

RV Trip: Texas to Mount Rushmore

This is a trip my wife and I took during month 4 of the COVID-19 pandemic. We'd had Mount Rushmore on our "bucket list" for years. And with the combination of social distancing orders, fears of flying, and our empty-nester status, it seemed like the perfect time for a long-distance RV trip.

The trip is 8 days long, if starting from the Dallas – Ft. Worth area, and spans 2,800 miles. We live in Austin but decided to make the 3-hour drive to Ft. Worth the afternoon before Day 1 as shown in the table below. That's because we wanted to make it to Dodge City on Day 1 without having to drive a full 10 hours in a single day. And we had a Ft. Worth based relative we could stay with that night.

The path to and from Mount Rushmore were different, on purpose. The path up goes through Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota while the path back goes through Wyoming, Colorado and back to Texas. Kelly referred to the trip as "8 states in 8 days".

We used Outdoorsy.com to rent the RV and Cruise America is an alternative rental site to consider. Outdoorsy is like AirBnB while Cruise America is like Hertz. Coachman Prism Sprinter 24G, which was perfect for just two travelers. There are some Class C RV's in the 24-26 foot range that have an additional sleeping area above the driver's cab area and/or an option to convert the sofa/dining table into a small bed.

Below is the exact itinerary we followed, including notes and ratings we captured afterwards for the benefit of others. The times you see under each destination represent the approximate drive time, not including stops for gas, meals, dog walking and the like.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Day	From	To	Notes
1	Dallas or Ft Worth	Dodge City (7.0 hrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rest Stops:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 1hr North of Denton at mile marker #3○ 1hr South of Norman at mile marker #59• Dodge City KOA (701 Park St): https://koa.com/campgrounds/dodge-city/<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Our assessment: 4 star○ Nice mail building – showers, laundry, etc○ Close proximity (walking) to the tourist attractions
2	Dodge City	Lake Minatare, NE (7.0 hrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lake Minatare State Recreation Area: http://outdoornebraska.gov/lakeminatare/<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not all sections are available to reserve ahead of time. Multiple different hook-up options (partial, full).○ Our assessment: 3 star<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Nice lakeside spots○ Of the RV spots in the Lake View East section (spots 1-27), all are good except 1 and 6.○ If have a kayak, we would probably rate this spot a 4 star○ Bugs (mosquitos, moths) were an issue for us (late June)○ Depending on where you reserve, you might need to enter via the campground entrance, which is 2 mi

			further from the first entrance, which is where Google Maps directs (if coming from Dodge City).
3	Lake Minatare	<p>Mount Rushmore</p> <p>(2.5 hrs)</p> <p>(+2 hrs if stop at Mammoth Exhibit and go through the nat'l parks)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rushmore View RV Park (522 South, US-16A, Keystone, SD) https://www.rushmoreviewinn.com/rv-campground/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our assessment: 4 star ○ There's a stream that runs along the back of the RV park ○ Only a 5-min drive to Mt Rushmore ○ Several restaurants, boutique retail and tourist stuff within walking distance of the RV park • Can drive and park at Mt. Rushmore (have area for RVs) on the way into town, visit the park, and then go to the RV park afterwards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Definitely visit the Sculptor's Studio and listen to the 10 minute educational lecture ○ If you have a pair of binoculars, bring them for even better viewing of the mountain sculpture • On the drive, if your route goes through Hot Springs, there is a Mammoth Exhibit that's a good 30 minute stop. It's an active, indoor archeological dig site with tons of mammoth bones. • On the drive from Lake Minatare to Mt Rushmore (after Hot Springs), if you take the path through the Wind Cave National Forest and the Custer National Forest (both amazingly scenic and with bison viewings), Highways 87 and 16A north of there have sections with small tunnels (as narrow as 8' and as low as 9'). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instead, you have to take 16A to the East, towards Hwy 36, then Hwy 40 into Keystone. ○ The whole process adds mileage, so make sure you have plenty of gas when leaving Lake Minatare. We went a few miles out of our way to the nearby town of Scottsbluff just to get gas first, and were glad we did.
4	Mt Rushmore	<p>Estes Park, CO</p> <p>(6 hrs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KOA Campground (2051 Big Thompson Ave) https://koa.com/campgrounds/estes-park/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our assessment: 5 star ○ Great views (camping spot #40 was awesome) ○ Nice office (small store) ○ Good showers • The drive to Estes Park via Loveland is breathtaking and also with lots of 20-30 mph curves • We drove into the town of Estes Park the next morning and walked along the Riverwalk for ~20 minutes. If you arrive in Estes Park early enough in the day, you could do this first before driving to the RV campground. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You can set your GPS for 125 Spruce Dr, park in the lot and walk up-river from there along a nice pathway.
5	Estes Park	<p>Pueblo, CO</p> <p>(2.25 hrs to G. of Gods) (+0.75 hrs to Pueblo)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The drive out of Estes Park via Hwy 36 thru Longmont and Boulder is very good (and different than the drive in via Loveland). Also, lots of 20-30 mph curves. • Stop @ Garden of the Gods (CO Springs) on the way to Pueblo: https://www.gardenofgods.com/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Amazing scenery and photo/video opportunities

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can take a 45 min open-air trolley tour, but we couldn't find a good place to park the RV (if interesting, research where to park and where to get on the trolley) ○ Can also drive a 1-2 mile loop through the Garden. We drove it twice and got good photos & video. There's only one or two spots along the back side of the loop where you can park the RV on the side of the road and get out. ○ On our 2nd lap around, we veered off to the path that goes by the Balanced Rock. That took us out of the Garden a different way back to I-25 and also included some amazing scenery. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Camping @ Lake Pueblo – Arkansas Point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> https://cpw.state.co.us/placestogo/parks/LakePueblo/Pages/Camping.aspx <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our assessment: 3 star ○ Nice lake view and nearby rock uplifts (desert-like scene) ○ The RV campsites only have electrical hookups but there are bathrooms with decent showers within walking distance ● In Pueblo, there is supposedly an Arkansas Riverwalk (101 S Union Ave) – Uber supposedly runs in Pueblo
6	Pueblo	Lubbock (6.5 hrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Camping at Lubbock RV park (4811 N. I-27) 806-747-2366 http://lubbockrv.com/index.php <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our assessment: 2 star ○ Would be a 4 star except for road noise (near the highway), rail noise (near tracks) and airplane noise (across the highway from the airport) ○ Bathroom with showers ○ Swimming pool ○ Lots of shade trees everywhere ● Buddy Holley Center – we drove there first, then to the RV park <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our assessment: 3 star ○ Not a lot to see but a decent 45 min visit if you like Rock & Roll history ○ Closes at 5:00, so take into consideration ● Palo Duro Canyon and Caprock Canyon (huge buffalo herd) could be alternatives to Lubbock. They are elsewhere in the Texas panhandle and are much more scenic. But they also change the drive times on this day and the following day.
7	Lubbock	Fredericksburg (5 hrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jellystone RV park https://twcjellystone.com/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our assessment: 5 star ○ RV sites are spaced apart nicely ○ We had a Creek Side spot, which was perfect ○ Tons of activities for kids (check out the website)
8	Fredericksburg	Austin	

Dodge City, Kansas

- **Boot Hill Museum:**
 - <https://www.boothill.org/>
 - https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g38668-d123645-Reviews-Boot_Hill_Museum-Dodge_City_Kansas.html
 - Open 9:00am (1:00pm on Sundays)
 - The museum and inside activities close at 6:00pm and usually take ~1 hours to complete
 - A combined and modified variety show and gunfight starts at 6:00pm outdoors and lasts about 45 minutes
 - Our assessment: 2 star
 - Museum was OK
 - Variety show wasn't very good
 - Shootout wasn't very good
 - Dodge City is a logical stop on the way to Mount Rushmore, but don't get your hopes up for an amazing tourist experience
- **Santa Fe Trail Tracks:**
 - There's an observation site outside of town, on the way to Lake Minatare
 - The views of the countryside are great, but you can't actually see where the Santa Fe Trail once ran.
- **Alternative RV camping sites if have to stop short of Dodge City on the first day**
 - Seiling: <https://www.rvparksseiling.com/>
 - Woodward: <http://woodwardcampgroundandrvcamp.com/>
 - Fort Supply: <https://www.swt.usace.army.mil/Locations/Tulsa-District-Lakes/Oklahoma/Fort-Supply-Lake/Fort-Supply-Lake-Recreation/>
 - Buffalo: <https://www.buffalorvparkok.com/>

Mount Rushmore Info

- No permit or access ticket needed
- There's a 30-min evening light show at the monument at 9:00pm. No reservation needed.
- 60-90 minutes typically needed to explore Mt. Rushmore, if the various walking pathways are open

Estes Park

- Online digital visitor's guide: <https://lsc-pagepro.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?m=62041&i=641968&p=1>
- Horse ride (as short as 1 hr): <https://www.skhorses.com/> (2 stables in different locations)
- Riverwalk in downtown Estes Park

Fredericksburg Wine Tour (wineries close to the RV park)

1. **Heath Sparkling Wines** 10591 E US Highway 290 (co-located w/ Grape Creek) –can walk to from the campsite
 - a. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g55863-d17752719-Reviews-Heath_Sparkling_Wines-Fredericksburg_Texas.html
2. **Grape Creek Vineyards** 10587 E US Highway 290 (next door to Heath Sparkling Wines, easy walk)

- a. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g55863-d1407440-Reviews-Grape_Creek_Vineyards_Fredericksburg-Fredericksburg_Texas.html
 - b. Supposedly a good place to eat
3. **Inwood Estates** 10303 US-290 (1/4 mi from the RV park, also has a bistro)
- a. <http://inwoodwines.com/>
4. **Signor Vineyards** 362 Livesay Lane
- a. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g55863-d14001643-Reviews-Signor_Vineyards-Fredericksburg_Texas.html

Tidbits

Rental Fee – Pay attention to what’s included with the daily RV rental fee. There will be limitations to daily mileage and propane use. You’ll also likely be required to return the RV with the tanks emptied (gray water, black water) and both the gas and propane levels the same as during pickup.

Insurance – RV rental sites sell various insurance options, including trip-cancellation, damage protection and roadside assistance. They aren’t very expensive but you should check with your car insurance provider to see if you already have similar coverage that extends to RV rentals. If not, it’s possible that a \$50 per year “endorsement” adds most/all of what you need and it’s also good for other things than just RV rentals.

Wifi – Only 20% of the time is it good enough at the RV camping sites for doing a videoconference or watching a streaming video (Netflix, etc). This, of course, will change over time.

RV Campground Reservations – Pay attention to the utility services that are available at the actual campsite you’re reserving for your RV. Not all have water and even fewer are considered “full hookup”, which includes the wastewater dump pipe.

Mobile App – Campendium is a good app to use. It’s like a Yelp for campsites and it also includes info on the best boondocking locations.

Arrival Time – Arriving at the campground after sunset makes it much harder to pull in (back in) to your site and get the utilities properly connected.

Electrical Supply – Most Class C RV’s have a large power cord connector that’s similar to what your clothes dryer uses. Most campsites made for RV’s that say they have power available at the site, have 20amp and 30amp connections. Some also have 50amp. Our RV (and probably most Class C RV’s in the 25’ range) was rated for 30amp but it came with an adapter to convert the plug for a regular 110v outlet, just in case it was ever needed (it wasn’t). Ask about this during pickup and orientation.

Diesel Fuel – Make sure to only fill the RV with diesel. You might also need to add an additive called DEF every 4-5 fill ups. Ask when you pick up your RV and go through orientation on where to pour it.

Furnishings – Ask how the RV is equipped. See packing list.

Pull-Thru Camp Sites – They're easier to navigate in/out. But if the RV is in the range of 25' long or shorter, it's actually pretty easy to back in to a campsite.

TV – Ask if your RV has an external cable TV connection port and, if so, is it connected to the TV. Otherwise, you'll need to use the TV remote to scan for HD channels broadcasted over the air. Also, if you want to access your favorite streaming services (Netflix, etc), ask if the TV's HDMI port is accessible (for a Fire Stick, Roku Stick, etc).

Packing List (excluding clothes & food)

Items That Might Be Included with the Rental (ask)

- Trash can
- Dissolvable toilet paper
- Scented toilet tablets (to help avoid odors)
- Can opener
- Wine bottle opener
- Toaster (or toaster oven)
- Coffee maker & filters
- Cooking pan & cooking utensils – if you plan to use the stove
- Flatware
- Ice trays
- Cleaning products
- Leveling blocks – pad sites are usually level, but if boondocking somewhere, it won't be

Other (excluding clothes & food)

- Small trash bags
- Ziploc bags (various sizes)
- Plastic wrap & aluminum foil
- Paper plates & bowls
- Hair dryer
- Folding chairs
- Bedding material – sheets, comforter, pillows
- Towel
- Spare glasses or contacts
- Toiletries
- Shampoo & soap
- Medications
- Coffee tumblers
- 25' extension cord
- Set of tools (the basics: hammer, screwdrivers, utility knife, pliers, tape, rope, etc)
- Fly swatter
- Bug spray
- Leftover containers

- 2-3 thick rubber bands
- Sunglasses
- Hat
- Books & games
- Binoculars
- Cell phone charger
- Flashlight