

Adiós to analogue

If you go to the West Country without digital TV this summer you'll be staring at a blank screen. Here's how to switch now and avoid missing out

THE DIGITAL SWITCHOVER has begun. That might sound like tech talk with no relevance to your caravan holiday, but if you are going to the West Country you'll need to be prepared for the new TV system. If your caravan TV isn't set up for digital you will see nothing.

Does the switchover affect me?

If you live in the West Country you'll have been bombarded with information about what to do to avoid missing your favourite programmes. Otherwise, you'll have heard nothing. Chances are the first time you'll realise that your TV has no picture is when you're pitched on the Cornish coast, 10 minutes before *Corrie* starts.

Over the next three years, all of the UK will make the change. Region by region, the analogue transmitters will be turned off and only people with a digital-ready TV, a digital set-top box or satellite dish will receive broadcasts.

So what do I need to do?

To make sure you get a picture using your current caravan aerial – whether directional or omnidirectional – invest in a digital-ready TV, which is the easier solution, or a digital set-top box for your current TV, which costs less. Before buying anything make sure it has the Digital Tick logo (below).

Buying a new TV or set-top box can be costly but the good thing about digital is that it provides access to Freeview channels. There is no monthly fee and you get more channels, as well as a crystal-clear digital radio signal.

To ensure you get a digital picture wherever you go you may need to upgrade your aerial. Omnidirectional and directional aerials pick up the digital signal but in weak-signal areas they will struggle. A poor digital signal means no picture at all, so for better reception buy a digital aerial and get it as high up as possible. Aerials produced for tourers are available.

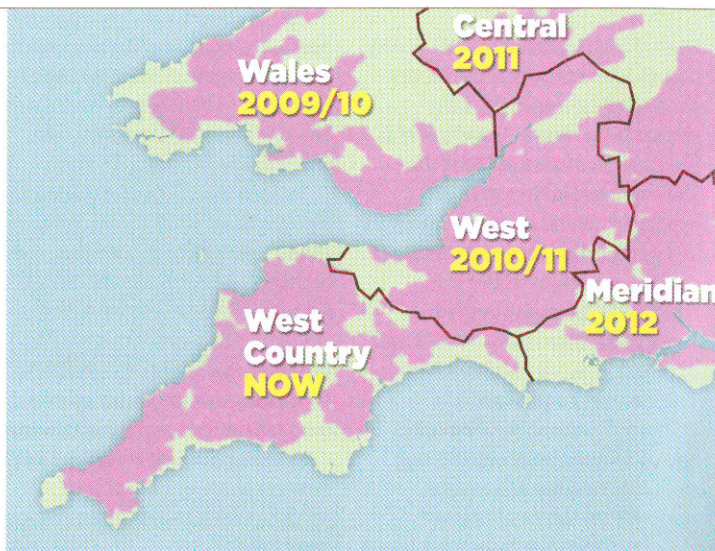
You then need a digital signal finder, to help you pick up your choice of channels in seconds.



Digital tick logo means the kit is digital ready

THE COVERAGE

Only the areas in pink will receive all of the broadcast digital channels after the switchover dates. Because the green areas only get a relayed digital signal, they miss out on some channels. The only way to make sure you get every free digital channel in rural and coastal locations is to get a satellite set-up.



Is that everything?

Almost. But depending on where in the country you pitch you might not pick up all of the channels. If you're pitched near a city then you'll likely be near one of the main transmitters. The signal from these carries all of the Freeview channels. But many rural areas, often the best places to go caravanning, rely on signals from relay transmitters. Some of these relays will be converted from analogue to carry all of the channels, but some will only carry around half of the digital channels. So even with your new digital set up, you may miss some channels. Only the pink areas on the map above will receive all channels.

A portable satellite dish will pick up more than 140 free-to-air channels and, with a satellite set-top box, you can watch them without having to pay a monthly subscription. Many Freesat boxes work on both 12V and 240V mains power, and cost around £150.

So what dish do I need?

As a rule of thumb, the bigger the satellite dish the better chance of signal reception anywhere you tour. If you plan on touring the UK, you'll only need a 40cm dish, which start at around £70. For touring to southern France you'll need a 54cm dish and for southern Spain a 66cm dish.

Whether it is worth the investment depends on how important TV is to your holidays. If you only watch a few favourites, a set-top box or a digital-ready TV is all you'll need. But to receive the maximum number of channels, a portable satellite system is a must.

WHAT KIT?

DIGITAL-READY TV

Displays digital signal without the need for a separate set-top box.

COST 12V versions start from around £150 (www.roadpro.co.uk) and mains-only sets start from around £120 (www.ebuyer.com)

FREEVIEW SET-TOP BOX

Enables you to watch digital Freeview channels on your existing TV.

COST From £15 (www.argos.co.uk)

DIGITAL AERIAL

Better at picking up a digital signal than existing analogue aerials.

COST From £22 (www.maxview.co.uk)

DIGITAL-SIGNAL FINDER

Connects your aerial and TV or set-top box to help you find the digital signal on site.

COST £15 (www.maplin.co.uk)

PORTABLE SATELLITE DISH

The best way to ensure you get all channels whether you're in the UK or abroad.

COST From around £70 (www.maxview.co.uk or www.roadpro.co.uk)

SATELLITE SET-TOP BOX

One-off-payment set-top boxes to display free-to-air satellite TV.

COST From £100 for mains-only box to £150 for 12V Freesat box (www.maxview.co.uk)

THANKS TO MAXVIEW FOR ITS HELP WITH THIS FEATURE