

A Guide to Buying an RV



Welcome to Togo University's course on buying an RV!

Whether it's for full-time living, the occasional weekend getaway, or everything in between, buying an RV is a big decision that requires research and thoughtfulness. In the next six chapters, we'll guide you through the process of making your RV dream a reality.

We'll start with some fundamental information about RV types, builds, brands, and companies. Then, we'll help you figure out what type of RV is right for you based on your travel style. We'll cover how to find the right RV, towing considerations, and the purchasing process—including loans, buying used, and navigating dealerships—and finally, taking delivery.

While there's no singular way to go about buying an RV, we'll present you with options, so you can decide what works best for you and your family. Hopefully, by the end of the course, you feel more informed and empowered to navigate the RV world.

Each chapter features videos, text, and quizzes to test your knowledge. We recommend taking as much time as you need. Watch the videos, take notes, and look at manufacturers' websites while you're learning. You can always come back and pick up where you left off.

RV ownership comes with its ups and downs, but at the end of the day, it's an incredible opportunity to make memories. By going through these lessons you'll feel more comfortable and empowered as you make your purchase.

The World of RVs



What's the difference between a motorhome and a towable, or a travel trailer and a Class A? With so many RV options, it can be hard to remember them all. In this chapter we're going to explain the different types of RVs so you can choose what works best for you and your family.

RV: Short for "Recreational Vehicle," which includes motorhomes, trailers, and more.

RVs can be grouped into two major categories: motorhomes and towables. A motorhome is any RV that's powered by an engine. A towable is an RV that requires another vehicle, usually a pickup truck, to tow it.

Motorhomes

Motorhomes fit into three different categories based on the chassis they are built on: Class A, Class B, and Class C.

Chassis: The load-bearing framework that supports the structure of a vehicle.

Motorhomes range from small vans to 45-foot-long motorhomes.

Class A Motorhomes

Class A motorhomes are constructed on a custom chassis and have a bus-like shape. They feature some of the most expensive and luxurious RVs since the chassis can often handle the added weight of expensive finishes and heavy appliances. But Class As can be smaller, lighter, and more affordable, too. They range in length from about 30 feet to a maximum length of 45 feet. They span in price starting at about \$75,000 to millions for a luxury motorcoach.

Some Class As are known as "diesel pushers," meaning a diesel engine is at the back of the vehicle. This allows for a smooth, quiet ride, and easy access to the engine bay. More affordable gasoline-driven models typically have the engine in the front.

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Class A Motorhomes (Continued)

Despite their sometimes large size, a Class A turns fairly easily thanks to the driver's position being in front of the turning axle. The longest coaches have a "tag axle" to carry additional weight.

Tag Axle: A second rear axle that takes power from the engine. Its sole purpose is to carry additional weight. Sometimes a tag axle turns the wheels in order to aid in slow-speed steering maneuvers.

Class As are often designed for two people, usually with one queen- or king sized bed. Floor plans with more than one bed are limited, but some models have a bed that drops down over the cab or a set of bunk beds. Most additional bedding requires converting a dinette or sofa for the night. Generally, Class As can accommodate up to around six sleepers.

Slide-Out: An expanding room that pushes out of the RV with a motor.

Class As usually have multiple slide-outs that expand the cabin space when parked. They sometimes have more than one bathroom, and a washer/dryer combo in the unit. There also tends to be a great deal of "basement" storage underneath the coach.

Class As are the heaviest of motorhomes, and require a truck or RV service center for repairs and maintenance.

In some states, an RV that weighs more than 26,000 pounds needs to be driven by someone with an upgraded license. Usually, only Class A motorhomes will fall into this category.

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Class B Motorhomes

Class Bs are the smallest motorhomes, built inside commercially manufactured van shells, with space for two adults to sleep. The bed usually converts to a seating area during the day. Most Class Bs are equipped with a bathroom, but a major trade-off for the size is often a shower/toilet combo, known as a wet bath, and smaller holding tanks for fresh and wastewater.

Class Bs are the easiest of all RV types to drive, and the most agile. Many vans fit into a regular parking space. This opens up virtually any campsite to the Class B owner, and lots of boondocking options.

Boondocking: Camping with no utilities outside of a campground, usually on public lands.

Class B travelers rarely tow anything, opting to break camp when they need to relocate or drive anywhere. Breaking down camp can be fast, so you can be on the road in short order.

Everything is smaller in a Class B, but they have innovative layouts that utilize the space well. That efficiency makes them more difficult and expensive to build, and delivery times on a custom order can be well over a year. Class Bs range in cost between about \$80,000 and \$200,000.

Fuel mileage is outstanding compared to larger RVs, and people often use Class Bs as their second vehicle. Some municipalities and homeowners' associations do not allow RVs to be parked in a driveway, but Class Bs sometimes circumvent the rule, since they might be registered as a van instead of an RV. Since they are built on a major brand-name chassis, like Mercedes-Benz, Ram, or Ford, service on the vehicle portion is fairly accessible.

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Class C Motorhomes

Class C motorhomes are usually built on a name-brand medium-duty truck chassis. RV manufacturers build the exterior “home” portion. They often have a boxy appearance and an overhang above the driver’s cabin and the hood. The overhang is usually used for a bunk that adds more sleeping room than you might find in a Class A. Many Class Cs, particularly those with a slide-out, rival Class As in the amount of living space. They tend to be very popular with families, offering a variety of floor plans with bunk beds in addition to dinettes and couches that can convert into sleeping spaces.

Class Cs are often more affordable than similarly sized Class As. Both gas and diesel models can be found, and, as with Class Bs, service on the vehicle portion is straightforward. It’s important to note that the cargo carrying capacity of a Class C is fairly limited compared to other RV types, so crunch the number carefully if you are planning to travel with a lot of gear.

| Other Types of Motorhomes

Class B+ Vans: You may hear people refer to a category of motorhomes called “B+.” These are technically Class C motorhomes since they aren’t built within the shell of a van. Instead, they use a cutaway van chassis and build the exterior to create an RV that bridges the size gap between a typical Class B and Class C.

Super C Motorhomes: These are Class Cs built on diesel powered heavy-duty truck chassis, like a Freightliner or Ford F-550. They can haul a significant amount of weight, making them perfect for towing a large trailer.

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| Towable RVs

Towables are generally pulled behind a truck, or sometimes a smaller vehicle. They range in size from the smallest teardrop trailer to massive 45-foot trailers with multiple slide-outs and spacious living areas.

Conventional Travel Trailers

Conventional travel trailers are the best selling RVs on the market, mostly due to their price. They range anywhere from around \$12,000 to more than \$100,000 with diverse amenities and floor plans. Some models have slide-outs, and living space depends on the length of the trailer. Highway sway can be an issue with conventional travel trailers pulled by undersized vehicles, and a sway control system is highly recommended.

Sway Bar System: A bar system that helps reduce swaying when towing a trailer.

Weight Distribution System: This type of hitch works with a platform to distribute the tongue load to the trailer and tow vehicle wheels. Equalizing arms that connect to the trailer's A-frame can be adjusted for towing performance. Spring bars bend up as chains are tightened, which lifts weight from the rear wheels and transfers it to the other wheels of the vehicle and trailer.



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Fifth Wheels Travel Trailers

Fifth wheels are named for their hitch, which is located in the bed of the truck, instead of attached underneath the bumper to the frame. This type of hitch was originally constructed out of a wheel, making it the “fifth” wheel on a vehicle.

Fifth wheels can be much heavier and taller than a conventional travel trailer. The largest fifth wheels are the most spacious of RVs, with multiple bedrooms and wide open common areas. But there are some fairly small fifth wheels, too. They range in price from around \$25,000 to more than \$200,000.

Since about 20 percent of the trailer’s weight rides in the bed, fifth wheels usually require heavy-duty trucks with high payload capacity to tow them. Sway is dramatically improved over conventional travel trailers due to the load riding right over the truck’s rear axle.

Gooseneck Hitch: A gooseneck hitch attaches in the truck bed with universal or custom rails. This type of hitch provides stability and is suitable for heavier loads. The weight of the tongue rests directly on the truck bed, over the rear axles.



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Expandable Camping Trailers

More commonly called pop-up campers, expandable camping trailers are generally the least expensive RV types available. They are essentially a tent on a trailer frame. Usually, the roof lifts up and beds swing out, all encased in soft canvas and mesh screen material. Most don't have private bathrooms, and some don't have any kitchen facilities.

It's the tent camping experience, but with the convenience of quick set-up, electricity, and (sometimes) heat and A/C. Expandable trailers are generally very light, and can often be pulled behind an SUV or minivan. Pop-ups don't have much storage, and they're more exposed to the elements. Just like tents, proper upkeep of the canvas is necessary.

Some campgrounds don't allow soft-sided RVs like pop-ups, either because they don't have separate bathroom facilities or because they're located in bear country.

New pop-ups can be purchased for as low as \$7,000 and there are many unique and interesting designs on the market.

Hybrid Travel Trailers

Hybrids are similar to conventional travel trailers, but instead of slide-outs they have expandable canvas sleeping areas. This drastically increases the space inside. Hybrids usually have the same amenities as travel trailers, but are less expensive than one of a similar size. They're usually priced between about \$10,000 and \$30,000.

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Teardrops and Other Ultra-Light Trailers

A teardrop trailer is easy to spot because of its shape, which can look a lot like its namesake. Teardrops are very small, lightweight trailers that can be towed behind a variety of vehicles. There's usually just enough space inside for a bed, often with a kitchen unit on the outside. Most models don't have bathroom facilities.

There are also many small "adventure" trailers on the market that carry fold-out sleeping tents and gear. These can be pulled behind a Jeep or other off-roading vehicle for adventuring beyond the pavement

Truck Campers

Truck campers physically ride in the bed of a truck. Though they're compact, they offer quite a bit of space. Like a Class B motorhome, you can drive and park them pretty much anywhere. There are usually retractable legs that allow the truck to be driven out from underneath the camper, so you can leave it at the campground. However, it takes some time to do, and a small percentage of campgrounds don't allow it. Truck campers range from \$8,000 to \$60,000.



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I Other Types of RVs

There are also plenty of RVs that are designed to cater to different interests.

Toy Haulers, or “Sport-Utility RVs,” are RVs that have a customizable garage space inside meant for dirt bikes, dune buggies, ATVs, golf carts, or motorcycles. There are toy haulers of all RV types: motorhomes, travel trailers, and fifth wheels. They are popular due to the multi-purpose garage space. Some models also feature fold-out party decks.

A **park model** is a trailer that is meant to stay in one place for an extended period of time, usually at a camping resort. It’s a similar concept to a mobile home, but park models are much smaller, and they can legally be towed with a regular truck without a special permit. Relocating usually demands a beast of a truck, so most park model owners have theirs professionally moved.

Most **tiny homes** are a custom-made travel trailer built on either a conventional or a fifth wheel trailer frame. This allows them to avoid building codes and to be able to be moved from place to place. Some tiny homes are designed to travel often, but most are built more like a park model, designed to move infrequently.

Similarly, **bus, truck, and van conversions** are types of custom-built motorhomes. These are built out of classic coaches, school buses, city transit buses, cargo vans, or other vehicle types.

Tiny homes and vehicle conversions may or may not be accepted at privately owned campgrounds, and insurance can be a challenge.



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What RV Ownership is Like

RV ownership can be a rewarding experience full of adventure and fun, but it's not void of challenges.

Advantages of RV travel

- You'll have significant control over the costs of travel.
- You can cook your meals at the campground instead of relying on restaurants.
- You can go to expensive resorts with amenities and activities, or affordable campgrounds with no frills—either way, you'll be in your own home on wheels.
- You don't have to worry about how clean hotel rooms will be.
- You don't have to carry bags around and pack and unpack for every trip.
- You travel from the comfort of a space that you've tailored for your own needs.
- You can easily move from destination to destination.

The interior of an RV is usually smaller than most hotel rooms, but the outdoors is your living room. At the same time, you're not limited to the great outdoors—you can visit cities, tailgate at a football game, or head to a music festival in your RV. And instead of flying to your destination, you get to explore the world from up close, and find off-the-beaten-path gems.

Campgrounds can offer natural getaways or fun resort atmospheres, and at state and national parks you often get to sleep in some of the most beautiful places on Earth.

But like anything major you own, RVs require some work to keep them in their best condition. An RV is like a home and an automobile combined, and diligent maintenance will ensure they can provide you with adventure for years to come. Just like with homeownership, problems will arise. And your new RV may not be perfect the day you pick it up. They're hand-built products that anyone who's just a little bit handy can maintain. You can outsource maintenance to RV repair shops and mobile technicians, but problems will arise on the road, and RV travel rewards those who can adapt when challenges arise.



Photo by: Lorem Ipsum

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Most RV issues can be solved with a basic set of tools and some knowledge from a trusted source, and there are great resources available in the Togo RV app. You may need to replace a sensor on your water heater, re-caulk a leaky window, or tighten up some plumbing. The vast majority of head-scratching problems are electrical, and can often be solved with a multimeter and a little bit of knowledge. Anyone can perform these minor repairs, but if you're not looking for that type of complication, RV ownership may not be right for you.

Here are some typical RV maintenance tasks that you should be comfortable with

- Tending water levels in batteries
- Winterizing water systems with antifreeze or compressed air
- Repairing worn sealant on the roof and windows
- Changing engine and generator oil
- Greasing wheel bearings
- Inflating tires
- Torquing lug nuts

Dealers can help with all of these things, but they must be done, and you'll save a lot of money doing them yourself.

You also need a good place to store an RV. Many towns or homeowner associations have rules about parking RVs in driveways or yards, so make sure you know where you're going to store it.

Make sure there's easy access to back it in or out from your street, and that the path is clear of obstructions, like trees, fences, and mailboxes.

RV ownership is an adventure, but it's one you'll want to commit to. Your travel budget will center around your RV, and it's a big decision that you really need to imagine every step of to make sure RV ownership is right for you.



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