

30+ TOP TIPS

for the Aspiring or Newbie CAMPERVANNER

Hi there!

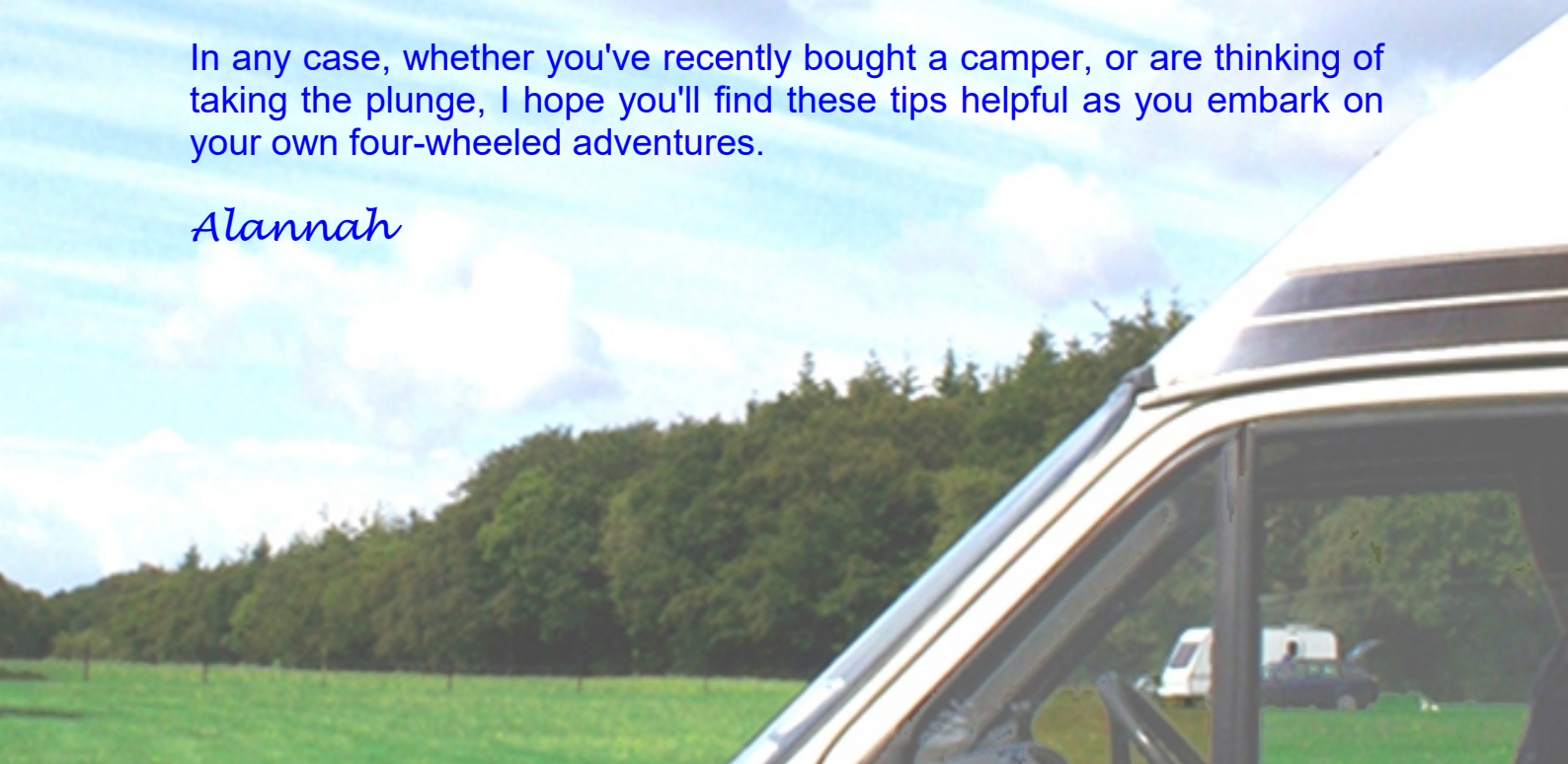
I'm Alannah Foley, author of [Campervan Capers](#), a book based on my first year exploring the world of campervanning with my partner, Steve. Back in 2009 when I had itchy feet, the best way to scratch them seemed to be to get a camper – and along came our old Autosleeper, Bessie.

It was mainly through trial & error that we learnt the ropes. And in this handy, printable 'cheat sheet', I share some of the tips which we picked up along the way. The **30 Top Tips** and **Considerations when Buying a Motorhome or Caravan** are those featured at the end of my Campervan Capers book. I've also included some tips I shared in **Campervan Capers 2**, which is a free ebook version of our 2011 travels, as documented on the [Campervan Capers blog](#).

Since writing these books, we've downsized to a Romahome. And, at the time of writing (end of 2015), we don't gad about quite as much as we once did. Despite this, I hope my writing will inspire a few eager beavers to dip their toes and give campervanning a whirl.

In any case, whether you've recently bought a camper, or are thinking of taking the plunge, I hope you'll find these tips helpful as you embark on your own four-wheeled adventures.

Alannah



30 Top Tips for the Novice

PRACTICAL TIPS

1. **Check systems before going away** – eg leisure battery charged, fridge functioning, etc.
2. **Keep a set of levellers on board.** Not all sites are flat or have hard standing.
3. **Be mindful of your 'van size.** When new to motorhoming, it's easy to forget you're in a larger vehicle. Pay particular attention with height-restricted car parks, and low tree branches and hedgerows on narrow country lanes.
4. **Purchase an aqua-roll** if you use a lot of water. These roll-along water containers are much easier to manoeuvre than portable ones.
5. **Memory foam** can make for a more comfy night's sleep, even in a more expensive motorhome.
6. **An up-to-date map** (or GPS) is invaluable. Even so, follow directions in club directories in preference to your GPS or what seems like a shortcut on the map. These may help you avoid trouble spots for motorhomes and caravans.
7. **Smaller, micro-fibre flannels or towels** take up less space than larger standard towels and can be quickly washed and dried.
8. **Take spare torches** to use on site at night, plus other lighting if you're on a site without electricity.

9. **Invest in clothing** for your trip that's light and fast-drying. It'll store more easily, and because it dries so quickly after washing, the 'van will feel less like a laundry room.
10. **A small, collapsible drier** is useful not only for drying clothes but also for airing duvets and blankets – great for 'van freshening on longer trips.
11. **Take a bicycle (pedal or rechargeable electric) or use local bus services** if you have a larger motorhome – save on parking fees and avoid problems finding suitable parking in town.
12. **Consider the advantages and disadvantages of awnings.** Plus side: they offer shelter, an extra room, and are useful for wet gear. Down side: they take time and effort to put up and down, and you should (ideally) air them out or clean them ASAP thereafter. Sites may charge for awnings.
13. **If you have a smaller vehicle or want to simplify** your packing, ask if you *need* or *want* items. Do you really need many entertainments? Or will they detract from your holiday explorations?
14. **Research cheaper fuel stops** on the internet to save money.
15. **Budget for inevitable parking fees** while you're away and keep plenty of change handy. Free parking may be available, but you might have to search for it.
16. **Check gas bottle levels** before going away. If low, buy a spare or research stockists to visit en route.



17. **If buying a larger caravan or motorhome**, ensure you're happy and confident driving it, especially down narrower lanes. Special courses exist to learn how to manoeuvre them correctly and safely.
18. **Shop around for insurance and breakdown cover.** If you're a motorhome club member, get a quote from their affiliates. How do they compare with other quotes?

GETTING THE MOST out of your HOLIDAY CHOICES

19. **Think differently about your holidays** now that you have a motorhome. Why not have more, shorter breaks away instead of the usual one or two longer holidays a year?
20. **Make a list of your interests and places** you'd really like to visit. Refer to your list often and use it to guide your holiday choices.
21. **For a quieter or cheaper holiday**, go away in low or mid season. High season will be more expensive and sites will be busier.
22. **Out of season, check opening times** before you go if you're intent upon visiting a certain tourist destination. Some open for only a few days a week. Others change routine or close altogether.
23. **Use the internet to compare sites**, get a feel for them, and to match your needs to the site details. If you definitely want to stay on a site at a given time, verify availability and confirm prices beforehand.

24. **Out of high season**, you may not need to pre-book a site. Great news if you like to travel where the wind takes you. Still, a word of warning: certain events held in the otherwise low season might mean accommodation is fully booked.
25. **If you want a less bustling holiday**, there are often sites near the hotspots which are quieter, yet which still leave you within easy reach of the tourist sights.
26. **Membership of an organisation** – eg National Trust or English Heritage – is handy, even if only for a year. Get maximum benefit by basing visits around their destinations – there's often free parking, too.
27. **Consider joining a club** for caravan or motorhome owners. Regular in-house magazines and discounts at their designated sites are just some of the benefits membership can bring.

TIPS for WINTER

28. **Tips for avoiding mustiness in your 'van**: air the 'van when weather permits; remove seat blocks, bedding and blankets, placing them indoors near a radiator; use a dehumidifier or warm-air fan; place tubs of salt inside to absorb moisture.
29. **Keep your eye out for rust problems**. Fix ASAP (especially as the 'van gets older) to keep rust manageable, save you money in the long run, and keep the 'van desirable for when you come to sell it.
30. **Drain the on-board water tank over winter** (unless it's an enclosed, insulated type). If drinking water from the tank when refilled, people are advised to use sanitising tablets to keep the water free of bacteria.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN BUYING A Motorhome or Caravan

BEFORE PURCHASE:

Check the 'van's bed setup. Know the advantages and disadvantages of each sort and choose according to your needs. Try putting the bed together, ensuring you're happy with it, and that all pieces are present and correct.

Consider the 'van's uses. Do you want a motorhome solely for holidays or to double as a work vehicle? How will this affect your choice of size, fuel economy and so on?

Where and when do you plan to holiday? An older 'van will usually be less well insulated than a more modern one. Something to consider if holidaying in colder climes or at colder times of year.

Motorhome shows are a great way to check out a wide variety of campers and caravans, as well as accessories.

Think through your needs carefully before putting down a deposit. A few useful questions are as follows:

- Is it time for you to buy a motorhome yet?
- Can you realistically afford one?
- If so, *what* can you comfortably afford?
- What do you want in a motorhome?
- What do you envisage using it for?
- Do you just want a weekender 'van or will you be going away for longer periods?
- How much space do you personally need?

- Will you be happy with a smaller 'van or do you need more room to manoeuvre?
- Have you got kids – and how will they fit in?
- What is the fuel consumption like?
- Does your health or age require an easy-setup bed?
- Do I want to get a basic check done on the 'van, or am I happy to risk a purchase?

Considerations when thinking of upgrading to another 'van:

- What am I hoping to obtain in the process?
- Do I really need a new one, or can I make changes to the 'van I already have?
- What am I willing to compromise on, and what not?
- What would I be considering upgrading to, and can I afford it?
- List the negatives about your current 'van and turn them around to find out what you're seeking in a new 'van.

Romahomes – some advantages and disadvantages:

On the plus side, they have good fuel economy, are versatile (some with pop-up tops) and, at the size of a small 'van, would be cheaper to run round the country or Europe. Having said that, check you're happy with the more limited storage space if going away on longer trips.

Caravans – some advantages and disadvantages:

On the plus side, you don't have to traipse your living space about, and you can keep your holiday stuff in it whilst running your household vehicle around separately. On the down side, you need to ensure you can reverse them, they are less stable in high winds, and if you want to stop off en route, you need to ensure adequate parking space.

Having a motorhome or caravan is a work-in-progress. Buy a 'van, try it out for a while, and it'll reflect back to you what you'll need in your next 'van. But remember: you *may* lose money by buying without thinking things through.

AFTER PURCHASE:

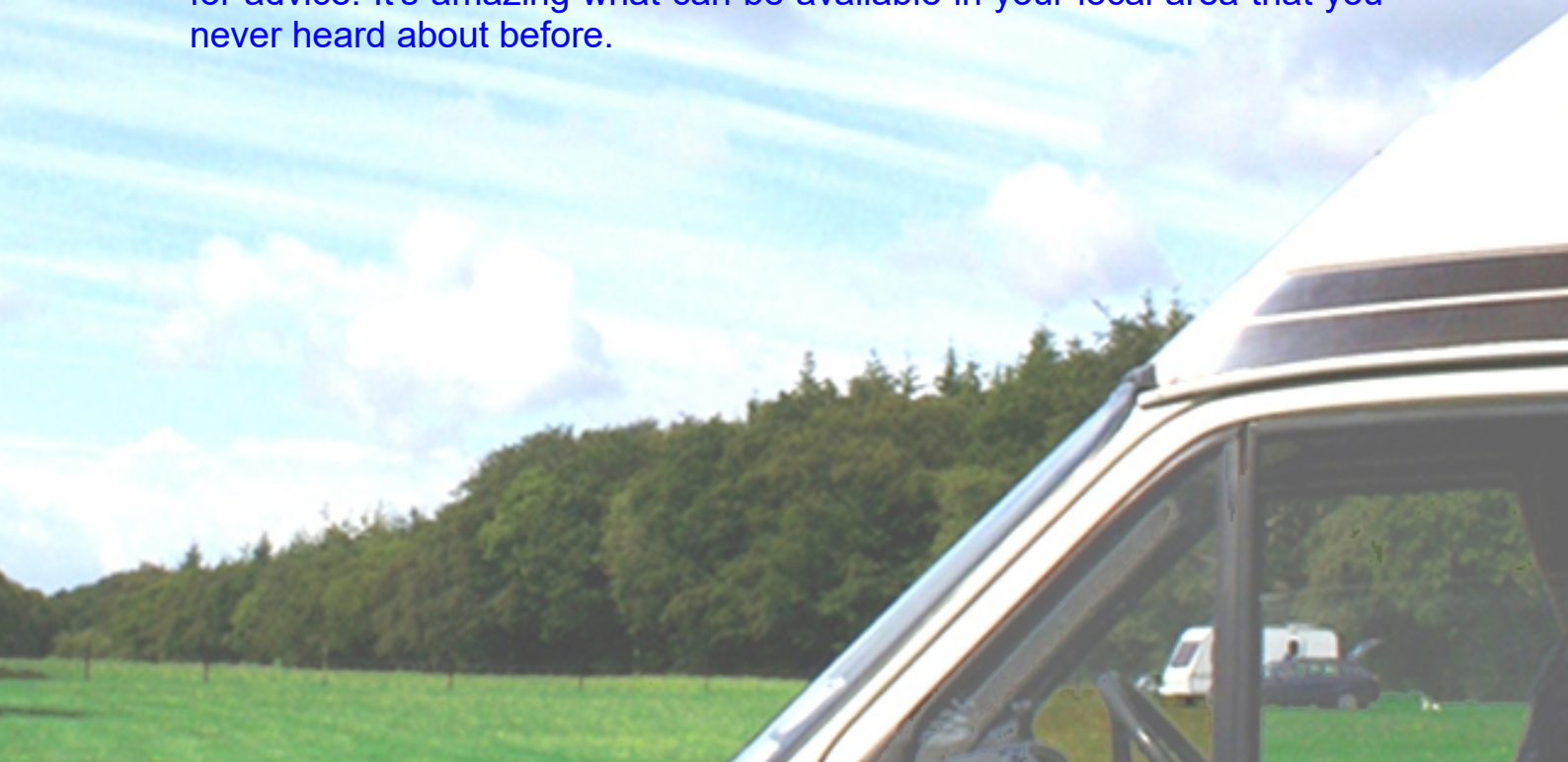
Habitation checks. Done by a qualified specialist, these will give you feedback on the condition of your 'van in terms of its structure, fixtures and fittings.

Mechanical checks. If you didn't get your 'van checked before purchase, why not get a 'health check' from a garage afterwards. This will point out any work that needs doing and you can iron out problems before the MOT comes up.

Get to know your 'van, whether it's new or old. Check out the manual (if you have one) as well as the nooks and crannies. Make sure everything you need for a trip away is present and correct, replacing anything that's missing, broken or faulty.

Fitting a bicycle rack may be an added cost but is well worth it if you or your family cycle regularly.

Check out local outlets that sell motorhome products or do campervan-specific repairs. If you know others with a motorhome in your area, ask for advice. It's amazing what can be available in your local area that you never heard about before.



BONUS Tips & Conclusions

The following tips & conclusions are plucked verbatim from the Campervan Capers blog entries in 2011 (later published as a free ebook – Campervan Capers 2). Although some tips are site-specific, I've left these in, as I find that what you learn in one area is usually transferable in principle to other places.

- Allow more time than you think you'll need to get to your destination, especially if you have a ferry to catch. Although we thought we'd left in plenty of time, we made it to the ferry with little time to spare – and the road directions to the port weren't the most helpful. One of our site neighbours had had a similar situation, arriving late for his ferry, but was fortunately let on to the next one. Had this happened in the peak season, I'm not so sure the ferry company could have been so obliging, however.
- If you think you'll be doing a reasonable amount of travelling and certain attractions appeal to you, such as the National Trust or English Heritage, it's worth considering a subscription, even if you just try them out for a year. A few visits to some of their sites will often justify the annual fee and it's often cheaper paying by direct debit.
- It might seem pretty obvious, but a thermos flask can be a real energy saver when you're away. If you have electricity on site, boil up a flask of water for a quick brew when you're out and about and you'll cut down on gas usage.
- It's worth checking out the weather forecast before your trip, although don't take it as gospel. Consider your destination and pack accordingly. SW Cornwall, for example, can be very changeable, so we took wet-weather gear and layers to guard against the chill winds. It turned out that we needed every bit of 'contingency clothing' we'd packed!

- Considering the site had only the basic facilities required of a CL, we thought the £10 a night fee a little excessive, especially as you can often pay that to get a shower and toilet on some sites. However, we had the site to ourselves and it offered solitude and a return to nature, so I wouldn't necessarily discount going there again.
- If you're travelling along country roads, it's always best to over-estimate your journey time when making plans. Winding about narrow lanes and giving way to, or backing up for, oncoming traffic will slow you down to a certain extent.
- Although we manage quite well in our smaller camper, think twice about navigating country lanes if you are in a larger motorhome or towing a caravan. It isn't always that easy to tell from a map how wide the roads are; and if you meet another large vehicle coming the other way, one of you has to draw the short straw and reverse to a suitable passing place.
- Price of fuel in rural locations can be quite high. If your engine guzzles the fuel like ours does, think ahead and plan where your next top-up point is. We've sometimes looked these up online (e.g. Bing/Google Maps) before going away and we usually use supermarkets where it's cheaper, tying it in with a food shop when necessary.
- Watch out for height restrictions on town car parks. The Exeter Park and Ride we went to had no parking for motorhomes. In the end, we drove into town and chanced upon an appropriate car park. Contacting the Tourist Information Centre before travelling might have been wiser.
- Make sure you have plenty of change to pay for your parking ticket beforehand.



- To avoid disappointment, book tours in advance if you have your heart set on them. The Exeter Underground Passages were fully booked up with school tours on the Friday, but we managed to secure a place the following day.
- It might seem obvious to say it, but take a trip away even if it's only for a day or two. Being out of your everyday environment can be most revitalising.
- Plan ahead with meals. I made up some nutritious, tasty grub before we went away (soup and pasta sauce) and put it in tubs so we didn't have to do much food preparation in the evening. That way, we could make the most of the day and chill out a bit when we were tired later on.
- Take extra wet-weather gear. If it's rainy one day, you can be wearing a dry Mac the next day while the other one dries. Window racks or similar (plus pegs) are also invaluable for drying clothes on!
- If it's in your line of interest join an organisation like the National Trust or English Heritage. Planning your trips around their destinations will give your trips direction and interest. Since we'd visited most of the NT properties in our area, we decided not to renew our membership, but even if you join for a year, you're supporting a good cause whilst getting good value for money.
- Since there is no parking at Tintagel Castle, you need to find alternative parking. We found a spot just before the town which was very cheap. The Pay and Displays in town would probably cost a bit more.

- Rather than take extended holidays, why not go for shorter local breaks and learn something about your area. The money you'd normally spend on fuel can either be saved or spent on a treat and you avoid the hassle of having to load up the campervan.
- For the foreseeable future, we'll be taking our own advice and getting the most out of the campervan by making daytrips. It's a great way of exploring the local area whilst letting the 'van stretch its wheels every now and then.

Well, that's it for now! If you've not long owned a camper, I hope you'll find some of these tips useful and will have discovered some of your own along the way. If you're still thinking about buying a 'van, I hope this 'cheat sheet' will give you some inspiration as well as useful points to consider in order to make a better, informed decision on what to look out for.

By way of a disclaimer, be aware that the information I share isn't meant to be exhaustive, and I don't claim to be any sort of expert. A lot of my tips are commonsense – especially to those who have been in the campervan world for a while. It should also go without saying, but please also use your own discretion with regard to any advice given.

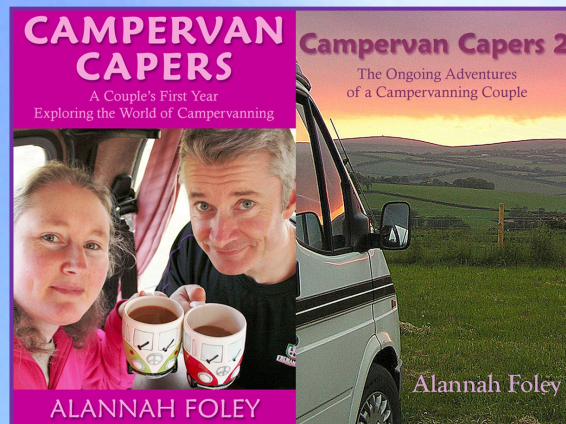
And with that, I wish you all the best and hope you have many safe and fruitful adventures!

Alannah

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To read about our mini adventures, just click for more information on the [Campervan Capers](#) book (available in digital & paperback) and the free ebook, [Campervan Capers 2](#).



Although I don't post much on the [Campervan Capers blog](#) these days, I've kept it up online so that others can enjoy our travel tales. You can also click to check out a whole bunch of our travel photos on [Flickr](#).

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About Alannah Foley... aka 'The Pyjama Writer'

Born in Australia, raised in the UK, Alannah is a writer of both fiction & non-fiction, covering topics as diverse as capers in a campervan, the vagaries of living with an obsessive cyclist, adventures Down Under, and tales 'full of twists, turns & tickles'.

To find out more about Alannah and her other titles, visit her website at

www.thePyjamaWriter.com

And to join her VIP Readers Group and receive her newsletter, visit

www.thePyjamaWriter.com/news-signup

FAUX REVIEWS by PSEUDO-CELEBRITIES for Campervan Capers

Here are just a few of the author's infamous 'faux reviews' of the spurious kind for Campervan Capers...

I go out in my camper to study insects. It's amazing how many different species you can collect on your windscreen as you drive full pelt along the motorway.

David Atinburrer

I used to have an RV back in the great US of A. But then I came to this tiny little island called Britain and read *Campervan Capers*. My God! I was transformed – and bought one of those quaint little English campers instead. Downsizing sure has made me happy!

Tom Crews

Actor, *Mission Improbable*

I heartily encourage a campervanning lifestyle! Getting out onto the open road, it's amazing just how much road-kill you can pick up... And, with a gas hob on board, I can fry up what I find on the spot.

Huw Fern-Leigh-Wit-In-Stall

More reviews can be found at the end of the Campervan Capers book.

N.B. – Disclaimer (To be referred to in cases of acute gullibility):

As denoted by 'faux' and 'pseudo', the above reviews are completely spurious in nature. Although they are loosely based on real-world characters, note that they do not reflect the opinions of any person, whether alive, dead or fictitious. Needless to say, no offence is intended upon the original characters.

To find out more about Campervan Capers, visit

www.thePyjamaWriter.com/campervan-capers