAMPFIRE ALLOWED?

Campfires may or may not be allowed in any of these types of locations. The key is to NOT assume they are allowed but instead to research the rules in each location. If campfires are allowed and you decide to have one, fully extinguish it before leaving your site or going to bed each night. If you don't know how to fully extinguish a campfire, Smokey Bear has tips for you [here](#).

Also, keep in mind you're not supposed to move firewood from site to site. See [Don't Move Firewood](#) for specific rules and regulations by state or province.

03 LEAVE IT BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT

When you camp off-road in any of these locations, plan to pack it in and pack it out. Always try to leave your site better than you found it for the next person — “leave no trace” is a fundamental rule. If someone else has left trash behind, please consider disposing of it yourself as it may cause damage to the natural landscape around you. We recommend reviewing and following the [7 principles of Leave No Trace](#) before you head out on your trip.

04 RESPECT YOUR NEIGHBORS

In many dispersed BLM and National Forest camping locations, it is recommended that you set up camp about 1,000 feet from your neighbors. This can vary based on the size of the camping area. As a general rule of thumb, if you can camp 1,000 feet away, then you should camp 1,000 feet away. It's that simple.

At a Harvest Hosts location, your host will determine where you can and cannot set up camp. Also, remember to keep your music down low and use the dimming light your RV hopefully has on the awning too!



05 KEEP AN EYE ON CHANGING WEATHER CONDITIONS

We recommend that you check the weather before you leave for your off-road trip, but we also recommend that you check it while you are there! Conditions can change quickly, especially in some of our western states where many off-road camping spots are located. Storms with high winds or hail can come up quickly and damage awnings or blow your belongings far away. So always be prepared. Leave your awning in when leaving your campsite and stay alert to the conditions around you.

Taking Care Of Your RV After The Trip

01 HAVE A PLAN FOR DUMPING YOUR TANKS

It's important to have a plan for dumping your black and gray tanks after an off-road trip. Planning to spend your last night at a campground with full hookups might be wise, as you can recharge your coach's batteries and dump your tanks.

If staying at a campground with full hookups is not an option, you can search for dump stations on rvshare.com, rvdumps.com, or several other apps and websites.

02 EMPTY YOUR FRESH WATER TANKS

If you will not be camping again for two weeks or more, you should drain your fresh water and water heater tanks using the low-point drain. This is advisable so that the water in the tanks does not grow bacteria or mold.

03 CLEAN YOUR SOLAR PANELS

You might also consider inspecting your roof after each off-road trip and cleaning off your solar panels so they maintain peak performance. Off-road trips can dirty up the panels more than a typical RV trip. Using water and a soft sponge or cloth should do the trick in most situations. Using a pressure washer or cleaners with harsh chemicals is not recommended.



If you follow these tips for selecting an off-road/off-grid RV, finding a site, preparing for your trip, following proper etiquette during your stay, and taking care of your RV after the trip, camping off-road and off-grid can be an incredibly relaxing and adventurous experience. You may just join the rest of the crew of campers who get hooked after their first trip!

Visit EmberRV.com to look through our Overland and Overland Micro Series products and find an RV that's right for you to help you go off-road and off-grid!





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