

# Jackery Explorer 500 Review: The Right Portable Power Station for You?

Ever since I took the plunge and started boondocking in the back of my Toyota 4Runner, the Jackery Explorer 500 has been a reliable companion.

The Explorer 500 falls in the middle of Jackery's offerings of portable power stations – both in price and capability. Fortunately, it's still quite lightweight and portable.

After owning this power station for well over a year, it has accompanied me on a 6,000 mile cross country road trip (more on that later), countless weekends camping, and even came in handy when I lost power during Hurricane Ida.

Jackery's line of portable power stations are extremely popular and usually receive overwhelmingly positive reviews. That said, everyone has different needs, so the Explorer 500 will be perfect for some people and a pass for others.

I've really put the Jackery Explorer 500 to the test and I'll share the results below.

**Related Post:** [The Best Camping Gear for Dispersed Campers](#)

## Quick Overview

This 518 watt-hour portable power station is perfect for powering small appliances and charging all your devices.

Back in 2015, Jackery launched the Explorer series as the first ever portable lithium battery system on the market. They've been a hit ever since.

While the number of power stations in the series has grown over the years, the Explorer 500 has been offered since the beginning.

Right away, you should note that the Explorer 500 can provide continuous power to run most small appliances, unlike most lower-capacity power stations.

For example, Jackery's most affordable model, the [Explorer 160](#), and other entry-level power stations (such as the popular [Goal Zero Yeti 150](#)) are only able to charge your devices.

Featuring a 518Wh (24Ah, 21.6V) lithium ion battery and a pure sine wave inverter, you'll have a variety of ports to charge or power your devices and even some small appliances.

The Jackery Explorer 500 has three USB-A ports, two DC ports, one standard 3-prong AC outlet, and one standard DC car port.

When it's time to recharge the power station itself, your options include using a standard wall outlet, a 12V car outlet, or a portable solar panel.

Weighing just 13.3 lbs with its longest dimension less than 12 inches, the Explorer 500 is true to the name "*portable*" power station. It feels solid and durable but without seeming bulky or difficult to maneuver.

The LCD screen illuminates when the "Display" button is pressed and provides a bright, clear reading of all of your key information: the batteries remaining charge (shown in a percentage that updates in real time) and the wattage being input and output.

## Jackery Explorer 500 Features and Specifications

Here are the most important features and specifications of the Jackery Explorer 500:

Lithium Ion Battery	518 Watt Hours Capacity
13.32 Pounds	11.8 x 7.6 x 9.2 Inches
3 USB Ports, 2 DC Ports, 1 12V Outlet, 1 AC Outlet	7.5 Hours to Charge w/ Wall Outlet
7.5 Hours to Charge w/ Car Outlet	9.5 Hours to Charge w/ SolarSaga 100 Solar Panel
Comes w/ Wall Charger & Car Charger	Built-In Carry Handle

## My Experience with the Explorer 500

When I got bitten by the "boondocking bug", I got bitten badly (don't worry, I confirmed that it wasn't a tick!). I desperately wanted the freedom to throw a few things in the car, find a great dispersed campsite, and hit the road.

I decided to dive head-first into the deep end: I'd embark on a solo, cross-country road trip, sleeping in my SUV the entire way. I also made it a goal to find free, dispersed campsites for the entire trip

As I was preparing to hit the road, one of my toughest decisions was whether to buy a traditional, insulated cooler, or spring for an electric option. While an insulated cooler does a great job keeping food cold, they can also be a bit of a hassle on longer trips.

When I found the [SetPower 12V Vehicle Fridge & Freezer](#), an electric cooler with great reviews that cost even less than the most affordable, non-powered Yeti cooler, it seemed like a

no-brainer. No more fishing food out of a dirty ice bath on day three of a camping trip? Sign me up.

This, of course, meant that I now needed a power source.

After doing a bit of research, I decided to move forward with a portable power station from Jackery. Their products were well-reviewed online, included a 2-year warranty, and there was an option for just about every budget.

While there are a ton of great looking power stations for sale these days with similar qualities, I also liked that Jackery was such an established player in the market.

I spent a long time (probably too long) debating which model of Explorer was right for me. I had everything else I needed for my trip when I finally decided on the Explorer 500. With that out of the way, it was time to get driving.

After two weeks and just about 6,000 miles, I was back home, not having spent a single cent on lodging. (For my sanity, I'm not counting the night spent in an overpriced La Quinta Inn while my SUV was stuck at a tire shop in Boise).

Truth be told, I couldn't be happier that I decided to purchase the Jackery Explorer 500 before taking this trip. It's probably the single most valuable product I purchased while outfitting my 4Runner for boondocking and overlanding.

## Pros and Cons of the Explorer 500

As happy as I've been with the Explorer 500, there are definitely some changes I'd make before considering it a perfect 10.

After almost two years of ownership, here are my biggest pros and cons for the Jackery Explorer 500 portable power station.

### What I Like

Here's what I like most about the Explorer 500:

- **Portable** – The Explorer 500 is about 40% lighter and 47% smaller than the Explorer 1000. I've never felt that it's too large to fit wherever I need or too heavy to carry with my other arm full of camping gear.
- **Rugged & Durable** – I've dropped my Jackery, forgotten it outside in the rain, and sometimes keep it in the back of my SUV with tools and building materials banging around. It works the exact same as the day I bought it.
- **Built-In Light** – While it seemed gimmicky at first, I end up using the built-in light on every single trip. And it's actually quite bright – on par with most flashlights and headlamps.

- **Easy to Charge** – The Jackery 500 comes with both wall and car charging cords. You can add a solar panel later on if you don't want to buy both at once.
- **Informative Display** – The display shows the exact battery charge percentage and the input/output wattage. Some portable power stations round the current charge to the nearest 10% or 20%. It's very helpful to know this down to the 1%. The display is also easy to read in every lighting I've encountered.

## What I Don't Like

Here's what I don't really like about the Explorer 500:

- **Not Enough Ports** – The Explorer 500's ports (3 USB, 1 AC, 2 DC, 1 12V) might have been adequate when it was released, but now there are competitors offering significantly more options on comparably sized models. I'd also much prefer an additional AC or DC port rather than three USB ports.
- **Can't Replace Battery** – According to Jackery, the Explorer 500 will go through 500 charge cycles before the capacity is reduced to roughly 80%. From here you can expect a steady decline in charging capacity. And the Explorer's lithium ion battery can't be replaced.
- **Appearance** – This is purely preference, but I find the Explorer line of power stations to be, well...pretty ugly. They look like a toy boombox compared to some of the newer, sleeker models on the market.

## What Can the Explorer 500 Power?

The Jackery Explorer 500 can both charge electronic devices and **continuously** power small electric appliances.

It's completely capable of continuously powering small gadgets like electric coolers, blankets, and lanterns as well as CPAP machines.

For instance, on a full charge you should be able to run an electric cooler or a CPAP machine for roughly 9 hours straight. The actual run-time will vary pretty widely based on your particular devices, how you use them, and countless other factors.

Although you're unlikely to take these items camping, know that the Explorer 500 isn't capable of powering larger household appliances like a full-sized refrigerator or freezer, air conditioner, space heater, or microwave.

In addition to providing continuous power to run small appliances, this Jackery power station is great for charging small devices, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, satellite messengers, cameras, rechargeable lanterns, and more.

And know that the Explorer 500 isn't a portable jump starter. Unlike some similar devices, you can't jump start a car with this power station.

## How to Charge the Explorer 500

To charge the Jackery Explorer 500 out of the box, you have two options: a standard AC wall outlet or the power outlet found in your car.

All of the necessary cords and adapters for both of these power sources are included with your initial purchase.

According to Jackery, the Explorer 500 takes 7.5 hours for a complete charge using either an AC wall outlet or a car outlet.

My experience has been relatively consistent with these figures. If anything, I find that it usually takes less time because I'm never charging it all the way from 0%.

You can also charge the Explorer 500 with a solar panel (like the [Jackery SolarSaga 100](#)).

Although you need to buy it separately, a solar panel can give you a lot of extra freedom, especially if you plan to camp in the field for a week or more without access to a wall outlet or the ability to run your vehicle for hours.

According to Jackery, fully charging the Explorer 500 with a 100-watt solar panel takes 9.5 hours.

However, solar charging time varies much more than wall or car charging time because of external factors like the weather (especially cloud coverage) and angle of the sun.

Rather than buying a portable power station and a compatible portable solar panel separately, Jackery also sells the two devices bundled (sometimes at a steep discount): [Jackery Explorer 500 with SolarSaga 100](#).

I don't personally own a solar panel, so I haven't used one to charge my Explorer 500, but I've strongly considered investing in one in the future.

## Who is the Explorer 500 Best for?

I think there are two groups of people the Jackery Explorer 500 is best suited for.

The first is people who do a lot of camping, but don't necessarily need to provide constant power to appliances.

Even with a few friends or family members in your group, the Explorer 500 should last you a solid couple of days without being recharged, assuming you're only using it to charge your **phones and other** devices.

The second group of people who should consider the Jackery Explorer 500 are those who have a small appliance they want to keep constantly powered while on the move.

This might be simply keeping food cold in an electric cooler or it might be as serious as running a CPAP machine nightly while you sleep.

Just remember, no matter the appliance, it's going to use a significant amount of battery power to run nonstop. For example, even a USB-powered fan that's smaller than my hand uses 5% to 10% of the Explorer 500's total battery capacity to run overnight.

If you rely on continuous power as a necessity (like a CPAP machine or keeping medication cool in an electric cooler) rather than simply a convenience, it's essential you have a way to consistently charge your Jackery.

That could be the addition of a solar panel or a tendency to spend several hours driving between campsites each day. Another option is investing in a larger portable power station from the start – like the [Jackery Explorer 1000](#) or an even higher-capacity model.

Unless you're looking at a portable power station for a very specific use (powering an electric cooler, in my case), I almost always recommend going for a model with more power than you think you'll need just to be safe.

Now, this isn't to say that a smaller-capacity power station isn't perfectly adequate for some people.

My experience has been that something around the 500Wh capacity is perfect for the average camper, but everyone's needs are different.

## Other Jackery Explorer 500 Reviews

The Jackery Explorer 500 is an extremely popular portable power station for camping.

So, we strongly encourage you to look at other online reviews – even though we've done our best to provide an unbiased review – before pulling the trigger.

The video review above (from [Off-Grid Backcountry Adventures](#)) gives you a great breakdown on the Explorer 500's features when used with the SolarSaga 100W solar panel.

Countless other YouTube videos break down the ins and outs of the Jackery Explorer 500 – just keep in mind that many (although certainly not all) of these reviewers received free products or are otherwise sponsored by Jackery.

So, if you're still looking for more information and opinions, I recommend looking at user reviews on Amazon (just take these with a grain of salt) and Reddit threads from other Jackery users.

This thread on [r/vandwellers](#) and this thread on [r/preppers](#) are a good start.

## Other Portable Power Stations to Consider

I strongly recommend the [Jackery Explorer 500](#), but it's far from the only option available.

If you need something a little beefier, that either lasts longer on a single charge or is capable of powering larger appliances, then the [Jackery Explorer 1000](#) is well worth a look.

Jackery also sells even higher capacity models. Their largest being the [Explorer 1500](#) and [Explorer 2000](#), both of which are ideal for RV boondocking, emergency home power needs, off-grid living, and more.

On the other end of the spectrum are smaller Jackery devices like the [Explorer 160](#) and [Explorer 240](#) as well as the [Goal Zero Yeti 150](#) (check out [our full Yeti 150 review](#) here).

And, of course, Jackery and Goal Zero are far from the only brands making high-quality portable power stations. [Anker](#), [Bluetti](#), and [Ecoflow](#) are a few other brands with popular offerings.

As I've mentioned already, there's no one size fits all portable power station that's best for everyone. The right model for you boils down to why you want such a device and how you'll use it.

## Where to Buy the Jackery Explorer 500

The Jackery Explorer 500 is a solid mid-size portable power station.

It's an excellent choice for dispersed campers who want to run small appliances as well as charge all their devices. It works well on its own as is or when paired with a portable solar panel (like the [SolarSaga 100](#)).

You can [buy the Explorer 500 on Amazon](#) or directly [from Jackery](#).