

The Ultimate Guide to Getting Set Up for a Road Trip Around Australia

Please note: some links in this post are affiliate links which mean that if you decide to purchase I will earn a small commission at *no extra cost to you*. Please see our [affiliate disclosure](#) for more information.

Table of Contents

1. The benefits of a road trip around Australia	7
2. The mistakes we made (that maybe you can avoid)	9
3. Understanding the different types of vehicles	11
4. How to rent a motorhome or caravan in Australia	16
5. How to buy a motorhome or caravan in Australia	18
6. How the camping works in Australia	24
7. How to set up your rig for self-sufficient camping	27
Water	27
Toilet	28
Power	30
8. Being prepared for disaster	35
9. How to keep in touch with friends and family when you're on the road	36
10. How to plan your route around Australia	40
11. How to pack for a road trip around Australia	44
12. How driving in Australia is different to the rest of the world	47
13. How much does it cost?	53
14. How to fund your trip around Australia	60
Ready to turn the dream into reality?	63

So you've decided you're going to come to Australia and travel this great continent by road.

Great idea!

We had the same idea over a year ago, but finding the answers to the many questions I had, proved time-consuming and a little bit frustrating. Though we searched high and low, the answers were all over the place.

So we decided that we wanted to help others; those that are as excited about doing this trip as we were, who have a seemingly insatiable desire to read everything they can about the topic, and who love planning everything that they possibly can before they go.

I mean, if you're anything like me, then the planning, the anticipation, the lining-all-your-ducks-up, is *almost* as fun as the going.

Almost.

But don't get bogged down in the planning.

Sure, do it because it's exciting and helps the time before the trip pass more quickly. But don't wait until you have absolutely everything sorted out.

You can't.

And that's half the fun of a trip like this, the learning and experiencing and changing tack because you discovered something new.

Heads up: this is a loooong post!

So before you start reading, I just want to warn you that this is not a short post.

At just over 16,000 words, this post is the most comprehensive post I've ever written and it covers EVERYTHING I could think of that would be important for getting set up for a road trip around Australia.

I recommend that you use the table of contents to guide you to the sections that are most important to you.

And at the [end of the post](#), I've provided a planning checklist to help you.

DO read this post if you:

- **Want to drive around Australia and will camp each night.**

That may be camping in a motorhome, caravan, campervan or tent and it could be in a caravan park, national park or a free camp.

- **Are coming from outside Australia.**

International travellers, I answer all your questions in here too.

With that in mind, there may be a few times where Aussies reading this article will think, 'well duh, of course you can drink the tap water' but that's not obvious for someone from another country. (Whether it tastes any good is another story.)

- **Are going for 2 weeks, 3 months or heading off full-time.**

DON'T read this post if you:

- **Are after a travel guide of all the things you must see while you're in Australia.**

There is soooo much to see and it all depends on whether you're a city person or a bush person, whether you're into museums or waterfalls, and it certainly will depend on your budget. There is so much information to be found on the internet of all the places you can visit, so I'm not covering that here.

- **Are already travelling around Australia.**

There's nothing new or ground-breaking in here. There's nothing you wouldn't have already experienced yourself, whether by trial or error.

This post is full of the basic information that you just don't know when you're either from another country, or haven't camped in Australia. And if you're on the road already, that's not you.

Let's get stuck in!

1. The benefits of a road trip around Australia

The very fact that you're reading this post tells me that you don't need to be convinced that taking an extended road trip around Australia is a great idea.

You already know why you want to do this. You may want to spend more time with your family, or see more of Australia, or just not work for a while!

But here are some other benefits that you may not have thought of.

Problem solving skills

When you're on the road and something goes wrong, you don't always have the luxury of being able to call someone up to deal with it for you. You have to deal with it, you have to get your thinking cap on and problem solve. You have to reach out to people to ask for help. You have to research a topic you know

nothing about to see if you can figure out what's wrong. You have to try and fix it, and either be pleasantly surprised that you got it right, or learn one way NOT to do it.

And it's not just you that benefits from this, your kids do to.

Have you ever had the time to teach them to fish, or to light a fire, or to dig a hole to go poop? In our increasingly fast paced and electronic world, they often aren't given the time or opportunity to learn tactile skills. When you're camping they can take the time to learn how to light a fire, and practice dozens of times until they're confident.

All of you will learn great problem solving skills.

A new appreciation for nature

How many sunsets have you missed simply because you were inside and didn't realise the sun was setting until it was time to turn on the lights? Or you couldn't see it anyway because you're surrounded by lots of buildings.

We may be a bit cuckoo, but we got so much enjoyment out of simple encounters with the local wildlife.

It was delightful to make friends with a magpie and feed her scraps of meat, and be totally entertained by her as she frolicked around our campsite.

And we felt special with each night that one frog would come and sit on our outdoor table and greet us (okay, frighten ~~us~~ me) as we headed to the toilet in the middle of the night.

Tenacity

If, in doing this trip, you find, like many of us, that a short-term trip isn't going to cut it; that you want to keep travelling around Australia for a couple of years or more; then you need to find a way to pay for it all.

Compromise

I had never thought about 'compromise' as being something that was important for the attainment of my goals. But being on this road trip has certainly taught me that.

Doing this road trip has been a dream of mine for many years. But I thought that I only wanted to do it if I could be in a nice motorhome, with an onboard bathroom, and nice decor and a great solar set-up. And I wanted to do it without having to work or worry about money.

And so it felt unattainable.

But when we decided we're going to do this trip anyway, there was certainly a lot of compromising that needed to be done.

A camper trailer instead of a motorhome, no onboard bathroom but staying at caravan parks and using their bathrooms, definitely no nice decor and an okay solar set-up.

While there was compromise, it certainly felt nice to not be compromising on our dream. For once.

Time

Yes, a lot of people talk about the benefit of time when you're on a road trip. Not only time with your loved ones and time to relax. But time to pursue the things that are important to you. Time to read. Time to create.

Time to discover what's really important to you.

2. The mistakes we made (that *maybe* you can avoid)

When we started on this road trip, we thought that it might be something we'd like to do for the foreseeable future, but we weren't sure.

So we said that we'd try it for a year and then reassess.

We also gave ourselves the 'out', that if either of us didn't like it, we could stop whenever we wanted. No harm no foul.

Well...

As it turns out, we LOVE this life, so a few things have needed to change in the way that we're set up.

Picking the right camper for us

I think it's pretty common, no one's first purchase of a home-on-wheels is the 'right' one. It's not until you've travelled in it, realised what type of travelling you like to do, the comforts that you don't want to give up, and those features that you just don't care about.

You have to take it around with you for hundreds of kilometres, set it up, pack it down, be stuck in it in the rain, sleep in it in the heat, cook in it, eat in it and clean it. Then maybe, you'll have an idea if it's the right type of vehicle for you.

For us, we got it quite wrong. The camper trailer was great for a first-go because it was cheap and light, and it certainly was everything we needed for our first four months. But now that we want to be on the road for at least a couple of years we've realised a few home truths about ourselves. We will happily get a

caravan and sacrifice those hard-to-get-to places in order to have some more comfort, an easier time setting up and packing down... and a toilet.

Funding our trip

We have loved our trip so much that it's made us want to live this life for the foreseeable future.

Six months, well, it was actually more like almost 5 months, just isn't enough time for us to see this country. We don't want to just drive through all these wonderful locations, we want to set up camp and stay for a couple of days, if not weeks. We want to live on the road.

So we have to figure out how we're going to make money. I've got a whole section on 'funding your trip', but in hindsight, it would have been better if we'd had that sorted before we left.

3. Understanding the different types of vehicles

We'll start off with a bang and get straight into talking about vehicles. This will be your largest one-off expense and determines so much about your trip.

We'll have a look at the different types of vehicles commonly available here in Australia and the pros and cons of each.

Just a note for my North American readers, you'll find that large rigs are pretty rare here. You'll be hard pushed to find an RV or travel trailer over 30ft and fifth wheels are pretty rare, but becoming more popular.

The list below is in order of the most popular, widely available and most seen options, to the least seen options. (Based on our own travels around half of Australia. The point is, caravans are everywhere, Class A RVs and fifth wheels are not.)

Caravan

Australia is definitely a caravanning nation (that's a travel trailer to my North American friends). There are thousands of these traversing the country at any one time.

The pop top is also very popular. The little effort required to pop up the roof when setting up camp means that the overall caravan weight is reduced as well as reducing the wind-resistance/drag of the caravan. Which equals cheaper fuel bills.



Pros

- Quick set-up/pack down
- Many have toilet & shower
- Heaps of them around
- Campgrounds are well set up to cater for them.
- You have a vehicle for everyday use
- Many have an air-conditioner

Cons

- You end up with a reasonably long rig which can be difficult in towns/cities.
- You need to make sure you have a sufficiently sized tow vehicle.
- Generally not suitable for unsealed roads.

Motorhome / Class C

You'll find lots of these mid-size motorhomes around Australia. They're a popular choice for renting because they're large enough to be comfortable, but small enough to be too stressful to drive.



Pros

- Everything contained in one vehicle
- Quick set-up/pack down
- Have toilet & shower
- Campgrounds are well set up to cater for them.
- Air-conditioner

Cons

- Generally not suitable for unsealed roads.
- You have to take your house with you wherever you go.

Campervan / Class B

These are great little units; small, compact and having everything you need for a road trip. (Except a toilet, and that's a deal breaker for me.) While many are built on a van chassis like the Toyota Hiace, I would also include in this category, the mini-vans or people-movers like the Toyota Tarago or Honda Odyssey. You'll see lots of these around Australia, the rented ones painted bright, and somewhat gaudy colours, so you won't miss them.



Pros

- Everything contained in one vehicle
- Quick set-up/pack down
- Heaps of them around
- Campgrounds are well set up to cater for them.

Cons

- They're quite small, which can feel even smaller when it's raining outside.
- Don't usually contain a toilet / shower.
- Limited storage space.

Pop-up trailer

These seem to be great for families. With beds at each end, a small kitchen, a seating area and some built-in storage the pop-up trailer is a good compromise between quick set-up and light weight. There isn't too much set-up (well, not as much as a tent anyway) but they're not as heavy as a caravan.



Pros

Plenty of space inside
Light weight

Cons

Set up and pack down time
No bathroom
No aircon

Camper Trailer

Camper trailers are very popular in Australia. They are light weight, manoeuvrable and stand up well to the rigours of harsh Australian roads and 4WD tracks.

They come in either soft or hard floor. The soft-floor are cheaper and allow you to have a large tent space (like ours) which is great for families who need the space for all the beds. The hard-floors are quick to put up and bring the tent area off the ground but it does mean that the inside the tent space is limited.



Pros

Lightweight – can be towed by almost any vehicle
Great for off-road/4WD trips
Plenty of space inside
Low cost

Cons

Set up and pack down time
No bathroom
Hot in summer and cold in winter

Tent / Roof Top Tent

The roof top tent is a design that will not limit where you can go. Quick and easy to set-up, your bed is off the ground (and away from any wild animals), yet it packs up into a compact unit that sits permanently on the roof of your car. This is a great option for serious 4WD enthusiasts, not needing to worry about towing anything and not adding too much height to their vehicle. It's perfect for the person that wants to be outside all the time (except when they're sleeping), because that's where you'll be.



Pros

- Doesn't limit where you can go
- Low cost

Cons

- Set up and pack down time
- No where to hang out if it's raining outside
- No bathroom

Bus / Class A

I do look on these a bit jealously sometimes. With all that space, and huge windows, it's as close to an actual home on wheels as you can get, I think. But the idea of having to drive one of these things make me shudder, and then having to park it! That's why the bigger the bus, the more likely it is to have a car being towed behind.



Pros

- Plenty of space inside – like a small apartment on wheels
- Have everything you need to live comfortably
- Air-conditioner

Cons

- Expensive
- Difficult to find parking/manoeuvring in cities/towns.
- You'll probably need to tow another vehicle for around town.

May be limited on where you can go and sites that you can get in to.

Fifth Wheel

When we set off on our trip we only saw one fifth wheel while on our loop from Sydney to Cairns, Darwin, Alice Springs and Adelaide to Dubbo.

Since we've been in Newcastle we've seen about a dozen in our month in the showgrounds only!



So there are not as many fifth wheels in Australia as there are caravans, but they are around.

While they are large in both length and height, they do look like they could have every mod-con you could want.

There are a couple of manufacturers in Australia but not heaps.

I can't wait till they take off here in Australia and New Zealand and the prices start to come down (I might just be dreaming about that) because I would love one of these.

Pros

Plenty of space inside – like a small apartment on wheels
Have everything you need to live comfortably
Easier to tow (apparently) than a trailer.
Air-conditioner

Cons

They're large
Difficult to find parking/
manoeuvring in cities/towns.
You need a vehicle that is big enough to tow it.
May be limited on where you can go and sites that you can get in to

4. How to rent a motorhome or caravan in Australia

To Rent or Buy?

You've got two options for a vehicle here in Australia, you can rent one, or buy one. There are two main factors which will determine the option that will suit you best.

- How long are you coming for? If it's only a couple of weeks, then it certainly doesn't make sense to go through all the hassle of buying a vehicle. If you're planning on staying for a couple of months? Well then it starts to make more sense financially, if you buy a vehicle.
- The other factor to consider is whether or not you're planning to go off-road. If it's a 4WD drive adventure that you want, purchasing your own vehicle may be best option.

Some of the best views and campsites can be found down the dusty dirt roads, if you're looking to escape the crowds and explore the raw (and often harsh) Aussie outback, then you may want to leave the sealed roads.

Having said that... you can travel all the way around Australia without leaving the seal. Just keep this in mind when you're deciding whether you're going to rent or buy.

If your Australian road trip is a couple of months or less, and you want a campervan or motorhome, then renting a vehicle will probably be your best option.

Just a couple of things to note:

Insurance – particularly for off-road

If you're going to go off the sealed highway (at all!) then make sure you get the right vehicle and insurance package to go with it. It will cost you more, but if anything happens while you're on the unsealed road you could be up for a hefty insurance excess ... and that's if you're lucky enough to still be covered.

One-way rentals

You would need to fly into a main city and pick up your vehicle there. Main cities include: Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide, Cairns or Darwin. But if you're planning on doing a one-way rental, for example flying in to Perth,

driving a rental vehicle across to Sydney and leaving it there, make sure to check out the costs. One-way rentals can be very expensive here in Australia.

Renting a caravan

There are places where you can rent a caravan, but then you'll need to hire a tow vehicle as well. While it can be done, they are not as popular as campervan and motorhome rentals, and you will likely have to do a lot more searching for this. Campervan and motorhome rentals are everywhere, you can easily pick up your rental at the airport making it super easy and convenient.

Guaranteed Buy Back

There are some campervan hire companies that will sell you an ex-rental campervan and give you a guarantee to buy the vehicle back from you at an agreed price. They'll buy it back at approx. 30-50% of the original purchase price, based on when you bring it back (it needs to be within 12 months). You just have to have it regularly serviced.

This option looks like it's set up to appeal to the young backpacking crowd, as I've only seen older vehicles in this category which are on the lower end of the price scale, but there's no reason why it should be limited to the young. ☺

5. How to buy a motorhome or caravan in Australia

If you're going to be in Australia for more than a couple of months, then this option probably makes the most sense for you.

Dealership or Private Sale

In Australia, there are two main ways you can purchase a vehicle, caravan, campervan. By buying from a dealership, or from a private party.

When you buy from a dealership it's less hassle than buying privately. A dealership:

- Will have inspected the vehicle and made repairs if necessary
- Gives you more legal protection because they can only operate within strict laws
- Will handle all the paperwork such as transfer of ownership
- Must provide a history check of the vehicle
- Can offer extras such as warranties and road side assistance

I suppose the biggest turn-off about dealerships for most people, is that you're dealing with professional sales people. While I don't want to tar all used-car sales people with the same brush, many of us have had experience with that one salesperson that made us feel uncomfortable, or duped. Obviously, they're not all like that and there are things you can do to protect yourself, such as getting a pre-purchase inspection.

Generally, the biggest benefit to buying private, rather than from a dealer, is that the seller may have more room to negotiate on their price. That *can* mean a saving of thousands of dollars, but offers less security for the buyer.

Petrol or Diesel

Having only ever bought regular 2WD cars before, I have never considered whether or not I should buy a petrol or diesel vehicle, they've always just been petrol. But once you start looking at 4WD vehicles, there are many that are diesel.

You can get both fuel types, pretty much everywhere around Australia. Personally, I've found that in more metropolitan areas there are fewer diesel bowsers at the gas station. If there are 10 bowsers, then maybe 2 of them will be

diesel. (But then, there are less diesel vehicles in metro areas too.) The more rural you go, the more often diesel is found. I've read that in some of the really remote places, you can only buy diesel, and if you happen to get stranded with no petrol, a passing motorist, local roadworkers or nearby farmhouse, is more likely to have diesel than petrol.

I like having diesel because I feel it's safer to transport, and we have two 20L jerry cans which we carry with us.

Research before you get here

Once you're figured out which city you'll be starting from, start looking for the vehicle that you would like to buy, and follow the marketplaces websites.

These are the websites that I recommend keeping an eye on. The reason why I recommend this, is that it gives you an idea of what types of vehicles are available, the prices, and which types of vehicles sell faster than others. This can help you to get an idea of prices, the condition you can expect a car to be in (at a particular price range) and the availability of different types of vehicles.

[Gumtree.com.au](https://www.gumtree.com.au) – for cars, caravans and motorhomes. Gumtree is probably the equivalent of eBay or Craigslist and both dealers and private sellers advertise on here.

[CarSales.com.au](https://www.carsales.com.au) – for cars

[CaravanCampingSales.com.au](https://www.caravancampingsales.com.au) – for caravans, camper trailers, motorhomes etc

Just a note – I know that for Gumtree, I wasn't able to contact any of the sellers (their contact details were hidden from me) because I was in New Zealand at the time that I was doing all the research. When we got to Australia, Gumtree still thought I was in New Zealand and still wouldn't allow me to see the sellers contact details. A quick phone call to their Helpdesk confirmed that I was now in Australia and they were able to clear my account.

Checks that need to be done prior to purchase:

RTA checks for ownership – by different states

If you're doing a private purchase, then you must do a check of who is the legal owner and if there is any finance on the car. This is easily done online at:

<https://checkrego.com.au/>

Pre-Purchase Inspection

Regardless of whether you're buying from a dealership or a private party, I would still recommend getting a pre-purchase inspection of the vehicle. If you're confident to do that yourself, that's cool, but if you're as clueless as me about all things mechanical, you'll need to book a pre-purchase inspection with a local mechanic or an organisation like the NRMA.

We chose [NRMA](#) , which is a nationwide organisation that does insurance and road-side assistance.

We ordered two pre-purchase inspections through them and found them to be great. It seems that they have inspectors out on the road all the time so once you book they've got a team of people they could assign the job to. For us in Sydney, this meant that we were able to ring up for the inspection and have it conducted within 24 hours. They provide you with quite a comprehensive report (emailed to you) and give you a fairly good idea of what you're getting yourself into.

We're so glad we did this.

The first car we had inspected was, in our inexperienced opinion, okay. It was a good price and there didn't seem to be anything wrong with it. The pre-purchase inspection showed that there were a number of items that would need some serious work in the near future.

The second vehicle we had inspected actually gave a glowing report and we've been really happy with our purchase.

The pre-purchase inspections, while not fool-proof, give a bit of peace of mind for those of us mechanically challenged.

Checklists for inspecting a second-hand caravan / camper trailer etc

I'd like to say that I have a comprehensive checklist for anyone purchasing a second-hand caravan or camper trailer. But I don't, which is pretty much how we ended up with the camper trailer that didn't have half the features that were listed on it's ad. But it was road-worthy and safe, thank goodness.

So I've hunted out some checklists that will help you on your initial inspection.

Camper Trailer Checklist

CamperTrailerAustralia.com.au – [Buying a Used Camper Trailer](#)

[AussieLeisureLoans.com.au – Checklist for Buying a Camper Trailer](http://AussieLeisureLoans.com.au)

Caravan Checklist

CaravanBuyersGuide.com.au

[Big4.com.au - Important Tips for Purchasing a Used Caravan](http://Big4.com.au)

[Outdoria.com.au - Ultimate Guide to Buying a Used Caravan Online](http://Outdoria.com.au)

Campervan Checklist

[Camplify.com.au - Ultimate Guide to Buying a Used Campervan](http://Camplify.com.au)

[RollingSolo.com.au - Killer Checklist for Buying a Motorhome or Caravan](http://RollingSolo.com.au)

Motorhome Checklist

Buying a second hand motorhome becomes a little bit trickier if you're planning on buying privately. When buying privately, you have no recourse should you find issues with the motorhome. From my research, it seems that the sensible option for buying a motorhome is to buy one from a dealer. Unless you're able to do the inspections yourself, of course.

There are companies that will do an inspection for you, however there are not as many as there are vehicle inspectors, which makes sense.

Ownership Costs

Of course, there is always costs associated with owning a vehicle. For any international visitors, here's what you'll need to consider for Australia.

Car registration

Vehicle registration is different in each of the eight states of Australia. But here's the general information:

- Registration lasts for a year
- You may need to have your vehicle inspected (at a registered inspection centre, such as a mechanic) for road-worthiness
- If the registration runs out while you're on your trip, you *may* need to be in the state that the vehicle is registered in, to re-register.
- You are required to purchase Compulsory Third Party (CTP) insurance when you register your vehicle.

The rules and costs are different for each state, so if you already know where you're going to buy your vehicle here are the links to each states vehicle registration information:

[NSW](#)

[VIC](#)

[QLD](#)

[SA](#)

[WA](#)

[ACT](#)

[NT](#)

[Tas](#)

Insurance

Australia is not like the USA where you need massive insurance in order to just walk down the street, but you'll want to have vehicle insurance.

In Australia we have Compulsory Third Party (CTP) insurance which is paid when your vehicle is registered (you can't register without it). CTP is not comprehensive insurance, it only provides the driver cover for any legal liability for injury or death as a result of an accident for which the insured is responsible.

You can easily purchase comprehensive insurance online. When we bought our car, I organized our insurance over the internet (on my phone) while Ben went through the sale process with the seller. By the time we drove off, we were fully covered.

Roadside Assistance

This isn't a pre-requisite of owning a vehicle, but it's a very, very high on the list of 'should haves'. Unless you're a mechanic yourself, travelling with all your tools... and spare parts, then you should have road side assistance.

ESPECIALLY if you're travelling to remote areas. You've got to remember that in some parts of Australia it could be 300kms to the nearest town, and by town I mean a pub, general store and a gas station. Getting a tow truck could cost you thousands and if your vehicle is broken down, you've got no way to tow your home. It gets very complicated, very quickly. Just get roadside assistance, okay?

Options include:

[NRMA](#)

[Allianz](#)

The various RAC is each state:

[RAC](#) (WA)

[RACV](#) (VIC)

[RACQ](#) (QLD)

Once you've got your vehicle sorted, you'll be looking for somewhere to park each night...

6. How the camping works in Australia

I want to talk about camping in Australia, because the type of camping you want to do will help determine the type of set-up you need and any of the accessories you'll likely want.

Caravan Parks

Caravan parks can be found all over Australia. In every city and town and sometimes even in the very smallest of towns that, if you blink, you'll miss it.

All caravan parks will have the following facilities:

- Powered sites – where you can plug into 240V power and water, and drain your grey water.
- A facilities block – with toilets, showers & laundry room
- A kitchen – with basic cooking (sink, stove, fridge, bench space) but many have extra things such as toaster, oven, blender, pots and pans, crockery and cutlery.
- Dumping – so you can empty your toilet cassette or black tank.

Caravan parks can vary widely, from a basic campsite with not much appeal (or grass), to resort-like complexes with multiple pools, childrens play areas, cafes, games rooms and mini-golf.

Private Camping Sites

With the popularity of WikiCamps (an app that lists all the campsites around Australia – see section 'How to find campsites' below) it's been much easier for people to set up campsites on their private property. Since campers will use the app to find their next campsite, the private campsite owners don't need to spend a fortune on traditional advertising. They just list their campsite on WikiCamps and that's it.

This could include farms, lifestyle blocks, the local pub with a big garden out the back or some other business with space out the back.

Since this is not regulated, you will get a huge range of options. It may just be grassy spot down by the river with no facilities, or a powered site with water and access to a bathroom block.

Prices are also variable, it can be quite pricey if you're in a popular tourist area, or it may be 'free' but with the expectation that you will buy a drink and/or a meal in the pub.

National Parks

There are National Parks all over Australia and they provide some of the best outdoor experiences. Each of the National Parks is managed by the state government, so they're all different.

You will find that there is a huge array of camping options, from free camping with no facilities, to fully managed campsites with power, water, dump points and a kitchen.

Some of the National Parks require that you pay a fee to enter the park, and then you pay camping fees on top of that. But they're all different, so search the website of the National Park for each state. These links should get you started:

[NSW](#)

[VIC](#)

[QLD](#)

[SA](#)

[WA](#)

[ACT](#)

[NT](#)

[Tas](#)

Free or Low-Cost Camps

First lesson... you will not find free camps in very touristy areas. For example, if you're travelling anywhere along the east coast, don't expect to find any free camps on the beach. For free camps, you will need to head inland and further away from the main touristy areas and then you'll find HEAPS of free or low cost camping options.

The one caveat I have to not being able to find free camping along the east coast, is rest stops. There are quite a lot of roadside rest stops where you're able to stop for the night. But they're not exactly in scenic areas, can be noisy since they're right beside the highway and may or may not have facilities. Most will have at least a long drop toilet, but that's about it.

Oh, and don't park in designated truck parking areas, these are rest areas for truck drivers only.

How to find campsites

Here are the two most common ways to find campsites in Australia:

WikiCamps

This app is a crowd-sourced database of all the campground and caravan parks across Australia. It shows the details of the campsite, the facilities available, the cost, as well as other information such as whether they allow dogs, local sites to

see and the proximity to other amenities. The value of the app lies in the comments, ratings, photos and updated costs of fellow campers.

The app also shows places of interest, dump points, day use areas and even has a map feature to direct you straight to the campsite.

At just \$7.99 it is worth every single cent.

[Camps Australia](#)

This is a physical book – now I haven't used this myself, but people that I've talked to have been pretty happy with this book. They also have an app which is still only \$9.99. I think that the main difference with the Camps Australia list of campsites, is that they're all verified sites.

7. How to set up your rig for self-sufficient camping

Okay, so now that you know the different types of camping that you can do in Australia, hopefully you've got an idea of the type that you and your companions will want to do.

If you're going to be staying in caravan parks for the duration of your trip, then you will be fine with a more basic set-up; you can use the caravan parks' toilet, shower, kitchen and laundry. You can charge up your electronic devices each night using the supplied power, you can get fresh drinking water and dump your toilet (if you have one).

But if you're planning to do free or low-cost camping then you'll need to be self-sufficient. And that means having access to the following things:

1. Water supply
2. Toilet
3. Power
4. Grey water disposal

Water

When you're free camping you probably won't have access to drinking water, so you need to take enough for you and your travelling companions, for the number of days you plan to stay.

Your caravan/motorhome/campervan is likely to have a water tank already, but consider how big the tank is, and all the things you'll be using that water for such as: drinking, cooking, washing (dishes and people) and the toilet.

In order to extend your stay you'll need to think about ways to conserve water, carry more water or have a way of re-filling your water. This may include things such as:

- Taking navy showers, or no showers, especially if there is a river or lake where everyone can go for a swim. (No soaps in the waterways though!)
- Taking extra water such as a tank in the tow vehicle, water jerry cans, water bladder or even just extra plastic bottles of drinking water.
- It may be that you're able to fill your water containers (e.g. jerry cans) when you're out and about sightseeing and use these to fill up the tank in the caravan.

You've got to remember that in some areas of Australia (i.e. the whole middle of Australia) water is scarce and you need to be mindful of where you're going and if there'll be water.

It's no problem in built up areas, but you'll need to think about this fact when travelling in remote areas.

Toilet

When we first set out on our road trip around Australia, I had thought that an on-board toilet wasn't such a high priority. I figured that if we're free camping with no toilet facilities, then I'd just go in the bush. But not all free camps are out in the bush. Some are beside the highway, or in an open field, or jam-packed with other free campers.

This is where it really comes in handy to have your own toilet on-board.

There are a couple of different types of toilet, that I think it would be handy to know about.

Cassette Toilet

This is the most common caravan/motorhome toilet that you will find in Australia. It's not too dissimilar to a regular toilet, you can have a little bit of water in the bowl, you do your business and when you flush it opens a flap at the bottom which empties into a small holding tank/cassette.

Emptying the cassette involves taking the cassette out (usually accessed from outside the caravan or motorhome) and dumping it into a dump station or in a toilet.



Holding Tank Toilet

These are the most commonly found toilets in large RVs in North America; where the toilet empties in a holding tank (black tank) and can be pumped out at a designated dumping point. These are not hugely popular in Australia, they are around, but cassette toilets are well and truly the most popular.

Portable/Chemical Toilet

The porta potty or chemical toilet is a self-contained unit you can use anywhere. It works on the same principle as the cassette toilet above, but the porta potty comes in two parts with the holding tank or cassette part right under the toilet seat part. You can easily separate the bottom half of the toilet from the top half so that you can dispose of the contents.



The porta potty can be easily moved around (just pick it up, it's not attached to anything and doesn't have any hoses etc) which makes it a great emergency loo. Store it anywhere on your rig and just bring it out when it's needed.

Going Bush

In less populated areas of Australia, it's acceptable to go to the toilet out in nature. However, there is a bit of etiquette involved in this.

Here's some basic tips for going bush toilet in Australia:

- Be discreet. No one wants to see you flashing your bits around and definitely no one needs to see you defecating.
- Number two's require you to dig a hole. Don't just break ground, but dig a decent depth hole that isn't just going to have the dirt blown away.
- Toilet paper – now this is really important. We have a little bit of an ongoing problem with toilet paper being disposed of incorrectly and creating a despicable scene at some of our most beautiful spots. DO NOT leave your toilet paper behind. Don't bury it, because it will get dug up by some curious critter. You have two options:

(a) either put a match to your toilet paper and burn it (although not in the middle of a dry field or during a fire ban!) OR

(b) just put it in the rubbish. Take a little rubbish bag with you and put your loo paper straight in there after use.

It's so easy to do, yet some people seem to think they're exempt from this problem and refuse to dispose of their toilet paper properly. Once you see toilet paper strewn around, you'll know



exactly what I'm talking about, and you'll be as annoyed (and flabbergasted) by it as I am.

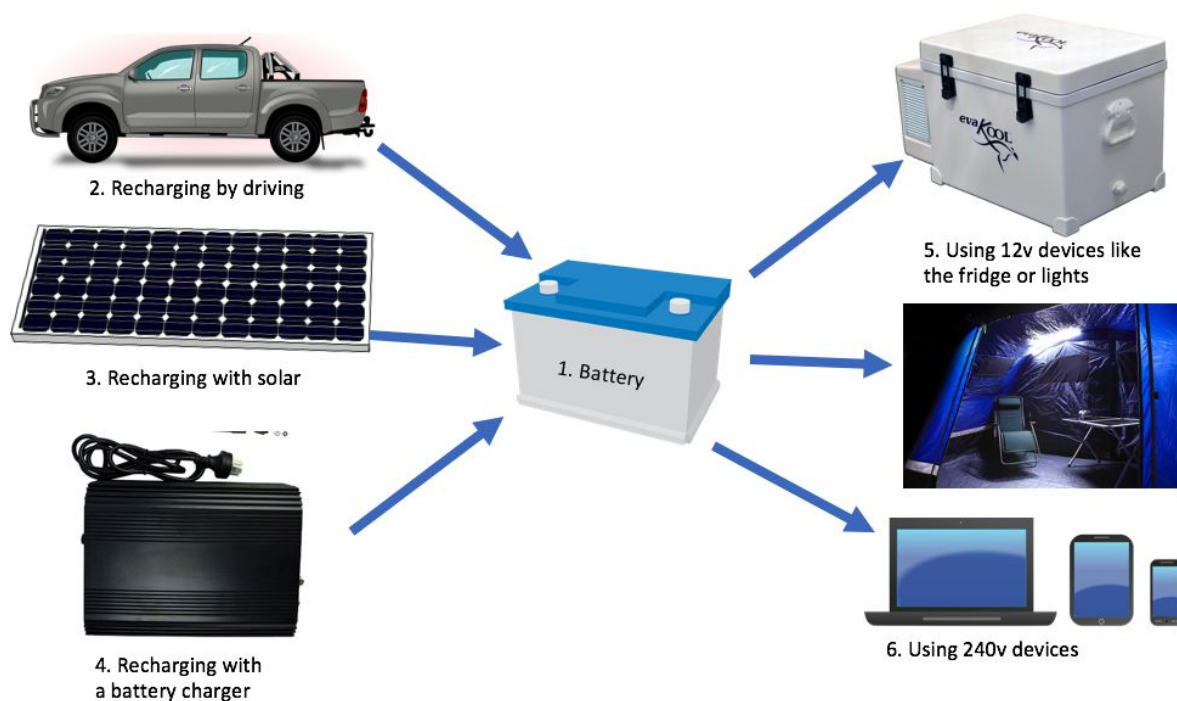
Power

Central to your power solution is your batteries. You'll use them to keep power hungry things going, like:

- Fridge
- Lights
- Electronic devices such as laptop, phone, camera equipment
- Microwave, coffee maker, TV

But you'll need to keep the batteries topped up, and you do this by recharging them by either:

- Charging from the car alternator when driving
- Solar panels
- Battery charger when connected to mains power or a generator



If you're renting a motorhome or campervan, then this is most likely to be set up already. But if not, here are the BASICS of what you'll need.

1. Battery – Deep-Cycle Battery

First question I get is: can you use the battery that's already in your car - the one that's used to start the car - to power everything?

No - you need another battery that is a deep-cycle battery. You may hear this referred to as an auxiliary, secondary, or a dual battery system. This is the battery that will be used to power the fridge, lights, devices etc.



A deep-cycle battery is a lead-acid battery designed to be regularly deeply discharged using most of its capacity. In contrast, starter batteries (e.g. most automotive batteries) are designed to deliver short, high-current bursts for cranking the engine, thus frequently discharging only a small part of their capacity. Thank you Wikipedia.

There are different types of deep-cycle batteries, the most commonly used types in Australia are the **Lead Acid Battery** and the **AGM (Absorbed Glass Mat) battery**.

You may have heard about how lithium batteries are becoming more and more popular as they are more efficient, lighter (in weight) and last a lot longer. But they are also much more expensive so I'm not going to go into them here. If you'd like to read up some more on them, I found [this article](#) gave quite a good overview.

The deep-cycle battery can be fitted under the bonnet of some cars (if they have a space already available) or they can be fitted into the cargo area of your car or in the camper trailer/caravan. It will depend on the type of battery you have and the space available.

What do the different sizes mean?

The battery size is determined by the Amp Hours (Ah) of the battery. If the battery is 100Ah, this means that you have 100 Amp Hours of power available (theoretically).

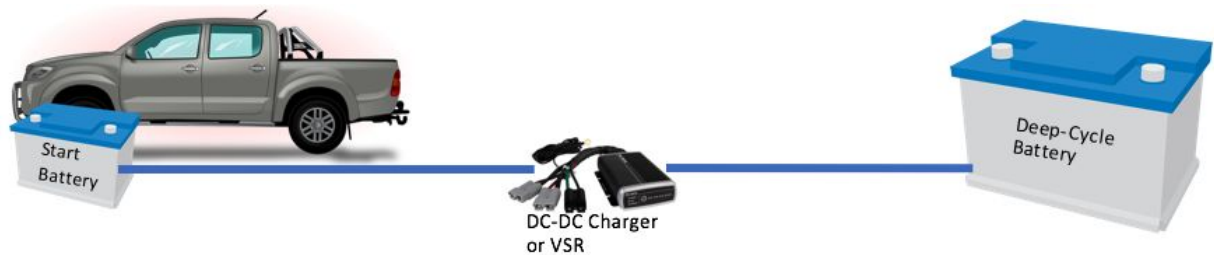
If you have power consumption of 10 amps per hour (for example, you've got a fridge that uses 5 amps of power per hour, lights that use 2 amps per hour and other devices that are using 3 amps per hour) then that means the battery will last for 10 hours before it is completely flat.

Unfortunately it doesn't quite work like that, AGM batteries should only be discharged about 60-80% before you need to recharge them again. But the Amp Hours is a good way of defining the size of a battery.

Now let's talk about how a battery is recharged.

2. Recharging by Driving

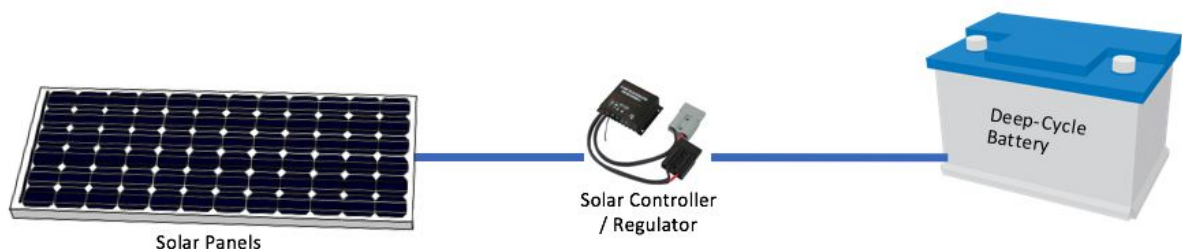
Your deep-cycle battery can be charged by being hooked up to the start battery in your car, which is charged up by the alternator when you're driving.



If you've heard of things like a DC-DC charger or VSR (Voltage Sensitive Relay) these are pieces of equipment that go between your car's start battery and the deep-cycle battery, this is to make sure that the battery is charged enough, but not too much and to make sure that the start battery never gets drained.

3. Recharging with Solar Panels

If you want to recharge your batteries using [solar panels](#) you will need to have a solar controller or regulator between the solar panels and the battery. The solar controller ensures that the battery does not get overcharged.



The size of the solar panels you need, will depend on how much power your devices consume. A set-up with a large fridge, multiple lights and devices will need more solar panels than a smaller set-up. I've found a very informative article on Hema Maps on the [The Basic Guide to Camping with Solar Power](#).

4. Recharging with a Battery Charger

When you have access to mains power, you can also recharge your AGM battery with an AC [battery charger](#). You just plug the charger into the power point and connect it up to the battery.



Battery chargers come in different amp sizes, the larger the amps the quicker the battery will charge. For example, a 10A battery charger will take about 12 hours to recharge a 120Ah battery. Whereas a 20A battery charger will take 5 hours.

Or from a generator – If you have a generator, you can use the AC outlet to plug in the battery charger, and use it just like it were mains power.

5. Powering your 12v devices

Anything that uses 12v can be plugged straight into the battery. This includes things like your portable fridge or lights. You need adaptors or a [battery box](#) that are connected to the battery so that you can plug the cigarette lighter plug into the battery.

6. Using 240v devices – you need an inverter

There are other electronic equipment that doesn't use 12v power, things like laptops, microwaves and toasters. They have the normal plug that you use in your house and run on 240v AC power.

In order to power these devices, you will need an inverter that will convert the 12v DC power of the battery, to 240v AC power for your devices.



The size of the [inverter](#) you buy, will depend on the power consumption of the devices you're running (i.e. the watts). For example, charging a laptop uses less power than running a microwave, so you will need a bigger inverter if you're planning to take a microwave with you.

Air Conditioners

Here's a question that we've pondered ourselves as we've sweated away in hot and sticky Darwin, or fried in the dry, but 40°C heat of Dubbo: can we run an air-conditioning unit while we're free-camping?

From batteries? NO

From a generator? Maybe. I've heard plenty of people are able to run their air-con from generators, you just have to make sure you get a generator that is rated high enough to power your air-con.

8. Being prepared for disaster

These should be part of every travellers set-up, as important as your batteries, or your hat, or your phone, but so many people forget these.

First Aid kit

Make sure you have a suitable first aid kit and check that everything is within date (i.e. not expired) and that you know how to use everything in there.

Have you all taken a first aid course? Don't forget, when you're out in the middle of nowhere (i.e. much of Australia) then you must all look after each other, and that includes having a well-stocked first aid kit and the knowledge to use it.



Personal Locator Beacon / Satellite phone

Consider taking a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) with you.

Having this device with you can mean the difference between life and death, particularly in remote areas. PLBs are designed to be used on land, and are designed to stay with individuals rather than vehicles.

You should make sure that you get one that has GPS as this means it will be much quicker for emergency services to find you. See the [Australian Maritime Safety Authority](#) website for more details.



Another option would be to either buy or hire a satellite phone. While not as cheap as a cell phone, they do mean that you can make calls even when you're out of cell phone coverage. You will find that no cell phone coverage happens a lot in Australia. In the outback, there will be no cell coverage except in towns, and even then some of the small towns will still not have coverage.

Fire Extinguishers

This one is a no-brainer really. Make sure you have a fire extinguisher in your vehicle and in your caravan/camper trailer.

Emergency Contact List

This is a simple, free and easy to do thing that will save you mountains of stress should you have an emergency situation.

A piece of paper that is easily locatable to you and those travelling with you, that has all the important contact phone numbers and details.

Things like:

- Everyone's mobile number - because you may not have memorised their numbers since they're all in your mobile phone anyway
- Phone numbers of close relatives - like parents and siblings
- Your doctors name and number
- Your medicare numbers
- Your car insurance phone number and policy number
- Health insurance numbers

It's simple stuff, but when it's an emergency and your phone happens to be flat, you'll be super glad to have all this info handy.

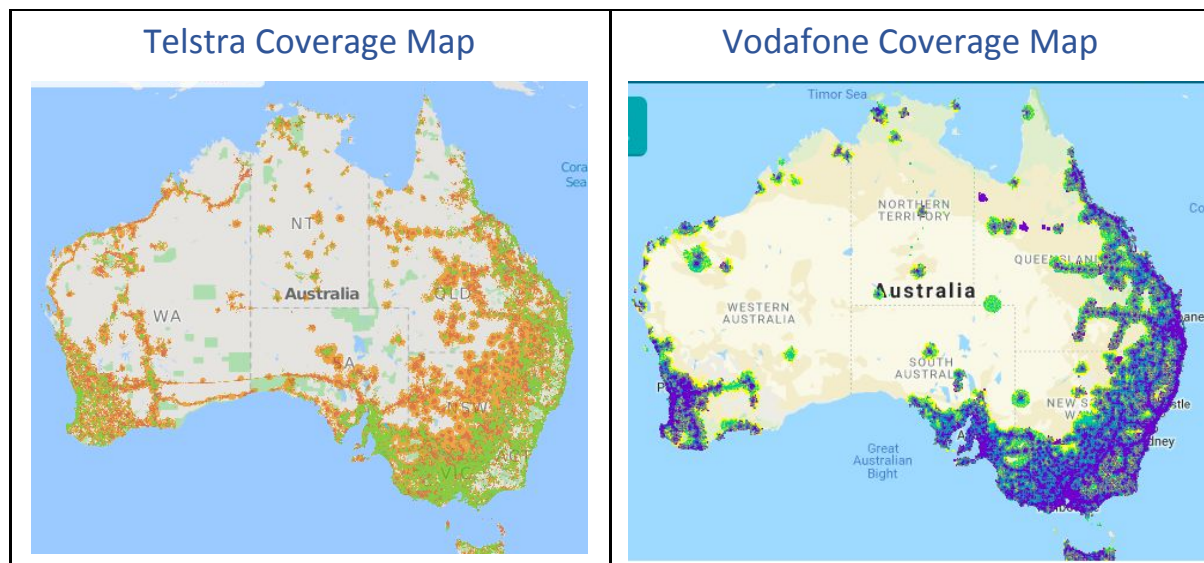
I've got a free emergency contact form template over [here](#) if you would like.

9. How to keep in touch with friends and family when you're on the road

Phone

There are a couple of large mobile phone providers in Australia like Telstra, Optus, Vodafone, Virgin as well as many smaller companies.

Without a doubt, the company with the best coverage around Australia is Telstra. They have the largest infrastructure network and therefore the largest coverage of Australia.



Telstra seem to have a bit of a reputation for not-that-great customer service, but that hasn't been our experience at all. Yes, you're going to get put through to a call centre in India, but each time they've been knowledgeable and able to help out with our situation.

Also, Telstra is certainly not the cheapest, but with the coverage they have (in both cell service and customer service) they really are the best choice.

If you live in Australia already, then you've likely got your phone sorted out already.

If you're travelling to Australia from somewhere else, then you will probably want a prepaid service. The costs for prepaid phone are not too bad... it's data that's the big cost.

Internet

Ahh, the bane and blessing of every travellers existence!

Getting internet in Australia isn't too hard, especially if you don't need lots of gigs and you're not in a remote area. But if you need/want heavier internet usage, things get a little bit trickier, and a lot more expensive.

Here's how you're going to get internet in Australia:

Free Wi-Fi

Free Wi-Fi can be found in all the regular places: shopping malls, airports, MacDonalds, hotels and libraries. Most often this will be capped, so of course this is only good for checking email, social media and browsing.

Hot Spot from your phone or mobile modem

This is a popular, and easy solution. If you're with Telstra you'll be able to get internet most of the time. For those on pre-paid it may be your only option.

To give you an example, when we first arrived I was on a **Telstra Pre-paid Casual Plan** which means that I bought the phone from them and pay a monthly amount but I can cancel at any time. This costs \$80 per month and gives me unlimited phone calls and texts within Australia and to selected other countries (including NZ, yay) and 25Gb of data per month. Extra data is at a whopping \$10 per gig.

Telstra then brought out an unlimited data plan, where you get 40Gb of data and once that runs out, you still get data but it is limited at 1.5mbps. So I swapped over to that plan (**Endless Data BYO Plan \$69**) which locks me in for 12 months. I brought my same phone over to the new plan, so I'm not paying for a new phone. Even though I didn't have a permanent job (and therefore theoretically couldn't get the credit rating for being on a plan), since I'd been paying my Telstra bill on-time for a year that was the basis for allowing me to go on a plan.

The fact that now I've got 40Gb of data is awesome, but when we both ran out of data one month, we still found the slowed down speed to be adequate for our needs. It was just a case of lowering the resolution to view videos and they played just fine.

If you're not on unlimited data, then please take note, you must change your internet habits!

We found that on the road we had to be **a lot** more conscientious of our internet usage. You can't watch whatever you like, whenever you like. You've got to stop going down the rabbit hole of endless Facebook or Youtube videos and make the most of free wi-fi when you get it, buy cheap DVDs from the second-hand shop, or read a book. Seriously, you *have* to get off your laptop / devices for this trip. I think you'll find that it's not hard though, there's so much to see you'll be glad to see how much you don't need the internet.

TV in Australia

I think people who watch TV while their on their road trip around Australia cop a bit of flak for doing so.

I used to be one of those people. :-/

But now that we're on the road ourselves, I totally understand peoples desire to watch some TV.

After a day of adventuring and exploring, it's really nice to be able to relax in the evening, catch up with the news, watch your favourite TV shows and maybe even a movie.

We do exactly the same thing, but we don't have TV, we use our laptops and internet.

Since TV isn't my thing, I'm going to refer you to Free Range Camping who know more about it than me. See their article all about getting a satellite TV kit [here](#).

10. How to plan your route around Australia

So you've arrived in Australia, you've got your home on wheels, you've packed in your clothes and bedding, you've stocked up the cupboards and fridge and you're ready to hit the road!

But which way do you go?

Well, that will depend on a few factors; where you're flying in and out of, the time of year that you're visiting, how long you've got and your bucket list of must-see places. But the main factor that you'll want to keep in mind is the weather.

Weather

Because Australia is so large, it has a wide variety of landscapes... and weather. In the north you have tropical rainforests, in the south and east you have mountain ranges and the centre is one huge dry desert.

So you'll want to consider the timing of your visit to some of these areas.

North

The north of Australia is semi-tropical, making it very hot and humid in the summer (Dec-Feb) and subject to monsoonal type rains and tropical cyclones. The rainy season runs from approximately November to April and can severely hamper travel in the region. Some roads become impassable, being either washed away or totally underwater.

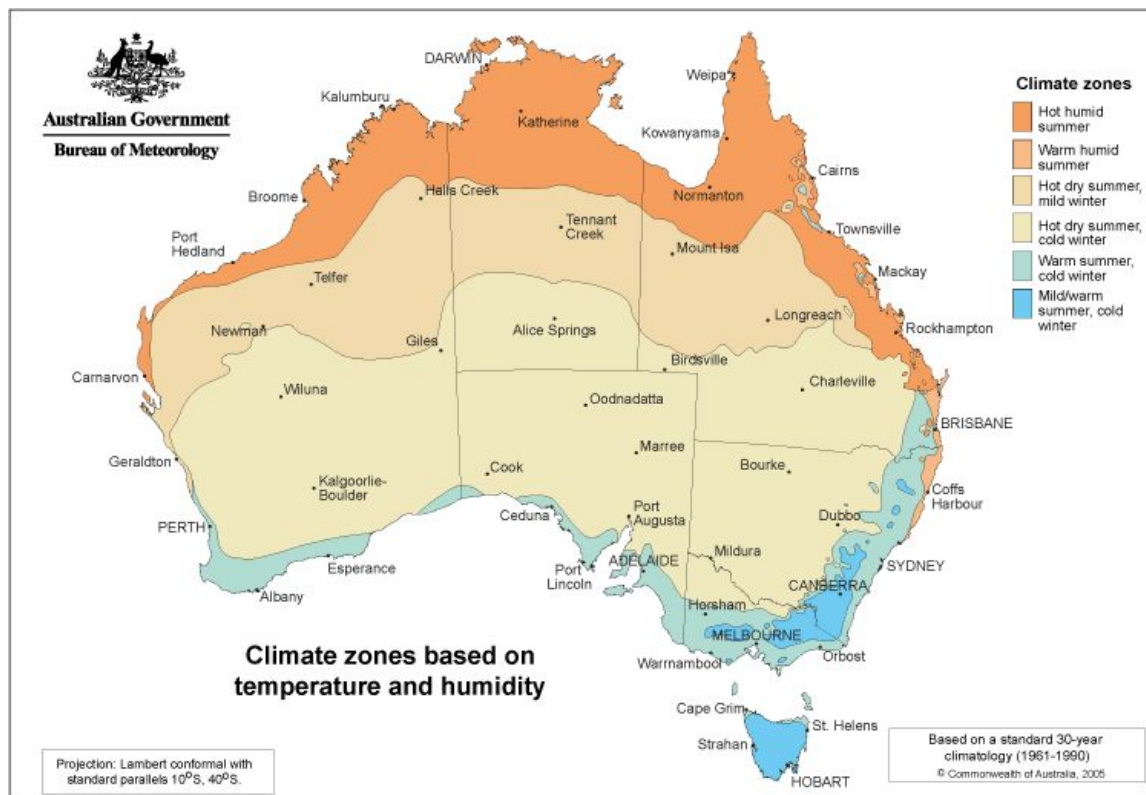
The Middle

The vast expanse that is the middle of Australia is desert or semi-arid. In the summer, temperatures can be in the high 30's to 40°C (104°F) during the day.

The winter months are a popular time to travel to the centre of Australia because the day time temperatures are comfortably warm, but you do need to be aware that at night the temperature plummets and you'll want to have warm clothing and bedding.

The South

A more temperate climate is found in the south-east and south-west regions of Australia. While it's cold for us, it will rarely get as cold as 0°C (32°F) so it's not nearly as frigid as our northern hemisphere visitors would be used to.



[Map Source](#)

Southern Hemisphere Seasons

The southern hemisphere seasons are:

- Summer - December, January, February
- Autumn - March, April, May
- Winter - June, July, August
- Spring - September, October, November

You will find that many, if not most, people travelling around Australia will travel to the northern half and centre of the country in winter, and enjoy the warm tropical weather while avoiding the monsoonal rains and heat of summer.

Then in summer, they'll head back south again where it will still be a hot summer, but not *as* hot.

Shoulder Season

We found ourselves travelling in the north of the country during the spring shoulder season (August/September) and we loved it. While literally hundreds of caravans were heading south as we went north we got to enjoy much less crowded camps but still pleasant temperatures.

Public Holidays & School Holidays in Australia

Being mindful of the public holidays will most likely help you with 'crowd-control' more than anything.

Starting your trip in Sydney? Well you DO NOT want to be picking up your campervan from the airport at 2pm on the Thursday before Easter and be heading north. You will be joined by every Sydney-ite desperate to leave the city limits on their first long weekend since summer.

Sure you could do it, but it will save yourself a heap of stress if you knew it was a long weekend and decided to stay the night near the airport instead.

You can find all the public holidays [here](#) and since it would also be best to avoid school holidays, if possible, here's the link to them [here too](#).

Bucket List items

This is where

Planning the actual route

For our trip around Australia, it was a case of 'head north' and then figure out the rest as we go.

However, if it's a shorter trip, or you have limited time then you might like to plan out your itinerary a bit more.

Online Trip Planners - these are where you can input your start and finish points, and stops along the way, and it will show you your route along with some tourist attractions along the way. I find them to be a little bit limiting, but they can be a great way to start your planning and give you some ideas.

Here's one from the NRMA that you may find helpful:

<https://www.mynrma.com.au/holidays/holiday-finder>

Pre-made Itineraries - you'll find lots and lots of itineraries already planned out for you, if you'd like to go that route. For example, Tourism Australia has some great self-drive itineraries [here](#), that you could just follow these trips and you'll have a great time.

But chances are, you'll use them as a guide for planning your route, taking note of the things they recommend that appeal to you, and ignoring the rest.

Google Maps - if you enjoy the planning process, you could use something as simple as google maps and enter in your start and finish points, and the places on your bucket list in between.

It's great how google maps gives you the drive times so you'll be able to gauge how far you can travel each day.

While you're there, you can search for local accommodation, restaurants and things to do. You can have a look at the map and see how far away the water is, the next town, the next interesting site to visit.

You can use the information that you find from itinerary examples and online trip planning tools to give you some idea of what would make a good trip, but then totally design it to your own needs, desires, budget and timeframe.

Personally, it's my favourite way of planning for a trip because I'm in total control.

11. How to pack for a road trip around Australia

Packing is a bit of a personal preference and I'm certainly no fashionista, so I won't be listing out the clothes I think you'll need. But rather, some of the items that you may not think about bringing.

So of course, bring the shorts, t-shirts, nice dress, button up shirt, comfy undies and high heels if that's what you want, these are the *other* things:

Protection against bugs

Light coloured and loose, long sleeve top and long pants

As dusk approaches and you want to sit outside with your glass of chardonnay or tinnie of VB, there's a good chance that the mosquitoes or sand flies are also thinking of settling in for their happy hour feast... of you!

It's no fun wearing longs when it's so hot, but it's either that get eaten alive. Or sit inside.

This is a particularly sore point for me, because the insects seem to LOVE me. Insect repellent and long everything doesn't seem to deter them. They find their way in and it's no fun.

This photo is what happened in Darwin when we left our window flaps open. All the doors and windows had fly screens but on one side the weave of the fly screen was a bit bigger than all the other openings, we normally kept it shut but it was so hot we made sure that every one was open. The tiny little blighters got through the bigger weave (which happened to be right beside me) and had a feast of my legs. Itchy. For. Days.



Insect Repellent

Everyone says that the only insect repellent that is any good must have DEET in it to be effective. While I've been happy enough to buy this at the supermarket I have to admit, it is a pretty 'corrosive' product. We had a roll-on insect repellent that leaked and while I can't remember what it corroded or stripped, but it was dramatic enough that we did quickly decide that it need to be stored in a zip lock bag from now on. And we put this stuff on our skin!?

I've read quite a few recommendations for natural products available here in Australia. I'm not endorsing them, because I haven't tried them; but I've heard

them mentioned a quite a few times so I'm putting their website links here for your reference: [Good Riddance](#) & [The Locals](#)

Heat & Sun

Okay okay, everyone sees pictures of sun-kissed Aussies enjoying the beach, splashing around in their next-to-nothings and looking youthful and happy.

That picture is not so common anymore.

More and more people are becoming painfully aware of our harsh Aussie sun and seeking protection from it.



Hat

While a cap may look cool, if you've got a favourite wide-brimmed hat then I'd bring that with you. If not, you'll be buying one when you get here anyway.

Long sleeves and pants

You know, when you see anyone that works out in the Australian sun all day (think road workers, farmers, those crazy cyclists and hikers that walk through the outback) they are most often wearing long pants and sleeves and a wide brim hat. Take your cue from them, especially if you'll be spending your whole day outside in the summer.

Rashie

In the water is where we are usually having the most fun and so forget to reapply sunscreen. Rashies are so, so popular now, so join the trend. They are especially great for kids, and everyone is wearing them, so you won't be the odd one out.

Sunscreen

It's not as effective as staying out of the sun in the first place. But if you can't/won't keep your skin out of the sun then at least find a high SPF sunscreen and reapply regularly.

The Cold

Yes, it does get cold!

I've reminded you a few times throughout this post that it can get really hot in many parts of Australia, but it's certainly not hot all the time and in all places!

If you're going to be in the middle to south of Australia during the winter months, then you'll need to pack your warm clothes too. Average winter temperatures would get as low as single digits in ° Centigrade (34-48°F).

And don't be fooled into thinking that the middle of Australia is hot all the time. In the winter, while day time temperatures may be warm, it can get down to zero (°C) overnight and take a couple of hours to warm up again in the morning.

12. How driving in Australia is different to the rest of the world

There are a few considerations that you need to be aware of when it comes to driving in Australia. Things that may be quite different to where you come from, so let's list them out:

International Drivers

In Australia we drive on the left side of the road and the majority of vehicles have the steering wheel on their right side.

You can use your overseas license in Australia for your entire visit, as long as you remain a visitor. If your license is not in English you must also carry an English translation or an International Driving Permit (IDP). Information on the IDP can be found [here](#).

Australian Road Rules

Just like you would in any new country, it makes sense to familiarise yourself with the local road rules. A good article which outlines the major parts of the road rules (especially those pertaining to international drivers) can be found [here](#). (Scroll about a third of the way down the page to get to the heading 'Australia Road Rules').

Driving at dawn or dusk

What might be quite different for our international visitors is that if you are in a country area, it is recommended that you don't drive at dawn or dusk times of the day. This is when the wildlife is the most active, and the chances of you hitting a kangaroo, wallaby, wombat or other creature, increases greatly.

You may not think that hitting a wallaby is that big a deal, but if you were to hit a large kangaroo that's decided to bound across the road at the last minute, these can be big enough to cause serious damage to your car.

Driver Fatigue

In some parts of Australia you can be driving for hundreds and hundreds of kilometres, with little change in the landscape and huge distances to cover.

Don't push it. If you're tired, there are plenty of designated rest stops, so make the most of them.

GPS and maps

You may think, like us, that phones are so useful now and that getting a GPS is a waste of time and money.

Or you may have figured out already, unlike us, that in the middle of the outback a phone is useless if you don't have any reception. So at the time when you really need reassurance that you're heading in the right direction to your intended campsite... you have no idea.

Unless you're able to use an app that doesn't require an internet connection but still uses the GPS function.

Otherwise, I'd recommend getting a GPS so you can have your navigation running all the time and there's no arguments when you want to use the phone to take pictures and videos to post on Instagram!

And don't forget the good old paper map. You remember them, right? You know that a paper map isn't ever going to leave you stranded because it can't get an internet connection, or doesn't have a line of sight to the sky or has gone flat. There is nothing quite so old school, yet safe and practical, as having a physical map. You'll find these in every Information Centre around the country.

Most Useful Apps

There are gazillions of apps that you could be using to plan and navigate your way around Australia. But for us, there were just a handful that I couldn't do without:

WikiCamps

I mentioned WikiCamps in the camping section and this is, without a doubt, the most used app on my phone. Ok ok, *maybe* facebook and Instagram are used more often, so I should probably say that WikiCamps was the most *important* app on my phone. I used it everyday that we needed to find a new camp.

It's just \$7.99 and worth every cent.

FuelMaps

This app used to be part of the WikiCamps app but they've separated it out into it's own app. There were a couple of times that we became a little concerned that our fuel was running low but we weren't sure how far it was to the next town. Or we were at a town with half a tank of diesel left but diesel was \$1.55

per litre. A quick look on the app assured us that the next town was 130 kms in the direction we were going and it was \$1.42 per litre. So we kept driving. It helped us to save money and, more importantly, keep the stress and anxiety levels in check! This app is free.

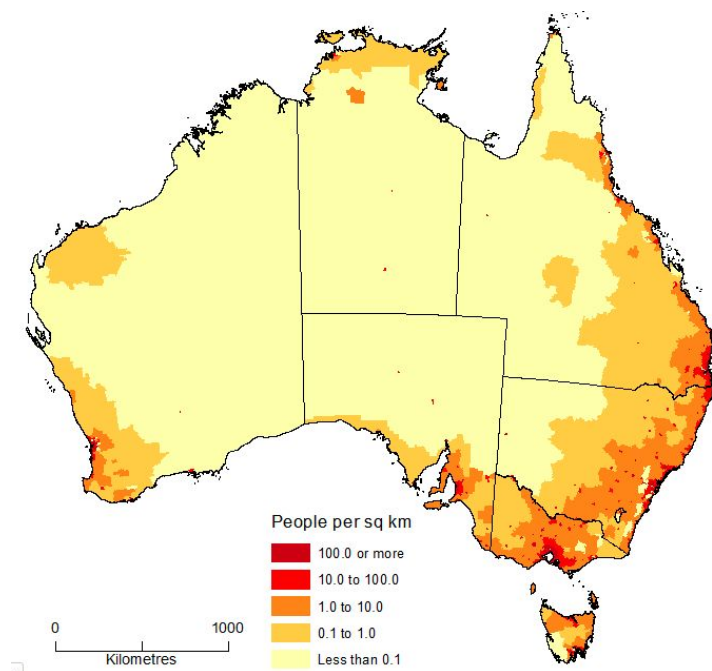
Special Considerations for Outback Travel

I'm just going to put this map of Australia here, superimposed over a map of North America, to remind you of just how large Australia.



But while the population density of the United States is 33 people per km², the population density of Australia is a measly 3 people per km².

Population Density – Australia Map ([Source](#))



Once you have a look at the geography of Australia, it all starts to make sense when you see that most of the middle of Australia is largely uninhabited. Sure there are small towns, and even a large town (Alice Springs) but no cities, and lots and lots of space in-between.

See all that pale yellow expanse in the *Population Density – Australia Map* above? All of that space has a population density of less than 0.1 person per km². So that's just one person per 10km². That's hardly any people.

I think I've made my point. You get it, that much of Australia is large and remote.

Water

It's not only remote and sparsely populated, it's also desert or semi-arid. Which means you **MUST** ensure that you have enough drinking water on-board your vehicle so that, should the unforeseen happen, you can at least stay alive.

Heat

It's also going to be hot. Depending on the time of year that you travel, it's going to be *really* hot. Make sure you've got appropriate clothing, that your set-up affords you some shade when you stop, and that you have ways to cool down when you need to.

Some of the ideas we had are a 12v fan, a fridge or freezer for cold drinks, and a spray bottle with water that you can squirt on yourself every now and then.

Fuel & Other Spares

Use the FuelMaps app to see where your next fuel stop is. Carry extra fuel if possible.

Make sure your vehicle is in good working order before you leave on your trip.

Make sure to take the common spares such as oil, water, spare wheel & wheel changing kit, some basic tools.

Road Conditions

Anyone who's driven on an unsealed back country road will know the displeasure of road corrugations / washboards. Having everything shaken to within an inch of your life is bad enough... doing so for over 500km is just soul-destroying!

We found this out ourselves due to some less than stellar planning. On the road from Burketown QLD to Boroloola NT, I couldn't understand why the Maps app kept wanting us to go the longer 1,255km route instead of the more direct 523km route.



If I'd taken just a few moments to notice the time difference between the two routes, I might have put two and two together.

I didn't.

And hence, we had two days of bone rattling corrugations. Our car and camper trailer handled the corrugations with aplomb - even though EVERYTHING was covered in red dust – but imagine if we'd had a caravan. I think that would have, literally, shaken a caravan to pieces. With our light little camper trailer we could afford to make mistakes like that and be none the worse for wear.

When we get a caravan, we'll have to be more careful and aware.

We have no regrets taking that road though. What ensued was a great little adventure that involved a lot of laughing as we shuddered down the road, a couple of exciting (to us) river crossings and picking up three locals in the middle of nowhere to give them a ride to the next town... 150kms away!

Alcohol Restricted Areas

Here's something you may not be aware of:

There are parts of Australia where alcohol restrictions are in place. You will come across these areas in parts of the Northern Territory, Far North Queensland and some parts of Western Australia. The restrictions vary in each state and area, and are constantly changing, but can be a total ban on alcohol consumption or a limit on how much you can buy, when you can buy and what you can buy.

There will be signs on the road as you enter into these restricted areas, but you'll also be made well aware of any restrictions when you buy alcohol. If in doubt, just visit the nearest Information Centre and they'll have all the info you need.

In one bottle store I heard a lady complaining loudly that she was a visitor to the area and shouldn't have to be subject to the same restrictions as the local people.

But you've got to remember that while these restrictions may be a bit of a nuisance to you as a visitor because they limit how many drinks you can have at your daily happy hour; the restrictions are certainly not for your benefit. It's for the benefit (in terms of safety and health) of the local community. In the aboriginal communities where these restrictions are in place, the goal of the restrictions is to minimise the dreadful harm caused by rampant alcohol abuse and misuse, and associated violence.

13. How much does it cost?

Now, this is going to be the hard section to write. Of course you already know that everyone is different so they're going to have wildly different budgets.

If you're on holiday for a limited time, you may not be so worried about costs because you're going back to work as soon as you get home anyway; compared to the person who has made being on the road their new lifestyle, and is now a lot more selective about what he spends his limited resources on.

First up, particularly for our international visitors, Australia is expensive.

All cost estimates are in Australian Dollars.

I think the most helpful thing I can do here is to share our budget with you, tell you how we came up with this budget, and whether it proved to be practical on the road.

Setting a budget

This is the budget that we had set ourselves before we'd even left New Zealand. Setting a budget for something when you don't even know what you're getting yourself into, can be quite hard. But I did lots and lots of research and did the best I could.

Our budget was divided into two parts, the **One-Off or Set-Up Costs** that we would incur within the first few weeks of arriving in Australia, and then our **Living Expenses** for six months on the road.

One-off costs

AUD	
One-off / Set-up costs	Budget
Flights, car rental, food etc for 2 weeks	\$ 2,100
Vehicle	\$ 10,000
Camper Trailer	\$ 5,000
Toilet & Tent	\$ 300
Solar, Battery, Fridge	\$ 3,000
Insurance	\$ 500
Roadside Assistance	\$ 250
Car Maintenance	\$ 2,400
Misc	\$ -
Six months of business costs	\$ 1,700
Total	\$ 25,250

Getting to Australia \$2,100 – Fights, rental car, hotel etc. This will be zero if you live in Australia already, significantly more if you have to come from the other side of the world.

Vehicle \$10,000 – I had a look at sites like carsales.com.au and gumtree.com.au to see what type of vehicles were available and the price range. While \$10k is on the low side for a 4WD vehicle, we were recommended a Hyundai Terracan so I did a heap of research on them and we decided it would be perfect for us and our small budget.

Camper trailer \$5,000 – Once again, it was only by looking online at lots and lots of camper trailers, caravans and campervan etc that we came up with a budget of \$5,000. We realised that we could get a good quality camper trailer for that price and still afford all the things we thought we'd need.

Toilet & Tent \$300 – This is for one of those pop-up shower tents and a porta-potti.

Solar, Battery & Fridge \$3,000 – We were hoping we'd get lucky and find a camper trailer that already had a dual/portable battery system, but we weren't banking on it. So we set this budget of \$3,000 after doing lots of looking for batteries, fridges & portable solar panels online and figuring out how much it would cost us.

Insurance \$500 – I just used www.iSelect.com.au to figure out what insurance would cost if I purchased one of the cars I've been looking at.

Roadside Assistance \$250 – through [NRMA](http://www.nrma.com.au)

Maintenance \$2,400 – I guessed this one. Based on \$100 per week for 6 months...ish. Oil changes, punctured tyres, ummm other stuff?

Misc – because there's always miscellaneous!

Business costs \$1,700 – this won't apply to everyone, but for us I needed to keep some money aside for regular payments for things like hosting, domain name renewals and other business costs.

Other bills or giving– mortgage, car or caravan loans, charitable giving – anything else that you will keep paying regardless of the fact that you're heading off on a trip of a lifetime.

Six Months Living Costs

When trying to come up with a 'living budget' I racked my brain for all the things I thought we'd need to pay for. I started with the things we already pay for in our lives – rent, food, petrol, phones, internet, entertainment, gifts,

subscriptions. And then added all the things that would be extra being on this trip.

The thing is, you won't know everything. You'll get some of it wrong, when you're on the road you'll realise that you needed to allocate more money to one area and you allocated too much money to other areas. But figuring out a budget beforehand, allows you to know how long your money is going to last you. If you're waaaay overspending your weekly budget you'll be able to know in advance that you're likely to run out of money. Either that's fine... and you break out the credit card. Or you tighten your belt and cut back on the less important things.

I probably did things a little bit backwards, but I calculated (sometimes guessed) how much we would spend each month and therefore for the whole six months. Then I divided it by 26 weeks to come up with the weekly budget.

<u>Living Costs</u>	Per Month	Six Months	Per Week
Camping Fees	\$ 400	\$ 2,400	\$ 92.31
Food	\$ 1,000	\$ 6,000	\$ 230.77
Fuel	\$ 800	\$ 4,800	\$ 184.62
Spending	\$ 400	\$ 2,400	\$ 92.31
Data Plan	\$ 100	\$ 600	\$ 23.08
TOTAL	\$ 2,700	\$ 16,200	\$ 623

So here's how I determined our monthly budget:

Camping fees \$400 – would be just like paying rent, or paying for a hotel/motel every night. From some quick online research I could see that \$30 per night for a caravan park (unpowered site) was reasonably normal. Ben and I talked about trying to free camp for four nights per week and staying in a caravan park for the other three nights per week. That gave us a budget of \$90 per week for camping fees, which I rounded up to \$400 per month.

Not exactly a science to my methods, but at least it gives us something to work with.

Food \$1,000 – we'll still eat generally the same things as we do now and in the same quantities, so that shouldn't change too drastically. Having lived in Australia previously we knew that the food prices between NZ and Australia are reasonably similar.

For any international readers, I would suggest taking the time to go through one of your regular weeks grocery list and jumping on to an online shopping site like www.shop.coles.com.au to price each of the items. It's a time consuming exercise for sure, but it will give you a really good idea of what you should budget for.

Fuel \$800 – it's gonna be a lot, I mean you are driving around Australia. Here's how I roughly calculated how much fuel would cost us.

Kms travelled	x	Fuel Consumption per km	x	Price per litre	=	Total Fuel Cost
---------------	---	-------------------------	---	-----------------	---	-----------------

Expected KMs - I used google maps to give me an approximate kilometres for a half loop starting in Sydney, following the coast up to Cairns, across to Darwin, down through the middle via Uluru to Adelaide, and then across to Dubbo.



This came to 10,175km. Since this amount is just direct distances between major cities I added on another 50% to account for the fact that we wouldn't be on the main highway the whole time, and for sightseeing etc. It's just an *aroundabout* figure so that I knew we were talking about 15,000kms rather than 5,000kms.

Fuel Consumption per 100km – I found some figures online as I was doing all the general research for this trip, that showed people reporting fuel consumption of 12-20L per 100km. I just took a stab and guessed that ours would be 18L/100km. I guessed this because:

- we wouldn't be in a vehicle with a huge engine, towing a massive (heavy) caravan, so it wouldn't be the highest number
- but we would be in an older vehicle which I just presumed we have worse fuel consumption
- I was guessing so I thought I'd better err on the generous side (notice a pattern here?)

Cost of diesel - \$1.60 per litre. Online I found people quoting an average diesel price of \$1.55 per litre, so I added another .05 for good measure.

Add all those figures into my calculation and this is what I got.

Kms travelled	x	Fuel Consumption per km	x	Price per litre	=	Total Fuel Cost	Per month (over 6 mths)
15,000		18/100		1.60		\$4,320.00	\$720.00

I rounded the per month cost up to \$800 (because I'm continually adding in padding when I'm doing lots of guessing like this).

Electricity \$0– will now be zero as it's covered in the nightly rate at caravan parks, or our battery system with solar will cover our needs

Gas – we didn't have a budget for this because we only used gas for cooking so it was hardly anything. But if you've got a gas fridge or water heating system you'll need to factor that in.

Phone / Internet \$100– presuming you'll be going with Telstra, just look up their [website](#) and see which pre-paid or contract plan (depending on which suits your circumstances) works for you. For us we figured we'd have two phones with each one on the \$50 per month pre-paid.

Spending \$400 – yeah, this one is a total guess. You'll need to think about what kind of travel you enjoy. While we love a good tour or attraction or night at the pub as much as the next person, we also get a lot of joy from a bundle of newspaper-wrapped fish and chips while sitting on the beach. If it happens to include a glass of Veuve Clicquot then you'll find me in a world of happiness!

While we would LOVE to have a much bigger budget here, we knew this was the most flexible area of the budget because it is all about our 'wants', not our 'needs'. Just because we're tight-arses, doesn't mean that you have to be.

You may find it helpful to break this bucket down even further. Here are some other categories that could go under 'Spending':

Coffee – although I love a good coffee, I would only buy one as a treat, so I don't need a separate budget for it.

Alcohol – this on the other hand... we probably should have budgeted for. :-O

Sightseeing Trips - you'll need to factor in museum or attraction visits or any of the we're-only-here-once-so-we'd-better-do-it visits. You know, things like swimming with whale sharks, a scenic flight over Uluru or a sunset cruise on Sydney Harbour. If there are must-dos on your list, then I would find out the price of each of those attractions (online) and add them to the budget.

Eating out - any takeaways, pub, café and restaurant meals.

Hair and beauty – haircuts and styling, nails, waxing – anything that you know you'll want to get done while you're on the trip.

Dog sitting services – if you've got an extra family member with you

Kid expenses – I don't know what extra costs kids have, but I hear they're expensive. ☺

It cost us...

I kept pretty good records of our expenses for our whole trip and I'm pleased to report that I wasn't too far off. I had way under-budgeted for in one area, but we made up with my over-budgeting in other areas.

Here's how it panned out at the three month mark:

One-off costs

One-off / Set-up costs	Budget	Actual
Flights, car rental, food etc for 2 weeks	\$ 2,100	\$ 2,405
Vehicle	\$ 10,000	\$ 8,778
Camper Trailer	\$ 5,000	\$ 3,260
Toilet & Tent	\$ 300	-
Solar, Battery, Fridge	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,233
Insurance	\$ 500	\$ 755
Roadside Assistance	\$ 250	-
Car Maintenance	\$ 2,400	\$ 1,008
Misc	\$ -	\$ 1,556
Six months of business costs	\$ 1,700	\$ 2,650
TOTAL	\$ 25,250	\$ 23,645

Not too shabby.

We're happy with this, we didn't stress over every dollar, but we did keep an eye on things.

Six Months Living Costs

And here are the 'Living Costs' for the first three months. Though it fluctuated wildly each week, it averaged out to being on budget.

	Budget	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
Camping	\$92	\$190	\$175	\$131	\$215	\$167	\$70	\$188	\$245	\$217	\$120	\$143	\$20
Diesel	\$185	\$121	\$105	\$123	\$60	\$136	\$68	\$126	\$309	\$308	\$345	\$117	
Food	\$231	\$202	\$214	\$172	\$184	\$313	\$158	\$328	\$251	\$222	\$161	\$286	\$194
Spending	\$92	\$100	\$49	\$44	\$145	\$85	\$72	\$354	\$55	\$161	\$249	\$45	\$86
Data	\$23		\$70			\$140						\$54	
TOTAL	\$623	\$613	\$613	\$470	\$604	\$841	\$368	\$996	\$860	\$908	\$875	\$645	\$300
Under/Over Budget		\$10	\$10	\$153	\$19	(\$218)	\$255	(\$373)	(\$237)	(\$285)	(\$252)	(\$22)	\$323

Every person and family will have a different budget, but by taking the time to at least price out what you *think* it will cost you, it will help you the plan your trip.

14. How to fund your trip around Australia

This is the question that has always stumped me the most.

For us, not only did we need to save for the caravan or motorhome, but also for our living expenses while we were on the road.

I had always thought it would be at least \$100k for a motorhome and then \$50k to travel for a year. While that is a HUGE amount of money and already felt out of our reach, the idea of then having to go back to work, well, I think that might have been the most frightening prospect of all.

So a few things had to happen before we could even contemplate setting out on this trip.

1. We had to downsize our motorhome expectations A LOT, and
2. We had to either figure out ways of making money online, or get comfortable with needing to stop and work as needed.

Downsizing our motorhome expectations

I've always been obsessed with RVs.

I love reading about all their features and new developments. I love reading blogs from people that have been travelling and working in them. And most of all, I love looking at RV floor plans, trying to decide which layout, size and type would be best for us.

So I decided to start my own blog about RVs, appropriately titled RVObsession.com.

Now, I could read anything and everything on the subject of RVs, all in the name of research!

It was this obsession with RVs and all my reading from so many different types of RVers that it started to dawn on me that we didn't need the fanciest rig in order to travel. We just needed something we could afford and then we'd figure it out from there.

When I started looking for something that we could *afford*, rather than something we *wanted*, a world of options opened up.

We realised that a camper trailer was the cheapest option (while still being a step up from a tent because the bed and much of the kitchen was already set-up) but we would still be reasonably comfortable.

Our budget for a camper trailer and car was \$15k... a far cry from the \$100k I thought we'd need for a motorhome.

Downsizing our expectations meant we could get on the road in three months... not three decades.

Figuring out ways to make money online

In all honesty, we've been trying to make money online for years (and years).

We've spent thousands of dollars on programs and tools and information products (probably enough to afford us a nice caravan by now :-O) and, while we've made some money here and there, it hasn't been much. And certainly not enough to replace our incomes.

Just a caveat about making money online: we've been involved in some really good quality programs and learnt from some really great people.

We've done everything from MLM, blogging, affiliate marketing to advertising, creating courses and sponsored posts. We've bought ads and traffic, learnt copywriting, created autoresponders and email newsletters.

We've done lots of stuff, but we totally recognise that we have lacked focus, discipline (argh) and the tenacity to consistently apply these things to one business idea.

We've learnt that we have to fix those things (discipline etc) first, and then consistently apply all the technical skills we have.

All that to say: just because we've not seen much success with making online money YET, we still believe it's a valid and valuable way to fund your travels, and we're still working very hard at it.

Phew, caveat over.

Okay, so on to what we *are* doing to create an online income:

Blogging

I have two blogs (this one and RVObsession.com) where the aim is to make money from advertising on the blogs, affiliate marketing and sponsored posts.

At the time of writing, only RVObsession makes any money and that's through ads and affiliate marketing.

It's always been my goal to make money from blogging, and it's a slow, long and hard process... not helped by the fact that I'm very inconsistent at posting new content.

Blogging is the long game.

So in the short term, the two other ways we make money online is through offering virtual assistant services and freelancing.

Virtual Assistant

It can be a little tricky to define exactly what a virtual assistant is/does but in a nutshell:

A virtual assistant is someone who helps you run your business, whether a traditional or online business, by doing any online tasks that you need.

This could be ANY tasks that can be completed online.

It could be admin tasks anyone in the corporate may undertake like: diary management, minute taking, email management, answering the phone, ordering stock, managing a database, customer service or cold calling.

Or it may be scheduling posts on your blog, social media management, email marketing or running ads.

Currently, I help one blogger by running her Instagram account, and the other client I have is a motorhome manufacturer who's Pinterest account I have set up and manage.

Freelancing

Generally this is someone who has a specialist skill that they provide to businesses on either a one-off project or an ongoing basis. This includes services like: writing, website development, design, app development and more.

Currently I have one freelancing gig where I write articles for a motorhome manufacturer every month.

Casual & temping work

This is our least favourite way to make money on the road, but it's what we're the most used to and there's plenty of it around.

When we stopped in Dubbo, Ben had a casual job at a tyre shop. And I had a casual admin job and then a temping contract for a couple of months.

It's not our favourite way of working because it means we're tied to the one location, plus you have to wear work clothes every day.

But it's easy and familiar and as I said before, there's plenty of it around.

This is the main way we've made money on this trip so without it we'd be screwed.

This is just what *we* are doing to make money and hopefully it will give you some ideas about what you *could* do if you also need to make an income while you're travelling.

This topic could be a whole 'ultimate guide' in itself, but I've written a bit more about ways that I've seen people making money while on a road trip around Australia. You can read that [here](#).

Ready to turn the dream into reality?

I realise that's a lot to take in and maybe you're stuck in the stage of, 'yeah that's great to know all that stuff... but what to I do now!?'

I've put together a timeline planner to help you go through all the steps that you need to think about and set up, in order to turn your dream into a reality.

I wish it could be as easy as saying, 'follow these steps, and in one year you'll be on the trip of a lifetime!', but we all know that a cookie-cutter approach will not work for everyone. We're all so completely different, with different needs, wants, budget and level of compromise!

This planner will help you to determine what things you should be thinking about, and at what stage.

If you'd like the planner, just enter your name and email address and I'll email the link to you. You will be signed up to my newsletter but I don't email very often and you can always unsubscribe at any time.

Here's the [link back to the blog post](#) where you can sign up for the planner. (Just scroll straight to the bottom of the post)

Phew, that's my take on Getting Set Up for a Road Trip Around Australia! I really hope you got some value out of this tome. If you have any questions, please feel free to add them in the comments below and I'll get to them as soon as I can.

Michelle