



This **GYPSY LIFE**
with Christina Rogers

The Lifestyle

You are buying a lot more than just a camper trailer.

The recent campertrailer.org event in Nyngan this October drew over 90 camper trailers to its annual meet. It looked like a cross between a refugee camp and a jamboree, with everyone set up by the beautiful banks of the Bogan River. After a few days of socialising, educational lectures and campfires, it felt like home. But that had more to do with the people there than the serene setting.

Many Australians rarely venture far from the [east] coast. Perhaps a few have actually trekked down to Tassie. They will never really understand Australia in the way camper trailer owners understand it.

Like I always say, if you've never had every single thing you packed along for a trip stained red from the Centre's dirt, then you haven't seen Australia. If you've never looked up at the night sky devoid of pollution to see the unobscured Southern Cross, then you don't get Australia. Hell, if you've never even been offroad, you definitely don't understand Australia.

I get so frustrated after a trip, especially if I'm still high from the journey, when I have to explain to someone what a camper trailer is, or what exactly we've been doing for the past few weeks. It's a bizarre realisation, but unfortunately there are still a lot of those types out there.

But this past weekend everyone understood, everyone knew, everyone was living the lifestyle. That's what is so nice about meeting fellow travellers. And by travellers I mean people who don't need to hear the word

camper trailer, people who can talk shop, who know what a soft floor is or what you mean by Cub. That is one of the fringe benefits once you buy into the lifestyle.

In the world of campertrailer.org, I'm a novice compared to the majority. Many of the members have been travelling Australia for decades. They're seasoned veterans who remember when a large percentage of the present bitumen was just a dirt track.

But they aren't snobby about it. In fact, they welcome you into their world, they want to know where you've been and where you're going, and of course, they are full of advice. And they're inspirational too.

While I was standing by the riverside watching water-skiers skid over the water, I met Gerry. He was down from Brisbane with his wife for the event and combining the meet-up with a square dancing tour through Australia. He told me all about a four-week trip to Alaska last year (without a camper trailer) and six-week African safari next year. He'd been all over Australia and was retired and ready to check out the rest of the world.

But in Nyngan, experience and worldview ran across the board. There were nearly 100 camper trailers, but not everyone there owned a rig. A few people came along with their tents, and one family I spoke to was in between trailers and staying in the caravan park's cabin. They came for the education, to meet a few folks, and figure out which trailer they needed to buy. At the end of the day, it's not how you travel, but that you travel. It's just more fun with a camper trailer.

It was especially nice to meet some of the other women. Camping with kids sounds ideal on paper, but it certainly has its challenges. Compared to a few of the others, my one child seemed like a breeze to their two, three and four in tow.

During the day, most of the kids rambled around the campground in bicycle gangs; a few swam in the river or played with the animals in the caravan park's small petting zoo. The parents didn't have to worry; there were plenty of folks around to watch them. They say it takes a village to raise a child, well for a few days I got to see it happen.

But the kids pulled their weight too. I watched longingly as a group of 12 and 13 year-olds dragged the dirty dishes to the sink

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and began to scrub them all down. Even the kids knew the drill, they understood that the lifestyle comes at a price. It's hard work, but the rewards are too big to pass up.

We were sad to leave, but had to get home to Melbourne. We'll see everyone next year and we'll all have new stories to share and new experiences to trade. It's nice to know they are out there, all those wanderers.

Once you've seen this great country, driven through its heart, skirted around its tropical top

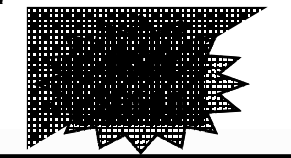
and bounced down tracks so remote the only thing you hear at night is a dull ringing in your ears, it's hard to relate to people who haven't. For us, we belong on the road, living the lifestyle, constantly seeking what we haven't seen before. Maybe that's why it's so difficult to sit still once I'm back home. ■

The communal campfires, day trips and daily sessions at someone else's camper trailer are a great way to meet people and get ideas for your own camper DIY projects.



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