

From Nova Scotia to Montreal: Driving Solo (and on a Budget) in a ‘Relocation’ R.V. Rental

When rental companies need to move their vehicles, they frequently offer one-way trips at a steep discount. Our Frugal Traveler snapped up a deal that took her through eastern Canada.

By **Elaine Glusac**

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Quebec City was designed to be imposing. On a steep hill above the St. Lawrence Seaway, behind 17th-century ramparts, the city’s streets are narrow and cobbled — no place for a road-hogging, 21st-century recreational vehicle.

Or so I thought, as I planned an ambitious solo R.V. road trip across eastern Canada — from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Montreal — that would take me through one of the oldest European cities in North America.

Colonial streets weren’t my only mental roadblock when I set out in May to take advantage of a six-night “relocation” deal on an R.V. rental for 39 Canadian dollars a night (about \$28) from the Canadian company [CanaDream](#); its trips normally start at 136 dollars nightly.

When R.V. companies need to move their vehicles to satisfy seasonal demand, they frequently offer relocation or one-way trips at discounted prices. The R.V. rental company [Cruise America](#) calls them “one way specials,” which recently included 75 percent off a trip in July from Las Vegas to Orlando. One-way sales from [El Monte RV](#) recently listed departures from 30 to 90 percent off.

Based in Calgary, [CanaDream](#) shuffles its fleet among seven locations across Canada. With [relocation](#) itineraries, the company stipulates the vehicle and departure and arrival dates. Renters pay for gas, food and campsite access in addition to the discounted vehicle.

Travel by R.V. [took off during the pandemic](#) as North Americans discovered the convenience and privacy of taking a home on the road. As someone who makes a living traveling light, I considered that style of travel freighted, sluggish and spontaneity-sapping.

What I got over six nights and nearly 800 miles on my maiden R.V. journey was an adventure in driving, a test of self-sufficiency and an introduction to slow-lane travel.



The Calgary-based CanaDream rental company shuffles its R.V. fleet among seven locations across Canada, often relying on travelers to do the driving. Renters pay for gas and campsite access in addition to the discounted vehicle. CanaDream RV

Driver's ed

Before setting foot in Halifax, I had watched a video about my vehicle — the 22-foot-long [Deluxe Van Camper](#) — introducing the many indicators that monitor electricity, waste and water. My sense of responsibility only grew when I got the keys and set out on my journey.

While small for an R.V., the two-person Deluxe Van Camper was taller, longer and less nimble than camper vans I'd driven in the past, which you might expect from a vehicle that you can comfortably stand upright in (its interior height was 6 feet, 3 inches).

The apartment on wheels contained a bathroom with a hose extension on the faucet that doubled as a shower head; a galley kitchen with a microwave, stove and small refrigerator; and a sofa in the back that converted into a firm queen bed. Storage areas, cabinets and drawers contained removable window shades and amenities that seemed essential to me — namely bedding, towels and kitchenware, which cost 175 dollars. A roof hatch and ceiling fan kept air circulating overnight.



The interior of the two-person Deluxe Van Camper the author rented on her Canadian trip. Elaine Glusac

Setting out after stops for food and drinking water (the water on board is not potable), I was immediately met by what I came to consider the “R.V. Symphony,” a soundtrack of clattering dishes and tinkling utensils punctuated by the squeak of wood cabinets.

Aware of the extra space needed to brake in an R.V., I drove like an A student fresh out of driver’s training, distant from vehicles ahead, going under the speed limit and, when it was time to park, picking remote, traffic-free spots.

Though I would become more comfortable driving with each passing day, my pace was deliberate as I stuck by my instinct to never drive more than 90 minutes straight. Sightseeing breaks relieved the concentration required of driving.



At Hopewell Rocks Provincial Park in New Brunswick, Canada, there are more than 20 free-standing sea stacks — monoliths that had eroded from mainland cliffs. Tourism New Brunswick

Tidal adventures

Over the first two days, I skirted the Bay of Fundy, where the [highest tides in the world](#) vary up to 53 feet. A few hours from Halifax, I followed the signs to [Joggins Fossil Cliffs](#) (free), a UNESCO World Heritage Site where tides have exposed the fossil remains of a 300-million-year-old forest along cliffs roughly 100 feet high.

Crossing into New Brunswick, I continued along the north shore of the bay to a campsite at [Ponderosa Pines Campground](#) (70 dollars). It neighbors [Hopewell Rocks Provincial Park](#), one of the province's biggest attractions, with its tide-carved sea stacks.

My quiet lakeside campsite, like all the R.V. parks I visited, included power and water hookups, a fire ring and picnic table.

In the morning, awakened by honking Canada geese, I took a mile-long forest trail from the campground to Hopewell Rocks (admission 15.85 dollars).

High tide peaked just before the park opened at 9 a.m., surrounding the park's more than 20 free-standing sea stacks — monoliths that had eroded from the mainland cliffs — in water. As the tide rapidly receded, a park interpreter pointed out the resemblance of the rock profiles to humans.

“There are a lot of native legends of people turned to stone,” he said, echoing the Indigenous [Mi'kmaq legend](#) in which an angry whale transforms runaway slaves into rock.

From Hopewell Rocks, a rural half-hour drive passed barns and fields in route to shoreside Alma just outside of [Fundy National Park](#). Tiny [Alma](#) has a string of restaurants near its working marina. At [Alma Lobster Shop](#), I savored a briny lobster roll and seafood chowder combo (29 dollars) from a bayside picnic table near sun-bleached whale bones.

With about three hours to visit Fundy National Park (admission 9 dollars), I stopped at the ranger station for advice on a speed tour. The staff seemed accustomed to the question, sending me first to [Dickson Falls Trail](#) to hike a nearly mile-long loop through a lush, fern-filled gully split by the stone-carving cascade. Farther down the shore, I followed the pine-shaded [Shiphaven Trail](#) along an estuary where shipwrights once built schooners on a gravel bar.

Back in the R.V., I settled in for a two-hour drive — punctuated by a few bird-watching stops — to my next campsite in the provincial capital of [Fredericton](#). On the St. John River, [Hartt Island R.V. Resort](#) was quiet in spring, its water park still awaiting warmer weather (60 dollars). Several riverside sites away, my closest neighbors were a pair of backpacking cyclists from England.

I stoked a campfire with dried leaves and watched diving ospreys, soaring eagles and paddling loons as the temperatures dropped with the sunset.



Wabanaki Tree Spirit Tours leads forest walks with an Indigenous point of view through Odell Park, a 400-acre swath of old-growth forest near Fredericton, in New Brunswick. Neal White

Local encounters

A former British garrison, Fredericton is filled with intriguing 19th-century buildings that made me long for a ride that was a bit more agile on city streets. But I braved them the next morning to hit the city's renowned [Fredericton Boyce Farmers Market](#) at 7 a.m. when parking was available.

The weekly Saturday event draws more than 200 vendors of everything from local produce to food-truck samosas. The best provisioning of the trip turned up aged Cheddar from neighboring Prince Edward Island (10 dollars), a loaf of sourdough (8 dollars) and spinach pies (2 dollars each) from a Lebanese vendor.

Before leaving town, I arranged to meet Cecelia Brooks and Anthony Brooks, a mother-and-son team who guide forest walks with an Indigenous point of view through their company, [Wabanaki Tree Spirit Tours](#) (60 dollars). We met at [Odell Park](#), a 400-acre swath of old-growth forest just minutes from downtown and began by burning small amounts of sweetgrass in homage to the giant hemlocks, some of which are over 400 years old.

We meandered through the forest for more than two hours, stopping to discuss plants and fungi that were used by First Nations people as medicine or food and to sample the balsam fir tea and homemade acorn cookies that Ms. Brooks, who is Mohawk and Wolastoqiyik, toted along in a basket.

“The elders say the Creator gave us everything we need,” she said.



Quebec City offered plenty of historical and urban diversions on the author's mostly park-centered drive.
Mélanie Jean, Destination Québec Cité

Quebec, plugged and unplugged

In [Rivière-du-Loup](#), on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, a [seasonal Christmas castle](#) and its giant Santa sculpture came between my site at [Camping du Quai](#) (39 dollars) and the water.

In search of better views, I joined locals in camp chairs awaiting sunset at [Parc de la Pointe](#), a boulder-filled beach park a 30-minute walk down the shore.

The next morning, I topped off the water tank and made the drive in a little over two hours (with a short rest break) to Quebec City and [Bassin Louise RV Parking](#). I reached the public lot in Old Port near the city walls by skirting the traffic-knotted center of town.

Bassin Louise offers “[boondocking](#),” or R.V. camping, without services like electricity and water. As a woman sleeping in her vehicle in a city, I closed the window shades for the duration. So did the occupants of dozens of R.V.s and vans around me. The lot seemed quiet, but having met the French Canadian couple in a truck camper next door, I knew that — if needed — help was a honk away (overnight parking costs 75 dollars, according to the lot’s website, but the on-site kiosk only asked for 16 dollars).

Short of spending 10 times more for a hotel within the walls, I couldn’t imagine a better location, just five minutes on foot from the tourism office where I joined a two-hour walking tour I booked through [GetYourGuide](#) (\$26).

“I love my city,” said H el ene Lemieux, the guide who ushered our group of 12, most of them from the United States, among landmark buildings while relating the city’s [history](#) as of 1608 when the French explorer Samuel du Champlain arrived to set up a trading post.

The British took over after a pivotal battle in 1759 and Ms. Lemieux helped us distinguish French buildings — with small windows, rough stone facades and dormered roofs — from English ones, made with rectangular stones. She seemed to delight in leading us where other groups weren’t, including the rear of the 17th-century Quebec [Seminary](#).

She ended the tour in a deserted alley, saying, “If you see a little passage, go inside!”

City traffic

The final frontier was getting the R.V. safely to Montreal, a roughly three-hour trip — with a break worked in — through rush hour. It was the last, stomach-churning challenge.

I didn’t miss the R.V. Symphony as I rode toward the airport in an Uber. But I missed my mobile home in the way you miss a great campsite. Taking all the conveniences of home — including a bed, bathroom and kitchen — on the road seemed indulgent. And it was; gas, which came to about \$285, cost nearly as much as the vehicle, \$290.

In total, the relocation offer saved more than \$400 and the R.V. itself forced me to slow down, stop frequently and, possibly, see more.