



Guide to... CARAVAN AWNINGS

Adding an awning to your caravan is an easily adaptable way to increase your living space and storage capacity. Here's how to choose and use one!

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www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how/ to download yours!



WHY YOU NEED AN AWNING

John Sootheran reveals why awnings are an essential accessory for most caravanners

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WE LOVE CARAVANS, but they can become a tad crowded when you're with the whole family, or have friends over.

I particularly love all that cosiness, but when I've had enough of the kids, it's good to be able to evict them to the awning, so that I don't have to endure the tinny sounds emanating from their various sets of headphones while I'm trying to read.

But having somewhere to bung annoying children is just one of a dozen good reasons why awnings are brilliant, and should always be your second purchase, right after that new (to you?) tourer.

An awning is basically a tent attached to the side of your van. As well as offering extra living space, they are excellent for storage, dining, sleeping and pets, and acting as an air-lock between your warm caravan and any bad weather outside.

Likewise, after a wet walk, an awning is a sheltered spot where you can easily remove damp outerwear and muddy boots, before stepping inside your clean, dry tourer.

Early days

Go back just a decade or so, and pole awnings had earned themselves the fond moniker 'divorce in a bag', guaranteed to test the most harmonious marriage to its limits.

This generally involved a bossy man shouting orders to his wife, who was then blamed when those orders proved to be poppycock! This scenario took place weekly all over the country, with idyllic breaks tainted by muffled cursing, high blood pressure and awning rage.

Things took a turn for the better with the advent of the air awning. These ingenious inflatables take much of the legwork, and almost all of the stress, out of setting up, and can be erected in minutes, often by a lone builder.

However, when I say they were invented a decade ago, that's not strictly true, because advertisements for inflatables appeared as long ago as the 1950s. But it wasn't until the

'As well as offering extra living space, awnings are excellent for storage, dining and sleeping'

2000s that materials technology finally enabled mass production of high-quality air awnings that wouldn't deflate and smother your dog in the night.

Initially, two or three firms got involved – the likes of Outwell and Vango – but soon, air awnings spread across the country's campsites, saving marriages (and vital drinking time) alike.

Air or pole

These days, you're more likely to see someone pumping up their awning, rather than swearing at a length of steel pole, but the humble pole awning still has its place.

Inflatables are generally lighter and smaller when packed (no pole bag), and much easier to erect, but there's nothing quite like the look of a taut, perfectly aligned pole awning to set off your touring pitch.

In addition, for long-term pitching or in windy weather, a pole awning is hard to beat.

I still remember a weekend in 2012, staying at Stowford Farm Meadows in Devon, when near-hurricane winds battered the site. Just across from us was a pristine Isabella awning, which I assumed would be in Gloucestershire by morning – but it didn't flex or budge an inch, despite Mother Nature's best efforts. I was impressed.

For me, though, convenience is key, and as I'm rarely in one place for more than seven days, I always take my inflatable.

Turn the page for more information on how to choose the right awning for you.





Awnings increase your living space
and can really improve your tours

HOW TO CHOOSE AN AWNING

Before you buy, read our expert advice from Nick Harding

WHICH AWNING IS the best one for you? Of course, the obvious answer to that is, only you know. And don't let any pushy sales folk try to persuade you otherwise.

That said, specialist awning retailers will be your real friend as you make the journey from initial research to purchase. You can use these experts to help you decide particular models that are best for you.

But first, you'll need to set yourselves some basic criteria, including what you want to use the awning for. Are you looking for helpful cover and weather

protection on short trips, or perhaps extra living/sleeping space on full holiday breaks?

First, a warning

'Divorce in a bag' – that's the unfortunate handle that's been attached to the otherwise quite blameless caravan awning.

This is basically the result of years of heated arguments when it comes to putting up your awning. But these days, the tag is a bit outdated.

Today's awnings are not just designed to be easier to set up, they're packed with plenty of user-friendly features. And they

are excellent value for money. So divorce? Holiday romance, more like. In truth, awnings are a brilliant – arguably essential – addition to your caravanning lifestyle, offering you extra living and storage space, or even more bedrooms if you wish.

Awning type and size

It's obvious, really, but choosing the right size is critical, especially if you're buying a full awning.

For more information on sizing, take a look at our online guide, at www.practicalcaravan.com/advice/the-ultimate-awning-guide.

But one early decision that you'll definitely want to make is whether to go for a full or a porch awning.

The former is going to be best for longer-term (seasonal) pitching and/or when you want a draught-free connection to your caravan.

The latter are easier to put up and take down, and are generally lighter, and if required, offer just as much space as the full version.

For a porch awning, you need measurements for height and a length that, ideally, won't impinge on van doors, windows,



- 1** Innovations such as these height adjustment discs from Outwell can help an awning pitch better on uneven ground
- 2** This Isabella Etna awning can double your living space
- 3** SunnCamp Ultima 390 porch awning is fitted with steel and glass fibre poles

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external lockers and so on. And there's a choice of depths, too.

Awnings are made of a variety of materials, so it's important to choose wisely, depending on your needs and budget.

This starts with cost-effective ripstop fabric, which is very light and great for weekends but not as UV-stable, so won't have the same lifespan as some of the heavier-duty acrylics or coated polyesters.

Basically, the higher up the fabric quality scale you go, the heftier the overall weight will be. That could be something to consider in terms of your caravan's payload – although you might find you're happier travelling with the packed awning stored in your car.

Pick your poles

This is simply a choice between traditional and inflatable. But it's fair to say that there's been a massive swing towards sales

of inflatable porch awnings over the past few seasons.

You'll see for yourself when you go to view the ranges at an awning specialist, such is the proliferation of this type. We've also started to see full awnings using inflatable technology.

If you prefer more traditional poles, there's a choice – steel (strong but heavy), aluminium (not as strong, but noticeably lighter) or glass fibre/carbon (the best of these are very strong and very lightweight).

Some manufacturers offer a choice of pole material for the same model of awning, as well as the option of increased diameter poles, which provide greater strength and stability.

Traditional plus points

- Separate bags for poles and the awning itself can make the job of packing much easier.
- Easier to take down in terms of expelling unwanted air.

- Better suited to long-term use, such as seasonal pitching.
- Often cost less than their inflatable equivalents.

Inflatable plus points

- No chance of the poles accidentally causing damage, for example, to your caravan.
- Perceived as easier to put up.
- Selection of contemporary designs and features.
- No worries about accidentally leaving the poles at home.

In practice, poled awnings can sometimes be as easy to put up as inflatables. You still have to thread them through your awning rail (often the trickiest part, but there are ways to make it easier) and peg them out.

Features to look for

- Doors and windows. It's easy to argue you can't have enough of these, for flexibility, but do ensure you have good access, as well as opportunities to see out. >>

'First, you need to set some basic criteria. One early decision you'll want to make is whether to go for a full or a porch awning'



4 Premium brands such as Dorema offer tougher fabrics, including TenCate, with higher UV resistance
5 Good ventilation is absolutely essential
6 Fiamma Caravanstore canopy is ideal in hot weather

'Dealers often have a stock of pre-owned awnings, which they acquire when caravans are traded in. They're usually offered at attractive prices'

■ Hydrostatic head (HH) is a measure of the material's water resistance. EU standards state a fabric is waterproof at 1000mm HH, but awning manufacturers usually exceed this figure, to allow for degradation of the material over time. Typically, you might see HH of 3000 or 4000, which ensures excellent waterproofing performance.

■ Pole-free pitching, which is becoming more prevalent with inflatable units. Many use adjustable upright poles to maintain a tight fit to the van's sides, but alternatives are increasingly on offer.

■ Tinted windows are a real boon – keeping out glare and heat as well as offering extra privacy – especially if weather conditions are particularly hot.

■ Optional extras. You might want – or need – to buy some add-ons, such as groundsheets, carpets, footprints, extra poles (including verandah bars),

storm kits and lighting. Think about an annexe, too, in case you are going to need extra sleeping accommodation and storage. If you feel there's any chance of the latter at some point in future, make sure you buy an awning that is compatible with such fittings.

■ You don't have to purchase everything all at once, but do look out for 'bundles' – awning plus extras at special prices, which can offer great savings compared with buying individual items separately.

■ Unlike the all-in-one nature of an inflatable, the weight of a traditional awning is split between the poles and the canvas, with separate bags for each. It makes them easier to carry, as well as store.

■ Ventilation is a critical factor, especially in inflatable units. Look for permanent vents, as well as those that can be closed off, although it's best to have

some permanent flow-through. This helps to avert any build-up of condensation (often wrongly thought of as a sign of a leak).

■ Consider adding a roof lining, especially if you're buying an inflatable. There's a far higher chance of condensation building up in such an awning.

■ Want to seal the deal? Ask the retailer to throw in a set of rock pegs. These are the heaviest-duty pegs you can buy and might come in handy when you're pitching up on particularly hard ground.

Buying secondhand

Caravan dealers often have a stock of pre-owned awnings, which they acquire when vans are traded in. These are usually on offer at attractive prices.

It's also worth noting that if you're buying a van (perhaps for the first time) from a retailer, they might offer to include a pre-owned awning in the deal.

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7 You might want to budget for an electric pump if you go for an inflatable awning

8 Bag much bigger than awning? Ideal!

Quality and condition can vary here, but you might get lucky with the perfect choice, and this is an excellent way of finding out what you are going to expect from your awning purchases in future.

As you would of course also expect, the general advice about buying pre-owned awnings is to be wary, unless they are a premium brand.

In addition, apart from the usual warnings associated with buying anything secondhand, do check carefully to see if the awning is the correct stated size and that all of the frame parts are still present.

Look for any signs of mould and whether the fabric has had any recent waterproofing.

Note, also, if you're switching your caravan and think this entails changing your awning, that some full awnings can be altered in size, saving you the cost of buying a new model.

Do your homework

■ Be prepared to do plenty of research before you buy. You can get good advice from your local caravan dealership, and ask other caravanners, too.

■ Go and see the products on display at a specialist retailer or a show before you proceed with any purchase. Depending on the fabrics, especially, you'll find that there's a different ambience inside each awning.

■ As well as information on their websites, most of the larger brands have a YouTube channel, where you can find helpful tips and guidance.

■ Ideally, try putting up your new purchase before going away with it for the first time. This will not only give you greater confidence when you begin setting up your awning 'in the field', it should also ensure that nothing is missing (yes, this can indeed happen, even to old-hand caravanners!).

And finally...

The addition of an awning can significantly enhance the whole family's touring enjoyment.

However, it's very important to take the time to select the awning that is just right for you and then familiarise yourself with how it works, to avoid stress when you arrive on site.

Don't forget, also, the awning reviews that feature regularly in *Practical Caravan*.

Again, though, just because we say that a particular awning is very good, this doesn't mean it's necessarily right for you. It's vital to do your research before you make your choice.

One final tip: always check the bags will be big enough to accommodate the awning being repacked – it will be bigger and bulkier after being taken out. It's a good idea to use a phone to video when you first unpack, so you will have a reference for how to put it away again. **PC**

'Do plenty of research before you buy. You can get good advice from your local dealership, and ask other caravanners what they think'



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AWNING BRANDS

There are plenty of names to browse when you're shopping for an awning

CARAVANS AND AWNINGS go together like sunrise and mornings, you could say.

Go onto a campsite anywhere in the world and you'll find that pretty much all of the caravans pitched there have some kind of fabric contraption attached to them. And it's really not that difficult to see why.

Putting up an awning on your van can more than double the space you have to move around in, and you are often in one place for a while, so it is well worth the effort of putting one up – and then taking it down again!

But are you confused by the numerous brands out there? Here are some major players.

1 Bradcot

Bradford-based Bradcot is best known for producing traditional poled awnings, very much geared for the seasonal market, such as the Residencia

50. In recent years it has also branched out into air awnings, including innovative models such as the Modul-Air, which can be either a full or a porch awning, depending on your circumstances and the pitch.

Many of its models are made of highly waterproof Tencate fabric, designed to withstand the worst of the British winter.

► bradcot-awnings.co.uk

2 Camptech

Camptech is unusual among awning manufacturers in being owned by the factory that makes the awnings.

In most cases, manufacturing is contracted out, usually to a factory in the Far East, but ownership stays close to home.

Aimed at the more budget end of the market, the company offers a full range of poled and air awnings, suitable for both touring and seasonal markets. Many of its awnings are made

in its own Climatech SR17 coated polyester fabric.

► camptech.com

3 Fiamma

Roll-out awnings are much more common in motorhomes, but they aren't unknown on caravans, particularly on the Continent; which is why Fiamma includes the Caravanstore Awning among its product line-up. The legs and fabric on this all roll back into the tube of the awning that runs along the top corner. The awning is also light enough not to cause problems when you are towing the caravan, and offers a quick, easy sunshade when you pitch up on site.

► www.agentfiamma.co.uk

4 Dometic

You probably know Dometic as the name behind the fridge in your caravan.

Swedish company Dometic produces awnings as well – and

it considerably increased its footprint in this market when it acquired Kampa, the British pioneer of air awnings among other things, in 2018.

Since then, there has been a bit of a change-around in marketing, so the Kampa name now only applies to campervan awnings and canopies.

Awnings that bear Dometic's name are designed for use with caravans and larger motorhomes.

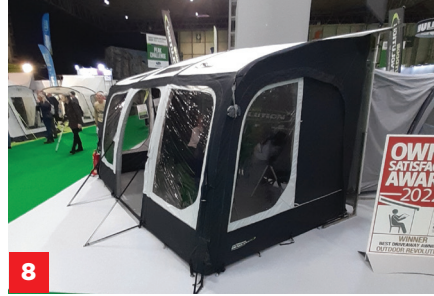
On the caravan side, new models include the Leggera Air Redux range – lightweight awnings that are made from recycled plastic bottles.

► dometic.com

5 Dorema

Dutch company Dorema is 35 years old this year, and produces a range of poled and air awnings for caravans.

However, if you feel that you wouldn't even have room for a porch awning with everything



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else you are taking, it also has an extensive selection of sun canopies, in various shapes.
 > dorema.co.uk

6 Isabella Isabella is perhaps the most widely recognised name in the caravan awning sector.

It produces a broad range of products, made from high-performance materials. Traditionally associated with poled awnings, for a while the Danish company was only offering inflatable alternatives through its slightly lower-cost Ventura brand.

But more recently, it has launched Cirrus North, the first inflatable range produced under the Isabella name.

Recent additions to the firm's offering include awnings that are specially designed for Eriba caravans with pop-up roofs.
 > isabella.net

7 Olpro Olpro is like many of the other brands, in producing a much wider range of products than just awnings.

But it's different from them, too, in that it has no dealers, selling everything (which in its case includes melamine crockery, camping furniture, daybeds and barbecues, as well as awnings) through its website.

The company has a strong campervan ethos, and most of the awnings it supplies are designed for motorhomes.

But it has branched out into poled caravan awnings, with

two Welbeck porch models, and inflatable awnings, with the impressive View range.
 > olproshop.com

8 Outdoor Revolution West Yorkshire's Outdoor Revolution produces a full range of family tents, as well as caravan and motorhome awnings. For caravans, it has three ranges, including the new-for-2022 Eden Air. This lightweight line-up provides individually inflated air poles, designed for caravanners who are on the move a lot.

The other two more premium ranges – Sportlite and Eclipse Pro – both feature single-point inflation. This year, the Eclipse Pro comes with a flat front.
 > outdoor-revolution.com

9 Prima Leisure Prima Leisure started out as Bailey's accessories business, although in recent years it has become more and more of a standalone organisation.

For caravans, its most recent development has been Discovery awnings, which are specially designed to fit Bailey's Discovery range of caravans.

These L-shaped awnings fit around the side and the rear of the van – the first all-inflatable awnings to do so.

They will fit any Discovery caravan, should you feel the need to change up or down.

Prima also produces a range of more conventional Classic air awnings to fit all caravans.
 > primaleisure.com

10 Quest Leisure Quest Leisure is best known as a distributor of caravan- and motorhome-related products. These include Westfield, a German range of poled and air awnings including the Pluto, Ceres and Vega. But it also produces more budget-priced awnings under its own name, and in the past season, it's this Falcon range that has been given a refresh.

The awnings are designed to be lightweight, sometimes weighing under 9kg including the bag and pumps, and come with multiple-point inflation.
 > www.questleisure.com

11 SunnCamp SunnCamp produces a range of inflatable caravan awnings among its selection of tents and canopies.

These include traditional full-size awnings, such as the Esteemed Air and Icon Air, and more innovative Air Volution

awnings and porch awnings.

As with much of the industry, recent product development has been somewhat hampered by the pandemic, but the company is promising plenty to come in 2023.
 > www.sunncamp.co.uk

12 Trigano Yes, Trigano is part of the group that includes some of the biggest names in caravans and motorhomes, including Adria.

It is, in fact, the only part of the whole group that carries the Trigano name – although it used to be called Eurovent.

In caravan awnings, it makes everything from traditional designs for seasonal use, to more unusual inflatable shapes.

New models this year include the Guerande, a modular awning made from polycotton.
 > trigano-camping.com

13 Vango Vango is a well-known camping brand, producing everything from sleeping bags to tents and a wide range of outdoor furniture.

The Scottish firm ('Vango' is a reworking of Govan, the famous Glasgow suburb) also produces ranges of caravan, campervan and motorhome awnings. Its caravan awnings include the conventionally shaped Riviera, the 'lean-to' Balletto and the Tuscany, with a bowed front. For 2022, many are in ProShield fabric, which lets water bead and run away quickly.
 > vango.co.uk

'Putting up an awning on your van can more than double the amount of space you'll have to move around in'



PUTTING UP AN AWNING

It's as easy as 1-2-3, when you know how!

1 The most difficult part of an awning build can be feeding the cord through the awning rail, so consider lubricating the rail with some silicone spray.

2 Always try to erect your awning in dry weather, although an advantage of air awnings is the speed at which you establish the basic waterproof structure. With practice, you could have the shell inflated in just four to seven minutes.



3 To keep your awning clean, roll out your awning carpet close to the end of the caravan, where you'll start feeding the cord into the rail.

4 Now empty the awning out of the bag onto the carpet, and unroll it.

5 Position it so that the correct end is close to the slot where the cord slides into the awning rail.

6 At this point, check your awning is the right way around! On one occasion, I had the cord halfway through the rail before realising I'd got it wrong.

7 A full awning will need to feed into

the rail right at the start of the track, normally low down on the end of the caravan. However, porch awnings can be fed into the rail higher up (there's usually a choice of entry points), as this minimises the distance they have to be pulled through.

8 Pull the cord through the rail by its reinforced tab, if it has one. If it jams, check the cord isn't kinked where it enters the rail.

9 Rather than balancing on the caravan step and stretching as you pull the cord through the rail, consider using a length of cord tied through the tab eyelet to pull it through. This will allow you to stand on the ground.



10 Alternatively, you could invest in the Kampa Easy Awning Pulley (from £21.99), a simple device designed to help you pull the cord through the rail with least effort. The pulley lets you stand at the end of the rail to feed in the cord while pulling it through, making it truly a one-person job.

11 A full awning will have to be pulled all the way through the rail, filling the

entire length, while a porch awning will only cover part of the van side, depending on its size.

12 Once the porch awning cord is in the rail, slide it along so it's in the correct position, covering the door, but if you've bought wisely, not covering half of a window.

13 If your porch awning crosses a window, invest in the draught-sealing systems that are offered by most manufacturers.



14 Once in position, peg the awning down, but only at the two points nearest to the side of the caravan. Insert any insulating/protection pads, ensuring a good fit.

15 Another advantage of air awnings is that there are usually no poles to accidentally scratch the side of your beloved caravan.

16 With an air awning, the next step is to locate the pump valve for the main structure, then attach the pump (either electric or manual) and start the inflation process, ensuring that any manual pumps are always on the 'blow' setting.

17 Now it's time to inflate an air awning, or start your pole build. Before you commence, make sure that your awning is spread out in roughly the correct position.



18 Within a few actions, the awning will start to expand and take shape. Most have pressure-release valves, designed to prevent over-inflation. When you hear air hissing out of the valve, disconnect the pump and seal the valve.

19 You now have a basic waterproof structure, so on a wet day you can do much of the remaining build under cover.

20 With a pole awning, you will need to follow the manufacturer's instructions provided, at least until you know exactly what you're doing.

21 Follow the build step-by-step, taking care not to catch the side of the van with the poles. With practice, you'll soon have the basic structure up and ready for adjustment.

22 With the structure in place, it's time to peg down. Zip the door closed and work out from

the van wall on each side, ensuring that the awning material is kept tight.

23 On uneven or bumpy pitches, you'll find that air awnings 'absorb' undulations quite easily, thanks to their flexibility. Pole awnings, however, will require more careful adjustment, to ensure a good 'seal' all the way around the base.

24 Pole adjustment systems do vary, so take the time to learn how yours works.



25 If you're expecting bad weather and high winds, consider fitting your storm straps.

26 With the awning structure firmly pegged in place, you can add any reinforcing poles or beams. Air awnings will often have several of these in the roof structure. After inflating them, they usually Velcro in place.

27 Check the awning seal against the side of the caravan (especially in cooler/windier weather) and adjust as necessary.

28 Next, for aesthetic purposes – or added heat retention in colder weather – fit the awning's draught skirt. This slips into a rail along the lower edge of the caravan sidewall and goes across or up and over the wheel arch, preventing draughts from blowing in under the caravan.

29 With a few final adjustments of both awning and carpet, you now have the perfect extension to your caravan living space.

ADVICE & ACCESSORIES

Clever kit, expert tips!



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➤ Consider taping your pump tubes together, to prevent them from popping apart in mid-inflation.

➤ Think about colour-coding your poles, to show how they connect together. This is especially important if you are only going to be using your awning once or twice a year.

➤ Take a headtorch if your awning build will continue after dark.

➤ On hardstandings, consider using a cordless drill and slim masonry bit to drill guide holes for your pegs (ensuring that you cause absolutely no damage to the pitch).

➤ When folding your awning for storage, try to fold on the seams as much as possible, and keep the plastic window panels as flat or curved as you can.

➤ Always aim to put your awning away bone-dry. If it's damp or wet, you should get it out once you're home, to dry it properly. Avoid leaving it in the bag while damp for more than a day or so.

➤ Double-check for tent pegs before leaving the campsite, especially if the grass is longer.

➤ Fairy lights add cheap, pretty, low-consumption illumination to any awning. Choose solar-powered ones to minimise cabling through windows, but always carry spare rechargeable batteries, just in case.

➤ Alternatively, consider uplighters, which create a similar, softer light that looks and feels better. There's a huge array of awning lighting options

at all price-points, so take a look online.

➤ If you mainly tour abroad, check out the brilliant wind-out awnings from the likes of Fiamma (F-series) and Thule (Omnistor).

These are permanently mounted in a 'roller tube' along the top edge of the caravan's doorside wall (although they're more common on motorhomes). They wind out with a handle, to provide a roof that will protect against rain and provide a sunshade.

Two legs support the front edge of the cover, and side panels can be added to create an enclosed awning in poor weather. These awnings cost from £500-£1000 and weigh in the region of 50kg, so should be factored into your payload calculations, because they are a permanent fixture.

➤ If the waterproofing of your awning material is failing in places, consider Isabella Aquatex impregnator spray to reproof the affected area (one litre costs £7.99).

➤ Awning linings are available to enhance the homely appearance of the interior, creating more of a 'posh marquee' effect.

➤ Buy good-quality pegs. Skimping at this stage will cost you later!

➤ Use your awning soon after you buy it and you'll have a better chance of obtaining a replacement or a refund if there are problems. If you buy it at an October show and don't use it until the following Easter, you won't be able to use it at the start of the season if there's an issue with it.



AWNING ACCESSORIES

Now you have your awning, it's time to choose some essential kit!



Glow in the Dark Hard Ground Pegs

Price £11.95

Web towsure.com

Tackle any surface with these sturdy pegs. Made from stainless steel, they also have a glow-in-the-dark plastic hook, to help prevent trips or falls. They are 20cm long and come in a convenient plastic storage box with a handy integrated cleaning brush.



Fabsil waterproofer & UV protector

Price £21.51 (five litres)

Web wowcamping.co.uk

If your awning looks a bit tired, or you are buying secondhand, a coating of waterproofer, such as Fabsil Universal Protector, will give it a new lease of (leakproof) life. Simply paint it on and allow to dry; the UV protector will also help to minimise future sun damage.



Dometic Dual Fix Draught Skirt

Price From £25.99

Web campingworld.co.uk

An awning skirt is an essential to help prevent draughts from underneath the van. This one from Dometic can be fixed along your caravan's skirt rail, or by using the company's Limpet fixing system. It's made of PVC, is available in three sizes, and has multiple peg-down points.



Via Mondo outdoor curtains

Price £29.99 (pack of eight)

Web caravanstuff4u.co.uk

If your awning doesn't come with curtains and you'd like a bit more privacy, you can purchase dedicated sets, including this pack of eight white curtains from Via Mondo. They feature a clip and a stitched top, so are suitable for curtain poles, and various sizes are available.



Extra-large zipped awning bag

Price £25.99

Web bags2cover.co.uk

Tired of having to stuff your awning into a bag that will only just hold it? You need to get your hands on a new bag, such as this one from Bags2Cover – it measures 115 x 43cm and is made of heavy-duty fabric. It's also available in a choice of four colours: black, blue, red or green.



Awning storm tie-down kit

Price £20.99

Web amazon.co.uk

Most awning manufacturers offer their own brand-specific storm straps, but universal kits are available, too.

This one features sturdy straps with metal clips and strong pegs that will help to keep your awning safely in place during rough weather.



Outwell Laze inflatable furniture

Price £207.99 **Web** [decaathlon.co.uk](https://www.decaathlon.co.uk)

Your awning should be a great space in which to relax, and the Outwell Laze inflatable furniture set will allow you to do just that. Featuring a sofa, chair and footrest, it comes with soft, durable, removable covers, and packs down to just 54 x 38 x 23cm.



**CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!**



Dometic TPV 115 camping table

Price £150 **Web** [dometic.com](https://www.dometic.com)

Every awning needs a table for dining or card games, and the TPV 115 from Dometic is a smart one. It features a stylish waterproof marble-effect top and sturdy aluminium legs, and has a 100kg load capacity. Yet it weighs just 11.5kg and folds flat for easy storage.



Stormsure repairer

Price £6.95 **Web** [towsure.com](https://www.towsure.com)

Don't write off your awning if it has a small rip or hole – give this stuff a go first. Stormsure forms a thick, flexible film to help seal tears in waterproof fabrics, extending your awning's lease of life if it's suffered damage in the past.



Outdoor Revolution Breathable Treadlite Carpet

Price £29.99 (380 x 250cm)

Web [winfieldsoutdoors.co.uk](https://www.winfieldsoutdoors.co.uk)

Many sites insist on breathable awning groundsheets to prevent damage to grass, in which case you need something like this Outdoor Revolution carpet, available in a range of sizes. It allows the grass to breathe, and comes in a handy carry bag.



Awning organiser

Price £20 **Web** [etsy.com/uk/shop/TheHappyCaravanner](https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/TheHappyCaravanner)

Keep your maps, books and copies of *Practical Caravan* tidy with this handmade organiser in cheery polka-dot oilcloth, from The Happy Caravanner on Etsy. Measuring 38 x 50cm, it features a trio of pockets and can be located against the wall of your van, using suction hooks.



Kampa Dometic Awning Hanging Rail

Price £17.95

Web [towsure.com](https://www.towsure.com)

If you have a Kampa Rally Pro, Plus or Club awning from 2012 onwards, you should also have the fixings to allow you to attach this handy rail – just perfect for hanging up damp clothing or towels, keeping them out of your caravan.



AWNING CARE

Look after your caravan awning and it will last for years! Sammy Faircloth shows you how



AFTER PURCHASING YOUR caravan, an awning or canopy is probably going to be one of the most expensive accessories you decide to buy.

An awning can offer you much needed respite from the elements, providing shelter from the sun and protection from the rain. And for those of you who enjoy long stopovers, the awning can also be a really useful source of additional sleeping space (1), as well as increasing the room you have for dining, or storing kit.

My first one was an Isabella porch awning, given to me by my father. Having bought a new van, finances were tight, so this was a welcome addition.

I would estimate it's about 28 years old now, but it is still in super condition and remains waterproof. The only tell-tale sign as to its age is the colour of the fabric (2)!

It makes sense to look after your awning or canopy, so here are some simple tips that should help to prolong its life.

Pitch carefully

Most of us turn up on site and look for our ideal pitch close to the amenities, with no thought for what might be above or

around us. Before you select a pitch, look up and identify the trees overhead.

Oaks are a great favourite with squirrels and it is not unknown for these cute little rodents to drop their acorns on the awning roof.

Pine trees have a pleasant aroma, but they also drip sap,

which is a very sticky substance. This is not great if it lands on your awning and really needs to be cleaned off quickly.

While you are assessing the type of tree above you, look out for dead branches. The last thing you want is for boughs to fall and rip the awning fabric.

Trees are also, of course, home to the birds and while they look and sound lovely, they often leave unwelcome messages. Try to clean away the mess sooner rather than later, or the awning material might be permanently stained.

Most pitches are on relatively level ground, but occasionally, it might be a bit undulating.



1 Sammy's Isabella porch awning, over 28 years old, is still going strong **2** An annexe attached to your awning can offer extra sleeping space and is great for teenagers or guests



Pitch so that the ground falls away from the awning. In the event of a heavy downpour, rainwater will drain away from your pitch.

Sometimes it is very difficult to pitch that way, as we found on one of our trips to Spain. After a torrential downpour, the campsite turned into a river, causing a great deal of damage (3). Fortunately, we came off relatively lightly and no serious harm was done.

When assembling an awning, make sure that you follow the manufacturer's instructions. The awning should be taut, to prevent puddles of water pooling on the roof (4). If this

has happened, just gently push the water off, because it could deform the material if left there for a long period of time.

If I had to choose one piece of awning kit to recommend, it would be storm straps (5).

On one of our holidays in Spain, we were surprised by the severity of the wind and found ourselves (along with many others) deploying additional pegs and guy ropes in the early hours of the morning. We now fit our storm straps as a matter of course.

Some canopy awnings can be rather large and might act like a kite in a strong wind (6). I'd recommend pegging the canopy

down or attaching storm straps to prevent the wind getting underneath and potentially causing damage (7).

Some materials are not 'breathable', so if you intend to use your awning for sleeping, you might find condensation forming. That's why zipped air vents are an important fitting, to provide adequate ventilation (8).

Awning cleaning

Cleaning and reproofing your awning at the end of the season will prolong its life.

However, it is important to check with the manufacturer about how to clean it. There

are various ways to do this: you can clean the awning in situ, by dropping the sides and resting them on the side of the van (9), or lay it out on the groundsheet (10). Bear in mind that you might need steps to help you reach those awkward places.

Rather than cleaning fluids, some manufacturers simply recommend using water (11) and a brush (12).

This is fine for removing dust and giving the awning a general clean, but stubborn stains, such as algae, tree sap and bird mess, might require some specialised cleaning products.

Be very cautious about using cleaning fluids and check first >>

3 Pitch so water can drain away from the awning to avoid flooding **4** Gently release water that pools on the roof to avoid stretching the material **5** Storm straps are important: you never know when the wind might pick up **6** Larger canopy awnings might be lifted by strong winds **7** Peg down a canopy or use storm straps to prevent wind damage **8** Open air vents if sleeping or cooking in the awning, to prevent condensation **9** Drop awning sides to gain better access to the roof **10** Lay out side panels on groundsheet to make them easier to clean





'Giving your awning a good clean makes all the difference'



11 Wash the awning down with water to remove dust and grit* **12** For tougher stains, such as algae, use a brush* **13** Many of the awning manufacturers sell their own versions of cleaning and waterproofing products **14** Before cleaning* **15** After cleaning* **16** Give the skirt a wipe down with water to remove any excess dirt **17** The groundsheet benefits from a good sweep, then you can clean off any dirt with water **18** Most manufacturers provide an oversized bag, which makes it easier to pack your awning away (*Photos courtesy of Isabella)

that they are suitable for your awning's type of material.

Many manufacturers, such as Kampa and Isabella, also sell their own brands of specialist awning cleaner and reproofer (13).

A good clean really does make all the difference and is worth the hard work, as you can see from these before (14) and after photos (15).

While you're working on the awning, don't forget to clean the skirt and draught skirt, because they tend to get quite muddy, particularly during wet weather (16). We often rope in the children to help take care of the groundsheet (17).

Packing away

Packing away your awning can be like attempting origami, but on a much larger scale.

Many's the time we have had to fold, unfold and refold our full-size awning!

Try to avoid folding on the window panels, because this can damage them. In addition, be mindful of where zips and other protruding objects are when you are folding.

Packing your awning away completely dry saves a great deal of time and effort when you get home. Unfortunately, our climate doesn't always enable us to do this. It is very important to pack the awning

away dry. If it is wet, either inside or out, on your leaving day, simply dismantle it and lay it out in your caravan.

On returning home, lay out the awning for a few days in the garage or a spare room, to be absolutely sure it is dry.

The reason for this is that if you pack your awning tightly away and leave it in the attic while it is still damp, mould will start to grow.

The last thing you want to find when unpacking on your next trip is a mouldy, smelly awning. Even using the various products on the market, mould stains are notoriously difficult to remove and can

be quite unsightly. As ever, prevention is better than cure!

Lastly, I do like the oversized carry bags that manufacturers tend to supply with the awning (18). This makes life so much easier. There is nothing worse than grappling for hours trying to get the awning back inside the bag that it came in.

Final thoughts

An awning is an expensive, but important, bit of kit, offering great storage solutions and extra sleeping compartments. But with careful cleaning and storage, it should provide years of good service, just like my Isabella porch awning!