

# YOUR FIRST TRAILER TENT

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW



**20 TOP  
TIPS**

from the Camping and Caravanning Club  
to help you start out with a trailer tent



So you're thinking about buying a trailer tent. You've heard they can give plenty of space but can be cheaper, lighter weight, use less fuel and be easier to tow than a caravan - but you've also found there's not much information around to tell you more. Read on for everything you need to know for your first trailer tent adventure, but were afraid to ask.

## 01 BEST OF BOTH WORLDS



Some say the trailer tent is the perfect compromise between a tent and a caravan. It has many of the practicalities of a tent – a relatively small pack size for the space you get on site, the unique experience of living under canvas and so on – while having some of the benefits of the caravan, including 'off the ground' beds with proper mattresses and other features such as seating, a kitchenette and access to domestic-style 230V electricity sockets (depending on the model).

## 02 A TRAILER TENT IS NOT THE SAME AS A FOLDING CAMPER



Generally you'll find folding campers are more expensive and luxurious than trailer tents, with some being more like caravans or motorhomes than tents. Technically the difference between the two is that a basic trailer tent has to be pegged out whether or not it uses the awning, whereas the cabin of a folding camper can be pitched without pegging out.

## 03 A BASIC CABIN FOR A SHORT STAY



Most trailer tents come in two distinct sections. The bed or beds will generally fold out from the trailer and there may be space for extra canvas sleeping tents under them. This extended trailer forms the base of a self-sufficient camping unit, which can be great for a short trip, such as a weekend away.

If you're camping for a week or two you'll probably want a larger living space, which is where the awning comes in. This large, tent-like addition is zipped securely to the cabin and can double, triple or even quadruple the undercover living space available.

## 04 TRAILER TENTS GENERALLY KEEP THEIR VALUE



In terms of depreciation, trailer tents and folding campers seem to hold their value well. This may be because they are few and far between, but if you look after your camper the chances are you'll get a good price for it if you ever decide to sell.



## 05 SOME TRAILER TENTS HAVE A HUGE ARRAY OF POLES



At the turn of the century some trailer tents had dozens of sections of pole in the awning alone. The 2003 SunnCamp Holiday 400SE, for example, has 48 poles in the frame, some of which have up to four separate sections joined with elasticated cord, making a total of 91 pole sections in the final construction. And that doesn't include the poles welded together to make joints. If you're thinking of buying, ask if you can see the unit being pitched to make sure you're confident you'll manage the process.

## 06 TRAILER TENTS OFTEN HAVE ALTERNATIVE STORAGE OPTIONS



You can keep a trailer tent outside but generally it's better to store it in a garage or similar, to protect it from the elements. Some manufacturers provide kits so you can store your camper on its side or on a wall so it takes up less space.

## 07 REPLACING THE CANVAS ON AN OLD TRAILER TENT MAY BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK



If you are interested in an older trailer tent that has a sturdy trailer but somewhat battered canvas or a faulty zip, companies such as The Canvas Repair Centre ([canvasrepaircentre.com](http://canvasrepaircentre.com)) can repair or renew the flysheet. Prices start from around £70 for repairing a simple tear.

## 08 SAFE FOR THE ROAD

Once you've taken the plunge and bought a trailer tent, remember everything you put in or on it counts towards its final weight on the road. There should be a weight plate on the trailer and you must not exceed the maximum authorised mass (MAM) stamped on it. If it's an older unit without a weight plate then the MAM should be in the handbook. It can be tempting to fill the trailer, strap bikes on top and more but you must not exceed the MAM of the trailer, the capabilities of your tow car or the limits of your driving licence.

## 09 CHECK YOUR SECONDARY COUPLING



If your trailer tent has a MAM of more than 750kg it will need a breakaway cable, which will pull the brakes on if the trailer comes away from the car when you're moving. Lighter trailers don't always have brakes, in which case they must have a secondary coupling - such as a chain - to keep it attached to the car if the hitch connection fails. Either way, make sure this safety feature is in place as soon as you have connected the car and trailer.



## 10 YOUR TRAILER LIGHTS MUST WORK

Once you've hitched up safely, make sure the lights at the back of your trailer tent are working correctly. This includes the brake lights, indicators and the numberplate light as well as the standard red lamps for use when it's dark. It's easier to do this with a helper.

## 11 CAN YOU SEE BEHIND YOU?



If your trailer tent is wider than your car you'll need to fit and correctly adjust your towing mirrors so you can see down the sides of it. And while you're at it, why not take a final walk around the car and trailer to make sure everything is securely stowed? Watch: [bit.ly/towingmirrors](https://bit.ly/towingmirrors).

## 12 CHECK YOUR TOWING SPEED LIMITS

Cars towing trailer tents 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 place and let traffic pass on single carriageways if a queue is building behind you. And don't forget you must not drive in the right-hand lane of a three-or-more lane motorway, unless you are instructed to do so by someone in authority.

## 13 START LOCAL



Towing a trailer isn't hard, and it gets even easier with practice, but it's worth visiting a local campsite on your first outing. It has been known, for example, for campers to forget something vital such as the frame poles. If you're close to home and forget something vital you can always nip back to collect it and won't need to abandon the trip.

Fuel stations can also be a bit daunting with a trailer in tow so make sure you have enough fuel to avoid having to refill for your first few trips.

## 14 KNOW YOUR WAY



You might be used to following your satnav to every destination, but it can cause problems when you're towing. A regular satnav won't take into account width restrictions or single-track roads that might be a problem with a long vehicle. Campsite postcodes can cover large areas in rural districts and you could find yourself on the wrong side of a valley or in the middle of a farmyard. If your trailer tent is small enough to manhandle you may be able to unhitch if you need to turn around in a narrow road, but it's best to avoid the issue if you can. Reversing with a trailer can be a challenge, even with a small trailer. Check for any large-vehicle-friendly directions given by the campsite before you set off.



## 15 QUICK AND EASY SET UP



Once you're on site there are some things to set up, though these will depend on the facilities in your trailer tent. If you have an electric hook-up, connect the mains power cable to your trailer tent's socket, unravel the lead fully and plug the other end into the site's bollard. Check the residual current device (RCD) in your unit is working. This is usually under a seat or in a separate box.

Other things you may need to do include turning on the fridge, collecting fresh water and positioning a waste water container at the drain outlet.

If you have a cassette toilet, you'll need to prime the toilet cassette with chemicals.

Turn on the gas at the cylinder – if there is one – and check it's coming through by lighting a burner on the hob.

## 16 CARRYING YOUR OWN TOILET



Many non campers imagine this 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, which vary in quality and upkeep but will usually have flush facilities. Be sure to use them after you've emptied your cassette 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](http://bit.ly/caravantoilet)

## 17 WASTE



It's not good practice to let your trailer tent's grey water – water from washing up or similar – empty straight on to the pitch.

All grey water should be collected in a suitable container and emptied at a designated disposal point, which is normally near the fresh water supply taps.

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

And when you pull away from your pitch at the end of your holiday, take one last walk around the pitch to check it's clear. Double check for camping pegs, which can wreak havoc when the grass is cut for the next camper.

## 18 CAMPSITE ETIQUETTE



If you haven't camped before, there are some unwritten rules about camping you may like to know. Don't take a short cut across a neighbour's pitch to get to the facility block – it's like walking through someone's garden without permission.

Noise travels on a campsite and you can hear everything, especially if you're under canvas. It's best not to be the one who's waking everyone else with loud music or car doors slamming late at night.

Observe quiet times at night and early in the morning. And don't forget to be friendly toward your fellow campers and caravanners, respecting their wish to keep to themselves if they prefer.



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## TRAILER TENTS HAVE THEIR OWN SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION



The Trailer Tent and Folding Camper Group of The Camping and Caravanning Club welcomes all Club members to its meets and Temporary Holiday Sites. Many of its members no longer own a trailer tent or folding camper, but it guarantees there will always be pitches suitable for those who do, and a friendly welcome, though you may need to take your own toilet and washing facilities. Find out more at [ttfcg.co.uk](http://ttfcg.co.uk).

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## MANY TRAILER TENT MODELS HAVE INCREDIBLY LOYAL FOLLOWERS



Dandy campers are unusual trailer tents with PVC flysheets in the place of the more standard cotton or acrylic canvas. The first was sold in 1965 and in their heyday in the 1980s more than 800 campers a year came out of the Wigan factory. Production of new units stopped in 2008 but you can still buy a beautifully reconditioned one from Riva Dandy Sales ([rivadandysales.co.uk](http://rivadandysales.co.uk)). A while ago we asked Dandy owners to get in touch with stories about their campers for a feature in Camping & Caravanning. We had more responses to that request than any other put in the magazine during the last 15 years.

If a particular style of trailer tent catches your eye, look out for online user groups. You'll probably find plenty of friendly enthusiasts to help you choose the perfect model.



For more information visit: [NEWTOCAMPING.CO.UK](http://NEWTOCAMPING.CO.UK)