Sweet dreams

A camping trip is only as good as the previous night’s sleep. Not sleeping soundly?
Change your gear. Here’s our pick of sleeping bags, mats and inflatable mattresses.

WORDS NICK DALL PICTURES JAMES GARAGHTY

SLEEPING BAGS

- **Bush Baby Envelope 250 g**
  Sleeping bags don’t come cheaper or simpler than this. It’s got a very synthetic feel, the filling rustles every time you move and it’s much shorter than most of the other bags tested, but it costs only R130 and it has a comfort rating of 9° C, which is an achievement in itself. Perfect for Plett Rage or Oppikoppi. Discard after use.
  R130 at Checkers checkers.co.za

- **Trail 0 Degree Envelope**
  This basic bag costs nearly twice as much as the Bush Baby, but it’s more than twice as good. It’s rated to 0° C (which might be debatable in practice) and it’s made from decent materials. The lining feels fine, and the filling – although obviously cheap – doesn’t sound like scrunched-up shopping bags. If you’re an occasional camper this is all you need, but it’s bulky so it’s not great for hiking.
  R260 at Mr Price Sport mrpricesport.com

- **Terra-Firma Sahara**
  I was impressed with this mid-range offering from Trappers. Although it has the same filling as the Trail 0 Degree, it has a comfort rating of +4° C, which seems more accurate. A sleeping bag isn’t all about warmth, though. This one’s shell is made from water-repellent rip-stop nylon and it has a silkier lining than the other budget bags. Its zips are better and its stuff sack is durable and comes with compression straps. Spend the extra R150 bucks and you’ll get a bag that will last much longer.
  R400 at Trappers trappers.co.za

- **K-Way Extreme Lite 500**
  The moment you take this bag out of its stuff sack, you know it’s something special. K-Way is known for entry-level polyester bags, but this lightweight goose-down bag is in another league. Designed with adventure racers and summer backpackers in mind, it weighs only 470 g and packs into a bag smaller than a loaf of bread. With a comfort rating of 10° C you wouldn’t take it to Everest, but if you buy a warm inner sheet, it could pass as a three-season bag. The cowl is on the small side, but I have a large head.
  R1 600 at Cape Union Mart capeunionmart.co.za

- **Deuter Dreamlite 500L**
  The Dreamlite 500L packs into a slightly bigger stuff sack than the K-Way Extreme Lite (below) and it weighs 130 g more. Its comfort rating (13° C) isn’t quite as good either, but because of its polyester filling it costs nearly half the price. You decide whether you’re prepared to fork out the extra cash, but the down filling in the K-Way will last longer if looked after properly and it’ll keep you slightly warmer. The cowl on the Deuter is bigger, but the K-Way has YKK zips.
  R800 at Cape Union Mart capeunionmart.co.za

- **First Ascent Ice Breaker**
  The Ice Breaker is a South African classic. It’s a thick, puffy down sleeping bag that rivals any of the big-name overseas brands in comfort and performance, at a much cheaper price. It’s filled with 850 g of the finest goose down, which gives it a really impressive comfort rating of -8° C. It’s a roomy bag, the cowl is cozy and the Microtex lining feels good against your skin. Some might say it’s expensive, but I reckon it’s a bargain.
  R3 000 at most major outdoor retailers firstascent.co.za

- **360° Adventure 250 Cowl**
  This was the second warmest bag tested (-2° C) and it should be more than adequate for most low-altitude southern African conditions. It’s comfy and spacious and it has a drawstring around the chest that keeps the warmth in. The stuff sack is nothing special and the bag is too bulky to strap to your backpack, but it’s perfect for car camping or caravanning, and not too pricey.
  R650 at Outdoor Warehouse outdoorwarehouse.co.za
MATS & MATTRESSES

**Bestway Comfort Quest (single)**
This single airbed is 30 bucks cheaper than the equivalent size from Intex – a more established brand in the airbed business – but it seems to be about the same quality. (I didn’t get the chance to give it a long-term test, it must be said.) At 185 cm it’s a tad short. Then a single-use repair patch included, but buy a proper kit if you’re heading into the bundu. R750 at Drifters - rammountain.co.za

- Price. Lightweight. 
- Puncture-proof. 
- Comfortable and warm.

**Intex Classic Downy queen-size set**
This set, which includes a small pump and two surprisingly comfy pillows, is an absolute bargain. Intex is the most established name in the airbed world and this behemoth is as comfy as a Sealy Posturepedic. It’s a mission to inflate (consider buying a 12 V electrical pump) and if it punctures you’ll spend the rest of the night on the ground, but it’s great if you’ll be camping in one spot for a long time with a manicured lawn beneath you. No repair kit included – buy one for R10 at Sportsmans Warehouse. R350 at Sportsmans Warehouse - sportsmanswarehouse.co.za

- Super comfy. 
- As big as your bed at home.
- Mission to inflate. One puncture and you’re on the floor.

**e3 Insulator closed-cell foam mattress**
Hand core mountaineers swear by an old-fashioned foam pad. This one is made from high-quality foam so it’ll last longer than a cheaper. The good thing about a foam mat is that it will never puncture, it weighs next to nothing and if it falls off the edge of the Fish River Canyon, you haven’t lost much. But it’s not very comfy. R35 at Drifters - rammountain.co.za

- Cheap. Unbreakable. Good in thunderstorms!

**K-Way Shield**
Imitation is the greatest form of flattery and K-Way has clearly borrowed a lot of technology from Therm-a-Rest – the self-inflating mattress pioneer. It’s slightly heavier than a Therm-a-Rest ProLite Plus (maybe because it doesn’t have that irritating tapered bottom end) and 1,3 cm thinner which means it’s softer and much warmer than a traditional self-inflating mattress. It weighs only 570 g and it packs up super small. To counter the ordial of inflating it, K-Way has designed a “dry pump” that can be attached to the valve and used like a bellows (pictured right). The pump sells for R245 and you can use it as a pillow or to store stuff. It’s weather proof but you can’t submerge it. A good repair kit is included. R660 at Drifters - rammountain.co.za (R665 without PrimaLoft)

- Extremely small and lightweight. Warm and comfy. 
- Bit of a pain to inflate. Punctures.

**JR Gear Insulated Traverse Core Standard Mummy**
This new product is making waves in the climbing and hiking community. It’s a compact inflatable mattress (no foam) with PrimaLoft lining for extra insulation. Inflated, it’s 8,9 cm thick, which means it’s softer and much warmer than a traditional self-inflating mattress. It weighs only 570 g and it packs up super small. To counter the ordial of inflating it, JR Gear has designed a “dry pump” that can be attached to the valve and used like a bellows (pictured right). The pump sells for R245 and you can use it as a pillow or to store stuff. It’s weather proof but you can’t submerge it. A good repair kit is included. R660 at Drifters - rammountain.co.za (R665 without PrimaLoft)

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**Carma Quip self-inflating mattress**
Orange River guide Marius La Cock spent four years developing and testing this mattress. It’s marketed as a self-inflating mattress, but it’s almost as thick as a real mattress. It’s also puncture proof. You can slash it open with a knife and still have a good night’s sleep. The differ- ence is the foam – thick, heavy-duty stuff that sucks in air. The downside is that it’s much bigger and heavier than other self-inflating pads: It weighs 3,5 kg so it’s not something you want to lug on the Afrurail Trail. A carry strap and carry bag are included. R750 (plus R100 delivery) at - carmaquip.co.za

- Puncture-proof. Durable. Comfortable and warm. 
- Bulky.

**Therm-a-rest ProLite Plus**
Therm-a-Rest introduced the world’s first self-inflating mattress in 1972 and they’ve been the global leaders in the field ever since. Every self-inflating mattress contains open-cell foam that fills with air when you open the valve. Sometimes a few extra puffs are required to fill the mattress completely. The ProLite Plus is a lightweight, three-season model. At 3,6 cm thick, it’s so warm and comfy you’ll (almost) feel like you’re on a real bed – as long as you can keep your feet on the tapered bottom end! It’s expensive and it will probably puncture eventually, but if you hike a lot it’s worth it. Repair kit sold separately. R1 500 at Cape Union Mart - capeunionmart.co.za

- Price. Tapered bottom end. 

**Puncture-proof. Durable. Comfortable and warm.**

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**GEAR SLEEPING STUFF**

- If there’s an involved, a puncture is always a possibility.
- If your mattress comes with a repair kit, remember to pack it. If it’s doesn’t, buy one.
- When you’re camping, roll up your inflatable or self-inflating mattress towards the valve. Close the valve when it’s rolled up.
- Back home, store your self-inflating mattress unrolled with the valve open.

**MATTRESS MATTERS**

- This mattress has an amazing R-value of 5 (a technical warmth rating). To put that in perspective, the Therm-a-Rest ProLite Plus is rated 3.8 and the K-Way Shield doesn’t advertise its rating.

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Coming home the hard way

After two years in London, financial services consultant Neil Lister couldn’t handle life without proper boerewors any longer. Not content to buy a cheap ticket home via Doha, he and his girlfriend Mikaela drove back to Cape Town along the less popular west coast of Africa. The trip must have been good because their relationship survived and they’re now happily married.

I never travel without… A pair of Havaianas. I don’t feel like I’m on holiday until I have them on. I almost lost them in knee-deep clay when the car got stuck in Cameroon at midnight, but otherwise they were the only shoes I needed. Like our Land Cruiser’s amazing BFG mud tyres, the Havaianas didn’t pick up a single puncture.

Sleeping set-up? I used a Kathmandu Odyssey sleeping bag (kathmandu.co.uk) because that’s what was available in London. It was only really necessary in Europe and Morocco and got packed away in favour of a sheet once we’d got through the Sahara.

Verdict: This box was a lifesaver for me and it didn’t affect my car’s handling much – not even in a howling Cape southeaster. It’s expensive, though, and that’s before you factor in roof racks which cost anything from R2 400 – R3 900 depending on your car. There are cheaper boxes in the Kamei range: the smaller Husky 330ℓ goes for R8 000.

R12 000 (including free delivery anywhere in SA) at Car+Me (carplusme.co.za)

Locked & loaded

If you have two dogs and a toddler like Nick Dall does, you’ll love the extra packing space the Kamei Corvara 475 roof box affords...

What is it? It’s a lightweight, hard roof box that can open from both sides and has a carrying capacity of 475 litres or 75 kg. Kamei is an award-winning German brand which is still new to SA.

Why would you want it? Because your car’s too small and you can’t afford a bigger one. It’s much cheaper and safer (albeit smaller) than a trailer and it’s really easy to take off – remember to do so before you head for the underground parking at the mall!

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