

# Camping - an introductory guide

Contributed by sean

Even Downsizers like to have fun - and according to Sean's guide you can even do it under canvas in a wet field...

Despite being a downsizer, you still want to go on holiday occasionally. Obviously you aren't going to jet off to an all-inclusive Caribbean resort because of the naughty CO2 emissions. Your last experience of camping was a mobile-home in Wales when you were six which you remember as the worst holiday of your entire life. Fear not, with downsizer's handy camping tips you can soon be enjoying a comfortable (ish) and economical holiday with ample opportunities to set fire to stuff.

A few points before we start. This article covers camping on a campsite in a tent. Why? Because that's what I do on holiday. If you want to carry all your gear into the wilderness and live off what you can forage then this article isn't going to be much help. This piece doesn't include caravanning or motor-homes because I don't like them and recent figures (made up by me just now) show that the construction and use of a caravan or mobile home uses more irreplaceable natural resources than a Lear jet.

Where should I go camping?

France, basically. Or the UK or possibly Italy. But I would suggest trying France first. It has better weather than the UK and loads and loads of really good cheap campsites. And nicer wine at lower prices than the Co-op in Aberystwyth. You can get there by boat too, which is handy when you've got a load of camping gear to carry. Buy or borrow a copy of the Michelin camping guide. This has nifty symbols for the facilities on each site, whether the site is quiet or not, how near the shops are etc. Flat is good. And shady. There are symbols for both these things.

What do I need?

Not a lot really. It depends a bit on whether you have children and how much eating out you're planning on doing. I would suggest:

**A tent** &ndash; Get one bigger than you think you need (especially if you've got children) and make sure that it has plenty of storage space outside the sleeping area. You don't need an expensive tent unless you want to carry it on your back/a bike or camp in winter. We used a Eurohike (Millets own label) three-man tent for years. If you've got children you'll want a design which gives you a covered area for playing in if it's raining. If you haven't got children you can just go and sit in a bar all day. If it is raining you'll be a lot happier if your tent erects either all-in-one or flysheet first. But it probably won't rain because you followed my earlier advice and went to France, didn't you? Make sure that you have a go at putting it up in your garden/local park/ballroom before you go. You don't want to be 500 miles from the camping shop when you discover that one of the poles is missing.

**Sleeping bags** &ndash; Again, for holiday purposes basic ones are sufficient. Some people prefer to take their normal duvet and stuff, which is fine but takes up a fair bit of space.

**Something to sleep on** &ndash; Karrimats are OK (that's the squidgy foam things for the uninitiated), inflatable mattresses aren't worth the bother in my opinion. Best of all are the self-inflating sleeping mats. They roll up smaller than a karrimat, are more comfortable and don't get punctures. They're heavier than a foam mat, but your car's carrying the weight around in this version of camping.

**Something to sit on** &ndash; I have no strong views on this, though a leather-upholstered sofa may not be the wisest choice. There's tons of folding tables, chairs, picnic tables etc. out there. Have a look around. Chairs with a glass-holder built in to the arm are good in my opinion. I like having a table but it isn't compulsory.

**Cooking stuff** &ndash; This depends on what you want to do. I'd go with a Trangia (or cheap Trangia knock-off) and a portable barbecue to start with. The Trangia gives you a set of cooking pots anyway. Take a decent knife with you, trying to open oysters with a butter knife is no fun. Alternatively buy an Opinel folding knife (you're in France, remember), they're razor sharp new, resharpen easily and won't stab you when you're rooting around in your cooking stuff as long as you remember to fold them up. One of those picnic backpack jobbies is good for

keeping everything together. Buy a coolbox and lots of the freezer bricks. Nearly every campsite has a freezer for refreezing them. Now you've got fresh milk for breakfast. A gas burner has the advantage of speed if you've got children or really, really need coffee in the morning. A couple of those folding stackable plastic crates are good for keeping everything organised. Oh yes, squeeze a full size chopping board in somewhere, there's no point taking a decent knife then blunting it because you're cutting everything up on plates. Charcoal (this is important if you're barbecuing most of your food (and if you aren't you won't enjoy camping anyway because you have an antipathy to fun)), most places in France sell two sorts, quick burning and slow burning. You want the quick burning stuff because your OH and children will lose their tempers waiting for the slow burning stuff to get up to cooking temperature. I'd take a proper coffee-pot. Don't forget a corkscrew/bottle opener. And a tin-opener. And matches, otherwise you won't be able to set fire to stuff.

Other stuff &ndash; Bin liners, for dirty/wet clothes, keeping things dry and indeed for rubbish. Clothes pegs. String. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of string when camping. For a start the clothes pegs are no use without a washing line. Lights of some sort, head-torches are good if you don't mind looking a bit of an idiot. Camping gas lamps are pretty good too but don't use them inside the tent. Some sort of large water container. I tend to buy a really big 'bidon' of water from a supermarket and refill it as needed. A plastic washing-up bowl. Handy for carrying your washing-up/laundry to the nice big sinks with hot water. Can also be used for washing small children if they go berserk when faced with a shower.

That's about it really. You're only going to a campsite in western Europe. There will be shops if you discover you've not got something important. I've left out advice about toothbrushes, shampoo, first-aid kits, suntan lotion etc. because I assume that you aren't an idiot. Just in case you are an idiot: don't leave valuables/money in your tent when you aren't there. It's made of nylon and closes by means of a zip, how secure do you think that is?  
Have fun.

Discuss and ask questions about camping on the Downsizer.net forum