Your First RV Camping Trip to the Champlain Islands: What to Know

Getting Started with RV Camping in the Champlain Islands

RV camping in the Champlain Islands offers a blend of lakeside scenery, outdoor recreation, and a relaxed pace that appeals to first-timers. Located in Lake Champlain between Vermont and New York, the islands are known for their quiet roads, farmland views, and easy access to the water. For someone new to RV travel, the area provides a manageable introduction: campgrounds are well-maintained, distances are short, and the local culture is welcoming to visitors.

The islands sit just north of Burlington, reached by a short drive across the causeway from the mainland. South Hero is one of the main islands, and it is here that many RV campers set up for a few nights or a full season. The landscape is mostly flat, dotted with apple orchards and old farmhouses, and the lake is never far away. A first-timer will find that the pace of life here encourages slowing down, which is part of the appeal of a peaceful Vermont RV getaway.

What to Expect at a South Hero Campground

Campgrounds in the Champlain Islands vary from basic tent sites to full-service RV parks. For a first-timer, the most important thing to understand is the level of hookups available at your chosen site. Full hookups include connections for electricity, water, and sewer. This makes your stay much simpler because you do not need to refill a fresh water tank or empty a holding tank as often. Many sites also offer 50 amp service, which is enough to run an air conditioner, a microwave, and other appliances without tripping a breaker.

When you arrive, you will check in at the office and be directed to your site. Most RV pads are gravel or paved, and some are pull-through, which makes backing up unnecessary. If you are new to RV driving, request a pull-through site when you book. It removes a lot of stress on your first day. The site will have a water spigot, an electrical pedestal, and a sewer connection. Take your time setting up: level the RV, connect the water hose (use a pressure regulator to protect your plumbing), plug in the power cord, and attach the sewer hose. If any step feels unclear, ask the campground staff. They are used to helping beginners.

View the location on Google Maps

Season dates matter. In the Champlain Islands, most RV parks operate from early May through mid-October. The weather in May can be cool, especially at night, while September and October offer crisp air and fall foliage. July and August are warm and busy. If you are booking for the

first time, consider a midweek arrival in late June or early September. The campground will be less crowded, and you will have more time to learn the ropes.

Choosing Your RV and Checking Site Accessibility

RV length is a key factor in choosing a campground. Most sites in the area can accommodate RVs up to 40 feet, but it is worth confirming before you book. A longer RV needs a longer pad and more space to maneuver. If you are renting an RV, ask the rental company about the length and whether the campground you have chosen can handle it. Some older or smaller parks may have trees or tight turns that make access difficult for large rigs.



Site accessibility also includes the height of the RV. Some parks have low-hanging branches, so check the height clearance at the entrance and along the roads. If you drive a tall fifth-wheel or a Class A with roof air conditioners, a low branch can cause expensive damage. A quick call to the campground office can answer those questions before you leave home.

Packing and Preparation for Your First Trip

Packing for an RV trip is different from packing for a car camping trip. You have more space, but you also need to manage weight and storage. Start with the basics: bedding, towels, toiletries, and a first aid kit. Kitchen supplies should include pots, pans, dishes, utensils, and a coffee maker. Many RVs come with a refrigerator and a stove, so plan your meals accordingly. Bring food for the first couple of days, then shop locally. The Champlain Islands have small grocery stores and farm stands where you can pick up fresh produce and dairy products.

Outdoor gear depends on the season. In summer, bring swimsuits, sunscreen, and insect repellent. In spring and fall, pack layers, rain gear, and warm jackets. A folding chair, a small table, and a campfire cooking kit are nice extras. Do not forget a basic tool kit, a leveling block set, and a surge protector for the electrical connection. These items are not expensive and can save you trouble. If you are renting an RV, ask what is already on board so you do not duplicate.

Things to Do and See in the Area

The Champlain Islands are a destination for boating, fishing, and cycling. Many campgrounds offer marina access, which means you can rent a boat or launch your own. The lake is clean and popular for kayaking and paddleboarding. If you prefer to stay on land, there are several short hiking trails with views of the lake and the Adirondack Mountains. The island roads are quiet and flat, making them ideal for bike rides.

History buffs can visit the local museums and lighthouses. The area also has a few golf courses, including a nine-hole course near South Hero. For a change of pace, drive to Burlington for a day. The city has a lively waterfront, restaurants, and shops. But many visitors find that the charm of the islands is in the stillness: watching the sunset over the lake, listening to the birds, and enjoying a campfire without city noise. That is what makes a peaceful Vermont RV getaway so memorable.

Understanding Campground Etiquette and Rules

Every campground has its own set of rules, but some are universal. Quiet hours usually run from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. During that time, keep voices low and avoid running generators. If you have a pet, keep it on a leash and clean up after it. Many parks require dogs to be under control at all times. Fire pits are common, but check if the campground allows wood fires or only propane fire rings. In dry conditions, burn bans may be in effect.



Speed limits inside the campground are low, usually 5 to 10 mph. Drive slowly to avoid kicking up dust or gravel and to watch for children and pets. When you leave your site, lock your RV and secure any outdoor items. Theft is rare, but it is wise to not leave valuables in plain sight. Finally, be considerate of your neighbors. If you arrive late, keep your setup quiet and use a flashlight instead of bright headlights.

Planning Your Travel Itinerary

A typical first trip to the Champlain Islands might last three to five nights. That gives you enough time to settle in, explore the area, and still have a relaxed day at the campground. Drive from Burlington to South Hero takes about 30 minutes. If you are coming from farther away,

plan to arrive in the early afternoon. That way you have daylight to set up and can find your way around before dark.

Consider stopping at a grocery store or a farm stand on the way in. The local general store may have limited hours, so it is better to arrive with what you need. Also, fill your propane tank before you leave home or at a station near the campground. Some parks offer propane refills, but not all do. A full tank gives you peace of mind for cooking and heating.

What You Need to Know About Reservations

Reservations are recommended, especially for weekends and holidays. Many campgrounds in the Champlain Islands book up months in advance for July and August. If you are flexible with dates, you may find last-minute cancellations, but do not count on it. When you book, the campground will ask for your RV length and the type of hookups you need. Be honest about your experience level. Some parks offer pull-through sites for beginners, but those are limited.

Check the cancellation policy before you pay. Some campgrounds offer a full refund up to a week before arrival, while others keep a deposit. If you are renting an RV, coordinate the rental dates with the campground reservation. You do not want to arrive before your site is ready or have to leave before your rental ends.

Final Practical Tips for a Smooth First Trip

Take it slow. The goal of your first RV trip is not to see everything but to learn how the RV works and what you enjoy. Make a checklist of tasks for each day: check the water level, dump the tanks if needed, and secure the RV before driving. Keep a notebook or a phone note of what you forgot or what you would do differently next time. Each trip gets easier.



Stay flexible. Weather in Vermont can change quickly. A rainy day is a good time to read, cook a big meal, or visit a local museum. A sunny day is for swimming or hiking. The RV is your home base, so even a storm feels manageable when you are dry and comfortable. And if something goes wrong, like a flat tire or a power issue, call the campground office or a roadside service. Do not try to fix something you are not trained for.

For those ready to try a peaceful Vermont RV getaway, the Champlain Islands offer a welcoming environment. The combination of natural beauty, friendly campgrounds, and simple logistics makes it an ideal starting point. Whether you stay at a full-service park or a quieter spot, the experience is about slowing down and enjoying the lake. If you have questions about a specific campground, call ahead. The staff can tell you about site sizes, amenities, and local attractions.

For more information about a South Hero campground that fits these needs, you can contact Apple Island Resort at 71 US-2, South Hero, VT 05486, USA, by phone at +1 802-372-3800.

Apple Island Resort is also on YouTube.