

A photograph of the Chicago skyline, featuring several prominent skyscrapers. In the foreground, a white and blue boat named 'WENDELLA' is on the water. The sky is a clear, deep blue. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**RV TRIPGEN**

# The Complete Guide to RV Travel in **Illinois**

Shawnee NF in the south, Lake Michigan shoreline, the Mississippi River corridor,  
and Chicago itself -- one of the most RV-hostile cities in the country.

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# RV travel in Illinois

Illinois is two RV states glued together. North of I-80 is Chicagoland: dense, expensive, traffic-heavy, with strict overnight-parking enforcement inside the city itself and most close-in suburbs -- bring a tow vehicle or expect to park your rig at storage facilities on the outer edges (Joliet, Aurora, Crystal Lake). South of I-80 the state turns rural and underrated, with the Mississippi River corridor along I-72 and US-67, the Illinois & Michigan Canal NHC connecting Chicago to the Mississippi, and -- the headline -- Shawnee NF in the deep south, the Garden of the Gods rock formations, and the LaRue-Pine Hills ecological area. Illinois has only one National Park unit of consequence (no major NP -- the state is a NF, NHP and NHC state). Lake Michigan shoreline access is mostly through Illinois Beach SP. Plan around Chicagoland congestion and Illinois rewards the southern half handsomely.

## Illinois by the numbers

<b>Boondocking + dispersed sites</b>	255
<b>Established campgrounds</b>	151
<b>Dump stations</b>	30
<b>Propane refills</b>	36
<b>Potable water fill-ups</b>	38
<b>Laundromats</b>	9
<b>RV showers</b>	18
<b>Verified-bad spots (overnight prohibited)</b>	9

Source: iOverlander community database (71% of Illinois spots verified in the last 24 months).

## Driving rules

<b>Interstate (cars)</b>	70 mph (rural), 55-65 mph (urban)
<b>Interstate (trucks)</b>	70 mph (rural, increased from 65 in 2014); towing follows same
<b>US/State highway</b>	55-65 mph (posted)
<b>Illinois Tollway (I-90, I-88, I-294, I-355)</b>	70 mph; I-PASS / E-ZPass strongly recommended (double cash rate for non-pass)
<b>Built-up areas</b>	25-35 mph (posted)
<b>Drive on</b>	Right
<b>Seatbelts</b>	Required for all occupants in all seats

**Cell phone use while driving**

Hands-free only (banned hand-held statewide); texting prohibited

## Highways

### RV-friendly corridors

Highway	Note
I-55	St Louis to Chicago. Easy big-rig route, dense truck stops, the standard southwest-to-northeast transit through central Illinois.
I-57	Cairo to Chicago via Champaign. Easy.
I-70	Indiana line to St Louis via Effingham. Easy big-rig route.
I-72	Hannibal MO to Champaign IL via Springfield. Easy.
I-74	Indiana line through Champaign to Iowa line at Davenport. Easy.
I-80	Indiana line through Joliet to Iowa line. Heavy truck traffic across northern Illinois; the chokepoint at Joliet (where I-80 meets I-55, I-39, I-355) is congested 24/7.
I-90 / I-94 (Kennedy/Edens/Bishop Ford)	Chicago metro spine. Through-traffic only off-peak; do not take an RV into the Loop. Use I-294 or I-355 to bypass.
I-294 / I-355 (tollway bypasses)	The standard way to get around Chicago in an RV. Toll, smooth, much faster than the city expressways.
US-20	Galena (NW corner) across northern Illinois. Easy, scenic in the driftless area near Galena.
US-67	St Louis area to the Quad Cities via Macomb. Quiet alternative to I-72.

### RV-restricted segments

Segment	Restriction
Lake Shore Drive / DuSable Lake Shore Drive (Chicago)	Buses, trucks, and most RVs (over a certain weight class) prohibited along the lakefront drive. Use I-94 or surface streets if you have to be in central Chicago at all -- which you shouldn't, in an RV.
Most of downtown Chicago and the close-in suburbs (Oak Park, Evanston, Cicero, Berwyn)	Overnight RV parking essentially banned by ordinance. Park your rig at storage facilities on the outer ring (Crystal Lake, Aurora, Joliet, Romeoville) and take Metra commuter rail in.
Lower Wacker Drive (Chicago)	Low-clearance, narrow, used by trucks but not for the unfamiliar; RVs strongly discouraged.
Garden of the Gods Recreation Area (Shawnee NF, southern IL)	Access roads tight; some interior loops length-restricted. Standard rigs to 30 ft fine; rigs over 35 ft check current postings.

Some rural county roads in deep southern Illinois (Pope, Hardin, Massac counties)

Narrow, no shoulder, sharp blind curves through the hill country. Stick to state highways.

## National parks + monuments

National Park / Monument	Entry fee	Reservation note
Lincoln Home NHS (Springfield)	Free entry (timed tickets in season)	Day-use only. Stay at Springfield KOA, Knights Action Park / Caribbean Water Adventure, or further afield at Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site (20 min north).
Pullman National Historical Park (Chicago)	Free entry	Urban; day-use only. The first NP unit inside Chicago, established 2015. Park at Pullman Visitor Center; do not attempt RV access to surrounding streets.
Illinois & Michigan Canal NHC	Free entry (heritage corridor, not a unit)	Multi-county heritage corridor; day-use only. State and county parks along the canal provide RV camping (Channahon SP, McKinley Woods, Gebhard Woods SP).

## State parks

Illinois State Parks operates 100+ parks and state recreation areas, the majority RV-accessible. Standout RV parks: Illinois Beach SP (Lake Michigan shore north of Chicago, full hookups, the only state park on the Illinois Lake Michigan shore), Starved Rock SP (the headline park, sandstone canyons along the Illinois River near La Salle, full hookups in adjacent state-managed campground but books out fast), Matthiessen SP (next to Starved Rock, quieter), Giant City SP (in Shawnee NF country south of Carbondale, full hookups), Ferne Clyffe SP (also Shawnee country, scenic limestone), Pere Marquette SP (where the Illinois meets the Mississippi north of St Louis), Eldon Hazlet SP (Carlyle Lake), Rend Lake (Corps of Engineers + state, southern IL), Stephen A. Forbes SP, Cave-in-Rock SP. Reservations open 6 months ahead at [camp.exploremoreil.com](http://camp.exploremoreil.com). Day-use free at most parks. Camping \$20-35.

## Boondocking + dispersed camping

**BLM:** Illinois has effectively no BLM land. Federal-land dispersed camping is via Shawnee NF -- see NF summary. Practical workarounds: Walmart and Cracker Barrel overnight (Illinois south of I-80 is generally permissive; inside the Chicago metro most refuse), Harvest Hosts at IL wineries and farms (Shawnee Hills wine trail is dense), Boondockers Welcome statewide, Illinois Department of Natural Resources fishing-area parking lots (some allow self-contained overnight; check current signage), casino lots on the Mississippi River (Rivers Casino Des Plaines, Argosy Alton, Casino Queen).

**National Forest:** Shawnee NF is the only NF in Illinois -- about 280,000 acres across the deep southern tip of the state, between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Free dispersed camping along forest roads with a 14-day stay limit; most dispersed sites accept rigs to 25-30 ft (forest roads are narrow). Developed campgrounds: Garden of the Gods (rigs to 30 ft, first-come, near the rock formations), Pine Hills (rigs to 35 ft, reservable), Pounds Hollow (rigs to 35 ft, reservable), Camp Cadiz (rigs to 30 ft, reservable seasonally), Bell Smith Springs and Lake Glendale (Glendale Lake) recreation areas have campgrounds. The

Mississippi Palisades Cypress Swamp and LaRue-Pine Hills ecological area are dispersed-camping zones with restrictions in spring/fall during snake migration -- yes, really, the road is closed twice a year for the snake migration through the LaRue swamp.

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

## Tribal lands

Illinois has no federally-recognised tribes with reservation land within the state. Pre-removal native nations -- Illini, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Miami, Sauk, Mesquakie, Kickapoo, Pokagon Potawatomi -- were forcibly relocated west of the Mississippi in the 19th century; their descendant nations are recognised today in Oklahoma (Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma), Kansas, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site (East St Louis, across from the Gateway Arch in MO) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the largest pre-Columbian earthworks complex north of Mexico -- day-use only, no camping on-site.

## Propane, dump stations, fuel

**Propane:** Plentiful along all interstates and US highways. Tractor Supply in every county seat, U-Haul in every metro. Most KOA, Sun, and Good Sam parks fill on-site. The deep south (Pope, Hardin, Massac counties) thins out -- top up in Harrisburg, Marion or Carbondale before heading into Shawnee NF. Chicagoland is dense for refills but parking the rig at the filler can be the harder problem.

**Dump stations:** Dense south of I-80, thinner in the Chicago metro (commercial parks dominate). Most Illinois State Parks with RV camping have free dump stations for registered guests. Flying J / Pilot / Love's / TA truck stops along the interstates and tollways charge \$10-15 for non-guest dumps. Several Shawnee NF developed campgrounds have free dumps for guests.

**Fuel:** Diesel and gas widely available statewide. No significant fuel gaps. Illinois fuel taxes are among the highest in the Midwest -- diesel and gas are typically 30-50 cents/gallon more than Indiana or Missouri. The trick is to fuel just before the Illinois state line if you're crossing from a neighbour. Chicagoland fuel is more expensive than rural southern Illinois by 30-50 cents/gallon -- top up south of Joliet if heading north. Fuel prices typically lowest in deep southern Illinois (Marion, Mt Vernon), highest in Chicago metro.

## Weather windows

**Best months:** Late May through mid-June, and mid-September through mid-October. Daytime highs 65-80 F, fall colour peaks mid-Oct in southern Illinois (Shawnee NF) and late Oct along Lake Michigan.

**Avoid:** December-February statewide are cold and snowy; lake-effect snow off Lake Michigan blasts the northeast corner with 12-24 inches at a time. July-August can hit 90+ F with humidity statewide; bugs in the southern bottomland forests. Spring (March-April) is mud season in Shawnee NF -- many forest roads are too soft to drive on. The deep southern tip can flood badly from Mississippi/Ohio backwater March-April.

**Climate caution**

Chicagoland congestion is the single most important Illinois RV-planning fact. The Dan Ryan / Kennedy / Edens / Eisenhower expressways are at standstill 6-9am and 3-7pm on weekdays; weekend traffic to and from the lakefront is similarly bad May-Sep. ALWAYS use I-294 or I-355 (toll) to bypass the city if you can't avoid Chicagoland entirely. If you have a Chicago overnight target, park your rig at a storage facility on the outer ring (Crystal Lake, Aurora, Joliet) and take Metra commuter rail or rent a car -- do not try to overnight an RV inside the Beltway.

**Emergency + road conditions**

<b>State patrol</b>	Dial 9-1-1 for emergencies; *999 from a cell phone for Illinois State Police non-emergency
<b>Road conditions</b>	<a href="https://www.gettingaroundillinois.com">https://www.gettingaroundillinois.com</a>

**How RV TripGen helps**

**Chicagoland bypass routing**

RV Tripgen automatically routes through I-294 / I-355 tollways for any Illinois leg that would otherwise cross the Dan Ryan, Kennedy, Edens, or Eisenhower expressways. The toll cost is worth it -- the avoided hours are real.

**Shawnee NF snake-migration closures**

RV Tripgen flags the spring (March-May) and fall (September-October) seasonal closure of Snake Road (FR 345) through the LaRue-Pine Hills ecological area for the cottonmouth and copperhead migrations -- yes, really -- so you don't plan a Shawnee through-drive around a closed road.