

With over 100,000 people travelling Australia at any one time, there needs to be plenty of places to pull up for the night. Fortunately, at just over 4000km wide, we have no shortage of space for hitting the sack. There are roughly 2600 caravan parks spread throughout Australia, and at least another 9000 campsites that are documented, with thousands more that are not.

When it comes to choosing a campsite, do you prefer a caravan park or a bush camp? Both have their pros and cons, but they are vastly different in everything from price to facilities, location and ease of access.

What's a bush camp?

Some people don't like the term bush camp because it brings to mind a patch of dirt in the middle of the bush. Of course, there are campsites like this, but bush camping basically covers free and low-cost camping anywhere in Australia. Many bush campsites have great facilities, and some have none at all.

There are thousands of beautiful bush camps around Australia's huge coastline or lining pristine rivers and lakes. National Parks in Australia showcase some of the best parts of the country and are full of bush camps that are used by thousands of people every day.

Private property camping in the South West. Photo: Aaron Schubert.

What are the differences?

1. Price

By far and away the most common talking point around caravan parks and bush camps is the difference in price per night. Bush camping is usually free and up to around \$15 per person per night. There are some exceptions to this, like the many stations along the Gibb River Road which charge around \$20 per night, but on average they are much less than caravan parks.

Caravan parks are businesses, and obviously are more expensive. Some cheaper parks charge \$20 - \$35 per night for an unpowered site, but the prices only go up from there. I've seen some caravan parks charging \$200 a night for a family of 4 on a powered site.

One thing that does vary a lot is the peak and off-peak pricing for caravan parks. Bush camps tend not to fluctuate as much (if at all), so regardless of when you travel the pricing is always the same.

Bush camps can be a free or low-cost way to explore Australia. Photo: Aaron Schubert.

2. Location

Caravan parks are located all over the country, but obviously, they are restricted to where they can build. Small towns often don't have caravan parks and the bigger the town the more caravan parks on offer. Some caravan parks are located next to beautiful beaches, rivers and inlets, but many are further back and in town.

A lot of bush camps are closer to nature as there are fewer restrictions. You can camp on that beautiful beach, or right next to a stunning river. However, you won't find a bush camp anywhere near a town, as it competes with the caravan parks.

Likewise, bush camps aren't usually near restaurants, cafes, shops, fuel stations and the rest of the usual facilities in a town or city.



View of the beach from a caravan park in Broome. Photo: Aaron Schubert.

3. Accessibility

By their very nature, bush camps are located away from the hustle and bustle of life. There are a lot of bush camps that are accessible via bitumen road and require a few extra minutes of travel to get there. Some are gravel roads only, which greatly reduces the number of people who visit, and then you have the real bush camps that are accessible only by 4WD, boat or hiking.

In my experience, the harder it is to get to a campsite, the fewer people you will see there, and usually the cheaper (mostly free) it is. In many cases, the overall rating of the campsite seems to go up too!



Bush campsites are harder to access, but they offer more privacy and seclusion. Photo: Aaron Schubert.

4. Facilities

Some caravan parks are fairly simple - toilets, showers and BBQ's. On the other end of the spectrum, you have those with huge entertainment areas, camp kitchens, giant inflatable pillows, water parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, on-site entertainment, tennis courts and the list goes on.

Caravan parks cater for those who want to arrive, set up and relax, without having to worry about sorting their own amenities out. Generally the more facilities, the more you pay, but location also plays a huge role in price.

Bush camps are at the other end of the spectrum. Many remote camps don't have any facilities at all. Those that are relatively popular usually have a long drop toilet, and then it gets better from there. Some have fresh water, eco-toilets, camp kitchens, BBQ's and even hot showers!



If you prefer to have access to facilities, caravan parks are the way to go. Photo: Aaron Schubert

5. Security

Feeling safe and comfortable when camping is important. Caravan parks provide a sense of security as you are located near plenty of other people, the gates are shut and security/police services are always available should something go wrong.

Bush camps don't have this, and a lot of people don't feel comfortable camping away from

others. If you can find campsites that are relatively unknown, you'll create your own sense of security.

Theft is always an issue for those travelling, and in some cases, caravan parks are worse, as they are a thief's dream. Wherever you stay, be sensible about how you do it - don't leave anything valuable out, lock your doors where possible and use common sense.



If you don't enjoy complete seclusion, caravan parks may be the way to go. Photo: Aaron Schubert.

6. Space and population

Caravan parks are limited on space, and as a result, campsites are usually much closer together than bush camps. A big caravan park site might be 8 metres by 4 metres, with the next site right next door. Bush camps can be substantially bigger than this, with neighbours at least 15 metres away, but with most much further apart than that.

I much prefer to camp where I can't hear anyone else!



Space is one of the bigger limitations in caravan parks. Photo: Aaron Schubert

7. Comfort

There is something about a nice, clean grassy site for camping. Gravel and sand can get old, and your choices for grass when bush camping is usually pretty limited.

Caravan parks often spend a lot of time keeping their campgrounds looking pristine and ensuring that campers are as comfortable as possible. Water is on tap at each site, and trees often provide great shade.

Washing facilities are easily accessible, along with various entertainment options for kids. There's no doubt camping at a caravan park provides a greater level of ease and comfort.



Caravan parks offer a few more comforts, such as toilets, showers and often entertainment for the kids. Photo: Aaron Schubert

Where are bush camps?

National parks are probably the best-known bush camps in Australia. They tend to cost around \$7 - \$15 per person per night, and usually have toilets and BBQ's available. They are often located in some of the most spectacular parts of Australia.

Station stays and private property are a fantastic way to camp on a budget, whilst maintaining some of the facilities that campers love. A lot of stations are opening up to campers as a side income, and they're almost a split between caravan parks and bush camping, with low pricing but great facilities.

Shire run campsites are spread all the way around Australia and tend to be very cheap to camp at, and out of town by 15km or so. Some of these have great facilities, whilst others have toilets and that's about it.



Farm stays on private properties are one of the options you have for bush camping. Photo:

Aaron Schubert

Preparation for bush camping

If you want to bush camp, it's up to you to make up for the missing facilities. If there are no toilets, you need to bring one (or learn to bush toilet). Then there are showers - you have to bring one too, along with the water required. If you want power, you either need a generator or solar and batteries.

There are a lot of things you can do to become a self-sufficient camper. These can cost a fair bit of money to set up, but once it's done you can effectively travel around Australia on a shoestring budget for accommodation and camping fees.



Bush camping does require self-sufficiency, so that's something to keep in mind. Photo: Aaron Schubert

Finding the best campsites

The trick to finding the best campsites is to spend the time looking around. [Wikicamps](#) is the best \$8 you will ever spend on anything camping related, as it shows you thousands of options.

Make sure the campsites suit your style of camping - the more research you do, the more enjoyable your stay will be.

Also, ensure you're allowed to camp in your chosen location as lots of people get caught and fined for camping where they aren't allowed to.



Take your time to find the best remote sites to camp on. Photo: Aaron Schubert.

What's best then - Caravan parks or bush camps?

In essence, bush campsites are cheaper, quieter and closer to nature. This comes at the cost of being harder to access sites and having fewer facilities.

Of course, I can only generalise in this post - if you find a bush camp with lots of facilities at a fraction of the cost of a caravan park, then hold onto it!

I prefer bush camps as you really get away from it all and save a packet in doing so. That being said, we often make use of caravan parks too, as it's nice to have a good hot shower, a swim in a pool and have somewhere to do your washing.

Stay where your budget and comfort requirements allow - just get out there and explore this magic country!

So, which side of the fence do you sit on? Bush camps or caravan parks?