

HOW TO

EXTEND YOUR STAY

SO YOU CAN CAMP OUT FOR MONTHS ON END.

Escaping civilisation and venturing out beyond the reach of supermarkets, petrol stations, and where water and electricity aren't available at the turn of a tap or a flick of the switch excites many people, including us. But, as we found some years ago, a lack of power, water, food or fuel prevented us from staying out longer. These days we do things much differently, so if this is the type of touring that you're considering, it's important to know how to stretch your supplies and resources further.

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SAVING WATER

You can save a significant amount of water by using good ol' paper towel when you're camping, as you only need a small amount to wipe over cutlery, plates, cups and mugs. Don't throw away the used paper towel though, as it's perfect for starting your next campfire.

And while we're not suggesting you stop bathing to extend your stay (and we're sure your fellow campers wouldn't want that either), showering can consume copious amounts of water if you're not careful. By using baby wipes for those times in between showers, you can easily save a good amount of water, and they're quite effective. Packets are small, lightweight and easy to pack, but just make sure you dispose of the used wipes appropriately.

Another water saving technique we've used for some time is to travel with a range of spray bottles. One has a mix of dishwashing liquid and water for cleaning dishes, while another contains a disinfectant/water mix which is handy for spraying cuts and abrasions. The other is a hand soap/water mix to wash grubby hands at any time of day, and it's surprising how little is needed to get things clean. We aim to recycle water rather than discard it, so we collect grey water and use it to douse a campfire or wash down gear.



1. A small amount of paper towel and a few squirts of soapy water is enough to keep things clean.

2. A mix of hand soap and water will keep grubby hands clean.

POWER

There's no doubt travelling with a supply of 12V power on board is going to allow you to have more options when it comes to creature comforts and keeping things charged. The key to having endless power is getting the set-up balanced right and knowing how to use power wisely and effectively. Calculate your daily usage rates by working out the total number of watts consumed, the amount of storage capacity you need (in amp hours), and your ability to replace the watts consumed using solar or by relying on your vehicle's recharging system.

The best time to charge your devices is during the day. This means you'll keep your system balanced as you won't be draining your storage battery capacity while the sun directs energy through your solar regulator system. Having 12V storage batteries full at all times will also extend their life, so it's important they take on as much recharge as quickly as possible. This is where a battery management system kicks in as it has a range of ways of keeping batteries recharged correctly depending on their chemistry. Aim for a system that uses a combination of solar and DC to DC charging in one unit, as these clever devices are your best bet for achieving fully charged batteries quickly.

Some devices have minor current draw simply by being connected to batteries, so turn these off and disconnect them. With all the different battery types, capacity sizes and chemistry types available to consumers, it's important to match the right battery to your 12V requirements.

Smaller battery storage cells are becoming popular and can be used to supply power to lighting circuits, recharge small portable devices such as phones, cameras and computers, or even jump start vehicles. These devices can be charged up using an array of methods and are a great back up, in addition to increasing overall power capacity. Being small and lightweight, they're also easy to store and carry around.

1. The solar blanket across the windscreen also works as a sunscreen for the portable fridge inside the cabin.
2. You can overcome power issues by travelling with a solar blanket.
3. Letting the solar blankets do their job while we get on with other things.



REFRIGERATION

Travelling with a fridge will extend the life of your food, but it's one of the larger users of 12V power. It's not all doom and gloom though – you can afford to turn it up to increase its cycling when you're driving or using solar while recharging your 12V system. It's a good idea to have your fridge full as the mass acts like ice in an esky, and turn it down at night as it will help minimise the number of cycling times and reduce the battery current draw.

Travelling with frozen vacuum-sealed meat or meals is another excellent way to help reduce the number of times a fridge cycles by simply placing a packet in the bottom of the fridge to allow it to slowly thaw over time. If you have a separate freezer, keep it full by freezing small bottles of water during daytime driving while there's an ample supply of power. Then simply rotate these bottles through your fridge and freezer to help make both run more efficiently.

Keeping fridges cool and covered by using shade awnings over vehicle windows and out of direct sun works wonders. Also invest in a fridge cover that has good insulating properties, and avoid packing items around the fridge motor vents, as they need to breathe for excess heat to escape.



4. Shades like these can make a huge difference in keeping your vehicle cooler.

5. A fridge cover will protect your fridge and help it run more efficiently.

MEALS

Having a meal planner is not purely for inventory control to know how many meals you're carrying, but also a way of controlling what to cook and when. Start by cooking meals and heating water using a fire, as it's a good all-around solution that saves on gas supplies, which can often be hard to come by while travelling.

We've found having homemade pre-prepared vacuum-sealed meals are a fantastic 'heat and eat' option while camping. When you're ready to eat, just place the bag into simmering water for five to 10 minutes and dinner's done, but don't throw the water away as it's perfect for doing dishes. There's also a range of pre-packed cooked meals available from camping supply stores that don't require refrigeration. Just like vacuum-sealed meals, place the bag in a container of simmering water to reheat, and they're ready to go.

Dry products such as yeast and dry fruits keep for ages, making these a good camping choice. As they'll still last for weeks after opening, it's easy enough to bake yummy bread, dampers or scones when camping. Long life products such as flatbreads and savoury biscuits for quick and nutritious meals are always a camper's best friend, take up little storage room, and work wonders for using up those meal leftovers. Above all else, always factor in some easy-to-prepare tinned or packet meals outside the number of days your meal planner has you covered for, in case of emergency.



1. Campfire cooking is an excellent way to preserve your gas supplies.
2. We enjoy travelling with vacuum-sealed home-style cooking meals.
3. Campfires allow us to both cook and keep warm during cold winter months.
4. Cracker biscuits are light and easy to pack for lunches and snacks.
5. It pays to know your fuel consumption rates before hitting the tracks.

FUEL

Travelling long distances and exploring the odd side track along the way means you need to have a fuel plan. So, it's important to do some calculations and know your fuel consumption rates in advance. Usage rates will differ for bitumen travel when compared to gravel roads where you'll run lower tyre pressures or low-range gearing. And fuel consumption rates are further increased when you're towing.

Carrying extra fuel has its challenges, and the most practical solution is to add a purpose-built and approved fuel tank for your specific vehicle. While they come at a price, they're by far the safest way of carrying extra fuel. Portable storage containers such as jerry cans or other fuel storage vessels can work as an alternative, but it's important to store the fuel appropriately, and avoid placing any containers inside the vehicle.



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If you're travelling with others, it's well worth having a discussion before taking off on your trip to determine how everyone will tackle the various elements for stretching camping supplies and resources further. This could be the perfect opportunity to develop plans that cater for everyone in the party to help you all stay out that bit longer. 