

Tips and Tricks for Life In An RV

By Sandy Westin, The Village Wordsmith
www.VillageWordsmith.net

Preface: These thoughts are being shared for those preparing to live lightly in the confined space of a recreational vehicle (RV). I will leave it to other resources (see bibliography at the end for a few good ones) to advise on places to park the RV for free or fee, getting used to driving, maneuvering and parking the beast, and dealing with the utilitarian facts of life: black water, gray water, weather challenges in winter and summer, etc. I'll just stick to some useful hacks to provide things we have found useful.

Introduction:

Moving from a two or three bedroom home that provides living space of 1000 sq ft or more to one of 440 sq ft or less, even with the slides out, does require making some trade-offs. When my husband, Paul, and I decided in August 2017 to make that change, it was largely with the expectation that living full time on wheels would provide mobility in response to life and work changes (which it has), and be more economical in the long run than renting a house or condo (well....sometimes**).

**Owning an RV can be very affordable, depending on the type of vehicle. Any rig that has the motor built in (Class A/bus, Class B/van, or Class C/truck conversion) is going to be expensive to purchase, maintain and to get it down the road, but if you plan to travel a lot, they are great choices. We opted instead for a travel trailer, which is much more affordable.

But owning the rig is only the first step; then comes the question of where to park it. A site that includes the standard utilities – potable water, sewer, electric, and (ideally) cable and wi-fi – typically costs \$500 to as much as \$750/mo, and that's in Western North Carolina with its relatively low cost-of-living. (We won't even talk about Phoenix or San Francisco.) Travel club discounts typically apply to the first days or weeks only. Leasing a lot for 6 to 12 months, however, provides a good discount over the daily rate.

Our rig is a 2013 34' Flagstaff travel trailer. We live in it full time for the present, generally staying put in one place rather than traveling. Paul built the porch and steps in three modules so they can be moved with us whenever we relocate.



Keeping things organized:

Keeping to one fundamental household rule makes living in an RV far less chaotic: Every THING has a place where it lives and must be returned to ASAP. While changes in agreed storage sites may evolve, they need to be announced and the new one adhered to. As long as everyone keeps that in mind, you'll get along fine.

(This is in keeping with that great maxim "Life works by agreements. If you make an agreement, keep it. If you must change an agreement, change it with everyone involved, then keep the new agreement.")

There's one great product line with multiple uses: Command™ brand stick-on hooks are great for RV's, especially since they are removable without marring surfaces. Check out these applications we found for some of their many sizes and types of hooks:

To put up wall art we use Command hooks and two-part Velcro strips. We later discovered, though, that Velcro strips damage the surface when removed from wood veneer surfaces. We got a furniture touch-up stick from the hardware store to repair nicks and scratches on the woodwork.



The kitchen is a great place to use Command™ hooks for lots of purposes. Here's how I store my measuring cups, measuring teaspoon set and hot pads near the stove.



Even pots and pans can be put on the wall with the heavier duty Command™ hooks.



I always enjoy having a houseplant or two in my home, and found a perfect specimen that adapts nicely to RV living – a vining Philodendron. What started out as a foot-long shoot has extended 5' in two directions from one medium sized pot. And yes, that's a Command™ hook suspending the vine from a cabinet above.



General tips and pics

Storage is always a major challenge. We use a variety of small containers on what used to be used as a bunk bed. Each box serves a different purpose, e.g. First Aid, Batteries, etc.



Most of our important documents are scanned and converted to digital files stored on the cloud. A plastic carrying case serves as the only filing cabinet we have for things that must stay in paper form like titles and owner's manuals. For scanning documents, we use a Brother DSMobile 620 scanner. Very compact; even works on business cards and receipts.



Sometimes you have to get creative with storage. I use a toaster oven and the built-in microwave oven more than the gas range, so the gas oven makes a great place for pans, dishtowels and other large items.



Stick-on lights work great inside dark cabinets. With a simple touch-on, touch-off, they are truly enlightening!



I found a cargo net in an auto parts store that works great to hold bulky fabric things on the bedroom wall under the TV. What's it held up with? You guessed it – the largest Command™ hooks!



In the kitchen/galley:

A compressible plastic dish drainer is available online or at an RV store. When the dishes are done, it is flattened and stores under the sofa. There's a laundry basket available with the same technology. Great space savers!



We find a simple plastic sheet cutting board is useful for everything from cutting up veges to rolling out cookie dough. Easy to keep clean, and it stores inside a kitchen cupboard hung on ... yep, a Command™ hook. The sheets are easily cut to the right size with a pair of kitchen scissors.

(Note the magnetic timer on the range hood below the cupboard. Good for lots of things, even for wake-up calls.)



This may be my most unorthodox tip. I don't use the propane stove very often. Got a thing about working with gas, and besides, it takes a bit of doing to take everything off that area and open the lid. So I cook nearly every meal on a single burner electric stove, plus the toaster oven and microwave. (Two-burner solid surface portable electric stoves are also available.)

A nice thing about using electric appliances (toaster, hotpot, coffee maker, waffle iron) is they can be taken outside in the summer, limiting the draw on the A/C. Our rig also has an outdoor kitchen, complete with its own gas range, fridge, sink and microwave, but not all RV's do.



For storage in the rig's pantry, I like to use the airtight hard plastic containers made by Good Grips™. Notice one of them is upside down? Several of them are tapered, so they fit together better when they alternate up and down. However beware! I've had the lid of an upside down container come off when it was carelessly handled. What a mess!

This is the top shelf of our four-shelf pantry closet. The whole closet is just 12" wide but 2.5' deep. Dry staples live on the top shelf.



The second shelf is for baking and cooking ingredients.



The third shelf is for canned goods, and the bottom shelf holds paper products for the most part. Assigning such categories keeps life sane, especially when two people share the space! Only smaller containers and “dinghies” of larger containers of food are kept in the pantry. One of the bays under the rig stores the major-sized containers.



Inside our small RV fridge, being organized is essential. Note the clear, hard plastic egg container, available at an RV store or online. It holds a full dozen, and can be stacked either above or beneath the green lettuce keeper box in the same footprint.



One more little tip that works for us. You know all those pesky storage container lids that clutter up the cupboard, and you can never find the right one when you need it? First off, we have very few hard plastic containers, and they generally nest well. Second, we keep all the lids in a gallon sized plastic zippered bag with rectangular or square lids on one side of the bag and round ones on the flip side. It works!



Two final tips – Simplify, Simplify!:

- Using **paper plates and bowls** limits the time spent dishwashing. Take advantage of them for quickie meals and cleanup.
- **Delicatessens** have great food available in small quantities – saves space in the RV's fridge and makes for variety in menus. They even come in their own storage containers!
- Got **Kindle**? Lugging physical books across the miles is so 20th Century. With E-books on a tablet computer you can bring an entire library with you in one container, expand the font to the size that works for you, and it even remembers what page you were on last time. There are other neat features in there as well. E-books are available through both Amazon to buy and most libraries to borrow.

References:

For learning all things RVing: www.IRV2.org provides a site where anyone can ask a question and read what other RVers have experienced about the same thing. The RV community is huge, and people are generally friendly and helpful.

For learning the basics, here are a few good titles. There are plenty more where these came from:

- "Tips for the RV Life", by Ray Burr
- "100 RV Tips and Tricks", by Malcolm "Mack" Massey
- "Secrets of RVing on Social Security", by Jerry Minchey
- "RV Camping Secrets for Beginners", by BJ Forest

Happy traveling, and keep the greasy side down!