

How much is a campsite worth?

The ad reads: "Work 20 hours/week in exchange for your site. Extra hours at \$6.50/hour."

Working in exchange for a site, or even a free site, is often part of the RV worker's (or Workamper's) offer. But what are you really paying for that site? Is this a fair amount? Will you owe income taxes on its value? Answering these questions can help determine if this job will be a moneymaker, or instead, cost you money.

Market Value

RV park: If an RV site is included with your job, during your interview ask the employer what value she puts on it. Then you can determine if this is a fair exchange. Some factors to consider:

Monthly rental rate: In the ad, the employer values your time at \$5.50 per hour. Multiply that by the 20 hours you are required to work for your site, and you are paying \$130/week. What do long-term tenants pay? Is that standard for the area? Since the employer probably can deduct the cost of your site as a business expense, the price to an employee should be less than the retail rate. He should certainly use the monthly rate, not the daily one.

Your hourly rate: If the regular monthly rate for a site is \$300/month and you work 20 hours/week for that site, you are "earning" \$3.75/hour. For the tasks you are required to do, is this reasonable pay?

Compare wages: The employer may not specify a number of hours you work for your site, but may pay less per hour than area employers who don't include housing. A check of what other employers pay for similar work will allow you to compute your cost. Multiply the dollar per hour difference in wages by the number of hours you (and your spouse, if applicable) work per week to give you the amount per week your campsite costs you.

Value to You

The other question: Is it worth it to you? If you normally stay at a membership park or boondock, you could be paying a lot of money for the privilege of working here. If it is an area you really want to be in and an employer you like, it may be worth spending the extra money.

Some RV parks and resorts have amenities that raise the rent. If you won't use them, you may not place the same value on the site as the employer.

Other perks like free propane, free laundry, and discounts decrease your expenses and effectively add to your pay. You can compute an approximate value to use in your decision-making.

Each case is individual. One RVer was told by an employer his site was worth \$700/month; monthly tenants paid half that amount. He figured he'd be better off paying the rent out-of-pocket and getting paid the extra \$700 in actual wages.

Another RV worker couple worked at an RV park in Estes Park, Colorado one summer then returned two years later, rented an RV space and worked at jobs in town. They made significantly more money the second time. Which do you value more, the convenience of living right where you work or the extra cash?

Bottom line, if you exchange work for an RV site, will your take-home pay still meet your income needs? If not, this particular job could end up "costing" you money.

The IRS

You could have to pay income taxes on the value of your RV site, but not if you play your cards right. According to Carol Richards, attorney for the Escapees RV Club, "If you are required to live on the premises, the value of your RV site is not taxable. If you could live somewhere else and still do your duties and the employer provides a site merely as a convenience, the value is taxable."

Managers and camp hosts typically must live on-site in an RV park. "For your protection and to satisfy the IRS requirements, have the employer state in your employment contract that you are required to live on-site," advises Carol. Since the employer can also deduct your site in the case of required occupancy, both of you benefit.

While there is no set formula for valuing an RV site, before accepting a job offer that includes a site, take a realistic look at what you are paying for it. Find out if you are required to live on-site or if will it be taxable income. This information will help you weigh job offers, avoid surprises and pick the best employment situation for you.

This article is excerpted from Jaimie's book: *Support Your RV Lifestyle! An Insider's Guide to Working on the Road, 2nd ed.*