

Campervan Fantastic

A revival in camping

It would seem that campsites are the new place to go for your summer break: It is estimated that around 1.2 million of us Brits shook out our sleeping bags and dusted off our camping stoves and took to the countryside this year. It is clear that the credit crunch has influenced the growth in holidaying in the UK, but the popularity of pitching up in a field is also being attributed to the growth of music festivals providing an introduction to camping, as well as the mounting awareness and concern over our carbon footprint.

The unfortunate reality of UK weather

For some people, however a 'staycation' i.e. spending annual leave at home would still be preferable to living and sleeping under canvass for a few days.

It is not hard to see why people eschew camping holidays, particularly with the promised 'barbecue summers' failing to materialise pretty much year on year. That said, 'staycationers' have missed out on the opportunity to see what the night sky in the countryside really looks like and experience the thrill of waking each morning in the knowledge that the most taxing thing they will have to do that day is light a campfire.

If it is exposure to the elements which is putting some people off camping, there is an alternative whereby they can still experience most of the benefits of life under canvas without so much of the hardship, and that is with a campervan.

Campervan camping – the best of both worlds

Ask most people what they think of when you talk of 'campervans' and they will describe the iconic and brightly coloured 'Volkswagen' version much favoured by surfers.

By definition, a campervan is a van equipped as a self-contained travelling home. They tend to be smaller than motorhomes and there is generally no divide between the driver's cab and the living area. They can house basic cooking, washing, sleeping facilities, storage space, water supply and a small table to eat at. In contrast, motorhomes tend to be roomier and more luxurious with shower and toilet facilities, climate control and a small kitchen and some battery-powered electrical devices within.

Helen and Garry Leader from East Grinstead are the owners of a 1972 Bay VW camper van. Helen sums it up:

"We have always loved camping and spent many a happy summer in the UK and in Europe with our tent. Now, we feel that we have earned our stripes and deserve a little bit more comfort. I'm not ashamed to admit it - my days of sleeping on the ground are over!

We spent a long time looking at what was available on the market and both of us fell in love with our VW. It is great fun and is perfect for us and is a definite ice-breaker with other campsite users wherever we go.

We can still appreciate the wonders of nature and the novelty of cooking over an open campfire but it's the option of closing the doors and having a roof over our heads which now gives it the edge over tent camping for us. This year when we were camping in Kent, we had several days of rain and if we had been in a tent I don't think we would have lasted the week."

Where to take the campervan

Campervan users have a number of options in terms of where to stay overnight. Campsites are the obvious answer with most offering shower, toilet and washing up facilities and sometimes a shop and launderette. Some campsites do not allow motorhomes due to restrictions in planning law, but are able to take campervans.

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Jim Henley, co-partner in [Bedgebury Camping \[Link\]](#) says: *“Campervan users are usually quite surprised when we say we can accommodate them on our site. About one-fifth of our customer base is currently made up of campervans. It has definitely become more popular”*

‘Free’ or ‘wild’ camping is also an option for campervan users. Basically, this involves staying in acceptable places i.e. beach car parks and camping free of charge. The downside of this can be the lack of washing and toilet facilities although cold showers can often be found near beaches, and public conveniences are always an option. The general advice regarding free-camping is to ensure you have appropriate permission otherwise you may end up being moved on, or with a fine to pay.

A word of warning, campervans tend to be bigger than the average car and as a result can be difficult to drive and to find suitable parking spaces for at times. Most modern vehicles will have power steering, reversing lights and large mirrors, however, this will not help with the problem of height restrictions in some public car parks. Furthermore, if the campervan is going to be left in a public place, then security may be an issue. Campervans tend to be easy to spot and can be a target for thieves and, therefore, valuables should definitely not be left inside them.

Buying and hiring a campervan

One of the major drawbacks of choosing the campervan option is the initial financial outlay. Prices range hugely and of course there is the maintenance and on the road costs in addition. For those committed to using their campervan as a base for their annual holidays, it can save on accommodation costs and is more convenient and cheaper than some forms of public transport.

For those who wish to have the benefits of campervan holidays but do not wish to purchase one, the internet should probably be the first stop. There are a large number of rental firms on-line and again rental prices vary. Hiring a campervan in the summer months can cost from £60 per day. This at first may seem a lot, but if you are planning to explore a particular area, not only do you not have to worry about the cost of using public transport but you have the added convenience of your home and wheels being there ready and waiting for you.

Try something new this year

Campervan holidays might not be for everyone and like all types of breaks, there are pros and cons. But, if you want to do something different with your life this year and have a few days to spare, why not take a trip somewhere in a camper van? Who knows, you may even enjoy it.

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