Inside Checks: The Art of Packing the Van (Without Losing Your Marbles — or Your Beetroot)



There's a particular kind of quiet satisfaction that comes from a van that's properly, thoroughly, *lovingly* packed for the road. Everything stowed. Everything silent. Nothing that's going to shift, spill, roll, or rattle its way into chaos the moment you hit the first corner.

There's also a particular kind of horror that comes from *not* doing this properly — which we'll get to, because it involves beetroot.

Whether you're pulling away from home or breaking camp after a great few days at a campsite, the routine is the same. It just takes a bit of practice, a bit of muscle memory, and a system you can run through without having to think too hard (especially on those mornings when the coffee hasn't quite kicked in yet). Here's how we do it — start to finish, inside first.

Like many full-time on the road couples, we split the workload. I'll do the inside while he does the outside — then we'll quickly double check each other's work before we hit the throttle.

Start With the Flat Surfaces

Every flat surface in the van is a potential launch pad once you're moving — kitchen benchtops, cupboard tops in the bedroom, the bathroom vanity. The rule is simple: **nothing left sitting out.**

Start in the kitchen. Once the final wash-up is done, dry everything and put it straight back in its allocated spot — no leaving it "just for a minute" on the drying rack. Food goes away, drink bottles go somewhere secure, and every lid and cap gets a proper check to make sure it's screwed on tight. If you've got a dedicated box or bag that lives in the sink for travel, this is the time to fill it and have it ready to go.

Then it's on to the bedroom. Clothes away, shoes stowed somewhere secure, and any devices switched off — CPAP machines, power points, the lot. Drawers and cupboards closed firmly, not just pushed to.

Make the bed, straighten the throw rug, arrange the pillows and cushions properly. It sounds like a small thing, but there is genuinely nothing more comforting after a long day of travel than opening the door to a bed that's made and ready to fall into. Future-you will thank present-you.

Open or close the blinds depending on your van and your preference, then make sure every window and hatch is closed and locked.

The Dining Area

Clear the table completely — everything into a secure cupboard or its designated pocket. Power points off. Blinds set how you like them. If you've got a café-style dinette, fold or slide the table away. And don't forget the TV — take it down and secure it properly for travel; they don't love being launched across the van at the first pothole.

The Stove

All burner switches off — always worth a second glance, since it's easy to brush one on by accident while packing up around it. If you store anything inside the oven for travel (cake tins, bread, the usual odds and ends), pack it in properly and make sure the door is firmly shut.

The Fridge and Freezer

This is the one that catches people out, so take your time here.

Lids on every jar and bottle. Containers standing upright with lids secured — not just resting on top. Have a good look for anything loose that could go rolling: fruit, eggs, that one stray tomato that always seems to find its way to the back. Then check again, because there's always one more thing hiding behind the milk.

Pop the security bars in place, then close and lock the doors properly.

If this all sounds like overkill, have a search on YouTube for what happens when these steps get skipped. There are plenty of videos of people opening the van door after a day's travel to find the entire contents of the fridge waiting for them on the floor — beetroot mixed through spilled milk, jam and pickles lidless and everywhere, all tangled up with whatever vegetables made a break for it from the crisper drawer. It is not a pretty welcome home.

One more thing while you're there: make sure the fridge is switched to DC for travel, if your setup requires it. This is a classic rookie mistake — miss this step and you can come back to a puddle of water in the bottom of the fridge, because it's effectively been switched off all day. Nothing cold, nothing happy. Particularly unwelcome in summer.

The Bathroom

All the bottles away — toiletries, shaving gear, cleaning products, soap. Towels hung securely. Heated towel rail switched off. Take the toilet roll off its holder and pop it in a cupboard (a surprisingly common casualty otherwise).

Check the shower door is properly closed and locked — you'd be amazed how many come off their rollers if they're not locked into position before you set off. And a final check of the toilet itself, just to be sure.

The Final Sweep

Now head to the opposite end of the van from the door and work your way back through, checking everything is closed tightly — cupboards, vents, hatches. If you've got a dust reduction system, switch it on. Confirm every window is closed and locked.

Then the switches: water pump off, hot water heater off, inverter off at both the mains and the on/off switch. Give the fridge settings one last check, because it's worth the ten seconds of certainty.

Grab whatever you need with you in the car — drink bottles, maps, phones — and then step outside. Bring the door mat in, along with the step if it's a separate one, or fold the step up onto the van if it's fixed.

That’s the Inside Sorted — But You’re Not Done Yet

The inside job is complete, but before you’re actually ready to roll, there’s a whole outside routine to run through as well. Time to cross-check your partner’s effort. Assuming the van is hitched to the car: are the stabilisers up? Water and power cords packed away? Rubbish bag or storage box secured? Is the gas turned off, safety chains correctly attached, the emergency brake fitting secured, and the electrics connected? Check the lights are working properly, and adjust your mirrors for travel mode.

Last Thing Before You Go

Wipe your feet before you climb into the car. Nobody — and let’s be honest, especially the other half — me — enjoys a car floor full of sand and gravel from the campsite.

And then, that’s it. Sit back, enjoy the drive, admire the countryside and the little towns you pass through. One last tip: if it’s not too glary, take your sunglasses off for a stretch. The colours come up richer and everything looks that bit crisper without them.

Safe travels — and happy packing.