

RV TRIPGEN

The Complete Guide to
RV Travel in

Iowa

Speed limits, towing rules, Loess Hills routing, Effigy Mounds,
and everything else you need to know before you cross the state line.

2026 Edition | Last verified: 25 April 2026

rvtripgen.com

RV travel in Iowa

Iowa is the quiet midwestern RV state that flies under everyone's radar. The Loess Hills along the Missouri River in the western tier are one of only two such formations in the world (the other is in China) -- wind-deposited soil hills hundreds of feet thick, with hiking and biking corridors threaded through. Effigy Mounds National Monument on the Mississippi protects pre-contact mound-builder earthworks. The state-park system is well-funded, well-maintained, and rarely full outside high summer weekends. The roads are well-graded, fuel is reliable, and you're never more than 60 miles from a propane refill. The catch is timing: the Iowa State Fair (mid-August) and RAGBRAI (the cross-state bike ride, late July) book out central Iowa RV parks weeks in advance. Outside those windows, Iowa is one of the lowest-friction states in the Midwest.

Iowa by the numbers

Boondocking + dispersed sites	182
Established campgrounds	191
Dump stations	29
Propane refills	9
Potable water fill-ups	37
Laundromats	10
RV showers	14
Verified-bad spots (overnight prohibited)	4

Source: iOverlander community database (70% of Iowa spots verified in the last 24 months).

Driving rules

Interstate (cars)	70 mph
Interstate (trucks + towing)	70 mph
US/State highway (cars)	55-65 mph (posted)
US/State highway (towing)	55-65 mph (posted)
Built-up areas	25-35 mph (posted)
Drive on	Right
RV passenger seatbelts	Required for all front-seat occupants (primary enforcement)
Cell phone use while driving	Hands-free only (texting banned for all drivers)

Highways

RV-friendly corridors

Highway	Note
I-80	East-west spine: Davenport to Council Bluffs via Iowa City and Des Moines. Major freight corridor, big-rig easy.
I-35	North-south via Des Moines from the Missouri line to Minnesota. Joins I-80 at Des Moines.
I-29	North-south along the Missouri River via Council Bluffs and Sioux City.
I-380	Cedar Rapids to Iowa City connector. Short, fast, RV-friendly.
US-30 (Lincoln Highway)	East-west parallel to I-80 through small towns. RV-friendly alternative, slower, scenic.
US-20	East-west across the northern tier via Fort Dodge and Waterloo. Four-lane most of the way; RV-friendly.
IA-9 / Great River Road (US-52, IA-76)	Mississippi River scenic byway in the NE corner. Two-lane, RV-friendly to 40 ft, gorgeous in fall.

RV-restricted segments

Segment	Restriction
Loess Hills Scenic Byway (county routes)	Most of the byway is two-lane and RV-friendly, but some of the side spurs into the hills proper have tight switchbacks. Class A and 40+ ft fifth-wheels should stick to the main IA-12 route.
County-numbered gravel roads	Iowa has more gravel road than paved. Stay on numbered state and US highways with any RV unless you've checked the surface.
Pikes Peak State Park internal roads	Tight; class C and small trailers only. Larger rigs use the overflow lot.

National parks + monuments

National Park / Monument	Entry fee	Reservation note
Effigy Mounds National Monument	Free entry	No camping inside the monument. Pikes Peak State Park 8 miles south takes RVs to 40 ft with electric. Yellow River SF nearby also has primitive camping.
Herbert Hoover NHS	Free entry	No camping inside the historic site. Day-trip from Iowa City. Lake Macbride State Park has full-hookup RV sites.

Lewis and Clark NHT (sites along the Missouri)

Free entry

Several waysides along I-29 and along the Missouri. Lewis and Clark State Park (Onawa) has full-hookup RV sites.

State parks

Iowa State Parks operate 70+ parks and recreation areas. Standouts for RV camping: Backbone, Pikes Peak, Lake Macbride, Lake of Three Fires, Ledges, Maquoketa Caves, Wapsipinicon. Reservable via iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com up to 13 months in advance. No park entrance fee. Camping \$11-25/night depending on hookups.

Boondocking + dispersed camping

BLM: Iowa has essentially no BLM-administered land. The closest free-camping options are USACE (Army Corps) reservoirs -- Coralville Lake, Saylorville Lake, Red Rock -- which permit primitive shoreline camping at some recreation areas. Wildlife management areas administered by Iowa DNR allow primitive camping at some sites with permits (Yellow River SF, Stephens SF).

National Forest: Iowa has no national forest. Yellow River State Forest (NE Iowa, 8,500 acres) is the closest equivalent and permits primitive camping with a free permit at designated backpack sites only -- not RV-friendly. For dispersed-style camping, Iowa is essentially a state-park-and-private-park state.

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

Tribal lands

Iowa contains one federally-recognized tribal nation: the Sac and Fox of the Mississippi (Meskwaki Settlement) near Tama. Tribal land is sovereign; state laws do not apply on settlement. Meskwaki operates a casino with RV parking. Respect signed restrictions; the settlement is a working community, not a tourist site.

Propane, dump stations, fuel

Propane: Plentiful statewide. Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, and most county-seat towns have multiple refill points. U-Haul, Tractor Supply, and Cenex farm co-ops all reliable. Most KOA and Good Sam parks fill on-site.

Dump stations: Adequate density along I-80 and I-35. Most Iowa state parks have free dump stations for registered guests. Flying J / Pilot at Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Council Bluffs, and Iowa City have fee dump stations. USACE reservoir recreation areas typically have free dump stations.

Fuel: Diesel and gas plentiful along all interstates and US highways. Iowa rarely has fuel gaps over 30 miles. Fuel typically cheapest along I-80 at Iowa City and Newton, highest in the NE Mississippi corridor and at lake resort areas. E85 widely available -- check your engine's compatibility before assuming.

Weather windows

Best months: Late May through September. Daytime 75-85 F, nights 55-65 F. Spring greenup is gorgeous; fall colors peak mid-October in the NE corner.

Avoid: Late April through May brings active severe-weather season including tornado risk and hail. December-February has ground blizzards across the open prairie; I-80 closes 2-4 times per winter. July-August can hit 90+ F with high humidity statewide.

Climate caution

Mosquitos are not the Minnesota plague, but Iowa's wet summers (especially in the Iowa River and Mississippi corridors) produce serious mosquito loads from late June through August. Bring DEET, citronella, and a screen room if you camp anywhere near water.

Emergency + road conditions

State patrol	Dial *55 from a cell phone or 911 for emergencies
Road conditions	https://511ia.org

How RV TripGen helps

Loess Hills slow-travel routing

RV Tripgen builds Loess Hills scenic-byway loops via IA-12 and the county connectors, with overnight stops at Wilson Island and Lake Manawa state parks for full hookups.

RAGBRAI and State Fair week warnings

RV Tripgen flags central Iowa overnights during RAGBRAI week (late July) and Iowa State Fair (mid-August), and surfaces overflow campgrounds 50-80 miles out as fallbacks.