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 OUR STOCK**





COVER

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I usually write this welcome note while I'm sitting at my air-conditioned desk at Campervan HQ or, if I'm lucky, when I'm out on a lovely campsite somewhere. This month, I find myself tapping away on my keyboard in the less-than-glamorous surroundings of the departure lounge at Luton Airport.

I'm currently waiting for a flight to France so I can get a sneak peek at the new range of campervans and motorhomes from Chausson. And you'll not be surprised to hear that I had a frustratingly long wait to get through security, my flight is now delayed and the airport is insanely busy and very hot. Yes, flying

really can be a miserable experience, sometimes – another reason I prefer travelling by campervan!

My report on the Chausson launch, along with the other launches we've attended this summer, will be on outandaboutlive.co.uk soon, but the first new 2027 models from Westfalia have already been revealed (see our news pages).

Happy campervanning!

Iain

IAIN DUFF ■ Editor

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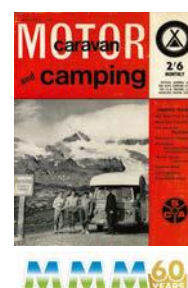
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MMM 60 YEARS

ILFRACOMBE NORTH DEVON

Explore the charms of this
Victorian seaside resort



North Devon's best-known coastal town is a resort in the subdued, sedate sense. It began life as a fishing village in Saxon times and became an important naval base, but with the arrival of the railway in 1874, it established itself as a fashionable holiday resort. There are gardens and a promenade to stroll, a theatre by the sea, and Victorian architecture to gently ease you back into a time gone by. If that all seems a bit dated, you can't fail to be impressed by Damien Hirst's controversial cultture, *Verity*.

SEE



Damien Hirst's 20m tall, bronze-clad statue, *Verity*, stands on the quayside in Ilfracombe as a "modern allegory of truth and justice". It would be fair to say opinions are divided about the sculpture, but there's no denying it catches your attention and it's well worth seeing.

W visitilfracombe.co.uk

EXPLORE



THE VALLEY OF ROCKS

This offers one of Exmoor's most dramatic landscapes. Jagged rock formations rise above the sea, while wild goats roam the cliffs. A scenic walk along the coastal paths rewards visitors with sweeping views.

W exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

STAY



HIDDEN VALLEY

A beautiful, secluded campsite in a wooded valley, among rolling hills of stunning Devon countryside. Just a few miles away are some of the county's most prestigious beaches, including the golden sandy beach at Woolacombe, and Croyde Bay.

W hiddenvalleypark.com

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you should be.

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BEACHES AND BUS PASSES

Swapping stressful parking and narrow lanes for buses, trains and easy walks, Julia discovers a more relaxed way to explore Dorset





We have wanted to visit Dorset for the unspoiled countryside and beautiful coastline, but long walks are not feasible for us, and the thought of navigating busy, narrow roads and the difficulties of parking a longer 'van put us off.

But after some considerable research into campsites, their locations and transport links, I found the perfect site for us. It is based in the pretty little village of Wool, with its thatched cottages, butcher, baker, and three pubs! The site is just off a main road and a five-minute walk to the station and bus stop...

On arrival, we were given a lovely welcome and help to settle in. We took a short walk across fields next to the campsite, down to the River Frome, along its banks to old Wool Bridge. It was even warm enough to sit outside the 'van and enjoy our evening meal!

With the keys 'hung up', we started our first day of exploration. The five-minute walk along the road to Wool railway station was easy and, tickets bought, we

boarded one of the regular trains to Poole. It took about 25 minutes and proved to be quite a scenic ride passing alongside the waters of Poole Harbour. We then walked down the high street to the harbourfront. Poole Pottery is no longer based on the quayside, but the area has been redeveloped with several cafés and restaurants, and a recently opened museum, so plenty to see while we waited for the ferry to Brownsea Island.

Ferry tickets are first come, first served, but with frequent trips. You can take a picnic so that you can walk across the island and not be constrained by using the café at the entrance. Brownsea is renowned for its scouting heritage, dating back to 1907, and there's a statue to Lord Baden Powell both on the island and on Poole Quay.

Despite several boatloads of people arriving on the island, once you set off walking it is very peaceful, and you hardly see anyone else. We enjoyed walking and finding benches to sit on and relax to enjoy the views and the tranquillity. We then made our way to the avocet bird hide, and it was far from peaceful!

Common terns and sandwich



TOP TIP

I can't recommend the Breezer buses highly enough. They have a good summer timetable and well-thought-out routes, which link key locations to many campsites. There is a bus number 35, called Campsite Connect, which links several main sites to Wareham and Swanage. If you are planning to visit the area, then do research the buses as you will find it is so much easier to park up and go by bus. Some are open-top, too!

W breezerbuses.co.uk

terns have nesting areas just in front of the hide, and the commotion was noisy but fascinating to watch. The hide was well set up with a screen that showed live pictures of the avocets from across the lagoon.

But would we see a red squirrel? We had sat quietly watching and hoping, but to no avail. Then, as it came to 5pm, and we were walking back for the last ferry, the squirrels appeared! Not one but two, playing, chasing up and down trees, and one even ran straight across the path in front of me. My day was complete!

After a fabulous day on the island, we boarded the ferry and ogled the mansions at Sandbanks before landing back at Poole Quay. We made our way back to the train station and collapsed onto the comfortable seat for our ride home. It had been a busy day, so we detoured back to the site via the pub and had a delicious meal, rounded off with a local speciality – Dorset apple cake!

MAIN PIC

Swanage beach

TOP LEFT

The Crumple at Lulworth Cove

TOP RIGHT

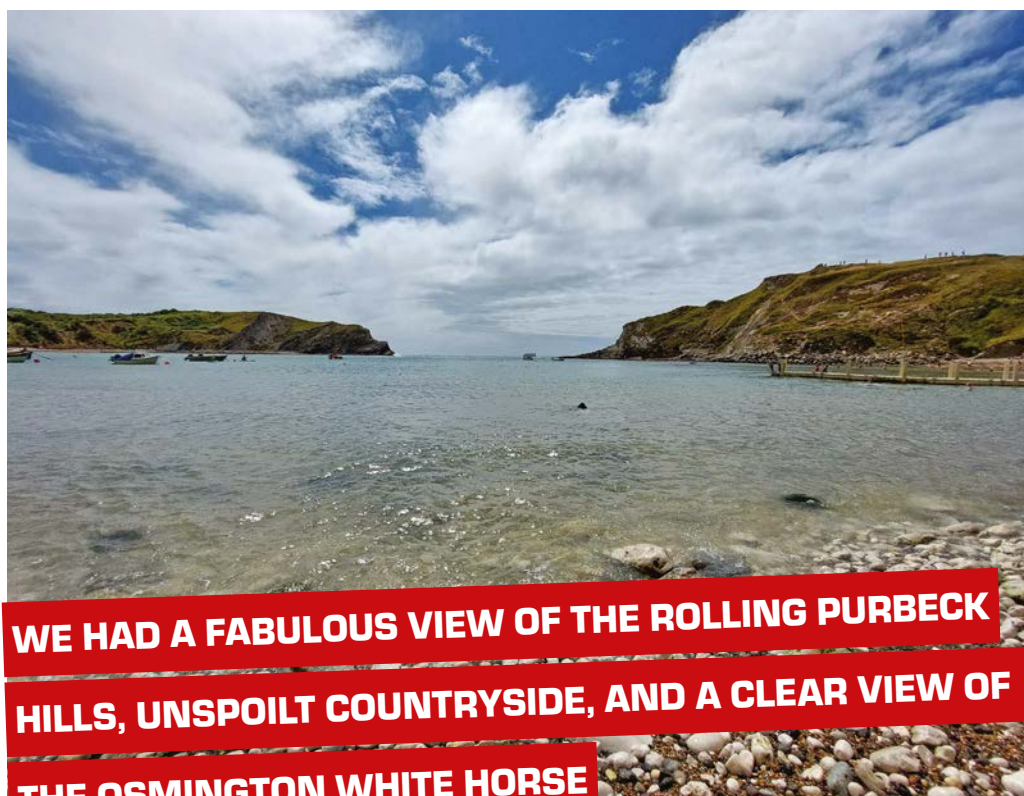
The White Horse at Osmington

INSET

Flower bed in the Victorian garden, Kingston Lacy

The next day, we headed to Weymouth. You can take the 20-minute train ride, but we were told the bus ride, although longer, was very scenic, so we boarded the bus. It didn't disappoint as we drove through the centre of Wool, and on to West Lulworth and through various small, pretty villages with thatched cottages, where the bus did battle with oncoming traffic on narrow lanes!

From the top deck, we had a fabulous view of the rolling Purbeck Hills, unspoilt countryside, and a clear view of the Osmington White Horse. Unlike many other white horses carved into the hillside, this has a man riding it. I later discovered that this depicts King George III riding his horse and was to celebrate the fact that he loved to visit Weymouth, particularly for sea bathing. Unfortunately, it was painted riding away from Weymouth, and the



WE HAD A FABULOUS VIEW OF THE ROLLING PURBECK HILLS, UNSPOILT COUNTRYSIDE, AND A CLEAR VIEW OF THE OSMINGTON WHITE HORSE



TOP

Lulworth Cove

LEFT

Pretty sweet shop at Lulworth Cove

story is that King George didn't like this and never returned!

Finally, we arrived in Weymouth to a wide-open promenade and a busy, bustling traditional seaside resort. The beach is the real draw, with its huge bay, three miles of sandy beach and shallow sea water. It is a real traditional seaside, with a wide promenade and deckchairs placed strategically to face the sun.

Just off the promenade, there is a large town with a huge variety of outlets. We found a lovely independent café for lunch in the heart of the town and enjoyed looking at the old

Georgian architecture reminiscent of the town's past.

Then the inevitable, ice creams sitting in a deckchair on the beach, admiring the views of the surrounding coastline and people watching as everyone enjoyed the beach.

Having relaxed enough, it was time for a gentle stroll past the Victorian clock and along the prom to





Greenhill Gardens to look at the pretty beach huts and chalets, and beautiful garden bedding displays. There is also a bus stop here, so very convenient when it was time to leave.

It was slightly overcast next morning, but that didn't put us off our excursion to Swanage! Our normal morning walk to catch the bus, and off we went. The scenic route took us through Wareham with its busy riverside quay and onto Norden Station, where you could alight to catch the steam train to Swanage. We continued by bus and enjoyed the iconic view of Corfe Castle rising above the village as we approached. It is a narrow and busy village, with limited parking, but we had a great view of the castle as we rode through and eventually arrived in Swanage by the railway station, just in time to see the steam train leave.

Swanage is a must-visit place; it's

TOP TIP

South Western Railway also runs a comprehensive timetable with trains covering Weymouth, Wool, Wareham and Poole. Check the website for times
[W southwesternrailway.com](http://www.southwesternrailway.com)

a quintessential seaside town packed with tradition, with a beautiful beach and lots of lovely independent shops and cafés. The bay is enclosed by the surrounding Purbeck Hills and backed by the traffic-free promenade. I love a Victorian wind shelter, and we sat in one to let the brief shower pass, then it was deckchair on the beach time, and a lunch of perfectly fried fish and chips. Delicious. Lunch over, and the evocative tones of Mr Punch rang along the beach! What a great way to spend an hour!

To round off the afternoon, we strolled along the prom to visit the Victorian pier and enjoy the

TOP

Kingston Lacy from the South Lawn

LEFT

Corfe Castle and village



INFORMATION

To get to Brownsea Island there is a ferry service at the quayside, but make sure you get the ferry and not a harbour tour. Sadly, dogs are not allowed on the island.

Check approximate times to make the most of your visit, as it is quite expensive with the ferry fare and Brownsea Island admission fee (£12 pp). The island is owned by the National Trust, so members would be free, but still need to pay for the ferry (£14.50 pp).

Also, use this website to book the campsites run by the NT, under the holidays section. Note, the motorhome site at Kingston Lacy has no toilet/shower facilities
W nationaltrust.org.uk



View from Brownsea Island over Poole Harbour

stunning views back across town, before a relaxing drink ahead of the journey home.

Our final full day and back on the bus to Lulworth Cove. We knew that the bus stop was in the main car park, making it very accessible for us to visit the cove. The car park is large, but the road through West Lulworth is narrow and can become very busy; it's also expensive at £30 for an all-day motorhome ticket. A £3 bus fare felt very reasonable.

It is a bit touristy here, and very busy, but the cove is a beautiful, must-see natural sight. We took a steady walk up the path for stunning views of Lulworth Cove and the surrounding area. We passed a fascinating rock formation, which has a pleated look, called the Lulworth Crumple. After soaking in the views, we walked down to the cove. A seal appeared and quite happily swam around in the shallow waters. Despite all the noise, nature still overcomes everything, and it is a truly magical place: but I expect it would be even better out of season!

Big decisions, back to the 'van for lunch or catch the bus to Weymouth – no contest! We got off the bus at the King George III statue and walked through town to the harbour.

This is a historic working



harbour that has been redeveloped with several cafés and restaurants based in the old buildings and warehouses that line the quayside. We had lunch at the Old Custom House, although we sat outside so I could jump up and watch the main town bridge lifting to let boat traffic through. For a visitor, this is fascinating to see.

The whole area is lively, with boats on the water and people walking about. It did feel completely different from the seafront, and we felt we were in a different town from the one we had visited previously. And so, our final bus ride home, open top if you please! And time to pack, ready to move on, but we are not quite

TOP
Weymouth Quay

ABOVE
Weymouth beach donkey

RIGHT
King George III statue at Weymouth





finished with Dorset yet.

As we didn't have far to travel to our next site (15 miles), we pulled up in a picnic area on the edge of Wareham Forest. This is an amazing area for walking and cycling, so while my husband sat in the sunshine, I took a walk through the forest. It was a beautiful walk, and I was ready for my picnic once I got back to the 'van!



treasure houses, in that it was gifted to them complete with all the contents, so it is presented as it was in the nineteenth century, with family photos and trinkets on display. The Victorian kitchen garden has been beautifully recreated with gorgeous flower beds, as well as glasshouses and buildings, used by the Victorian gardening team, restored to how

Then a short drive to find Kingston Lacy, a National Trust 8,500-acre estate not far from Wimborne Minster. There is a five-pitch site on the estate, which was perfect. Our pitch was opposite the estate's rare breed herd of Portland sheep and North Devon red cattle, the oldest pedigree herd in the UK, and surrounded by trees and fields. After pitching up, we had a gentle stroll in the estate grounds and got our bearings.

From the South Lawn you get an amazing view of the house, remodelled in the mid-1800s. William John Banks filled the house with a magnificent art collection and treasures from his travels around the world and it is considered to be one of the NT's



ABOVE

Jurassic coastline at Weymouth

BELOW

Pretty Dorset thatched cottage

INSET

Classic Punch and Judy

they once were.

After another very peaceful sleep, our holiday was over. This has been such a relaxing and stress-free break, as we were able to park up yet visit everything we wanted to see. We have done so much that it feels like we have been away for far longer than seven nights. We were able to experience some of what Dorset has to offer. I already have a list of other places to visit here, as there is such a variety of things to see and do and, with a bit of planning, Dorset is not as difficult to visit as we first thought.

STAY AT

WHITEMEAD CARAVAN PARK

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W whitemeadcaravanpark.co.uk



KINGSTON LACY (NATIONAL TRUST MOTORHOME SITE)

Pamphill, Wimborne, Dorset
BH21 4EA

T 0345 266 0795

W nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays/dorset/kingston-lacy-motorhome-site

WALK THE LLŷN

From the beaches of Criccieth to the wildlife-rich shores of Bardsey Island, a week exploring North Wales' western frontier proves some places are worth revisiting



The remote Llŷn Peninsula in North Wales juts out from Snowdonia into the Irish Sea, bordered by Bae Ceredigion (Cardigan Bay) on its south coast. Although relatively small in size – just under 30 miles from end to end, and eight miles wide on average – the peninsula offers nearly 100 miles of coastline to explore.

Paul's family regularly went on holiday to the Llŷn Peninsula during the 1980s, when his children were small. So he was keen to revisit a place that holds many happy memories for him, find out what might have changed in the meantime and, perhaps, make some new discoveries.

Our first campsite, Eisteddfa Caravan and Camping Park, is two miles from the small town of Criccieth on the south coast of the peninsula. We were keen to discover what Criccieth had to offer. But first we were heading back east to Porthmadog, once the busiest slate port in North Wales and now a bustling tourist destination with a picturesque harbour. We'd booked seats on a Woodland Wanderer train to Tany-Bwlch, a tiny station in the heart of the ancient oakwoods of Eryri (Snowdonia National Park). However, our train wasn't due to depart till 2.50pm, so we had plenty of time to eat lunch and explore the

MAIN PIC
View over Criccieth main beach from Criccieth Castle

LEFT
Paul paddling on the beach with Criccieth Castle in the background



holiday town of Porthmadog.

Wandering along the high street, we concluded that Porthmadog is a welcoming but down-to-earth seaside resort that doesn't feel too touristy. Cadwaladers, an ice cream parlour with a distinctive turquoise frontage, tempted us in for a double scoop ice cream cone (New York Biscoff cheesecake and mascarpone, and salted caramel) before catching our train.

At Harbour station, engineers in dungarees and waxed caps were busy preparing the shiny-black steam locomotive which would haul the heritage train carriages off the Llŷn Peninsula and up through the mountains of Snowdonia. The Ffestiniog Railway was originally constructed to serve the slate

industry. Between 1836 and 1863, horses were used to drag the trams up the tracks, descending in their own 'dandy waggons' – a type of railway carriage designed for horses – with gravity propelling the trams back down the track.

As the train left Porthmadog we had good views to our left over the Afon (River) Glaslyn where sheep grazed the salt marshes. Then, as the train chugged higher up through the mountains we could see the Afon Dwyryd, flowing through a valley increasingly distant below us. The countryside was a lush green, accessorised with pink – the soft-pink of blackberry flowers, the mauve-pink spires of buddleia, creamy-pink hemp agrimony (also known as 'raspberries and cream'), and the vividly bright pink thin spikes of rosebay willowherb.

Passing Maenofferen Slate Quarry, we stopped briefly at Minffordd Station, then on through the Welsh mountains. We only had an hour at Tan-y-Bwlch station, which really wasn't long enough. But we took a brief stroll through the woodlands next to the platform, remnants of a vast 'wildwood' that once extended down the western side of Britain and Ireland. These oakwoods comprise an ancient temperate rainforest, with trees that are direct descendants of those that rooted here at the end of the

TOP TIP



You can't reserve specific seats on the Woodland Wanderer train from Porthmadog to Tan-y-Bwlch station. Arrive early for the best choice of seats

last Ice Age, around 10,000 years ago. On the descent to Porthmadog, we spotted more oaks, crab apple trees, ash and mountain ash alongside the track.

Before returning to the campsite, we took a short detour to the village of Borth-y-Gest. At one time, before Porthmadog was developed, Borth-y-Gest was the starting point of a major crossing over the wide and dangerous Glaslyn Estuary, and locals earned money by guiding travellers over the treacherous sands of Traeth Mawr to the other side. Although disappointed to find the tide out, we opted to paddle in the harbour. Bad idea – we'd failed to notice the signs warning of shallow mud. But we enjoyed our stroll along the footpath overlooking the estuary.

Criccieth is a charming little town. It's got two beaches, separated by a small headland topped with a castle. In fact, Criccieth Castle is one of a number of stone castles constructed by the English King, Edward I, when he invaded Wales following the failure of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the prince of Gwynedd, to pay homage. Over the centuries Wales' borders have shifted and changed, and the cliff-top castle later became a symbol of Welsh power. We admired views over Criccieth and beyond, from the castle ruins. Later on, we paddled in

OUR 'VAN



Our 2020 VW California Ocean T6.1 is our second ex-demo California. We love the clever detailing; it's a compact and perfect holiday home on wheels

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT

The Plas Glyn y Weddw Gallery has a café inspired by the shape of a sea urchin

View of Hell's Mouth Bay from the ornamental gardens at manor house, Plas yn Rhwi



**WALKING THROUGH YELLOW-FLOWERED GORSE,
INTERSPERSED WITH CLUMPS OF PINK HEATHER,
WE COULD HEAR GRASSHOPPERS CHIRRUPING**

the sea, the castle perched on the headlands above us. Before leaving, we bought a sculpture of handcrafted glass oystercatchers perched on a driftwood log, from the Glassworks Studio.

Paul has fond memories of visiting Penarth Fawr, a well-preserved medieval house with impressive carved timber beams and a huge stone fireplace. Penarth Fawr provides a rare glimpse into how the Welsh gentry lived the good life during the fifteenth century. But, when we turned up, the property was closed for the day to prepare for a wedding. However, after Paul explained he used to bring his children here when they were small, the owner kindly let us in for a quick look around. On hearing that we were en route to Aberdaron, he also recommended

that we visit the Plas Glyn y Weddw Gallery and Café, near Abersoch.

The gallery has a reputation for displaying art by Welsh artists. And it's also renowned for its space age, metallic-silver extension to the main house, inspired by the shape of a sea urchin. As it was a sunny day, we stopped in Abersoch to buy yet another ice cream – this time from the Two Islands parlour, where a collection of vintage ice cream scoops was displayed on the wall in the seating area.

Driving past Hell's Mouth Bay our next destination was the National Trust property, Plas yn Rhiw. This manor house was home to the Keating sisters for many years. The sisters grew up in Nottingham but came regularly to the Llŷn Peninsula with their mother for their holidays in the

1920s and 1930s. Plas yn Rhiw was derelict at the time, and in 1939 the three of them pooled their savings to buy and restore the property.

The family were friends with architect, Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, who designed the nearby fantasy Italianate village of Portmeirion. He helped with the restoration, including details such as a Gothic door rescued from a mock castle.

The sisters welcomed the presence of rare Welsh black honeybees in the roof and, apparently, honey would sometimes ooze through cracks in the walls. As we wandered around the beautifully landscaped – bee-friendly – gardens, we learnt a lot about bees from the signage. Who knew that bumblebees use their smelly feet to mark the flowers they've been feeding on, so other bees know the nectar has already been taken! Before continuing our journey, we ate a delicious al fresco lunch in the café overlooking the gardens and Cardigan Bay.

Unfortunately, Paul was disappointed to find that Aberdaron wasn't quite as he remembered it. In the 1980s a number of buildings were constructed from painted corrugated iron, and he wasn't



TOP LEFT TO RIGHT

Penarth Fawr, a well-preserved medieval house near the village of Chwilog, Gwynedd

The beach just outside Borth-y-Gest



TOP TIP

Don't miss the opportunity to try battered lobster tails with chips at Sblash in Aberdaron. We reserved ours in advance

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• Since Covid-19 the best means of contact is by email - sales@rallydesign.co.uk

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EISTEDDFA CARAVAN & CAMPING PARK

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W eisteddfapark.co.uk

MYNYDD MAWR CAMPSITE

Llanllawen Fawr, Aberdaron,
Pwllheli LL53 8BY

T 01758 760223

W aberdaroncaravanandcampingsite.co.uk

impressed by their modern replacements. A member of staff in the bakery told us she'd worked there in the 80s, and welcomed the difference modernisation made to her workplace.

In the centre of the village, a stream runs under two small humpback bridges at right angles to each other and, from there, past an ice cream parlour and onto the beach. We took a refreshing dip in the sea, and returned later that evening to eat battered lobster tails with chips from Sblash, a fish and chip shop with outside tables overlooking the stream.

We'd booked a pitch at the Mynydd Mawr Caravan and Camping site, at the very end of the peninsula. Driving along narrow country lanes between high verges crammed with a profusion of wildflowers, we spotted yarrow, cow parsley, red campion, foxgloves, honeysuckle and many more besides.

From our pitch, it was just a short stroll up to the headland. Walking through low-growing, yellow-flowered gorse, interspersed with clumps of pink heather, we could hear grasshoppers chirruping



and spotted a small green specimen right at our feet. From the headland we had a perfect view of Ynys Enlli – the 'Isle of 20,000 Saints' – otherwise known as Bardsey Island. We'd booked a boat trip over to the island the next day, but this was cancelled due to high winds.

With hindsight, we probably didn't take enough notice of the weather forecast. We woke up during the night to violent gusts, over 40mph, battering the 'van. We'd never experienced weather like this and weren't sure whether we were more likely to cause damage by leaving the pop-up in place, or taking it down. Fortunately, the 'van survived unscathed, and our boat trip was rearranged for a couple of days later. That afternoon we noticed red-beaked black choughs, pecking vigorously in the grass next to our 'van in search of insects and worms.

With a day to spare before our postponed boat trip, we drove to Morfa Nefyn, on the north coast, where we parked in the golf club car park to stroll to the small



fishing village of Porthdinllaen.

We'd heard good things about the pub, the Tŷ Coch, which overlooks the harbour. But we'd have enjoyed our visit more if we hadn't got drenched by rain on our walk over.

Bardsey Island has held an important place in Christianity ever since Saint Cadfan built a monastery on the island in the sixth century. These days it's home to a working farm, thriving lobster and

ABOVE

A fishing boat at the historic small lobster cove of Porth Meudwy

BELOW

Whitewashed cottages in the coastal village of Aberdaron



TOP TIP

Take cash with you for car parks. The National Trust owns the lovely, secluded cove of Porth Ysgo, but the car park is on private land and has an honesty box for parking (£2 gives you up to two hours, and you pay more for longer). The machine in the town centre car park in Porthmadog only accepts £1 coins



crab fishery, a bird observatory and varied wildlife. Our boat set off from Porth Meudwy, the exact same spot from which pilgrims would historically have set off on their journeys to the island.

The owner of the boat explained that there were about 1,000 fewer birds around the island than the previous week. Our trip was towards the end of the breeding season and, consequently, many birds had already set off on long migratory journeys. Even so, there was plenty to see. Colin pointed out puffins swimming in the water, parent birds feeding young shags perched on the lower reaches of cliffs, newly fledged herring gulls hanging around in gangs like teenagers, black and white razorbills, and guillemots.

As we arrived at the island, he advised us to keep an eye out for seals near the harbour. Later that day we saw close to a hundred basking on the rocks, heads and tails in the air in a curiously banana-shaped posture. Memorably, the seals were singing a haunting



chorus, like a group of children pretending to be ghosts, elderly uncles joining in with gruff coughs and snorts.

The following day we visited the secluded cove of Porth Ysgo, stopping off on the way at a peaceful little chapel, Eglwys St Maelrhys. From the car park, we followed the path alongside a stream, and down 150 wooden steps descending to the beach. The stream trickled down the cliff alongside us as the Pistyll y Gaseg

INFORMATION

Visit Wales

W visitwales.com/destinations/north-wales/eryri-snowdonia-mountains-and-coast/exploring-ilyn-peninsula-national

Daytrips to Bardsey Island

W bardseyboattrips.com

The Woodland Wanderer heritage train service from Porthmadog to Tan-y-Bwlch

W festrail.co.uk/woodland-wanderer

waterfall, and then made its way over pebbles towards the sea.

The sandy cove was atmospheric and dramatic, with massive angular black and tan rocks interspersed with smaller boulders and pebbles. We paddled in the surf, and watched oystercatchers with their distinctive orange beaks foraging for shellfish along the shoreline, and waves crashing against the cliffs further down the coast.

Porth Ysgo was one of our favourite destinations on this trip, and we were pleased we'd already bought a sculpture of oystercatchers. When we got home, it would remind us of a very special afternoon on the Llŷn Peninsula.

TOP CENTRE

View of Bardsey Island from the headlands

TOP RIGHT

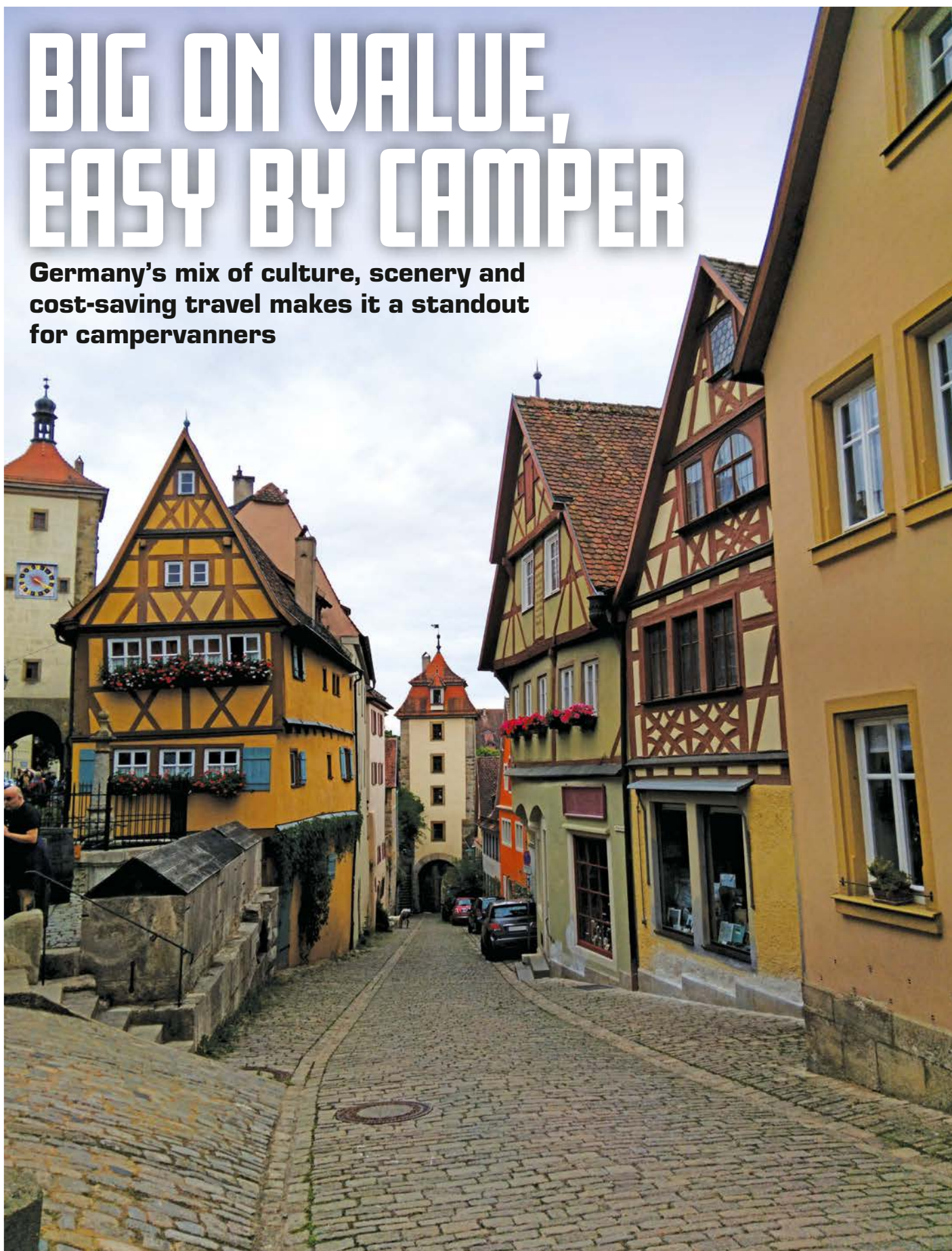
Sue walking through the ancient oakwoods next to Tan-y-Bwlch Station, in Snowdonia

ABOVE LEFT

The peaceful little chapel, Eglwys St Maelrhys, in Llanfaelrhys, Gwynedd, Wales

BIG ON VALUE, EASY BY CAMPER

Germany's mix of culture, scenery and cost-saving travel makes it a standout for campervanners





When UK campervanners start planning a European tour, Germany rarely tops the list. France, Spain and Italy tend to steal the spotlight, yet Germany offers one of the best-value experiences in Europe. It's vast, varied and exceptionally well set up for touring.

Germany is big – far bigger than many people realise when scanning a map – and that scale brings staggering diversity. Medieval towns and half-timbered villages sit alongside dramatic alpine scenery, vast lakes, dense forests and vibrant cities. One week you can be parking up beneath castle walls in Saxony, the next cycling lakeside paths at Lake Constance, or riding an alpine coaster in Bavaria – all without blowing your daily budget.

What truly sets Germany apart, and what keeps us coming back, is just how campervan-friendly it is. Germans love their *wohnmobil*, and accordingly campervans are extremely well provided for everywhere you go in Germany.

For anyone travelling on a

budget, Germany's stellplatz system is a game changer. These dedicated stopping places – often provided by towns or local authorities – are everywhere. You'll find them in city centres, beside rivers and lakes, next to swimming pools, cable cars, vineyards and historic old towns. Many cost between €5 and €15 per night, and some are even free.

Unlike campsites, stellplätze keep things simple: level hardstanding, fresh water, waste disposal and often electric hook-up for a small extra fee. You pay for what you use, you're not tied to minimum stays, and you don't need to book in advance.

For travellers who like to keep moving, and don't like to book campsites, that flexibility saves both money and time.

We're often wary of choosing and booking campsites in advance, as our travel plans tend to change at the last minute. As a family of four, travelling with young children, we often can't predict our driving times or stops so we embrace campervan-designated overnight park-ups. Germany's extensive network of



OUR 'VAN

2009 Renault Master Minibus LWB self-conversion. It has been nicknamed 'The Holiday Bus' by our young children. It has a rear dinette that converts to a king-size bed, with overhead folding bunk beds

stellplätze (or aires, as they're known in France) offer flexible – and even late-night – arrivals.

During our trips to Germany, we have discovered many stellplätze across the country that have been perfect for one-night temporary and unplanned stays. We use the park4night app to search for convenient overnight stops, and have been surprised by the quality, quantity and variety that Germany

MAIN PIC
Rothenburg ob der Tauber

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT
Rothenburg ob der Tauber underpass

Stellplatz at Wank Mountain, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

INSET
Traversing the streets of Gengenbach

RIGHT
Colditz Castle courtyard





offers for vanlifers.

They range from beautifully located dedicated overnight parking spots in castle grounds near Colditz, to Rothenburg ob der Tauber where you can step straight from the campervan into one of Germany's most perfectly preserved medieval towns.

Nesselwang, at the edge of the Alps, is where you'll find one of our favourite aires, which is within walking distance of the alpine coaster. And on the outskirts of famous Garmisch-Partenkirchen is a peaceful place and there are great facilities within the parking area for the nearby mountain's cable car.

Outdoor living isn't a holiday add-on here; it's a way of life. Everywhere

we went we have found public play areas, community sports facilities, running tracks and open-air leisure complexes. Even with children in tow, it's easy to fill days without spending much. Within walking distance of a great

stellplatz near Lake Constance, in the charming town of Wangen im Allgäu, we found a running track, sandpit, outdoor marble run and brilliant play area. Cycling, in particular, is a national

hobby. On Sundays, almost every car on the roads has a bike rack as German families spend the day outdoors together. If you enjoy cycling and are able to take your bikes away with you, you'll enjoy Germany's well-marked, well-maintained cycle paths that criss-cross towns, countryside and nature parks.

Nature parks and forests are equally inviting, with signposted walking trails, boardwalks, viewing platforms and information boards that encourage visitors to explore at their own pace, without entrance



ABOVE
Walkways leading to Colditz Castle

INSET
Playmobil FunPark entrance mascots



TOP TIP

If relying on free or low-cost stopovers, arrive early afternoon in peak season to guarantee a spot

GERMANY IS FAR BIGGER THAN MANY PEOPLE REALISE WHEN SCANNING A MAP AND THAT SCALE BRINGS STAGGERING DIVERSITY



fees, parking costs or expensive attractions. Many offer their own dedicated overnight parking options, even if they do not have facilities, and we love these peaceful nights surrounded by trees and just a few fellow vanlifers.

Swimming is another national pastime, and most towns have their own community pools. Often, the town's overnight parking is located in the pool parking areas, which makes it very convenient to take the opportunity of a swim.

Food shopping is another area where Germany really shines for budget-conscious travellers. Supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl are everywhere, even in smaller towns, and prices are consistently lower than in the UK. Most bakeries and supermarkets bake on

site, making it easy to eat well without spending much.

Our girls particularly love these supermarkets' bakery sections, using the tongs to select a tasty pastry or pretzel before heading back to the 'van for a continental-style breakfast. Cheese, cold meats, yoghurt and pasta are excellent value, and even branded goods tend to be keenly priced. For those touring in a campervan, the quality of fresh produce makes self-catering both affordable and enjoyable – and a great alternative to eating out at restaurants.

Fuel costs are of course always a factor for campervans, as fuel is our biggest cost for any trip we take – other than a ferry or LeShuttle crossing. While prices do fluctuate, diesel in Germany is often

comparable to – and sometimes cheaper than – the UK, particularly away from motorway service stations. Many travellers quickly learn to avoid fuel stops on the autobahn (Germany's motorway network), where prices can be much higher, and instead fill up in nearby towns or villages. We've certainly never found Germany's fuel prices to be a shock to the system on our trips.

One of Germany's biggest financial advantages for road trippers is the lack of tolls. Unlike several neighbouring countries, Germany does not charge tolls for private vehicles on motorways or main roads. You can cross the country using the autobahn network without paying a penny extra, making long-distance travel

ABOVE
Lake Constance

LEFT
Free stellplatz at Podelwitz,
near Colditz



far more affordable.

These motorways are fast, and not for the faint-hearted – especially if you're in a larger vehicle or have a speed limiter fitted. Often only two-lane, it can be tricky to pass slower vehicles when there is no speed limit and cars can suddenly be upon you within seconds!

Germany is full of variety, from coast to mountains, and we've only touched the surface of what this beautiful country has to offer. Here are some of our favourite places, selected from a number of different holidays in our campervan.

The Black Forest (Schwarzwald)

TOP TIP

Use an app like park4night to help identify suitable stellplätze along your route

is one of Germany's most evocative and touristy regions with dense pine forests, farmhouse villages, cuckoo clocks and spa towns – yet it remains remarkably accessible for campervan travellers on a budget.

Pretty towns such as Freiburg, with its historic centre and cobbled streets lined by tiny canals, make a relaxed base, while Gengenbach offers classic half-timbered charm straight from a storybook. There's a perfect stellplatz here, within easy walking distance of the beautiful fairytale town – but get there early in peak season as space is tight in the afternoon. Nature lovers are well catered for, too, from the towering Triberg Waterfalls to the wide-open views around Feldberg, the region's highest peak. Add in the lakes at Titisee and Schluchsee, ideal for gentle walks and lakeside stops, and the Black Forest becomes

ABOVE

Neuschwanstein Castle

BELOW

Nesselwang alpine coaster

an easy area to explore slowly.

Lake Constance (Bodensee) is an easy region to fall in love with, combining beautiful scenery with a relaxed, affordable pace of travel. Shared by Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the German side of the lake offers excellent value with well-maintained lakeside cycle paths, swimming areas and pretty



INFORMATION

Some of the stellplätze very close to the lake proved to be either extremely expensive, or too popular for our liking. We found a hidden gem in nearby Wangen im Allgäu, offering top facilities at a low cost within strolling distance of a traditional small town

Travelling through Germany with children can be done on a budget by mixing low-cost outdoor and cultural activities with the occasional standout attraction, while places like Playmobil FunPark near Nuremberg offer great value

harbour towns such as Lindau, Meersburg and Friedrichshafen.

Perched above the Tauber Valley in northern Bavaria, Rothenburg ob der Tauber is one of the best-known stops on Germany's Romantic Road, the scenic route that runs from Würzburg to Füssen. The town lies within the Franconia region, an area known for its rolling countryside, vineyards and historic market towns, making Rothenburg a natural centrepiece rather than a standalone attraction.

It's one of Germany's most photographed towns, yet campervan travellers can still experience it without paying premium prices. Staying on a low-cost stellplatz just outside the old town, we walked into the centre within just five minutes.

The Bavarian Alps are proof that mountain travel doesn't have to mean expensive resorts or exclusive experiences. Stretching along Germany's border with Switzerland and Austria, this region offers towering peaks, flower-filled meadows, crystal-clear lakes and picture-perfect villages – and all within easy reach for those travelling in a 'van.

Towns and villages throughout the region provide excellent aires and stellplätze, often within walking distance of cable cars, lakes or trailheads.

The parking area is next to the ski resort, and despite being very popular we've not yet struggled to find a space – helped by the handy



ABOVE

Colditz town – free parking

INSET

Enjoying the running track near the stellplatz at Wangen



webcam on the website to check for space availability!

Another popular spot in this region is the iconic Neuschwanstein Castle, near Füssen. This visitor attraction is often billed as Germany's most recognisable sight – the fairytale inspiration behind Disney's Sleeping Beauty castle – and while it's undeniably busy, it's still well worth including on a campervan tour with a little planning.

Our journey through Germany took us as far as Colditz, a small town near Leipzig and the Czech border. Colditz is one of those places many travellers know of rather than visit – and that's part of its charm. Dominated by the legendary Colditz Castle, perched high above the Mulde valley, the town feels quietly atmospheric without being busy or packed with tourists. The castle itself is famous for its role as a high-security prisoner of war camp during the Second World War, where many awe-inspiring and heroic escape attempts were made.

Visitors to Colditz Castle will find far more than an imposing exterior. Inside, the museum (and

hostel) offers a well curated and absorbing insight into the castle's time as a prisoner of war camp, using original rooms, photographs, documents and personal accounts to tell the stories of the Allied officers held there.

The parking in the charming, cobbled town square was free on Sundays, and only a short walk to the castle. We spent the night before at a designated stellplatz in the nearby village of Podelwitz, and our second night at Colditz's campervan parking on the outskirts of the town – and all for free.

STAY AT

WANK MOUNTAIN

Wankbahnstr. 2, 82467 Garmisch-Partenkirchen

NESSELWANG

27 An der Riese, 87484 Nesselwang

WANGEN IM ALLGÄU

Engetswiler 2 Knolpershof, 88239 Wangen-Neuravensburg

ROTHENBURG OB DER TAUBER

Laiblestraße 12A, 91541 Rothenburg ob der Tauber

GENGENBACH

Berghauptener Straße 29, 77723 Gengenbach

COLDITZ

14 Furtweg, 04680 Colditz

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

The best campsites for family fun, because nothing beats making holiday memories with the kids

Words ■ Claire Tupholme



LOMOND WOODS HOLIDAY PARK

Tullichewan, Balloch, Loch Lomond G83 8QP

T 01250 878123

W woodleisure.co.uk

OPEN All year

Located just a 10-minute walk from the southern end of Loch Lomond, there is so much within walking distance of Lomond Woods Holiday Park that no member of your campervan holiday crew will be bored. Within half a mile is an aquarium, a bird of prey centre, and Lomond Shores – a lochside shopping centre with cafés and a play area.

Lomond Woods' pitches are hardstanding with electric, sheltered by trees and shrubs, and there are also fully serviced pitches. Toilet and shower facilities have the addition of family bathrooms and an accessible bathroom, plus there's a launderette, outdoor play area and indoor games room. A pub is five minutes' walk away, with a train station and bus services in Balloch, half a mile away.

The campsite's website has details of discounts to local family-friendly attractions, too: woodleisure.co.uk/whats-on/family-friendly/loch-lomond



MONKTON WYLD HOLIDAY PARK

Scotts Lane, Charmouth, Dorset DT6 6DB

T 01297 631131

W monktonwyld.co.uk

OPEN 6 February – 2 November

Monkton Wyld is an excellent choice for families, offering an extensive outdoor playground, a nature trail, a games room and plenty of space to enjoy the outdoors. Just three miles from the Jurassic Coast, it combines a child-friendly setting with a calm, relaxing atmosphere for adults. The campsite is arranged across several paddocks, with generously sized pitches that back onto hedges or flower borders, giving guests a greater sense of privacy.

Guests can choose between grass or hardstanding pitches, all with electric hook-ups. On-site amenities include toilets and showers, family washrooms, a launderette, a shop and dedicated areas for dog walking, along with a dog wash. Food trucks stop by on selected evenings, making it easy to grab dinner without leaving the site.

From Monkton Wyld, there are scenic walking routes leading to Lyme Regis and Charmouth. These nearby spots are perfect for children to explore the beaches and search for fossils. While loose fossils are fair game, you should never dig into the cliff faces or rocky ledges.





GOLDEN SQUARE CARAVAN PARK

Oswaldkirk, Nr Helmsley, York, North Yorkshire YO62 5YQ

T 01439 788269

W goldensquarecaravanpark.com

OPEN 1 March – 31 October

Located in a scenic spot just southeast of the North York Moors National Park, this campsite offers pitches overlooking a mix of farmland, woodland and open moor. Surrounded by excellent countryside for walking,

it's also conveniently positioned about two and a half miles from the market town of Helmsley.

There are plenty of family-friendly attractions close by, including the historic Helmsley Castle and Pickering Castle, with Pickering roughly a 30-minute drive away. The site is also within 40 minutes of Rawcliffe Bar Park and Ride, providing easy access into the city of York, where there's no shortage of things to see and do.

Golden Square's campsite is arranged across three levels, offering grass pitches with electric hook-ups, some private screened options and premium fully serviced pitches.

Facilities include two heated shower blocks with family bathrooms, covered washing-up areas, a microwave, launderette, licensed shop, dog exercise field and woodland trails. For activities, visitors can hire bikes, and younger guests can enjoy two outdoor play areas, an indoor play space, crazy golf and a football field.



LADY'S MILE HOLIDAY PARK

Exeter Road, Dawlish, Devon EX7 0LX T 01626 863411 W ladysmile.co.uk OPEN All year



For families wanting a seaside break with a touch of nature, Lady's Mile is ideally situated. It's under a mile from the sandy shores of Dawlish Warren Beach and close to the 500-acre Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve. The beach stretches for about a mile and a half, and it's lined with dunes, and nearby you'll find shops, amusements, go-karts and adventure golf.

On this site, swimming is a major highlight, with both indoor and outdoor pools, flumes, a plunge pool, and an indoor inflatable aqua course for younger guests. There's also plenty more to keep everyone entertained, including a bowling alley, outdoor play park, bike pump track and arcade. Food options range from the on-site shop to the restaurant, bar, and fish and chip takeaway, with evening entertainment on offer for the whole family.

Pitches include grass and hardstanding options with electric hook-up, some offering water and drainage. Facilities include toilets, showers and a launderette, and dogs are welcome, with a wash area and dedicated walking field available.



Pixabay



BROADHEMBURY CARAVAN & CAMPING PARK

Steeds Lane, Kingsnorth, Ashford, Kent
TN26 1NQ

T 01233 620859

W broadhembury.co.uk

OPEN All year



Nestled in the Kent countryside, Broadhembury is well placed for exploring the Garden of England, just 20 minutes from the coast, half an hour from the historic cathedral city of Canterbury, and around 40 minutes from London by train. A bus stop can be found less than a mile away, while the nearby town of Ashford – only a 10-minute drive away – offers a full range of amenities, including a train station and an outlet shopping centre.

The campsite is divided into two distinct areas. The Family Park is ideal for those wanting to be close to play areas, a sports field and a games room, while the Meadows provides a more peaceful, adults-only setting suited to couples – ideal if grandparents are joining the holiday, too.

Each section has its own toilets and showers plus there is a family bathroom, laundry facilities and a small shop on site. There is also a separate play area for children aged under six. Pitches on the Family Park are available on grass or hardstanding with electric hook-ups.



ABERERCH SANDS HOLIDAY CENTRE

Abererch, Pwllheli, Gwynedd LL53 6PJ

T 01758 612327

W abererch-sands.co.uk

OPEN 1 March – 30 October

Perfect for families who enjoy the beach and water sports, Abererch Sands Holiday Centre sits right by the sea, protected by a large sand dune. Its private sandy beach stretches for four miles, offering plenty of space and easy access just a few steps from the site. On the opposite side, a nearby train line and station make it simple to reach Pwllheli, where you'll find shops, pubs, restaurants and a marina.

The campsite has touring pitches, all with electric hook-up, and water-fill point on firm grass. There is a toilet and shower block, launderette, dishwashing facilities, a play area and an indoor swimming pool.

For a fun day out, you are only a short drive from Snowdonia National Park, too, where you could head to ZipWorld Llechwedd and have some adrenaline-filled fun on the zip wires or the underground trampolines!



STANWIX PARK HOLIDAY CENTRE

Greenrow, Silloth, Cumbria CA7 4HH T 01697 332666 W stanwix.com OPEN All year



This is the family holiday park that has it all, whether you want a day at the coast or to explore the Lake District. Stanwix Park is next to a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and less than a mile from the seaside town of Silloth. The path to the beach is just over the road from the site and a golf course can be found here, too.

The trouble is you might find it hard to leave the campsite, since there's a 29-metre indoor pool, an outdoor pool, ten-pin bowling, a play park, crazy golf, tennis, cycle hire, amusement arcade, a sports bar and family entertainment at the Sunset Inn. If you're in need of some refreshment after all that activity then head to the site shop or café, and maybe relax in the sauna and steam room.

Stanwix offers fully serviced pitches on hardstanding, with toilets, showers, bathroom cubicles and a launderette all nearby.



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W polmanter.com
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Set in the Cornish countryside, this award-winning touring site strikes a great balance between on-site fun and easy access to St Ives, which you can reach on foot or by regular shuttle bus.

For younger guests, there are two playgrounds, indoor soft play and a games room, while everyone can enjoy the heated outdoor pool, tennis courts, putting green and playing field. Practicalities are taken care of with an on-site shop, bar and restaurant, and four-legged family members have a dedicated exercise field and shower.

There is a choice of pitches, including grass or hardstanding with electric hook-up and multi-serviced hardstanding pitches. Toilets and showers, accessible suites and family bathrooms complete the site's facilities.

New for 2026 are fully furnished and kitted out safari tents – perfect if multi-generations want to holiday together but not everyone has a campervan!



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W pure-leisure.co.uk
OPEN 1 March – 30 November

Set within the historic Lowther Estate, Lowther Holiday Park is tucked among woodland by the river, around a 10-minute drive from Penrith and just outside the Lake District National Park. On site, there's a playground, amusements, and a restaurant and bar known as The Cow Shed featuring a family room, play area, and beer garden.

The park offers a mix of grass and gravel pitches with electric hook-up, along with facilities including toilets, showers, a launderette and a shop. Dogs are welcome, and there are plenty of nearby walking and cycling routes to explore. The estate is also home to Lowther Castle, where you'll find impressive ruins, exhibitions and



lan Kennedy/stock.adobe.com

POMEROY FARM PARK

Street House Farm, Pomeroy, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 9QG
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W pomeroyfarmpark.co.uk
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This small, family-run farm site sits on the edge of the Peak District National Park and even produces its own dairy ice cream. The farm is home to a variety of animals, including pygmy goats, sheep, miniature donkeys, alpacas, tortoises and giant rabbits, with hands-on experiences like goat walking or pig bathing available to book.

There's direct access to the High Peak Trail, perfect for traffic-free walking and cycling. The spa town of Buxton is just a 10-minute drive away, offering attractions such as the Pavilion Gardens. Nearby highlights also include Buxton Country Park with woodland walks and the underground Poole's Cavern, as well as a Go Ape course.

The Pomeroy site offers mainly grass pitches with full services (a few hardstanding options are available), plus toilets, showers, a family bathroom, laundry room, shop, a ball game field and a secure dog exercise area. Fire pits are available to hire, and a local pub is just a mile away.

an adventure playground, plus a café and shop. For a family outing, Ullswater is just a 15-minute drive away, offering scenic steamer boat trips on the lake, or you can enjoy kayaking and canoeing as a family.



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STRETTON LAKES

RUTLAND

Stretton Lakes is an adults-only campsite set within 120 acres of farmland in the Rutland countryside. We spoke with the owner, Rachel Needham, who talked us through how eight fishing lakes have been created over the past 40 years to form an idyllic setting surrounded by woodland and open farmland.

This five-star rated VisitEngland touring site has 32 fully serviced, all-weather lakeside pitches. Some are south facing with spectacular views across the fishing lakes to the countryside beyond. Others are located beside their own established lake, sheltered by a mature hedge and trees. Site facilities include a luxury shower building with individual private shower rooms, a laundry room and a dog wash facility.

The local area is perfect for walking and cycling. There is also an abundance of golf courses within a short drive and Rutland Water is only eight miles away. Here you can walk or cycle around the reservoir, take to the water, look for ospreys or visit the nature reserve.



An adults-only campsite in the heart of the England's smallest county

How long have you been running your campsite?

We have been running our touring park for three years, opening July 2023. Prior to this, we were dedicated to farming the land.

Tell us a little about your site and how it first began

Our journey began in 2002 with fishing lakes. In 2003, after joining the Caravan and

WE ABSOLUTELY LOVE WELCOMING GUESTS, HEARING ABOUT THEIR ADVENTURES AND READING WONDERFUL REVIEWS



Motorhome Club, we opened a CL site with grass pitches. As the site was very seasonal, we began looking at ways to develop and diversify the farm further.

The CL site proved popular, so over the following years we gradually expanded, adding log cabins, increasing the size of the site, and digging additional lakes.

Our aim was to create a touring site that



could remain open all year and it was this vision that led to the development of our current site, including two new lakes designed exclusively for guests. Every pitch is lakeside, carefully positioned so guests are not overlooking one another.

What made you want to run a campsite?

Farm diversification is crucial to the survival of our farm, plus we have met so many lovely people over the years, staying on our CL site, that it seemed natural to expand to a larger park. Our lodges are four and five-star rated, so we wanted to create a welcoming park built to the highest standards.

What do you like most about being a campsite owner?

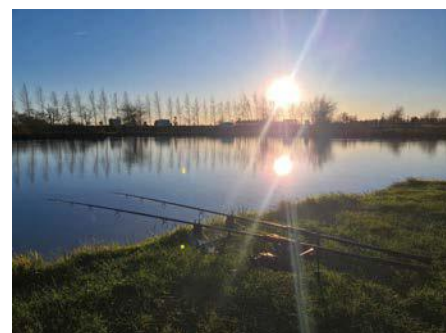
We absolutely love welcoming guests, hearing about their adventures and reading wonderful reviews. It brings us so much joy to provide a relaxing space where friends can gather, unwind and leave with happy memories.

What makes your site special to the guests who return every year?

We have many returning guests, and will always continue to invest on improving our site. We want to make our guests' stays the best we can offer, and this applies to all aspects of Stretton Lakes.

What do you love about the region your site is based in?

Rutland is a wonderful small county, offering



many places to visit. The highlight would be Rutland Water and all its attractions, but we are also very close to Stamford and Burghley House (also a must-visit whilst staying with us). We have an abundance of lovely restaurants with easy access, as we are situated between the two towns of Stamford and Oakham.

What do you do on a rare day off?

Since we live on the site, we don't really have traditional days off. However, during quieter times, we love eating out at local restaurants and taking our dog for walks in the beautiful Rutland countryside.



Information

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STRETTON LAKES
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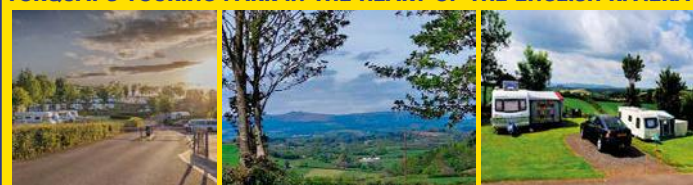
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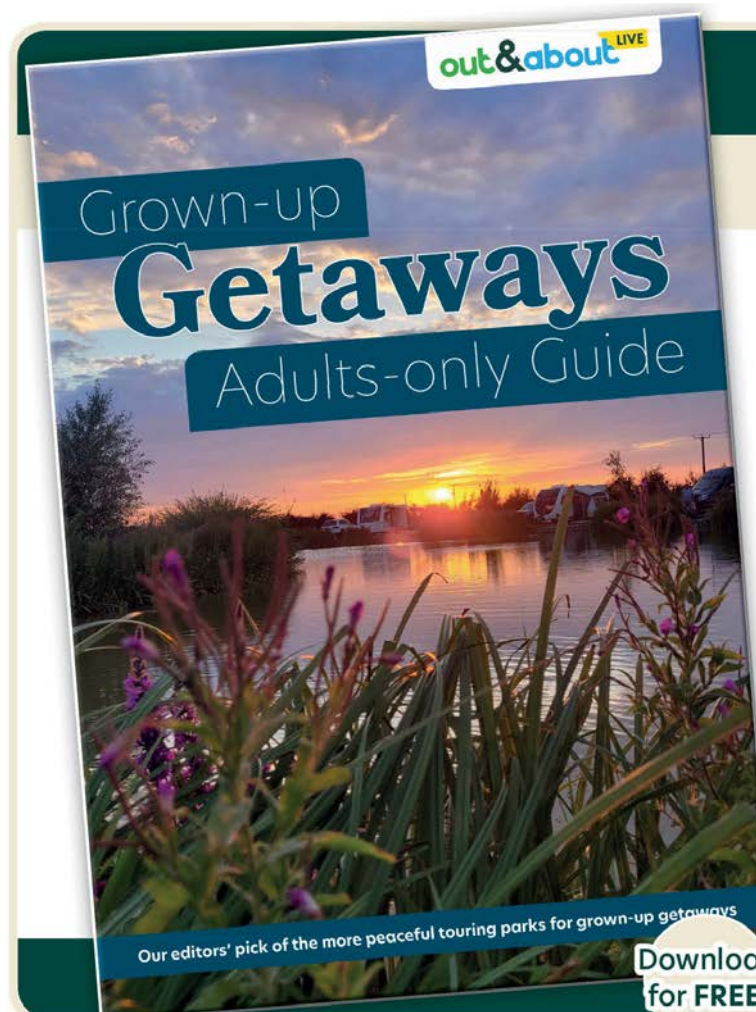
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MAN AND BOY

A bucket list trip ticked off and some excellent father and son time

Those bucket list destinations don't need to involve long-haul flights or a price tag that has you saving for years. I've been lucky enough to go campervanning as far north as Norway, as far south as Morocco, and in places you might not expect, like Thailand and the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. I've travelled extensively in our own isles, too, but the Isle of Man had so far escaped me. Not that I didn't want to go. I really, really did, but my wife wasn't keen, and I'm not a fan of long

ferry crossings (or rather my stomach isn't!). It had been on the bucket list for a while, never quite making it to the top.

The planets aligned, though, because the school where Katy teaches and the academy that our son, Ruben, attends had different Easter holidays. So, we'd have a boys bonding trip while the boss was working, and I'd just have to pack some travel sickness tablets for the journey across the Irish Sea.

That was the bit that I wasn't looking

forward to, especially as a week earlier some sailings had been cancelled due to high winds. I'd booked to cross from Heysham to Douglas, rather than from Liverpool, as the MV *Manxman* used on this route is the most modern ferry currently operating in the British Isles (the alternative route uses a smaller fast ferry). With capacity for 1,000 people and 300 cars, the *Manxman* promised plenty of space and, to be doubly certain that I wouldn't arrive regretting the trip already, I

Words and pictures ■ Peter Vaughan

Parked at the Calf of Man



MY 'VAN

Peter's camper is a 2019 Volkswagen Transporter T6 with HemBil Urban conversion by Concept Multi-Car of Hythe, Kent

campsites, with around 10 to choose from (there are also off-grid possibilities, except in the Ayres National Nature Reserve where wild camping is banned). As we'd be arriving in the evening, I did some Googling and pre-booked the Laxey Campsite (rated at a reassuring 4.9 stars) and, as the isle is only 32 miles long and 14 miles wide, it seemed sensible to make that our base for the whole trip.

As it turned out, Laxey was a brilliant choice. It only has five hardstandings, which are worth booking, but the facilities were immaculate and there's even a campers' kitchen with tables and chairs, cooker, toaster, microwave, sink, and even pans, cutlery, crockery, etc. Or, if you're as lazy as me when it comes to cooking, you can just walk down the hill to the Mona Lisa restaurant for excellent pizza. And while you're down there, take a stroll along the prom and the pebbly beach.

It's a quiet contrast to the expansive seafront at Douglas, which is your first view of Man when the ferry docks. The sweeping bay here reminds me of many a British seaside town, except that parking is easy and it feels genteel, relaxed not rundown. With around 85,000 inhabitants, this isle has a similar population density to rural Wales, so nowhere feels crowded and the people appear polite and unhurried. It's been a long time since I've witnessed such courtesy on the roads and, if you really want to slow your pace of travel and unwind, take a ride on one of the historic horse-drawn trams.

Of course, speeds would all be very different at TT time (late May to early June), when as many as 14,000 motorcycles arrive on the island for the famous race. Maybe I'll come back for that one year because it must be a truly incredible spectacle, with riders hitting over 135mph on the 37.7-mile course. It's such a big part of Manx culture that there are reminders of the TT everywhere, from the

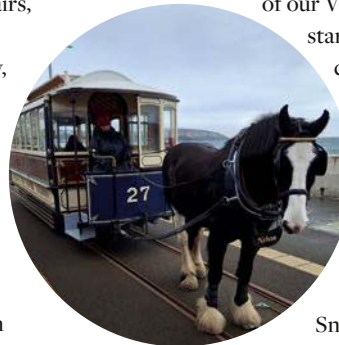


Arriving in Douglas

display in the Manx Museum in Douglas (well worth a visit to learn about many aspects of the island's history) to the bike collections at Jurby, Santon and Peel. Padded barriers and signs were already being erected over a month before the event and I couldn't resist a photo of our VW next to the grandstand on the start/finish line – maybe a TT race for campervans next?

With the Mountain Road (one of the world's top 10 drives, according to National Geographic) closed during our visit, we had to content ourselves with taking the railway to reach the top of Snaefell, Man's only mountain, at 6,221m. On a clear day, it's said that you can see seven kingdoms from here – the Isle of Man, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Neptune and Heaven! We could only spot Ireland in the distance, not the remaining five – the peak often seems to be shrouded in cloud. It's also extremely windy up there, so we soon dived into the café for a warming hot chocolate.

Maybe the views aren't quite as spectacular but it was warmer and brighter when we climbed to the top of Milner's Tower at Bradda Glen – well worth the effort of a short hike and the 40 steep



booked the Barrule Premium Lounge. I'd thoroughly recommend the upgrade, which includes comfortable, reserved reclining seats, unlimited tea and coffee and soft drinks, biscuits to nibble and newspapers and magazines to while away the three-and-three-quarter hours on board. That took our five-day return fare, with the 'van, to £362.50 – not cheap – but the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company is your only option.

There's more choice when it comes to



Douglas seafront



Peel



Campervan racing?



Castletown



View from Milner's Tower

stone steps. From the top you can see Port Erin Bay and Port St Mary on the other side of the isthmus, as well as uninhabited Calf of Man – a 600-acre island off the tip of the Isle of Man that's a breeding base for 33 species of seabirds, including Manx shearwater, kittiwake, razorbill and shag. You can also spot peregrine, hen harrier and chough here but it was the many seals sunbathing on the rocks that caught our attention.

Whilst at this southern end of the isle, it's worth visiting Cregneash, the oldest open-air folk museum in Britain. Sadly, we arrived too late for a proper tour of the village that was home to crofters and a last stronghold of the Manx language but we were still able to get a look at the traditional houses, thatched in unique Manx style.

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Instead, we did find time to wander around Castletown, the ancient capital of Mann, with its beautifully preserved medieval castle and, although it wasn't exactly hot in mid-April, we couldn't resist Isle of Gelato By The Sea – the tiramisu flavour ice cream was unmissable!

Another castle – and more good food – was found on the west coast, at Peel, which was our favourite town on the island. Peel Castle – famously home to Moddey Dhoo (the Black Dog ghost) was constructed on St Patrick's Isle by the Vikings in the 11th century and its 700m curtain wall remains remarkably intact. We spent a good hour or more wandering the site, listening to the audio guides, hoping to walk off some of the calories consumed at The Boatyard, a seafood restaurant that was by far the best eatery we found. Then local schoolkids highlighted the free fun to be had collecting scallop shells on

the beach, never before have I seen them in such huge quantity.

After three full days of touring, including venturing inland on some scenic but very minor roads unsuitable for anything much larger than a VW Transporter, we had to

be ready for our early morning crossing back to England. The view of Heysham nuclear power station as we docked was perhaps a fittingly stark contrast to all the beauty we'd encountered 94 nautical miles away. We'd briefly seen the Great Laxey Wheel (the world's largest working water wheel) but run out

of time for a proper visit, while the Manx Electric Railway and the steam railway from Douglas to Port Erin (the longest narrow-gauge line in Britain) remain on the list for next time. Rather than ticking off the Isle of Man as 'done', Ruben and I are already talking about a revisit – and, having seen our photos, this time Katy wants to come, too.



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Words and pictures ■ Liz Morrell



Wellbeing and adventure festivals are a growing trend for those looking for a different escape from the norm in their 'vans

I'm perched nervously in my swimsuit on steps set in front of a wooden barrel that sits facing a crowd of people I've never met before, watching the man in front of me telling me how to breathe. "In... hold... out," he repeats. I'm transfixed.

It's not that I've forgotten how to breathe, but the wooden barrel is full of multiple bags of fresh ice and he's expecting me to get in it

in front of strangers. I'm someone who can barely get in a swimming pool without shrieking and for whom a wetsuit is a must, even when bodyboarding in the middle of summer. And, naturally, I'm worried about the prospect of my colourful language when the toe-dipping begins.

But I trust this man completely. Guided by his calming method, I've gone beyond



thinking I'll look stupid or chicken out and am determined to do this. When I finally brave climbing into the ice bath and somehow stay submerged for more than two minutes, the after-effects are exhilarating as the endorphins rush to greet me.

CAMP WILDFIRE

This was just one of the adventures on my list of experiences at Camp Wildfire, a festival dubbed a summer camp for adults.

But it wasn't the only one. I also made extreme ice cream using nitrogen and a whole array of weird and wonderful ingredients, ranging from Marmite to

Parmesan. I proved how bad my balance is on a slackline set among the dappled light of trees in the forest, and was part of a mime act, finding out that my non-verbal acting skills are officially as bad as my verbal ones.

I'd hung inelegantly upside down trying, and failing, to master aerial silks and I had my drawing skills mocked by a drag queen. "I look positively neanderthal," she shrieked after seeing my toddler-like attempts in the drag queen life drawing class.

I also extracted the DNA from a strawberry – a rather long-winded process that involved washing-up liquid, plastic bags and alcohol – although sadly not in cocktail form. I also

joined a signing choir, learning to sign a whole song in half an hour with the chance to perform it in front of other Camp Wildfire attendees at the closing ceremony.

I sculpted a clay pot that looked like it had been formed by a toddler. I satisfied a childhood fascination with archaeology by going on a 'dig' and learning about the things we found; made a flower headdress; had my hair braided like a child even though I'm a mum of teens in her 50s; and shared prosecco in a hot tub with another group of strangers.

After a quick 'van trip to pick up my teenagers from Boardmasters the week before, my visit to Camp Wildfire couldn't have come at a better time. I was desperately in need of the chance to relax and unwind from my normal day-to-day responsibilities of single parenting and work.

The festival, repeated each year in August across two different weekends, encourages attendees to adventure by day and party by night, with a range of more than 100 activities from the crafty to more active pursuits to try out, and one of four patrols (Foxes, Hawks, Badgers and Squirrels) for you to join, dress up as and compete to win points in patrol games if you wish.

It took a while for me to relax into the experience and remember how to act with the abandon of a child (albeit one driving a campervan!). However, once I did, I absolutely loved it.

THE BIG RETREAT FESTIVAL

That was last summer. This year, I decided I needed more of a focus on wellness, arriving at The Big Retreat Festival in Lawrenny, Pembrokeshire, Wales, in May. It was a campervan escape that, after a near-



shredding of the cambelt had threatened my 'van's very existence only a few days before, I needed once again.

By contrast to Camp Wildfire, The Big Retreat is a more laid-back affair. At Camp Wildfire, you have to book and pay extra for the activities you want to do. This means you can end up with a packed itinerary of activities. It's great fun but can be exhausting,

especially if you also get involved in the evening partying.

At The Big Retreat, most of the 300-plus activities, feel-good experiences, talks and workshops are included in the price of entry and aren't bookable. It means that while Camp Wildfire sees a rush to book some of the most popular experiences on the app, The Big Retreat encourages a more relaxed approach of turning up and seeing what you are drawn to on the day.

"Part of the magic of the festival is stumbling across experiences you weren't planning to attend," says Amber Lort-Phillips, co-founder of The Big Retreat Festival. "Many people arrive with a carefully planned schedule and leave talking about something completely different that they discovered by chance."

Yoga is top of the agenda with multiple classes taking place over the four days of the festival, but Amber is keen to stress that

many visitors leave the site having never even stepped inside a yoga tent, with plenty more to do to relax and unwind.

"One of the biggest lessons we've learned over the last seven years is that people don't want wellbeing to fit into a box," she says.

"They want choice. Some want yoga at sunrise, some want a cold-water swim, some want to listen to inspiring speakers, and others simply want to dance with friends under the stars."

I followed the organisers' advice and took a more chilled approach than the fit-it-all-in method I employed at

Camp Wildfire. I chilled out in yoga classes, drifted off in a gong sound bath and learnt new things in talks ranging from chocolate to manifestation and the pleasure of kink (now that's a whole different kind of feature!).

I took part in more active classes, too,



INFORMATION

THE BIG RETREAT CAMBRIDGESHIRE

11-13 September, 2026 (adults only)

W www.bigretreatcambridgeshire.com

THE BIG RETREAT PEMBROKESHIRE

28-31 May, 2027

W thebigretreatfestival.com

CAMP WILDFIRE

28-31 August and 4-7 September, 2026 (adults only)

W campwildfire.co.uk

CAMP KINDLING

21-24 August, 2026

W campkindling.co.uk



including a pom-fit class (a fitness class using giant handheld pom-poms); a power-hoop class (I still can't hula-hoop); and a Mr Motivator fitness class at the main stage (yes, he is still going and no, he really doesn't look his 73 years and puts most of us to shame).

Of course, wellness and wellbeing also require letting your hair down in the evenings and, like all good festivals, music is an important, though secondary, element. Highlights at The Big Retreat included Craig Charles's DJ set and Rick Parfitt Jnr, the son of the Status Quo guitarist of the same name, rocking a storming set of covers with his backing band.

In the spirit of relaxation, The Big Retreat was also accompanied by late morning breakfasts, snacky teas and late-night giggles by our vans as I relaxed with friends Selena and Tilly in the campervan area.

Finally, in contrast to the ice bath experience that marked the end of my Camp Wildfire stay, at The Big Retreat we finished off by climbing into the hot tub; although, with a heatwave in full swing, we wished we'd booked an ice bath instead.

FESTIVAL STORIES

Adventure and wellbeing aren't unusual features at a festival, but at The Big Retreat and Camp Wildfire, they take centre stage. The founders of both are eager to expand their businesses, having refined their blueprints over the years.

THE CAMP WILDFIRE STORY

"We basically set out to build the weekend we wished existed: the adventure of being eight years old, with the soundtrack and the bar of being a grown-up," say Jules Lowe and Lee Denny, co-founders of Camp Wildfire.



"We found a magical heritage pine forest near Sevenoaks in Kent, built a scrappy little website to explain the idea, and somehow 350 brave souls turned up for the first one in back in 2015."

More than 10 years after it started in front of 350 brave souls in a pine forest near Sevenoaks in Kent, 10,000 people now attend Camp Wildfire's events each year. "We've deliberately kept Camp Wildfire small and friendly, capping ticket numbers so it never loses the feeling that made the first one so special," say Jules and Lee. "The biggest lesson is that the magic was never the zip wire or the headline act, it's the people, so almost everything we've learned comes back to protecting that."

"We've invested in the unglamorous things that make or break a weekend, like clean toilets,

warm showers and proper food, and have learned to plan for very British weather.

Making the most of the experience comes down to two things, say the pair. "First, say yes to the thing that scares you a little, whether that's your first axe-throwing lesson, a turn at the open mic, or simply talking to strangers.

"Second, pace yourself: it's adventure by day and party by night for three days."

THE BIG RETREAT STORY

The Big Retreat was born out of the success of a small retreats business based in the Pembrokeshire grounds where the festival is held. "We wanted to create an event where people could discover their own version of feeling good," says co-founder Amber.

"Not everyone wants to spend a weekend doing yoga, and not everyone wants to spend it doing fitness classes. Some people feel their best paddleboarding, listening to live music, learning to cook over fire, dancing, singing, or simply sitting around a campfire with new friends," she says.

"The idea is that attendees create their own festival journey," says Amber. "I often describe it as a cross between a bootcamp, a yoga retreat and a music festival, but what makes us different is that we don't tell people what wellbeing should look like. Our motto is 'Feel good – your way,'" she says.





ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The latest trackers can prevent your vehicle from being stolen and, if the worst happens, help recover it quickly

With campervans increasing in value, investing in a good GPS tracking system is becoming essential. Campervans are high-value vehicles and, of course, are a target for thieves. The rising prices have made them even more attractive to criminals in recent years. Even older models can be targeted due to the high value of spare parts.

Tracking systems also play an increasingly important role in preventing theft and improving recovery rates, yet one company states that only 50% have alarms and/or trackers installed.

WHY YOU NEED A CAMPERVAN TRACKER

Trackers have developed rapidly in recent years, with the most advanced systems not only allowing your vehicle to be tracked in real time, but also helping prevent theft.

While GPS trackers have always been one of the most effective ways to recover a stolen vehicle, modern systems can now stop theft attempts before they even take place.

If the worst does happen – such as a vehicle being lifted onto a low-loader – the tracker will detect movement and alert both the control centre and owner. Recovery rates for vehicles fitted with an insurance-approved tracker can be as high as 95%.

HOW DOES A TRACKER WORK?

A tracking device works in a similar way to a sat-nav system. It uses GPS satellites to determine location and a GSM/GPRS mobile network connection to transmit that data to a monitoring centre.

Most trackers are permanently powered units with a SIM card hidden inside the vehicle. They send location and movement data to a control centre and to the user via a smartphone app, allowing real-time tracking.

There are two main types:

- Passive trackers which send alerts via text, email or app
- Actively monitored trackers, which are monitored 24/7 by a control centre

Actively monitored systems will contact you if suspicious movement is detected and can work with the police to recover your vehicle. Speed is key. Thieves often move a vehicle quickly before attempting to disable the tracker, so rapid alerts significantly improve recovery chances.

2G OR 4G?

Most campervan GPS trackers currently operate on 2G networks, although newer systems are moving to 4G. The UK plans to phase out 2G and 3G networks by 2033, with some providers switching off earlier:

- EE: from 2029
- Vodafone: by 2030
- O2: no confirmed date yet

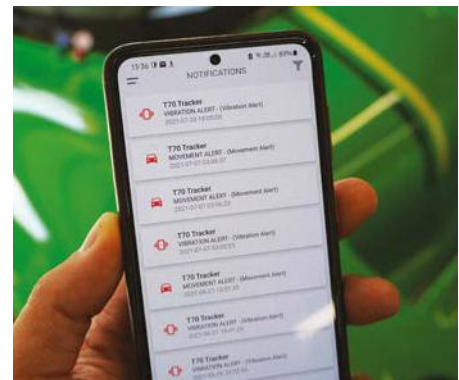
Many tracker manufacturers are now offering 4G-compatible devices, especially for use in countries where 2G has already been switched off.

Before buying, check what network the tracker uses, whether it can be upgraded and if it works across Europe.

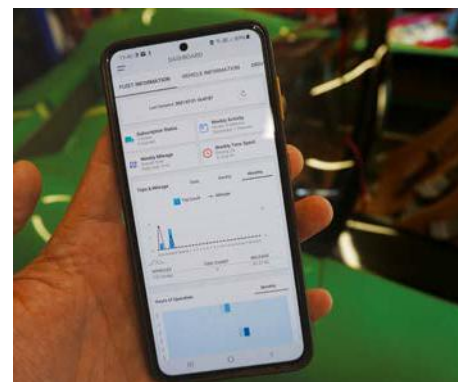
TRACKER FEATURES

Modern campervan tracking systems offer a wide range of features, including:

- Geofencing – alerts when your vehicle enters or leaves a set area
- 24/7 monitoring – control centre support at all times
- Smartphone apps – real-time location tracking
- Battery monitoring – checks leisure and



If the tracker triggers an alert, it will appear on your phone in the app, as well as via text and email – this can all be set by the user



Trackers can seem a little intrusive, as they also monitor the vehicle speed, usage, location and how it's being driven. But then so does your smartphone...

vehicle battery levels

- Immobilisers – prevent the engine from starting
- Driver ID tags (ADR) – stop unauthorised use
- OBD port protection – prevents key cloning

DO CAMPERVANS COME WITH TRACKERS PRE-INSTALLED?

Some new campervans now include factory-fitted tracking systems. For example, Auto-Trail offers My Auto-Trail tracking (upgradeable to Thatcham Cat 7) and Auto-Sleepers has a Sargent Cat 6/S7 tracker with app. Swift includes a pre-installed S7 tracker, but a subscription is required.

If your vehicle doesn't have one already, dealers or specialist installers can fit an aftermarket system. Interestingly, some experts comment that aftermarket trackers can be more secure, as factory-fitted units may be installed in predictable locations.

HOW TO INSTALL A TRACKER

There are two main types of tracker

CONTACT

- Autowatch **W** autowatch.co.uk
- Back2You **W** back2you.com
- CanTrack **W** cantrack.com
- Hal Locate **W** hal-locate.co.uk
- Moving Intelligence **W** movingintelligence.co.uk
- Rewire Security **W** rewiresecurity.co.uk
- Scorpion **W** scorpiontrack.com
- SmarTrack **W** smartrack.uk.net
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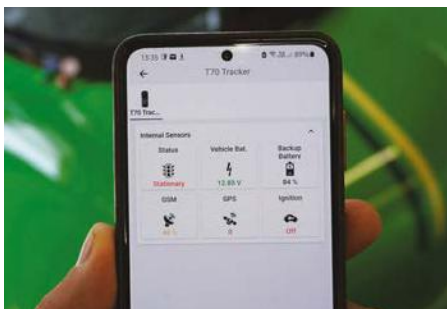


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Trackers also monitor the vehicle's journey, direction and speed, so its destination can be monitored and predicted, helping the vehicle to be recovered if stolen



Some tracker apps offer useful additional information such as the battery voltage of your vehicle and how much charge is in the tracker's backup battery

installation, hardwired or portable.

Hardwired trackers are installed directly into the vehicle's electrics, therefore no charging is required. These often have 24/7 monitoring and instant alerts, which is usually required for insurance purposes (Thatcham-approved). Some insurance companies insist on a tracking system for vehicles above a certain value.

Portable trackers are battery-powered and



This is a typical DIY tracker from Rewire Security. While not insurance company approved, it does allow you to remotely monitor your vehicle

easy to install. Normally, these batteries can last up to six months. They are much more discreet but can be slower to respond. Most insurers prefer a professionally installed Thatcham-approved tracker, as these offer the highest level of protection.

DO TRACKERS REDUCE INSURANCE COSTS?

Installing a tracker can reduce insurance premiums by 10% to 25%, depending on the provider. Many insurers now require a Thatcham-approved tracker to provide cover for higher-value vehicles.

Non-approved trackers may still provide protection, but they may not be recognised by insurance companies or supported by the police recovery services.

S5 VS S7 TRACKERS

S5 and S7 trackers refers to the Thatcham rating. These are the industry standard for vehicle security systems.

An S7 tracker is primarily GPS tracking with 24/7 monitoring, while the S5 tracker includes driver ID (ADR) and often immobilisation of the vehicle. Both systems are monitored around the clock, but the S5 offers a higher level of theft prevention.

TRACKER COSTS

All campervan tracking systems require a subscription due to SIM data and monitoring services.

Typical costs:

- S7 tracker – from £69 (plus subscription)
- S5 tracker – from £299 (plus subscription)

Annual subscriptions are between £100 and £200. Some providers offer lifetime subscriptions, but these may not transfer when selling your campervan.

Most vehicle trackers require a subscription to function properly, as they rely on mobile networks and monitoring centres. Some systems allow you to use your own SIM card, but this requires careful set-up and may not offer the same level of reliability or support.

Remember that physical security options, like wheel clamps, steering wheel locks, driveway posts and more are also recommended.

OTHER SECURITY MEASURES

With the increasing level of electronic sophistication adopted by criminals, it's recommended also using physical devices to protect your 'van – they won't stop a professional, but they will slow thieves down and will deter opportunists.

Steering wheel locks are a common device to use, but unless they cover the whole steering wheel, they're of limited use – the bar type can actually help thieves if they need to break the steering lock as they give extra leverage! As the steering wheel is made of mild steel, thieves will often just cut the rim to remove the lock – so fit a complete steering wheel cover.

Some people chain the cab door handles together, but as most door handles are plastic and easily chopped off, this takes seconds to get around. You're better fitting an extra security lock on the habitation door – that's where most thieves gain entry.

Pedal locks that cover the clutch, brake and throttle pedals are another useful visual deterrent and tricky to get around.

Wheel clamps and security posts are both obvious visual deterrents and can be very useful, especially against opportunist thieves. But, as with all devices, given the time, opportunity and the likelihood of not being disturbed, even these can be overcome by a determined gang.

With all mechanical devices, you have to balance the inconvenience of using and storing them with the benefit they bring. Fitting a steering wheel cover, wheel clamp and chaining your 'van might be a great visual deterrent but will be a pain to have to remove each time you want to use your 'van.

But brightly coloured, obvious security devices do put thieves off and are a visual statement of how seriously you take vehicle security, so do use them.



**READ MORE ABOUT
CAMPERVAN SECURITY**
motorhome.ma/security

LIFE BEYOND BRICKS

Tash shares a few of her favourite sites for solo escapes

Recently I wrote about hosting a solo female travel panel where everyone said they never use campsites and it had me wondering if was I entering my 'comfort phase' of life. Because I seem to spend more nights on campsites than ever before.

Since then, however, I've chatted to a couple of those same women and discovered we weren't necessarily talking about the same thing! When they heard campsites, they were picturing larger sites. When I said campsites, I was thinking of CLs (Certificated Locations), CSs (Certificated Sites), and CAMpRA style stopovers.

This got me thinking about some cracking sites I've stayed at recently and, of course, I want to share them with you.

First up is Shady Oak CL in Longville in the Dale, Shropshire. It's a gorgeous, adults only, off-grid (as in no EHU) site between Much Wenlock and Church Stretton. The camping field is immaculately kept and the limited on-site facilities (fresh water, grey waste disposal, Elsan point and bins) are well presented and thoughtfully laid out with clear signage. It might sound simple but it makes such a difference.

There was something really homely and warm about the campsite. Once I met the owner, Sarah, it all made sense. She couldn't have been friendlier or more welcoming, and that is clearly the vibe that is mirrored in her site.

The cherry on top was the site's namesake; the oak trees! They provided much needed shade during the sunny weather and they beautifully framed the views of the rolling Shropshire hills that surround you. It's hard to believe it was only £10 a night.

The owner, Sarah, couldn't have been friendlier or more welcoming



Can you tell I had a dreamy stay there? It is exactly the kind of spot I like; clean, tidy, friendly and quiet. Your only neighbours are sheep! I learned that the two hardstanding pitches are a fairly new addition. That ticks even more boxes for me because now I can add it to the list of potential winter stopovers, too.

Next up is a site called



Buttercup Meadow in Clipston, near Market Harborough. Seriously, this place is as cute and charming as its name suggests. It's another adults only, off-grid site with well-laid-out facilities and thoughtful touches. The information hut with locally produced honey and free mint and parsley for you to help yourself to was particularly lovely. But my biggest highlight was the complimentary cupcakes the owner, Jane, gives you when you arrive. It was so thoughtful.

A similar story to above, when you meet Jane the owner, you clearly see that the campsite is a reflection of her. Warm, welcoming, and a pleasure to encounter. There is also the added bonus of a dedicated dog walking paddock. The site is within close walking distance of the local village and pub, plus there are walks and cycle routes you can do in the area. I was only staying for one night on my way south so I didn't sample the local pub but I can imagine it is as charming as the village it sits in.

My lifestyle sometimes requires the full facilities and predictability of larger sites, but the smaller sites continue to be my favourite places to stop.



Read more about Tash and Jon's adventures at lifebeyondbricks.co.uk and follow them on social media





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WWW.WARNERS-SHOWS.CO.UK

Find out what's going on in the world of campervanning

WESTFALIA LAUNCHES 2027 MODELS

German campervan brand Westfalia has announced three new models for the 2027 season with a new special edition Sven Hedin and a new range.

The Sven Hedin was launched on the VW LT in 1976 and so the coming season sees a 50th anniversary edition.

The Sven Hedin will also be available as a Classic and Premium specification. The Classic gets the 2-litre engine with 140hp and a six-speed manual gearbox while the Premium has the 163hp unit with eight-speed automatic and LED headlights.

You can also specify the Premium Plus Package and leather upholstery on the higher-spec models along with an Energy Plus Package which includes 300Ah lithium battery, 3kW inverter, 80A booster and charger and a 120W solar panel. You can also specify 18in wheels, all-terrain tyres and wheelarch extensions for a more rugged look.

The 50th Anniversary Edition model is based on the Premium kit, but comes with the Premium Plus Package, the Multimedia, 120W solar panel, Westfalia connect app, two 100Ah lithium batteries,

special paint with retro decals and a 70s-inspired upholstery scheme.

This will be available in Europe for €99,990, but UK prices have yet to be confirmed.

A new range is being launched for the coming year. The Nansen will have two models, 600L and 640LS, based on the Fiat Ducato.

Both will get the 140hp engine and eight-speed automatic gearbox with a white exterior finish as standard. This can be upgraded to the 160hp or 180hp with grey and blue exterior colour options. You can also order the Nansen Pack (£1,280) which features a 150Ah lithium battery, reversing camera, flyscreen for the side door, awning light, leather steering wheel, 16in alloys and an electric step.

The 600L has a transverse double bed (1.90m by 1.30m) and removable bunk (1.85m by 1.30m) above; the lower bed can also be removed to increase the rear storage area when needed. This Nansen 600L is priced from £67,490 and will be available to order from September, 2027.

The second Nansen model, called 640LS, features a lengthways double bed (1.90m by 1.50m) that can be raised and lowered at the touch of a button. When lifted away to the ceiling the rear storage area is 1.60m high, while the lowest position means the bed is just 66cm off the floor. The price for the 640LS starts at £69,990, again available from September.

The Mercedes-based James Cook models will also be available in Classic and Premium specification and can be ordered with a digital interior rear view mirror and a Clesana toilet. Finally, the Club Joker Urban, on the Ford Transit Custom, can be ordered with a new aqua blue paint and sees changes to the kitchen unit for the coming year.

The Ford Transit Custom-based Kipling, with its transverse rear bed, adopts new two-tone upholstery, integrated blinds for the cab and a new generation of Eberspächer heater. Prices for this will start at £63,090.

The classic side kitchen Kelsey will get a 240-degree opening roof canvas as well as all the changes seen in the Kipling, and is priced from £63,090.



CAMPERKING AIMS NEW MODEL AT 'COST-CONSCIOUS' CUSTOMERS

CamperKing



CamperKing has unveiled its latest model aimed at “cost-conscious customers”, which comes with a price tag of under £60,000.

The new T7 Go! includes a range of features as standard, including an upgraded three-seater Titan bed and a pop-top roof with panoramic zip-out tent.

A double gas burner and sink, diesel heater and 50-litre Vitrifridge fridge/freezer are also standard features in the campervan, which starts at £59,500.

It also includes a Sargent integrated smart power system using a 95Ah AGM leisure battery. Optional upgrades include body kit, furniture, upholstery, flooring and different colour combinations.

CamperKing was founded in 2010 and claims to be the UK’s largest converter of Volkswagen-based campervans, building hundreds of conversions a year. It has three showroom locations in England – the Midlands, North East and London – as well as 12 dealer locations across the UK.

Stuart Kidman, CamperKing’s Group Marketing Manager, said: “We think the T7 Go! will appeal to cost-conscious customers and those who may already be familiar with CamperKing’s tried and tested conversions, which have been used as the platform from which to make the Go! a success.”

MOTORHOME PIG INCORPORATES AI INTO MOTORHOME BUYING

Father-and-son duo, Gary and Lewis Cheetham, run a motorhome brokerage with an in-built system that incorporates AI into the buying and selling process.

Alison, a 24-hour AI assistant built in-house, instantly answers customer questions and handles initial enquiries, allowing the human team more time to build relationships.

This combination of smart technology and personal, trustworthy service has made the business one of the UK’s largest specialist motorhome brokerages, managing around 400 motorhomes at any given time.

Lewis Cheetham, co-founder of Motorhome Pig, said: “People are understandably nervous when they’re buying or selling something worth tens of thousands of pounds.

“We have invested heavily in systems that give customers complete visibility throughout their journey while making sure there’s always a knowledgeable person there whenever they need advice or reassurance.

“A major benefit of the AI support is that listings can be created and motorhomes advertised online on the same day they are received. Sellers also have access to a personal dashboard, where they can track enquiries, appointments and progress in real time, giving them complete visibility throughout the selling journey.”



Vanlife Conversions, an Essex-based converter, has been named the National Service Excellence Award winner at the prestigious HSBC UK Small Business Growth Awards.

The finals took place on at the Savoy Hotel, where the award was presented by entrepreneur and *Dragons’ Den* star, Sara Davies, herself a campervanner.

Founded by husband-and-wife team, Oli and Emily

ESSEX CAMPERVAN CONVERTER LANDS NATIONAL SERVICE AWARD

Arnold in 2018, Vanlife Conversions focuses on creating off-grid campervans designed for a wide variety of journeys.

Judges were impressed by Vanlife Conversions’ highly personalised approach, which includes sourcing base vehicles on behalf of clients, creating detailed visual design proposals, and providing an online portal with regular progress updates.

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WESTERN SHOW APPROACHES



After a sell-out 2025, over 50% of pitches have already sold for the much-loved Western Motorhome & Campervan Show which returns to the Three Counties Showground in Malvern from 21-23 August.

Highlights include three live stages of country-themed entertainment, with

performances from Rocky Road Ramblers, Blue Horizon Band, One Night in Nashville, Johnny Cash Revisited and the Ian Highland Band amongst many others. Visitors can also look forward to a trade area showcasing a whopping 500 vehicles for sale along with thousands of outdoor leisure accessories from 240 traders.

Meanwhile, a trip to the show is as much about learning as it is shopping. Eighteen free talks will be on offer within the advice centre, covering the following topics: Motorhome/campervan buying advice; Outer Hebrides by campervan; Scandinavia and the Baltics; Live Italian cooking demo and talk; Self-sufficient electrics; Motorhome driving – turning anxiety into adventure; Touring the NC500 in 2026 responsibly; Touring Britain's coastline; North East 250; Yorkshire through dales, moors and coast; plus hints and tips on solo travelling. Check out the full schedule on the website.

Popular show features such as the Lonestar Old West Re-enactment group, line dancing tuition, live cooking demos, the best dressed Westerner competition and daytime music will also take place.

● To find out more or to book tickets, head to outandaboutlive.co.uk/shows

FERRY TRAVELLERS BACK RETURN OF SCANDI CROSSING



The return of a direct ferry link from the UK to Scandinavia is the number one wish of British ferry travellers.

The UK Ferry Travel Survey 2026, conducted by FerryGoGo, identified France as the favourite destination among ferry travellers.

But when asked which direct route they would most like to see launched or reinstated, 56.9% chose a UK to Norway service, ahead of all other options. More broadly, 74.6% selected a Scandinavian route, whether to Norway, Sweden or Denmark.

A Newcastle-to-Bergen route was discontinued in 2008.

Meanwhile, 74.1% of respondents said their biggest barriers to ferry travel were the lack of direct routes and the cost.

When discussing the biggest benefits of ferry travel, respondents overwhelmingly cited the ability to bring their own car or campervan (63.2%), while avoiding the airport and environmental considerations came second and third respectively.

The comfort ratings resulting from the survey was one of the significant findings in the survey. Respondents gave ferry travel an average comfort score of 8.0 out of 10. Flying for a similar trip scored an average of 5.0 out of 10.

YORKSHIRE CARAVANS & MOTORHOMES CHANGES HANDS

Sunlight has released the first details of its production-ready Ibx 4x4 campervan, with the Volkswagen Crafter-based model set to enter series production from August 2026.

Originally unveiled as a concept vehicle, the Ibx has been developed into a fully fledged off-road campervan aimed at adventure-focused travellers aiming for more from their route plans.

The Ibx comes as standard with all-wheel drive, automatic transmission and a 163hp engine. Measuring just under six metres in

length, it offers an interior standing height of 1.98m thanks to a specially developed raised roof design.

Sunlight says extensive real-world testing has helped shape the final specification. The campervan has been trialled in challenging environments including Iceland and the Faroe Islands, with feedback from users helping refine the production vehicle.



TAKING STOCK

Big purchases need thought and consideration. Here's our latest highlights reel from the current stock on Out & About Live's Campervans For Sale listings... for anyone on the lookout for a new or used 'van

Words ■ Henry Hurt

ELDDIS SIGNATURE CV20



Built exclusively for Tyne Valley Motorhomes, the Signature edition adds a higher level of specification than the standard model. It includes an awning, reversing camera, a solar panel, TV aerial, flyscreen and LED lighting throughout.

One of the standout features is the cleverly designed rear lounge; the benches obviously provide a comfortable living space, but also

the width of the vehicle means you won't be struggling to be face to face. The flexible sleeping arrangement is also a bonus. Dependent on your mood you can make two singles or a larger double. Despite the interior spaciousness, it is not a tank of a vehicle so winding single-track roads don't pose any difficulties. The well-thought-out layout offers the comfort and practicality needed for everything from weekend escapes to extended touring.

PRICE £53,995 YEAR 2022 MILEAGE 22,700

WHERE Tyne Valley Motorhomes, Newcastle upon Tyne

● Find out more here: motorhome.ma/2022-elddis-signature



VOLKSWAGEN CAMPER BY WESSEX VANS



The Wessex conversion combines the refinement of a modern everyday vehicle with the freedom of a well-equipped campervan. Though this is quite a reasonable goal, it fulfils it excellently. The high-quality RIB rear seat is a particular highlight, the gold standard for many, both in regard to comfort and also safety.

The pop-top roof also gives you another sleeping area, but arguably more importantly also transforms the feel of the interior, creating a bright, open living space with generous standing room. Paired with a traditional side kitchen and diesel heating, it's a camper that rivals even the cosiest of homes.

PRICE £39,495 YEAR 2017 MILEAGE 57,600

WHERE VW Kamper Centre, Ringwood

● Find out more here: motorhome.ma/vw-camper-wessex-2017



AUTO-SLEEPERS KINGHAM



Bigger isn't always better. Rather than chasing maximum berth numbers, Auto-Sleepers has focused on creating a layout that's genuinely comfortable to spend time in. Everything has its place, so you can settle in and simply enjoy your surroundings. Combined with Auto-Sleepers' renowned build quality and thoughtful attention to detail, it's a pretty strong option. One thing to be aware of, though, this is a manual not an automatic.

PRICE £49,995 **YEAR** 2017 **MILEAGE** 41,161

WHERE Highbridge, Newton Abbot

• Find out more here:

motorhome.ma/kingham-campervan-2017



ORANGE CAMPERS MICRO CAMPER



The Micro Camper is a compact conversion designed for buyers who require the increased practicality of a daily driver without sacrificing touring comfort or the amenities attached.

Built on the Fiat Scudo, the camper measures just 4.96m long and 1.93m high with the pop-top closed, making it especially easy to manoeuvre.

Buyers can also choose from a range of layout options, including a full-length worktop in place of the wardrobe or a single rear seat to create additional living and storage space. A new gas-free option replaces the traditional two-burner hob with additional worktop space, a larger square sink and extra storage where the gas locker would usually sit. For those keen on further excursions, there is an off grid package, with a 300Ah lithium battery and 270W solar panel.

PRICE £42,999 **YEAR** 2026 **MILEAGE** N/A

WHERE Orange Campers, Rotherham

• Find out more here: motorhome.ma/buy-orange-micro-camper

FORD CUSTOM RS



With its RS-inspired styling, this Ford Custom immediately stands out from the crowd, offering a sportier take on the traditional campervan without compromising on practicality. If you intend to stand out this could be the choice for you.

On a more pragmatic front, the long-wheelbase layout makes clever use of every inch of space, creating a roomy interior. Sleeping four and equipped with a diesel heater, it's equally suited to family holidays or spontaneous weekends away in any season. Especially when we consider the chasm between a British summer and a British winter. Speaking on the interior, the darker surfaces and fixings look very smart and on the practical side of things are a lot easier to keep clean.

PRICE £34,995 **YEAR** 2016 **MILEAGE** 60800

WHERE Tyne Valley Motorhomes, Newcastle upon Tyne

• Find out more here: motorhome.ma/rs-campervan-for-sale

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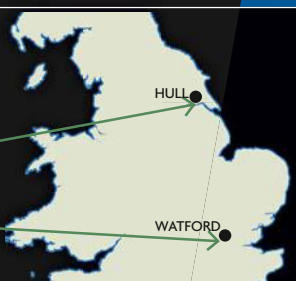
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TOP OF THE POPS



There's a huge amount of choice in the pop-top campervan world. Here, we compare four of the best models currently available and our team each picks their favourite...

Words ■ Peter Vaughan

Choosing a pop-top campervan might look easy, after all most have the same side kitchen layout. So, just pick one that you like the look of from a converter near to your home, no?

No, no, no! There's a lot more to think about. A LOT more...

First, you'll want to investigate the pedigree of the converter, whether its conversions are type approved and/or have approvals from Ford or VW, or the NCC (National Caravan Council). Will your camper be registered with the DVLA as a 'motor caravan' or just a 'van with windows'?

Then you'll need to think about the spec you want, both on the base vehicle (there's a huge cost difference between the lowest and highest-spec vans) and the conversion. Do you want all the toys and an automatic gearbox? Or is keeping the cost down more important, perhaps with a preowned or preregistered base van?

There are many different pop-top roofs, some easier to use or of superior quality, while not all roof beds have a sprung base. Then there are as many different seat/bed systems, sliding or fixed seats, with two or three rear seatbelts. The width of the seat will, of course, dictate the size of the bed.

Kitchens may use gas or electricity, or a combination. Water may be on-board in portable containers or in a fixed tank, usually underslung. Fridge sizes vary and can be front or top loading.

Practical storage and good space utilisation are key in a small campervan, but you'll also want to think about options such as solar panels, lithium battery upgrades, leather upholstery and alloy wheels (don't go too big!).

Of course, there's the choice of Ford or VW, which are now very closely related (other base vehicles are available!). And that's just the start, long before you start looking at colour schemes.

LEFT TO RIGHT
WILDTRACKS PANORAMIC
From £62,000
As tested £80,850

LANDSEER CUSTOM 2.0
From £76,000
As tested £87,365

MOORLAKE LIBERTY
From £75,000
As tested £75,000

BILBO'S CELEX PRO
From £69,500
As tested £87,040



BILBO'S CELEX PRO

Almost 50 years' experience in building VW campervans



FACT FILE

Base vehicle
VW Transporter T7
Price from £69,500
Price as tested £87,040
Berths 4
Travel seats 4
Length 5.05m
Width 2.03m
Height 2.04m
Gross weight 3,000kg
Payload 500kg

PROS

- Excellent storage
- Easy bed-making and a wide bed

CONS

- Fixed seat reduces versatility
- Continental roof is an expensive option

VERDICT

If you admired Bilbo's practical approach in the past, then the latest Celex carries on in that tradition.

The most notable first impression of the latest Bilbo's camper, as seen here – apart from the clever CE11 LEX number plate! – is the Reimo roof. We've become used to seeing the Surrey-based converter fitting its own pop-tops, called Low-Lie.

In fact, Bilbo's has long offered what it refers to as a 'Continental front lifting roof' as a factory option. Here, it adds £5,000 to the price, including a 1.96m by 1.12m bed with its mattress mounted on Zomi plastic springs for comfort. The Low-Lie roof can't match the Reimo's bed size but it does have the appeal of being very easy to use, offering the same headroom front to rear (as it is side-hinged), and the windows built into the canvas ensure there's plenty of daylight coming in. Unless you plan to sleep up top, we'd take the substantial saving and go for the Low-Lie version, especially as the new securing catches on the roof fitted here were a bit of a struggle to release.

However, it's worth noting the pluses of the Reimo roof compared with its rivals. This version has a panoramic, fully unzippable canvas but, when the weather isn't tropical, you can still get daylight in through a front window and some ventilation via flyscreened panels on either side.

With a Low-Lie roof, the Celex starts at £69,500, based on a 110hp Commerce-spec van with manual gearbox. This demo model upped the equipment level to Commerce Pro and the drivetrain to a 150hp motor with eight-speed automatic gearbox, raising that figure to £77,750. It looked extremely discreet in metallic Graphite Dust grey (£1,000 extra) with matching Montreal Grey 16in alloy wheels (another £75) and it was a surprise to see no Bilbo's branding anywhere. The other external feature to note is the single sliding window (fully opening) on the offside, behind the side kitchen.

After nearly 50 years of building Volkswagen campervans, you wouldn't expect Bilbo's to throw the baby out with the bath water and the new Celex carries over much of what made the previous T6/T6.1 version so successful for so long. Not only is the Celex NCC (National Caravan Council) approved but Bilbo's is one of just six UK companies to have VW Motorhome Qualified Converter status.

The Celex is quite a traditional design and retains curtains, rather than fitting blinds, for example. Bilbo's also continues to fit its own fixed seat/bed system, which, like the Low-Lie roof, you'll not see anywhere else. It only caters for two rear passengers but it comes with a nearside armrest and automotive-style head restraints. Importantly, it's one of the easiest seats to turn into a bed, with the backrest simply pulling forwards over the top of the seat squab. There's a slight ridge in the middle of the bed which needs a little refining of the infill cushion's size/shape but this double bed offers generous width of up to 1.36m (mattress length is 1.88m). Under-seat storage is good, too, with a compartment for a loo on one side and a large cupboard adjacent.

The side kitchen carries on this practical approach to storage, with three good-sized drawers (so much better than cupboards) and a Dometic 55-litre compressor fridge. A gas grill is available as an option (replacing a drawer), with a two-burner hob fitted as standard. The table mounts onto a rail on the front of the galley and can thus offer extra meal preparation space. A second table (a £25 option) is provided for al fresco dining.

Full-height storage begins alongside the back seat. This unit is shelved, while a wardrobe with hanging rail is found to the rear. Boot area storage is particularly capacious, too, but because there is a fixed seat it can't be extended.



LANDSEER CUSTOM 2.0

Premium-quality camper, now with a four-year warranty

Highly Commended in the 2025 Out & About Live Campervan Awards in the pop-top category, NCC (National Caravan Council) approved and sold through a dealer network (rather than factory direct), Landseer Leisure has already stamped its mark on the campervan market despite only being established just over six years ago.

The Custom 2.0 arrives here already having impressed on a full live-in road test (watch the video at motorhome.ma/review353) and this latest spec comes with even more kit and a four-year warranty on both the base vehicle and the conversion.

It is built on the Ford Tourneo 'camper donor' (ready for conversion to a campervan), a specification that means it is classified as an M1 passenger vehicle and will be registered with the DVLA as a motor caravan. It also comes with the Ford Camper Assist roadside assistance package.

Its cab spec was already comprehensive but the 2026-model gets a full-sized spare wheel, larger fuel tank, wireless phone charging, reversing camera, trailer hitch assist and six-way adjustment on both (heated) front seats. In addition, there are LED headlights, 17in alloy wheels, a 13in touchscreen, and metallic paint (six colour choices) as standard.

Starting at £76,000 with the 150hp motor and six-speed manual gearbox, our test vehicle featured the 170hp motor and auto transmission, increasing its base price to £79,950. The new Driver Assistance Package (adaptive cruise control, sat-nav, power folding mirrors and heated steering wheel adds an extra £1,530, while the superb leather upholstery front and rear costs £2,600.

As well as the enhanced Ford spec, the latest Landseer sees the company swap seat supplier from Schnierle to Mobiframe. Both seats slide on floor rails

but the new bench takes less effort to transform into a bed and, thanks to a neat infill along the nearside wall, the double here is a good size, at 1.92m by 1.29m.

There's a second bed in the roof (1.98m by 1.20m), where the mattress sits on ClimaPlux springs. Landseer uses a premium German pop-top from SCA and you can see that this is a superior-quality roof in areas such as its belt 'n' braces locking mechanisms. However, its canvas seems to have been designed for hotter climes than ours – you can fully unzip the front three-quarters (leaving just a mosquito mesh) but, if you only want daylight (not ventilation), the small offside window is a bit disappointing. The kitchen really impresses here, with oak worktops, an underslung sink with solid wood cover and optional Highland Green finish. The slide-out unit for tinned foods, etc, and the dimmable ambient lights exemplify the premium nature of this camper. Cooking is on a Sterling twin induction hob, linked to a Clayton lithium power system. That was upgraded here to 160Ah and a 3kW inverter for £840, while a 240W solar panel is standard.

There's hot water here, too, both at the sink and rear external shower (£210), supplied from a Webasto Thermo Top diesel system (£1,245 extra) that includes blown-air heating. Unless you plan to use the shower, we'd stick with the standard-fit Webasto Air Top heater, especially as that frees up cupboard space and allows the loo to store more conveniently at floor level.

Talking of convenience, it's odd that the rear corner cupboard cannot be opened when the rearmost section of the bed is horizontal – that seems like a schoolboy error when so much of this camper is so well thought out. Boot area storage is good although not class-leading but can, of course, be increased by sliding the bench seat forwards.



FACT FILE

Base vehicle
Ford Tourneo Custom
Price from £76,000
Price as tested £87,365
Berths 4
Travel seats 5
Length 5.05m
Width 2.03m
Height 2.07m
Gross weight 3,175kg
Payload 725kg

PROS

- Premium design and finish
- German high-quality pop-top

CONS

- Rear corner cupboard hard to access
- Limited daylight in roof

VERDICT

Landseer is constantly tweaking the spec of its Custom 2.0 to keep it at the top of the premium pop-top sector



MOORLAKE LIBERTY

A clever mix of 230V power and cooking on gas



FACT FILE

Base vehicle
VW Transporter T7
Price from £75,000
Price as tested £75,000
Berths 4
Travel seats 5
Length 5.05m
Width 2.03m
Height 2.03m
Gross weight 3,025kg
Payload 565kg

PROS

- EcoFlow portable power station
- Five-year conversion warranty

CONS

- Knock-on furniture edging
- Preregistered base vehicle

VERDICT

If you want all the kit and a practical, cost-effective approach to going off-grid, the Moorlake looks great value for money

Here's a name that will be less familiar than those alongside it, although Moorlake isn't new to the world of VW campervans. It's a dealer rather than a manufacturer – it outsources the conversions, which are built to its spec, and it has recently switched supplier, so the T7 Liberty is its latest model. As with previous Moorlake campers, it is available from branches in Hertfordshire and Yorkshire and both outlets have a variety of colours (some, as here, wrapped to give a retro duo-tone effect) in stock and ready to drive away.

With Moorlake, you won't have to debate optional extras, although you can choose your kitchen worktop, cabinet colours, upholstery and alloy wheels. It has tried to keep the buying process simple, so only the cosmetics change from 'van to 'van (although you can add an awning or awning rail to the standard kit list).

Conversions are built on preregistered, delivery-mileage VWs and the base price of £73,000 includes a Commerce Plus T7 with a selection of options that bring it close to Commerce Pro specification, including the wide centre console in the cab, heated seats and a rear view camera. All are powered by the 150hp motor driving the front wheels through an eight-speed automatic gearbox, so the Moorlake is starting to look good value from the off.

As a Liberty model, this one is two grand more but the extra spend seems well worthwhile, adding an EcoFlow 1kW portable power station. Hidden away in a floor cupboard, the EcoFlow gives you the ability to power all your gadgets (an air fryer or hair straighteners, perhaps, but not simultaneously) even when no hook-up is available, and it can be recharged from zero to 100% in just an hour's driving, thanks to the 800W alternator charger that's also included in the Liberty Package. It can even be used to jump start the

'van, should the vehicle battery go flat.

Undoubtedly the prettiest camper here on the outside, the Moorlake comes with two sliding windows in the living area and an Austops roof to give you standing room. With simple straps to secure it, this pop-top feels more basic than the German roofs but it still comes with a 1.83m by 1.11m bed featuring Froli springs for extra comfort.

There's no economising when it comes to the seat/bed unit, though, which is a sliding three-seater bench with Isofix, from Stide. It makes into a 1.92m by 1.10m flat double bed but lifting the backrest back into its seat position takes some effort (leaving the head restraints off makes it easier if you're not carrying rear passengers). Of course, as with any seat on rails you can slide it forwards to bring kids nearer to parents, or just to maximise load space at the rear. There's a useful locker under the seat but this can be reached by lifting the squab cushion.

With a 150W solar panel mounted on the roof and a 200Ah lithium leisure battery, you might expect Moorlake to have followed the gas-free trend but here gas is retained for cooking on the two-ring hob. A single Campingaz cylinder is neatly stowed in a hinged compartment in the boot.

The kitchen also includes a microwave (or have a cupboard instead as a no-cost choice) and space to store a portable toilet. There's a cutlery drawer above the 50-litre fridge and a neat pull-out worktop extension alongside the back seat. Soft-closing mechanisms are fitted, too, but the knock-on edging feels a bit 'budget' when the rest of the camper makes a good impression.

The icing on the cake is a five-year conversion warranty, which is subject to annual habitation checks by Moorlake.



WILDTRACKS PANORAMIC

A long-wheelbase T7 with added all-round vision

Most converters of the VW Transporter or Ford Transit Custom offer the option of going for a long wheelbase model which, with a side kitchen conversion, gives you a longer galley (and some extra cupboard space) as well as more floor space (useful if you have dogs). The T7 is already a tad longer than its T6.1 forebear, though, so the LWB model (at 5.45m rather than the SWB's 5.05m) may be a bit big as a daily driver – it all depends how you use your campervan and how essential it is that it fits in a car-sized parking bay.

Not only is this Wildtracks conversion the only longer camper in this selection, as a Panoramic model it has no tall furniture – with extra space AND extra windows, it feels extra spacious.

It also has a double passenger seat in the cab, making it a six-seater. This example was a customer's vehicle built to their spec, but, unless it's essential to have the additional seatbelt, we'd avoid the three-seat cab which prevents walk through to the rear and lacks the comfort of a single chair with armrests. Here, the FWX swivel base also slides and, with the rear bench moved forwards, you have five seats around the free-standing Loc8 table (stored in the sliding door). However, parked on a slight slope, the reversed seat refused to stay still!

Much better is the Mobiframe sliding bench in the rear, which converts quickly into a 1.94m by 1.19m bed. With quad rails in the floor, there's even the possibility of adding two more removable travel seats – up to eight people in total! You can also specify the Mobiframe under-seat storage bags that stop items stored in the boot sliding forwards, down the sides of the drawer, under braking – a must-have in our book. As standard, Wildtracks fits a fixed rear seat (usually RIB), the Mobiframe slider is a £2,250 option.

There's a second bed (£750 extra), with Froli springs

in the Austops roof and here the LWB gives extra mattress length of 2.11m! The pale colour of the roof canvas might let in too much early morning daylight for light sleepers, though.

This Bristol-based converter also offers Discover and Explorer conversions on the T7 but this Panoramic model feels quite different with its full-length low-level unit along the offside. You're not short of storage as there are top lockers, too, and here you'll find one of the model's star features – its built-in crockery racks.

Similar attention to detail can be found in the cutlery holder, the wireless phone charger hidden in the bamboo worktop and the mood lighting beneath the galley, but the key feature really is the Vango induction hob. This is part of the £1,500 Off-Grid Package that includes a 340Ah lithium battery and 3kW inverter (standard fitment is a 110Ah lithium battery). Webasto diesel heating is also standard, while a Pundmann 12V/230V boiler is optional. A 250W solar panel is fitted to the roof but its installation looked untidy, with wiring on show.

Elsewhere, the aesthetics of this T7 Commerce Pro 150hp automatic look spot on, with its 45mm lowered suspension (£650), striking 19in Indianapolis alloy wheels and styling pack (£500). Wildtracks offers by far the most personalisation and conversion options here and puts its new vehicles through the IVA (individual vehicle type approval process). It typically converts one or two-year old Transporter vans, which it sources for customers to keep prices lower.

Clearly cost-cutting wasn't top of the agenda on this £80k test vehicle, though, which also featured £3,000 leather upholstery, an underslung 51-litre fresh water tank with outside shower at £900 (portable water carriers are standard) and Fiamma roll-out awning (£1,100 extra).



FACT FILE

Base vehicle
VW Transporter T7
Price from £62,000
Price as tested £80,850
Berths 4
Travel seats 6
Length 5.45m
Width 2.03m
Height 2.10m
Gross weight 3,225kg
Payload 500kg

PROS

- Spacious feel with no tall cabinetwork
- Extra storage and floor space of LWB

CONS

- Too long for a standard car park space
- Untidy solar panel fitting

VERDICT

Wildtracks offers a huge amount of choice, with three side kitchen models and loads of options, so you can tailor the spec to your needs and budget

VERDICT

Four different campervans, but which one wins?



**Iain Duff, Editor,
Campervan**

Because all the campervans here were very good, it's tempting to call them all winners. But this isn't school sports day where everyone gets a medal just for turning up. We need a genuine winner, and the Moorlake is the one that takes the first prize.

The Wildtracks is bright and airy, but its long-wheelbase layout means it doesn't quite work as a daily driver. The Landseer looks impressive but there are practical storage issues. The Bilbo's offers a large bed, but the ridge in the middle affects comfort – and at £87,000, I expect absolute perfection.

For £75,000, the Moorlake gives you a well-specced T7 with an automatic gearbox, sliding rear seat/bed, EcoFlow portable power station, sprung bed in the roof, duo-tone wrap and five-year conversion warranty. Its simple approach avoids endless optional extras, while still offering choices in worktops, cabinets and upholstery. In short, it's a premium 'van without the premium price tag.

campervan



**Peter Vaughan, Editor,
What Motorhome**

It's not hard to see the appeal of the Moorlake's value for money approach, but it's not the best camper here. The Wildtracks is more expensive but feels more expensive – and the Panoramic conversion appears so light and airy. Perhaps the Bilbo's talents are less obvious but dig a little deeper and you'll discover the practicality born of five decades' experience.

In contrast, Landseer is a relatively new kid on the block but it has already proven its worth in a full live-in road test (October 2025 issue, *Campervan*). Back then I wrote, "with a gas-free and stylish design, it should be on your shopping list if you're looking for a compact campervan." In the spec seen here (the green furniture option, especially), it's even more appealing and Landseer continues to gently refine the model. Above all, for its premium feel throughout, it would be my choice from this foursome.

**What
motorhome**



**Rachel Scholes, Deputy Editor,
MMM**

In terms of campervan size, I'd generally go for one with more facilities every day. Think toilet compartments and proper kitchens. Something like a medium-wheelbase Ford Transit that's not too big or not too small. Just call me the Goldilocks of campervanning!

However, there's no denying that the smaller pop-tops can be much more flexible, acting as both a daily driver and an adventure wagon. That's pretty important in the current climate where our budget is being squeezed from all angles. So which one would I pick?

I love modern interior wood accents, but practicality has to be at the fore when I'm choosing a campervan. That's why the Landseer impressed me; that under-seat storage is simply some of the best I've seen in a long while. Add in the sliding ladder unit and I almost swooned. It takes a lot to win me over, but Landseer might just have done it.

MMM

VW T7, T6.1 &
FORD TRANSIT
CUSTOM
CAMPERVANS

AWARD WINNING
CONVERSIONS

WILDTRACKS
campervans

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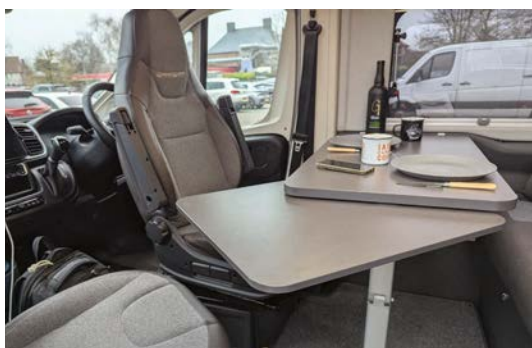


SEASIDE SPECIAL

We take a trip to the coast with an upgraded favourite, a rear lounge campervan from Swift

Words & pictures ■ Iain Duff





 **WATCH THE VIDEO** motorhome.ma/review379

Swift's Carrera range of campervans has built a loyal following over the years and the 144 remains one of its most popular layouts. For 2026, it has undergone some design tweaks – not so much a complete reinvention, more of a refining, with updated styling, improved technology and some subtle fine-tuning of the interior.

The more important issue is whether or not this Fiat Ducato conversion delivers on the freedom and practical benefits it promises. So, to put it to the test, I decided to pack my bucket and spade and take the Carrera to the north Norfolk coast for a couple of days at the seaside.

Which is why I found myself heading to Hunstanton – for some reason they call it Sunny Hunny – on a dreich Tuesday in February.

The plan was that, by the end of the trip, we would know how well suited this 'van is for travelling to the sort of places people take their campervans to in real life. It's all very well test-driving a campervan on motorways and A-roads, but I wanted to find out if this 6m 'van would be able to cope with the narrow winding coastal roads, tight parking spots and busy seaside towns and villages you'll find on the Norfolk coast... basically, real UK touring conditions.

HOME BASE

The Carrera 144 is built on a Fiat Ducato with a 2.2-litre 140hp diesel engine and comes as standard with a six-speed manual gearbox, or for just under £3k you can upgrade to automatic transmission. It's a fair chunk of money, but for me it's worth paying more for the convenience and ease of driving it brings, although I realise that's not a universal view.

The 144 comes with a starting price of £79,870, with the automatic version you see here coming in at £82,865. This is a three-berth 'van, with four travelling seats, including Isofix fittings. As previously mentioned, it's almost exactly six metres long and is 2.26m wide and 2.72m tall.

Now finished in Fiat's Artense Grey with updated graphics, the new version of the Carrera 144 looks clean and modern without being overly flashy.

Swift's conversion includes 3M Thinsulate insulation, double-glazed windows and a one-piece insulated ceiling panel and floor – all designed to keep it usable year-round. And on an out-of-season couple of days on the British coast, I can assure you that was much appreciated; although, if it had it been seriously cold, the underslung water tanks' heating might have been tested.

On the outside you've got practical touches like an external barbecue point, cold water shower, LED awning light and electric side step. There's also a 110W solar panel fitted to the roof, so you can stay off-grid for short trips and the 16in alloy wheels give the 'van a sporty look.

ON THE ROAD

The Carrera felt manageable on those tight coastal roads, even if you are conscious that it is that bit longer and wider than smaller pop-top campervans.

Likewise, I had no difficulty negotiating north Norfolk's coastal villages or the busy streets around Hunstanton. It's the sort of place where you always have to be ready to react to a holidaymaker randomly stepping out onto the road in front of you – too engrossed in their ice cream and candy floss to pay

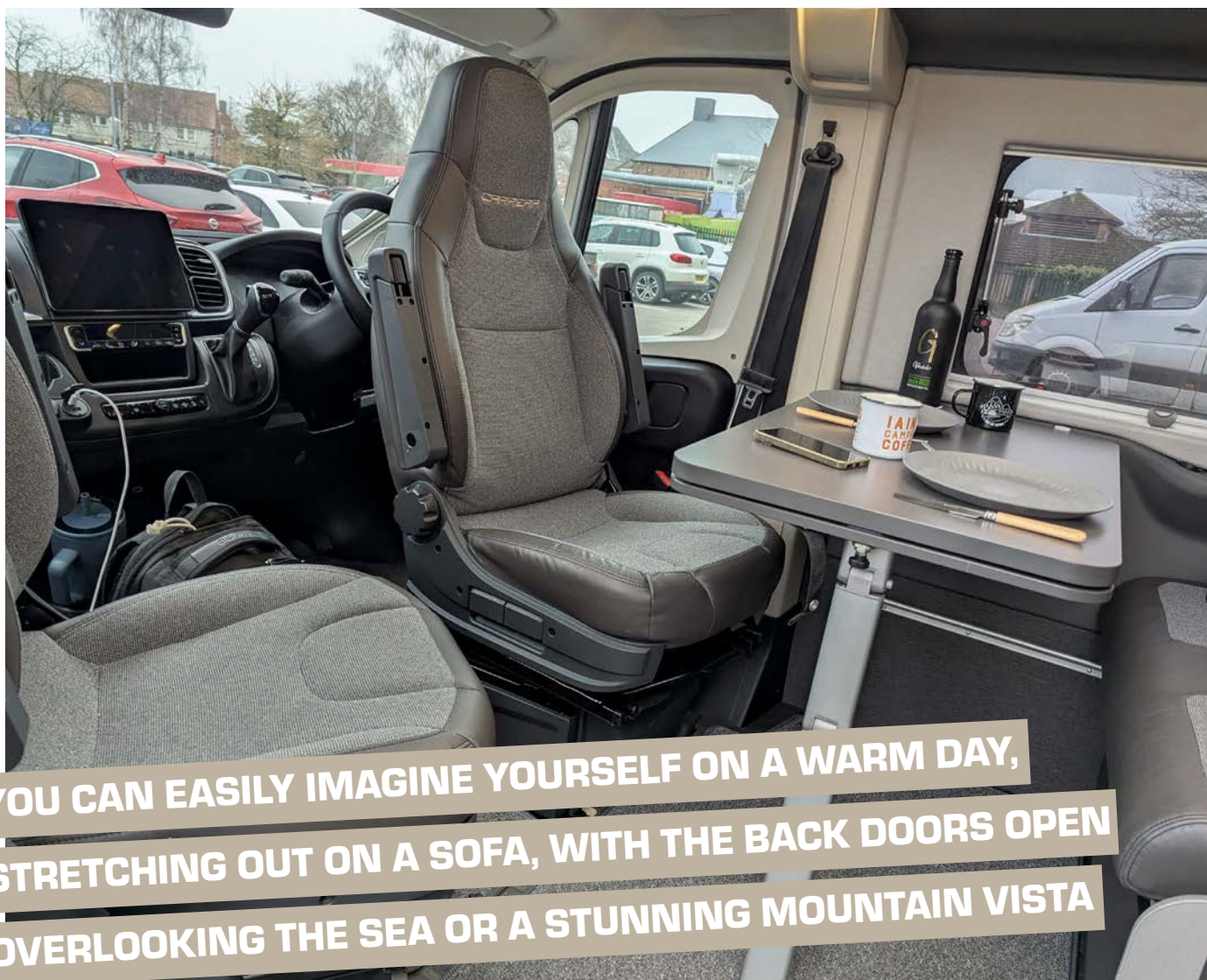
PROS

- Easy to drive and manoeuvre around town
- Comfortable rear lounge
- Generous standard spec including a solar panel and the Winter Pack

CONS

- Central passage space is limited
- Storage capacity may feel tight for longer touring trips
- Kitchen worktop area is modest





YOU CAN EASILY IMAGINE YOURSELF ON A WARM DAY, STRETCHING OUT ON A SOFA, WITH THE BACK DOORS OPEN OVERLOOKING THE SEA OR A STUNNING MOUNTAIN VISTA



attention to the traffic.

What helps, of course, is the plethora of driver assistance features you have access to, such as the new reversing camera, sensors, cruise control, and Fiat's traction and stability systems. All of this is designed to take all the stress out of driving.

Inside the Ducato's cab there's a 10in touchscreen with sat-nav, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a digital dashboard, wireless phone charger and air-con, so it feels more like driving a modern car than a van.

At this point, I would love to tell you how easy it is to fit the Carrera into a parking space, but in their wisdom, the authorities in Hunstanton have unfortunately made most of their car parks inaccessible to anything over 2m tall – and the Sainsbury's car park in town was full while I was there. As a result, I ended up parking on the roadside quite far out of the centre of town, which was less than ideal and given how busy the place can get at peak times, I don't know how realistic an option it would be at the height of summer season, either.



FINE DINING

The Carrera's sliding side door is on the nearside (being a British-built model) and has a flyscreen to allow ventilation in summer without letting in the bugs. The rear doors also have a flyscreen, and I really liked the storage pockets and mini fold-down table that are built into the barn doors.

Inside, this is a classic front dinette and rear lounge layout and that's a big part of why this model has stayed popular for years.

Up front, both cab seats swivel to form the dinette, creating a cosy eating area for four around an extendable dining table. The new Acacia fabrics feel durable and easy to clean and there's some neat embroidery on the seats, too. Adjustable headrests and armrests add comfort to the two belted travel seats, which also have Isofix.

In the front is a Heki rooflight with flyscreen and an overcab skylight, the combination of which makes the dinette area feel really bright and airy. Also here is a window with new pleated Horrex honeycomb blackout blinds and flyscreens. For storage, there are good-sized



overhead lockers above the dinette, with full length, ultra-low-energy LED strip lighting.

There are numerous USBs and mains sockets situated throughout the 'van and a TV aerial port, with wiring and sockets, to both the front and rear lounges.

Setting up the campervan requires minimal effort; swivel the seats, maybe fire up the Whale blown-air heating if it's chilly and you're ready to relax.

Typically for a van conversion, the Carrera 144's well-equipped kitchen sits just inside the sliding door. Here you have a Dometic two-burner hob and sink combo with glass lids and a built-in oven and grill, which is always a popular additional feature with British buyers.

The Dometic 90-litre compressor fridge has a freezer compartment and a double-hinged door for easier access, and a large wardrobe with hanging rail is located underneath. There's decent overhead storage above the kitchen, with LED strip and ambient lighting, and a drawer with a cutlery tray positioned under the hob unit.

There's not a huge amount of worktop space here,

although the lift-out extension panel at the forward end of the galley does help. It might feel a little cramped for preparing bigger meals, but the oven and grill widen your cooking options.

Another issue here is the narrowness of the passageway in front of the kitchen – it's 40cm wide at its narrowest point (just over a foot) so there's really not a lot of room to manoeuvre.

Of course, this is by no means unique to the Carrera; unfortunately it tends to come with the territory in this type of layout. If you're bigger built it might be worth looking at alternative options – or take very deep breaths when you pass through the campervan.

LITTLEST ROOM

Opposite the kitchen is the washroom, which uses a tambour door and a foldaway basin to maximise space. In most campervans the washroom is the place where you really feel that you're compromising over space, but this does actually feel quite spacious.

In here there's a Thetford swivel cassette toilet, shower tray and a fair amount of storage space.

FACT FILE



SWIFT CARRERA 144

Price from: £79,870

As tested: £82,865

BASICS

Berths: 3

Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Three years on both base vehicle and conversion

Type Approval: Full GB approval

DIMENSIONS

Length: 6.00m

Width: 2.26m

Height: 2.72m

Gross vehicle weight:

3,500kg

Payload: 475kg (manual)

430kg (automatic)

BASE VEHICLE

Type: Fiat Ducato

Engine: 2.2-litre, 140hp, six-speed manual gearbox or eight-speed automatic (as tested)

KITCHEN

Cooker: Dometic two-burner gas hob, combined oven and grill

Fridge: Dometic 90-litre compressor

BEDS

Rear double bed: 1.78m x 1.29m

Front dinette bed: 1.70m x 0.90m

ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 93 litres (underslung, heated)

Waste water: 58 litres (underslung, heated)

Space/water heating: Whale blown-air

Gas: 2 x 3.9kg

Leisure battery: 2 x 80Ah

OPTIONS

Fitted to test vehicle: Automatic transmission

£2,995.

Awning is a dealer-fit option



two 3.9kg cylinders.

There are tinted, acrylic windows on both sides, with the same pleated blackout blinds and flyscreens made by Dutch manufacturer, Horrex, that we saw in the front lounge.

The Heki skylight above the rear lounge provides more brightness and ventilation and has a blind for privacy at night. There are also small windows on the back doors with blinds and flyscreens.

TIME FOR BED

At night, the rear lounge converts into a transverse double bed, which I measured to be 1.78m by 1.29m.

If you prefer, you can leave the rear bed permanently made up while still using the front dinette during the day. An additional front single bed (1.70m by 0.90m) can be created using the dinette seating and swivelled driver's seat, likely to be more suitable for a child or a temporary guest.

Storage is fairly typical for a campervan – there are overhead lockers, a wardrobe and the aforementioned under-seat space. But if you are travelling with bulky outdoor gear, you'll definitely notice the limitations compared to 'vans with a large rear garage area.

Swift has certainly made sure that the 144 is well specced as standard. In addition to what we've already highlighted, there are plenty more features designed to make camping life as convenient and comfortable as possible. Included are a fold-out external table at the back of the kitchen, an electric entrance step and plenty of mains and USB sockets. I also like the neat fold-out bin and the pull-out worktop extension built into the kitchen unit.

All of these features come included as standard – in fact the only factory option available is the automatic transmission. Really, the only thing missing as standard is a roll-out side awning, but you can choose to have one fitted by the dealership. For spontaneous touring and short breaks, the Carrera 144 feels incredibly easy to live with.

The vanity cupboard features a mirror, LED lighting and a decorative panel. The stylish black fittings are one of the new additions to the 144 and give it a nice modern appearance, while a Micro-Heki skylight provides ventilation and daylight.

The Ecocamel showerhead is designed to deliver a powerful shower while conserving water, which is a sensible feature in a campervan, where your water tank capacity is always going to be limited. Speaking of which, the fresh and waste water capacities are 93 litres and 58 litres respectively, and both are heated tanks for cold-weather touring.

Heating and hot water are provided by an upgraded Whale system with blown-air distribution and there's an eight-litre underfloor water heating system. These are operated from touchscreen panels above the side door. A central control panel allows monitoring of battery levels, water tanks and environmental conditions such as internal temperature and humidity. The twin 80Ah leisure batteries are located under the cab seats.

LOUNGING AROUND

Move to the rear of the 'van and you've got a lounge with facing sofas and this is where to sit when you want to properly relax. You can easily imagine yourself on a warm day, stretching out on a sofa, with the back doors open overlooking the sea or a stunning mountain vista.

And when the weather isn't so good (such as a chilly February evening by the seaside), this is a cosy place to chill out and watch TV or read a book. Overhead lockers along both sides provide useful storage, and LED strip lighting and roof-mounted speakers add to the ambience.

This can also be used as an alternative dining area, with the addition of a pedestal table between the two sofas. You'll also find storage space under the seats. The gas locker is located in one sofa base and takes





£756

INSURANCE

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motorhome.ma/QuoteInfo

VERDICT

Swift has updated its classic rear lounge/front dinette campervan with the latest Carrera 144. There's a little more spec and some cosmetic enhancements to keep it competitive, while fitting this layout into a 6m van gives it a manoeuvrability advantage over key rivals. That rear bed will be too small for some, though, as will the slim centre aisle.

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ORANGE CAMPERS TROUVAILLE OPTION 2



**Now available with a shower –
and an Atek pop-top...**

Words ■ Peter Vaughan





Orange Campers has extended its line-up of 5.4-metre pop-top campervans – again! Last month we reported on its new fixed bed model (Option 3) and now here's another new variant – the popular and proven rear kitchen layout (Option 2) but with an on-board shower for the first time.

Last time we reviewed this model, one of the few downsides we pointed out was that it offered a toilet compartment, but no shower. Orange has been working to address that, without altering the appeal of the model. So, now you can order your Trouville with a purpose-built glass-fibre shower pod, designed with the company's usual practical, durable approach so that it won't leak. It's a good size, too, and as with the 'toilet only' version, the shower door opens out across the aisle to provide a screened-off area for drying and dressing. The shower compartment itself is completed with a roller screen across the doorway – no clingy curtain here. Fresh water comes from a 75-litre

underslung tank, while hot water (and heating) is supplied by a diesel Truma Combi.

Of course, the shower area also provides space for a toilet, an electric-flush Porta Potti in this case (any portable loo, including composting models, could be used) which is lifted out when showering. As with the 'non-shower' version, the opened door provides privacy. When closed up, the only difference between the two versions is the slightly narrower gangway here.

Based on a high-spec, medium-wheelbase Fiat Ducato, the Trouville still caters for families as well as couples, with the £9,999 option of an Atek pop-top on top of the standard Fiat H2 high roof. And with the roof closed, you don't miss out on daylight as the pop-top has a rooflight over the access hatch.

As for base vehicle spec, Orange orders its Fiats with metallic paint (Artense Grey or Iron Grey), 16in alloy wheels, an electric parking brake, keyless entry, reversing camera, automatic air-con and a 10in touchscreen with sat-nav.

PROS

- Generous kitchen with good worktop space
- Lots of storage
- Choice of single beds or a double

CONS

- Cab seats higher than rear seats
- Toilet has to be moved for showering



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Orange
CAMPERS

The Option 2 layout is unchanged. There's a pair of individual RIB seats up front, then the kitchen at the rear and the shower in the offside corner. One issue with this style of floorplan in a Ducato is the higher floor in the cab, compared with the main living area. Orange Campers minimises this issue by fitting approved, lowered cab seat bases, so when these seats are swivelled they are not too much higher than those in the back. There's a neat flip-up table on the offside wall, while an island leg table caters for mealtimes. Then, when it's time for relaxing, you can turn the offside seat into a settee.

The rear seats also have Isofix and forward and sideways sliding mechanisms. The former allows the seats to recline, the latter means they can slide together to make a 6ft by 4ft double bed. Crucially, the beds (as singles or a double) do not use the cab seats, with feet going under the furniture towards the rear. Although, if you're very tall, it's possible to incorporate

the front seats with a mattress topper.

That rear cabinetwork is extensive, with a kitchen that would shame many a larger campervan. A three-burner hob is standard, with a gas oven/grill or microwave available as an option, while a practical touch is a hose-style tap that can be pulled outside via the side window or back doors to hose down muddy boots, dogs or kids. There are lots of drawers, plus large eye-level cupboards with doors that are side, rather than top, hinged. Storage also includes a 90-litre compressor fridge, a wardrobe with shelves or a hanging rail, and even specific homes for your outdoor chairs and levelling wedges – you can just tell that company owner, Richard, uses his own campervans (you can try one, too, as rental is available).

The comprehensive spec also includes a 160W solar panel, an external barbecue point, a 100Ah lithium battery, an underslung 25-litre gas tank and a five-year conversion warranty.

FACT FILE

ORANGE CAMPERS TROUVAILLE OPTION 2
Base vehicle Fiat Ducato
Price from £83,999
Berths 2 (4 with pop-top)
Travel seats 4
Length 5.41m
Width 2.05m
Height 2.64m (2.78m with pop-top)
Gross weight 3,500kg
Payload 400kg (300kg with pop-top)

VERDICT

Orange Campers continues to offer more choice in its range of compact 5.4m campervans, with this latest derivative adding a shower without compromising the rest of the spacious interior. High spec and a high-quality finish continue to impress.



HYMER REDWOOD 600 TRAIL



Words ■ Peter Vaughan

Exclusively based on the six-metre Ducato panel van, the new Hymer Redwood is described as the 'entry point to premium campervans', mixing the company's reputation for quality with modern design. Its interior features bamboo and textile accents with ambient lighting, while the Smart Connect Unit allows operation and monitoring of the habitation systems (heating, lighting, water and fridge) via an app – you can even set your preferred lighting moods, which can then be selected at the touch of a button.

Built on the latest Fiat van, the Redwood is available in a choice of colours, depending on the equipment level chosen – Trail, Sport or Explorer. The Trail spec is the entry-level, identified by its pale, non-metallic Campovolo Grey paint. It comes with front fog/cornering lights and the Rio upholstery. Sport adds £2,650 to the price and comes in Storm Blue Metallic with Peru fabric inside. Then the Explorer (£3,270 extra) tops the tree in Lanzarote Grey with the Self-Sufficiency Package (6kW diesel heating with 230V

element, a heated waste water tank and lithium battery), plus Caldera upholstery.

There are just two layouts in the Redwood range currently, this 600 and the 601, which differ only in their ablutions. The 600 has a compact washroom, leaving room for a wardrobe, while the 601 has a more modern swing-wall shower that eschews the 600's shower curtain. The Redwoods sit below the other Hymer campervans, saving you nearly £10k in comparison with the equivalent six-metre model, the Grand Canyon.

Externally, the Redwood campervans come with 16in alloy wheels and framed habitation windows. The 140hp engine and manual gearbox are standard, with the automatic option costing £3,240.

The Driving Comfort Package (£3,420) adds Fiat's 10in infotainment screen to the dashboard, with sat-nav, fully digital instruments, automatic air-con, an electric parking brake and a multifunction steering wheel. LED headlights, a heated windscreen, towbar and heated cab seats are all available as additional

A new range for 2026, the Redwood replaces the previous Free campervans



PROS

- The Hymer name without the cost
- Comfortable Travel Lounge seating
- Choice of spec/colours/trim

CONS

- Showering requires a curtain
- Stoop to enter the cab from the living area

FACT FILE

HYMER REDWOOD 600 TRAIL

Base vehicle Fiat Ducato

Price from £63,970

Berths 2/4

Travel seats 4

Length 5.99m

Width 2.08m

Height 2.60m

Gross weight 3,500kg

Payload 597kg

VERDICT

The Redwood replaces the Free as a more affordable campervan but still retaining the Hymer DNA. With three spec levels and plenty of options, it's possible to tailor the model to your needs.



individual options.

If you need extra berths, the Sleeping Roof (£4,280) is a pop-top with skylight, electric locking mechanism and a 2.09m by 1.43m double bed. It comes with a cold foam mattress, reading light and USB. But if it's extra storage you need, the Backpack+ (£680) adds a carrier system to the left-hand back door. You can also add Hymer's own set of outdoor table and chairs, neatly stored on the inside of the rear barn doors for £270.

However you choose to kit out your Redwood 600, though, it's the classic rear transverse double bed layout with a contemporary twist to the décor. So, it's the expected half-dinette lounge up front with the typical wall-mounted table, complete with extending leaf. The Travel Lounge bench seat has an additional squishy backrest for added comfort, as well as automotive head restraints. Tiny reading lights clip to rails, so can be quickly repositioned. The overcab shelf is retained, rather than a full-height walk-through to the cab, but an overhead LED strip stops the area feeling gloomy.

The galley mates bamboo worktops (including a useful extension by the door) with a mid-grey finish and includes generous drawers for practical storage. There's the usual two-burner hob and sink (no oven), while the tall (90-litre) compressor fridge sees the counter rise towards the bedroom. Although as it's not a full-height unit there's still some worktop above. A neat addition is the slide-out coffee pod compartment at eye level.

Opposite the galley, the washroom has a swivel cassette loo and an unusual parallelogram-shaped basin set into the counter, with a large mirror behind. There's an opening window and overhead storage but you'll have to deploy a curtain when showering in the 600.

The rear bedroom has a folding step for easy access, not that it's a high bed. The overhead lockers (in grey, with neat curved bases) continue along both sides and there are more movable reading lights, but insufficient headroom to sit up. Opening windows in the rear doors provide ventilation and there's also a window on the nearside, at the foot of the bed.



TRAIL TAILGATE AIR



A budget-friendly inflatable awning designed for campervans and SUVs

Words & pictures

■ Iain Duff

FACT FILE

TRAIL TAILGATE AIR
Price £297 (RRP £450)
Weight 17.4kg
Length 250cm
Width 250cm
Height 210cm
Packed size
 68cm x 27cm x 28cm
Maximum vehicle height
 210cm
Poles Inflatable
Material Polyester
Hydrostatic Head
 (waterproof) 5,000mm
UV Protection UPF50+
Groundsheet Removable

At under £300, the Trail Tailgate Air Driveaway Awning is half the price of some of the offerings from better-known brands. But the big question is: can something at this price actually compete with the more established companies? So, is the Trail Tailgate awning actually good value for money... or is it just cheap?

WHAT IS A DRIVEAWAY AWNING?

First things first – if you’re new to campervanning, you might be wondering what is a driveaway awning?

Well, in simple terms, it’s an extra room that attaches to your campervan. So instead of living entirely inside the ‘van, you’ve now got extra covered space for cooking, eating, storing gear, getting changed – or even sleeping.

The “driveaway” part means you can disconnect the campervan and leave the awning standing on your pitch while you head off for the day. That’s especially handy on campsites where you don’t want to lose your camping spot.

This particular model is a tailgate awning which means it is designed to fit onto the rear of the ‘van rather than over the side sliding door.

HOW MUCH DOES THE TRAIL TAILGATE AIR AWNING COST?

One of the biggest selling points of the Trail Tailgate Air Awning is the price. At the time of writing, it comes in well below a lot of the big-name inflatable driveaway awnings on the market – and Trail seems to have sales on a fairly regularly basis as well. Currently it’s available

on the Trail website for £297.49, more than £150 off the RRP. Normally when something’s significantly cheaper than it should be, there’s usually a catch. Sometimes the fabric feels thin or the zips feel flimsy, but actually first impressions here are pretty decent.

The fabric feels more robust than you might expect for the money, and it has a 5,000mm hydrostatic head rating, which basically means it should cope very well with British weather.

You also get UPF50+ sun protection, really useful in hot summer weather, taped seams and inflatable air beams, rather than traditional poles.

FEATURES AND DESIGN

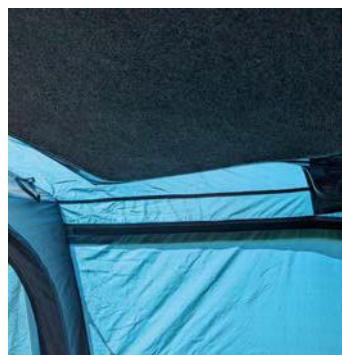
Size-wise, the main body of the awning is 2.10m tall and its footprint measures 2.5m by 2.5m, with another 2.5m of additional sheltered space under the front canopy, which can be rolled away in bad weather.

It’s designed mainly for mid-sized campervans up to 210cm in height – like the VW Transporter, Ford Nugget, Ford Transit Custom/Connect and the Ford Tourneo Custom/Connect – as well as SUVs.

And although it’s designed primarily to be used as a tailgate awning, you can also use it as a side awning if your ‘van has an awning rail and the correct connection kit.

Inside, it’s surprisingly bright with good standing room throughout. You’ve got large PVC side windows with curtains, skylights in the roof and mesh ventilation panels to help reduce condensation.

Side doors on the joining section between the main body of the awning and the ‘van gives access to your



vehicle without passing through the awning. A large D-door connects the awning with the vehicle. There are storage pockets dotted around the interior for smaller bits and pieces and the groundsheet clips in and out, which makes cleaning easier.

There's also room to add an optional inner sleeping pod if you want to use this as extra sleeping space for kids or friends. And importantly for an air awning – yes, it does come with a pump!

That avoids that awkward moment where you realise you've bought a giant inflatable structure with no actual way to inflate it. As a former tent camper, I've been there...

WHY USE A DRIVEAWAY AWNING?

So, why would you actually want a driveway awning for your campervan?

Well, extra living space is the obvious answer. Campervans are brilliant, obviously, but unless you've got a massive coachbuilt motorhome, space is always at a premium.

A driveway awning gives you somewhere to store wet gear, muddy boots, bikes, dog beds, portable toilets or just yourself when the weather turns.

If you're away for more than a weekend, that extra room can make a huge difference.

Families especially tend to love them because the 'van itself stays less cluttered. And if you're on a longer campsite stay, being able to leave the awning up while taking the 'van out and about is extremely useful.

But driveaways do have their downsides. First is storage and transport. Most awnings take up a fair bit of room once packed away, especially inflatable models, and they can be heavy, too, which is worth taking into account when you think about your campervan's payload.

The Trail Tailgate Air weighs 17.4kg and has a packed size of 68cm by 27cm by 28cm, broadly similar to rival awnings from the likes of Vango and Outwell.

Then there's set-up time. One reason that some campers don't like awnings is the length of time they can take to pitch, especially on one-night stops.

Driveaway awnings are mainly a campsite thing, so if you're wild camping, overnighing in a car park or using French aires and quick stopovers, you won't be able to set one up. So, they are really aimed at people

who prefer to stay put for a couple of days, or longer, on a site.

PITCHING AND FIXING

Inflatable awnings are certainly easier to pitch than old-school pole models, and the Trail Tailgate's simplicity makes it even more straightforward.

You spread it out, peg the corners loosely, inflate the poles using the supplied pump, then tension everything properly with the guylines.

The first time I used it, it took around half an hour to pitch and with a bit of practice I reckon you could halve that.

Attachment depends on your 'van. The awning can attach via straps over the roof and fits snugly onto the tailgate area, or onto the side via an awning rail with a driveway kit.

Disconnecting it to drive away is pretty quick once you've done it a couple of times.

VERDICT

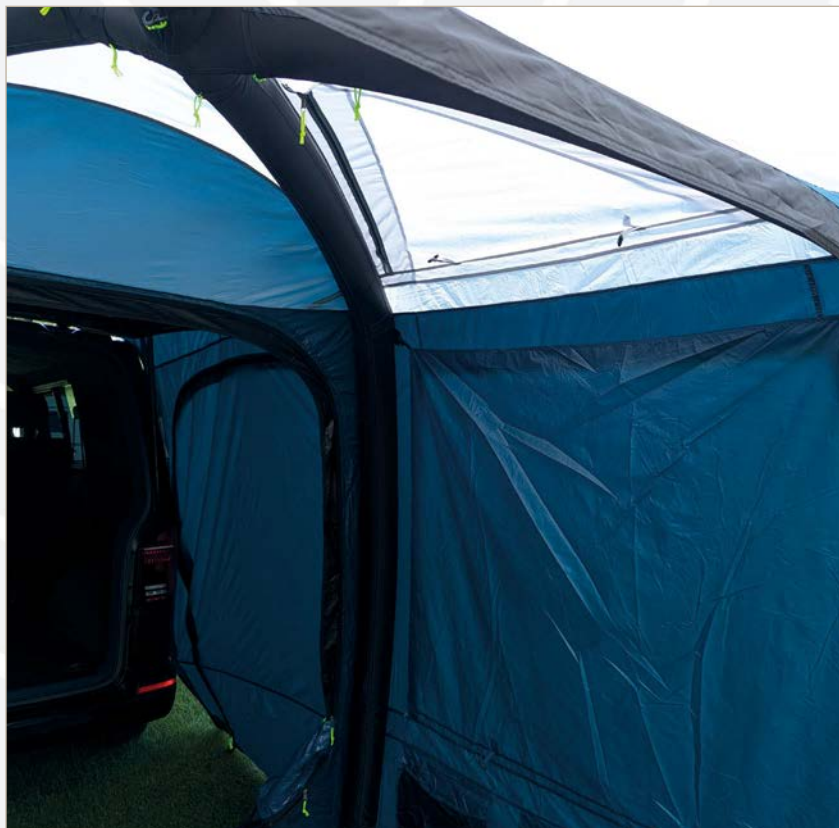
For the money, this is actually a really impressive package. It's arguably not quite at the level of the premium awnings costing hundreds more – but it's definitely closer than you might expect.

The materials feel decent, it's easy to use, bright inside and gives you a very useful amount of extra living space. The downsides are really the same downsides you get with almost any driveway awning – set-up time, storage space, and the fact they can really only be used on proper campsite stays.

But if you regularly spend a few days on site and want more room without spending a fortune, this makes a lot of sense. It's a great value piece of kit.

THANKS

Thanks to Incline Campers and Home Farm Touring Park in Lincolnshire for their help with this review.



The latest campervan and outdoor accessories



BERGHAUS RIDGE-SEEKER WATERPROOF JACKET

The Berghaus Ridge-Seeker is a tough four-season Gore-Tex shell with reinforced zones for durability. With pit zips, adjustable hood, pack-friendly pockets and versatile ventilation, it's a dependable all-weather jacket for serious hikers who demand resilience and comfort., designed not only to brave the elements, but to move comfortably

through them. The Gore-Tex construction acts as a protective yet breathable barrier, shielding you from the storm while allowing heat and moisture to escape. That sense of protection carries through the finer details, too. Velcro-adjustable cuffs help seal in warmth, while cordlock adjustment points at the hem and within the hood let you hold onto heat when it matters.

This is a fantastic coat. The core elements, for example the weather resistance, are top tier. Outside of that the huge amounts of pocket storage and nice structure of the coat mean you have ample storage if you want to forgo a bag. If you are looking for a top-quality coat at the upper end of the market this could be it.

PRICE £360

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SWOX ZINC SPF 50 WHITE SUNBLOCK

Sun safety is essential in the great outdoors, and for campervanners who spend long days on exposed hills, Swox Zinc SPF 50 White is a reassuring companion. The thick zinc-based formula creates a visible protective sun barrier that stays put in wind, sweat and light rain. Water-resistant, fragrance-free and kind to sensitive skin, it's particularly effective on noses, cheeks and ears.

PRICE £9.90

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WILD WIPE

Wild Wipe is a portable female wiping device designed for hiking, camping, festivals and any outdoor situation where toilet paper is not available. Lightweight, durable and easy to carry, it aims to make going to the toilet outdoors a little cleaner and less awkward for women. It comes with its own case so, once used, it can be stored away safely until it can be washed properly.

Overall, Wild Wipe is a great product, and it's good someone has finally tried to tackle the issue of women needing to go to the toilet outside. It is lightweight, simple to use and useful for any trip where proper facilities are limited.

You do need to be careful when using it to make sure you have good aim and do not accidentally get wee anywhere else. You also need to make sure the case is firmly back on afterwards, because the last thing you want is any leftover moisture escaping into your back pocket or wherever you are carrying it.

However, if you are a woman who enjoys the outdoors, Wild Wipe is definitely worth considering. It is not the most glamorous piece of kit you will ever buy, but it might be one of the most practical.

PRICE: £13.99

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SCARPA RIBELLE CROSS 2 MID GTX WMN



One of the lightest hiking models in the Scarpa range, this is a mid-cut walking boot designed to offer stability, durability, and comfort whatever the terrain. The Ribelle Cross 2 Mid GTX WMN features a Gore-Tex

ePE membrane, and a grippy, cushioned sole, making for an ideal choice for all weather conditions.

After a few hours in the Lake District, these boots proved to be comfortable, lightweight and capable across a range of terrain. The generous fit, breathable feel and dependable grip make them a strong option for hillwalkers looking for all-day comfort without the weight often associated with traditional hiking boots.

The only reservation concerns the particular colour we tested (fog/aqua green). The lighter finish looks great out of the box, but I suspect the typical fell-walking conditions may quickly show.

PRICE £175

BUY IT HERE fave.co/3Si14Cg

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