



# Beginners guide to caravanning

**TrailLite Group**



# Want to know if the caravanning lifestyle is right for you? Keep reading...

At TrailLite Group, we have over 70 years of experience making and selling motorhomes and caravans. You could say, we're New Zealand's experts.

Over time we've built a wealth of knowledge that we're more than happy to share with you to ensure you find the right solution to create your dream lifestyle. That's what this guide is for.

Whether you're looking to buy or just looking to learn, you've come to the right place





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# A country made for travelling!

New Zealand is great for driving holidays with so many amazing places only a few hours apart. You're never far from a main town and it's only a few 100kms from the east coast to west coast. No wonder so many international visitors flock here every year. So why shouldn't kiwis also get to explore our own magnificent backyard? It certainly isn't just reserved for the savvy international tourist.

Caravanning (and motorhoming) is a great way to see the best New Zealand has to offer. The main benefit a caravan has over a motorhome is that it can stay put while you take your other vehicle on a day trip somewhere. Plus, depending on the brand and model, a caravan could be a more affordable investment over a motorhome.





# Why choose caravanning

As a country we are relatively narrow, not that long and peppered with small interesting towns to stop at along the way. While most international visitors prefer motorhoming because it doesn't require a tow vehicle, Kiwis are equipped with permanent vehicles suitable for caravan towing as well as a sound knowledge of our roads and good driving skills, making caravanning an appropriate option for domestic travel.

## Where can I go with a caravan?

Some roads in NZ might be more challenging to navigate when towing a caravan due to their winding and steep nature, however there are hundreds of supreme location options accessible by well-maintained state highways and as a country dominated by road freight – if a truck and trailer can make it, so can you and your caravan.

## Freedom camping in a caravan

New Zealand is blessed with legislation that protects our ability to freedom camp, known in caravan lingo as “certified self-contained” camping. What this means is when your caravan is suitably certified according to NZMCA criteria (detailed on page 9) then you're able to park up almost anywhere safely, legally and comfortably to explore and enjoy New Zealand's great scenery.

However it's important to note that Freedom camping in a caravan is quite different to freedom camping in a motorhome. The main and quite sizeable difference is that you are much more limited in a caravan – where you can park will depend a lot on your length and size, as well as your set up; it's a bit more cumbersome to set up a caravan for the night and you'll have to be more mindful of the locations that can comfortably accept a caravan. Some reserves and freedom camping spots are restricted to motorhomes only.

The NZMCA (New Zealand Motor Caravan Association) has compiled a list of motorhome/ caravan friendly towns that helps you plan your journey and decide where to stay. There are over **50 locations** throughout the North and South islands that are committed to allowing and providing the resources for happily self-contained camping in some of the most picturesque locations in the world.

Check out some of recommended [trips](#).

## Campermate

Campermate is an app that started after the developers travelled the length of our amazing country on a 50cc scooter. Like most Kiwis they wanted to help keep our country clean, green and sustainable.

Campermate aims to help reduce the impact freedom camping has on the environment by providing campers/motorhomers with accurate information, feedback and ratings to maximise your happiness and ease while on the road exploring NZ; things like spots to park, the rules for each location, rubbish and dumping stations, fun activities along the way and so much more.

The app is free to download and a great resource for anyone interested in exploring exactly where you can go in a caravan. Turns out, that's almost everywhere!

# What is certified self-contained?

So you want to take advantage of our amazing landscape and freedom camping ability.

But what exactly are the rules and regulations? And how do you keep yourself and your family on the right side of them?

Freedom camping means staying at a place that is NOT an official campsite, in a tent, caravan, campervan/motorhome. Like motorhoming, certified self-containment camping is a great way to explore and see New Zealand and it's perfectly legal to do so as long as you meet some basic requirements.

Caravans are less likely to meet certified self-containment standards as it's not always fundamental for caravan owners who might be using it for purposes other than travel (discussed on page 12) – the section about “other ways a caravan can be used”.

For example, many caravans come with suitable fresh water tanks but not grey water holding tanks. However, if self-containment is important for your dream lifestyle, there are basic added extras you can put in to ensure you meet the standard including 40 litre roll away tanks for grey water. The basic criteria are\*:

- Fresh water supply (4 litres per person per day / 12 litres per person minimum over 3 days)
- Sink via a smell trap/water trap connected to a water tight sealed waste water tank
- Grey/black waste water tank: 4 L per person per day (12 L per person minimum, vented and monitored if capacity is less than the fresh water tank)
- Toilet (3 litre sewage tank capacity per person over 3 days) – must be usable when the bed is fully made up
- Holding tank (same or larger volume than fresh water)
- Evacuation hose: (3 m for fitted tanks) or long enough to connect to a sealed portable tank
- Sealable refuse container (with lid)

You can find out more about the criteria on the [NZMCA website](#) or by downloading our [Buyer's Guide](#) that explains more about the NZMCA and the self-containment criteria.

\* Note: Subject to Government regulation changes

# What are the costs of caravanning?

Maintenance costs vary depending on whether the caravan needs to be road worthy or not. However it does pay to keep it in reasonable travelling condition for resale purposes and to keep your options open.

## Approximate Annual maintenance costs

WoF	\$59
Registration renewal	\$30-\$35 per year
NZMCA memberships	\$90 per year (not including initial subscription fee)
Servicing	\$250-\$1000 per year (variable)



# How much does a caravan cost?

Caravans are a very cost effective choice with some older but well-presented options priced very reasonably.

Pricing in caravans really does fluctuate depending on a number of variables length, age, brand and condition. It always depends on how you are using the caravan and what you want to achieve with your purchase as to what is going to be right for you.

## **Under \$20,000 – \$30,000**

- Renovated older caravan
- Might not be road worthy or towable but could be good for permanent site
- Unlikely to have self-containment specification
- Late 1990's imported

## **\$20,000 – \$50,000**

- A good quality second hand import
- Good condition older NZ built caravan
- Later model mid 2000's
- Some would have self-containment certification

## **\$60,000 – \$90,000**

- Large range of new options from UK based brands
- Greater variety of length and condition
- Good quality second hand

## **\$80,000 – \$130,000**

- Larger UK based brand caravans
- Twin axle
- Premium upgrades

## **Over \$130,000**

- Outback quality
- New Zealand or Australian made
- Self-containment capacity and inclusion

# What are some other ways a caravan can be used?

Caravans are a cost effective accommodation option for many different situations and they attract a varied range of lifestyle choices. Here are some of the most common examples:

## **The granny flat**

The construction of separate dwelling self-contained housing is regulated by local government and subject to the building code legislation. Caravans can serve as a cost effective and simple solution. Instead of waiting months for consent, spending thousands on building fees and then trying to find and project management the build, why not consider a caravan? While there are some regulations to consider, a caravan can be connected to the waste and water mains, are fully functional and spacious enough to enjoy comfortable living permanently.

## **Temporary housing**

Building a house but need somewhere to live while the house gets finished? Lots of people turn to caravans as a temporary home. You have the section, power and water set up early in the build process meaning a caravan can be a cost effective solution to renting or living with family while your permanent residence is completed.

## **Guaranteed holiday spot**

The beauty of a caravan is you can go anywhere or you can stay in one place. Many families enjoy a permanent site at some of the country's most desirable holiday destinations for a fraction of the cost of buying property in those areas. Think Orewa, Bay of Islands or Raglan. And when you've seen all there is to see there and you're ready to explore a new summer holiday hot spot, you just pick up your caravan and you're away!





### **Holiday accommodation overflow**

Own a section somewhere you love in New Zealand with a utility, bach or plans to build but need some accommodation overflow for the busy summer holidays when family and friends visit? Kids wanting their own space at the family bach and renovations are not financially viable? A caravan can be a cost effective and desirable solution. They are comfortable with all the requirements of another 'master' bedroom and ensuite.

### **Tent transition**

While camping is a great way to spend time with family and in the outdoors over summer New Zealand's summer weather is far from consistent. One day of rain in your annual family camping trip can quickly result in a soggy mess with towels you can't dry, bored kids locked down inside tents and dirty muddy feet. The beauty of a caravan is that you can spend this time together all year round, making use of winter long weekends and school holidays despite the likelihood of wet cold weather. Caravans offer a waterproof and warm alternative to tenting that gives you the assurance you can go no matter what winter throws at you.

Tare weight plus payload or  
carrying capacity = GVM or fully  
laden weight or loaded weight



# How do I tow a caravan?

Lots of people think they can't get a caravan because they don't have an adequate tow vehicle.

Nowadays there are lightweight and easy to tow options, long options, and the huge carrying capacity caravans with nearly everything in between. Even if you have a smaller vehicle, modern technology and manufacturing quality of vehicles has dramatically increased in recent times meaning that towing a caravan is easier than ever before, so there's a good chance a suitable caravan could be available without needing to also upgrade your tow vehicle.

## Some things to consider:

- A 4WD is not an essential requirement for towing a caravan
- With a fully loaded trailer, braked or unbraked, you must be able to stop from 30km/h on a dry road within seven metres
- You shouldn't tow an unbraked trailer that when fully laden weighs more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  the weight of the tow vehicle
- 99% of caravans these days will be braked meaning you can work off the braked towing capacity of your car
- Make sure you know the rating of the towbar and don't assume the rating of the towbar and the vehicle will be the same
- An important point to note is that there are a number of different tow ball sizes and numerous different wiring options

Head along to the [AA website](#) to find out exactly what weight your vehicle might be able to tow and use this when looking at suitable caravans, keeping in mind that the towbar compatibility and tow rating will also need to be considered. The caravan weight you are going to be looking for is the loaded weight or GVM.

While towing a caravan can seem daunting it can be easily taught and with some simple tips and tricks you'll be on the road running smoothly in no time.

### Just remember:

- Speed limit is 90km/h when towing
- Leave 60m of space between you and the vehicle in front
- Your acceleration rate when towing is significantly reduced so keep that in mind when overtaking or pulling out

### Towing a caravan is relatively easy if you've ticked the following boxes:

- Your vehicle and caravan are compatible
- You have the caravan correctly loaded both from a towbar point of view and how you've stored stuff inside (e.g. it's no good putting all your carrying capacity weight in the front or in the back)
- You have adequate towing equipment

# What sort of models are there?

Caravans have many different floor plans, right up to 6 berth options suitable for families. There are also many different added extras that can be considered to maximise space and sleeping capacity for additional guests such as fully enclosed awnings that can serve as an additional lounge area or tent like sleeping.

In most new or late model caravans you should expect to find a functional kitchen with a full oven and fridge, a bathroom with cassette toilet and shower (either with a separate shower cubicle or combined with shower head over the toilet) and somewhere for comfortable sleeping.



## **2 berth = sleeping for two**

2 berths can range from being quite a small compact option right up to a big outback style caravan designed purely around functionality and comfort for two people. In compact options the lounge will be converted into the bed for sleeping whereas in larger options the bed will be a permanent fixture but the lounge doesn't have capacity to convert to allow for additional guests.

## **4 berth = sleeping for four**

Permanent rear beds with single island or French bed options. French bed is when one side of the bed is against the exterior wall of the caravan. The additional sleeping will be in the front lounge where beds will be easily made up from the seating. They are usually quite spacious and could easily accommodate a small family.

## **6 berth = sleeping for six**

Permanent double bed with the additional sleeping made from a more permanent bed. It could include a permanent island double and bunk beds. These are usually designed predominantly with families in mind and can be a great option for people with young children.

# Motorhome or caravan?

There are some key differences between motorhoming and caravanning that are important to consider and while they may seem obvious they impact people differently based on their lifestyle and how they see themselves enjoying the on-road adventure.

Detail	Motorhome	Caravan
Maintenance costs	Based on a vehicle so 'motor' maintenance required (road user charges, WoF, servicing).	You might already have a suitable tow vehicle and are not interested in maintaining another 'motor'.
Setting up camp and exploring	Your motorhome is your 'camp' and your vehicle so where you go, it goes too. The benefit of this however is that if you set off exploring and find another more desirable location to spend the night you have the freedom to do so.	You are able to detach your caravan, leave your camp set up and head into town for supplies or go off exploring without needing to lug everything with you.
Permanent site	It's less of a viable option to permanently site a motorhome unless the motor in it no longer works.	Caravans are located at permanent sites all through the country meaning you can secure a spot at the best campsites in the country and when it's time to explore another town/beach haven then you can easily and cost effectively relocate your 'bach on wheels' to another campsite.
Full time living	Spacious, functional and mobile.	A good option for living full time while building a house or bach or to serve as overflow accommodation.
Towing	Towing can become nerve-racking for people which a motorhome solves.	Able to use existing vehicle that you are used to driving on a regular basis to tow your caravan.
Freedom	Able to travel, freedom camp and move around the country very easily.	More restricted on your travel choices, places to stay, ability to up and leave for a weekend i.e. you have to pack the car.

Caravanning is a popular and desirable choice for a varied lifestyle. It gives you the functionality and flexibility to enjoy and explore, a dream lifestyle for every occasion!

Thank you for downloading and reading our guide. We hope you found it helpful.

### Want to learn more?

Our website is home to a library of blog articles, more guides and other resources to explore. Then, when you're ready, book in a time to chat with one of our friendly team.

### What to expect

Our consultative approach digs into getting to know you and your vision for life on the road. Because once we truly understand your dream lifestyle, we can match you with the perfect solution.

### Browse your options

Explore our carefully selected international brands or become the proud owner of an exclusive TrailLite built motorhome or caravan – the best of the best, crafted right here in New Zealand.

### Hit the road!

Following a comprehensive handover session you'll be fully prepared to explore far and wide without worry knowing you're backed by the best. We have a dedicated service centres in Pukekohe and Christchurch along with a nationwide service network while you're on the road.



Happy trails!

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