



# Staying snug in your van

Touring in winter is great fun – but only if you prepare well. Lindsay Porter gives us 10 tips for staying warm

## 1 Find the right site

Every year, more and more sites stay open throughout the year simply because more of us want to use them. Mind you, I've been on a site in February which advertised 'hot showers'. True, they were hot but the air was freezing. If you shower in your van, the problem is solved, but make sure you avoid damp. On the same site, the water wasn't properly insulated, so the entire supply froze. The moral is: try to use a Club site where such things rarely, if ever, happen.

It pays to ensure your sites has hardstandings. It can be miserable on grass if the weather is extremely wet and you won't be able to put heavy vehicles there anyway, because they'll sink. Levelling-up is not much harder than in the warm but is more of a chore if it's cold, wet or dark. Go for sites with level pitches.



## 2 Choose the right gas

Propane, which comes in a red cylinder, is fine at lower temperatures but provides less heat and burns less cleanly than butane. It's a must in winter.

You could use propane all-year-round or be prepared to switch regulators or hoses in the summer months.

**OLDER TYPE-REGULATORS** If your regulator fits directly to the cylinder, you need a different one for each type of gas.

**EURO REGULATORS** If your regulator is fixed on to the bodywork near the cylinder(s), you can use the same regulator but then change the hose (over from regulator to cylinder) as is required.

**CYLINDER TYPES** The most popular range is the one produced by Calor. Their blue (butane) and red (propane) cylinders are easily understood. Calor Patio Gas (green cylinders) is propane.

## 3 How much electricity do you need?

Before leaving, you need to calculate the amperage you can use before tripping out the mains. Here's how to do it:

■ Add up the Wattage of all the appliances you will use and divide it by 230 (a 230V supply).

■ For example, a 1kW heater, 125W fridge, 750W kettle, 55W television, plus two 40W lights totals 2010 watts.

■ 2010 divided by 230 gives the number of Amps required, in this case, just over eight.

■ So, you can see that if you want to use your heater at 2kW (and that's what they're made for!) as well as boil a kettle, you'll need a site capable of supplying over 13 amps – but say 15 amps to be on the safe side.

■ However, many sites only provide a 10 amp supply, so be prepared to use gas as a heat source or to only use a gas kettle for boiling water.







## 4 Wrap up the water

'Roll-along' water carriers are essential if you're putting down roots for more than a night. You'll need to insulate them. You can buy a jacket or make your own but ensure that the material you use is unaffected by water.

Onboard tanks rarely freeze unless you travel with water in them, which you shouldn't do anyway.

Daft though it may sound, it's a good insurance policy to revert to the old-days and take a small camping water container with you. It's easily filled and carried offsite if the on-site taps freeze up.



## 5 Check heating before leaving

It's essential that the heater gas flue pipe is clear of debris. If it's not, invisible but potentially fatal fumes will seep in. In any event, invest in a carbon monoxide alarm – not the same thing as a smoke alarm. It could save your life if there's a problem with your heater while you're having an evening snooze or watching TV.

Even if you don't normally use the blown air heating fan, try it before leaving. It spreads heat while preventing the upper reaches from becoming too stuffy, which will happen if you rely only on the convection from the 'room' heater. While you (or an engineer) are on the roof – best done in the better weather – check and, if necessary, renew seals, too.



## 6 Add insulation

Use an awning – you'll be amazed how much difference it makes! You'll insulate the whole of one side and keep out draughts. You'll also have somewhere to store wet coats. Mind you, if you take it home wet, be sure to dry it after use or it will go mouldy. Put flat corrugated card inside the awning, just outside the door, to act as a doormat.

Good quality sleeping bags or a high-tog quilt will reduce the need for night heating.

Carpets are warmer than vinyl while a second layer of mats will protect, keep more warmth in and be easy to clean.



## 10 Let there be light

During the dark, winter months, it's a good idea to have outside auxiliary lights fitted, so you can easily change your gas cylinder, toilet tank or just find your wellies in an outside locker!

## 9 Waste water

To prevent freezing of waste water tank or toilet, add a proprietary water system anti-freeze. You often see a suggestion that you can use car-type anti-freeze but that is entirely wrong. Not only could vehicle anti-freeze damage the chemical toilet, you should never discharge vehicle anti-freeze into a drain because of the pollution it will cause. And I somehow doubt if your local authority waste disposal site is going to want you to empty your chemical loo into their disposal point for anti-freeze!

Salt is fine for use in a plastic container (though dissolve it first), but it could harm a chemical toilet's mechanism.

If waste sink or shower outlet pipes droops beneath the caravan, they will retain water which can freeze. If you're serious about winter touring, lag these pipes with suitable insulation from a builder's merchants, held on at short intervals with cable ties.

## 7 Avoid damp

In the winter, the inside of your van is bound to become damp. The trick is to stop it being a nuisance:

■ If not fitted, add temporary boards to keep bedding from the side walls at night.

■ Shower in the block or open the window as soon as you're decent.

■ Use an electric kettle. The water won't be any different but you'll prevent the amount of moisture created. Cook with a microwave if you can as well.

■ Fit an extractor fan to remove moisture at source or at least have plenty of ventilation when cooking.

■ Leave wet shoes, wellies and coats in the awning.

■ Air bedding during the day, when the heating is on.

## 8 Be a safe driver

The safest approach is not to set out if extreme conditions are forecast.

That said, we're talking about very unusual conditions. In normal winter weather, it will be enough to carry out the usual pre-trip checks but to be that bit more thorough. In particular, replace tyres well before they reach the legal 1.6mm tread depth limit. Sites may also be slippery, so take a pair of grip mats.

It's best to avoid pitches with potentially difficult drive-off areas unless you have 4WD. However, generally speaking, a 2WD vehicle with a traction control system will also offer advantages.

## Lindsay says...

- Take strong steel awning pegs in case of a frozen pitch.
- If there's snow, lift the mains cable regularly or it will freeze-in.
- Use Dometic fridge vent covers.
- Place bowls of moisture absorbing crystals around the van.

## Useful contacts

### Gas advice

Calor Gas [w calor.co.uk](http://www.calor.co.uk)

Campingaz [w campingaz.com](http://www.campingaz.com)

### Vent covers and roof fans

Dometic [w dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)

### Water systems

CAK [w caktanks.co.uk](http://www.caktanks.co.uk)

### Insulation

Hodgson & Hodgson Group Ltd

[t 01664 821 810](tel:01664821810)

[w acoustic.co.uk](http://www.acoustic.co.uk)

### Mud grip mats

[w pyramid-products.com](http://www.pyramid-products.com)