How to Book Campervan Scotland: A Practical Guide for First-Timers

There is a moment that tends to stick with anyone who takes a campervan into the Scottish Highlands for the first time. It usually happens around midday, when the rain has softened to a drizzle and the sun breaks through just enough to catch the loch. You pull over, boil the kettle, and sit with the doors open, watching the light move across the water. That moment is not something a hotel can give you. It is the reason people come here, and it is why so many now choose to book campervan Scotland trips rather than stick to conventional accommodation.

But booking the right van and planning the right route takes more than enthusiasm. Scotland's roads are narrow, the weather is unpredictable, and the best spots for wild camping are often the hardest to reach. This article covers what you need to know before you commit, based on years of driving these routes and talking to people who have done it well and people who have done it badly.

Understanding the Route Before You Book Campervan Scotland

The North Coast 500, or NC500 as it is commonly called, has become the most famous campervan circuit in the UK. It runs about 500 miles around the top of Scotland, starting and ending in Inverness. The landscape is extraordinary, with sea cliffs, empty beaches, and single-track roads that test your reversing skills. But the NC500 is not the only show in town. The Outer Hebrides offer a completely different experience, with white sand beaches and a slower pace. The Isle of Skye draws huge crowds for good reason, although you need to plan parking carefully in peak season. Glen Coe gives you drama on a scale that photographs cannot capture, and the Trossachs National Park offers gentler scenery closer to Glasgow and Edinburgh.

If you are short on time, a loop from Glasgow up to Fort William, along the Caledonian Canal, and across to Inverness gives you a solid taste of the Highlands without the full NC500 commitment. If you have two weeks, you can add the Outer Hebrides by taking the ferry from Uig on Skye to Tarbert on Harris. That crossing alone is worth the price of the trip.

What Kind of Campervan Suits the Scottish Highlands

Motorhome hire in Scotland comes in several flavours. The smallest option is often a converted van, sometimes called a G-Whiz style vehicle, which is nimble on single-track roads and easier to park. The trade-off is space and facilities. You get a hob, a sink, and a fold-out bed, but you will not have a separate toilet or shower. For many people that is fine, especially if

you plan to use campsite facilities. Others prefer a full-size campervan with a bathroom, especially in bad weather when you do not want to walk to the shower block.

Bunk Campers and similar hire companies are well regarded for their fleet condition and customer support. If you hire from a reputable operator, you typically get a van that has been serviced recently and comes with breakdown cover. Do not skimp on campervan insurance. Standard car insurance does not cover the contents or the structure of a campervan, and some policies exclude damage to the roof or undercarriage. On Highland roads, low-hanging branches and loose gravel are real risks. Check that your hire includes proper campervan insurance, or buy a separate policy for the rental period.

Where to Stay and How to Find It

Wild camping in Scotland is legal under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, as long as you follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. That means camping away from houses, leaving no trace, and not staying in one spot for more than a couple of nights. The reality is that many of the best wild camping spots are on the NC500, and they fill up fast. If you arrive at a beautiful lochside spot at 7pm in August, it is probably already taken. Plan to arrive early, or have a backup campsite in mind.

Campsites range from basic farmer's fields with a tap and a toilet, to well-equipped parks with electric hook-ups and showers. VisitScotland has a detailed directory of sites, and many independent operators list availability online. The key is to book ahead in summer. June through September sees the heaviest demand, and some of the smaller sites on Skye and around Loch Ness book out weeks in advance. If you plan to book campervan Scotland trips in that window, start looking at sites at least a month before you travel.

One practical tip: when you wild camp, carry a portable toilet if your van does not have a built-in one. The Outdoor Access Code requires you to dispose of waste properly, and digging a hole every time is not always practical, especially on rocky ground. A simple camping toilet with biodegradable bags solves the problem and keeps the landscape clean.

Driving the NC500 and Beyond

The NC500 includes long stretches of single-track road with passing places. The etiquette is simple: if you are driving slower than the car behind you, pull into a passing place and let them past. If you meet an oncoming vehicle, the one nearest the passing place pulls in. It sounds straightforward, but it causes stress for many first-timers. The key is to stay calm, use your mirrors, and accept that you will travel slower than you expected. That is part of the point. The best views on the NC500 are the ones you see when you are not rushing.

Glen Coe is a highlight, but the road through it, the A82, is busy and narrow in places. Take your time and stop at the visitor centre for a proper look at the Three Sisters. Further north, Loch Ness is worth a stop even if you do not believe in monsters. The Caledonian Canal runs alongside it for part of the way, and the towpath makes for a good short walk. Inverness is the natural hub for resupply, with supermarkets and launderettes within easy reach of the main campsites.



If you have time, push further north to John O'Groats or west to Ullapool. The road from Ullapool to the ferry terminal for the Outer Hebrides is dramatic, and the islands themselves feel like a different country. The beaches on Harris and Lewis rival anything in the Caribbean, minus the warmth. Bring a good jacket.

Practical Considerations for Your Trip

Fuel can be scarce on the NC500. Fill up whenever you see a petrol station, even if your tank is half full. Some stretches, like the road between Durness and Thurso, have no station for over 60 miles. The same applies to groceries. Stock up in Inverness, Fort William, or Glasgow before you head into the remote areas. Small shops in Highland villages charge more and have limited hours.

Weather in the Scottish Highlands changes fast. You can get four seasons in one day, and you will. Pack layers, a waterproof jacket, and sturdy footwear. Midges are a problem from May to September, especially near still water. A good midge repellent and a head net cost little and save a lot of misery. If you are wild camping near a loch at dusk, you will understand why locals recommend a midge net as essential kit.

Phone signal is patchy in many parts of the Highlands. Download offline maps before you leave, and carry a paper map as backup. The OS Landranger series covers the NC500 and the islands in detail. A power bank for your devices is also worth bringing, because campsite electric hook-ups are not always available.

Working with a Broker to Simplify the Process

If all this sounds like a lot of research, you can use a service like Scotland's Adventure or similar platforms that connect you with independent hire partners. They handle the matching process, check availability across multiple operators, and often get you a better deal than booking direct. The advantage is that you deal with one point of contact, and the operator has already vetted the hire companies. It is a good option if you are booking from overseas or if you want to compare a few different van types without contacting each company individually.

When you book campervan Scotland through a broker, you usually get a confirmation with full hire terms, insurance details, and pickup instructions. Read the terms carefully, especially the mileage allowance and the policy on one-way rentals. Some companies charge extra if you drop the van in a different city from where you picked it up. Others include unlimited mileage but restrict you to the mainland. Know that before you sign.

One more thing: check the van's height and width before you drive under a low bridge. There are several on the NC500, and a few on the route to Skye. The A87 near the Kyle of Lochalsh has a low railway bridge that catches drivers every year. A moment of inattention can cost you the damage deposit.

Why This Trip Is Worth the Planning

The appeal of a campervan holiday in Scotland is not just the scenery. It is the independence. You wake up in a place that has no reception desk, no checkout time, and no neighbours unless you want them. You decide when to move and where to stop. That kind of freedom is rare, and it changes how you travel. You start noticing details you would miss from a car, like the way the light falls on a particular hillside at 7am, or the sound of a river after a night of rain.

If you are thinking about doing this, the best advice is to go, but go prepared. The preparation is what lets you relax when you are there. Whether you choose a small van from G-Whiz or a larger model from Bunk Campers, whether you follow the NC500 or head straight for the Outer Hebrides, the experience will stay with you. And when you finally book campervan Scotland for your next trip, you will know exactly what to expect and how to make it even better.