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Marketing News for RV Parks,
Campgrounds & Services from
the TRAILER LIFE DIRECTORY

eHighway

In This Issue:

This month, RVgeeks Peter and John give helpful tips on taking great photos of your park for Web sites and brochures. Then, we summarized RVIA's "What's Hot and What's Not" ideas for SAVEcations. Finally, there's news about GoRVing's 2009 ad campaign and its campground-friendly tie-in program.

Enjoy this month's installment of Trailer Life Directory's eHighway!

"I Want to go There!"

As RV park and campground owners, what better emotion can you evoke from potential customers than a strong desire to visit your park? We've all heard that "a picture is worth a thousand words," and compelling images are a key component in attracting visitors.

The Internet provides the easiest and most cost-effective means to share your park's appeal. Like everyone else, RVers are becoming more Web-savvy every day. When they want the most complete, up-to-date information about where to go and where to stay, they turn to their computers.

Taking great photos of your park doesn't necessarily require professional photography skills or equipment. A reasonably priced and easy-to-use digital camera, a thoughtful eye and a few basic guidelines can produce fine photos. Add some basic knowledge of an image-editing program like Adobe Photoshop, and you'll be producing professional shots of your park in no time, ready to put up on the Web to attract new customers.

Let's start with the most obvious component: the camera. If you already have a reasonably nice digital camera that you're happy with, you should be all set. If you haven't yet made the leap to digital, or want to upgrade to a camera that's really optimal for shooting your park, now's the time. With the wide range of modestly-price digitals available today, there have never been more options to choose from.

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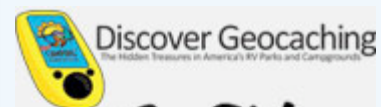
In This Issue:

[I Want to go There! Tips on Photographing Your RV Park](#)

[RVIA Urges Consumers To Take SAVEcations](#)

[Go RVing Unveils Updated Affordability Ads for 2009](#)

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Go RVing



A great way to begin sorting through choices is with a retailer like Best Buy — www.bestbuy.com — where online comparisons of features and prices are quick and easy. Unless you're already a pretty serious film photographer, we'd recommend that your first digital camera should probably be a compact point-and-shoot type, which are the least expensive and easiest to operate. They have every feature you'll need to take great shots of your park (and lots of other things, of course). For a first camera, we'd suggest staying away from the "Digital SLR" class, which have interchangeable lenses — unless you're prepared to shell out some sizable cash, and deal with occasionally cleaning dust off the image sensor, which can be very challenging.

As of this writing, Best Buy lists 156 compact cameras priced between \$70 and \$600. Don't let the large number of choices scare you away! If you're ready to shop for your first (or a replacement) digital, there are three primary considerations that will maximize your ability to show off your park: flash, megapixels, and zoom.

Flash is an important requirement, but since virtually every digital camera has one built in, you won't need to worry about it. You also won't have to worry about focusing, or setting the shutter speed or aperture (the lens opening), since most every camera has fully automatic exposure settings (hence the "point-and-shoot" designation). Many even come with image stabilization, which prevents blurred photos if you should move the camera while shooting. This feature isn't really critical for shooting around the park, as it's most useful for long zoom shots and/or low light, and we'll be taking mostly wide-angle daylight shots in the campground (except inside the clubhouse or other interiors, which is where the flash comes in).

While the megapixel rating is not by any means the only factor that affects picture quality, it is important, since a higher-resolution image is sharper, and allows for any desired cropping during processing, while still maintaining picture quality. The good news is that anything around 5–8 megapixels is more than enough, and most cameras today are 8 megapixels or higher.

One of the most overlooked considerations on point-and-shoot digital cameras is the lens. Not the quality of the lens, but the focal length, or zoom. While specifications like "5x digital zoom" and "10x optical zoom" can be important considerations (the higher the "optical" number, the higher the image quality on long zoom shots), this is not our main consideration in shooting around the park. What we really want is wide angle.

For the purposes of taking great photos to showcase your park, there is no greater help than having a wide-angle lens. When looking at the specifications for a particular camera, look at the "lens focal length." You'll want a 35mm equivalent (referring to a 35mm film camera) of 28mm–100mm (28 is wide angle, and 100 is telephoto). The second number can be higher — such as in 28–200mm, 28–250mm, or 28–325mm — but the first number, the "wide-angle" number, should be no higher than 28. This allows you to show an entire row of RVs in one shot, or the whole interior of your clubhouse, or your big, beautiful lake with the trees and mountains on both sides.

You will find that the majority of shots around the park will be taken with your camera on the widest possible zoom. This little secret will make your photos "pop" by having your entire scene fit into the frame, without having to step back so far that everything is distant and tiny. This also allows you to move in close enough to avoid unwanted items at the sides of the shot, such as a telephone pole or that old rusty car, while still getting the entire subject into the frame. Currently, the least expensive (\$70–\$200) entry-level digital cameras nearly always have a higher (less wide-angle) 35mm focal length equivalent — most commonly about 35mm or 36mm. By spending a little extra (in the \$200 to \$300 range), you will find a nice selection of cameras with a 28mm equivalent wide-angle lens, perfect for that campground photo shoot. Fine cameras in this lens range are available in the following manufacturers' model lines: Canon Powershot, Nikon Coolpix, FujiFilm FinePix, Kodak EasyShare, Panasonic Lumix and Samsung.

There are many other factors to consider when buying a digital camera, but stepping up just a little bit to a more advanced point-and-shoot in the \$200–\$300 range will generally get you just about every bell and whistle you'll ever need. Don't be intimidated by the technology, since one of the best features that every model shares is the ability to simply do everything for you, except frame the shot and press the shutter

release!

A website like www.dpreview.com (for "Digital Photo Review") is a great resource for researching cameras. While their reviews probably contain more information than most beginners will need, familiarizing yourself with the myriad features, terms and technologies of digital photography can be useful in making a choice you'll be happy with for years.

Now that we've chosen a good camera, let's talk about how to use it. The most common mistake we see is lack of proper composition. Many people look through the viewfinder at their primary subject in the middle of the frame, but forget to look at the entire frame. Of course, they certainly will notice the trash cans next to the swimming pool when they see the image on their computer! Remember to frame your photos using the entire viewfinder. Take a few extra moments to look around in there, and notice everything that's visible in the shot. Think about where you are standing too — if you take a few steps forward or to the side, how will it affect the shot? The human brain and eyes are great filters when they view three-dimensional situations in real life, focusing only on what we want to see. Photographs tend to turn off that filter, and small details become more noticeable, as the subject and the background are now on a flat, two-dimensional plane. Take your time, and look around before you press the shutter release. Spend a few minutes setting up your shots (like moving those trash cans), and you'll be much happier with the results.

One big advantage of digital photography is the complete lack of film and developing costs. Once you buy the camera, it is essentially free (maybe you'll want a tripod and some other accessories, but you get the idea). When you're doing a photo shoot of your park, be sure to take advantage of this free resource, and take lots of pictures. It's difficult to be sure you got that perfect shot, until you see the results on a big computer screen. So take two just in case. Or four. Or eight!

We typically shoot about 300–500 photos of a park, and end up using only about the top 10% of them for a website. Until you actually see the images enlarged, you'll never know for certain which shot is your best work. Just remember that it's free, and snap away! With digital, we always say, "You can't take too many photos."

Lighting is another area that requires a little thought. A sunny day is our favorite canvas, as it really makes colors more vivid and bright. Just be sure to keep the sun behind, or alongside you, whenever possible. Try taking the same shot in the morning, and then again in the afternoon. We typically shoot three or four different sets of photos at various times of the day, over a period of days. You don't have to be Ansel Adams, waiting in the snow for the perfect cloud formation to float by, but thinking about where the light is coming from, and how well your subjects are lit, will provide lots more choices later, when it's time to select the very best photos of your park.

Another good lighting tip relates to indoor shots. While using flash works great in many cases, it can sometimes make objects in the foreground look harsh or overexposed compared to the background. When shooting your recreation hall, try taking two shots of each angle — one with the flash, and one with the flash turned off. Remember, digital images are free, so try lots of different things! This is where that tripod might come in handy. In low-light situations, a longer exposure time (lower shutter speed) will often produce results superior to using flash. Keeping the shutter open for a longer period of time will let in enough light to make up for a dimly lit room, while keeping the shot free of the "hot" area that flash can create.

Of course, you'll need a tripod for this one, as even image stabilization won't make up for moving the camera around during a long exposure time. Every camera includes a standard tripod mounting hole in the bottom, and most also allow for manual control of the shutter speed and aperture. Try opening up the aperture (lower number = more light) and slowing down the shutter speed (lower number = more light). Have fun experimenting along the way. No film and developing costs means there's no harm in trying lots of things.

Another tip is to get some elevation above your subject. Looking down from even a small height adds a great perspective to many shots. It's not unusual for us to walk around a campground with a small stepladder, or kick off our shoes to stand on a picnic table, or on a chair in the clubhouse, to get a better

angle on things. You'll find that shooting from just a couple of feet higher will improve the look of many scenes. If you're able to safely get some real height, like from the roof of an RV or out a second-story window, you can get some great overview shots. Now take your terrific photos and put them online for everyone to see how beautiful your park and the surrounding area are. Like all good advertising, the purpose of a website is to increase business. It's a very cost-effective way to reach RVers, who expect to find you online.

A website with great photos will provide all the information potential customers need. They won't know you have the amenities they want unless you tell them (or better yet — show them). People are more influenced by what they see than by what they read — a picture really is worth 1000 words!

We do some of our own RV park and campground photography on-site, but since we also design websites "long distance," some of our customers provide their own photos. We then color-correct, crop, re-size and optimize the quality and look of every photo as needed for each website. But the magic of Photoshop can't hold a candle to well-framed photos, taken with a thoughtful eye and a little planning.

When your customers see how beautiful your park is, they'll think, "I want to go there!"

Full-time RVers Peter & John design beautiful and effective custom websites for RV parks and campgrounds. Learn more at www.rvgeeks.net