

YOUR FIRST MOTORHOME OR CAMPERVAN 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 motorhome or campervan that's 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 motorhome adventure but were afraid to ask.

01 LOAD IT SAFELY



Remember that everything you put inside the motorhome, including passengers, counts towards its payload and overall weight. Don't exceed your motorhome's maximum authorised mass – the most it can legally weigh – stamped on the converter's weight plate. Consider weighing it fully loaded at a public weighbridge for peace of mind.

Ensure all passengers are in designated travel seats and wearing three-point seatbelts and that anything inside the vehicle that can fall over or move about is secure.

Don't put heavy items in high lockers – they could burst out when you round a corner, or have to change lanes suddenly on the open road. Remove grill pans and microwave oven plates, and place a tea towel or other damper under the lid of your hob if your motorhome or campervan has one – in time you'll become a dab hand at locating and reducing the squeaks and rattles from the living quarters when you drive.

Read: myccc.co.uk/datasheets, #26 Safe for the road

02 KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Know your motorhome's height and width dimensions – don't leave it to guesswork as you approach a low bridge or height barrier. Put a label on your sun visor as a reminder. If your mirrors won't go through a gap, the rest of the vehicle won't either. Also, brush up on speed limits for your motorhome – for heavier motorhomes, speed limits are not the same as for passenger cars. Motorhomes with an unladen mass of more than 3,050kg are restricted to 50mph on single carriageways, 60mph on dual carriageways and 70mph on motorways. Plan in regular breaks for longer motorhome journeys – driving a high-sided motorhome requires more concentration than driving a passenger car, so it's more tiring. Look out for overhanging branches or signs and for pronounced cambers in the road.

Read: bit.ly/Safetyonthemove



03 GET READY TO HIT THE ROAD



If you have a three-way fridge, switch it to 12V to keep the contents cool while in transit. Before you hit the road, double check that rooflights, windows and doors are shut properly. Ensure that external locker doors and any flaps covering your electric hook up or barbecue points are fixed in place. Check your road lights are clean and working, and your tyres are properly inflated.

Read: bit.ly/MotorhomeChecklist

Watch: bit.ly/MotorhomeTyres

04 GAS BEFORE YOU GO

Check your gas – or other fuel source for heating and cooking, depending on your motorhome's type of heating – is full before you go. This is important if you're expecting cold conditions while you're touring. Propane is generally the most appropriate gas for the UK. There are several dedicated devices on the market to measure gas levels in a bottle, or you can weigh the cylinder on a set of bathroom scales.

Read: myccc.co.uk/datasheets, #30 Gas for motorhomes

05 GO LOCAL FIRST

While you hopefully had a thorough handover when you bought your motorhome or campervan, it's worth going to a local campsite – or even staying overnight in it on your driveway if you have one – to get used to all the different features and controls.

Check that the vehicle's lights in its living quarters, hot and cold water, heating and fridge are working as they should. Practice setting it up for day and night time use, and settle on where you'll store loose items and bedding while travelling.

Read: myccc.co.uk/datasheets, #17 Ready for the road

06 CHECK THE DIRECTIONS



You might be used to following your satnav to every destination, but that's a bad idea when you're driving a motorhome as regular satnavs won't take into account the extra weight, width and height. Always refer to the site's own motorhome-friendly directions, detailing approach roads or routes to avoid. Consider taking a Club Motorhome Course to help build your confidence behind the wheel.

Read: bit.ly/Confidentmanoeuvring

07 PITCH SMART ON SITE



Is your pitch on the campsite flat and level from side to side and front to back? You may need a levelling ramp under one or more wheels, and a wheel chock to stop the wheel rolling back down the ramp.

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 motorhome or campervan's tyres on grip mats in the event of it being soggy when you plan to leave.

Read: bit.ly/MotorhomePitch

08 WHAT ABOUT WATER

If your motorhome has a fresh water tank, it's smart to travel with it empty. A litre of water weighs 1kg, which eats into your payload and potentially impact your motorhome's on-road stability. Take onboard fresh water at the campsite motorhome service point on arrival. Be sure to use a clean, food-grade hose that fits your van's fresh water inlet point, and do this before setting up on the pitch, unpacking your camping chairs and putting the kettle on.

If it's a campervan without fresh or waste water tanks built in – whether onboard or underslung – collect the fresh water in a container and set up your waste water container to collect grey water from your van's outlets on the pitch. Empty this at the designated disposal drain point normally near the fresh water supply taps.

09 SORT YOUR SET UP



Connect the mains power cable to your motorhome or campervan's inlet, then unravel the lead fully and plug the other end into the onsite electric bollard, not the other way round. Check the residual current device (RCD) in your van is working, and check the fridge is turned to electric.

Prime the toilet cassette or portable toilet 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. If you're hooked up but there's no power to your appliances and sockets inside the van, check the hook-up bollard's consumer unit hasn't been tripped – reset it if it has. If that doesn't work, check your van's consumer unit hasn't been tripped and reset it. Do consider why it has tripped, such as excessive current draw, before you reset it.

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

Watch: bit.ly/MotorhomeSetup

10 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 camping kettle, and a 230V supply, it will draw 3.5A when you use it. If you use it at the same time as your 750W toaster 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 electricity.

Read: myccc.co.uk/datasheets, #30 Electricity

11 AWNINGS MADE EASY



Awnings are great – whether yours is a wind-out canopy awning, driveaway awning or static awning, they can double the dry space you have available at your pitch on site.

For the driveaway and static types, 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 motorhome.

Read: myccc.co.uk/datasheets #7 Choosing an awning

12 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. After all, we are the Friendly Club.

13 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 motorhomes and campervans 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.

14 BE WATER WISE



Be sure to empty your waste water regularly – otherwise it may begin to smell after a few days. It's poor form to let your motorhome or campervan's grey water – that is, water from showers or washing up – empty straight from your van on to 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. If a tap and drain have grey- or fresh-water only signs, ensure you and your family observe them. If you have onboard tanks, drive to a motorhome service point and empty it there, or collect it in an onboard tank or external container and empty it at a grey water drain. Be sure to close the 'van's drain valves again after you've emptied it, or you'll be emptying the last bits on the campsite's roads as you drive.

15 EMPTYING MADE EASY



Non-campers imagine this one task ruining holidays, but emptying a toilet cassette or portable 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

16 STAY ON TOP OF SECURITY

Most motorhomes will have an immobiliser fitted and some have alarms. Make sure you know how to use these, especially at night if you don't want to sound the alarm when nipping out to the facility block.

If you are concerned about theft, especially of an older vehicle, consider using a visible mechanical lock and wheel clamp. These will act as a deterrent to a would-be thief.

Read: myccc.co.uk/datasheets, #14 Keeping it secure

17 KEEP IT CLEAN



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

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 CAMPING 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 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.