



When Your RV is Home Sweet Home

Living Small to

Live Large

By Rachael Jordan Williams

Have you seen a “tiny home” in person yet? It shouldn’t be surprising that these homes, hardly bigger than your average backyard shed, have become the latest craze. With the trendsetting millennials eschewing the underpaid daily grind in favor of travel, free time, and simplicity, tiny homes (especially tiny homes on wheels, “THOWs”) are a completely logical fad. Not all tiny homesteaders are millennials, however, and not all tiny homes are homemade, two-story contraptions.

For a number of people living small, home is a prefabricated RV.

Fulltime RVing is no longer solely a retiree lifestyle. Today’s full timers range from college students living on campus in their vans to large families traveling the continent in fifth wheels. Some travel from RV park to RV park every week, while others never leave their plot of property. Others load their rigs up with solar panels and massive water tanks and “boondock” in the middle of nowhere. There’s no wrong way to RV.



Many people with frequently relocating jobs find that moving an RV just makes more sense than loading a moving van every few months. Nickey Reid and her pipeline welder husband Doug Graf quickly realized this after their twins, Landon and Daisy, were born two and a half years ago.

"We can work in one place anywhere from 2 weeks to 9 months. When he applies for a job, we find out the next day if we got hired or not, and if so, we have 24 hours to leave and drive 500 miles a day to get there," Nickey explained. "Before the kids, we would stay in hotels and apartments, but it simply wasn't a good living situation with two babies. We had to keep them happy to keep the noise level down. Packing and unpacking



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apartments while my husband worked was a disaster. Without the RV, the kids and I would not be able to travel with my husband as he works. RVing has allowed me to keep my family together, which is especially nice during the kids' early years."

Like Nickey, travel nurse Jessie Diana Menck has been RVing for roughly a year and a half. She's parked in dozens of cities from Atlanta to Iowa City, enjoying all the perks of being a travel nurse while still sleeping in the same bed every night—even while vacationing.

"RVing is a lot easier than finding short-term, furnished, inexpensive, dog-friendly housing!"

Jessie said. "I wish more women felt confident enough to do it! It's a lot better than trying to fit into a car with two dogs and living out of extended stay hotels and Airbnb's. My RV is my own mobile base camp! I love the flexibility. Sometimes I even park way outside a big city and take the train in to sightsee."

But frequent relocators aren't always doing it for work. The Leonards don't have to move around for Mark's job anymore, but after enough years in the military, moving around a lot just feels natural. They have been RVing for almost two years, "roadschooling" their four children under 8 (with one due in July!). Danielle also brings in some income writing about her thriftiest lifehacks on her blog, "The Frugal Navy Wife." Although frugal living is a priority for the Leonards, she said their main reason for

making the change was a yearning to show their kids the country.

"As a former military family with family members scattered everywhere, we moved around a lot, and no place really felt like 'home.'" Danielle said. "We're keeping our eyes open for the right place to settle down and plant roots eventually. For now, we want the kids to soak up as many cool experiences as they can!"

The Leonards move every week or two. In each new place, they tend to sightsee during the week and make sure some of their work- and school-focused days fall on weekends, when the attractions tend to be more crowded. In the last year, they traveled up the East Coast from Florida to Maine before driving back down to Texas.

"I love being able to see the country. I love being able to talk to my kids about the Civil War while standing on the Gettysburg battlefields or visit a site of a Revolutionary War battle and explain why we won or lost that battle," Danielle said. "I love watching the awe on their faces when we visit Thomas Jefferson's home or a museum with dinosaurs. My kids are excited about travel and have even started their own mini bucket lists. Travel also forces you out of your comfort zone. You just can't beat the experiences."

The RV life isn't without its drawbacks. Danielle lamented having only one bathroom for six people, which is particularly challenging during pregnancy. Traffic can also put a cramp in



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their travel plans, forcing them to change their itinerary at the last minute. RVers who stay put sometimes struggle with winterizing or summerizing their RVs. But for Danielle and everyone else who lives the nomad lifestyle, the benefits are worth a few inconveniences.

Although travel and flexibility are frequently cited as the top “pros” of living in an RV, the lower cost of living almost always comes up as well. A livable used trailer can often be found on Craigslist for just a few thousand dollars, while newer RVs and THOWs typically range from the cost of materials (for the handy types) to a reasonable five-figure mortgage. Whether RVers travel or stay put, the affordability brings a different kind of freedom: that coveted free time.

Jessica Caviness, one half of the hip young vegan couple running RVeganliving.com, moved into a modified toy hauler truck after having a financial revelation one morning. She recounted the thought process behind the transition in a blog post: “I’m supposed to [spend] 40+ hours a week working to pay for a home that I will likely be paying off the rest of my life and spending all of my free time cleaning and gardening?” she wrote. “Where is the real benefit over renting if I won’t own the house outright until I’m

over 60? Where is the light at the end of the tunnel? Where does the joy of retirement come in? Social Security is certainly not going to cover bills of this magnitude.”

The money wasn’t the only factor for Jessica, however. Earth’s well-being is close to her heart, so she was eager to reduce her carbon footprint. For the non-claustrophobic environmentalist, RV living can be an enjoyable way to save money while saving—and seeing—the planet. Even the flashiest fifth wheels consume far less power and water than traditional “stick and brick” houses. Limited space forces Earth-friendly creativity, such as tiny, foot-powered washing machines and fold-away clotheslines.

But that’s just a nice side benefit for most RVers. Megan, a multi-city roller derby champ, describes the overarching appeal of RV life in two succinct sentences:

“Quit my job behind a desk as a project manager. Chasing the sunshine.”

It’s hard to find a downside to that.



Rachael is the oldest of six and has been writing and editing professionally since 2009. She lives in Douglasville with her aunt and cat while pursuing a second master’s degree.