

BLUE RIDGE

RV TRIPGEN

The Complete Guide to
RV Travel in

North Carolina

Speed limits, towing rules, NPS reservations, Blue Ridge tunnels,
and everything else you need to know before you cross the state line.

2026 Edition | Last verified: 25 April 2026

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ARKWAY

RV travel in North Carolina

North Carolina spans the Atlantic barrier islands, the Piedmont, and the southern Appalachians in a single state -- arguably the most varied RV state east of the Mississippi. The Outer Banks at Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout, Wright Brothers NMem at Kitty Hawk, the Great Smoky Mountains NP (the most-visited national park in the country, shared with Tennessee), the Blue Ridge Parkway, Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, and the Cherokee homeland in the western mountains together make a three-week loop trivial to plan. State parks are good, fuel is cheap, and the I-40 / I-95 / I-85 grid handles big rigs comfortably. The catches are specific: the Blue Ridge Parkway has 26 tunnels with strict height limits (the lowest is 10 ft 6 in at Pine Mountain Tunnel), the Smokies campground reservations are brutal and book six months out, the Outer Banks are hurricane country Jun-Nov with mandatory evacuation routes a real planning constraint, and the Appalachian back roads (NC-28, NC-281) have switchbacks and weight-limited bridges that ruin a big-rig day.

North Carolina by the numbers

Boondocking + dispersed sites	499
Established campgrounds	196
Dump stations	26
Propane refills	47
Potable water fill-ups	79
Laundromats	22
RV showers	31
Verified-bad spots (overnight prohibited)	44

Source: iOverlander community database (63% of North Carolina 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 mph
Blue Ridge Parkway	45 mph max (federal, no commercial vehicles)
Built-up areas	25-35 mph (posted)

Drive on	Right
RV passenger seatbelts	Required for all front-seat occupants
Cell phone use while driving	Texting banned statewide; hand-held banned for drivers under 18

Highways

RV-friendly corridors

Highway	Note
I-40	Wilmington west through Raleigh, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Asheville to Tennessee. Crosses the Pigeon River Gorge west of Asheville -- 6% grades but standard interstate, no restrictions. Big rigs, easy.
I-95	Atlantic-corridor spine through Fayetteville and Rocky Mount. Hurricane-evac route Jun-Nov. Easy.
I-85	Charlotte northeast to Raleigh and on to Virginia. Easy.
I-77	Charlotte north to Virginia. Climbs into the mountains around Fancy Gap; some 6% grades but standard.
I-26	Asheville south to South Carolina. Recent expansion; easy.
US-64	Cross-state from the coast (Manteo) inland through Raleigh and on to Murphy in the deep west. Largely four-lane east of the mountains.
US-17	Coastal corridor through Wilmington and New Bern. Four-lane in stretches.
US-74	Wilmington west through Charlotte to Asheville. Most stretches are interstate-grade.

RV-restricted segments

Segment	Restriction
Blue Ridge Parkway tunnels (NC section, 26 tunnels)	Lowest clearances at posted heights as low as 10 ft 6 in (Pine Mountain Tunnel) on the western half; most are 12-13 ft. Big motorhomes and toy haulers should consult the NPS tunnel-clearance chart before driving the parkway. The parkway is also closed to commercial traffic and has a 45 mph speed limit.
NC-28 from Deals Gap to Robbinsville ("Tail of the Dragon" / Cherohala Skyway approach)	The Dragon proper (US-129 north of Deals Gap, technically TN) is 318 curves in 11 miles -- physically possible in a small motorhome but a genuinely terrible idea. NC-28 itself is twisty and unkind to anything over 30 ft.
Cherohala Skyway (NC-143)	Robbinsville to Tellico Plains TN over the Unicoi Mountains. Sustained 5-7% grades and tight curves. Manageable for a 30-ft motorhome with low gears; not for 40-ft or trailers over 30 ft.

Mount Mitchell summit road (NC-128)	Highest point in the Eastern US (6,684 ft). Two-lane spur off the Blue Ridge Parkway. Manageable for 30-ft motorhomes; trailers should park at the lower lot.
Newfound Gap Road (US-441 through Great Smokies)	RVs over 30 ft "strongly discouraged" by the NPS through Newfound Gap; trailers over 25 ft physically struggle. Use I-40 around the park instead.
Outer Banks NC-12 during hurricane warnings	Hatteras Island and Ocracoke are reached only via NC-12 (and ferry from Hatteras to Ocracoke). Mandatory evacuations are common Jun-Nov; once issued, leave immediately -- ferries and roads fill within hours.

Mountain passes

Pass	Elevation	Note
Newfound Gap (US-441)	5046 ft	Crossing the Smokies into TN. Sustained 6-7% grades both sides. RVs over 30 ft strongly discouraged; use I-40 instead.
Soco Gap (US-19)	4341 ft	Maggie Valley to Cherokee. Standard mountain highway. Manageable for any rig.
Beech Mountain summit area (NC-184)	5506 ft	Highest incorporated town east of the Mississippi. Steep two-lane climbs. Fine for 30-ft motorhomes; tight for trailers.
Mount Mitchell summit road (NC-128)	6684 ft	Highest point east of the Rockies. Closes for ice; trailers should park at the visitor center.
Roan Mountain (TN-NC line, NC-261 / TN-143)	5520 ft	Rhododendron Gardens access. Manageable for 30-ft motorhomes.
Wagon Road Gap (Blue Ridge Pkwy MP 412)	4535 ft	Standard parkway grade; subject to tunnel clearances south of Asheville.

National parks + monuments

National Park / Monument	Entry fee	Reservation note
Great Smoky Mountains NP (NC side)	Free entry; parking tag required (\$5/day, \$15/week, \$40/year)	Smokemont CG (NC side) takes RVs to 40 ft, reservable Mar-Nov via recreation.gov, no hookups. Books 6 months out for peak fall colour (mid-Oct). Cataloochee CG is small/dry. Cosby and Big Creek are TN-side.
Blue Ridge Parkway	Free	Multiple NPS campgrounds along the NC portion: Linville Falls (MP 316), Crabtree Falls (MP 339), Mount Pisgah (MP 408), Doughton Park (MP 239), Julian Price (MP 297), Linville (MP 316). Reservable Mar-Oct via recreation.gov, no hookups, 14-day limit. Most take RVs to 30 ft; check individual CG size limits.

Cape Hatteras NS	Free entry	Four NPS campgrounds: Oregon Inlet, Cape Point, Frisco, Ocracoke. Cape Point and Ocracoke have RV sites to 40 ft; reservable Mar-Nov via recreation.gov. All dry, no hookups. Subject to hurricane closure Jun-Nov.
Cape Lookout NS	Free entry	Island-only, accessible by ferry. No vehicles. Primitive backcountry camping with permit.
Wright Brothers NMem	\$10/person (7 days)	Day-use only. Multiple commercial RV parks in Kill Devil Hills and Nags Head.
Fort Raleigh NHS	Free entry	Day-use only. Manteo commercial RV parks within 2 miles.
Carl Sandburg Home NHS (Flat Rock)	\$5/person (7 days)	Day-use only. Lake Powhatan CG (Pisgah NF) 20 miles north has hookups.
Guilford Courthouse NMP (Greensboro)	Free entry	Day-use only. Hagan-Stone Park (county) 10 miles south has RV sites.
Moore's Creek NB (Wilmington area)	Free entry	Day-use only. Multiple commercial parks in Wilmington.

State parks

North Carolina State Parks operate 41 parks; most have RV camping. Notable with hookups: Carolina Beach (Wilmington area), Goose Creek (coastal), Lake Norman (Charlotte area), Falls Lake (Raleigh), Jordan Lake, Stone Mountain, Hanging Rock, South Mountains, Lake James, Mount Mitchell (tents/small RVs only at the highest state-park CG in the East). Reservable up to 13 months ahead via ncparks.gov. Day-use generally free. Camping \$20-35/night for full hookups.

Boondocking + dispersed camping

BLM: No significant BLM land in North Carolina. Public-land dispersed camping is restricted to national forests and a handful of state-managed game lands requiring a state hunting license or game-land pass.

National Forest: Pisgah NF (western NC, ~510,000 acres) and Nantahala NF (far-western NC, ~530,000 acres) together cover over a million acres and permit free dispersed camping along forest roads with a 14-day stay limit. Popular: FR 475 (Davidson River corridor), FR 1206 along the Pisgah ridge, the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness perimeter (hiker-only inside), Tsali (a recreation area requiring a small fee for the developed CG). Croatan NF (coastal, ~160,000 acres) and Uwharrie NF (central, ~50,000 acres) also permit dispersed. Bridge weight limits on forest roads are real -- many max out at 5-10 tons.

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

Tribal lands

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (federally recognised) is centred on the Qualla Boundary at Cherokee, NC, adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains NP. The Qualla Boundary is sovereign and welcomes visitors; Harrah's Cherokee Casino has RV-friendly parking (check current overnight policy). The Museum of the Cherokee Indian and Oconaluftee Indian Village are major cultural sites. Respect

signage and stay on developed roads -- off-road exploration is not permitted on tribal land.

Propane, dump stations, fuel

Propane: Plentiful in Charlotte, Raleigh, Asheville, Wilmington, Greensboro, and along all interstates. Tractor Supply, U-Haul, and most KOA / Good Sam parks fill on-site. Sparse in the deep western counties (Graham, Cherokee, Clay) -- fill at Asheville, Sylva, or Murphy before heading into the Nantahala backcountry.

Dump stations: Dense along I-40, I-85, and I-95. Most NC State Parks have free dumps for registered guests. Flying J / Pilot truck stops have fee dumps. Pisgah and Nantahala NF developed campgrounds have dumps but seasonal (closed Nov-Mar at higher elevation). Outer Banks well-served by commercial parks; ferry-only Ocracoke has limited but functional facilities.

Fuel: Diesel and gas widely available along all interstates. Rural Appalachian stretches on US-19/74 between Murphy and Bryson City, and on the Blue Ridge Parkway (which has no commercial services -- you must exit at intersecting US highways), can run 25-30 miles between stations. Outer Banks has fuel at Manteo, Avon, Hatteras, and Ocracoke but prices run 20-40 cents/gal higher than mainland. Fuel prices typically among the lowest in the country in the Piedmont.

Weather windows

Best months: Late April through June and mid-September through early November. Daytime highs 65-80 F. Mountain fall colour peaks mid-October above 4,000 ft. Outer Banks shoulder seasons (May, Oct) have the best weather without the crowds.

Avoid: July and August inland: 88-95 F with 80%+ humidity. June through November is hurricane season on the Atlantic coast; the Outer Banks are particularly exposed. Mountain elevations get violent thunderstorms in summer and ice storms in winter. Tornadoes possible Mar-May statewide. Winter (Dec-Feb) brings sustained cold at higher Blue Ridge elevations; Mount Mitchell road closes for ice routinely.

Climate caution

The Outer Banks (Hatteras, Ocracoke) sit on a fragile barrier island reached only by NC-12 and a single ferry. If a hurricane warning is issued, mandatory evacuation triggers within hours -- leave before it does. Once issued, the ferry queues are multi-hour and NC-12 floods at the first storm-surge inch.

Emergency + road conditions

State patrol	Dial *HP (*47) from a cell phone, or 919-733-7952 for NC State Highway Patrol main line
Road conditions	https://drivenc.gov

How RV TripGen helps

Blue Ridge Parkway tunnel-clearance routing

RV TripGen knows the height of every Blue Ridge Parkway tunnel (the lowest at 10 ft 6 in) and routes high-profile motorhomes and toy haulers around the restricted sections rather than discovering the clearance the hard way.

Outer Banks evacuation awareness

RV TripGen monitors NWS hurricane forecasts for the NC coast and flags Outer Banks overnight stops (Hatteras, Ocracoke, Frisco) 72 hours ahead of any cone-of-uncertainty hit, with reroutes inland of US-17.