

Recreational Vehicles



Renting Out Your RV

Having an RV can mean living the dream.

Camping at a moment's notice. Spontaneously deciding to spend the weekend in the great outdoors. But the rest of the time, it's just sitting there. It doesn't have to be that way. A new rental market has opened up for RVs. Here's how to take advantage.

PICK A COMPANY

There are several companies out there that list RVs for rent, such as Outdoorsy, RVShare.com, RVezy and more. The sites handle booking requests and money, the owners coordinate with renters on meetups, set up and take care of maintenance and cleaning.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many owners say they're making more money than ever before.

"People came to me because they had trips planned, but suddenly their hotels had canceled on them," RV owner Frye told NerdWallet. "People were scrambling to find places to stay."

HOW MUCH CAN YOU MAKE?

RVShare.com says that with a luxury motorhome, you can make as much as \$60,000 per year through rentals. But there are also some costs associated with the venture. These online marketplaces make money somehow, and that's largely through commission on your rentals. Outdoorsy takes about



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20% of the total reservation costs and RVShare is said to take about a quarter of the rental cost.

You're also probably still making monthly payments on that expensive RV unless you own it outright, so you'll also have interest and fees, and you'll also have maintenance and RV insurance to take into

account. Lastly, consider storage. Unless you can keep your RV in your garage or on your property, you should factor in the cost of off-site storage, which can be around \$1,500 a year or more.

You should also consider that many people renting RVs are novices and your camper may come back in less-than-

pristine condition.

"You can't be too emotionally attached," Frye said, cautioning owners not to get upset over every little scratch and ding.

BUYING AN RV

The rental market, however, shouldn't be your primary reason for buying an RV. Trips to Discover's annual found that

many popular RV models have seen their sticker price jump 50% in the last decade. RV manufacturers saw record shipments in 2021, but the industry is still slowed by shortages and labor disruptions. Demand is also higher than ever before, and that increase leads to skyrocketing prices.

Getting Off the Grid in Your RV

When looking for an RV spot, one of the first things people look for are sewer, water and electrical hookups so that they can have all the modern conveniences while on the road.

However, it's now possible to go off the grid in your RV and still keep most of the parts of modern life that you're used to.

ELECTRICITY

Solar power is making the adventurous RV life possible. Advances in solar power mean that solar power systems are more compact and more powerful than ever before. Some RVs come with integrated solar power, but you can also use portable solar units to get the juice you need. These smaller solar power systems tend to not be as powerful as integrated units, however, so keep in mind how much power you use when you're considering your options.

Bringing a gas generator is another option, and it's familiar to many people, especially if they've used an RV before. There are some serious drawbacks, though, in that generators are heavy, loud and require frequent gas refills. So much for peace and quiet with one of these guys



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running your setup.

WATER

If you're going off-grid, you'll need to bring clean water with you. RVs have water storage on board, but you'll still need to carefully consider how much you're

using and how you're using it. Look at recycling your gray water from dishes for the toilet, for instance. Speaking of toilets, you'll also need to know how much black water, or sewage, your RV can hold. And you'll need to know where your nearest dump sta-

tions are to safely offload it.

Maximizing Efficiency
No matter which systems you choose to go off-grid, you'll need to make sure your RV is as efficient as it can be. Try to choose campsites in neutral climates so you don't have run your climate control.

Use LED lighting instead of less-efficient bulbs and stock your RV with high-efficiency appliances. Only use electricity when you absolutely need it and, if you're using solar panels, move them throughout the day to take best advantage of the sun's rays.

Living in a Van

What was once a threat or a surefire disappointment — living in a van — is now full-on trendy lifestyle choice.

Then again, those vans down by the river didn't have high-speed Wi-Fi and an air fryer. Today's vans are high-tech and carry with them most of the modern conveniences of home. Not to mention plenty of Instagram followers.

#VANLIFE

COVID-19 spurred more of an interest in seeing the country in a van as it became one of the more safer ways to travel. The popularity of these all-in-one car and RV combos is an offshoot of the skyrocketing popularity of RVs.

Leland Gilmore, founder of Benchmark Vehicles, said his custom van company has taken off. Demand has nearly doubled during the pandemic, he told *The New York Times*.

"What we say is: We build your escape," he explained. "These are little escape vessels, escape pods."

Scott Kubly of the van rental company Cabana told the newspaper his orders jumped a startling 400% when the pandemic started.

Mercedes-Benz, who makes the Sprinter van favored by van enthusiasts, says that their U.S. van sales have jumped

nearly a quarter.

"Everybody's trying to get their hands on a van," Stefanie Doemel, who manages upfit solutions for vans for the company, told *USA Today*.

THE CONS

It's not all pretty as an Instagram picture, though. Vans are tiny, especially once you've added in kitchen, bath and bed fixtures.

"It's definitely not for everyone to be in that tight of a space," Abby Erler told *USA Today*. "But we can park in a regular parking space, which makes it super versatile in terms of where you can go."

Gas prices are also spiking right now, and if driving around the country was your dream, it just got a lot more expensive. You should also learn how to do at least basic vehicle maintenance and work on your own; reliable mechanics can be hard to find.

Lastly, if you're going full-time in the van, you'll need to be able to receive mail. Check into a P.O. box you can regularly get to or a virtual mailbox you can access. This will ensure you don't miss any official correspondence.



Get Your Questions Answered

RV ownership hit a record high in 2021 as 11.2 million U.S. households reported owning an RV.

That's a 62% jump over 2001 figures. Nearly a third of RV owners are first-time owners and many of those plan on upgrading in the future, industry site GoRVing.com said. If you're one of those new owners, you may have some questions. We've got answers.

DO I NEED A SPECIAL LICENSE TO DRIVE A MOTORHOME?

For the vast majority of owners, no you do not, RVUSA.com says. But some states may require a special driving test for the largest motorhomes or towable RVs.

WHERE CAN I CAMP?

There are an estimated 27,000 public and private campgrounds in the U.S. and Canada, RV maker Thor Industries says. For your first few trips, look for a campground close to home and make a staycation of it.

HOW BIG A TRAILER CAN MY CAR OR TRUCK TOW?

Be careful here. Weight ratings vary from vehicle to vehicle and configuration to configuration. The dry weight of your RV refers to the actual weight of the trailer without fuel, fluids, cargo or optional equipment. You want to figure your



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gross weight, which is the actual weight of the fully loaded RV.

The gross vehicle weight rating, sometimes called the GVWR, is the heaviest weight determined by the manufacturer for the safe operation of your RV. This is the number you should use for the towing weight of your RV.

Check with your RV dealership or vehicle manufacturer for how much weight your

vehicle can tow.

WHAT IS A SELF-CONTAINED RV?

Self-contained RVs allow you to go off grid, carrying the basic necessities for several days without external connections. This usually includes toilet facilities, fresh water storage, waste holding tanks, stoves and climate control, and a storage battery.

WHAT KIND OF GAS MILEAGE WILL I GET?

Again, this depends on a lot of different variables. You should plan, however, on getting a lot less miles per gallon than you do every day without towing a trailer.

WHAT FINANCING OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

You can finance your RV, but

it's not quite like financing a car or a home. In fact, it's sort of in between the two.

On average, RV loans range from 10-15 years, with interest rates depending on the size of the loan, length of the loan, down payment and, of course, your credit rating, Thor says.

You can finance through your RV dealer or through your local bank or credit union.

Negotiating a Price

We've already seen that RVs have seen an incredible increase in prices since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There's still room, however, for negotiation, albeit it very little. Here are some tips for getting the best price on your RV from RVUSA.

LOOK UP THE PRICE

The first step in getting a good deal is to figure out how much the RV you're considering is actually worth. Just like with a car, you can look up RV prices through the NADA guides and comparison shop online. Know exact figures, locations and features of each RV you're comparing so you can come into the negotiation armed with the knowledge to get yourself the best deal.

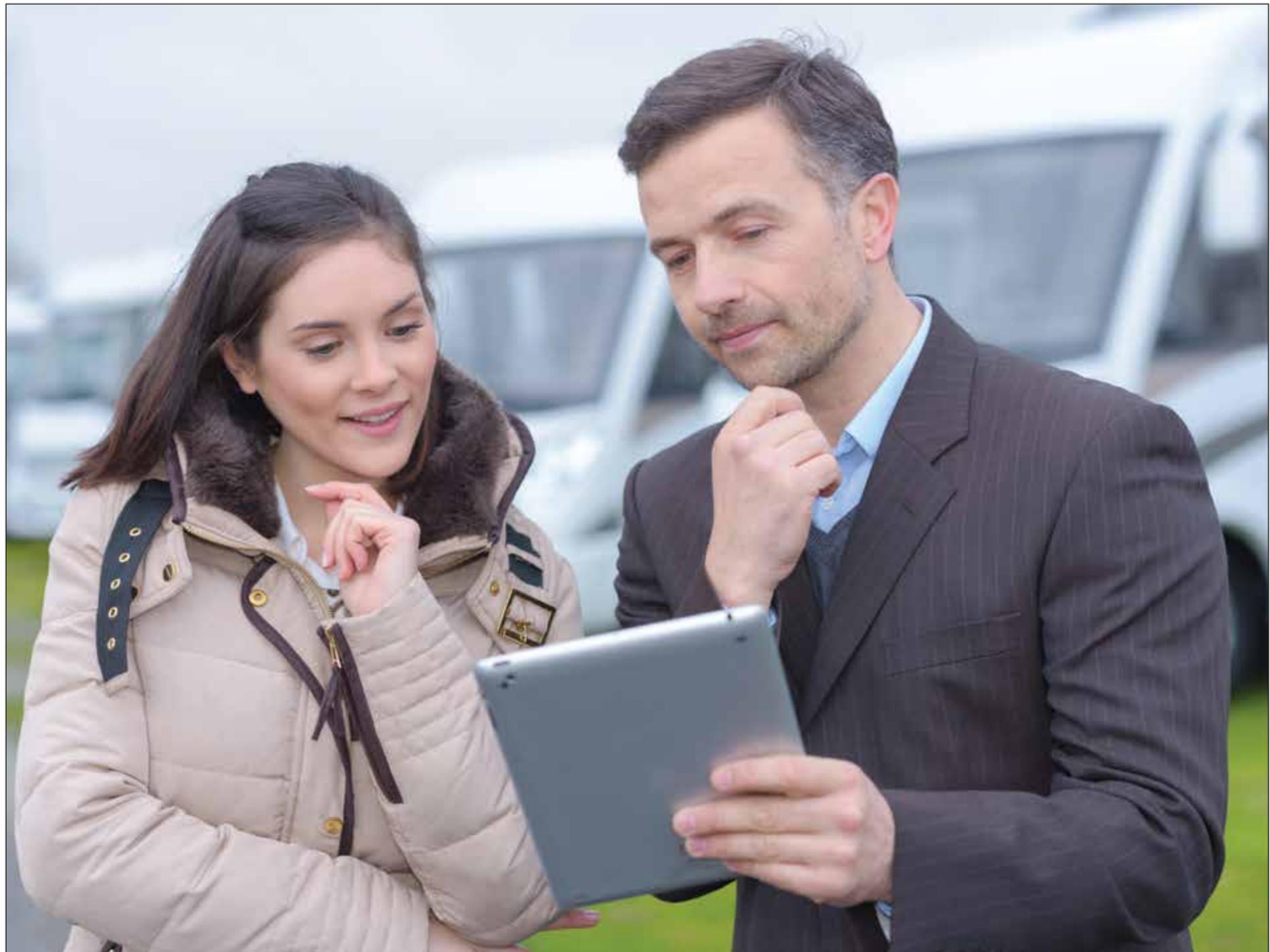
DEALER FEES

Also similar to a car purchase are the RV dealer's fees. RVUSA says you can usually negotiate your way out of these by threatening to leave if they don't take them off the bill. Just remember that you have to be ready to actually follow through on that threat for it to work.

Also remember to factor in other outside costs, such as a warranty and service plans.

BUY DURING THE OFFSEASON

Spring and summer are high tide for RV sales. Try to time



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your purchase toward the end of summer or beginning of fall. That may save you big bucks in the long run.

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

This means both the RV you're considering AND the dealership. Read online

reviews, ask friends and family, and check out RV forums for the manufacturers you're looking at. You may find some helpful hints about doing business with both the dealer and the manufacturer. Consider service plans and the dealership's service experience as well when you're researching.

JUST ASK

Salespeople are usually betting that you're going to be doing some negotiation. They're ready and willing, usually, to lower the price to a certain amount. Just remember to be courteous and respectful; honey gets more flies than vinegar.

BE UPFRONT WITH YOUR BUDGET

Salespeople want to make a sale. If you're honest about what you can afford, they're going to do everything they can to help you. Don't tempt financial stress and overload by going outside what you can afford.

Staying Online on the Road

Remote work can really be remote these days, if you have the right equipment.

Even if you're not working from home, you still may need to stay connected to friends and family, pay bills and do other things online. Here's how to stay online while you're on the road.

“FREE” WI-FI

Many campgrounds and other places to park your RV will offer free Wi-Fi included in the price of your space rental. It sounds awesome. But beware the security on free Wi-Fi. Other users and the network administrator may have access to your devices and information on free services.

Furthermore, it can be difficult to provide good service to a large area and, RVShare points out, RVs are made of some materials that aren't Wi-Fi friendly, such as aluminum. So don't count on that free Wi-Fi to meet all your needs.

If you find yourself continually having problems with free Wi-Fi networks, you can try adding equipment to your RV such as repeaters, boosters or rangers. These devices extend and make stronger existing Wi-Fi signals.

WI-FI HOTSPOTS

You can purchase a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot through any cellular carrier. Start by checking



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with the carrier you currently use and work from there. Most carriers have more than one option for Wi-Fi hotspots, and which one you pick will depend on your usage. If you can, pick a device that offers 5 GHz Wi-Fi which is faster and less congested. If you don't use a lot of Internet, you may be able to tether to an existing device such as your smartphone. Check first to make sure your plan allows for that so you don't accrue extra charges.

SATELLITE AND GLOBAL INTERNET

Another option for getting Internet to your RV is a satellite. Most of these plans require a dish to be installed on your RV, which is good if you plan on staying in a campground for weeks or months at a time. But if you're planning on staying on the road this might not be the best solution for you.

Instead look at a global Internet plan such as Skyroam.

With these plans, which are similar to cellular data plans, you buy unlimited data for a 24 hour period, a monthly subscription or a pay per gigabyte plan. However you should know that some of these plans aren't as good as cell service in the United States. But if you're planning to travel to Canada, Mexico or abroad this might be worth looking into.

BEWARE

When you take a look at how

you use the Internet, are you mostly streaming videos? Or are you just using it to check email or send text messages? Be aware that some common Internet usage is can really blow through data usage plans. Take a close look at how you use the Internet, even on the road, and be honest with yourself about your data usage. Paying for a bigger plan now is probably less expensive than paying the overage charges later.

New National Parks to Visit

We've got to admit, the last few years have been pretty bad — but there is a bright spot. There are several new national parks to visit.

The United States now has 63 national parks. Here are a few of the newest and why you should visit.

NEW RIVER GORGE, WEST VIRGINIA

The New River Gorge features 53 miles of whitewater rafting opportunities including a 13-mile stretch of Class IV and V rapids. There are also mountain bike trails that stretch for miles. Rock climbers will find sheer limestone cliffs and more than 1,500 routes to explore. The park is also an outdoor museum of the people who lived and worked there in the past, supplying lumber and coal that fueled American industry.

WHITE SANDS, NEW MEXICO

White Sands' gypsum dunes change color as day turns to night. The scenery has captivated photographers for years but now it's a national park that features rich flora and fauna, including the soap tree yucca. Rangers lead sunset strolls, full moon hikes and meteor shower parties.

INDIANA DUNES, INDIANA

Even though Indiana Dunes



White Sands, New Mexico

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it's nestled between Chicago and Gary, Indiana, it's home to a surprising variety of flora and fauna. Try the West Beach Trails, which feature lake swimming, birding, wildflowers and views of Lake Michigan.

PINNACLES, CALIFORNIA

Pinnacles was designated a National Monument in 1908. It's known for its eroded spires, an extinct volcano and unusual caves, all products of the area's seismic history near the San Andreas Fault. It's also home to the endangered California condor and just 80 miles from San Francisco.

CONGAREE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Congaree is a southern swamp that became a national park in 2003 and was designat-

ed as a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1983. It's a long-standing floodplain, one of the last examples of the old-growth bottomland hardwood forests that once covered the southeastern United States. It has a popular boardwalk and canoe trails that wind through stands of loblolly pine, persimmon, water tupelo and bald cypress.

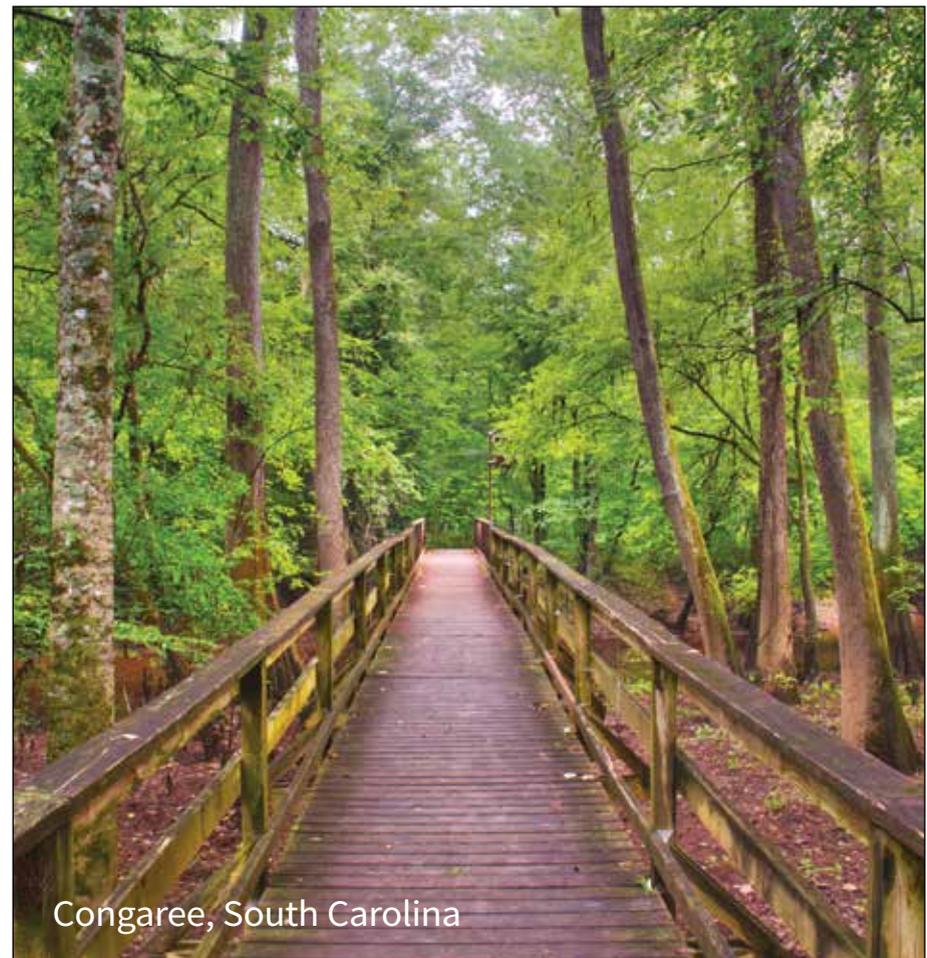
CUYAHOGA VALLEY, OHIO

This waterfall-filled sanctuary is close to both Cleveland and Akron, and is also home to private homes and other development that might disappoint adventurers looking for unspoiled wilderness. What it does have is hiking and biking options such as the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail and the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad.



Pinnacles, California

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Congaree, South Carolina

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