

Places Map

A clickable map built from a Google Sheet.

Each row is one pin with a story.

The short version

Your spreadsheet is the database. One row per place — a name, coordinates, and whatever story you want to tell about it. The map just draws what is in the sheet.

Editing your map means editing a spreadsheet, which you already know how to do. Add a row, refresh, there is a new pin.

What people use it for

It is one map pointed at whatever data you give it, so the same tool covers a lot of ground:

Camping and trip spots	Where you stayed, what it was like, whether you would go back.
A bucket list	Places you want to go, mapped, so you can see what is near what.
Family history	Where ancestors lived, arrived, married, are buried — with the story on each pin.
Everywhere you have been	States or counties shaded by how much of them you have covered.

What you need

A Google account, for the sheet. That is the whole list. There is nothing to buy, nothing to install, and no sign-up for the map itself.

Where your data lives. In your own Google Drive, in your own sheet. The map page reads it directly in whoever's browser is looking at it. Nothing is stored on anyone else's server, and there is no account, no database, and no copy of your places kept anywhere else.

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Making your own map

About ten minutes, start to finish.

1 Copy the starter sheet

Go to janrlong.com/places and click **Open the starter sheet**. Click the **Make a copy** button it offers you, and your own private copy lands in your Google Drive — with the right column headings and eight example rows to learn from. You will need to be signed in to a Google account for it to have somewhere to put the copy.

Prefer to start from a file? Download **template.csv** from the website, then use **File > Import > Upload**.

2 Add your places

One row per place. Only three things are truly required: a **name**, a **lat**, and a **lon**. Everything else makes the map richer but can be left blank.

To get the coordinates: open Google Maps, right-click the exact spot, and the very first line of the menu is the latitude and longitude. Click it to copy, then paste it into the sheet and split it across the two columns.

Delete the example rows when you are ready. Leave the heading row alone.

3 Publish the sheet

In your sheet: **File > Share > Publish to web**. Change the second dropdown from *Web page* to **Comma-separated values (.csv)**, click **Publish**, and confirm.

Copy the address it gives you. It is long, and it ends in **output=csv**.

4 Open your map

Add your sheet address to the end of the map address, like this:

```
janrlong.com/places/map.html?sheet=YOUR-CSV-ADDRESS&title=My%20Map
```

That is the whole thing. Bookmark it, or send it to family. The **title** part is optional and sets the heading — write **%20** anywhere you want a space.

Publishing makes that sheet readable by anyone who has the link. It is not listed anywhere and will not turn up in a search, but treat it as public: do not put home addresses, phone numbers, or anything private in a sheet you publish. Publishing is also separate from sharing — it does not let anyone *edit* your sheet.

Changes you make to the sheet show up on the map within a few minutes. Google holds published sheets in a cache briefly, so it is not always instant.

What each column does

Headings must be spelled exactly as below, in the first row. The order does not matter, and you can delete any column you do not use — anything missing is simply skipped.

Column		What it does
name	required	The title on the pin's popup.
lat	required	Latitude as a decimal, like 41.9843. Not degrees-and-minutes.
lon	required	Longitude as a decimal, like -111.3407. Negative in the Americas. lng also works.
story	optional	The reason the place is on the map. A full paragraph is fine. This is the point of the whole thing.
status	optional	been or want . Drives the Been / Want to go / All toggle. Want-to-go pins draw as hollow dashed rings.
tier	optional	Tenderfoot , Wanderer , or Expert . Sets the pin colour. Blank counts as Wanderer.
who	optional	Comma-separated names, like Jan, Sue, Dale . Becomes the people picker, so you can show everywhere one person went.
date	optional	When you were there. Anything containing a year works: 2019-09, 1904-05-12, 1911. The year feeds the year filter.
category	optional	Your own grouping, like Water or Family history. Becomes a filter. Invent whatever categories suit you.
region	optional	The U.S. state, spelled out, like Utah. Powers the states-shading view. state also works.
county	optional	Utah county name without the word County, like Tooele. Powers the counties-shading view.
rating	optional	1 to 5. Shows as stars in the popup, and lets you filter down to only your favourites.
photo	optional	Web address of an image to show in the popup. Must be a direct link to an image file.
link	optional	Web address of a fuller write-up. Adds a Read the full story link to the popup.

The three tiers

Tier is about how far off the map a place is — not how much you liked it. That is what **rating** is for.

-  **Tenderfoot** — Easy to get to, well known. Bear Lake, Yellowstone.
-  **Wanderer** — Off the beaten path. You had to look it up.
-  **Expert** — Remote, obscure, or hard-won. Most people have never heard of it.

A hollow dashed ring instead of a solid dot means **want to go** rather than been.

One row, explained

Here is a single row from the starter sheet, with what each part is doing. Nothing here is required except the first three — this is just what a fully filled-in place looks like.

name	Great-grandma Alma's homestead	The popup's title.
lat	41.6005	From right-clicking the spot in Google Maps.
lon	-93.6091	Negative, because it is west of Greenwich.
category	Family history	Invented on the spot. Becomes a filter.
tier	Wanderer	A blue pin. Off the beaten path.
status	been	A solid pin rather than a hollow ring.
region	Iowa	Shades Iowa in the states view.
date	1911	Feeds the year filter. A bare year is fine.
who	Alma, Peter	Puts two more names in the people picker.
rating	5	Five stars in the popup.
story	The quarter-section they proved up on after arriving from Norway. The barn foundation is still there in the field.	The reason the pin exists.

What the map can do

All of this is driven by the columns you fill in — fill in more, get more. The filters stack, so you can ask for something quite specific: everywhere Dale went in Utah in 2019 that you would rate four stars.

Been / Want to go / All	Flip between where you have been and where you are going.
People picker	Show everywhere one person appears.
Filters	By category, state, county, year, rating, and whether a place has a story or a photo.
States and Counties shading	Colour regions by how many places you have in them. The coverage view.
Four base maps	Light, Detailed, Terrain, and Satellite, from the control at top right.
Story popups	Date, who was there, your paragraph, a photo, stars, and a link to the full write-up.
Works on a phone	Which is where you will actually use it, standing in the place.

No sheet, no problem. Open the map with nothing after the address and you get a demo set of real Utah places, so you can click around before committing to anything.

If something is not working

The map is empty, or shows the demo places instead of mine

Nearly always the sheet address. It has to be the one from **Publish to web** ending in **output=csv** — not the address in your browser's bar while the sheet is open. The two look similar and behave completely differently. Go back and re-copy it from the Publish to web box.

A place is missing, or landed in the ocean

Check that row's **lat** and **lon**. A row with no coordinates is skipped quietly. A pin off the coast of Africa means one of the two is blank or zero. A pin on the wrong continent usually means the two got swapped, or the minus sign is missing from the longitude.

I edited the sheet and nothing changed

Give it a few minutes and refresh. Google caches published sheets briefly. If it still has not moved, check you edited the sheet you actually published, and not a copy of it.

My photo does not show up

The **photo** column needs a direct link to an image file — one that ends in .jpg or .png and shows just the picture when you paste it into a browser. Share links from Google Photos, Dropbox, and iCloud point at a viewer page rather than the image itself, so they will not load.

The commas in my story broke the row

They will not, in Google Sheets — type freely, commas and all. This only bites if you are hand-editing a CSV file in a text editor, in which case wrap the text in "double quotes".

Going further

Full write-up pages

The **link** column can point at a proper page — a photo gallery and a longer story for one trip — so the popup stays short and the detail lives elsewhere. Any web address works.

Adding pins from your phone

There is an Add a place mode for capturing a spot while you are standing in it. It needs a small script connected to your own sheet, so the map can write back to it. Without that, the map only ever reads. Get in touch through the website if you want this set up.

More than one map

Nothing is stored in the page itself, so one sheet is one map. Make a second sheet for a different subject and you get a second map from the very same link, just with a different sheet address on the end. Camping in one, family history in another.

Places Map is free, and made by Jan R. Long.

The guide, the map, and the starter sheet all live at janrlong.com/places