



Camping is a family affair, but one member is overlooked a little too often...

It doesn't have to be this way though – camping with a dog can be both a fantastic and rewarding experience.

One of our favourite trips would have to be when we went to Cape York along the Old Tele Track, with our kelpie. It was a blast swimming in the creeks with him and jumping off ledges into crystal clear water. He was a bit of a celebrity amongst the other campers along the track who were missing their own dogs. They all knew his name and wanted a pat!

Managing a photo with the whole family at the tip of Australia is something we will always cherish.



*Along the Birdsville Track. A quick stop to stretch the legs and have a play.*



*Splashing around in Canal Creek on Cape York's Old Telegraph Track.*

## It's a Dog's Life

Bringing the family dog along on holiday has so many positives. Taking a walk, going kayaking, or swimming with your four-legged friend is a great way for everybody to get some exercise.

Playing games like 'Chasey', or 'Fetch' with their favourite ball, Frisbee, or even a stick is good entertainment – and doesn't require plugging into a power socket.

Taking your dog camping is especially positive when there is a strong family bond. Plus, it eradicates the sad, guilty feeling after leaving them at home!



*He just wants that ball. Having a play is better than looking at a screen.*



*A bond is formed forever. Cooper's first camping trip with our daughter.*

## The Best Parts

### Meeting New Friends

Firstly, camping with your dog is a great way to make new friends – both canine and human varieties! Everyone loves to pat a dog – and it's without a doubt they'll be at the campsite next door making friends too! A dog is an easy way to break the ice, and makes your stay at the campground more enjoyable. Plus, there's no need to organise for someone to watch your dog at home while you're away. Pet motels or dog kennels can be expensive long-term, and probably not as enjoyable for your dog as a camping trip with the family.

That said, consider the extent to which you can include your dog in all aspects of your adventure. It's not always fair to your pup or to others if you leave them at base camp while you're out exploring. Consider your pet's behaviour and temperament when left alone (even if with close family members or friends) – or leave them at home altogether, with a sitter.

### Leftovers

Bringing your dog camping makes disposing food scraps easy too!

## Security

Another big benefit is not only the companionship but the added element of safety that a dog brings – especially when travelling solo. Dogs have a great sense of hearing, smell, and night vision. This is excellent for indicating early warning against crocs, dingos, feral pigs, and snakes – as well as whatever goes bump in the night (mainly other people who shouldn't be so close to your camp!).



*Waiting for leftovers (he eats better than us sometimes!)*



*Dogs provide both safety and companionship.*

## 'Dog-gone-it': The Cons and How to Manage Them

### Vehicle Space

Depending on their size, your dog can take up a fair amount of the limited room inside the car. To make up for that lost storage space for your gear, roof racks and trailers are an option. On that note, keep your dog safe when you're driving. We keep Cooper secure in the rear of our car, behind a cargo barrier and beside the fridge slide. Other options include car hammocks and backseat bridges. When he was small enough to be in the back seat, we used a harness through the seat belts. For more details on safe travelling with dogs, check out this resource here.

### Campsite Limitations

Having a dog can also limit where you can stay. While some state forests, private campgrounds, and lots of free camping spots are dog-friendly – national parks and nature reserves are out of the question. Some national parks allow you to take your pup for walks only, as long as they stick to the trails and remain on a leash at all times.

A dog's scent can disrupt the wildlife, deterring some animals from their own habitat. Often, baiting systems are in place to control feral species – and these can be fatal if ingested by your dog. At the campsite, both the smell and sight of food or scraps is a magnet for scavenging birds and animals – including dogs from neighbouring campsites. Keep *all* food locked in your car or tightly sealed in a container. Mice are notorious for nibbling holes in plastic bags – and dog food isn't the natural diet of native birds and animals. In fact, it could be harmful to their health.

Be aware of your own dog's scavenging habits too, and nip it in the bud immediately; as soon as your dog discovers treats at other campsites, they become difficult to control!

### When Your Doggo Goes Rogue-go

One of the biggest fears is losing your best friend. It's a *must* to have them microchipped, with a tag on their collar displaying your contact details – but keeping treats in your pocket should also be enough to keep your dog from wandering too far. Ensuring they come back to you when called is a command you should have mastered, and enables your dog a little more

freedom around camp. Depending on both your dog and the campground, you may also need to attach a lead.

### **Tangled Tethering**

When your dog becomes tangled up with guy ropes, it can be so frustrating – the moment you manage to untangle them, they’re stuck around three poles and intertwined with more rope again. A screw or Hex peg is the perfect solution: your dog can be tethered out of reach of awnings and tents, always with water and shade. Having a guy rope trace spring on the peg should also stop your dog from hurting themselves and pulling the peg from the ground.

### **Waste Maintenance**

Picking up their waste also isn’t pleasant, but it’s something you have to do. Otherwise, sites will ban dogs entirely. Always keep biodegradable bags with you, and do the right thing in keeping the campgrounds clean. A trowel is also handy for burying your dog’s number twos.



*Cooper gets a thick foam mattress for trips in the car!*



*Going for a walk around camp at Bigriggan. A long lead gives Cooper a bit more freedom.*

## **10 Doggy Essentials for Camping**

- A camp chair or mat for lazing around during the day
- Dog food and bowl, plus treats for good behaviour and training
- Plenty of water
- Glow sticks – great for attaching to the collar at night for visibility
- Long and short leads
- A screw or Hex peg, with a guy rope trace spring
- A collar, and tag with necessary names and contact details
- Biodegradable waste bags
- Toys to play with and chew on
- Dog sunscreen or glasses – especially at the beach



*A bit of luxury – having somewhere comfortable to sit in the shade.*

## **Locations**

There are some fantastic sources of information on places to camp with dogs. Some of our favourites include Landcruiser Mountain Park, North Stradbroke Island, Bigriggan, and Neurum Creek Bush Retreat. Guidebooks like Camps Australia Wide 10 also detail whether or not dogs are allowed at each campsite.

Online, there are both Facebook communities and sites like Wikicamps and Find-A-Camp. Or, simply Google the area you're interested in. Ensure you understand and abide by the respective rules for each site.

*There are lots of resources to help find suitable camping spots.*

*Landcruiser Mountain Park has plenty of room to run around... but he's always keeping watch.*

## Additional Considerations

### Overheating

Never leave your pooch locked in the car – even for five minutes, with the windows down a crack. Not only is it dangerous but could land you in court with a heavy fine. If you have to, find a safe, shady, cool spot and ensure they have plenty of clean, fresh water. We always keep a collapsible bucket in the car. Sometimes water sources like creeks or puddles contain bacteria or other nasties that may affect your dog's health. Keep a reliable water filtration system on hand if you run out of your own water supply. This ensures drinkable water for everyone on your adventure.

### Sickness and Infection

Keep your best mate up to date with vaccinations and tick treatments. If you're yet to take your canine camping and unsure what this involves, speak to your vet. Always check for ticks or strange bumps, especially around the face and legs. A tick will be very tiny if it has only recently latched onto your dog. It may not be easily seen – so be aware, and watch out for tick-induced symptoms that may arise after a few days. Common signs are a cough, vomiting, difficulty swallowing, shaky legs, and unusually subdued behaviour. If their bark doesn't sound the same, or their walk doesn't look right after a trip away – get to the vet. We've never had a problem, but it's always wise to be diligent. It's also a good idea to keep a tick remover in your first aid kit.

### Monitoring Their Enthusiasm

Scan the campground for wildlife (like kangaroos or wombats) and other dogs. If either are present, wait until larger animals have evaded the area before allowing your dog to leave the car. If your dog tends to take off, track, and follow scents until you wonder if they'll never come back – set them up with a bed and water bowl, and keep them secured on a longer lead.

### Routine

Dogs are creatures of habit. Exploring a foreign land may be unusual for your dog, and some may find the new experience overwhelming. Keep your dog's feeding, walks, and training to the same time and structure they're familiar with. Similarly, avoid changing the type of food your dog is usually fed, and pack a few favourite toys or well-known belongings, such as their

 bed.

If you own an 'indoor' dog, maybe invite them to stay with you in your tent or swag. A suggested setup is an old foam roll, blanket, or yoga mat to provide both extra comfort and protection from the ground. There are also dog-specific portable camping beds available. Another option is a separate shelter, like the Darche Hutch. This can be attached to the end of your swag, or used on its own as a mini, freestanding abode.

## Campfires and Fire Pits

Check any surrounding fire pits for residual heat. I've seen our dog stand in one straight after jumping out of the car, and thankfully it wasn't hot.

## Insurance

Some people may want pet insurance, to prepare for worst-case scenarios. Ask your insurer whether their dog is covered when camping or travelling, and if so what they're covered for.



*Don't leave your dog alone in a car.*



*Camping just west of Birdsville. These two are inseparable.*

## Our Best Memories

The most memorable camping trips have been with our kelpie. The hardest part has always been convincing him to jump out of the car when we arrive home; he just lies in his spot with these big, brown, sad puppy dog eyes, wanting to go back!

Don't leave your best friend at home on your next trip. Do some research, make room in the car, and set off on an adventure together.



*Stopping in for a look at Ilfracombe on the way home from the Gulf of Carpentaria.*

**I still laugh when I think about the time Cooper ate Lara's sandwich that was on the camp table! What's the funniest experience you've had camping with your dog?**

*This original article by Adam and Lara was updated in 2022 by Snowys Outdoors.*

**We've discussed this topic on the [Snowys Camping Show](#).**