

# Tin can getaways

California's latest resort out to capture fans of sleek mid-century travel trailers

ONE DAY YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DRIVE across the United States staying every night in a fabulous vintage trailer—without actually dragging one behind your 1954 Chevy Bel-Air.

Think of the money you'll save on gas. Motels that include travel trailers among their room choices, or offer nothing but, are popping up all over.

You can start in the self-proclaimed capital of doo-wop, Wildwood, New Jersey, where the Starlux Motel has two Airstream trailers as part of its neon-drenched vibe.

You'll need to drive a bit to find your next trailer motel. But once you hit the desert, your choices blossom.

There's Utah's Shooting Star Drive-In, with such accommodations as Anna's Cabana, the Airstream where Ann-Margret relaxed between takes of *Viva Las Vegas*. Now that'll get you dreaming.

Bisbee, Arizona houses one of the oldest trailer motels—the Shady Dell, a 90-year-old trailer park that began renting tourist trailers in 1994. It plays up the '50s big time, complete with pink flamingos, leopard-skin carpets, 45-rpm turntables, and a 1947 Tiki bus. Among the trailer brands are Airstreams, Spartannes, Manors, and more.



**MEMORIES ON WHEELS.** Inside and out at Matthew Hofmann and Neil Dipaola's newly opened 'Airstream Motel' at the Santa Barbara Auto Camp.

California, natch, is also on the bus. There are at least two vacation trailer parks in the vicinity of Joshua Tree. Kate Pierson, the B-52's singer, operates Kate's Lazy Desert there. If you're more psychedelic than Tiki, you might enjoy her Hot Lava Airstream, with orange blobs crawling across the ceiling like a lava lamp on a rampage.

Down the road at the Hicksville Trailer Palace, consider a night at Fifi, a purple and pink trailer that, the proprietors say, is "like being inside a genie bottle."

The newest entry is on the coast, where architect Matthew Hofmann opened the Santa Barbara Auto Camp in January.

Forget lava lamps here. Hofmann and his partner, Neil Dipaola, are aiming at mid-level luxury, with new skylights, flooring of teak and bamboo, "even beach cruisers to tour Santa Barbara," says Hofmann.

Hofmann has converted five Airstreams

in the 91-year-old residential trailer park into hotel rooms. "People are fascinated with these things," he says.

The Auto Camp is about two-and-a-half miles from the beach, near a popular bar and Hofmann's favorite Japanese restaurant.

"People these days, they want something that's more unique, more true to the actual locale," than staying in a standard hotel, he says.

The Auto Camp has been attracting "old folks who come in with their memories of crisscrossing the United States in their Airstream," he says, "hipsters from LA, people who want a different type of hotel experience."

Trailers may provide small spaces, but enthusiasts think big. Hofmann and Dipaola plan to go international.

They are scouting for a trailer site in San Francisco, then plan to "move into other

unique spaces," Hofmann says, citing as possibilities for conversion "a meat-packing plant or a marina, floating hotel rooms."

Submarines, anyone?

*Photography: courtesy Matthew Hofmann*

## HIT THE ROAD IN A TRAILER:

- **Santa Barbara Auto Camp** 2717 De La Vina Street, Santa Barbara. sbautocamp.com
- **Starlux Hotel** 305 E. Rio Grande Avenue, Wildwood, New Jersey. 609-522-7412
- **Shooting Star Drive-in** 2020 West Highway 12, Escalante, Utah. shootingstardrive-in.com
- **The Shady Dell** 1 Douglas Road, Bisbee, Arizona. theshadydell.com
- **Kate's Lazy Desert** 58380 Botkin Road, Landers, California. lazymeadow.com
- **Hicksville Trailer Palace** Joshua Tree, California. hicksville.com