



Benefits of Park Model RV Rentals

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Benefits of Park Trailer Rentals

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Panelists attending a CampCalNOW Education Day share their insights regarding the costs, management and marketing of the cottage-style units. Manufacturers have long touted the merits of investing in recreational park trailers or “park models” as rental accommodations, which can generate anywhere from two to five times as much annual income as a typical RV site.



But while there’s no question that these units can generate significant revenue, private parks that go into the accommodations business also encounter additional costs, according to park operators who discussed the cost, management and marketing of park models Jan. 13th during CampCalNOW’s Education Day at Newport Dunes Waterfront RV Resort and Marina.

“Housekeeping has been a challenge,” said Michael Gelfand, president of Terra Vista Management, which rents 24 park models at Newport Dunes. Gelfand said his company initially rented park models without linens, but later switched to a daily maid service, which he offers free of charge to his guests “to minimize the thrashing of the units.”

Gelfand said renters tend to take better care of their park model when they know someone will be coming in to clean the unit each day. Housekeeping staff can also alert management if the guest breaks something or causes damage to the unit so that they can be held accountable to pay for any damages before they leave. In this sense, the value of having a daily maid service goes far beyond that of simply making the beds or cleaning the unit, he said.

But not every park operator sees a need to offer daily maid service.

The Fountain of Youth Spa RV Resort in Niland, California finds it worthwhile to provide weekly maid service for its seven park models, which it rents on a weekly and monthly basis, said Jolene Wade, the resort’s managing partner.

John Croce, managing member of Huntington Beach, Calif.-based Team RV Management LLC, whose properties include Yosemite Pines RV Resort & Family Lodging in Groveland, California, said his guests do not really expect or require daily maid service. However, he does provide linens for the park’s 26 park models and eight yurts, which collectively require about \$30,000 worth of linens.

Each unit requires at least two sets of sheets, blankets, bedspreads and pillows, not only in case of loss or damage, but because it's not possible or practical for park operators to quickly wash and replace the same set of linens in units when one set of guests leave at 11 a.m. and the next guests arrive soon after that. "At peak season in Yosemite Pines, we may turn 20 or 25 units a day," Croce said.

Park operators who have large numbers of park models will also need to invest in commercial grade washers and dryers. "You can run maybe three to six park models and use your existing laundry. But once you pass six, you need commercial laundry equipment," Croce said.

The park's housekeeping staff needs will also vary, depending on the season, Croce said. In peak season at Yosemite Pines, for example, Croce has as many as 12 people handling housekeeping duties. "Sometimes we only need a half a dozen. Sometimes we need a lot more," he said.

Croce added that park models should also be set up in "little villages," Croce said, partly to keep them separate from transient RVers and partly to make it easier for housekeeping staff to maintain the units.



But while private parks take different approaches with maid service, park operators say it's imperative to invest in high-quality units that can withstand wear and tear. "Don't go for a stripped down version," Gelfand said, because they won't hold up.

Gelfand, Croce and Wade also offered other tips in terms of what park operators should ask for when they order park models for rental use:

- Choose laminate flooring if possible. It's more durable than linoleum, which can tear, and it's easier to clean than carpeting.
- Equip the units with instant hot water heaters. Standard water heaters are often too small for rental use.

Park operators who invest in durable units will be glad they did. Croce said he's had units last nearly eight years at very high occupancy rates at Yosemite Pines and he doesn't yet see a need to replace them. "I think their lifespan can go on for years if you maintain them," he said.

Maintenance, from Croce's standpoint, includes removing all of the furniture and thoroughly

cleaning each unit once a year and replacing or repairing anything that is broken or needs attention. “In the mountains, you have to reseal the cedar every three or four years,” he said.

In terms of marketing park model rentals, Gelfand, Croce and Wade all said they generate most of their leads and bookings online.

“It’s essential to have online reservations,” Croce said, adding that parks need to invest in their websites and make it easy for consumers to find them easily through web searches. “The more you get out there (on the web), the easier it is for people to find you,” he said.



Croce added that online reservations can generate cash flow for the park months before the guests actually arrive. “We’ve done great in February and had an empty park,” he said, adding, “If you have limited marketing dollars, invest in your website.”

Gelfand, for his part, said most of his marketing is also web-based. However, Gelfand has also hired a public relations consultant who promotes Newport Dunes in newspapers and magazines.

Gelfand and Croce also said that one of the key merits of park models is that they can turn “dysfunctional” campsites into moneymakers. In fact, Croce said the park models and yurts at Yosemite Pines generate as much income as all of the RV sites in the park combined. But despite their revenue generating potential, Croce recommended that park operators start with a small number of park models. “Start with two or three and let demand determine what you need,” he said.

At one point during the discussion, Bill Garpow, executive director of the Recreational Park Trailer Industry Association (RPTIA) asked the park operators attending CalARVC’s education Day if any of them had regrets about investing in park models. Not one park operator raised his hand.

Editor’s Note: *At time of publication, park models fell under the preview of the Recreational Park Trailer Industry Association (RPTIA). In 2012, RPTIA merged with RVIA which now handles all the standards and inspections for Park Trailer RVs. Additionally, prior to 2012, units were commonly referred to as park models. Today’s naming convention is a park trailer RV.*