



Glam rocks

Like the outdoors but don't want to rough it? Sebastian Oake finds out what glamping has to offer

Once camping meant uncomfortable sleeping on hard ground, not touching the flysheet because the rain would seep through and eating baked beans from the tin. But now luxury camping, or glamping, has caught the imagination.

Perhaps taking inspiration from the extravagant safaris conducted by wealthy explorers in the 19th century, in which porters had to shoulder all sorts of items not strictly necessary for survival, glamping is giving people what traditional camping never could. And it comes by throwing everything, including, literally, the kitchen sink, at the whole experience of outdoors living.

Welcome to the world of pop-up hotels in the shape of yurts, tipis, tents, shepherd's huts, Romany caravans, tree-houses and even replica Iron Age roundhouses. Here you can expect top-of-the-range beds with crisp cotton sheets and soft down duvets, carpets or reindeer fleeces on the floor, comfortable settees, wood stoves, candelabra, ornaments and, of course, somewhere to chill the wine. You might not get

wifi or phone reception – but that might add to the relaxation.

Glamping sites are spread widely. Guy Mallinson runs Crafty Camping near Chard in Dorset, a hand-crafted woodland retreat with three bell tents, two yurts, a tipi and a shepherd's hut. He says luxury camping is proving tremendously popular. "Glamping offers peace and tranquillity," he explains. "Here it's a chance to be in the woods and get back to nature, which is a great de-stresser."

Everything here is unhurried and soft. You can hear water trickling into the central pond, overlain by the sound of bird song, and in the dappled pattern of woodland light and shadows, there is every shade of green imaginable.

On-site is a field kitchen with full facilities, including a wood-fired pizza oven. Here too are a communal "sitting room" yurt with sofas, books and games, a sauna yurt and a woven-willow shower open to the skies. And there's a craft area, where you have the option of learning woodworking skills. You can carve

a bowl or even make a chair under the careful eye of Mallinson, a former London cabinet maker, or his right-hand man, Adam.

If that sounds too energetic, you can simply observe your surroundings from the comfort of your personal hammock. But don't be tempted to remain horizontal for

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too long because you wouldn't want to miss the best aspect of glamping – lighting a wood fire and barbecuing a fine feast over it. Carolyn Van Outerstep, who runs the Jollydays glamping site near Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire with her husband, agrees with Mallinson on the appeal of this sort of holiday. "There is a yearning in our modern technological world to reconnect with nature," she says. "Things once seen as 'hippy' are now mainstream." Jollydays provides accommodation largely in safari-type lodge tents,

fitted with luxuries once considered impossible under canvas, including four-poster beds and roll-top baths.

The site is contained within 200 acres of mixed woodland and Van Outerstep believes the trees play a big part in making the experience special. "Lots of people come here with a whole agenda of doing this, this and this," she says. "But the woods slow people down and their plans go here, there and everywhere. For some people, the woods are really seductive and they don't want to leave at all.

Mallinson adds. "The beauty of it is that people come from all walks of life. And they are of all ages too. We had a 50th birthday party here and then, two days later, a couple of late teenagers getting engaged on-site. Actually, we see lots of engagements – it's lovely."

While Crafty Camping is aimed at adults, at Jollydays children are actively encouraged. Van Outerstep explains: "What families love about coming here is that the children tend to find each other and hang out together, building dens and so on. The parents hardly ever see them."

At Jollydays, the number of units set up in just seven years speaks volumes – there are 15 lodge tents, as well as a couple of bell tents and four woodcutter huts. Van Outerstep believes that people who would once have stayed at a holiday cottage are now often choosing glamping instead – although it must be said that glamping rarely comes cheap. Holiday cottages can be cheaper.

But despite the luxury, isn't the unpredictable British weather a turn-off? Not a bit of it. If the weather turns nasty, you can just retreat into your inner sanctum, light the wood-burner and get cosy.

"Even if it rains, it can still be magical in a wood," says Van Outerstep.

Mallinson says his site is in use through the coldest months of the year, even when there is snow on the ground. He does have an admission to make though.

"The electric blankets have been a massive success in winter," he reveals. ■

At Crafty Camping (www.mallinson.co.uk), a two-night mid-week stay for two people in a yurt, tipi or shepherd's hut during June or July costs £278-£316. At Jollydays (www.jollydaysglamping.co.uk), a four-night mid-week break for six in a deluxe lodge tent during June or July costs £625-£750

Above: Jollydays in North Yorkshire. Right: Inside a shepherd's hut
Photos: Jolly Holidays/
Sebastian Oake

GLAMPING SITES



NORTHERN ENGLAND

Drybeck Farm, near Armthwaite, Cumbria
Yurts and a gypsy caravan in a riverside setting
www.drybeckfarm.co.uk

Full Circle Yurts, near Ambleside, Cumbria
Yurts on wooded fellsides above Rydal Hall
www.lake-district-yurts.co.uk

Hesleyside Huts, near Bellingham, Northumberland
Shepherd's huts in the grounds of Hesleyside Hall
www.hesleysidehuts.co.uk

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Forest Garden, near East Grinstead, East Sussex
Yurts in ancient woodland with wood-craft and foraging courses available
www.forestgarden.info

Hideaway Huts, near Looe, Cornwall
Shepherd's huts on a farm holiday complex with a swimming pool, riding school and tennis court
www.hideawayhuts.co.uk

Little Brookstreet Llamas, near Edenbridge, Kent
Shepherd's huts on a llama farm and trekking centre
www.littlebrookstreet.co.uk

Secret Meadows, near Woodbridge, Suffolk
Lodge tents, hobbit box, plus a cabin with a shepherd's hut set in 115 acres of meadows and woodland
www.secretmeadows.co.uk

Summerhill Farm, near Hittisleigh, Devon
Yurts on a Soil Association organic livestock farm
www.summerhill-farm.co.uk

Upcott Barton Roundhouse, near Crediton, Devon
Replica Iron Age roundhouse with chestnut and bluebell woodland
www.canopyandstars.co.uk

WALES

Eco Retreats, near Machynlleth, Powys
Tipis and yurts in a forest-fringed meadow with natural healing treatments available
www.ecoretreats.co.uk

Living Room, near Machynlleth, Powys
Family-size treehouses in bluebell woodland
www.living-room.co.uk

The Yurt Farm, near Tregaron, Ceredigion
Yurts and a train carriage on a family-run organic farm
www.theyurtfarm.co.uk

SCOTLAND

Inshriach House, near Aviemore, Highlands
A yurt, shepherd's hut, bothy and old fire engine in riverside woodland on a country house estate
www.inshriachhouse.com

Lochhouses Farm, near Dunbar, East Lothian
Beach-side tree-houses and safari-style tents
www.harvestmoonholidays.com

Roulotte Retreat, near Melrose, Scottish Borders
Traditional Romany caravans from France and Holland grouped around a meadow pond
www.roulotte retreat.com

For further ideas, see www.canopyandstars.co.uk