



When heading on a holiday, getting a good night's sleep is one of the most important things. That said, it can be hard to understand which bedding option works best when camping. No matter where you are or who you're with, not getting some good sleep often means not having as good a time as you would otherwise.

But... what are the bedding options? How do they differ from one another? Most importantly, which is going to allow me the best night's sleep?

In this article, we'll look at a range of different sleeping options to give you a better idea of what you should take on your next camping or outdoor trip. Let's take a look!

Inflatable Mattresses

Everyone has slept on an airbed or inflatable mattress before. Some have had good experiences, others not so much. An inflatable mattress relies solely on air to keep its shape and support you while you sleep.



Pros:

- Very much on the cheaper side of the budget, as they are quite basic.
- Available in a range of sizes, with a built-in pillow.
- Given they are quite deep, they tend to be quite comfortable. Your hips stay away from the ground or other firm surface, and they conform to the shape of your body (similar to a water bed).
- Can be pumped up tight for a firmer feel, or expelled of some air to soften it.

Cons:

- Can be quite easily punctured.
- If you puncture the mattress and it deflates slowly overnight, you wake up on the cold, hard floor!
- Small holes can be very difficult to find and patch (especially at 2 o'clock in the morning).
- Inflatable mattresses offer no insulation from the ground, so don't provide a particularly warm night's sleep. In cold conditions, they are best used with a blanket over the top.
- Can be bouncy; if sleeping on a Double or Queen, you are likely to feel every movement from your partner.
- Require a pump to inflate (another expense and something else to carry). Using a hand or foot pump can be tiring, and electric pumps are both noisy and require power.

Self-Inflating Mattresses

Self-inflating mattresses are similar to inflatable mattresses in that they are an airtight bag which, when sealed with air, supports your body. Inside the airtight bag is foam, which is compressed when the mattress is rolled up. When unrolled and the valves opened, the foam expands back to its original size, sucking air into the bag as it does so.

When the foam return to its full size and the bag is inflated, the valves are closed, containing the air. To pack away, simply open the valves and compress the foam, forcing the air out as you roll. By closing the valves at the end, no air will enter again, thus preventing the foam from expanding.



Pros:

- As the name suggests, these mattresses will inflate on their own, negating the need for a pump.
- Simple to set up: roll it out, open the valves, and walk away. Just remember to close the valves again afterwards.
- Comfortable, particularly in the larger sizes.
- Insulative, keeping you much warmer.
- Given its foam interior, any puncture won't result in ultimately sleeping on a cold, hard floor!

Cons:

- Can occupy a lot of room.
- Larger mattresses will have more foam, therefore occupy more room when packed away too.
- On the other hand, some self-inflating mats available are quite thick when unrolled, but small when packed away. These mattresses will contain more air than foam, and often more expensive than thicker models.
- Over time, the edges of the mattress can deteriorate (depending on the quality).
- Any small punctures can be harder to locate than on inflatable mattresses. Any holes will also mean the mattress inflates in its bag when packed away, and this can cause difficulty when removing from the bag again.

Camp Stretchers

A camp stretcher is a fold out frame with a canvas (or similar material) stretched out and pulled nice and tight, supporting the body.



Pros:

- Raised off the ground, making it much easier to get in and out of bed.
- Quick and easy to assemble, and provide extra storage space beneath (for baggage etc.).
- Compact for storage and transport.
- Can be a cooler option for warm weather, given they're raised from the ground.

Cons:

- Stretchers can be quite heavy, some weighing up to 10 - 12kg.
- When new, and depending on the type of stretcher, they can be a little tight. And whilst their design is easy to assemble, they tight canvas can be difficult to stretch into place.
- Stretchers do not insulate you from the ground and can be very cold overnight, especially during the winter months.
- Some stretchers will come padded however these will be larger and bulkier to pack away.
- You may find stretchers quite firm to sleep on and are often partnered with a foam mattress or self-inflating mattress to offer a little more comfort.
- Some stretcher frames can be quite rocky and creak loudly when moving around on them.

Swags

A swag is a canvas bedroll, protective from wind, rain, dirt, sand, and bugs. It can be used outside on its own, or inside a tent, caravan, or even the living room as a roll-out bed. Swags usually boast a canvas construction and come in all shapes, sizes, and designs. Commonly, they come equipped with a foam mattress inside.



Pros:

- An efficient source of bedding, with very little setup required. Depending on the design, most need only be rolled out before they're ready for use.
- Sleeping bag or other bedding (such as sheets and blankets) can remain inside, even when rolled up.
- Most swag mattresses are made from dense foam of varying thicknesses, usually very comfortable.
- Owing to their canvas construction, swags are insulative and protective from both the ground and cold outside air.

Cons:

- Large and sometimes awkward to pack away and transport.
- Often require transporting in a trailer or on roof racks.
- Can be heavy, depending on size and canvas weight.
- Can be uncomfortable in warm and humid conditions. In areas prone to bugs and insects, it's necessary to zip yourself inside the swag completely - though this can create very hot and sticky interior conditions, and therefore an uncomfortable sleep.

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Image: OZtrail

Whichever sleeping arrangement - I recommend that you first consider how you will be transporting your chosen bedding to your destination. Upon arrival too, think that how much space will you have to set it up.

Check out our range of sleeping gear to find the right bedding that will ensure you get a good night's sleep on your next camping holiday!