

First-timer's guide to...

Campervan holidays

Read on and ride off into the sunset, with tips from camping expert **Andrew Day**

Campervans are the essence of travel freedom: comfy to sleep in, protected from the elements — and they move on your timetable. Large, deluxe models (ie, the Mercedes Sprinter) even have built-in bathrooms and full kitchens, so you certainly don't have to rough it. Here's how to put yourself in the driving seat...

My fantasy's a vintage VW...

They're beauties, aren't they? But they're 'cosy', even for two. Rental is pricey, cooking facilities rare and there are no bathrooms — but if your heart is set on one, try oconnorscampers.co.uk (three nights from £295). Modern vans are more fuel-efficient and often better equipped: couples will get a better deal hiring a two-berth Toyota people-carrier (spaceshipsrentals.co.uk; from £19 a day); families or groups will have the room to spread out in modern, easy-drive VW Californias (sunshinecampers.co.uk; from £80 a day) or 'Hi-Tops' with extra space in the roof (bigtreecampervans.com; three days from £210). Don't go too large — you need to feel relaxed driving, and for any vans over 3.5 tonnes you'll need a C1 'medium-sized vehicle' licence. Check pick-up location, since you might book a van online and later find you can only pick it up in Devon — not great if you want to go to the Highlands. Can't find a provider near you? Check camperbug.co.uk: the Airbnb of campervans connects hirers with private owners all over the UK.

So where should I go?

The world's your oyster — but if it's your first time, start in the UK, where you're most comfortable driving. Visit coolcamping.co.uk or pitchup.com for reviews of campervan-friendly sites.

I'd prefer to camp off-piste...

It's legal to 'wild camp' in some English and Welsh national parks (see nationalparks.gov.uk for a full list), while in Scotland the Outdoor Access Code permits use of unenclosed land if you follow common-sense guidelines (see outdooraccess-scotland.com). Morning shower a must? Tynecampsites.co.uk lists 75 sites with facilities, while a guide by britstops.com (£27.50) has hundreds of spots where campervans can park free for 24 hours. Most hire companies, including Wild Campers (wildcampers-scotland.com; from £75 a day), allow wild camping, but check your contract as you may have to stay on a designated site.

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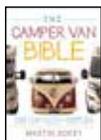
is the length, in centimetres, that a van's built-in bed must be in order for the vehicle to qualify as a campervan in the UK. It also must have a water tank, and a permanently fixed cooking facility.

Any other expenses?

Hire companies make money by selling overpriced insurance add-ons, such as Collision Damage Waiver (£20-plus per day), which covers your excess (usually about £500). Avoid being ripped off by arranging your insurance separately in advance first. Many companies offer campervan cover as an add-on for their annual policies: icarhireinsurance.com can upgrade its Excess Europe policy (£38) to include campervans from £20 for the year. And finally, to avoid sneaky 'per-mile' charges, always book with a firm offering unlimited mileage.



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY



FURTHER READING: THE CAMPER VAN BIBLE

Want to know everything about 'van holidays'? This fun new book by Martin Dorey covers the lot, from camper-friendly recipes to the best Euro campsites. It even explains how to buy a van, in case you're keen. *Bloomsbury, £18.*

Thinking of skimping on van insurance? Don't — even if you don't damage it, someone else might. In 2015 nearly a fifth of icarhireinsurance.com claims came from incidents that occurred when the car was parked and the driver absent.