



Nothing else gives you the freedom or feeling of nostalgia quite like sleeping in a swag. Your swag becomes your mate. Reliable and dependable – a home away from home. Perfect for any situation, swags can be used for camping, festivals, fishing trips, kids sleepovers, a place to crash at that 21st in the country, or even as a makeshift spare bed.

Swags have come a long way since the days of the Jolly Swagman. The utilitarian nature of early swags has been enhanced with advancements in materials and design. At its core, a swag is still a piece of canvas with a mattress inside. Something to keep you dry and off the ground. But newer features will keep you warmer in winter, cooler in summer, and keep the mozzies out at the same time.

What I keep in my swag

I keep my swag rolled up and ready to go at a moment's notice. Inside I keep a pillow, sleeping bag, blanket, folded up tarp, and an old jacket. Everything you need for a comfy night in the bush. The tarp is to spread out as a ground sheet, and you can also lay or suspend it over the top in heavy rain.



Compact and with a small footprint, swag camping is all about simplicity and enjoying the Australian bush. Image: [Doug Beckers, Flickr](#).

I also have a length of rope so that I can tie the outer cover to a tree, to keep it off my face at night. Most swags have an eyelet to accommodate this. Although my swag has poles like a tent, if I'm only setting it up for one night, tying the hood to a tree is sometimes just as effective. It's nice to keep the canvas off your face, but not essential.

Tents vs Swags

Sleeping in a swag is not claustrophobic, especially if you do set the poles up – you end up with something that resembles a small tent. The advantage of a swag over a small tent is you've got everything bundled in one: sleeping bag, mattress, and shelter.

With a tent, each item is assembled and carried separately. That said, the advantage of a tent is that it packs down smaller than a swag. I guess it depends on your circumstances and your mode of travel. And how much of an old romantic you are!



While swags are pretty waterproof, throwing a tarp over the top or as in this case with the [Darche](#), setting up under your awning, will keep it even more watertight. Image: [Darche](#).

Consider the different styles

When looking at buying a swag, consider the different styles. For example, there are different sizes -single, king single, and double. Test out different brands to see which is more comfortable – the thickness of the mattress may matter to you, but you can always add a [lightweight mattress](#) if you want.

Depending on what sort of camping you intend to do with your swag, the durability and thickness of the zips and canvas could be a deal breaker. A feature of my swag is the full-length mesh – this means I can be fully zipped up and enclosed, but with the canvas outer



rolled right back. This basically allows me to use my swag in any weather, including hot desert nights in the middle of summer.

Pictured below is the type of swag I use – the AOS Tracker. This is fairly typical of most modern swags, with versatile zipping options to allow for varying airflow in different climates. This swag has been set up with hoops at the top and bottom, a great way to keep the canvas off your body and face.



The AOS Tracker – the swag Morgs took around Australia with him. Image: Morgan Wright

Figure out what you need

Of course, the range of features and functions feeds into the cost of the swag. Before you make your big purchase, nail down what your real needs are and how often you're going to use it.

In my case, I was swagging around Australia working on exploration projects, so I was looking for a swag that would accommodate me in varying conditions, and be comfortable night after night.

I was happy to spend a fair bit, and never once regretted my decision. Happy swagging!

What do you like best about your swag? Comment below.