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Guide to... SAVVY SPENDING

Everybody loves touring, but these days, we all have to keep a close eye on the purse strings. Follow our expert guide for brilliant tips on saving – everything from buying a caravan to staying on great-value campsites

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MONEY- SAVING TIPS

As the cost of living rises across the board, it's essential to watch your spending wherever you can, and that includes caravanning. If you'd like to save some cash, read on for our handy hints!



'If you can be flexible in terms of timings, try searching for crossings at various days and times to get the best deal'

A CARAVAN TOUR is always an enjoyable experience, but if you're not careful, costs can add up surprisingly quickly. However, following a few simple steps could help you keep your spending to a minimum. To set you on your way, here are some top money-saving tips for your next journey!

1 Save on food and drink

Heading off-site for the day? Then think about the food and drink you can take with you, so that you won't have to worry about finding a place for lunch.

This takes a bit of preparation, but is well worth it – you also get to choose where you stop for a picnic each day, which can give you the chance to relax in truly picturesque surroundings and green spaces, while you enjoy your home-made feast.

When evening comes, cooking in your caravan presents you with a budget-friendly way of trying out the area's local produce.

You might be quite surprised by some of the delicious dinners you can easily rustle up in your van's kitchen.

Find out whether the town you're visiting has a local market – it's often much cheaper to buy produce direct during your stay, rather than stocking up at the supermarket before you go. Chances are that the goods will be fresher, too.

Another clever idea is to prepare and cook your favourite meal before you go away, and freeze it – then put it in the van fridge before you leave, and it should have defrosted by the time you arrive. That will save you being tempted to go out for a meal or get a takeaway!

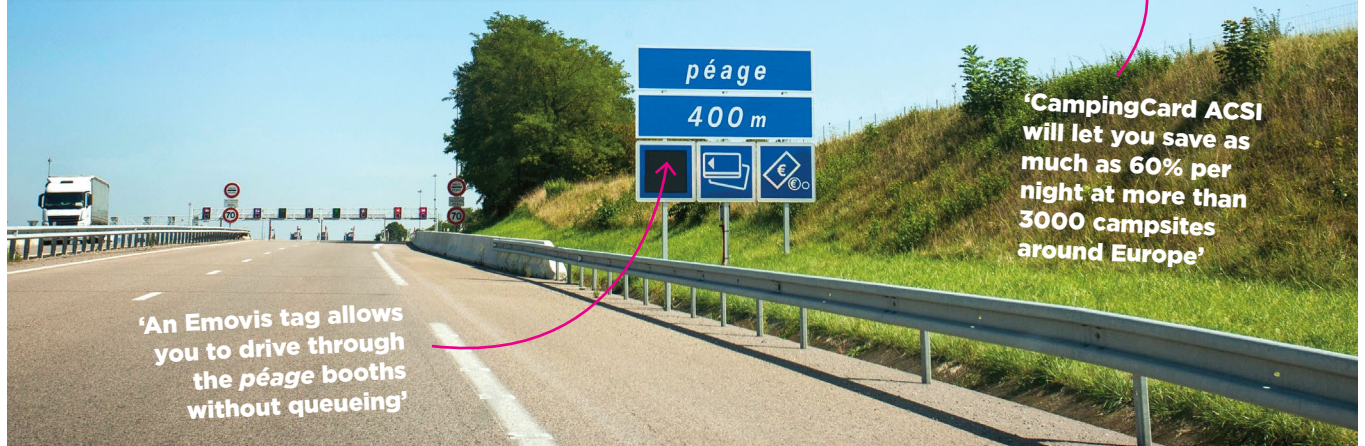
Finally, if you enjoy food and drink from regional vineyards or producers in France, check out nearby supermarkets first. You'll often find local honey, chocolates and wine much cheaper there than the prices you're asked to pay at major tourist attractions.

2 Know what you want to do

Be sure to plan out what you intend to do while you're on tour. The surrounding area could have beautiful parks to visit and free museums to explore. However, if you have settled on a day out at a particular attraction, take a look at websites such as myvouchercode.co.uk and see if you can find some handy vouchers or discount codes to keep the entry prices down.

3 Identify a well-priced campsite to stay at

Have a think about the type of site you would like to stay at, and what kind of facilities you will require. Are you after a basic site, or somewhere with plenty of on-site facilities? After deciding what you want, you can start settling on the campsite that provides the price and features you're after. For great UK sites, see our *Top 100 Sites Guide*, accompanying this issue. >>



4 Save money on campsite fees

There are numerous membership options out there that could be worth looking into, as they offer a great way of saving money when you're booking a campsite.

For example, the Caravan and Motorhome Club offers membership from £56 per year, which could pay for itself within just five nights of staying at a Club site.

Alternatively, there's The Camping and Caravanning Club. Membership starts from £42 per year and allows you to save up to 30% each time you stay at one of its sites. You can also visit its member-exclusive campsites, known as Certificated Sites. There are over 1300 of these, with prices starting from as little as £10 a night.

CampingCard ACSI (www.campingcard.co.uk) is another option worth considering. A subscription starts from €12.95 and will let you save as much as 60% per night at more than 3000 sites around UK and mainland Europe when you tour in the low season.

5 Ferry crossings for less

When you're booking ferry journeys, shop around as much as you can, and if you can be flexible in terms of timings, try searching for crossings at various days and times (late at night, for example) to find yourself the best deal.

An online search facility, such as Travel Supermarket (travelsupermarket.com/en-gb/ferry), should allow you to select caravan-specific deals.

Don't assume you'll get the best price with a return ferry ticket, either: buying two singles with different operators can sometimes save you money.

Likewise, you can also consider different routes, such as travelling from Dover on the way out, but returning to Newhaven.

It can be tempting to simply go for the most direct crossing, but choosing a less obvious route can work out cheaper, even once you've added any toll costs in France. You can find the price of motorway tolls in France by going to autoroutes.fr.

Another good way to save some cash is to take a packed meal to eat on board, rather than paying for expensive food from the ferry's restaurants.

6 Fuel price checker

PetrolPrices (www.petrolprices.com) is simply fantastic for tracking down the cheapest fuel in your area – enter your postcode and it will tell you where you can get the best deal at the pump.

It's free to sign up, and you can receive a daily update listing the cheapest prices in your area. You'll be using more fuel when towing, so be sure to have a loyalty

card (such as Nectar or Clubcard, for example) with you when you fill up. You won't always save money at the pump (although certain vouchers allow you to do so), but you'll soon accumulate enough points to get serious amounts of cash off your grocery shopping bills.

7 Toll-free touring

If you're not in a rush when driving through France, it's worth sticking to the *routes nationales* rather than using the *autoroutes* – they're generally free, and often more scenic.

However, if you do want to use toll roads, take a look at autoroutes.fr before you go, to find the cheapest. If your vehicle and caravan are less than 3m high and the tow car has a Gross Vehicle Weight of under 3500kg, you can buy a *télépéage* tag via the UK Emovis website (emovis-tag.co.uk).

This handy little tag allows you to drive through any non-height-restricted *télépéage* point, and the toll will be taken from your bank account in sterling, via direct debit.

Small fees apply, but you won't have to pay a transaction fee on your credit card for each purchase, and you can drive straight through the *péage* booths without needing to queue.

If you're touring in Spain and Portugal, you'll be allowed to use the VIA-T tag lanes.



OUR ADVICE

Top tips from the *Practical Caravan* team
on how to make your cash go further!

Campsite stays can be expensive, particularly during the high season, so make sure you're not paying for facilities that you won't use. A swimming pool on site is a nice idea, but will you actually spend enough time in it to make it worth the extra that full-facility sites cost? Similarly, if you're happy to use your caravan's on-board facilities, there's no need to pay for an all-singing, all-dancing site with fancy bathrooms – a more back-to-basics campsite might be better for your wallet.

Sarah Wakely *Editor-in-chief*



Don't forget to make use of your supermarket loyalty cards – you can find big savings on entry to a number of visitor attractions, in many cases a far better deal than simply redeeming points for shopping. For example, £5 of Tesco points is worth £15 when buying tickets for Sea Life Centres and Sanctuaries. Many other brands also offer free-entry deals – Cadbury is currently offering vouchers for two-for-one entry at more than 20 Merlin attractions, including Thorpe Park, Blackpool Tower and Legoland.

Peter Baber *Reviews editor*



Stock up on dried pasta or noodles, along with pesto and sauce sachets. As well as being filling and quick to cook, they're cheap and can be kept in your lockers for when you need them.

And why not take a bicycle on tour? It'll make trips to the shops for those urgent essentials that much easier, and you won't need to start up the engine, so you'll be saving fuel, too.

Simon Mortimer *Art editor*



Make sure your vehicle is in tip-top condition before you go. As a minimum, check oil levels, screen wash and tyre pressures (don't forget the spare). Setting the right tyre pressures won't just make your transport safer, it will reduce fuel consumption on your journey. And by ensuring you have plenty of fuel before you leave, there's less chance of having to dash to buy more, eating into your holiday time and burning even more fuel while you're travelling.

David Motton

Tow car editor

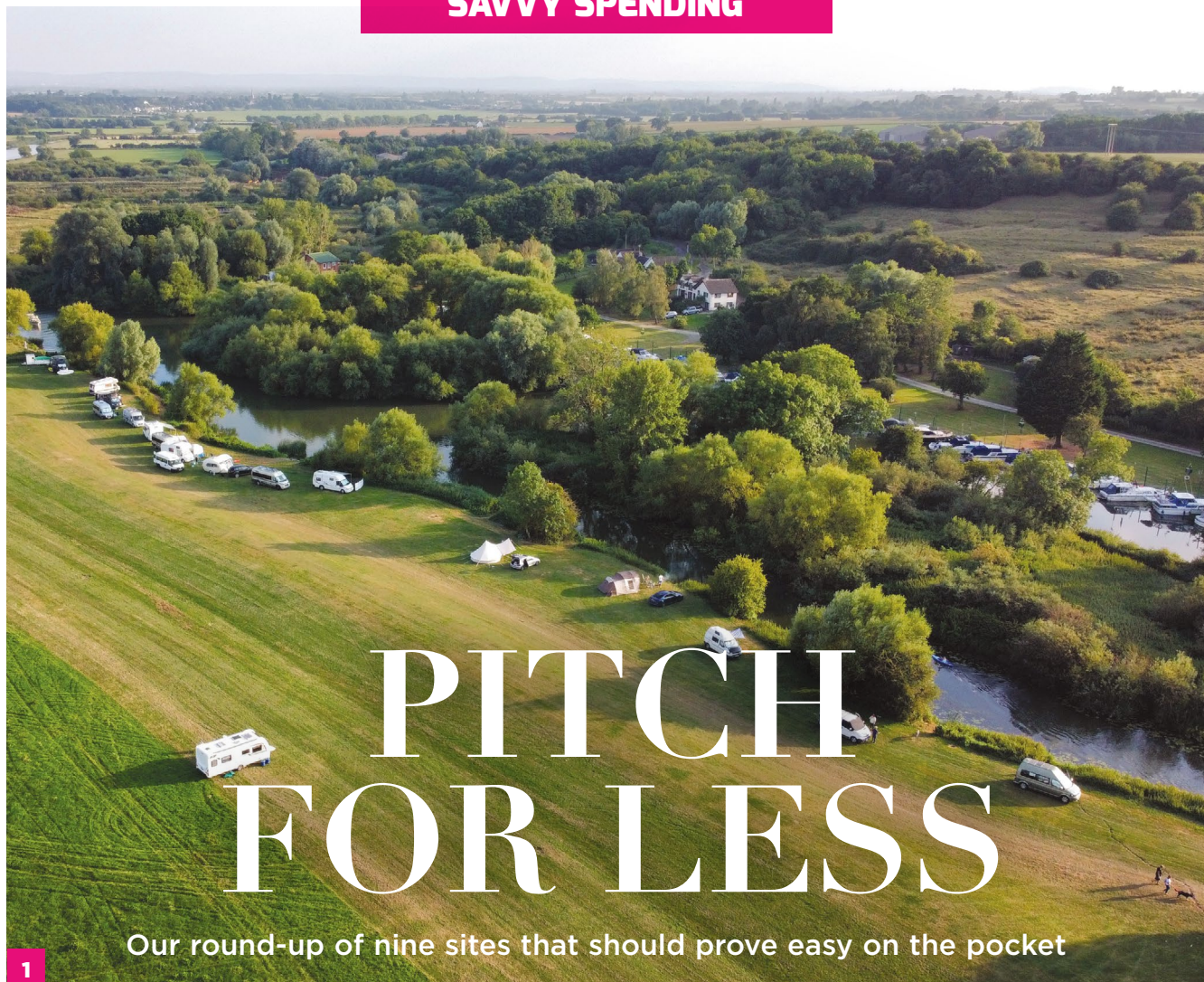


Heading for Europe? Remember the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), giving free or discounted medical care in the EU and Switzerland, is being replaced by the Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). Check your EHIC is still in date (bottom right of card) or apply for a GHIC before you travel.

Paul Critcher

Deputy editor





Our round-up of nine sites that should prove easy on the pocket

1 Andrew's Field Worcestershire

An attractive if basic site, Andrew's Field has a fantastic location on the Avon, in the delightful village of Eckington, and offers direct access to the river.

Facilities are limited, with no electricity on the site, but there is a tap for drinking water and a waste-water disposal point.

Wildlife abounds and you can see deer at the riverside, along with birdlife such as kingfishers, cuckoos and woodpeckers.

The village is on the outskirts of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and you'll find an abundance of excellent walks in the vicinity.

Price £11 per night

▶ avoncamping.weebly.com

2 Parc Farm Caravan Park Montgomeryshire

Ideally located in the beautiful Tanat Valley, in Powys, and with the River Tanat running through the site, this charming park provides privately owned holiday homes and a separate touring area for up to 22 caravans or motorhomes.

It's on the edge of the magnificent Snowdonia National Park and offers

spectacular views of the nearby Berwyn Mountains. Fishing for grayling and trout is available on the river, and site facilities include a picnic area, toilet and shower block, launderette, a children's play area and a small football pitch.

Price (pitch+2+hook-up) £23 per night

▶ berwynscaravanparks.com/parc-farm-caravan-park

3 Berry Bank Farm Peak District

This small campsite, just five miles from the elegant spa town of Buxton, is located on a family-run working farm and offers no-frills touring pitches for caravans, motorhomes and tents.

Stay here and you'll find yourselves in a great position to explore the Peak District National Park, with its abundant hiking trails and climbing routes.

The farm has excellent walks nearby, including Shutlingsloe – known as the Matterhorn of Cheshire because of its distinctive profile – and Three Shires Head. Drinking water, cassette-emptying facilities and toilets are available on site.

Price £10 per night

▶ berrybankfarm.co.uk

4 Balloch O' Dee Dumfries and Galloway

This beautiful site near Kirkcowan is just 10 miles from Galloway Forest Park and prides itself on being a traditional campsite.

Campfires are allowed in fire-pits and pitches are less regulated than at other sites, with friendly communal areas.

Overall the site has a more boutique, bespoke feel than most. As well as touring pitches, there are vintage caravans, a bothy, a yurt and a ranch house for hire.

The local beach at Stairhaven is only 10 minutes away and has been voted one of the best beaches in Scotland.

Best of all is the delightful pair of Shetland ponies that you'll sometimes spot wandering around the campsite!

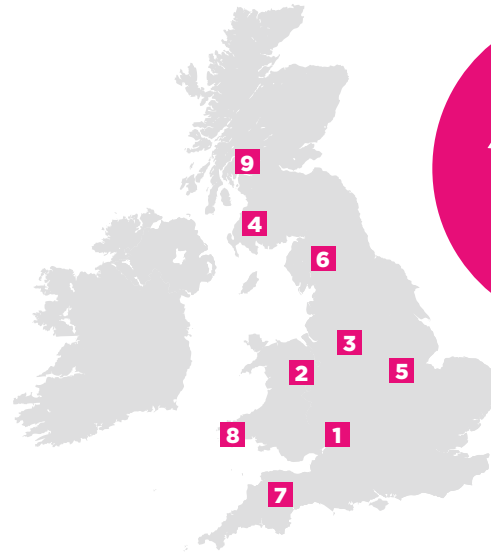
Price (pitch+4+hook-up) £25 per night

▶ ballochodee.com

5 Ashleigh Lakes Lincolnshire

This peaceful site near Spalding, in the Fens, has two lakes and is perfect for those looking for on-site fishing – the lakes are stocked with roach, rudd, carp, tench and bream. Site facilities include toilets and showers and a chemical disposal point.

4


CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!


2



This is a very quiet site and great for birdwatching, as well as spotting the occasional hare, rabbits and deer.

You'll find a handy bus stop, shop and welcoming pub within walking distance, and driving, it's under half-an-hour to Spalding and Wisbech.

Price From £15 per night (non-electric grass pitch)
 > ashleighlakes.co.uk

6 Newby End Farm Cumbria

Eden Valley Holidays, located at Newby End Farm, provides an excellent base for exploring the Lake District National Park, with spectacular scenery guaranteed.

This peaceful, family-friendly site is in Cumbria's beautiful Eden Valley, between the National Park to the west and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the east.

On-site there are electric hook-ups and free Calor Gas powered showers, and the park can accommodate up to 24 caravans, campervans or tents, across two fields.

Price From £15 per night (non-electric grass pitch)
 > newbyendfarm.co.uk

7 Cockingford Farm Devon

Cockingford Farm is sure to provide you with a relaxed touring experience. While there's no electric hook-up (unless you choose to stay in the Cockingford Caravan), the staff should be able to help you with charging devices or bikes.

There are three fields on the site, and heading to the top of the third will give you spectacular views of the beautiful Widecombe Valley. This is also a good spot for stargazing.

It is easy to reach the moorland from the site, while the charming village of Widecombe is only a 30-minute walk.

Price From £16 per night (two people)
 > cockingfordcampsite.com

8 Parke Farm Camping Pembrokeshire

If you're looking to explore the gorgeous Pembrokeshire coast and take in some stunning sea views, Parke Farm could be the ideal site to pitch up at.

This family-friendly campsite gives you the option of staying in an adults-only field if you want some real peace and quiet, too. Located in the Pembrokeshire

Coast National Park, the dog-friendly site is ideally placed for exploring the pretty village of Angle and magnificent Pembroke Castle, visiting some of the breathtaking beaches, and much more.

Price From £19.50 per night (two people)
 > parkefarmcamping.co.uk

9 Cobleland Campsite Gartmore

Nature really is all around you at this fabulous campsite, with the River Forth and the Loch Ard Forest creating a very beautiful, peaceful setting for the 126 touring pitches to be found on-site.

If you're heading for Gartmore, be sure to pack comfortable footwear, because there are plenty of great outdoor activities to be enjoyed in the area – Ben Lomond is just 13 miles away, and there are numerous forest walks to explore, too.

For a more leisurely expedition, you could head to mighty Stirling Castle, where you can discover more about the area's fascinating history, or for something a little bit different, take a half-hour drive to Blair Drummond Safari Park.

Price From £18.50 per night (two people)
 > campingintheforest.co.uk



BUYING A USED VAN

Purchasing pre-owned can save you cash, but you still need to spend wisely. Here's what to look out for before you buy



Take your time and look around a good selection of caravans before you decide

A CARAVAN is a substantial purchase, and even a secondhand tourer is likely to cost you several thousand pounds – hardly small change – so it's well worth taking your time, researching your purchase carefully and only handing over your hard-earned cash when you are sure you have the right van.

Why buy used?

There are numerous reasons to consider purchasing a pre-owned van, rather than a new one. The most obvious is price.

As soon as a caravan is towed away from the forecourt, it starts to lose value. This steady loss is known as depreciation.

While this has a negative effect on the first owner, it will benefit the second or third – you get exactly the same van, with the same layout, features and performance, but at a much reduced cost.

So how much could you save by buying pre-owned? Well, the rate at which a used caravan depreciates will vary, depending on the make, model and condition.

There's also another upside to buying used that you might not expect: owners

of pre-owned caravans and motorhomes tend to be happier with their purchase.

In the *Practical Caravan* Owner Satisfaction Surveys (practicalcaravan.com/news/meet-the-winners-of-our-owner-satisfaction-awards-2022), owners of used vehicles generally reported fewer faults. We suspect this is due to the first owner identifying niggling problems and having them fixed under warranty.

However, talking of warranties, that's one of the disadvantages of buying a pre-owned caravan.

A new tourer is very likely to come with a manufacturer's warranty lasting around three years, and a separate warranty for the bodyshell lasting six years or more.

Choose a used vehicle that is outside the warranty period, and repairs will be down to you. Unless, that is, the dealer you are buying from offers a warranty. Warranties lasting for at least three months are quite common, unless the caravan in question is particularly old and tatty.

Alternatively, you could arrange to have your own aftermarket warranty cover.

Choose the right layout

The best way to get to grips with the variety of tourers that you'll find available is to go to one of the big shows, or take a trip to your nearest large dealership.

There, you will be able to have a good look around at a variety of models, all at your leisure, and get a much better feel for what would suit you best.

Fundamentally, there are two matters to consider. First, you are going to need enough berths for the number of people you plan to holiday with. Then, take some time to think about how you will actually be using the tourer.

The more hours you expect to spend inside the van during the day, the more important the lounge area will be. Likewise, if you are going to eat most of your meals in there, a practical and well-equipped kitchen will be absolutely vital.

Think about the size of the caravan, as well as the layout. A large tourer might look ideal on the forecourt, but does it make a safe and sensible match for your car? Does your licence allow you to tow



'Fundamentally, there are two matters to consider: first, the number of berths you are going to need, and second, how you will actually be using the van'

the caravan? For more information about this, see our *Know-how guide to Towing*, downloadable from www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how.

Make and model

Caravanners can be very loyal to a brand, but take a look at a variety of makes to be sure that your loyalty isn't misplaced.

It's also worthwhile perusing our recent Owner Satisfaction Surveys, to find out more about the most reliable caravan brands and the best places to buy them.

Where to buy

Dealerships will have a wider choice of models for you to browse among, and the facility to service the vehicle before you purchase it. They are also likely to offer you a warranty.

Private sellers are typically cheaper than a dealer, but they won't be in a position to offer you a warranty. This means that you'll need to be very sure about the condition of the van before you commit to buying it.

Another source of used leisure vehicles that you're going to come across is the online auction. These sales sites can be extremely tempting, particularly when the bidding is well below the true market value. But we would advise against buying any van unseen, however tempting the price tag might appear to be.

Paying on finance

Financing your purchase is often easier than paying one lump sum, but be careful not to spend more than you mean to.

Think about your monthly income and outgoings. How much is left to pay for the van? Don't forget to budget for servicing, insurance, and storage if needed.

Dealers will offer finance packages, but compare the interest rates with a personal loan. A few minutes online will indicate how much you'd have to pay each month if borrowing from a bank rather than through a dealer. Bear in mind the size of the deposit and the whole cost of the loan, not just the monthly payments.

Know your rights

If your tourer develops a fault, where do you stand? You'll be in a much better position if you buy from a dealership.

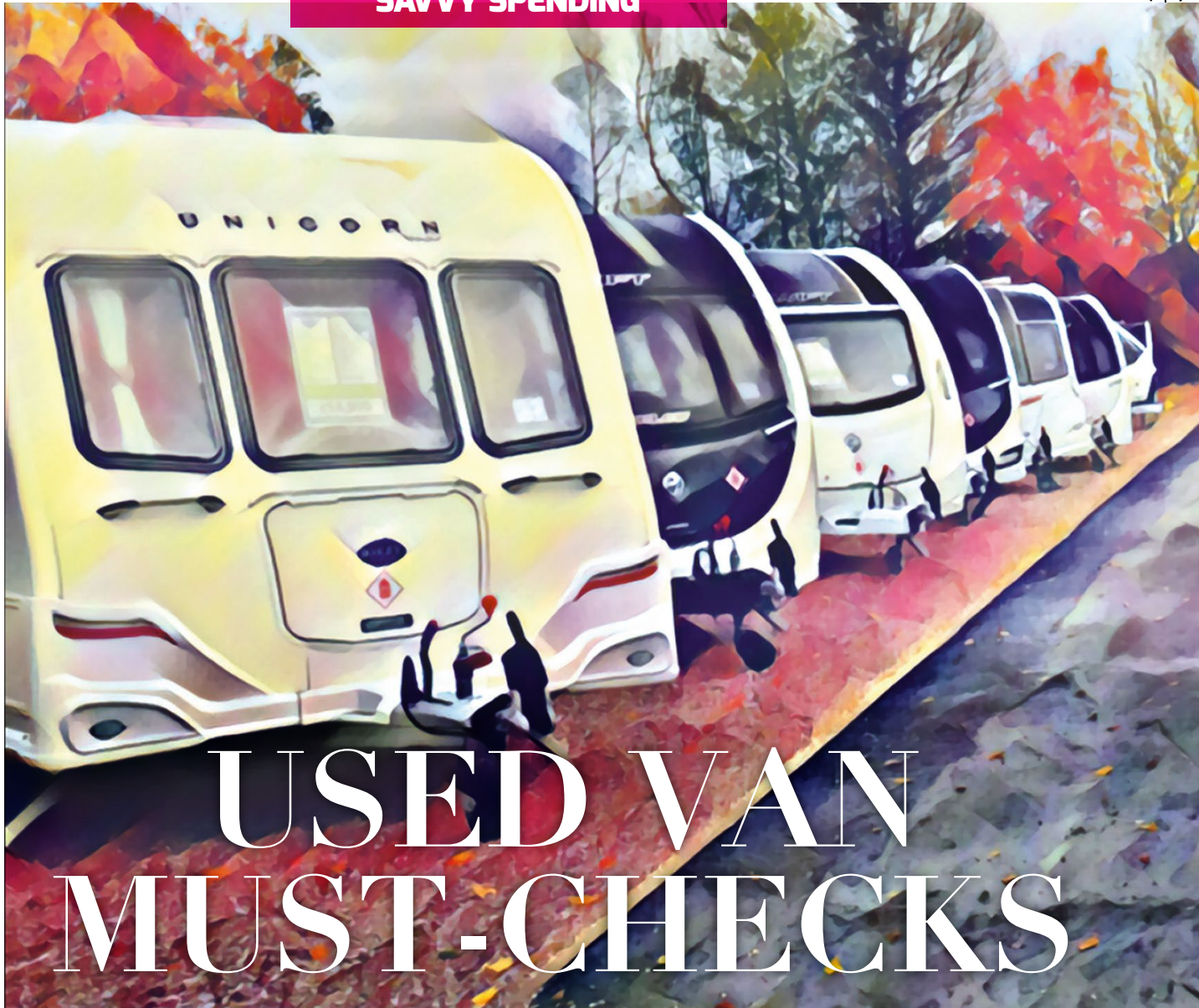
First, the chances are that it will have a warranty. Second, your legal rights are stronger. Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, any goods (in this case, your caravan) should be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose, and as described.

The term 'satisfactory quality' is the key here. What is and isn't satisfactory will vary, depending on the age and condition of the vehicle you're buying. A 10-year-old tourer can't reasonably be expected to be of the same quality as a brand-new one.

Conclusion

Buying a pre-owned caravan can be the perfect route to acquiring an affordable, high-quality tourer. Just carry out your research before you make your final decision about the purchase, to help you spend more wisely.





USED VAN MUST-CHECKS

Tempted to buy your next caravan pre-owned? Don't miss our handy list of interior and exterior checks to ensure your money is well spent

THERE ARE SOME crucial choices and checks to make when picking your next preowned caravan, which will help you come to the right decision, particularly if you're buying from a private seller.

Always take detailed notes while you are assessing the caravan and use any repairs required to negotiate the price down.

Don't be seduced by any stylish touches if the practicalities of the van aren't right for you. You'll quickly come to regret it.

If it's a private seller, ask the owner about the van's previous use. Does it sound realistic, or is it a sales pitch? Be slightly more wary if it sounds like the latter.

Before travelling to view a private sale, and even if you're not intending to (although this is advisable – see www.approvedworkshops.co.uk), ask the vendor if you can have the caravan checked by an NCC AWS-approved technician. If the vendor has anything to hide, they probably won't get back to you to arrange your viewing.

EXTERIOR CHECKS

Begin your inspection outside the van:

Windows

Check for condensation forming on the interior of double-glazed windows. Also, see if there's any crazing or scratching caused by over-enthusiastic cleaning.

Window seals

On older vans, check that the rubber window seals haven't perished, and all windows and rooflights open properly.

Keys

Are all of the keys present? There's a hassle factor in obtaining new ones, even if the cost involved is negligible.

Hitch head

Ensure all mechanicals on the hitch head are functioning: handbrake, breakaway cable, electric cable (does it have the right

connection for your car?), jockey wheel, stabiliser and towball-release handle. See if there are any AWS service stickers. These are dated and denote top-quality servicing.

Front panel

Inspect for damage, because this receives the bulk of the dirt and debris that is thrown up by the tow car.

Major repairs

Ask if the tourer has had any major repairs or accidents. There might be evidence of this on the receipts.

Weight plate

Check the weight plate (you'll find this next to the door) to see if it's compatible with your tow car. The MTPLM and MiRO are indicated.

Novices should seek a caravan with an MTPLM that's no more than 85% of their tow car's kerbweight.



Chassis

Have a look under the van at the chassis and axles, to see if there's any damage or corrosion, or anything loose. Galvanised Al-Ko chassis shouldn't corrode. While you're there, check for any corner-steady damage, plus auto-leveller or motor mover condition, if they're fitted.

Tyres

Ask the owner when the tyres were last changed, then check the age on the side of the tyre wall. This is two low-digit numbers in a small lozenge, for example: 15 17. This example would indicate that the tyre was made in the 15th week of 2017.

Allowing for some shelf-time at the tyre fitters, you should be able to work out how honest the vendor is being and, of course, the age of the tyre. Bear in mind that van tyres should be changed every five to seven years, irrespective of wear.

Battery

Ask about the leisure battery age, and how it has been charged and cared for. Someone using an intelligent trickle charger cares

about their battery. A poorly maintained battery could cost you £100 to replace.

Ask the owner to charge it before you arrive. The battery meter should read 12.7-12.85V when fully charged, and is completely depleted at 11.8V.

If the vendor is a serviced site user and you're going off-grid, you might need to upgrade the leisure battery to 100 or 110Ah.

Documents

Ask to see all paperwork including invoices, service reports and receipts, tyres, batteries and so on. All self-respecting caravanners hoard this stuff for when the time comes to sell. Are there any advisories on the latest service report?

Panels

Scour GRP panels for hairline cracks. They are quite common, especially on older vans.

Under the polish

On older caravans, look for 'chalking' of the GRP panels. This is where the surface layer of the glass fibre has eroded and can be chalky or dusty. A good polish can help

disguise this and protect the surface, if the van is too big a bargain to miss.

Lights

Check that all of the exterior lights work, and ensure there is no water inside any of the light panels.

Roof

Check the roof for damage: hailstones on aluminium-skinned roofs can result in potentially expensive repairs being needed.

In store

Where and how was the caravan stored? Premium CaSSOA site storage suggests it's been cared for and invested in. Was it kept under cover? Is a top-quality cover, such as those from Protec or Specialised, included in the sale?

Security

Does the alarm work? If the caravan has a tracker, contact the provider and check it works. You will need to re-register and perhaps reactivate the system. A year's monitoring can cost £50-£200. >>



Check that the lounge seating is supportive, and set up the table to see if it is big enough



Make sure that all of the kitchen appliances are working, and lie down on the beds

INTERIOR CHECKS

Now take a good look around inside:

- Take note of the smell – any dampness or mustiness should be checked out.
- Press the ceiling and walls to see if they feel spongy anywhere.
- Look inside lockers and wardrobes and under seats for any signs of damp.
- Check all appliances work as they should, on gas, leisure battery and mains. Ask the vendor to chill the fridge before you arrive, and request that the space- and water-heating system is on when you get there (especially with Alde heating, which takes longer to warm up).
- Ask for the instruction manuals for all appliances (a careful caravan owner will have kept all of them).

- Set up the freestanding dining table. Can the whole family sit around it comfortably?
- Walk slowly across every inch of the floor to feel for any soft areas – this can expose delamination.
- Ensure that the sealant around the basin and shower is intact. Look for leaks under the sink and basin, and around the base and edges of the shower unit.
- Lie on all the beds to check that they are comfortable and the right size. Make up the non-fixed beds to ensure you have all the cushions you need.
- Do all of the blinds pull out and retract?
- Make sure that the foam cushions in the seating aren't sagging or slumped from repeated use. In general, caravan upholstery is very durable, but bad batches can creep through. Look for wear on edges.

- Check all decorative trims are properly fixed. Caravans come with lots of colour coordinated panels and elegant styling, but these can eventually come loose.
- Investigate the condition of the carpets. Dirty, damaged carpets are hard to hide, and a sign that the vehicle hasn't been cared for as well as the vendor suggests.
- Check that any radio/MP3 player is still functioning as it should.
- Check that all of the interior lights are in good working order.
- Do the hydraulic dampers on the bed bases function properly? Can you lift them up easily?
- You might want to allow for the cost of a toilet renewal kit from Thetford. These include a new seat and lid, plus a fresh cassette. They cost around £100 to £150.

WHERE TO BUY YOUR NEXT VAN

Purchasing a caravan might be expensive, but you can still save money if you choose your dealership carefully

WHAT'S THE BEST way to save money when you are looking to buy a caravan? However big (or small) your budget is, it's likely to be a significant outlay.

But we do love caravans, and many of us particularly love owning them. If you are among that huge group of enthusiasts, the only answer is to track down the very best deal you can find.

Bagging a bargain

Luckily, despite the fact that demand for new and used caravans remains high, there are still excellent bargains to be had.

So how can you get hold of such a deal? First things first: stick to your guns. If, for

example, you decide, after much research, that an end-kitchen model is what you are looking for, you should only look for one of those, no matter how difficult it might seem to find that type at the time.

Buying a caravan with the wrong kind of floorplan for your needs could prove a costly mistake further down the line.

This could mean having to settle for a slightly older model than you planned – or buying used, rather than new.

If that turns out to be the case, Martin Spencer, technical manager at the Caravan and Motorhome Club, recommends getting a pre-purchase inspection, if possible. This will reassure you there is nothing wrong

with the van, and could even help you negotiate a lower price with the dealer.

You can arrange for such an inspection through the Approved Workshop Scheme (*see overleaf*) or caravaninspectors.co.uk.

Finding a dealership

But where should you look to get the best deal for your hard-earned cash?

If you want to buy a new caravan, the offers that manufacturers might tempt you with at the various industry shows (such as the NEC) can seem too good to miss. But do bear in mind that if you buy from a dealer at a show, you might need to take your van back to that dealer for >>



'Our Owner Satisfaction Awards are a great place to start – they're based on dealership feedback from thousands of Practical Caravan readers'





its regular servicing – which could involve a fair amount of travelling (and fuel). We'd recommend buying from a dealer within easy reach of home if you can.

The next question is, what's the best way to choose a good dealership?

The Owner Satisfaction Survey run by this magazine with The Camping and Caravanning Club is an excellent place to start your search. The results (which you can see at practicalcaravan.com/news/meet-the-winners-of-our-owner-satisfaction-awards-2022) are based on feedback from thousands of our readers – rather like word of mouth from a huge group of caravanners!

First impressions

Your chosen dealership should also be very happy to let you come and see any caravan you might be interested in buying. Martin Spencer says, “Be very, very cautious of buying – or even putting down a deposit – on a model that you haven’t seen.”

There are many ways to check you are not being scammed, but one of the easiest is Google Maps. “If the dealer is not clearly visible, it probably doesn’t exist,” he adds.

First impressions count when you turn up at the dealership, too. Smart premises and an extensive accessories shop aren’t the be-all and end-all, but they certainly indicate that your chosen dealership is thriving and should be here to stay.



Servicing and repairs

Getting a reasonable price for servicing and repairs should be a little easier than it has been, thanks in part to the Approved Workshop Scheme (AWS), run by the National Caravan Council in partnership with the Caravan and Motorhome Club and The Camping and Caravanning Club.

The scheme's 570-plus members must show that all workshop staff have gained four separate training certificates connected with caravan repairs. They promise to provide written estimates for any service-related repairs that come to more than £150, and should give realistic timescales for completion.

The AWS could potentially help if you want to buy from a show, but don't want to have to go back to the dealer you bought from there. Through the scheme, you can arrange for a local workshop to carry out all

warranty-supporting repair work – although you do have to get the original dealer's approval.

That's not to say non-AWS members won't make such arrangements on an ad-hoc basis; speak to your dealership, and they will be able to confirm whether this is possible.

Repair work

It's worth noting that the AWS only applies to service-related tasks. More substantial repairs, such as damp work or crash damage, are not covered.

Whatever your circumstances, and whichever dealership you purchase your caravan from, you should never skimp on servicing. If it's required for your warranty, you might void that warranty by failing to keep up with it.

For more information about the AWS and its members, visit approvedworkshops.co.uk.





SAVE ON SERVICING

Following a few simple steps can help you minimise your maintenance costs

HAVING YOUR CARAVAN professionally serviced on a regular basis is essential, but it's not cheap – so how can you save money while you're doing so?

The answer is to carry out some basic maintenance and checks before your tourer goes to the workshop, which could save you time and labour costs – and will also help to minimise the need for expensive major repairs in future. Here are a few key areas:

➤ Regularly check the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and change them as needed.

➤ Check tyre pressures before every journey (don't forget the spare).

➤ Keep an eye on the age of your tyres. You'll find the date imprinted inside a small lozenge on the tyre wall. These two numbers indicate the week and year of manufacture. For example, '11.18' means the tyre was made in week 11 of 2018. Always replace your tyres when they reach five to seven years old, even if the tread is not worn out.

➤ Look for tell-tale signs of cracking or damage in the inner and outer walls of the tyre, especially if you know you have caught a kerb, or hit a pothole or some road debris.



➤ Check the tyre tread depth; 1.6mm is the legal minimum, but we would recommend 3mm as a sensible minimum.

➤ Keep an eye out for evidence of corrosion on the chassis, especially at joints, and if the surface has been damaged or scuffed, for example, by heavy kerbing or a feisty speed bump.

➤ If you have 12V electrical problems and your battery is more than five years old, it might be time to consider replacing it. Make sure that

the battery terminal connections are nice and tight.

➤ The first obvious sign of water ingress can be a damp or musty smell. Keep a nose out for it.

➤ When you are changing gas bottles, consider using an LPG leak detection spray (about £6) to make sure that you have tightened everything up correctly afterwards. Simply spray it on the connections, and it will bubble up if there is any gas escaping.

➤ Lubrication is the caravanner's friend. Consider greasing/oiling the easy-to-access points on a regular basis between services: moving parts on the hitch-head, the handbrake cable, the corner steadies, and accessories such as motor movers.

➤ The gas pipe to the regulator should be changed every 10 years. The date of manufacture will be printed on the pipe.

➤ If you've ever whacked your jockey wheel on a speed bump or a ferry ramp (and who hasn't?), check that it hasn't sustained any damage.

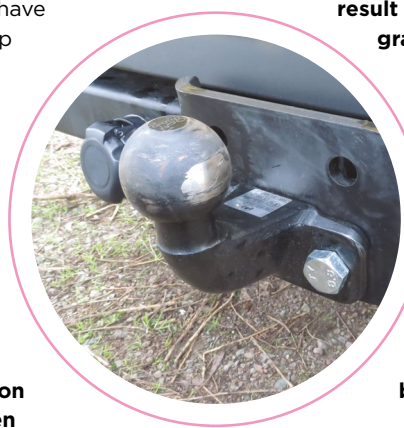
➤ Coat the toilet cassette blade/seal lightly with silicone lubricant (or olive oil) on a regular basis.

➤ Spraying some WD-40 into locks keeps them lubricated and prevents water from getting in. At the very least, apply spray lubricant at the start and end of the touring

season. Spray cans that have thin tube applicators are ideal for use in locks.

➤ Clean algae and moss from around seals, because they can grow and push the seal away from the window.

➤ Keep your towball clean. Rust and grease cause damage to your Al-Ko stabiliser and could result in a horrible



graunching sound when you are in the process of manoeuvring your tourer. New, painted towballs should be taken back to a metal finish with a piece of emery cloth before use, and greasy or dirty towballs should be wiped clean.

➤ After washes, use a cloth to apply silicone spray to rubber door and window seals.

➤ Worn friction pads are simple to replace and cost around £25. Alternatively, they can be shimmed.

➤ Stabiliser pad wear can be seen on the scale on the front edge of the stabiliser. With the towball secured in the cup, push the handle down until you start to feel friction (just the weight of your hand resting on the handle). Now check where the arrows align on the scale. On an Al-Ko 3004 stabiliser, they should fall between the green and the red lines. The nearer it is to red, the more wear has taken place. Next, push the handle right down. The arrows should align with the black line.



➤ Ensure that the fridge flue is kept clear and has good ventilation all around it.