

Heading away with a big group of friends or family is a different experience from going solo or with your own family. A bit of forethought goes a long way, so here are a few things that you can do to make group camping a success. If you have never been camping with a group of people before, then definitely give it a whirl!

A good crew of people always makes for a great trip.

1. Pick your people

Let's kick off by pointing out the obvious. If you go away with people that you don't necessarily like or enjoy the company of, it's going to be awkward and not the greatest experience!

Everyone has their close group of mates who they feel most relaxed around and camping together is a brilliant way to enjoy your connection and share some good times. However, be mindful of those occasions when friends of friends join in - sometimes the addition enhances the party and other times it backfires! If you get on well with your extended family, camping is an awesome way to spend time together and is especially great for grandparents and cousins.

Location, location, location...

2. Choose a campsite

Your campsite can make or break the trip. Everyone has their own idea of the perfect camping spot but here are some important tips...

Find somewhere:

- that is big enough for your group and suits all of the different setups - caravans/camper trailers/4WD's/tents/swags.
- that offers something for everyone to do.
- that fits within the budget of all of your travellers.

It's also important to find out who is in need of what amenities - does anyone need access to toilets, showers or a camp kitchen?

Australia offers some world-class camping locations and there's nothing like sharing that experience with your favourite people.

Lesser-known campgrounds can offer more space for groups.

3. How many days

Going on from above, if you're camping with someone you don't know i.e. the mate of a mate, it might be best to leave the 3-week trip for another time. Subtly suss them out first by heading away for a night, or a weekend and get a feel for how things go. Being stuck with others that you don't get along with on an extended camping trip is a nightmare!

If you're heading away with someone who hasn't camped before, they are likely to prefer a

shorter getaway to establish whether or not it's their thing. Start small and once you are confident that it works, then commit to longer trips.



Our big breakfast cook up!

4. Communal meals

One of my favourite things about camping in a bigger group is having communal meals. It doesn't have to be for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but when a whole heap of people bring a small amount of food to the table you end up with an amazing vibe and an exciting buffet of food.

Everyone comes together around one table and picks out what they want to eat. With our plates on our laps, we'll often sit around for a good hour enjoying the food and conversation, whether it be first thing in the morning, meeting up at lunch or congregating at the end of the day.

For example, we love doing a big spread in the mornings. One family will cook the bacon, hash browns and fry some tomatoes. Another family might cut up some fresh fruit for everyone, and the remaining family prepares the eggs, toast and sides. On their own, the food is nice, but when you have it all together it's a feast!



Sharing a feast for breakfast.

For lunch, it could be a spread of shared dips, cheese, crackers, salad sticks and meat, and dinner can be as simple or elaborate as you want. One family does a roast in the camp oven, the other does the dessert, and another may take charge of the vegies. However you plan it, group cooking and communal eating is truly enjoyable and brings everyone together. It's the camping version of the *potluck* except nominations can be doled out ahead of time so you don't end up with three desserts and no main meal.

We've frequently had group meals come about spontaneously which makes for loads of fun. Everyone checks their fridges or eskies and calls out what they've got or what needs using up and inevitably the table fills up with an impressive spread.

You don't have to share every meal though as everyone has different tastes and preferences. On longer trips, we've found that sharing a meal every couple of days creates a good balance and prevents it from getting tedious and difficult.



Camping in paddocks on private property allows everyone their own space.

5. Give yourselves space

One of the reasons that we prefer staying on private property or bush camps is that you get more space and can choose how to configure your setup. Group camping should have the perfect balance between being able to spend time with your friends and family while also being able to retreat on your own. Setting up a communal area near the campfire or under a shelter is a great way to designate the group space.

Just because you are camping in a group shouldn't mean you are spending every minute of every day with them. Spend some time alone or just with your own family. Do an activity in smaller groups with a couple of people and you'll enjoy it far more. It's all about balance and

picking the right distance away from others so you have the privacy you need when you want it. Being able to come and go from the group means you'll have a far more enjoyable time and you won't drive each other crazy.

Group camping with just one other family.

6. Planning ahead

Different people camp in different ways. I know some who don't even have a destination in mind when they hit the road, yet others map everything out and research to the nth degree. They know exactly where they are going when they will arrive, where they are stopping to get fuel and what activities they are going to do during the trip.

When you camp with a group, you need to be open to different ways of doing things. That doesn't mean you have to fit in with everyone else, but you should be respectful and aware of how you are going to manage it. We've found the best way to plan a camping trip is to decide on what you want to do and make it clear. Then leave it open for others to come and go and do as they please. There may be a little compromise needed in some areas but for the most part, if you communicate openly and are clear about your intentions, no one can snitch at you later.

We normally start a Facebook event giving a rough idea of what we are doing and invite whoever we think might want to come. We assume anyone joining in will do their own thing as well. For longer trips, we don't always end up at the same location at the end of each day and that's just fine.

Be flexible and allow everyone to do their own thing.

If I've planned to take the boat out one afternoon, I wouldn't be disappointed that you wanted to hang back at camp and relax for a couple of hours. Different people enjoy different things and you have to be flexible.

Likewise, it's nice to share the planning around. When we wake up in the morning, we'll often take it in turn as to who gets to choose what we are doing for the morning or the afternoon. Sometimes we'll go together as a group, and other times we'll split and do our own thing. I've been on camping trips where every single minute of every single day was planned. There was never an opportunity to do what you might have wanted.

Some people are okay with this and others couldn't think of anything worse. Being flexible and open to what other people want to do makes for a fun and relaxing trip. Match the level of planning to who is going and what you all prefer.

Check the weather before you go in case the blue skies turn grey.

7. Check the weather

We get some diverse weather in Australia and camping makes you particularly exposed to the elements. Make sure your location and activities match the forecasted weather and that your gear is suitable.

For example, taking a novice camper into the Victorian High Country in the middle of winter when they only have gear suited for summer is going to leave them vulnerable and

unprepared.

Check the weather before you go but also have a plan for the unexpected. Make sure you have what you need if it rains, gets windy, or becomes super warm.

Camping with other families with kids is a great way to share the load.

8. Share the kids

For young families, one of the best things you can do is head away with another family with kids of a similar age. They will play together for hours and learn plenty of new skills at the same time. When they explore and play well together, the adults have more of a chance to kick back and relax beside the campfire.

Beyond this, one of the best things about travelling in a group is that you can share the load of looking after the kids. One adult can watch them for an hour, and then you rotate.

Meanwhile, the others can have a well-deserved break and older kids can help out as well.

We love camping on our own but camping with a big group of people is an adventure we also look forward to. If you've not done much group camping before, give it a go.

What's your favourite way to camp?