

THE Grey Nomad's

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO AUSTRALIA

Experience the beauty and
freedom of our great land –
for young and old alike!



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by Rob Catania of FRC (Full Range Camping)

If you are reading this, chances are you are about to embark on, or are planning to embark on, the adventure of a lifetime. Or perhaps you're already a somewhat seasoned adventurer and you want to know a little more. Maybe a *lot* more. Be it part-time, full-time or periodic, becoming a nomad can allow you to experience one of the greatest new adventures of your life. Be it grey, pink, green or otherwise, nomadding is colour-blind. It doesn't really matter how old you are either. The key word here is *nomad*.

And unless you have grown up in a family that did a lot of camping it might also mean a whole new way of life for you. Just as it was for us. In 2012, when we finally took the plunge, the nomad life was almost a complete mystery. So, there we were, my wife and I, with our small children and no knowledge of caravanning, and without ever even had a weekend camping trip. We embarked on what was and continues to be the best adventure of our lives.

It was a spur-of-the-moment decision, after being introduced to a family of nomads. They inspired us to spend the following twelve months redesigning our life and planning a trip around Australia. Packing the home and parking our business we set off to live full-time on the road in our motorhome with a six-year-old and a two-year-

old. Yes, many would say we were crazy, and some people weren't even as flattering as that.

Our preparation at the time consisted of hours scouring the internet, not really knowing what to look for. We attended numerous caravan shows and spoke to as many people as we could about caravanning and camping. However, it was a long, drawn-out process, and finding all that we needed in one place was nearly impossible.

In hindsight, although we didn't realise it at the time, we probably headed off *slightly* unprepared, but for us that was part of the journey. As we got underway, we experienced adventure after adventure, from escaping bushfires to being airlifted from major floods. Along the way we have met and made incredible lifelong friends, and in the meantime have got to see the best this county has to offer.

However, learning as we went, allowed us to find there was something missing in the marketplace:

- A way to find thousands of campsites and RV related businesses easily
- A way to interact with other campers and nomads
- A way to research and buy an RV or camping gear, or sell it for that matter
- Somewhere to buy the latest camping products
- Somewhere to find new and exciting places to see
- A way to obtain discounts and save money while we travelled
- Somewhere that provided services specific to RVs and nomads such as RV insurance
- A way to put all that we have learnt and experienced into one place.

The list goes on and on, so with the assistance of our long-time friend Glen Wilson, we set about putting all this information in one place, and thus the FRC website and app were born: an all-in-one, one-stop shop for everything camping and caravanning.

That took a lot of time. In fact, it took over six years of development to amass the huge amount of information necessary for FRC to be

a truly useful and comprehensive resource for campers and nomads in Australia. But there was *still* something missing. What we didn't have at the time of preparing for our trip was exactly what Xavier Waterkeyn has masterfully put together in this book.

This is a compendium or 'how-to' book to help you be better prepared and to give you the best possible introduction to the nomadding life; a guide that tells you what to look out for and how to prepare, and then if you need further information where to find it. A manual that introduces you to the power of online resources that even people who are initially intimidated by technology will find easy to use, as well as an offline resource that you can access all the time, even when technology fails.

Carefully researched and written in a down-to-earth manner you will find this book a great asset in preparation for what you are about to embark on, whether it's your first step or your hundredth. It is something we wish we had read before preparing for our trip as it would have saved us *considerable* time, money and effort, both in the pre-planning stages, and while on the road.



We humbly thank Xavier and the whole team at New Holland for consulting us in his preparation of this book and allowing us to contribute with our experiences where possible. We hope you enjoy reading it, and that it will greatly benefit you in your preparations.

However, just remember, as prepared as you think you can be, the real fun is in the impromptu experience, there is no doubt, anything can and probably will happen, things that are not even in the scope of this book, but if they do, *embrace them and enjoy.*

All the best and happy camping!

Rob Catania

Co-Founder, FRC





INTRODUCTION

WHAT THIS BOOK WILL DO FOR YOU

Lots of people don't read introductions to books, and who can blame them? After all, there's a lot to be said to just jumping straight into a subject and getting on with it. But if you're reading this, let's use this introduction to give you some context for this book and how it will be useful to you.

The Grey Nomad's Guide to Australia was written *specifically* with the grey nomad in mind. However, it has lots of useful information for campers of all colours and for holiday campers too.

This book was also written with the invaluable input of FRC, a company specifically created to provide services and resources to the camping and nomadding community and that's constantly developing an ever-wider network of contacts and building a community that all campers and nomads can access. They provided a lot of links for further reading and you'll find these scattered throughout the book, along with a few traveller's tales and illustrative anecdotes from FRC's Co-Director, Rob Catania. FRC also provided invaluable insider information about what nomadding is actually like – the sort of hard-earned information that only years of experience can give

you – as well as insights into the sorts of challenges nomads face and the wealth of opportunities for fun and adventure that are available to nomads that their more settled brothers and sisters can only dream of.

In fact, it's the dream that gets nomads started on the life in the first place, and in this book we wanted to empower you as much as possible to live the dream. It's a dream that tens of thousands of Australians are living full time, and over a million a year are living part-time.

Even seasoned nomads don't know everything. Many will attest that they are constantly learning. We saw the need for an introduction to nomadding that would be useful both to those who are still in the dreaming stage and those who wanted to know more. We've come up with a great introduction to nomadding and this book will be a resource that you'll come back to again and again on your travels.

But no introductory book, no matter how well-researched or clearly written, can possibly tackle the *huge* subject of nomadding all on its own —with over 9000 campsites and thousands of other businesses and attractions that support nomadding including all this information would have required a substantially bigger book. Instead, we decided to create something truly unique. A book that would not only serve as a useful, standalone introduction but that would also allow you to access a huge amount of additional information.

This book includes an offer for Premium Membership to FRC which will allow you to access all areas of FRC's website and to use its app at a substantial discount.

Premium FRC Membership effectively allows you into a database of real-time, constantly updated information that is of immense value to nomads and all campers. Think of this book as a key that unlocks that database to you – and the main tools that you'll be using are the internet and the FRC's website and app.

Imagine being able to drive anywhere and know instantly where

the nearest campsites are. Imagine being able to know exactly if they're free or paid and if so, how much you will have to pay. Imagine being able to phone them ahead to book a space. Imagine being able to find petrol stations, towing services, mechanics and suppliers and being able to get discounts on services and products. All this at the touch of a button, without having to spend frustrating hours looking through the internet, because we've already done all that work for you.

So, what you're holding in your hands is a tool that harnesses the full power of both the traditional printed word and the power of modern technology in an easy, accessible way. You don't have to imagine it anymore, because it's here, now, for you.

Happy camping! Happy nomadding!

And tell us what you think. We'd love to hear from you.

info@fullrangecamping.com.au

You'll find full details on FRC's Exclusive Offer for Premium Membership to readers of this book on page 318.







FIRST STEPS



Grey Nomadding: Unleashing Your Inner Nomad

A grey nomad is defined as a retired person, usually over the age of fifty-five, who has chosen a life of travelling around Australia, exploring this amazing country's 7.692 million square kilometres (that's almost 3 million square miles). You could explore a thousand square kilometres of it every single day and it would still take you over twenty years to see all of it – and that's just the land. The coasts and waters are another thing altogether!

It's a life dominated by driving to far-flung places and either parking the recreational vehicle of your choice at a campsite or in the wild. It's a life of as much self-sufficiency and isolation or as much cooperation and community as you want. And it's a life of experiences and adventures that you couldn't possibly have any other way.

Grey nomads often travel in pairs, but singles and small groups of friends or family are not unknown, and all are bound by a common desire to experience Australia the way that they want to, in their own time and on their own terms.

Australia has several advantages as a place where you can adopt the grey nomad lifestyle:

- It is a developed, first-world economy with substantial infrastructure in place.
- It has a comprehensive health care system that includes emergency services that can reach most parts of the continent and its islands.
- It includes eight major climactic zones, ranging from tropical to alpine and thus supports a wide variety of plant and animal life as well as having some of the world's most spectacular scenery.
- It combines urban areas of dense population with vast, wild areas that are virtually uninhabited – and everything in between.
- It is one of the safest countries in the world to travel in and the wars, riots and other civil disturbances that plague so many other places on this planet are almost unknown here.
- It has one of the most comprehensive social security systems in the world, allowing even people of modest means to be able to afford the lifestyle.

It's unlikely that you'll choose this way of living unless there's always been a bit of a nomad inside you, waiting to get out – out of a city or a town, out of a rut or out of a way of living that isn't working for you anymore. If you're reading this, odds are you've felt that urge to break free and to unleash that inner nomad and begin your adventure.

You know you want to.

This guidebook is all about how you're going to make it happen so that the experience is one of the best of your life.



The longest journey starts with a footstep ... or at the very least a cup of tea.

Why Become Nomadic?

There are as many reasons to become a grey nomad as there are grey nomads, but some of the more common reason are:

- Liberation: from a mortgage, from the city or, sometimes, from relationships.
- Curiosity: about the country, about other people, or about themselves.
- Independence – a desire to be entirely self-determined, without anyone telling you what to do, whether it's a boss, a landlord or controlling families.
- Self-sufficiency: a need to experience what life is like when you rely mainly on your own resources and inventiveness, rather than the support of civilisation, to get through the day.

- Freedom: to have the time and means to experience difference – food, entertainment, scenery and the way that other people live – experiences that would be difficult to have if you were ‘settled’, or always bound to a particular time and place, and don’t forget ...
- Livin’ the dream: for many, nomadding is the opportunity to fulfil a decades-long ambition to retire from the rat race and have a fun life of adventure. If not you, who? If not now, when?

This book is full of warnings and advice to be cautious, but the point is to be fully prepared. Yes, stuff happens, but it’s still a fun and liberating life full of adventure. Our mission is simply to prepare you for some reversals, simply so that you can spend the vast majority of your time enjoying yourself. The fun part, after you’ve sorted out the basics, is up to you. Your own personal discoveries – that’s where the real adventure is.

What’s in a Name?

We can thank documentary filmmakers Catherine Marciniak and Steve Westh for coining the term ‘grey nomad’ in their documentary of the same name, first broadcast on ABC television on 23 September 1997. More than twenty years later, the term has not only gained a foothold in the Australian vernacular, and an entry in the *Macquarie Dictionary*, but in the consciousness of Australians as a whole. It’s highly likely that you know at least one full-time or part-time grey nomad, maybe more.

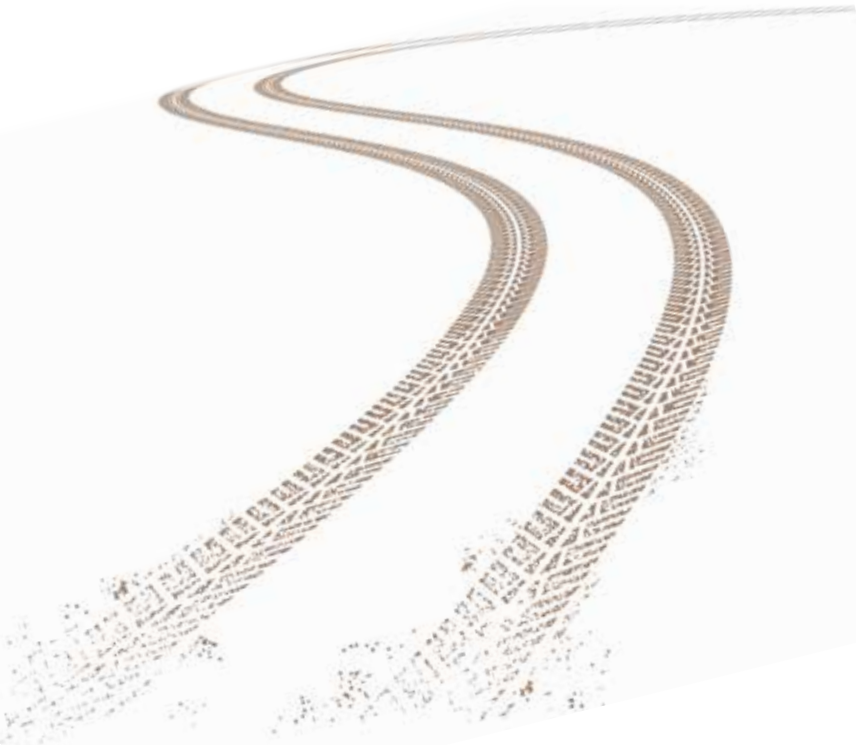
You might still occasionally hear the word ‘sundowner’. In past times in Australia, sundowners were travelling workers and odd-jobs men who’d arrive at farms too late to do any work, but who were happy to accept a meal and a place to sleep, so that at least they could start the next day rested and refuelled. The term doesn’t quite have the same ring to it, nor does it sound as romantic as ‘grey nomad’.

In North America, you'll hear the term 'snowbird'. This refers to retired people who travel south for a warmer climate during the winter months. It doesn't quite have the same implications as 'grey nomad' either.

It looks as if the name, as well as the phenomenon, is here to stay.

Strangely enough, some people who fit the description of grey nomad, absolutely hate the term, and especially hate the term being applied to them. Why this would be so is difficult to fathom, since most grey nomads wear the label with considerable pride, especially when you consider that being a *successful* grey nomad, with all its challenges, pitfalls and potential traps, is quite an achievement. But people are entitled to their eccentricities and it takes all types to make a world. Just be aware that not everyone who to all intents and purposes is a grey nomad, likes being called one, and be prepared for a negative reaction. It's rare, but these reactions do happen.

In any case, as you'll soon discover, there are a lot of different nomads out there, and they're not all grey.





ON THE ROAD



Grey Nomadding on the Road

The nomad lifestyle is, by definition, one of movement. The whole point of nomadding is to go to different locales to experience what they have to offer. This means dealing with roads in all sorts of conditions and being aware of how road conditions will affect your travel plans.

The Big Lap

The term ‘big lap’ refers to the circumnavigation, by road, of the Australian continent. This is generally done going along Highway 1, the M1, the interconnected highways that run the rim of the country, mostly, but not exclusively, along the coast.

The trip takes many people about a year, or longer. If you're starting in the south in summer then people usually travel counter-clockwise to take advantage of the prevailing winds – this means travelling west to east then north in the spring/summer months, and east to west then south in the autumn/winter months. Note however that the northern wet season that can seriously affect your travels hits north of the Tropic of Capricorn anytime from November to May, but generally peaks mid-December to April.

The M1 connects: Melbourne (with a side detour to Hobart), Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns, Darwin (with a major detour off the M1 to Alice Springs and Uluru if you're so inclined), Port Headland, Perth, Esperance, Adelaide, then back to Melbourne.



The M1 is sealed, so you don't need a four-wheel drive, but road conditions vary a lot – from multi-lane freeways to single-lane roads. If you want to take side journeys to some of the more rugged places that connect to the route, you'll need a vehicle capable of low gears and those in the know generally recommend a turbo-diesel engine for its efficiency and the fact that diesel is more readily available in remote areas than petrol.

If you plan a lot of off-the-beaten-track stuff, you're probably better off using a high clearance four-wheel drive and towing a smaller trailer than using a motorhome. This is one of those cases where you have to decide how mobile you want to be.

You'll need to be a bit cashed up if you plan to do things like frequently stay at campsites and don't want to skimp on eating in restaurants – to the tune of about \$150 per day for a couple. It's always possible to do this for far less, but fuel is something that you won't be able to avoid spending on if you plan to travel the huge distances involved. Remember to budget for the occasional toll as well.

Road Conditions

There are over 900,000 kilometres of road in Australia, of which only about 350,000 are paved with the other over 560,000 unpaved, so road conditions and the skills and awareness to negotiate them play a major part in the nomadding experience.

Here are some things to factor into your decision-making processes when you're driving around.

Dust, Dust, Dust

If there's any problem besides unwanted moisture (page 148) that's a major issue in Australia, it's dust. Australia's arid environment and winds have had thousands of years to grind sand into a fine powder. Even some of the commercially built caravans and camper trailers will



not be prepared for Australia's bull dust and it's especially prevalent in outback Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Bull dust is so fine, it will get through the very slightest of cracks in your rig and it will get into everything. After, say, a trip to Charleville in Queensland, which might involve a 60-kilometre side trip along a dirt road to a campsite, you could spend days cleaning the dust out.

It pays to thoroughly dustproof your rig. And once you've done a great job on your own, you can go into business dustproofing other people's rigs.

Weather and Natural Disasters

Something as simple as being alert to or actually paying attention to weather warnings can save you a lot of grief and hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in repairs. Awnings blown off in strong winds are one of the most common occurrences for nomads and we hear from insurance companies that it's one of the more frequent claims.

You'll need to avoid certain areas if you know there is prolonged rain coming up. The FRC app has its own weather forecast capability built into the app. It shows a seven-day forecast at a glance at each and every campsite, which helps with your advanced planning. You can also set that alerts can be sent to your phone via the app to advise you of strong wind warnings in your area.

And even though natural disasters are nothing to wish for, they can also provide people with an opportunity to help where help is most needed:

www.frc.camp/helpaftercyclone

Left: The other side of dry, dusty Australia is wet, soggy Australia. Both have their charms and challenges.

Animals on the Road

We're usually talking kangaroos here, but we're not just talking about the odd kangaroo. It is conceivable that you could be in a situation where you could be wiped out by a whole mob of over a hundred kangaroos.

The other thing some nomads get a little overwhelmed with is the number of dead roos on the road. Sometimes you'll see a stretch of



tens of roos in a length of only 20 kilometres of road. Droughts tend to bring them to the side of the road and the trucks, and in some cases nomads in caravans, clean them up.

Other animals you'll see, both dead and alive, include emus by the dozens, camels galore, even eagles feasting on kangaroo carcasses in the middle of the road. Eagles rightly feel that you're in their territory, so they can take their time about flying away, so it's important to assess your speed when trying to avoid them.

And keep your eyes on the road. Running over a slow-moving tortoise makes a rather unpleasant 'crunch' sound that can spoil the whole day, especially if you're the sort of person who feels guilty about inadvertently killing wildlife.

Not one of the more pleasant pictures of the reality of Australian road travel, and certainly not one that you'll find in glossy tour brochures, but we're not here to lie to you and tell you that Australia is all fluffy bunnies, fairy floss and illustrations by May Gibbs. Roo roadkill is a fact of life that you'll have to get used to. Critical times to save both you and the roos from an unpleasant incident or potential mutual destruction are dawn and dusk, when kangaroos are at their most active.

Dealing with Road Trains

Road trains are either single units or convoys of large trucks usually transporting cargo. They're known as 'trains' because they involve some sort of articulation, with two and sometimes three trailers behind a main vehicle. Road trains are big and intimidating and, even though they don't mean to be, they are potentially dangerous. You'll find lots of road trains around the Nullarbor, making the cross-continental trip.

Your CB radio (page 191) will be your best friend here. Most truckies use channel 40, and if you make contact and state your intentions most will do their best to accommodate you. They will



Yep. Road trains are every bit as intimidating as they look.

tell you when it is safe to overtake, and if you are in front of them and you want *them* to overtake you, it is best to tell them first what your intentions are. Being overtaken by your first road train can be a little scary and overtaking one just as scary. You have to not only be aware of oncoming traffic but also any animals that may run out on the road. Some of the trains will let you know how many trailers they have, but some don't, so you don't really know if they have two or three trailers till you get right up beside them. The only drawback with having the CB on all the time is that some of the language from the truckies can be a bit colourful at times. Don't say we didn't warn you.

If you find yourself encountering a road train then a bit of discretion might be in order. Pull over to the side of the road, rest a bit. Let the road train pass. This is especially important during bad weather or if the road train picks up a lot of dust.

Parking and Rest Areas

There are 250 local councils spread throughout Australia and they vary hugely in friendliness, competence and frankly, intelligence levels. Some are a delight to deal with and some seem to have work cultures that go out of their way to make life difficult.

Some local councils actively encourage campers and nomads, others couldn't give a toss, so gathering information on parking and rest areas that are RV-friendly throughout the country is an ongoing challenge that FRC is nevertheless bravely attempting.

In the meantime, your next best friend for finding RV-friendly parking and rest areas is through local tourist information centres (TICs). You'll find contact details for TICs in the FRC Directory.

1. Login.
2. Go to the directory.
3. Select the state of your choice.
4. Select the category 'Tourist Information Centres' and then the map on your screen will show TICs with map markers at each location.

Rest Areas Versus Free Camps

As much as we all acknowledge the need for drivers to be well rested, there is, nevertheless, a war out there when it comes to staying overnight in rest areas. Most rest areas will be clear as to whether or not caravans can stay in them or not. There are some however that are *purely* designated for heavy vehicles. This is so that truckies can sleep.

Truckies can get very upset if a caravan pulls over in one of their areas. There are some instances where there are so many caravans using up designated truck space that there's no room left for them. This makes life for them impossible, because it is mandatory for truckies to rest as part of their work conditions. In some cases, they have been known to block the recalcitrant caravans in and not let

them out and the odd fist-fight has occurred. There are currently movements out there to crack down on caravans abusing the rights of truckies. FRC and others have done their best to combat abuses where possible and to clearly distinguish what is a rest area versus what is a free camp and to further distinguish caravan rest areas as opposed to truck stop rest areas.

Roadside Assistance

Australia, in case you hadn't noticed, is a big place, and if you and your vehicle get in trouble it might be very difficult to get help unless you get insurance for roadside assistance and, if necessary, towing. Fortunately, Australia has some of the best motoring organisations in the world and no matter which state you're based in there's an organisation ready to help you out.

The fees are extremely modest, considering the coverage and benefits that you get. To give you an idea, even the Premium Plus Coverage (recommended for grey nomads) offered by the New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory-based NRMA, only costs around \$60 for a one-off joining fee, plus around \$30 per month – less if you pay a whole year in advance.

Even if you're travelling around, it's good to have some place to pick up your mail, so where you have a post box is usually going to be your 'address' even if you are a 'person of no fixed abode'. As a result, people tend to join the association in the state or territory where they either spend the most time, pick up their mail, or where they actually have a fixed residence that they haven't given up in order to go nomadding.

Please note: the NRMA is a *national* association, so even though they're based in New South Wales they don't care where you live and will take members from anywhere. Their Premium Plus coverage has you covered no matter where in Australia you are when you call them. Other motor associations might have limitations on whom they allow

Darwin: Tap and Ride Card; website:

[www.nt.gov.au/driving/public-transport-cycling/public-buses/
fares/tap-and-ride-card](http://www.nt.gov.au/driving/public-transport-cycling/public-buses/fares/tap-and-ride-card)

[www.nt.gov.au/driving/public-transport-cycling/public-buses/
bus-tracker-app](http://www.nt.gov.au/driving/public-transport-cycling/public-buses/bus-tracker-app)

Hobart: Greencard; website:

www.metrotas.com.au/fares/greencard

www.metrotas.com.au/communication/apps

Melbourne: myki; website:

www.ptv.vic.gov.au/tickets/myki

[www.ptv.vic.gov.au/footer/about-ptv/digital-tools-and-updates/
mobile-apps](http://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/footer/about-ptv/digital-tools-and-updates/mobile-apps)

Perth: SmartRider; website:

www.transperth.wa.gov.au/SmartRider/Types-of-SmartRider

[www.transperth.wa.gov.au/journey-planner/mobile-services/
official-transperth-app](http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au/journey-planner/mobile-services/official-transperth-app)

Sydney: Opal Card; website:

www.opal.com.au; www.transportnsw.info/plan

Adelaide

