

YOUR FIRST CARAVAN HOLIDAY:

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW



**20 TOP
TIPS**

from the Camping and Caravanning Club
to help that first outing go smoothly

So you've bought a caravan, it's a safe and legal match for your tow car and suitable for your driving licence, plus you got a great deal on accessories and an awning. Congratulations and welcome to our wonderful pastime. However, if you still have a nagging doubt that you're not 100 per cent sure what to do with your new toy on a campsite – you're worried that maybe you've got all the gear and no idea – read on for everything you need to know for your first caravan adventure but were afraid to ask.

01 LOAD IT SAFELY



Remember that everything you put inside the caravan counts towards its payload – that is, the weight of every item loaded into it – and its overall weight. Don't exceed your caravan's maximum technically permissible laden mass – the most it can legally weigh, stamped on its weight plate or in its handbook – and ensure the caravan doesn't exceed your car's kerbweight. Consider weighing the caravan fully loaded at a weighbridge. When loading it, ensure heavy items are stowed low down over the axle, mid-weight items are stowed forward or rear of this and lighter gear is stored higher up.

Watch: bit.ly/loadcaravan

02 FIT EXTENSION MIRRORS



Once you've hitched up safely, attached your breakaway cable and towing electrics, secured your jockey wheel and released the caravan brake, got someone to check the road lights are working at the rear of your caravan and your number plate is still attached, don't forget to fit and correctly adjust your towing mirrors so you can see down the sides of your caravan. And why not check one last time that all the leg steadies are raised and the windows and rooflights are closed.

Read: bit.ly/prejourney

Watch: bit.ly/towingmirrors

03 KNOW BEFORE YOU TOW

Know your towing speed limits: cars towing caravans are restricted to 50mph on single carriageways, and 60mph on dual carriageways and motorways. Plan in breaks – towing requires more concentration than driving solo, so it's more tiring. Be prepared to pull over into a safe lay-by and let traffic pass on single carriageways if a queue is building behind you. And don't forget that you can't drive in the right-hand lane of a three-or-more lane motorway unless you are instructed by someone with authority to do so.

Read: bit.ly/Towing-Caravans

04 CHECK YOUR VITAL STATS

We've mentioned the importance of knowing your caravan's weight, but it's also important to know its height and width dimensions too – you'll find these figures in your caravan handbook, or on the manufacturer's website. Don't leave it to guesswork as you tow your caravan toward a low bridge or height barrier.

05 GO LOCAL FIRST

Towing a caravan isn't hard, and it gets easier with practice. Visit a local campsite on your first outing and ensure your tow car's fuel tank is full enough to avoid having to refill with the caravan hitched up to the tow car. Fuel stations can be daunting with a caravan in tow. Also, once the caravan is pitched on the campsite you can always nip home again if you find you've forgotten anything.

06 CHECK THE DIRECTIONS



You might be used to following your satnav to every destination, but that's a bad idea when you're towing – regular satnavs won't take into account road height or width restrictions that may pose a problem. Campsite postcodes can cover large areas in rural districts and you could find yourself on the wrong side of a valley. That's why many campsite guides include 'caravan-friendly' directions.

Read: [#21 Towing: safe for the road](https://myccc.co.uk/datasheets)

07 PITCH SMART ON SITE



Is your pitch flat and level? You may need a ramp and chocks – to stop the wheel rolling back – under the caravan wheel if one side is lower than the other. It's easier to do side-to-side levelling using the tow vehicle. If you reverse your caravan on to the pitch, be sure to pull the car forward a foot or so before unhitching, to re-engage the caravan's brakes and to release the hitch head compression, which could otherwise damage your car's bumper when it's unhitched. Apply the handbrake, lower the jockey wheel and unhitch. Adjust the level of your caravan front and rear with the jockey wheel and lower your corner steadies. If you are on a slope, you may need blocks for the steadies. Remove your towing mirrors.

Read: bit.ly/choosingpitch

08 SORT YOUR SET UP



Connect the mains power cable to your caravan's inlet, then unravel the lead fully and plug the other end into the onsite electric bollard. Check the residual current device (RCD) in your caravan is working – this is usually under a sofa box or in a wardrobe. Turn on the main switch at the caravan's control panel. Turn on the fridge, collect fresh water with your fresh water container and position your waste water container at the caravan's drain outlets.

Prime the toilet cassette with chemicals. Turn on the gas at the cylinder and check it's coming through by lighting a burner on the hob. Plug in a device – such as your mobile phone – to check the mains electric is working.

Read: bit.ly/pitchingup

09 DON'T BE A CURRENT HOG



Remember, you're not at home on mains electric when you're on a campsite. Your hook-up bollard will be rated, for example at 10A or 16A. You'll need to consider this when you're using electrical appliances. Amps equals watts divided by volts. If you have an 800W microwave oven, and a 230V supply, it will draw 3.5A when you use it. If you use it at the same time as your 750W camping kettle drawing 3.3A, 1500W hair dryer drawing 5.2A and 2000W fan heater drawing 8.7A, you'll trip the circuit and lose your supply of electric.

Read: [#30 Electricity](https://myccc.co.uk/datasheets)

10 AWNINGS MADE EASY



Caravan awnings are great – they can double the dry space you have available on your pitch on site. But putting them up takes a bit of practice. It's best to put up an awning with its side panels in place, but if it's breezy take the panels out first to avoid fighting large areas of wind-blown fabric or damaging the awning or 'van.

Watch: bit.ly/fittingawning

11 DISPLAY CAMPSITE ETIQUETTE

Don't take a short cut across a neighbour's pitch to get to the washblock – it's like walking through someone's garden without permission.

Noise travels on a campsite and you can hear everything – there's nothing worse than other people's loud music or car doors slamming late at night.

Observe quiet times between certain hours, such as late at night and early in the morning. And don't forget to be friendly toward your fellow campers and caravanners. After all, we are the Friendly Club.

12 FOLLOW THE CAMPSITE'S RULES



Many campsites will ask you to keep dogs on a lead and clean up after them, play ball games away from other people's caravans in a dedicated area, and arrive or depart within certain time frames. It's good form to check the rules and follow them.

Plus, be sure to stick to the speed limit on campsite roads, for the sake of kids and other campers – this is 5mph on Camping and Caravanning Club Sites.

13 BE WATER WISE



It's not good practice to let your caravan's grey water – that is, water from showers or washing up – empty straight from your van onto the pitch.

All grey water should be collected in a suitable container and emptied at the designated disposal drain point, normally near the fresh water supply taps. Observe the signage – if a tap and drain have grey- or fresh-water only signs, try to ensure you and your family observe them.

14 EMPTYING MADE EASY



Non caravanners imagine this one task ruining holidays, but emptying a cassette toilet is really not that bad, providing you've used the correct chemical dosages.

Campsites have chemical disposal points, and they vary in quality and upkeep. They'll usually have flush facilities, so be sure to use them after you've emptied your loo, and leave it as you'd like to find it. Never empty a cassette toilet at a grey or fresh water point.

Watch: bit.ly/caravantoilet

15 CONSIDER THE CONDITIONS



If you can avoid driving on wet grass and either churning it up or getting yourself stuck, then it's best to do so.

If in doubt, it's a good idea to get out and walk on the grass before driving on to it. Is it very spongy underfoot?

If you're on a grass pitch for a number of days, and it's dry on arrival, consider parking your tyres on grip mats in the event of it being soggy when you plan to pack up and leave at the end of your holiday.

16 TV AERIAL TIP



If you can't get a signal on your TV, and don't know where to line up your aerial to pick one up, take a look at the aerials on buildings or on other caravans around you.

You don't need to worry about a separate TV licence either as you are covered by your home TV licence while caravanning. Some sites have poor terrestrial aerial TV signals, so consider fitting a satellite dish.

17 KEEP IT CLEAN



When it comes to toilet, showers, washing up basins or laundry, leave the campsite's facilities, for the next camper, as you'd expect to find them.

Similarly, respect the local wildlife that may visit your campsite and even your pitch. Don't feed wild animals in the area and stow all food securely, so as not to attract any wild animals to the area.

18 CARAVANNING WITH KIDS



Campsites are great for kids to let their hair down and explore the great outdoors, but they should be supervised, and taught campsite etiquette too.

Get them to play in designated areas and to be conscious of other campers who may be trying to enjoy a bit of peace and quiet. Parents should know where their kids are on site and what they're up to at all times.

19 DON'T BLOCK THE VIEWS



Most sites have dedicated pitches, and will allocate them for you. But some campsites don't.

Do not set up camp on top of your neighbours: maintain a respectful six metres from their pitch and try not to obscure other campers' views.

There is nothing worse than coming back to your campsite after a day out to find a new arrival has invaded your space and blocked your sea view.

20 LEAVE NO TRACE



Use the correct bins on site. There will often be designated areas for disposing of different types of rubbish and recycling.

Don't leave full bin bags on your pitch, for someone else to deal with, when you leave. When you pull away from your pitch at the end of your caravan holiday, be sure to stop and take one last look.

Don't leave behind rubbish, and double check for camping pegs, which can wreak havoc when the grass is cut for the next camper.