

**RV TRIPGEN**

The Complete Guide to  
RV Travel in

# Tennessee

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

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# RV travel in Tennessee

Tennessee may be the single best RV state in the Southeast. Great Smoky Mountains NP (the most-visited national park in the country, shared with North Carolina), Nashville and Memphis as music-tourism anchors, Chattanooga and Lookout Mountain on the Georgia line, the Cherokee NF along the eastern spine, the Natchez Trace Parkway running from Nashville to the Mississippi line, and a Tennessee State Parks system that ranks among the country's best for RV camping. Civil War sites (Shiloh, Stones River, Chickamauga across the GA line) are dense. Roads are well-maintained, fuel is cheap, and the I-40 / I-75 / I-65 grid handles big rigs. The catches: the Smokies campground reservations book six months out, Newfound Gap Road (US-441 through the park) is genuinely tough for any RV over 30 ft, the eastern Appalachian back roads have switchbacks and low bridges, Tennessee sits in Dixie Alley with violent overnight tornadoes Mar-May, and Nashville traffic is now bad enough to plan around.

## Tennessee by the numbers

<b>Boondocking + dispersed sites</b>	351
<b>Established campgrounds</b>	192
<b>Dump stations</b>	19
<b>Propane refills</b>	27
<b>Potable water fill-ups</b>	64
<b>Laundromats</b>	20
<b>RV showers</b>	15
<b>Verified-bad spots (overnight prohibited)</b>	25

Source: iOverlander community database (66% of Tennessee spots verified in the last 24 months).

## Driving rules

<b>Interstate (cars)</b>	70 mph
<b>Interstate (trucks + towing)</b>	70 mph
<b>US/State highway (cars)</b>	55-65 mph (posted)
<b>US/State highway (towing)</b>	55 mph
<b>Natchez Trace Parkway</b>	50 mph (federal, no commercial vehicles)
<b>Built-up areas</b>	25-35 mph (posted)
<b>Drive on</b>	Right

<b>RV passenger seatbelts</b>	Required for all front-seat occupants
<b>Cell phone use while driving</b>	Hand-held banned statewide; hands-free only

## Highways

### RV-friendly corridors

Highway	Note
I-40	Memphis east through Nashville and Knoxville to North Carolina. Crosses the Cumberland Plateau (steady grades but no sustained passes). The Pigeon River Gorge east of Knoxville is the dramatic stretch; standard interstate, no restrictions for RVs. Big rigs, easy.
I-65	Alabama line north through Nashville to Kentucky. Easy.
I-75	Chattanooga north through Knoxville to Kentucky. Easy.
I-24	Chattanooga west through Nashville to Kentucky. Crosses Monteagle Mountain (Sequatchie Valley) with sustained 6% grade -- runaway-truck-ramp territory; use engine braking and stay in the right lane.
I-26	Johnson City southeast to North Carolina. Recent expansion; easy.
I-81	Knoxville northeast through the Tri-Cities to Virginia. Easy.
US-441 (north of the park)	Sevierville and Pigeon Forge to Gatlinburg. Four-lane through tourist sprawl; bumper-to-bumper in summer but no clearance issues. South of Gatlinburg into the park, see restrictions below.
Natchez Trace Parkway (TN portion)	Nashville south to the Alabama line. 50 mph, no commercial traffic, no services. RV-friendly two-lane. Meriwether Lewis NPS campground (MP 385.9) is the major in-state Trace overnight.

### RV-restricted segments

Segment	Restriction
Newfound Gap Road (US-441 through Great Smokies)	Crosses the park from Gatlinburg TN to Cherokee NC. RVs over 30 ft "strongly discouraged" by the NPS; trailers over 25 ft physically struggle with the tight switchbacks and 6-7% sustained grades. Use I-40 around the park (north side) instead.
Cades Cove Loop Road (one-way 11-mile loop in the park)	Vehicles over 25 ft technically permitted but the road is narrow with no turnouts; once you start the loop you cannot turn around. Bear and tourist congestion can stop traffic for an hour. Best done in a dinghy.
US-129 / The Dragon (Deals Gap to TN-72)	318 curves in 11 miles. World-famous motorcycle road. RVs are physically permitted but a genuinely bad idea -- avoid in anything over 25 ft.
Cherohala Skyway (TN-165)	Tellico Plains TN east to Robbinsville NC. Sustained 5-7% grades and tight curves. Manageable for a 30-ft motorhome with low gears; not for 40+.

Monteagle Mountain (I-24 between Chattanooga and Nashville)	Sustained 6% grade with runaway-truck ramps. Standard interstate but use engine braking and the right lane in any rig over 10,000 lb GVWR.
Nashville downtown streets (Broadway, Music Row)	Narrow, low overhanging signage, no big-rig parking. Use Two Rivers Campground, Nashville KOA, or Seven Points (USACE Percy Priest Lake) and Uber in.
Memphis Beale Street area	Same story -- park at T.O. Fuller State Park or Memphis-Graceland RV Park and Uber in.

## Mountain passes

Pass	Elevation	Note
Newfound Gap (US-441)	5046 ft	Crossing the Smokies into NC. Sustained 6-7% grades both sides. RVs over 30 ft strongly discouraged. Closes routinely for snow Nov-Apr.
Clingmans Dome Road (off Newfound Gap)	6643 ft	Highest point in TN; closed to RVs (parking at the trailhead is small and the spur road is steep and narrow). Park at Newfound Gap and dinghy or hike.
Roan Mountain (TN-143 / NC-261)	5520 ft	Rhododendron Gardens. Manageable for 30-ft motorhomes.
Monteagle Mountain (I-24)	1942 ft	Sustained 6% grade. Runaway-truck ramps. Standard interstate but use low gear in any rig over 10,000 lb.
Cherochala Skyway (TN-165)	5390 ft	Tellico Plains east. Tight curves and 5-7% grades. Not for 40-ft rigs.

## National parks + monuments

National Park / Monument	Entry fee	Reservation note
Great Smoky Mountains NP (TN side)	Free entry; parking tag required (\$5/day, \$15/week, \$40/year)	Cades Cove CG takes RVs to 40 ft, reservable Mar-Nov via recreation.gov, no hookups. Elkmont CG takes RVs to 32 ft. Cosby and Big Creek are smaller. Books up 6 months out for peak fall colour (mid-Oct) and summer.
Big South Fork NRRRA (TN side)	Free entry	Bandy Creek CG (main in-park) takes RVs to 50 ft with electric/water hookups, reservable via recreation.gov.
Obed WSR	Free entry	Rock Creek CG takes RVs to 32 ft, dry, no hookups, reservable via recreation.gov.
Shiloh NMP	Free entry	Day-use only. Big Hill Pond State Park 30 miles south has full hookups.
Stones River NB (Murfreesboro)	Free entry	Day-use only. Cedars of Lebanon State Park 20 miles east has hookups.

Fort Donelson NB (Dover)	Free entry	Day-use only. Land Between the Lakes Hillman Ferry CG 15 miles west has full-hookup sites.
Andrew Johnson NHS (Greeneville)	Free entry	Day-use only. Davy Crockett Birthplace State Park 20 miles north has RV sites.
Manhattan Project NHP (Oak Ridge)	Free entry	Day-use only. Melton Hill Dam CG (USACE) and Yarberry Peninsula CG nearby take RVs.
Trail of Tears NHT	Free (auto tour route)	Self-guided driving routes; multiple state parks and commercial RV parks along the way.
Natchez Trace Parkway (TN portion)	Free	Meriwether Lewis NPS CG (MP 385.9) is free, first-come, dry, RVs to 30 ft, 14-day limit. No commercial services on the parkway itself.

## State parks

Tennessee State Parks operate 56 parks and are widely regarded as one of the best-run systems in the country with day-use free at every park. Full-hookup RV sites at Henry Horton, Fall Creek Falls (one of the largest state parks in the East), Pickwick Landing, Paris Landing, Reelfoot Lake, Cedars of Lebanon, Cumberland Mountain, Roan Mountain (high-elevation), Big Ridge, Cove Lake, Norris Dam, Standing Stone, T.O. Fuller (Memphis), David Crockett. Reservable up to 11 months ahead via [tnstateparks.com](http://tnstateparks.com). Camping \$20-45/night for full hookups. Fall Creek Falls books out 11 months ahead for fall colour weekends.

## Boondocking + dispersed camping

**BLM:** No significant BLM land in Tennessee. Public-land dispersed camping is restricted to the Cherokee NF, the Land Between the Lakes NRA (joint TN/KY), and a handful of state WMAs requiring a state license.

**National Forest:** Cherokee NF (eastern Tennessee, 650,000+ acres, split into north and south districts by the Great Smokies) permits free dispersed camping along forest roads with a 14-day stay limit. Popular: Tellico Ranger District (FR 210 along the Tellico River), the Watauga district north of Elizabethton, Citico Creek area, French Broad River corridor. Developed campgrounds (Indian Boundary, Cardens Bluff, Rock Creek) take rigs to 35-40 ft, some with electric hookups. Land Between the Lakes NRA (joint with KY) permits backcountry dispersed with a small permit; check [lbi.org](http://lbi.org) for current fees.

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

## Tribal lands

Tennessee has no federally-recognised tribal nations resident in-state today; the Cherokee were forcibly removed via the Trail of Tears in the 1830s. Major heritage sites include Red Clay State Historic Park (last Cherokee capital before removal) and several Trail of Tears NHT segments. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (just across the NC line at Cherokee) maintains cultural ties to East Tennessee.

## Propane, dump stations, fuel

**Propane:** Plentiful in Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, Chattanooga, and along all interstates. Tractor Supply, U-Haul, and most KOA / Good Sam parks fill on-site. Sparse in the deep Cherokee NF backcountry (Tellico Plains area, Cosby) -- fill at Athens, Maryville, or Newport before heading in.

**Dump stations:** Most Tennessee State Parks have free dumps for registered guests. Flying J / Pilot on I-40, I-65, and I-75 have fee dumps. Cherokee NF developed campgrounds have dumps but seasonal at higher elevation. Land Between the Lakes campgrounds have free dumps for guests. Natchez Trace has no commercial dumps along its length -- use Nashville and Tupelo MS at the ends, or exit at intersecting US highways.

**Fuel:** Diesel and gas widely available along all interstates. Rural Cherokee NF stretches and the Natchez Trace Parkway (no commercial services along its entire 444-mile length) require fuel planning. Top up at Nashville or Memphis before extended Trace runs; top up at Athens or Newport before deep Cherokee NF trips. Fuel prices typically among the lowest in the country; Memphis and the Tri-Cities reliably cheapest.

## Weather windows

**Best months:** Late April through June and mid-September through early November. Daytime highs 65-82 F. Fall colour in the Smokies peaks mid-Oct above 4,000 ft, mid- to late Oct lower down.

**Avoid:** July and August: 88-95 F inland with 80%+ humidity and near-daily afternoon thunderstorms. March through May is peak severe-weather season; Tennessee sits firmly in Dixie Alley with frequent violent overnight tornadoes -- the December 2021 Mayfield outbreak crossed western TN. Winter (Dec-Feb) brings ice storms that can shut Middle and East TN for days; the Smokies see real snow and the higher elevations close for ice.

### Climate caution

Newfound Gap Road (US-441 through the Smokies) closes for snow and ice typically a dozen times each winter and can close in summer for downed trees or rockslides. NPS posts current conditions at [nps.gov/grsm](https://www.nps.gov/grsm) -- check before you commit, especially Nov-Apr.

## Emergency + road conditions

<b>State patrol</b>	Dial *THP (*847) from a cell phone, or 615-251-5166 for Tennessee Highway Patrol main line
<b>Road conditions</b>	<a href="https://smartway.tn.gov">https://smartway.tn.gov</a>

## How RV TripGen helps

### Smokies reservation-window planning

RV TripGen warns you 6 months ahead when peak-Smokies overnight slots open on [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) for fall-colour and summer dates -- the [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) drop is the difference between camping in the park and a Pigeon Forge KOA an hour out.

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### **Nashville and Memphis park-and-Uber planning**

RV TripGen bases your music-city stays at vetted big-rig campgrounds outside the downtown core (Two Rivers, Seven Points, Memphis-Graceland) and times the Uber legs into Broadway and Beale Street.