



RV TRIPGEN

The Complete Guide to
RV Travel in
California

55 mph trailer limits, Pacific Coast Highway length restrictions, Yosemite reservations, fire-season closures, and what desert summer really means.

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RV travel in California

California is the biggest, busiest, and most varied RV state in the country. The Sierra Nevada, the Pacific coast, the Mojave, the redwoods, and nine national parks are all reachable from the same loop. The trade-offs are price, traffic, and rules. Fuel is the most expensive in the lower 48, urban traffic is brutal, and the state imposes a strict 55 mph limit on anyone towing a trailer regardless of posted limits. Wildfire season (Jul-Oct) routinely closes Forest Service roads and entire national parks at short notice. Outside those constraints, the variety is unmatched: you can be in Death Valley one morning and sea-level redwoods the next.

California by the numbers

Boondocking + dispersed sites	3,889
Established campgrounds	1,142
Dump stations	225
Propane refills	308
Potable water fill-ups	542
Laundromats	228
RV showers	221
Verified-bad spots (overnight prohibited)	550

Source: iOverlander community database (68% of California spots verified in the last 24 months).

Driving rules

Interstate (cars + motorhomes, no trailer)	65-70 mph (posted)
Interstate (any vehicle towing a trailer)	55 mph (statewide, regardless of posted limit)
Two-lane highway (cars)	55-65 mph (posted)
Two-lane highway (towing)	55 mph
Built-up areas	25-35 mph (posted)
RV length limit (motorhome alone)	45 ft
Combined length (motorhome + tow)	65 ft

Drive on	Right
Cell phone use while driving	Hands-free only (banned hand-held; texting prohibited)
Seatbelts	Required for all occupants

Highways

RV-friendly corridors

Highway	Note
I-5	Spine of the Central Valley from the Oregon line to Mexico. Boring but easy; long stretches with full services. Grapevine (Tejon Pass, 4144 ft) is the only significant grade.
I-10	Los Angeles to the Arizona line via Palm Springs. Hot in summer, easy grades, dense fuel.
I-15	San Diego to Las Vegas via Cajon Pass (4190 ft, 6% grade). Heavy weekend traffic LA-Vegas.
I-80	Bay Area to Nevada via Donner Pass (7239 ft). Chains required Nov-Apr in storm conditions; grade is steady but long.
US-101	Coast route, San Francisco to Oregon. Easier than CA-1; full hookups dense; redwoods accessible.
US-395	Eastern Sierra spine. Bishop, Mammoth, Lone Pine. Scenic, big rigs fine, fuel gaps possible.

RV-restricted segments

Segment	Restriction
CA-1 (Pacific Coast Highway, Big Sur)	Length and weight restrictions in places; tight cliff-edge curves between Carmel and San Simeon. Not recommended for rigs over 30 ft. Section closures from landslides are common in winter.
CA-120 (Tioga Road, Yosemite)	Closed Nov-late May/June. Open season has 25-foot length advisory on the eastern descent.
CA-108 (Sonora Pass)	9624 ft. Closed Nov-May. Tight switchbacks; trailers strongly discouraged.
CA-36, CA-299 (Trinity Alps)	Logging-truck country. Tight, slow, and remote. RVs over 32 ft will struggle.
Mt Tamalpais area roads (north of Golden Gate)	Steep, narrow, no turn-arounds. Avoid in any RV.

Mountain passes

Pass	Elevation	Note
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Tioga Pass (CA-120, Yosemite east)	9943 ft	Closed Nov-late May/Jun. 25 ft length advisory.
Sonora Pass (CA-108)	9624 ft	Closed Nov-May. Trailers strongly discouraged.
Ebbetts Pass (CA-4)	8730 ft	Closed Nov-May. Narrow with no centre line in places.
Carson Pass (CA-88)	8574 ft	Open year-round; chains often required Nov-Apr.
Donner Pass (I-80)	7239 ft	Open year-round; chain controls common Nov-Apr in storms.
Tejon Pass / Grapevine (I-5)	4144 ft	Open year-round; long 6% grade either side. Closes occasionally for snow or wind.

National parks + monuments

National Park / Monument	Entry fee	Reservation note
Yosemite NP	\$35/vehicle (7 days), \$80 America the Beautiful annual	Day-use reservation often required Apr-Oct (check current rules at recreation.gov). Five campgrounds reservable up to 5 months ahead -- book the morning slots open. Upper/Lower/North Pines: rigs to 35-40 ft. Hodgdon Meadow + Crane Flat outside the valley.
Sequoia + Kings Canyon NP	\$35/vehicle (7 days)	Generals Highway has a 22 ft total-length advisory between Hospital Rock and Giant Forest. Lodgepole + Dorst Creek campgrounds reservable. Big rigs should enter via the King's Canyon side (CA-180).
Death Valley NP	\$30/vehicle (7 days)	Furnace Creek Campground reservable Oct-Apr; Texas Spring + Stovepipe Wells first-come. Avoid May-Sep entirely (130+ F days; tyre blowouts on hot pavement common).
Joshua Tree NP	\$30/vehicle (7 days)	Most campgrounds reservable; Black Rock + Indian Cove take rigs to 35 ft. Jumbo Rocks + Hidden Valley are smaller-rig-only.
Lassen Volcanic NP	\$30/vehicle (7 days)	Manzanita Lake + Summit Lake reservable Jun-Sep. Most campgrounds closed Oct-May.
Redwood NP + State Parks	Free entry to NP; state parks \$8 day-use	Jedediah Smith, Mill Creek, Elk Prairie state-park campgrounds reservable via reservecalifornia.com. Most rigs OK to 35 ft.
Pinnacles NP	\$30/vehicle (7 days)	Pinnacles Campground reservable; rigs to 35 ft. Only the east entrance is RV-accessible.
Channel Islands NP	Free entry	No vehicle access -- island camping only via park concessionaire boat. Mainland visitor centre at Ventura.

Lava Beds NM

\$25/vehicle (7 days)

Indian Well Campground first-come, rigs to 30 ft.
Remote NE corner of the state.

State parks

California State Parks operates 280+ units, the largest state-park system in the country. Reservations open 6 months ahead at reservecalifornia.com and the popular ones (Big Basin, Henry Cowell, MacKerricher, Anza-Borrego, Pfeiffer Big Sur) book out within minutes. Day-use \$8-15. Camping \$35-65 (full-hookup sites at coastal parks command the higher end). Length limits vary by park: many beach parks max out at 27-30 ft.

Boondocking + dispersed camping

BLM: California has extensive BLM dispersed camping in the Mojave (Trona Pinnacles, Afton Canyon), Owens Valley (Alabama Hills near Lone Pine -- iconic), Imperial Valley (the Slabs near Niland), and the Eastern Sierra. Standard 14-day stay limit. The southern California desert fills up with snowbirds Nov-Mar; arrive early in the week if you want a spot near Quartzsite-spillover areas like Pegleg Smith (Borrego Springs).

National Forest: Inyo, Sequoia, Sierra, Stanislaus, Eldorado, Tahoe, Plumas, Lassen, Six Rivers, Klamath, and Mendocino National Forests all permit dispersed camping along forest roads. Fire restrictions are aggressive and frequent Jun-Nov -- many forests ban all open flames including stoves with no shutoff. Check the specific forest's current order before lighting anything. A California Campfire Permit (free, online) is required for any fire including portable stoves outside developed campgrounds.

Stay limit: 14 days at any one location (federal rule, applies to BLM and NF dispersed).

Tribal lands

California has 109 federally-recognized tribes, more than any other state. Most reservations are small. Some operate RV resorts (Pala, Pechanga, Cahuilla, Harrah's Resort SoCal). Dispersed camping is generally not permitted on tribal land. Always check current rules before pulling off the highway in reservation territory.

Propane, dump stations, fuel

Propane: Widely available throughout populated California. U-Haul, Tractor Supply, and most RV parks fill on-site. Sparse in the northeast corner (Modoc) and the eastern Sierra north of Bridgeport. CARB regulations require a \$5 cylinder inspection on first refill at some commercial fillers -- not a big deal but it surprises out-of-state RVers.

Dump stations: Dense along the I-5 / US-101 corridors and around metro LA, the Bay Area, and Sacramento. State parks generally have free dump stations for registered guests. Flying J / Pilot stations along I-5 and I-40 charge \$10-15. Sparse in the eastern Sierra and the Lost Coast.

Fuel: California has the highest fuel prices in the lower 48, often \$1.00-1.50/gal more than Arizona or Nevada at the state line. Fill the tank before crossing in if you can. Diesel is widely available along all interstates and US highways; uncommon on smaller state routes. Notable fuel gaps: US-395 between Lone Pine and Bishop has limited late-night options, and CA-190 through Death Valley has only Furnace Creek + Stovepipe Wells with limited hours.

Weather windows

Best months: March-May (deserts + central valley + Sierra foothills) and September-November (everywhere except the north coast). Coastal fog ("June Gloom") suppresses summer temps along the coast.

Avoid: July-September in the deserts (Death Valley + Joshua Tree + Mojave: highs 105-130 F). November-April for Sierra passes above 7000 ft -- chain controls and closures common. Wildfire season Jul-Oct can shut national forests, parks, and entire counties at short notice with little warning; air quality can drop to hazardous (300+ AQI) for days.

Climate caution

Watch CalFire ([fire.ca.gov/incidents](https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents)) and AirNow.gov daily during fire season. A 200-mile relocation upwind of an active fire is sometimes the only safe option; do not park downwind of an active incident regardless of how scenic the spot is.

Emergency + road conditions

State patrol	Dial 9-1-1 for emergencies; (800) 835-5247 for CHP non-emergency
Road conditions	https://quickmap.dot.ca.gov

How RV TripGen helps

We hold you to the 55 mph trailer limit

California's 55 mph statewide trailer-towing limit is enforced. RV Tripgen plans your daily mileage assuming 55 mph average for trailer rigs, so the schedule we hand you is the one you can actually drive.

Fire-season alternates baked into your plan

Every California overnight stop in your plan has a backup option flagged for fire-season displacement, so a closure or air-quality event doesn't strand you.