

There's no better way to see Australia than with a 4WD or caravan, and some sort of camping setup. No words will truly express the magic to be experienced within Australia – you've got to get out there and see it for yourself!

When it comes to planning a trip away, some people are happy simply with a destination in mind and some rough dates. Others have the planning down to a fine art. The planning process can be as defined as you want it to be, and it's vastly dependent on your circumstances. For example, if you have very young children you learn to plan your trips a little more than if you have the freedom to arrive at camp halfway through the night! Driving late at night looking for a campsite with a screaming toddler in the back typically isn't a good time!

Have a detailed plan in place and the flexibility to throw it out the window as things change (and they will!). If you don't put the effort into researching and planning early on, you could miss out on some amazing opportunities and places.

The planning process can be as defined as you want it to be, and it's vastly dependent on your circumstances. Image: Aaron Schubert

Where to Start?

A longer trip away might seem a bit disconcerting to start with, but if you take your time and plan well, it's easily achievable. It all begins with an idea: a place that you want to see, an experience you want to have, or some friends or family that you want to catch up with. From there, cover the below steps and let the planning begin.

Budgeting

What can you afford to do? Some travel a lap of Australia for less than \$1000 per week, some up around \$1500 per week, and others end up spending a lot more. The number of meals you eat out, how many attractions you see or experiences you have, how far you travel and the type of accommodation you stay at will all be impacted by your budget.

As a general rule, 30% of your budget will go to food, 30% will go to fuel, 20% to accommodation, and maybe 10% to entertainment or experiences. The remaining 10% will spread out across things like mobile phone bills, insurance, maintenance, or just purchasing or replacing things as you travel (you will definitely need to upgrade your fishing and camping gear!).

No one can tell you exactly how much you need, but you won't need a full vault-load of cash to do it. It comes down to your tastes, style, and frequency/distance of travel.

If you take your time and plan well, an extended trip away is easily achievable. Image: The Todoing Family

Locations and Time of Year

You may already have a list of places that you want to visit. Call it a bucket list, or just some favourites – whatever it is, there's more than enough to see in Australia. The key is to match

your location to the right time of year. Get that nailed early on, and you'll be off to a cracking start.

Australia has some obvious and distinct weather patterns. If you head to a great destination at the wrong time of year, you might find it doesn't live up to your expectations. You can be hammered with winds, sitting in sand (white, yellow, red, or any colour in between), scorched by the sun, or pelted by rain. If you're in a caravan or camper trailer, ensure it can stand up to the worst days - or have a plan to withstand the hot nights, chilly evenings, or washed-away days! Ultimately, everything works - just go in with what works for you, and whoever you're travelling with. If it's just a tent, so be it - it is so worth the effort!

The northern part of Australia is normally best experienced in the dry season. This runs from May to October each year. In the wet season, a lot of the roads are closed and you'll cop hot weather and torrential rainfall! Summer in Perth is warm, so most head south to where it's cooler - but come wintertime, watch how many people jump in their cars and head north in search of balmy days and sunshine while the rest of the country freezes through winter!

If you want to visit multiple locations, put every destination down to start with and narrow it down as you go. There are so many beautiful places to stay, but you can't do them all. Also, beware of the crowds! It's not fun as a lapping traveller to turn up with everyone else at a location, experience, or accommodation spot. Consider school holidays, weekends, and public holidays where crowds might be present.

Everything works - if it's just a tent, so be it! Image: Aaron Schubert

A location such as Karijini can be hot, cold, or underwater depending on the time of year. Image: Aaron Schubert

Annual Leave and Time Off

The majority of working Australians are entitled to four precious weeks of annual leave a year. This is a major factor to consider when planning your trip away. If you want a really long trip away, you may need to go more than a year without any leave. Can you cope with that? How long do you have available? Is it months, a year, or maybe more? Australia is a massive country - you can literally spend years covering it and still not see everything! If the plan is to complete a lap of Australia, decide how long you have available first. Then, use this as a guide for breaking up the lap. Think about how you can maximise your annual leave - make use of public holidays and shift patterns (if applicable).

When you have a rough plan of where you're going and how much time you're taking off, book your annual leave. The earlier you do this, the better. Time creeps up faster than we expect! The more time you have to get things ready and plan an amazing holiday, the better.

Preparation

Australia is a big place. Don't plan a trip without knowing that your 4WD and gear are up to the task, or that they will be by the time you leave. You'd be mad to head somewhere remote without the right gear to travel safely and comfortably.

Have a good think about facilities available. Some places do not have toilets and require grey



water collection. Are you set up for that? Also, make sure that the gear and clothing you take cover the type of weather you're due to experience!



Don't plan a trip without knowing that your 4WD and gear are up to the task! Image: Aaron Schubert

In Episode 44 of the Snowys Camping Show, Ben unpacked his half-lap across Northern and Western Australia:

What to See and Do

Once the trip is booked in, you need to fill the gaps in and around each of your chosen locations. What is it that you want to see and do? You won't fit everything in, but write it all down and prioritise it later on. Itineraries are great, but not for everyone. At least know the must-do's for the trip, so you can budget to be in the right place for the right time. You will find a whole new world of information from Google, Facebook, Instagram, WikiCamps, YouTube, and various blogs. There are a lot of apps, books, maps and resources out there. Visit information centres whenever you enter a new town or region too. A simple Word document works fantastically for any information you might read or find useful. You can then read it throughout the trip to determine what you want to do.

Transport and Housing

Consider what you travel in and where you'll stay a capital expense before heading off. From people in tents, whizbangs, and station wagons, to campers, caravans, buses, and motorhomes - you can travel around Australia in all of them. A full-size caravan, for example, can offer the simplicity of setup and space for a school-aged family of 5.

However, if you're travelling in a 4WD and visiting somewhere popular (especially in peak season), you need to sort your accommodation options ASAP. Find out what needs booking, research where the best places are, and book them in! Some parks are booked out up to three months in advance!

Your choice of where to stay each night is pivotal to having an amazing trip away. Some of the best camping destinations in the world are in Australia, but you need to find them! Sometimes, you'll stumble across them - but more often than not it takes prior research and local knowledge!



Your choice of where to stay each night is pivotal to having an amazing trip away. Image: The Todoing Family



How Fast and Frequently Will You Move?

Firstly, a spreadsheet works extremely well for planning this sort of thing. You can also note down each location, mark whether it needs to be booked, when you've booked it, where you're likely to find fuel and water, and where you'll drive to and from each day. Note down where you will stock up on food, what needs doing before you leave, what needs packing, and anything else that's relevant to you.

Sometimes, a spreadsheet will also reveal massive days of driving - this allows time to make changes. For example, if you dedicate one year to a full lap of Australia, try moving every two to three days on average. With more time, you could attempt moving every four to five days. Sometimes an overnigher is necessary, or two nights somewhere instead of one. Each location feels or needs its own time sometimes! Think about your setup, pack up, and time for the lap - then work out how often you should be moving around.

Don't Cram!

You won't be able to do everything you first list down, and you will have to cull a few things. Make a habit of having a list of things you want to do and working your way down the list at each location.

Yes, you can do a lap of Australia in three months - but there's something in seeing more of less and coming back another time, as opposed to only catching a glimpse of every part of Australia.



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Image: The Todoing Family



There's something in seeing more of less, as opposed to only seeing a glimpse of everything.

Image: Aaron Schubert

Stock Up and Pack

Once you're confident about where you are going, what you're doing, and you've booked your leave, you can start to get ready. Buy long-lasting food in the months leading up to your trip to save money - look out for specials, and buy what you need. The more gradual your preparation, the better your chances are of doing it well!

Ensure everything you want to take fits properly in your 4WD, and that you aren't overloaded!

Have a good think about aligning what you take to the nature of the locations you are going to. For example: if there are complete fire bans, taking a heap of cooking gear for over the fire isn't a good idea. On the other hand, if you're due to spend lots of time at the beach, perhaps a kayak or paddleboard would be worth taking.



Trial Runs

If you haven't done much camping before, smaller trips beforehand are the best way to work out what's good and what isn't. Take a notepad every time you travel and make a note of things that can be improved or replaced. It's an ongoing process - so the more you practice, the better you get at it.

No matter how good your planning is, you won't get everything right. Some campsites you pick might not live up to their reputation, some drives will take far longer than you planned for, and your kids might decide they've had enough of driving for the day sooner than you hoped or predicted! That's okay - you can't control these things, so you need enough flexibility in your plans to adapt as things change.



A shorter trip will help prepare you for the bigger one! Image: Aaron Schubert

Get Out There!

Whether you are heading away for a week or 10, these are the basics of planning a long trip - no matter your time frame. Some thorough planning will make a world of difference to your trip. Aside from that, it provides the motivation and something to look forward to as the days tick over in the lead-up to your departure date!

Do you have any great planning tips for a longer adventure?