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COVER

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After what felt like a very long, dreary winter, it finally seems like the campervan season has properly arrived. But while most of us are only just digging out the camping chairs for this season, the industry is already looking ahead.

Believe it or not, manufacturers have started unveiling their 2027 campervans at launch events across Europe and the UK. Our team has just returned from the first launch of the year in Germany and I'm heading to France soon for more previews.

Keep an eye on our newsletters and website because we'll bring you the announcements as soon as we can. Our editorial team recently completed a

pop-top campervan group test. The full results will appear in the August issue – another good reason to subscribe if you haven't already see outandaboutlive.co.uk/campervans/campervan-magazine

And finally, don't forget our summer party at the Norfolk Motorhome & Campervan Show in July, where magazine subscribers get exclusive access to the Out & About Live camping area. See page 11 for more details.

Iain

IAIN DUFF | Editor

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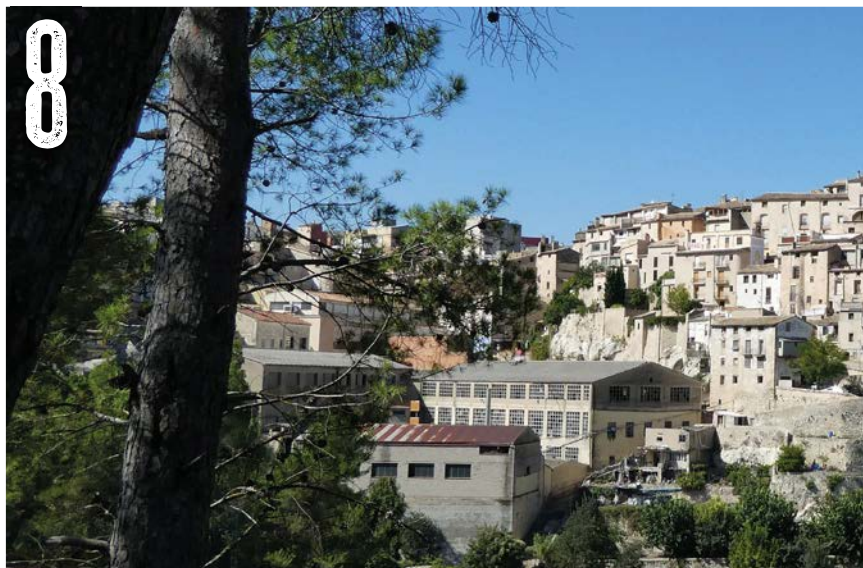
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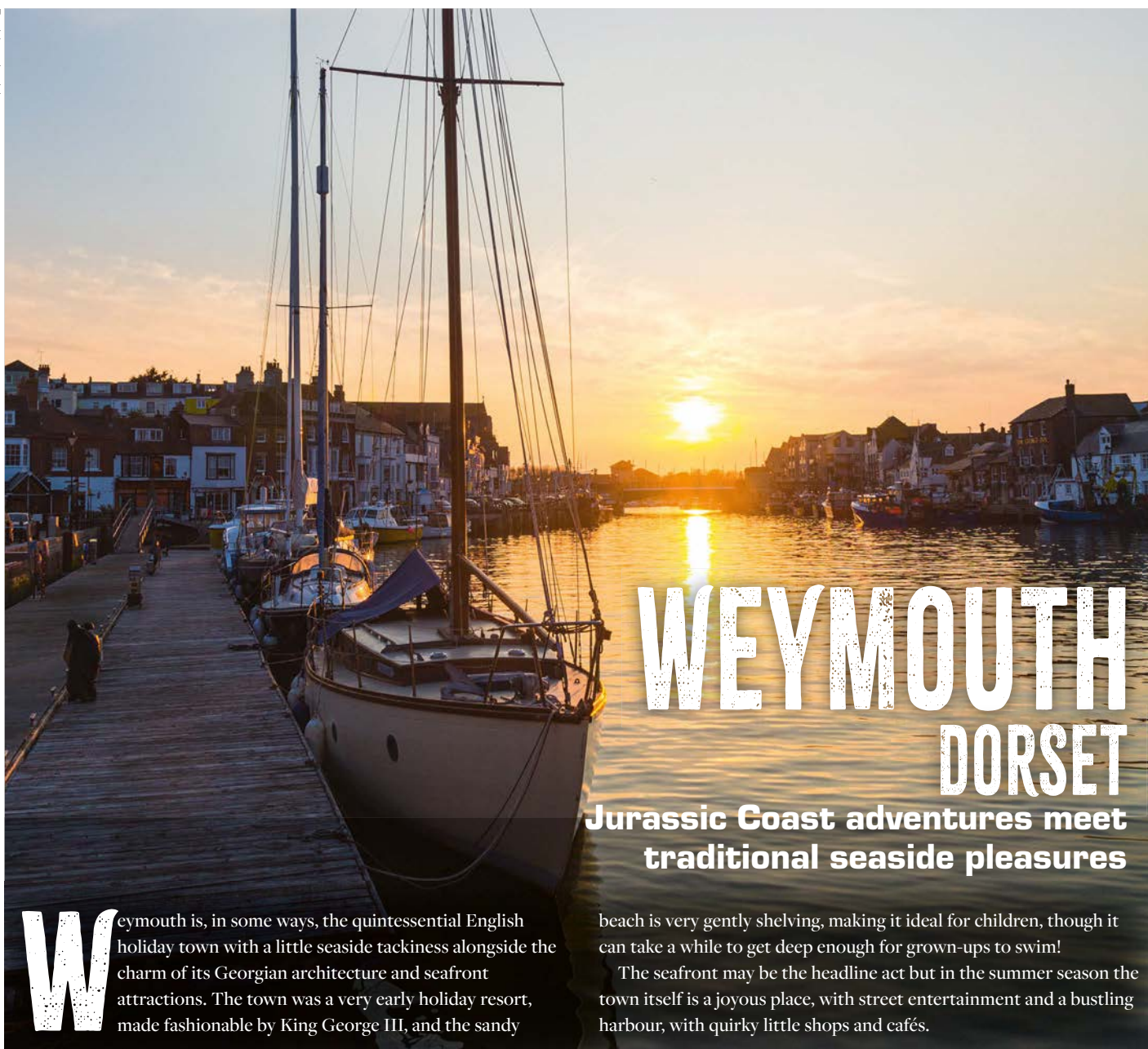
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WEYMOUTH DORSET

Jurassic Coast adventures meet traditional seaside pleasures

Weymouth is, in some ways, the quintessential English holiday town with a little seaside tackiness alongside the charm of its Georgian architecture and seafront attractions. The town was a very early holiday resort, made fashionable by King George III, and the sandy

beach is very gently shelving, making it ideal for children, though it can take a while to get deep enough for grown-ups to swim!

The seafront may be the headline act but in the summer season the town itself is a joyous place, with street entertainment and a bustling harbour, with quirky little shops and cafés.

DISCOVER

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NOTHE FORT

Perched on a headland overlooking Weymouth Bay, Nothe Fort offers fascinating insight into Victorian coastal defences. Explore underground passages, military exhibits and panoramic sea views.

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EXPLORE

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JURASSIC COAST

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HOLA ESPAÑA!

Exploring some of Spain's less visited coastline





Full of rustic charm, its narrow streets criss-crossing up the hill, lined by old stone houses with iron-wrought balconies, the delightful mountain village of Ansó, in the Aragonese Pyrenees mountains, was the start of our tour around Spain.

Excitement was in the air. It was a fiesta weekend! We watched as side streets were boarded off and a cattle truck was unloaded of young bulls who, after a warning rocket was fired into the air, were released onto the main street... a bull run! After watching the action we rested at the campsite but returned later in the evening. A raucous brass band played in the main street where people gathered to enjoy family time and dance along to the beat. An unexpected traditional start to our trip!

The road out of Ansó took us through a stunning gorge before it opened out onto arid plains dotted about with rocky outcrops. Stopping to watch a young vulture sitting on a roadside fence, it took off and flew awkwardly past our 'van, just inches from the windscreen! We camped for a few days in the lush Matarranya Valley where we enjoyed some cycling along nearby trails. With just the sound of birds and the scent of rosemary and thyme growing alongside the tracks to stimulate

our senses, we were impressed by the silence. Mornings in Spain started cool and fresh but soon became hot and dry so we were always up and about early. We were able to enjoy swimming pools at many campsites, which were deliciously cool after a morning exploring. Then after the burning heat of the day came the cool of the evening which, as the light faded, brought out the cicadas whirring an endless song in the vegetation and sometimes bats, silently darting over the grasses between the trees.

Feeling rested, we set off for the

OUR 'VAN

Gill and Martin enjoy travelling across Europe for six weeks at a time in their 2018 Ford Transit Custom SWB high-Top, a high-spec self-converted campervan, bespoke to their needs.

Wherever they are, it is perfect for enabling them to hike, cycle, snorkel or just wander...



TOP TIP

If you wish to visit the Alhambra, purchase tickets well in advance from the official websites and plan out your day!

Mediterranean coast, to Peñíscola, a fortified town on a promontory surrounded by the sea. From our campsite we cycled past fragrant flowers, orange groves and roadside prickly pears, past smallholdings where we stopped to watch a young man guiding a horse-drawn plough through his field of artichokes until we reached the promenade and a long sandy beach. Securing our bikes, we wandered up the warren of narrow streets, in between tall whitewashed houses, until we reached the Knights Templar castle, over which many battles had taken place between Moors and Christians.

From the coast we headed back into the hills to Navajas, through wooded mountains again, where the rocks glowed orange-gold in the sun. We enjoyed cycling along the Via Verde de Ojos Negros (once a railway line used to transport iron ore to the coast) which passed just behind the campsite and walking along the river, where we saw the Cascade de Brazal which, at this time of year, trickled over the cliff like a delicate shower! We watched as the occasional lizard, taken by surprise, scampered across the sun-baked paths ahead of us. Back at the campsite, we were

MAIN PIC

Europa Point Lighthouse, Gibraltar

ABOVE LEFT

Via Verde de Ojos Negros.

ABOVE RIGHT

Portal de San Roque

INSIDE THE ROCK OF GIBRALTAR ARE MANY CAVES, INCLUDING ST MICHAEL'S CAVE, KNOWN FOR ITS SPECTACULAR STALACTITES AND STALAGMITES



amused to observe a lovely little gecko 'hanging out' on the ceiling of the shower block!

A two-day journey then took us along beautiful roads that carved their way through lush mountains and crossed dry farmland with arrow-straight roads, complete with mirages shimmering in the heat, past



ABOVE
The Rock of Gibraltar, overlooking La Línea de la Concepción

LEFT
Lord Nelson Memorial, Gibraltar

INSET
Martin and Gill

fruit pickers loading their crates of oranges and peaches from the many small farms and plantations along the way, overseen by castles standing proud on distant hilltops. Stopping to admire the multilayered hillside town of Bocairent, we carried on through little towns where tall date palms lined the streets. The weather continued hot and the views were hazy as we drove across vast arid landscapes with occasional sierras popping into view. It was like driving through coastal sand dunes at times, but with unlikely verdant orchards dotted about. The architecture along our route in Andalusia reflected the region's Moorish past, whilst the Arabic signage on some major roads reflects the present. As we headed again for the coast, we could see,

shimmering like an estuary ahead of us, vast expanses of 'plasticulture' where fruit, vegetables and flowers are grown in huge quantities. Beyond, in the Parque Natural del Cabo de Gata-Níjar, scrub vegetation covered the barren mountains which plunged dramatically into the sea as we approached Las Negras, a quiet village nestled into a pebbly cove, good, we hoped, for snorkelling. However, moderate winds from North Africa whipped up waves and churned up the sea so it was not until our next remote beach campsite, at La Garrofa, that we were able to don our shorty wetsuits, fins and snorkels and slip into a calm sea, as the early morning sun rose over the water. As we floated along, mindful of the many sea



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AUTOGUARD
WARRANTIES



urchins settled on the rocks under the water, shoals of pipefish and colourful wrasse swam by unperturbed, red starfish sat quietly on the seabed among forests of large anemones wafting their tentacles and a crayfish busied itself with breakfast in the nooks and crannies.

On 'National Day' Bank Holiday,

TOP TIP

Remember that passports are needed to enter/leave Gibraltar. It is easier to park in La Línea de la Concepción and cycle/walk across the border and then the airport runway, which is operated like a train crossing, with lights indicating when it is safe to cross!

(which commemorates the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas,) we arrived in the Sierra Nevada, driving from the dramatic arid eastern side of the mountains to the greener western side, past the white villages of Las Alpujarras. Our campsite in the mountains, at Beas de Granada, was well situated for exploring the local area. Cycling from the village, we enjoyed a great ride along the old 'Camino del Molino de Félix' towards Granada. Pausing to look at a tethered mule patiently waiting with saddlebags on his back, we saw an elderly man picking corn

cobs from a small parcel of land, whilst a drover walked past us along the track with his herd of goats. The snow of the high sierras keeps these valleys well watered and so, despite the

dryness, it was a fertile area with a variety of trees and carefully tended plots of tomatoes and marrows amongst the olive trees and corn. The track narrowed to a stony path





TOP TIP

If travelling on any of the Brittany Ferries UK to Spain routes it is advisable to have an overnight cabin. However, on popular dates cabins can be fully booked even several months ahead so book well in advance.

for a while and dipped in and out of several small streams before we stopped for our picnic under the shade of some trees, where a woodpecker chipped away at the bark looking for his lunch.

We didn't manage to cycle all the way to Granada; however, the next day we did hop on a convenient bus (€1.85!) which took us there in about 30 mins, and with the Sierra Nevada as a backdrop, what a fabulous city it is! Rich in history, the period of greatest splendour was from 1238 under the Nasrid dynasty (rulers of the last Spanish Moorish kingdom) until it was taken by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492. It is a fascinating place to visit. The most notable

building is, of course, the former palace/fortress of the Moorish emirs, the Alhambra. We wandered through the city, past the cathedral, to the Cuesta de Gómerez, a wooded road that climbs uphill to the fortress walls. It would have been wonderful to visit; however, tickets to go inside have to be booked many weeks in advance so instead we walked around the outside and up onto the peaceful hill above where, from a small thirteenth century castle known as The Moor's Chair, there are wonderful views of the Alhambra in all its glory and of Granada, including the Albaicin and Sacromonte neighbourhoods. We then headed down along the Cuesta de Los

Chinos, over an eleventh century bridge and into the Albaicin, where the narrow Nasrid streets wind their way up the hillside.

We could have explored further in Granada but there is only so much you can do in a day and we had plans for more time in the mountains. Our second site was at Güéjar Sierra (actually another convenient site for visiting Granada) where we had a lovely pitch at a campsite above the Canales Reservoir. We could watch the golden dawn reflecting on the mountains in the mornings and in the evenings, the paling of the sky whilst the sun set over Granada.

In Andalusia, a third of the world's olive growers produce 80% of Spain's olive oil from 70 million olive trees and, as we headed west from Granada, long rows of olive trees, like marching caterpillars, spread across the hillsides in giant groves along our way. Stopping en route at the vulture observation station at Peñarrubia, we were thrilled to see a 'kettle' of about 50 birds rising on a thermal above us as we munched on our lunch. We carried on to the mountaintop town

TOP

Hillside town of
Bocairent

FAR LEFT

Plaza de Toros
(Bullring) in Ronda

TOP RIGHT

Canales Reservoir,
Sierra Nevada

LEFT

Puente Nuevo, Ronda



of Ronda, which, despite the tourist crowds, was well worth a visit. Cycling in from the campsite we then explored by foot. Built on a ridge, the town is split in two by a deep river gorge which, with tall houses built precipitously along its cliffs, is crossed by three bridges: the spectacular Puente Nuevo spanning the highest point, the Puente Viejo lower down, and the Puente

Romano at the bottom. In the old Moorish town, we visited the Plaza de Toros, home to the Real Maestranza de Caballería de Rondal, where classical dressage is taught with beautiful thoroughbred Spanish horses, as well as being a bullring. A museum explains the cultural history of bulls and bullfighting. Also of great interest were the ancient Arab Baths, said to be the best preserved in Spain. The Muslim adaptation of ancient Roman baths, the hammam, consisting of a similar system of reception, cold/temperate/hot baths and underfloor heating, provided for religious ritual and a social hub.

From Ronda, we drove on through drizzle, as low clouds rose like steam from the mountains, until we arrived at La Línea de la Concepción, just outside the British enclave of Gibraltar. From the campsite, we cycled across the border and then the airfield (after waiting for the runway to be clear!) before wandering through the old quarters, which extend along a fringe between the Rock and the port, until we got to the Punta Europa lighthouse looking out across the Gibraltar Strait. The following day we took the cable car to the top of the rock and then walked slowly down, visiting various historical landmarks on the way, enjoying fabulous views across to Morocco, whilst managing to avoid too much attention from

the Barbary Apes! Inside the Rock are many caves, including one open to the public, St Michael's Cave, known for its spectacular stalactites and stalagmites. We also visited tunnels which had been dug in the limestone Rock during times of war.

Leaving Gibraltar behind us we headed north, past Seville, over vast dry plains of ploughed farmland. Menacing clouds with their life-giving rain hovered over the parched land. Our destination, Mérida, contains more Roman remains than any other city in Spain and, with an all-inclusive ticket, we spent a day exploring the magnificent theatre, amphitheatre, Mithraeum villa with mosaics, Puente Romano (the longest of all surviving Roman bridges) the Alcazaba, Morería Archaeological Area, and Temple of Diana. We felt we had been transported to ancient Rome!

The last stretch of our journey took us across agricultural plains, hazy green after recent rains, dotted about with livestock. We spotted many stork nests balanced on pylons along the route and watched large birds of prey flying above us, scouting for roadkill. Eventually we arrived in the beautiful Basque region where we stayed in the hills for our last couple of nights before heading to the ferry from Bilbao with lots of good memories of our adventure around España!

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ABOVE

Las Negras fishing village, Andalusia

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YEARS

Words Nick Harding ■ Pictures Lin Oakley

AWAY FROM THE CROWDS

Less well known, even lesser visited. Dumfries and Galloway is a great region for a campervan tour. Go there before the crowds catch up



Well, that was easy. Our drive up from South West to South West – that is, England to Scotland – found us heading north until we were just over the border, turning left at Gretna Green and hitting Dumfries and Galloway.

The SWC300 was our guide for the next two weeks. That's the South West Coastal 300, a rambling route you can use, as we did, as the basis for a campervan trip around an area you previously may never have thought of visiting. Do go, though, because you'll be richly rewarded in terms of history, environment, scenic easy-going driving and plenty more.

But, be warned, there's a dark side. Among many, many highlights of our two-week tour of Dumfries and Galloway was the early research discovery that Galloway Forest was the UK's first and world's fourth International Dark Sky Park.

It means light pollution is totally minimised and there are plenty of opportunities to spot stars, constellations, the Andromeda Galaxy, the Milky Way and more.

Indeed, much of the region is also home to a biosphere, the Dumfries and South Ayrshire area that includes Stranraer to Ayr in the west coast, across to Kirkcudbright, including a coastal area of some 12 nautical miles, as well as wetlands, uplands, ancient woodland, nature reserves, etc.

The area has been designated by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) for its high environmental values and as a place



for research into sustainability.

It was something of a paradox, then, that an early attraction we visited as we ventured into Dumfries and Galloway from the east was the Devil's Porridge Museum. This small, two-floor venue celebrates – OK, that's the wrong choice of description – something altogether more sinister. In 1916 HM Factory Gretna was officially the world's largest munitions factory – its location, alongside the Solway coast, kept secret (for obvious reasons) by being, among other things, free of public roads.

Some 30,000 people worked here at its peak, the huge majority women as young as 16, in windowless, ventilation-free conditions producing cordite. It was a young journalist called Arthur Conan Doyle (later Sir) who came up with the devil's porridge term for the toxic glop that was mixed by hand by the "canary girls", who got their nickname because their skin turned yellow as a result of the poison they were dealing with.

From burns to Burns. Dumfries and Galloway is also Rabbin Burns country. There's plenty to visit if you're a fan of Scotland's foremost poet – from his birthplace in Alloway to the 1.5-mile Burns Town Trail in Dumfries, which includes

the two-up, two-down house where he died some 230 years ago.

Entry is free but you're welcome to make a donation, a system that seems to go for the other attractions on the Burns Trail, apart from if you fancy a dropping in for a drink in one of Rabbin's locals, the Globe Inn. If you want the full behind-the-scenes tour there is a charge here.

Dumfries is the region's largest town (there are no cities in this corner of Scotland), but our favourite urban destination turned out to be Kirkcudbright. Self-proclaimed artists' town (the quality of its light was/is a big attraction) and "an important but not always wealthy port through the centuries," there's more than a whiff of grandeur here, although that may have been down to the gin that was sampled at the Dark Art Distillery after a tour around Kirkcudbright Galleries.

The distillery shares its former schoolhouse home with the Dark Space Planetarium, a simply amazing insight into space and the only science museum in southern Scotland. We thoroughly enjoyed a virtual tour of the solar system, as well as

finding out about Scotland's links to the first man on the moon, Neil Armstrong, and lots more besides. It's hard not to encounter a

distillery on your travels anywhere in Scotland. Less so a brewer. In Castle Douglas we stumbled across (OK, not quite literally) Sulwath Brewers, a craft ale producer with a rather welcoming taproom, where we sat, sampled and then purchased (including, for one of us, the t-shirt). But not before we started a debate

amongst the locals when we asked how you pronounced the brewery's name – it's sull-with, we were informed, an earlier name for Solway; but there was also discussion over whether 'sull'ith' was an earlier pronunciation. We left them to it, having purchased a boxed case of 12 bottles of its brews in order to pursue our own further essential research.

A close second to Kirkcudbright was Wigtown, where the books outnumber the local population by 250 to one. OK, that's just a headline-grabber, but if – like us – you enjoy secondhand bookshops,



MAIN PICTURE
Caerlaverock Castle

ABOVE
LEFT TO RIGHT
Relaxing at the farm shop
at Mossyard Beach

Don't panic! It's just
dressing up

Cleaning up at the Devil's
Porridge museum

Street food in Kirkcudbright

LEFT INSET
Shopping outlet, Gretna

RIGHT
Dark Space Planetarium





WE REACHED SCOTLAND'S HIGHEST VILLAGE THANKS TO A FANTASTIC, SCENERY-PACKED DRIVE THROUGH THE MENNOCK PASS

you'll love Wigtown. There are indeed lots of booksellers here in Scotland's very own book town, the focus of which is just one, The Bookshop. Extensive and more than slightly quirky, it's run by self-anointed "bookseller and misanthrope" Shaun Bythell. So, of course, we couldn't resist buying a copy of his first book, *The Diary of a Bookseller*, which is now one of a very entertaining, funny and informative series.

A penultimate high point? Forgive the pun, but Wanlockhead is Scotland's highest village, home also to the Museum of Lead Mining, which we reached thanks to a

fantastic, scenery-packed drive through the Mennock Pass from Loch Doon campsite, also including a brief stop-off to clamber through the ruins of Loch Doon Castle. Merrick is the highest mountain in southern Scotland.

On a clear day you can see across to the Isle of Arran. And we didn't find out until we got home that the castle was originally in the loch itself, but was moved to its current resting place as recently as 1935.

And finally, on our journey home we stopped off at Crawick Multiverse, quite simply an amazingly atmospheric open space, the like of which I've never seen before. I'm not sure how to describe this other than as an artistic interpretation (I think the term "land art project" may have been used) to represent some of the universes beyond ours.

The theory goes – and it is a theory – that we are part of a huge multiverse. Crawick is the repurposed site of a former open-cast coal mine (and a sandstone quarry before that), and it makes for a great walk. Peace, quiet, very much a time to reflect among the stone sculptures and landscaping, and even its own wee camping area in the car park. What more could you want?

Nearby Sanquhar is also home to the world's oldest post office – yet another feather in the Dumfries and

Galloway cap.

I wouldn't expect fellow campervanners to necessarily stay at as many campsites as we did. The list below follows the direction of our tour – albeit with a three-day gap towards the end where we headed up to the Tartan Heart Festival near Inverness.

However, hopefully our trip helps demonstrate there's a good variety of sites here. Briefly, we agreed: Anwoth Holiday Park scored highly for its washroom facilities (including a bathroom) as well as access to all facilities at its larger Auchenlarie site (also a Premier Park); Burrowhead Holiday Village if you want rugged coastline – looking across to the Isle of Man, which certainly confused our mobile phones, which seemed to think we'd managed some kind of daring escape from Scotland – and the amenities you'd expect with a site that also includes statics; Aird



ABOVE
LEFT TO RIGHT
Enjoying a tippie

One of many Wigtown book shops

Camping at Loch Doon

LEFT
Dark Art Distillery

RIGHT
History of lead mining in Wanlockhead



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WWW.RETROFESTIVAL.CO.UK

STAY AT

CRIFFEL VIEW CARAVAN SITE

Landis Farm, New Abbey DG2 8HH

T 01387 850238

W criffelview.co.uk

Open 1 March – 30 September

SOLWAY VIEW HOLIDAYS

Balmangan Farm, Borgue,

Kirkcudbright DG6 4TR

T 01557 870206

W solwayviewholidays.co.uk

Open All year

ANWOTH HOLIDAY PARK

Garden Street, Gatehouse of Fleet

DG7 2JU

T 01556 506200

W swallowholidaygroup.co.uk/anwoth

anwoth

Open 1 March – 1 November

BURROWHEAD HOLIDAY VILLAGE

Tonderghie Road, Cutcloy, Newton

Stewart DG8 8JB

T 01988 500252

W burrowheadholidayvillage.co.uk

Open All year

LOCH DOON CARAVAN AND CAMPING PARK

McNabstone, Loch Doon,

Dalmellington KA6 7QE

T 07506 325030

W lochdooncaravanandcampingpark.com

Open 31 March – 1 October

THE GREEN FROG

Hammerlands Centre, Jeff Brown

Drive, Moffat DG10 9QL

T 01683 221220

W thegreenfrogmoffat.co.uk

Open All year

CRAWICK MULTIVERSE

B740, Sanquhar DG4 6EG

T 01659 50242

W crawickmultiverse.co.uk

Open 14 March – 1 November

AIRD DONALD CARAVAN PARK

London Road, Stranraer DG9 8RN

T 01776 702025

W aird-donald.co.uk

Open All year



Donald if you prefer an all-touring site with plenty of extra little touches (like the benches and tables next to some pitches); Loch Doon, for the loch (of course); The Green Frog for walking into Moffat; and Crawick Multiverse – five 'vans only, but with after-hours key code access to the public toilets.

But our two favourites were Criffel View and Solway View – we obviously like our views, but for location and just sheer atmosphere these were our particular choices. It was the smallest of the two, Criffel View, that topped the list, for its barn display of vintage vehicles, mainly tractors – Allis-Chalmers, Fordson, Field Marshall, David Brown, Case, Masseys and more. Lin was in her element. And so were the Carruthers family, the site owners happily taking time to discuss their collection, which also includes a motorbike originally purchased by a family member in London (the original receipt is here) and driven home to the farm in just two days, including camping alongside it each night en route.



TOP LEFT

Culzean Castle

TOP RIGHT

Cairn Holy

BOTTOM RIGHT

The world's oldest post office at Sanquhar

Ironically, then, that the only tractor we went out with was at Solway View, where farmer/site owner, Robert, and son, Archie, took us out across the fields of their 330-acre farmland. If you ever want an insight into where the needs of sustainability are met by the constraints of farming, this is a thoroughly worthwhile trip to ask about if you stay on site here.

A quick shout-out, too, for three of the places where we enjoyed food – The Pheasant (near Burrowhead Holiday Village – great Italian food, but now only running on a pop-up basis); Skipper's Scran Van in Kirkcudbright (brilliant seafood takeaway) and Mabie House Hotel near Dumfries, a chance encounter





that proved excellent value for money in the grandest of settings.

There's plenty more to add to the plus column for Dumfries and Galloway. Parking is free in its local authority-run car parks. I can only remember a couple of height barriers, too. And the roads (no motorways) were varied yet easy for driving – as well as pretty much free of potholes.

Our southwest Scotland fortnight also saw us notching up two castles; Culzean and Caerlaverock – the former an early acquisition for the National Trust for Scotland, the latter actually two castles, which featured in the Scottish Wars of Independence. We also visited a couple of museums – John Paul Jones (was he a pirate? You decide) and

Newton Stewart, a random goldmine of local artefacts from bygone eras. Plus, we also dropped in on Mull of Galloway Lighthouse.

Also, a duo of whisky distilleries. Moffat is home to one of just two distilleries in the world using wood-fired stills, although don't be fooled into thinking it has a long history – it's less than five years old and is also proud to call itself (for the time being, at least) Scotland's smallest distillery.

Bladnoch Distillery, near Wigtown, on the other hand describes itself as the oldest independently owned Scotch whisky producer, and the southernmost in Scotland. Here, I somehow emerged clutching a bottle of its unusual eight-year-old (it's aged in red wine barrels rather than the usual sherry or Bourbon casks), plus two Glencairn world's official whisky glasses (you'll recognise the shape).

An excellent alternative, then, offering plenty more than the somewhat notorious NC500? Dumfries and Galloway has so much going for it – just let the SWC300 be your guide.



FIND OUT MORE



• To the multiverse... and beyond
W crawickmultiverse.co.uk

• Kicking things off with the SWC300
W scotlandstartshere.com

• Going biospher-ic in Galloway
W gsabiosphere.org.uk

• Where the devil's porridge was made
W devilsporridge.org.uk

• Newton Stewart's rambling, eclectic museum
W newtonstewartmuseum.co.uk

• Secondhand news
W the-bookshop.com

• Highest point for lead
W leadminingmuseum.co.uk

• Mull over the views... and the birds
W mull-of-galloway.co.uk/mull-of-galloway-experience

TOP LEFT
Evening socialising at Burrowhead

TOP RIGHT
Sorbie Tower

INSET
Portpatrick lighthouse

LEFT
Caerlaverock Castle

WEST SUSSEX FOR THE WIN

This area offers wildlife aplenty and grand castles, as well as quaint coastal charm and rural idylls





In January, I make a calendar showing key dates – football fixtures, meetings of the WI, a wedding in the family – and see what gaps there may be for trips away. From that routine came a late spring break in Littlehampton, West Sussex. It was sunny and dry, which so helped our enjoyment and exploration of an area neither Diane nor I knew.

We started with a drive along Littlehampton's seafront heading east for the day's first dog walk on the promenade to Rustington. These seaside towns claim a beach, but I do not consider it a fair noun to use for their very stony shores. However, at the top of Rustington's beach the stones between the groynes were home to large clumps of sea kale topped with pretty white flowers.

Back in Littlehampton we initially

MAIN PIC
Arundel Castle

ABOVE
Alliums, Walled Garden,
Arundel Castle

BELOW
Diane Symonds at
Pagham Lagoon, Pagham
Harbour Local Nature
Reserve

INFORMATION

- WWT Arundel wetland centre has its own car park
www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/arundel

- Pagham Harbour RSPB Nature Reserve is located just outside the village with parking at the centre costing £12 for campervans
rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves/pagham-harbour-local-nature-reserve/location



Egret, Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve

- For the beach at West Wittering parking prices vary by time of year, day of the week and time of arrival. You can also book in advance which is recommended at peak times
westwitteringestate.co.uk

- Chichester's Northgate car park (PO19 6AA) has no height restriction and if you park near the tennis courts there is a small grass border which means some large campervans may fit in a space.

- To visit Bognor Regis, there is limited on-street pay and display parking on The Esplanade

- For Chichester Canal Centre, if you can't find space adjacent, head to Chichester Gate shopping centre with three hours free parking





headed inland alongside the River Arun towards the lifeboat station. On this wall were imaginative pedestals displaying recipes for fish dishes – in 1869 there were 189 fishing boats registered here, though there are far fewer now – with the ingredients generally listed in a circle around the edge of a plaque and the method described in the centre. Two fish and chip shops face the wall, but we bought crab and fresh fish from the shack on the harbour.

Walking back towards the mouth of the river, we stepped onto a very short pier from which we could see families vying for positions on the few patches of sand on the town's East Beach.



ABOVE

Flood warning sign, Bosham

BELOW

Damselflies, Arundel Wetland Centre

INSET

Sea kale, West Beach, Littlehampton

My research suggested Pagham Harbour, south of Chichester, would interest us. Here an RSPB reserve hosts many overwintering wildfowl, since departed, but there remained enough attractions to warrant making the visit.

Shingle and silt thrown up by the sea means Pagham was abandoned as a harbour some 750 years ago. We walked the North Wall Trail overlooking the saltmarsh of Pagham Lagoon to the south with reed beds inland to the north.

The morning's highlights included egrets and shelducks and a surprise appearance by a roe deer in an adjoining field. A stiff breeze blew across the lagoon creating ripples on its surface.

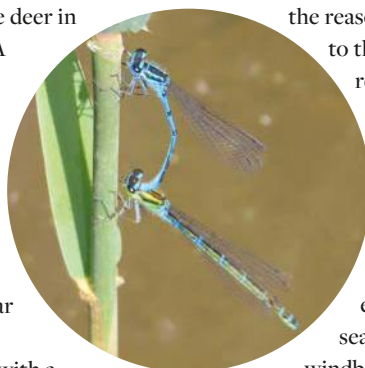
Back at the car we consulted our OS map, looking for a car park similar to the previous lunchtime, namely with a view, and came to West Wittering.

When we arrived, it was clear that much of the West Sussex population knew of the area's appeal and had



driven to this very spot on the coast, prepared to pay a staggering £15.45 to park their car for the day. We found the reason: the stone beaches to the east had been replaced by a broad stretch of golden sand.

Notwithstanding the clear sunny sky, the stiff breeze brought out that essential British seaside accessory, the windbreak. Many families were shielded by blue fabric with red and yellow bars, all adding to the splendour and colour of the scene. Youngsters were playing in the sea. There were lifeguards on duty.



**ABOVE**

Yacht being towed to the quay, Bosham

RIGHT

Swans, Arundel Wetland Centre

At the far western end of the car park field the beach and general area becomes East Head, a sand dune spit owned by the National Trust and offering more of a nature walk on the fringes of Chichester Harbour. Here plenty of dogs were running, but red flags banned swimming.

We spent a weekday afternoon exploring Chichester. Its four main streets – East Street, South Street, West Street and North Street – meet at its Market Cross. We walked through the cloisters and past its free-standing bell tower.

I used to play cricket and now I play lawn bowls, so I got a bigger kick from Priory Park, which is home to the old Guildhall but more especially has a wonderful bowling green and a

cricket pitch. I wish I could have watched folk playing their sports at the weekend.

About four miles from our campsite, we found Wepham Wood. It lies on the Angmering Park Estate where they allow public access. The approach lane took us past a field of beans where we could see the soil contained many of the stones seen at the shore.

As with Pagham, we missed the optimal time to visit, because the standing remains of bluebells suggested there would have been a grand blue picture under the trees just three weeks earlier. However, we did encounter other wildflowers to interest us, including yellow archangel and spurge.

From Wepham Wood, it was a short drive into Arundel where we visited the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust site (400 yards past Arundel Bowling Club). Here our timing was wonderful because many resident birds had hatched their chicks.

Geese were leading their goslings around the site. Two swans appeared around a corner on a path with a cygnet between them. A pair of



coots were feeding their chicks whose young heads were red, not the signature white crown they will develop.

Some were still waiting for eggs to hatch: a black-headed gull was sitting on a nest in the reeds. Damselflies were also pairing off. Yellow irises were blooming in good number all around the ponds.

On a green immediately across the coast road from the pier, Bognor Regis Bowls Club (with blue and red trim on their white shirts) were playing against Pulborough (green and yellow trim). We watched while we ate our ice creams bought on the pier.

King George V granted the Regis suffix to Bognor in 1929 after convalescing there, but our impression was that Bognor's heyday

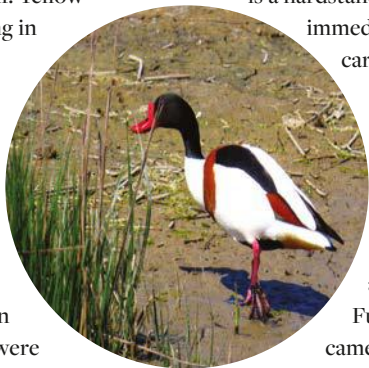
is long past.

The next morning, we found a more attractive venue in Bosham (pronounced Bozz-um, we learned). The village lies southwest of Chichester with a front on the waters of Chichester Harbour. There is a hardstanding yacht park immediately beyond the car park.

Passing a large sign that stated 'This road floods each tide', we strolled along Shore Road admiring the views.

Further along we came across early morning canoeists cleaning their boats before returning them to the clubhouse, plus folk pushing small sailing dinghies down the ramp into the shallow water.

We picnicked sitting on one of the benches, after which we walked through the churchyard.



INSET

Shelduck, Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve

BELOW

Fountains, Walled Garden, Arundel Castle



ARUNDEL CASTLE, HOME OF THE DUKE OF NORFOLK, HAS WONDERFUL GARDENS AND IS A STATELY HOME, TOO





At the time of our visit alliums were the featured flower in the grounds, which include a rose garden, a walled garden, which houses a series of fountains, and two stumperies. Valerian and buttercups growing on the banks and fortifications of the castle added to the colour.

A separate building, the Fitzalan Chapel, is a shrine to earlier dukes. The current Duke of Norfolk, the eighteenth in the line, is the Earl Marshal of England, the office holder responsible for organising the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles. In the castle library display cabinets contain photographs, orders of service and other mementos from both of these historic occasions.

In a guardroom in an older part of the castle we read of the 18-day siege of its Royalist occupiers who surrendered to the Parliamentarians in 1643 as Civil War raged. Among items on display are pikes and crossbows from the time they were the must-have weapons.

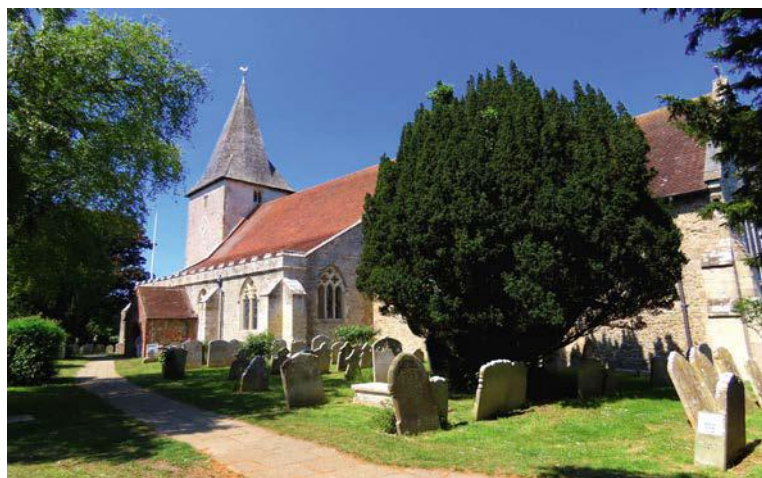
In the slightly more modern section we walked through drawing rooms and a dining room. I am in awe of the architects who conceived these large rooms with high-vaulted ceilings. The dining table was laid out with red wine glasses for claret and blue glasses for white.

We finished with a game on Arundel's 18-hole putting green. Space limitations prevent my reporting the result.

Our week in West Sussex included

Weathered and faded gravestones were tilting at various angles, but I found one poignant message. "In Memory of THOMAS son of Richard and Ann BARROW Master of the Sloop Two Brothers who by the breaking of the horse fell into the sea and drowned... Aged 20 years".

With one day remaining there was still one core attraction to visit, Arundel Castle, home of the Duke of Norfolk, the Fitzalan-Howard family. It has wonderful gardens and is a stately home, too.



LEFT

Chichester Canal from Hunston Bridge

BELOW LEFT

Bosham church with leaning gravestones

BELOW RIGHT

Market Place, Chichester

STAY AT

LITTLEHAMPTON CARAVAN & MOTORHOME CLUB SITE

Mill Lane, Wick, Littlehampton BN17 7PH

T 01903 716176

W camc.com

ROWAN PARK BOGNOR REGIS CARAVAN AND MOTORHOME CLUB SITE

Rowan Way, Bognor Regis PO22 9RP

T 01243 828515

W camc.com



CONCIERGE CAMPING

Ratham Lane, West Ashling, Chichester PO18 8DL

T 01243 573118

W conciergescamping.co.uk

so much variety: stone beaches and a sandy Blue Flag beach, fishing harbours, a lagoon and associated wildlife, picturesque Bosham, Wepham Wood, the wetland centre, Arundel Castle with its history and wonderful gardens, and the area's main city, Chichester, with its canal. It's a grand place!



THE CALL OF THE COAST

A beachside break blends sea, sand and simplicity, for the ultimate escape

Words ■ Claire Tupholme



CANNON CAMPING & CARAVAN PARK

Eastbourne Road, Pevensey Bay, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN24 6DT
T 07899 651612

W cannoncamping.co.uk

OPEN 30 April – 2 October

Cannon Camping & Caravan Park is conveniently located just off the A259, within easy reach of Pevensey Bay on foot and about three miles from Eastbourne. The site is enclosed by hedges and open fields, with a nine-hole golf course situated directly across the road and the beach just beyond it. Pevensey Bay, around a 20-minute walk away, offers a long stretch of shoreline along with a small selection of shops and cafés. In the opposite direction, about a mile away, is the contemporary Sovereign Harbour marina near Eastbourne, made up of four interconnected harbours alongside a waterfront area filled with shops and places to eat.

The campsite provides both electric and non-electric grass pitches. On-site amenities include toilets, showers and a washing-up area. A couple of pubs can be reached on foot, there's a bus stop right at the entrance and a cycle path runs from the site to Sovereign Harbour and onwards to Eastbourne. A public footpath also leads from the campsite along the river to the historic Pevensey Castle.



DAMAGE BARTON CARAVAN & CAMPING SITE

Station Road, Morteohoe, Devon EX34 7EJ

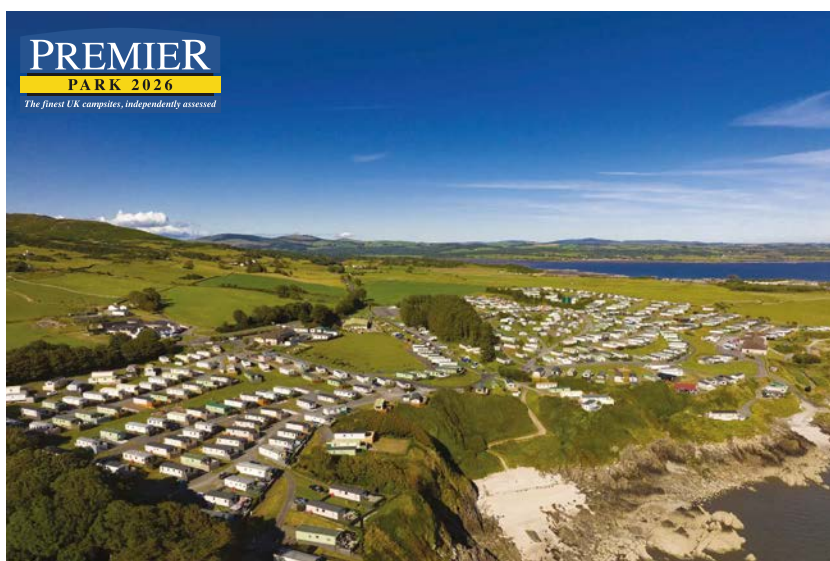
T 01271 870502

W damagebarton.co.uk

OPEN 20 March – 1 November

If you prefer a campsite set back from the shoreline but offering sweeping views of the sea, Damage Barton is an excellent choice. This caravan and camping park occupies 16 acres within a larger 600-acre working farm raising cattle and sheep, located along the north Devon coastline between Woolacombe and Ilfracombe. The upper section of the site features hardstanding pitches with electric hook-ups reserved for Caravan and Motorhome Club members. The lower area, positioned nearer the coast, is open to all visitors and offers both grass and hardstanding pitches with optional electric. Both sections have access to facilities, including toilet blocks, a shop, a wetsuit cleaning area, a motorhome service point, picnic spaces and designated areas for walking and exercising dogs.

A footpath across the farm connects directly to the South West Coast Path, while Woolacombe's well-known and award-winning beach lies about two miles away. There is also a bus stop at the entrance to the site, and the Tarka Trail cycle route, following former railway lines, is just a mile away.



AUCHENLARIE HOLIDAY PARK

Gatehouse of Fleet, Castle Douglas,
Dumfries & Galloway DG7 2EX
T 01556 506200
W swalwellholidaygroup.co.uk
OPEN Mid-February – end of October

Auchenlarie sits on the coast of Dumfries and Galloway, with direct access to a quiet and secluded beach, overlooking Wigtown Bay. The sandy beach is a small cove, sheltered by rocky, tree-lined cliffs. The site

is just a short drive from the Galloway Hills and only 11 miles from Galloway Forest Park, making it a convenient base for walking and cycling. The towns of Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbright, Newton Stewart and Castle Douglas are all within a 20-minute drive.

Open from mid-February to the end of October, Auchenlarie offers grass and hardstanding electric pitches, some with sea views, others with views to the distant hills. On-site facilities include an indoor heated pool, sauna, arcade, entertainment, children's play areas, restaurant, takeaway, shop and three bars. Touring amenities provide toilets, showers, dishwashing facilities and a laundry room.

FEN FARM CARAVAN SITE

Moore Lane, East Mersea, Mersea Island, Essex C05 8FE T 01206 383275 W fenfarm.co.uk OPEN 4 March – 31 October

Open from 4 March to 31 October, Fen Farm is set in East Mersea on Mersea Island, with a path leading straight from the site to the beach. A short stroll brings you to the island's dog-friendly sand and shingle shoreline. In the other direction, a pub and local bus service are less than half a mile away, making it easy to explore or simply settle in and unwind.

Next door is Cudmore Grove Country Park, reachable in under five minutes by car or via a walk along the beach. Here you'll find

open green space, a play area and access to the East Mersea Flats Nature Reserve.

The town of West Mersea is just a 10-minute drive away, with a selection of shops, and plenty of places to sample the fresh seafood for which the island is known.

On site, grass pitches with electric (and three hardstanding pitches), toilets and showers, play areas and WiFi are complemented by peaceful surroundings, wildlife-rich fields and woodland walks.



Nicola Pulham/shutterstock.com



BEACHSIDE HOLIDAY PARK

Lethlean Lane, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 5AW
 T 01736 753080
 W beachside.co.uk
 OPEN 28 March – 31 October



Set along the coast of Cornwall, amid the dunes of St Ives Bay, Beachside Holiday Park offers direct access to a wide sandy beach, making it easy to spend your days by the sea. Whether you prefer early morning walks along the three-mile shoreline or relaxed afternoons listening to the waves, the beach is always just moments away.

The campsite provides a range of spacious grass pitches, many with electric hook-ups, and some are full service. Open layouts and coastal views create a comfortable base for a traditional seaside stay.

Facilities on site include modern toilet and shower blocks, a launderette and dishwashing areas, along with a small shop for everyday essentials. For leisure time there is an outdoor pool, surf school, children's play area and a café, restaurant and bar. The touring area is open from 28 March to 31 October, with some facilities only open for part of the season.

CAERFAI BAY CARAVAN & TENT PARK



St Davids, Haverfordwest,
 Pembrokeshire SA62 6QT
 T 01437 720274
 W caerfaibay.co.uk
 OPEN 27 March – 8 November

Caerfai Bay Caravan and Tent Park is a spectacular coastal retreat tucked just outside St Davids, Britain's smallest city. The campsite sits on a gentle hillside overlooking Caerfai Bay, offering sweeping sea views and some of the most dramatic coastline within Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

The real highlight here is the beach itself. Caerfai Bay is a beautiful sandy cove framed by striking red sandstone cliffs.

At low tide, the beach expands to reveal rock pools, and the water is often clear and inviting, ideal for swimming, kayaking, or simply paddling along the shoreline. From the campsite, a short walk leads directly down to the beach, while the nearby coastal path offers breathtaking clifftop walks.

The site is open from 27 March to 8 November, with grass or hardstanding pitches with electric hook-up. There are toilets and showers, family rooms, disabled facilities and a laundry room. Dogs are welcome on site and are accepted on Caerfai beach all year round.



Tamas Gabor/shutterstock.com



FRESHWATER BEACH HOLIDAY PARK

Burton Bradstock, Bridport,
 Dorset DT6 4PT
 T 01308 897317
 W freshwaterbeach.co.uk
 OPEN March – November

If being right beside the sea is an essential for your coastal holiday, Freshwater Beach Holiday Park sits in an enviable spot along the Jurassic Coast.

Set in the Dorset countryside near West Bay, the wide sweep of sandy beach is just steps from some of the touring pitches; close enough to hear the waves at night and wander down with a morning coffee in hand.

The South West Coast Path runs right through the park, making it easy to head out on foot and follow the coastline's curves towards

Burton Bradstock, West Bay and beyond. It's a landscape of sandstone cliffs and long horizons.

On site, there's a choice of grass or hardstanding pitches, some with sea views and full services. The site is open from March to November; an indoor and outdoor pool, restaurant, bars and seasonal entertainment add options. Plus, dogs are welcome on site and on the beach all year round.



DEVON

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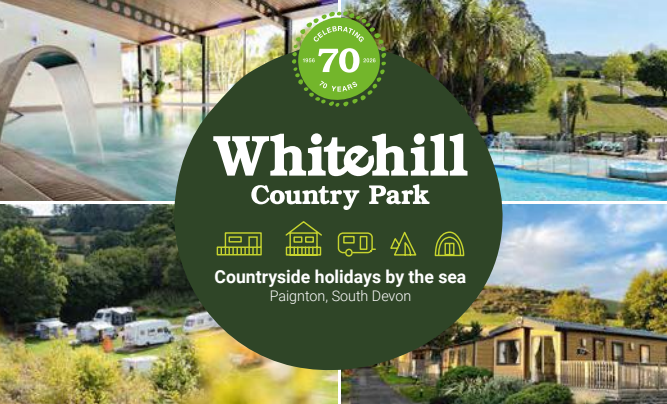
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For an easy-going seaside break, Homing Park is well placed between open countryside and the north Kent coast. Just a 15-minute walk away lies Seasalter Beach – a wide stretch of shoreline known for its big skies and memorable sunsets across the Thames Estuary. It's a lovely spot for relaxing walks, paddling on warm days or joining the Saxon Shore Way, which follows this historic stretch of coast and is ideal for walkers and dogs alike.

Homing Park is open from 1 April to 29 October and offers fully serviced grass pitches with electric hook-up, fresh water and grey waste drainage. There's also an outdoor pool, tennis court, clubhouse, five-a-side pitch and playground, along with toilets, showers and a launderette.

A short drive or cycle brings you to Whitstable, where pastel beach huts line the pebble shore, fishing boats bob offshore and independent galleries, cafés and oyster bars give the town its distinctive, creative charm.



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With a season running from 8 March until 2 November, Warren Caravan and Camping Park sits in woodland on the headland above Budle Bay Nature Reserve. Pitches range from simple grass spots to fully serviced options, and there's also a peaceful adults-only area.

On site there are showers and dishwashing facilities, a launderette, licensed shop, pub and restaurant, plus an outdoor pool and games room. A short nature trail winds through the grounds and St Oswald's Way passes directly through the park, making it easy to set off on foot.

Less than a mile away, the dunes and mudflats of Budle Bay form an important bird sanctuary, while just three miles away lies Bamburgh, dominated by the striking silhouette of Bamburgh Castle above a vast sweep of sand. Inside the castle is a treasure trove of unique artefacts.

A little further north is the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, with a castle, walking routes and vast beaches. Reached by a tidal causeway, the island car park is very campervan friendly but remember to check safe crossing times.

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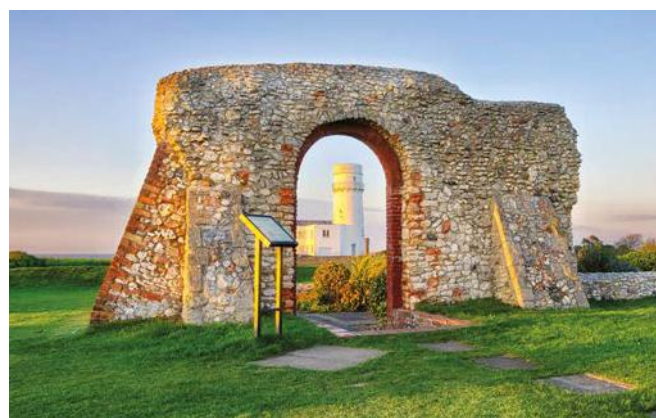
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Open all year, Searles Leisure Resort in Hunstanton gives you a superb base on the north Norfolk coast for a classic seaside break. Pitches come with electric hook-up, 10A for the grass pitches and 16A for the hardstanding pitches that also have TV, water and waste water connections.

On site there are plenty of things to enjoy – an indoor and outdoor pool, a gym, entertainment, bars and restaurants, crazy golf, pétanque court, a golf course, bowling green... the list is endless, and that's just what's on site!

You're a short walk from a vast sandy beach and the wide coastal views of Hunstanton. The beach here is unique on the east coast as it

actually faces west, making for stunning sunsets. You can explore the town's promenade with cafés and amusements, or head up to Old Hunstanton where there is a lighthouse and access onto the Norfolk Coast Path.



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HOLME VALLEY CAMPING & CARAVAN PARK WEST YORKSHIRE



Holme Valley sits just outside the market town of Holmfirth, surrounded by the rolling countryside of West Yorkshire and within easy reach of the Peak District.

Over the past 40 years, the park has grown from a derelict mill site into a well-established destination, now offering a blend of touring pitches and glamping accommodation. Facilities have evolved with it, too, including modern amenities blocks, a reception and a shop, alongside additions like a takeaway food cabin, all designed to make longer stays feel that bit more comfortable.

Despite the changes, the focus has stayed firmly on creating a welcoming, well-kept site that feels personal rather than overdeveloped. Its location is a big part of the appeal, with Holmfirth just a mile away for shops, cafés and restaurants, while walking routes, reservoirs and open countryside are right on the doorstep.

We spoke to Naomi and Ben Humphreys to find out more about the park's 40-year journey.

The award-winning Yorkshire campsite is celebrating its fortieth birthday in 2026

How did Holme Valley first begin?

Before moving back to the UK, Naomi's parents, Hazel and Phil, used to hire out touring caravans on the Mosel River in Germany, where they lived for 10 years. It persuaded them to give up their day jobs and open their own caravan park in Holmfirth, West Yorkshire. The local council was on the lookout for someone to open a caravan park in *Last of the Summer Wine* country, as the

area was becoming well-known and inundated with tourists keen to see the location of the sitcom.

What were those early days like?

Difficult! Developing the land from a derelict mill site led to so much mud that Hazel and Phil feared it would be the last place anyone would want to bring a caravan or tent! Fortunately, grants from the local council and





WE LOVE TO SEE FAMILIES RETURNING EVERY YEAR AND WATCHING CHILDREN GROW UP AND RETURN WITH THEIR OWN FAMILIES

West Yorkshire, as well as winning the *SHE* magazine award for new businesses, helped to keep us afloat.

How has the park changed and developed?

Gradually, over the years, more and more land was bought and added to the park, including farmers' fields and woodland. In 2014, just in time for the hundreds of guests arriving to watch the Tour de France passing



by the park, a new two-storey park building was completed. This houses a reception and shop at the entrance to the park and, below, new toilets and showers as well as family bathrooms. More recently, in 2018, Ben and Naomi introduced glamping accommodation, starting with four cabins; this has now increased to a range of nine accommodation units, including pods and a geodesic dome. The Camping Stove, a takeaway food cabin, opened in 2023.

What have been some of the biggest milestones over the years?

The longest-running British TV comedy programme, *Last of the Summer Wine*, filmed several scenes at the campsite in the early 90s. This was great promotion in the park's early years and made us popular with fans. Getting our first David Bellamy Award for Conservation was another milestone. We received a Silver award in 1995, the second year of the scheme; since then, we have achieved a Gold award every year.

In 2014, the UK leg of the Tour de France cycle race passed the entrance of the park.

Minutes after the announcement, bookings flooded in, leading us to fill a field never used before for camping! We arranged a big screen and a pop-up bar – and the weekend was a great success!

We received the David Bellamy Special Distinction Award in 2015 for the green credentials of our newly built amenities block.

Radio Leeds broadcast live from the park in 2023 during "Rima's Roadtrip," their tour of Yorkshire.

Being selected as a location for a Swift motorhome advert and, very recently, scenes for an upcoming Channel 4 drama. Being crowned Out & About Live Campsite of the Year 2026!

What has stayed the same since the beginning?

Its green ethos. From the very beginning, Phil and Hazel were passionate about conserving wildlife while developing the site. A borehole ensures that the park always has a supply of fresh water. Native trees and hedgerows continue to be planted, and both amenities blocks are run sustainably using biomass boilers and solar thermal panels.



What do you enjoy most about running a campsite after all these years?

Working in a beautiful green location with an excellent team and meeting new customers every day. We love to see families returning each year and watching children grow up and return with their own families.

What have been some of the biggest challenges along the way?

Covid introduced new dynamics; however, it also opened us up to new ideas and developments.

Do you have any memorable stories or moments from guests over the years?

When Naomi's former A-level French student from her teaching days walked into reception to check in and said, "Mrs Humphreys! What are you doing here?!" He became a regular guest, bringing his own children on holidays. We have also had several

couples get engaged while staying at the park.

What do you think keeps people coming back to Holme Valley year after year?

The warm welcome, friendly staff and beautiful setting.

What makes the location of Holme Valley special for visitors?

We are not miles from anywhere, so guests from nearby towns and cities such as Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester can reach us quickly. The market town of Holmfirth, just one mile down the road, is a gem with plenty of independent shops, cafés and restaurants. We are surrounded by many fantastic walking trails and reservoirs, and we are located on the edge of the Peak District.

What does a typical day look like for you?

We started with a team of two (Hazel and Phil), and now the team numbers 25! We see significantly more arrivals every day, and it

can often take two members of staff just to field the phone calls.

What are your hopes for the future of the park?

The park still has plenty of potential! We plan to further our green credentials and build a solar array. We would like to expand our range of accommodation and introduce caravan storage. We are also planning to expand the range of activities for children with woodland walking trails and activity backpacks, and perhaps a Cresta Run and outdoor cinema. We're always looking to run our business in an ethically sound and more sustainable way while being supportive of the environment.

Finally, what do you enjoy doing when you get a rare moment away from the park?

We love the outdoors – walking, biking, skiing, and especially family holidays. We have a campervan, so we can't help enjoying a busman's holiday and checking out what other campsites are doing!

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LIFE BEYOND BRICKS

There's no right or wrong way to do the campervan lifestyle, according to Tash

What a year it's been so far! I've met some lovely people and caught up with lots of familiar faces; we really do have the best community. I've also had the pleasure of interviewing some incredibly interesting people in my sessions at the Out and About Live shows and from that I've gone away with things to ponder. It has made me think about the way I tour and how that has changed over the years, more so in recent times.

The specific panel I'm talking about is the solo female travel discussion I hosted at Campervan Campout earlier in the year. During the course of the chat, we spoke about where people source amenities like water and, inevitably, we talked about safety on the road.

I use campsites for facility runs and also if I want a quiet, comfortable stop. I was surprised to learn, though, that not one of my five guests use campsites. Ever.

I've shared in the past how, when I first started solo travelling, the majority of my stopovers were pub stops and small campsites, to build my confidence. But then I naturally started doing more park-ups and approved stops.

I was in awe, if I'm honest, that none of these ladies ever use sites. Not because solo travel is super scary or that bad things are going to happen, just because even from a practical point of view, I assumed campsites would likely be part of everyone's routine. As spontaneous as I am, when it

comes to knowing where I can top up water and empty my cassette, I like to know I can get it done easily. I'd rather not have to hunt around to find amenities.

I then started thinking about all the stops I've done in recent times and I realised nearly all of them nowadays are pub stops or campsites. And I don't just mean when I'm travelling on my own, I'm talking about in the big 'van with Jon as well. I chatted to him about this and we both agreed, we would rather be relaxed.

I prefer to be comfortable and have guaranteed stops rather than the unknown

Living and working on the road full-time carries a lot of mental load at times, so it makes sense to want to slow some elements down where you can. Especially as we have no fixed base. There is an element of budgeting that comes with it, because using campsites all the time does add up, but it's doable. Plus, the flexibility of the lifestyle means you can switch to whatever you need. Cut back in



one area to add to another.

So, I wondered, have I lost my sense of adventure?

I had a chat with some fellow touring friends about it and came to the conclusion that I am simply in my cosy era, or maybe better referred to as my easy era. I much prefer to be comfortable and have guaranteed stops rather than the element of the unknown.

Is this a natural phase after seven and a half years on the road? I think it is, probably more so after a tough couple of years.

I also reminded myself that, no, I absolutely have not lost my sense of adventure, because what do I always say to people? There is no right or wrong way to enjoy this lifestyle. You do what suits you, that's the whole point! You travel to incredible places, you meet all sorts of wonderful people and you get to do it from the comfort of your home on wheels. How you choose to do that is up to you.



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



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LIFE'S A BEACH

Heading to the coast this summer? Iain Duff brings you the 10 essential things you need to do when you're beside the seaside

Campervanning is good for the soul... and camping by the coast is even better. There's something about breathing in the sea air and feeling sand between your toes that just makes you feel so much better. In the UK, no one lives much more than 80 miles from the coast, so it's not surprising that thousands of us head for the seaside every weekend. And, of course, the best option is to take your 'van to one of the many campsites on

or close to our coastline. Here's 10 things you should do once you've parked up.

1. ENJOY THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

Part of the charm of seaside resorts is the traditional attractions like the piers, amusement arcades and funfairs. Kids might be more sophisticated these days thanks to video games and non-stop social media, but they still love the thrill of stuffing 2p coins

into brightly lit up machines or being hurled into the air on a rickety old fairground ride.

2. WATCH THE SUN SET

For a more genteel way to pass the time, cast your eyes eastwards. If you're lucky enough to find a pitch with a sea view, chances are you'll spend many an evening sitting outside your camper, gazing in awe as the sun sinks slowly into the sea.

Words and pictures ■ Iain Duff



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3. SCOFF 'JUNK' FOOD

No trip to the coast is complete without generous helpings of fish and chips, ice cream and a traditional stick of rock. Some of our seaside towns will try to tempt you with 'exotic' stuff like kebabs and burgers, but don't succumb. Cod and chips is the only acceptable fast food to eat when you're strolling along the prom. But watch out for the seagulls.

4. EAT FRESHLY CAUGHT SEAFOOD

If you insist on eating more healthily, the seaside is the place to do it. You don't need to cast a line off a pier or go rummaging around in rock pools for seaweed to enjoy the fresh taste of the sea. We've already mentioned the joys of cod from a seaside chippy, but there are plenty of other seafood specialities available around Britain. For example, tuck into potted shrimps in Morecambe, dressed crab in Norfolk or smokies in Arbroath. Whitstable in Kent is a seafood lover's paradise, famed for its shellfish, and there is an annual oyster festival in the town.



5. TAKE THE PLUNGE

OK, so the waters around Britain can be just a bit chilly, but that doesn't mean you can't have a swim, as long as you do it safely. What could be better on a sunny summer's morning than an early dip in the briny before rushing back up to your van for bacon and eggs and a mug of tea? And for those of you that like the idea of catching some waves, many beaches have wetsuits and surfboards for hire, with some offering lessons for beginners.



6. HUNT FOR TREASURE

Imagine taking a stroll along the beach and discovering a rock containing the fossilised remains of a creature that lived millions of years ago. The beauty of fossil hunting is that you really don't have to put much effort into it. Although fossils can be found in all sorts of places, the beach is the most common place to look for them and the most suitable for children. They can keep an eye open as they dig in the sand or paddle in the sea.



Dorset's Jurassic Coast is one of the best places in Britain to find fossils and the best area to search for them is around Charmouth and Lyme Regis. But it's not just prehistoric treasures you'll find on the beach. Arm yourself with a metal detector and go searching for shiny stuff.

7. BROWSE THE SHOPS

We love the tacky souvenir and gift shops that line the promenades in seaside towns. You can stock up on everything from buckets and spades to giant inflatables. You'll also find hundreds of postcards on sale.

Letter writing is becoming a forgotten art but the kids will love choosing a postcard and sending a quick note home to grandparents and school friends – and getting a card in the post is so much better than an email or WhatsApp message. Away from the kiss-me-quick hats, there are plenty of upmarket independent stores selling quirky seaside-themed knick-knacks that you won't find anywhere else – especially in more upmarket resorts like St Ives and Southwold.



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8. HAVE A PICNIC

Soggy sandwiches and cans of warm fizzy pop are so 1980s. These days a seaside picnic is a far more exotic affair, whether you prepare it yourself or buy everything from the local deli. You could even take a mini barbecue and cook some chicken wings on the beach. Don't forget to pack sun hats and sun cream to protect from the sun's rays and a windbreak is essential to stop sand getting into your

sandwiches. You could even hire a beach hut for the ultimate seaside experience.

9. WATCH THE WILDLIFE

The cliffs, rocky shores, sandy dunes and muddy estuaries of Britain's coastline are habitats for all sorts of marine life; birds, mammals, fish and plants. Britain has some of the most important sea bird colonies in the world and at the coast you can look out for gulls, terns, oystercatchers, gannets, puffins, guillemots and kittiwakes. Along parts of the coast, seals, dolphins and even whales and sharks can sometimes be seen. Grey and common seals are fascinating creatures to watch in their natural habitat and there are plenty of places to spot them around the British coast, including Blakeney in Norfolk, Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire, Donna Nook seal colony in Lincolnshire, the Orkney Islands, Cornwall, Moray Firth and Farne Islands National Nature Reserve.



10. EXPLORE ROCK POOLS

Youngsters love poking around in rock pools and it's a great way of introducing them to the wildlife that's to be found on our coastline. Grab a net and explore the many pools that appear when the tide goes out. You can spend hours searching for all sorts of marine life left behind by the sea. And even if you don't discover any living creatures, you're sure to uncover some interesting-looking rocks and stones.



10 GREAT BRITISH SEASIDE RESORTS

What's better than a traditional British seaside resort? Here are our 10 favourites – all of them perfect for a campervan getaway

- 1 Blackpool, Lancashire
- 2 St Ives, Cornwall
- 3 Whitstable, Kent
- 4 Whitby, Yorkshire
- 5 Great Yarmouth, Norfolk
- 6 St Andrews, Fife
- 7 Newquay, Cornwall
- 8 Cromer, Norfolk
- 9 Llandudno, North Wales
- 10 Lyme Regis, Dorset



BUILDING CONNECTIONS



Whether you are looking for advice on your 'van or what you need to buy, inspiration on where to go, a boost of confidence for your first trip or to find new friends, online forums can be an invaluable part of your 'vanning experience.

They certainly were for me. When I bought my 'van, I was a nervous wreck. I lacked confidence and knowledge and, although I was planning adventures, I was scared of the reality of putting those plans into action.

As she handed over the 'van keys, the previous owner could see how worried I looked. "Check out the forums, there's loads of support on there," she said.

How right she was. The choice of communities is a little overwhelming. As well as the essential advice in the magazine itself, *Campervan* magazine has its own forum,

Motorhome Matters (forums.outandaboutlive.co.uk/forum/11-motorhome-matters/) as well as a presence across social channels including Facebook and Instagram where you can connect with other 'van owners. Campervan Campout is an annual festival organised by the people behind the magazine and the website outandaboutlive.co.uk

But that's just the tip of the iceberg of the forums available online. I joined several, gaining confidence and making connections that would help me on my way. Some of the forums were geared to planning trips, others answered more technical questions about the mechanics of the 'van itself (a VW T4) and some were women-only, providing a place of encouragement, support and inspiration.

It was one of the latter that was the most

Words ■ Liz Morrell

New to campervanning? Online forums and groups can be a great way to get advice – and even find new friends



useful to me in those early days – a safe space where I could share my nerves. And it's where I would be inspired by others to dream bigger as my experience grew.

One of those who inspired me was Lynne. What I didn't realise was that the forums had provided the same lifeline for her when she was starting out.

Like me, she used forums for advice on finding a 'van and to answer what she describes as basic newbie questions. "I started off knowing nothing, so it was a huge learning curve," she says.

She soon found the groups where she felt most comfortable – something that's even more important when you are new to campervan life. "I migrated to the groups that gave sensible answers rather than sarcastic comments. Everyone has to start somewhere and sarcasm really isn't helpful," she says.

But Lynne had one flaw in her plan for new adventures – she didn't know anyone else with a campervan. "I soon tired of dragging non-camping friends off with me, with all the extras that brings, such as awnings, airbeds, bedding, hosting, etc.

"I also found that while I wanted social

DUBBED OUT VW COMMUNITY

One of the biggest VW-specific online forums is the Dubbed Out VW Community, comprising more than 68,000 Facebook members and managed by event organisers, Neil Green and Germaine Williams.

The pair launched the community in October 2019 to connect 'van owners and ultimately create an audience for their plans to launch a campervan festival, which followed in 2022. Although the ultimate aim of the group was commercial, Germaine says the community had to stand alone, too, and for that it needed to feel nurtured and genuine.

"We used a few tricks we'd learned over the years to ensure the group grew fast and the members felt special," he says. "In the first few years, rather than sell, we gave away thousands of pounds' worth of stickers. It was about getting our logo on as many Volkswagen campervans as possible.

"That worked really well. It made them part of a club and put our name on thousands of campervans, giving people an instant connection and a reason to say hello to their neighbour on random campsites across the country."

Policing the group – as in any successful forum – has been essential to its success, says Germaine. "We were quite ruthless with those who were rude to other members," he says. "Our approach meant people felt safe posting and asking questions, knowing our admin team would not allow anyone to behave badly towards others."

In 2020, the first in-person meet-ups of members of the group followed just after the first initial lockdown restrictions were relaxed. "They were small camping weekends that sold out overnight," says Germaine. They grew in size, followed by the festival in 2022. "Today, the campouts attract up to 300 'vans and around 900 people each time. If we do four campouts a year that's over 3,500 people who have made new friends," he says.

Like Lynne, Germaine says it's OK to start with baby steps when joining a forum or thinking about attending a group meet-up. "My advice would be, join the Facebook group. Be brave, post a picture and let us know you're new and nervous. Don't be afraid to ask questions. I can promise you, you'll receive a warm welcome."



contact whilst campervanning, I also like my own space – and you don't get that when you take people with you."

In 2018, after eight months of owning her first 'van, she joined an online group in the northwest and one in the Midlands.

"The first meet-up event that came up was in the Peak District and I set off with some fear," she recalls. "I had no clue what to expect, thinking it would all be hippy, crocheting camper chicks or conversations about mechanics, solar and split chargers. It was neither.

"Instead, I met the loveliest bunch of kind people, who were sociable, shared a love of the outdoors and were happy to help a newbie with questions," she says.

Eight years on, Lynne still keeps in touch with most of the people from that first group

STARTING AGAIN

For Alice, 'van forums have been a lifeline to making new friends and having new adventures after her husband died in 2020. "We had three campervans during our time together. After he died, I bought my first 'van, a Toyota Granvia with a push-up roof," she says.

"Someone had mentioned a women's camping group to me. I joined the group as I didn't really want to go off on my own as I wasn't confident enough," she says.

On her first trip, she met up with five other women. "It was a wet and cold few days but I loved it. The ladies were all friendly and suggested a few items I might need to buy to make camping more enjoyable."

After nine months Alice upgraded to a bigger 'van, by which time she'd joined several other forum groups. "Through the groups you meet lots of different people, from all different backgrounds. Some even end up becoming very close friends."

She advises anyone to just try a forum meet-up. "To those trying camping on their own I'd say join the groups initially to get some ideas about where to go, etc, and then leave the groups if you like to be on your own. I don't. I never go away on my own as I enjoy the company of others. There's always someone who wants to join you on a trip."



meet-up. "But I also made two lifelong friends there who I've had many adventures with since," she says.

Those adventures, including 'van trips to the likes of Spain, France and New Zealand, have continued to inspire, with Lynne sharing her adventures on the same forums. "I have written about my travels partly to show that if I can do it, anyone can do it, and partly for my own entertainment," she says.

But it's also useful companionship on solo trips, she points out. "It's a joy to wake up to all the comments when travelling solo and feeling you're not on your own," she says.

Her first experience of a meet-up also encouraged her to set up her own local 'camper chicks' group serving Yorkshire and the northeast only a month after. "It was slow to start with only a handful of members the first few years and a very informal vibe, but we had good times with small and local chilled meets," she says.

"The first one was just a day meet in the Yorkshire Dales – I think about 10 'vans turned up. I have deliberately kept anything I have organised to 12 'vans to keep that 'small and friendly' vibe."

Today, Lynne's group comprises around 1,800 members. "It's still small in the scheme of things, but nice as, if someone organises a meet-up, there is a good chance that you'll get a good mix of long-term members and people new to the group," she says.

"The main focus is around being



supportive, whether that is sharing contacts who have been helpful in 'van maintenance, great places to stay, asking questions or meeting like-minded people," she says.

Lynne's tales of lifelong friendships made and experiences enjoyed echo in my head. Despite owning my 'van for five years and writing this feature, I have never actually been to an organised forum meet-up. Part of the reason is nerves, as well as the freedom that a solo trip allows.

But she urges me to try a meet-up. "Be brave and do it," she says. "If you're really nervous, maybe arrange to stay for one night only. That's what I did. I think I stayed for three in the end as I was enjoying myself so much.

"Once you have been to the first one, then it's likely you will have made some connections there that make future ones less scary. Hopefully, like me, you will never look back. I have had the best time," she says.

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GEAR OF THE YEAR 2026

Are you looking to pick up some new accessories for your campervan adventures? This selection of award-winning kit is as good as it gets

Every year, our colleagues on the camping section of the Out & About Live website celebrate the best outdoor kit of the year.

The annual Out & About Live Camping Awards are the biggest and best in the UK – covering tents and outdoor accessories of all kinds.

Of course, lots of the camping equipment that is used by tent campers is just as useful for campervanners. And that's why we've picked out some of the highlights of the 2026 awards that we know campervanners will love.

The Camping Awards are all about helping readers decide how to spend their hard-earned cash.

When money is tight, you need to know that the gear you're spending your cash on is worth the outlay. Value for money, innovation, versatility and style are all taken into account when it comes to handing out the prizes. But sometimes it just comes down to what has that indefinable something, the X factor that sets it apart from everything else.

The winners all have one thing in common – the expert seal of approval.

RUCKSACK KELTY REDWING TRAVELER 50



SLEEPING BAG OUTWELL CONSTELLATION LUX XL



If your idea of camping comfort leans towards boutique hotel, the Outwell Constellation Lux XL sleeping bag (which costs around £120) is going to be right up your street. Designed for campers who refuse to compromise on a good night's sleep, this generously proportioned bag delivers space, softness and serious warmth in equal measure.

What really sets it apart is its bed-like feel. The ultra-soft brushed outer and cosy cotton lining are immediately inviting, while the premium Isofill filling ensures reliable insulation from spring through to autumn. It's properly roomy too, so you won't feel restricted if you tend to toss and turn in your sleep. The addition of a removable, integrated pillow – neatly tucked into the hood – adds a touch more night-time comfort.

On warmer nights, the Constellation Lux XL can be fully unzipped to create a



Long regarded as US brand Kelty's most iconic backpack, the **Redwing** has been refined rather than reinvented, making it a brilliant choice for hikers, festivalgoers and travellers who want one bag that does it all. The updated model introduces an advanced perimeter frame for improved load stability, alongside the FIT-Pro adjustment system that allows a quick, dialled-in torso fit on the move. Comfort is further boosted by the new AMP-Flow ventilated back panel, helping reduce heat build-up on longer days on the trail. Practicality is a standout, too: wing side pockets now feature slots for trekking poles or fishing rods, while the clever hybrid U-zip opening lets you switch between top-loading simplicity and full panel access. At £140, it delivers serious versatility without pushing into premium expedition pricing, and that balance of durability, comfort and smart design is exactly what makes it a winner for 2026.



large, luxurious duvet, perfect for couples or for sprawling out solo. Add in its PFAS-free construction and 100% recycled polyester filling, and you've got a product that's as responsible as it is comfortable.

In short, this is camping sleep done properly. Plush, practical and packed with thoughtful details.

Highly commended in the awards was the **Trail Alpine 400 XL**. At just £44.99, this is outstanding value. Its extra-large size, cosy -5°C rating and soft lining make it ideal for taller campers or anyone wanting warmth, space and comfort without breaking the bank.

COOLBOX/FRIDGE COLEMAN SNAP 'N GO COOLER

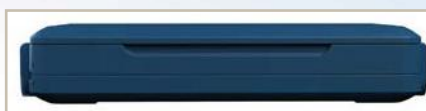
If you've ever wrestled with a bulky coolbox when packing the car, the Coleman Snap 'N Go Cooler feels like a bit of a revelation. Priced from £129.99 (35QT), £159.99 (45QT) to £189.99 (55QT), it cleverly bridges the gap between rigid durability and soft-shell practicality.

Aimed at everyone from campers to festival-goers and beach-day adventurers, its standout feature is the foldable design. It collapses down to around a third of its full size, making storage at home – or squeezing it into an already packed boot or campervan – far less of a headache. When you need it, it snaps into shape in seconds, with the reassuring sturdiness of a traditional hard cooler.

Performance is equally impressive. The removable TPU liner keeps ice frozen for up to 55 hours, while also offering antibacterial protection that tackles odours and keeps things hygienic, making it ideal for longer trips. It's fully leakproof, easy to clean, and thoughtfully designed with sturdy side handles for carrying.

What make it stand out – and ultimately wins it the award – is the balance of innovation and usability. It solves a real problem without compromising cooling performance, making it a versatile companion for modern camping life.

Highly commended was the **Igloo Trailmate**, a rugged all-terrain favourite. The Trailmate is a stylish coolbox built for serious outdoor use. With oversized wheels, sturdy construction and excellent ice retention, it's ideal for campsites and beaches alike. At £159 for the 25Qt version, its price compares favourably with similarly influencer-friendly Yeti coolers.





COOKER

CAMPINGAZ CAMP & TREK TWIN CV & ROBENS FIRE FINCH DOUBLE STOVE

The winner in this category (Campingaz Twister CV Connect) is aimed at the sort of wild campers who pitch a tiny tent at the top of a mountain, but the two highly commended products will be of more interest to campervanners.

Ideal for sociable campers and families, the **Campingaz Camp & Trek Twin CV** (£110) is a lightweight double-burner stove that makes outdoor cooking beside your 'van easy. Dual 2,000W burners, simple EasyClic connection and excellent stability combine to deliver reliable performance. The **Robens Fire Finch Double Stove** is a dual-burner stove that offers consistent heat, wind protection and solid stability. With independent controls and piezo ignition, it's a great option for campers wanting dependable, fuss-free cooking in a small package and, at just £65, it's a bargain.



WALKING BOOTS/SHOES

LOWA INNOVO GTX



For the last six months, our editor and gear awards head judge, Iain, has been in training for a hike to the summit of Snowdon and the **Lowa Innovo GTX** has been his go-to shoe throughout the process.

They were put through their paces in a variety of weather conditions, and on a range of terrain, from long, flat Tarmac roads and stone paths to tricky uneven footpaths and some steep inclines.

They dealt admirably with whatever they encountered, impressing with the balance between comfort, support and durability –

the holy trinity for serious (and not so serious) walkers.

Shoes and boots (these are available in both low and mid) are obviously a personal thing, but what immediately stood out with the Innovo was the fit. They were comfortable straight out of the box, no need for them to be 'worn in'.

The broader toe box gives your feet room to breathe (and swell on those longer hikes), while Lowa's Monowrap support frame gently cradles the foot to keep everything stable over uneven ground. Underfoot, the

double-injected DynaPU+ midsole delivers cushioning that doesn't fade after a few miles – or even a few hundred.

Grip is equally confidence-inspiring thanks to the chunky outsole, with multidirectional lugs and a defined heel brake that come into their own on softer, muddier terrain.

Add in a breathable suede and fabric upper, plus a Gore-Tex membrane to keep the worst of the British weather at bay, and you've got a true all-conditions performer. And they won't look out of place in the pub!



FURNITURE

VANGO ATLAS CHAIR

The Vango Atlas is a camping chair that delivers on the promise of relaxation, offering an oversized, generously padded seat that you'll happily sink into after a long day outdoors.

Built around a robust steel frame, the Atlas doesn't just prioritise comfort – it backs it up with serious strength, supporting up to 180kg. The DuoWeave fabric strikes an excellent balance, too; tough enough to handle years of campsite use, yet soft enough to make you forget you're sitting outside. Thoughtful touches elevate it further, from the padded armrests that make getting in and out effortless, to the wide, stabilising feet that prevent sinking into softer ground (a small detail that

makes a big difference on soggy British campsites).

What really sets the Atlas apart is how it blends that lounge-like feel with practical portability. The detachable headrest frame reduces pack size, and it all stows neatly into a carry bag with compression straps for easy transport. Add in a handy side storage pocket, and you've got a chair that feels genuinely designed around real camping life.

Also worthy of note is the **Trail Slimfold Kitchen Stand**, a brilliantly practical bit of kit that is ideal for an outdoor cooking set-up by your campervan. Its quick-fold design, generous workspace and clever storage options make meal prep effortless, while the lightweight frame and compact pack size ensure it's as portable as it is useful.





JACKET

SPRAYWAY CWT ACTIVE TL JACKET

The Sprayway CWT Active TL is a well thought-out jacket designed for proper UK hillwalking and the kind of weather that can't make its mind up. The genius is its modular approach: a windproof TecShell outer and a breathable PrimaLoft Active Evolve inner that can be worn separately or together depending on output, terrain and temperature.

That adaptability is backed up by proper technical thinking. The TecShell outer is windproof, highly water-resistant and packs away neatly, while the Active Evolve inner uses lofted fibres to regulate warmth and dump excess heat during high-output climbs. Together they form a lightweight layering system that feels far more than the sum of its parts.

It's this versatility that makes it a winner: one jacket system that can switch from storm-lashed ridgelines to breezy valley miles without faff, fuss or overheating drama. Perfect for committed walkers who need reliability on the move.



ACCESSORY

EASY CAMP MOSS TOUR COOK SET

If there's one thing that can make or break a camping trip, it's dinner. And the Easy Camp Moss Tour Cook Set makes sure you're eating well rather than wrestling with a pile of mismatched pans. Designed for adventurers who value space, simplicity and solid performance, this compact cooking system is a masterclass in efficient outdoor living.

The set's stackable design and included carry bag mean it slips neatly into your kit without swallowing half your storage space. The clever MicroGrid anti-stick base helps prevent food from sticking and saves you from the dreaded "camp pasta scrape", while integrated lid strainers make draining water fuss-free.



It's firmly aimed at campers, vanlifers and lightweight travellers who don't want to compromise on proper cooking kit – and it delivers exactly that, without any drama or clutter.

Highly commended in this category is the Coleman Ultimate Terrain Wagon. Built for serious camp hauls, this rugged wagon takes 180kg across all terrain thanks to fat, wide tyres. With a 132-litre capacity, side storage pockets and a foldable handle, it's ideal for festivals, family camping and trips to the beach. It folds down compactly when the adventure ends.

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Words ■ Iain Duff

LICENCE TO GRILL

Nothing says summer campervanning like a barbecue. Follow our guide for everything you need to know – from the type of fuel to what to cook



For the uninitiated, cooking outdoors involves barbecuing a few bangers and burgers to a crisp and wondering why everybody scoffs all the tortilla chips and dips but leaves the cremated pile of meat products on the side of their plate.

But with just a little planning, you can be rustling up gourmet meals on the campsite in around the same time it takes to heat up a tin of baked beans.

With a few essential items and a selection of condiments, herbs and spices, you really can transcend the monotony of conventional camping fare.

The key to the perfect barbecue is to use what's in season locally. Locally grown veg and produce picked up at the nearest farmers' market or the village shop all helps support the local economy.

When eaten outside just yards from where it was caught, raised or cultivated, even the simplest fresh local produce tastes better than the most complicated haute cuisine concoction. Inland, try to find authentic local sausages and pork chops from happy outdoor-reared pigs. But a word to the wise here: it isn't just about meat. Fish is fantastic on the barbie – just don't overcook it.

At the seaside, look out for fresh mackerel and sardines, which are absolutely brilliant cooked simply on the barbecue. Whether it's salmon steaks or sea bass fillets, fish is done in a matter of minutes and is best cooked with its skin on to protect the delicate flesh.

Explore the opportunities offered by vegetables and a vast new horizon opens up. How about fine green beans or fresh asparagus spears wrapped in a bit of streaky



bacon or Parma ham and griddled over hot coals for five minutes?

Corn on the cob brushed with melted butter makes a refreshing alternative to potatoes and if you can get your hands on a load of ripe red bell peppers, slicing them into strips, coating with oil and grilling over a hot barbecue turns them into a smoky, sticky, sweet side dish to savour.

GAS OR CHARCOAL?

It's the eternal question and, increasingly, campers are opting for the hassle-free heat afforded by gas. Lightweight, portable gas-fired grills are as easy to pack as a traditional grill and the cylinders come in a variety of sizes – just make sure you get the right attachment for your particular barbecue.

The biggest benefits of a gas barbecue are speed, control and consistency. You can be cooking within minutes of lighting the grill and it's easy to turn the heat up or down, with no risk of losing heat at a critical point in the cooking – as long as you check there's sufficient gas in the cylinder.

Compact gas cartridges are fine for the occasional beach barbecue, but if you plan to use your barbecue every day, invest in the largest cylinder that it's compatible with – it will save money in the long run and provide

CHECKLIST

- Wooden chopping board
- Long-handled tongs, spatula and fork
- A set of sharp knives
- A grater
- Pestle and mortar (for grinding seeds and spices)
- Kitchen roll
- Olive oil
- Box of flaked sea salt
- Black pepper mill
- Cumin, coriander and fennel seeds
- Paprika
- Dried chillies
- Fresh herbs: garlic, rosemary, thyme, coriander, basil, bay leaves



more consistent fire power.

While it's certainly convenient, barbecue purists insist that a gas barbecue simply can't replicate the smoky flavours imparted by a traditional charcoal grill and as long as you have plenty of time, we're inclined to agree.

Charcoal barbecues generally fall into one of two categories: open griddle or closed kettle-type versions. The open type is ideal for cooking sausages, burgers, steaks, fish and simple veggies, but won't cope with anything much bigger than a thick juicy steak.

Kettle barbecues cook things more slowly over a longer period and, although the cooking technique requires a little more practice, the reward is food that tastes like nothing you've ever cooked at home in the oven or on a grill.

To get the best results on a griddle barbecue, use charcoal briquettes, which tend to last longer and deliver a more even heat. Pile them up in the bottom of the barbie and get them started with a little lighting liquid or gel. Don't overdo this, or the taste will taint your food.

Once the briquettes have turned light grey, spread them out in an even layer over the

bottom of the grill and pop the grate over. Give it a few minutes to warm up then get griddling. Brush any items that don't contain their own fat with a bit of olive oil or melted butter to get that tasty caramelised charring on the outside.

Kettle barbecues are also best fuelled with briquettes, but once they're up to temperature, they need to be arranged around the outside of the kettle before the grate goes on, followed by the lid. Once the kettle is up to temperature, put the chicken, leg of lamb or whatever you want to barbecue on the grate then replace the lid.

Adjust the vents so that a steady stream of air can reach the briquettes to keep them burning and leave the joint for as long as it takes; That might be anything up to a couple of hours, or even longer depending on the size of the piece of meat. Resist the temptation to lift the lid to check it until you think it's ready.

There's a fair bit of trial and error involved at first, but once you've tasted a smoky roast chicken, a whole side of wild salmon or a butterflied leg of lamb cooked in a kettle, the traditional Sunday roast will never be the same again.



TOP BBQ TIPS

Here's some of our best tips to enjoy a successful camping barbecue:

- Always check your chosen campsite is OK with barbecues and the particular type you intend to bring along. Some operators are wary of fire pit-type designs that end up being used for keeping people warm rather than cooking
- Barbecuing can be a great opportunity for family and friends to gather around and enjoy a meal and more... but do spare a thought for your campsite neighbours. Not everyone appreciates the smoke
- Keep your barbecue off the grass to prevent it from scorching
- Make sure your barbecue is stable at the start of your preparations
- A reliable temperature probe gives you confidence to serve properly cooked food.
- Keep an antibacterial hand cleanser or a bowl of water and supply of towels (paper or otherwise) handy when outdoor cooking so you can wash your hands after handling raw meat
- A small plant sprayer filled with water can be used to prevent your barbecue getting too hot
- Never spray lighting fuel on warm coals to revive the barbecue
- It's always worth considering a fire extinguisher and/or blanket to accompany your first aid kit
- Never be tempted to drag a barbecue into your awning for warmth, post-cooking. The carbon monoxide gas that is generated by smouldering coals is a killer
- When cleaning, fire up the barbecue to full heat and 'burn off' the cooking grate. Once the residue has dried and carbonised, brush it clean with a T-brush.



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

FORESTRY ENGLAND LAUNCHES NEW OVERNIGHT STOP SCHEME



Forestry England has announced a new scheme allowing overnight stops at a select group of locations across the country.

Running from 16 July to 14 September, 2026, this limited-time experience invites campervan and motorhome users to plan a scenic trip through England's forests.

The stopovers are designed for fully self-contained campervans and motorhomes only, and size limits apply. The limits are 7.5m long and 5,000kg GVW; lower limits of 6.5m and three tonnes apply at Cardinham Woods. Tents (including roof-top tents), trailers and caravans will not be permitted.

Among the locations featured are Bedgebury National Pinetum and Jeskyns Community Woodland in Kent, High Lodge in Thetford Forest, Suffolk, Wendover Woods in Buckinghamshire, Cardinham Woods in Cornwall, Gisburn Forest in Lancashire and Kielder Castle in Northumberland.

The route has been chosen to include a mix of action-packed activities like mountain biking and outdoor adventures as well as more casual strolls.

Visitors can stay for a maximum of 48 hours and are asked to follow Forestry England's Forest Code and leave no trace. Prices are £14 per night for members and £16 for non-members in all locations except Kielder Castle, where it's £15 per night for all. Pre-booking is essential at all locations apart from Kielder.

There will be no electric hook-up or waste disposal available, and visitors are asked to check the code of conduct on the website, where you can also book your stay.

• forestryengland.uk/campervan-stopovers

BOND'S M WAS A CLUB MEMBER



The real-life inspiration for James Bond's 'M' has been identified as an early member of the Caravan and Motorhome Club. Sir

Mansfield Cumming, the first Director of what became MI6, appears in the Club's early membership records. Cumming was known for signing official papers with a single 'C' in green ink and is widely considered to be the inspiration for Ian Fleming's fictional head of the Secret Intelligence Service.

The detail has been highlighted as the Caravan and Motorhome Club Collection marks 20 years at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu. Cumming's name appears mainly in early membership lists, but his connection adds an unusual note to the Club's history. It also gives a glimpse of the type of people who were involved in the early touring movement, long before campervans and caravans became mainstream.

Sara Riccabone, Caravan and Motorhome Club Curator at the National Motor Museum, said the discovery adds, "a whole new layer of intrigue" to the early membership records, "It seems even the head of the Secret Service needed a pitch in the New Forest to get away from it all!"

AUTO-SLEEPERS APPOINTS NEW NORTHEAST DEALER

Auto-Sleepers has announced the appointment of a new dealer, Durham Caravans & Motorhomes, based in Newton Aycliffe. The County Durham



dealer was established in 2018 and has 10 members of staff and operates a six-bay service workshop alongside its dealership. It is also an AWS Approved Service Centre.

Owners Paul and Craig commented: "We are incredibly proud and honoured to have been chosen by Auto-Sleepers UK as an official retailer of their exceptional motorhomes and campervans."

The partnership strengthens Auto-Sleepers' presence in the region, giving buyers another dedicated retailer through which to explore the brand's latest models.

CORNWALL NAMED UK TOP DESTINATION



Cornwall has been named the UK's top holiday destination for campervan and motorhome owners, according to new research from insurance specialist, Safeguard.

A survey of 500 motorhome and campervan owners found that 26% chose Cornwall as their preferred place to stay in the UK, ahead of the Lake District, which received 22% of the vote. Devon followed in third place with 16%, while the Scottish Highlands and Dorset completed the top five, with 12% and 5% respectively.

Cornwall also came out on top for campsites, with Beachside Holiday Park named the most popular site in the UK, receiving 13% of the vote. Carlyon Bay Caravan and Camping Park, also in Cornwall, placed second with 7%.

The top five campsites named in the survey were Beachside Holiday Park in Cornwall, Carlyon Bay Caravan and Camping Park in Cornwall, Glen Nevis Caravan and Camping Park in the Highlands, Freshwater Beach in Dorset and Pennine View Caravan Park in Cumbria.

YORKSHIRE CARAVANS & MOTORHOMES CHANGES HANDS

Yorkshire Caravans and Motorhomes, which had been owned by the same family for 100 years, has changed hands. The new owner, Jason Cooper, is a UK-based entrepreneur and investor with interests across multiple sectors. The business will continue to operate from its 34-acre site near Bawtry, selling campervans, motorhomes, caravans, awnings and accessories.

Jason Cooper, who has been closely involved in the business over the past year, said: "This is a business with strong foundations, a great team and a loyal customer base. Our focus now is to build on that success, improve performance across the business and continue delivering a best-in-class customer experience. There is significant opportunity ahead, and we intend to realise it."



CELLO UNVEILS 5G SMART TV



Cello has launched the world's first 12V Smart TV with a built-in 5G router, designed for leisure vehicles.

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MOOR THE MERRIER

We visit a campervan dealer where they prefer a friendly chat over a cuppa to high-pressure sales techniques

For many people, buying a campervan is fulfilling a lifelong dream. It should be a joyful experience. But, too often it can be a stressful process. Hertfordshire and Yorkshire-based dealer, Moorlake, wants to change all that.

Like many others, the Moorlake journey really got started in the post-Covid campervan boom. But this is a business that has chosen to take a different route to its

rivals... and it seems to be paying off.

Rather than employing high-pressure, target-driven sales techniques, Moorlake's directors, John Flintham and Ed Sylvester, prefer a more conversational approach with potential customers.

That means sitting down over a cup of tea in their Watford and Hull showrooms, having a chat and establishing what kind of 'van would suit their customers. "We just try and look after the customers," says Ed. "If you put the customer first, and the product is also fantastic, then you get them coming back in time and time again."

"We don't have a sales team. We don't have any sales targets. Vic, who works with us six days a week, started off just valeting and we found out very quickly that just by talking to people, he was selling more 'vans than anyone else."

Ed recalls seeing customers physically tense up as they walked onto the Moorlake forecourt, fearing the hard sell, but that's not



part of the Moorlake approach.

"Buying a campervan should be a fantastic experience," says Ed. "This is a lifelong dream for a lot of people. So, our ethos really is to make someone a cup of tea and have a chat. You just see people relax a little bit and then it's a conversation. It's not, 'We think you should buy this campervan'. It's 'What do you want from a 'van? Have we got something that fits?' And most of the time we find someone a





'van that works for them."

Moorlake started as a car dealership and moved into campervans in 2019, but it was the explosion in popularity of campervans in the wake of the pandemic that saw the business really take off. It's an independent dealer rather than a manufacturer – so it outsources its conversions, but they are all built to their own spec. Both outlets have a variety of different colours in stock and ready to drive away, with prices on new campervans ranging from £55,000 to £75,000.

Moorlake specialises in VW Transporter conversions and the latest model – the Liberty – is built on the new T7. Simplicity is an important part of what is on offer, though. Instead of a huge number of layouts and a seemingly endless list of optional extras, Moorlake basically has one model that you can tweak to fit your own taste. The idea is that one model will include pretty much everything on most peoples' wish lists.

The Liberty is available as a manual or with an eight-speed automatic gearbox and there's

an Austops pop-top roof with a large sprung bed. Downstairs is a sliding three-seater bench with Isofix which converts into a flat double bed. You can slide it forward on its rails to maximise load space in the rear.

A key new feature is the optional EcoFlow 1kW portable power station, a cost-effective way of going off-grid. It gives you the ability to power all manner of electrical gadgets even when you're not hooked up to the mains. Other features include a 150W solar panel and a 200Ah lithium leisure battery, a two-ring gas hob, 50-litre fridge and a microwave, which can be swapped out for a cupboard if you prefer. Not to mention a very neat pull-out worktop extension.

Ed says, "We love the 'van. What we've tried to do over the years is take feedback from customers. People would say, 'I love that one, but it hasn't got a sliding bed or it hasn't got solar, it hasn't got a diesel heater, and I need five seats, etc. So, we thought, let's try and fit everything into the 'van and then no one can say it's missing this or missing that. We've tried to build a 'van that includes everything on most of people's wish list."

Across the Watford and Hull branches there are around 40 'vans of varying colours, inside and outside. You can choose something that is in stock and ready to drive away or you could request a specific colour and interior. Vans are bought direct from VW dealers





upholstery, the worktops, the furniture, etc.

“If you were to look at a ‘van and say, ‘I love everything about it apart from the upholstery’, I can change the upholstery for you and you can take this ‘van. Or if you don’t like the worktop or the cupboards or the flooring, we can build you a ‘van to your exact specs; all the edging, the worktops, everything. That’s the sort of flexibility we offer people.”

You might imagine that this level of flexibility would impact on the price, but that’s not the case. As Ed explains, “The only thing that’s affecting the price is the price of the van. So, if we can still buy vans at the prices that we’ve bought these ones at, then the price stays the same, even if you get it built to your specification.”

Part of the Moorlake success is down to the first-hand campervan knowledge of the people who work there. Vic has a six-year-old campervan, while his colleague, Mark, owns a 20-year-old ‘van.

Says Ed, “The combined knowledge they have is fantastic – for example, Mark knows



how to tinker with things a bit and knows from his experience what works for him and what doesn’t.

“We never try and push anything on someone. It’s just a different perspective and I think the more perspective we can offer, then the more information they’ve got to make their own mind up about what they want in their campervan.”

before going into the factory to be converted. Customers can also choose to have a conversion on a used base vehicle, either their own or one sourced by Moorlake.

“We’ve got a huge amount of stock coming in all the time,” says Ed, “and we can build the interior they want – they can choose the



ON THE SPOT

What are the key features in your ‘vans?

We’ve tried to tick as many boxes as possible in the campervan design. So, we’ve got a scenic roof which opens up fully, solar power charging the 12V battery and a diesel heater. All of our ‘vans are five-seater by default, and a sliding bed gives you absolutely stacks of room in the front or the back.

The bed is very comfy to sit on, but it’s also very comfy to lie on because you lie on the back, which, again, a lot of people are asking for. We do a swivel passenger seat and a swivel driver’s seat. Again, customers were asking for that, and we just try and include as much in the ‘van as possible.

What makes a great campervan conversion?

I think the key thing to a campervan conversion is actually the safety aspect of it. You’ve got to make sure that your roof is certified, that your bed is crash tested. Everything should conform to the correct safety guidelines. You then layer on the aesthetics of the ‘van, and you make it look fantastic and you make it function well.

But there are a lot of smaller converters who might not pay as much attention to the safety aspect of it. I think that’s critical. I think the campervan looking lovely and doing what you want it to do is brilliant, but at the end of the day, you have to have a ‘van that’s safe in the event that something does go wrong.

Are you a camper yourself?

I went away with the family in tents when the kids were younger but I’ve been around campers loads and I absolutely love it. The kids are too old for it now, and I don’t have my own ‘van but Vic and Mark, who work for us, both have their own ‘vans and that passion comes across when they talk to customers. They can talk with real experience about what to do at night and the places to go, etc.

A few times a year I still go out in a camper and as anyone who’s got one knows, the freedom you get is just fantastic. You’ve got a little flat, an apartment that you can just drive and stop wherever you want. It’s amazing.



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HATS OFF TO VALUE



The latest offering from Spanish brand Panama proves you can still get a well-equipped campervan on a budget...

Words & pictures ■ Iain Duff



 **WATCH THE VIDEO** motorhome.ma/review378

Value for money has never been more important to campervan buyers. But that doesn't necessarily mean grabbing the cheapest 'van you can find. It's all about getting the most bang for your buck and this new offering from Spanish brand, Panama, available from Marquis Leisure, serves up a large helping of bang for a very reasonable amount of buck.

For under £64,000, the P12+ is based on the long-wheelbase Ford Tourneo Custom, the people-carrier version of the Transit Custom. And at a time when similarly sized campervans can come with a price tag of over £80,000, this seems refreshingly affordable.

Panama is part of the giant Trigano Group (as is Marquis) and the Spanish marque arrived on these shores at the start of the 2025 season, with two 'vans, including the P12. The new P12+ is a longer version of that, measuring 5.44m (40cm longer), which gives it more floor space and storage inside but makes it less practical for day-to-day use – it's actually a fraction longer than a medium-wheelbase Fiat Ducato which offers rather more internal living space. You will fit it into some supermarket car parking bays, but only with one end hanging over the lines.

On the other hand, one issue the P12 had, which was flagged up in our video review at the time (watch at motorhome.ma/review316), was its height. The SCA pop-top roof took the overall height to 2.06m, making it just a little too tall to get into many car parks.

Panama has now replaced the SCA roof on the new model with its own pop-top. It keeps the total height of the 'van to exactly 2m, and that few centimetres' reduction means it will clear more height barriers. It might also go into multi-storey car parks and even

some domestic garages.

SPECS APPEAL

You might assume that the lower price means a lower spec. And in some ways that's true. For example, as Henry Ford (sort of) said 100 years ago, you can have any colour you want, as long as it's white.

However, colour apart, this is far from a back-to-basics 'van. In fact, the Tourneo is more people-carrier than panel van and that shows in the level of spec you find, both inside and outside. Panama doesn't offer a lengthy list of options, or indeed any options at all. Instead, it has an array of high-end features as standard that you might otherwise expect to pay extra for, including 17in alloy wheels, flush tinted side windows, a colour-coded front bumper, LED headlights with cornering function and heated electric wing mirrors.

It's the same story inside, where you get all the latest driver assistance technology, including keyless entry and starting, parking sensors (front and rear), speed sign recognition, lane-keeping assist, wrong way alert, cruise control, pre-collision assistance, emergency brake and hill start assist.

If you enjoy being harangued by your vehicle while you're driving, you'll also appreciate the stern warnings you receive if you take a hand off the steering wheel, drive too long without a break or veer slightly from the centre of the lane. And woe betide you if you stray even 1mph over the speed limit, when you will instantly face the Ford's wrath via a tirade of bongs. Or so I'm told – obviously it's not something a responsible reviewer would ever do!

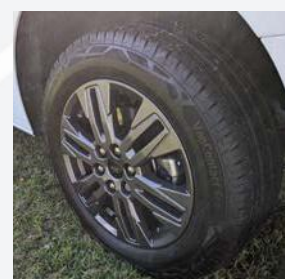
The SYNC 4 13in touchscreen features DAB radio, Bluetooth connectivity and a reversing camera, as well

PROS

- Excellent value for money
- High spec base vehicle, inc automatic gearbox
- Flexible interior space with sliding seat
- Diesel heating
- Only 2m high (roof down)

CONS

- Longer body makes daily use more awkward
- Living space can be quite dark
- Insulated stick-on screens rather than blinds on most windows
- Limited interior lighting



REVIEW PANAMA P12+



THE PANAMA P12+ HAS AN ARRAY OF HIGH-END FEATURES AS STANDARD THAT YOU MIGHT OTHERWISE EXPECT TO HAVE TO PAY EXTRA FOR

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as Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Comfort is also to the fore in the cab, with climate control air-conditioning and heated front seats with armrests, height adjustment and lumbar support included as standard.

Under the bonnet you'll find a 2-litre EcoBlue diesel engine with 136hp, which is linked to an eight-speed automatic gearbox (there's no engine upgrade option, although Panama does offer a petrol/electric hybrid elsewhere in its range). The gears are controlled from a stalk on the steering wheel, which is quite intuitive once you get used to it.

PLEASE BE SEATED

In the back, the three-seater Mobiframe bench slides on floor-mounted rails, so you can move it all the way forward towards the cab seats or slide it back to create more floor space. It means if you've got kids in the back, then they can be sitting a little bit closer to you (assuming that's something you think is a good idea!). Speaking of kids, there are Isofix fittings for child seats on two of the seats here, as well.

Perhaps even more importantly, sliding the seat forward creates loads more space in the boot. The rear section of the bed, behind the seat, can be left flat to use as a parcel shelf where you can store bedding, or it can be folded upright to fit taller items in the back. There's more storage under the seat, but it could do with a panel along the front to stop items sliding into the living area when you hit the brakes.

The gas bottle – just a single Campingaz 2.72kg – also stores in a compartment at the side of the boot and alongside you can access the electrics, including an inverter, which lets you use a low-power mains appliance without hook-up.

TIME FOR BED

Converting the seat into a double bed is really easy. Start by lifting the handle at the front, then slide the seat base out and flip it over. Lean over and lift the little red lever, which lets you fold the backrest flat, then flip over the end section of mattress. It creates a flat surface to sleep on – and because you're not lying on top of the seat, there are no uncomfortable



FACT FILE



PANAMA P12+

PRICE from: £63,995
As tested: £63,995

BASICS

Berths: 4
Travel seats: 5
Warranty: Two years on habitation, three years on base vehicle, five years water ingress
Type Approval: Full GB approval

DIMENSIONS

Length: 5.44m
Width: 2.15m
Height: 2.00m
Gross vehicle weight: 3,225kg
Payload: 570kg

BASE VEHICLE

Type: Ford Tourneo Custom
Engine: 2-litre, 136hp diesel, front-wheel drive, eight-speed automatic gearbox

KITCHEN

Cooker: Can two-burner gas hob
Fridge: Isotherm 42-litre compressor

BEDS

Lower bed: 1.91m x 1.19m
Upper bed: 2.08m x 1.14m

ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 50 litres (inboard)
Waste water: 32 litres (inboard)
Space/water heating: Webasto Air Top 2000 2kW diesel heater, cold water only
Gas: 1 x Campingaz 2.7kg
Leisure battery: 90Ah

OPTIONS

No factory options listed

ridges or seatbelts. If you store your bedding on the rear parcel shelf, it will simply be a case of pulling it into place.

The bed is a decent 1.19m wide and a fairly generous 1.91m long and you can raise the head end of the bed to create a chaise longue set-up for breakfast in bed. When the bed is in situ, there's still enough floor space for a Porta Potti or maybe a dog bed and, importantly, you can still get access to the fridge, so your morning cuppa is safe.

The second double bed is 'upstairs' in the pop-top. It is slightly longer than the downstairs double and the mattress sits on wooden slats. So, it's perhaps not as comfortable as a bed with the plastic springs found in some campervan roofs, but certainly far better than a flat board. There are a couple of flexible reading lights with USB sockets up there, too.

The pop-top has large mesh windows at the front and on both sides, but PVC windows would be helpful in allowing in more light when the weather doesn't permit the mesh panels to be opened.

FINE DINING

Back downstairs, the P12+ has the typical campervan side kitchen layout, featuring a Can hob with two burners and a stainless-steel sink with a cold water tap supplied from a 50-litre inboard tank. When closed, the glass lid sits flush with the worktop to extend the usable surface space. In fact, there is actually a reasonable amount of work surface alongside the cooker. The 42-litre Isotherm compressor fridge is a good enough size for the essentials and it also has a small freezer section.

The dining table attaches to a rail on the front of the kitchen unit and it's a good size for four. You can place it in front of the swivelled cab chairs and slide the rear seat forward, so a quartet of diners are within reach of the table.

The table also has an extra set of foldaway legs, so it can be used as a free-standing table outside when the weather is good. The downside is that it is stored in a zip-up canvas bag attached to the inside of the tailgate. It's a little awkward to fit it in and it's not ideal if you need to bring it into the camper or



put it away when it's raining.

Warmth comes from a Webasto 2kW blown-air diesel heater, so you don't need to worry about eating into your gas supply when you need to take the edge off the chill – in fact, your gas is only for cooking. Controls for the heating system are just behind the driver's seat.

REACH FOR THE STORES

Storage in the kitchen is an improvement on the short-wheelbase P12 – alongside the fridge there's a cupboard for your Porta Potti and beside that there's similar-sized storage for pots and pans, or tins and packet food. The tambour doors here mean the cupboards are accessible regardless of the sliding seat's position or the bed set-up.

Further storage can be found beneath the worktop, which is accessed from the top by lifting a small hatch, and there are two cubbyholes for mugs, etc, at the end of the kitchen unit. You'll also find 12V, 230V and USB power points here, and there are more of these at the other end of the galley, behind the driver's seat.

There are no overhead lockers, but further back, alongside the rear seat, there's a cutlery drawer and a couple more cupboards – one decent-sized, the other tiny, but fine for slotting in smaller items.

Completing the storage are the two tall lockers at the back, again with tambour doors to make access easier. One of these is almost entirely taken up with a ladder for accessing the pop-top roof area. You might find that surplus to requirements and you could leave it at home to make much better use of the cupboard (storing clothes, for example). Similarly, you can create more general storage space if you don't need to take the loo with you.

Elsewhere, most of the windows have stick-on insulated covers for night-time, rather than blinds or curtains – a bit laborious when you want to go to

bed. The exception is the kitchen window, which has a cassette blind and flyscreen. The window here (and on the sliding door opposite) has a hinged opening section which provides ventilation, although not as much as if it slid open.

Illumination comes from two dimmable LED strip lights in the base of the roof bed. These are fine for lighting up the living area, but disappointingly there's no localised lighting at the head end of the downstairs bed. There are other nice touches in the habitation area, though, such as a cup or bottle holder, a slot for your phone and a rear speaker.

Although there are no factory options as such, you can ups spec your P12+ with various dealer-supplied accessories. These include a removable carpet for the living area (£299), a towbar (£995), a 200W solar panel (£899), a bike rack (£657), a Thule roll-out awning (£1,195) and a Vango drive-away tailgate awning (£575).



£570.47

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VERDICT

The Panama P12+ hits the sweet spot between price and practicality, offering strong spec levels for under £64k, including automatic transmission, a sliding seat and a Webasto diesel heater. The extra length might rule it out as a daily driver but the lower roof height certainly improves everyday usability. A few cost-saving omissions are noticeable but, overall, the P12+ delivers a great package.



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HILLTOP ERYRI ADVENTURER



This Welsh company makes great-value campervans on a variety of bases

Words Rachel Scholes ■ Pictures Iain Duff



Hilltop is based in Wales and has been around for 20 plus years. Owner, Phil, told us that while the company will convert many different vans he prefers the Renault that this model is based on. He states “the squareness of the Renault gives it more room and I like the way they drive as it feels more car like.” In addition, Renaults also offer great value for money in terms of standard specification normally.

This model is the Eryri Adventurer, one of a new range of layouts, with two more set to follow, the Nomad and Explorer. While the Renault is the standard conversion the model can also be ordered on the Ford and VW vans. That’s not the only option however, because everything is built in-house, so Hilltop is able to tailor models to each customers’ individual needs.

This is the LWB model, measuring 5.40m, but you can order the model in SWB (4.99m) form, too. And the model we previewed was a gas-free option with a Wallas hob/heater powered by diesel; you can order it with gas systems if preferred. A 2,000W inverter will be standard fitment going forward with an uprated 220Ah lithium battery.

What’s interesting to see in this model is the Renault double passenger cab seat. The innermost seatback can be dropped down to create a drinks holder and snack tray. Use it on the road if there’s just two up front, or even when on site as a coffee table.

This allows for five belted seats, three up front and two in the rear. The double cab seat swivels round to face the back seats and the Vulcan system used allows

it to slide forward, too. You do have to undo five bolts to do this – make sure those bolts are stashed away carefully, as you wouldn’t be able to drive without them fitted. Hilltop told us a drawstring bag could be provided to help keep these important bolts all in one place when the seat is swivelled.

And while it does slide forward, it’s not enough for four to dine at the one table. We’d probably want to see another table offered – maybe a free-standing Loc8 that can be stashed away in a recess on the sliding door. Hilltop said it will provide a slightly wider table for future models, but anything much bigger would get in the way. The table is currently stored above the cab, but the company is working on a new table with dedicated storage.

This is a side kitchen model that is pretty well specced. The 50-litre fridge (from Alpicool) is a decent size with a small freezer compartment and two door shelves. It’s got Bluetooth, which allows you to control the temperature of the fridge and freezer using an app. This sits below the sink, again a good size with a good-quality swan neck tap in on-trend black.

Next to this is the hob. As already alluded to, this is diesel-powered with a flat glass cooking plate and space for two pans. It also can act as a heater, too. The gas version comes with a double-burner gas hob and Autoterm heating.

There are USB A and C sockets and a mains socket near the kitchen as well as the simple control panel. The lower part of the kitchen under the hob has two locker doors. The lowest one contains two water tanks, though if you wanted to save space you could always

PROS

- Great value
- Easy-to-make bed
- Lots of options for base vehicles and more
- Space for 12V battery upgrade



CONS

- Table won’t allow four to dine at once
- Small parcel shelf at rear



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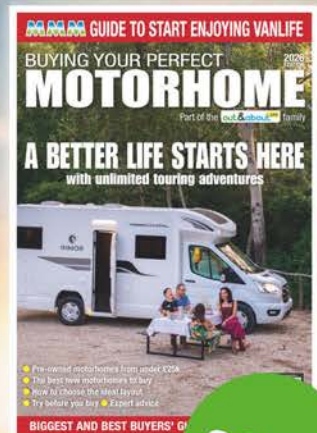
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It might not be an issue for all, but I find the small pull-tab catches – also fitted in many other campervans – fiddly and painful to use and have lost count of the number of nail breakages.

The rear seat is a Vulcan model that converts into a double bed pretty simply. It makes a very flat bed, too. However, the rear parcel shelf, where most campervanners store their bedding, is a touch small. It would be OK for a couple of soft cloth bags, but you would have to take care opening the rear doors.

The benefit of the Vulcan seat is that the backrest can be set at different rake positions. The well-regarded Mobiframe is an option and this does come with more rear storage.

You can still access the cutlery drawer and water storage with the bed in place – handy if you need a teaspoon for your morning cuppa or need to top up the water supply.

The under-bed space can be accessed through a rear hatch but this is quite small – I'd like to see a bigger door here, or a drawer that slides out, the latter of which Hilltop can now offer.

The storage unit at the back is not quite full height, but this does create a useful shelf while on site. The front section is accessed through a tambour door, while the rear has a shelf, with the lower part for the electrics and storage and the upper section a good space. While the model previewed did not offer access

to this top section from the inside, there will be a hatch from the wardrobe in future models.

The lowermost locker at the rear stores the 105Ah lithium battery and offers more storage but this is likely be where the gas locker is on the models with LPG systems. I'd like to see some of the wires ducted off to protect them. However, it's important to note that, because of the space available, you can increase the battery capacity; one customer had 500Ah installed. Plus there is a 200W solar panel on the roof for helping to keep charge flowing back into the battery. The Victron app helps you stay on top of power usage and demands.

However, there is a mains and 12V socket handily located between the electrics and the battery locker. Perfect for inflating awnings, outdoor gear or more.

Up top, the pop-top is a Van-Lidz model. It lowers and raises easily on gas struts. This model is fitted with the Premium fabric, though the Deluxe is the standard on Hilltop campervans. Whichever you opt for you get a windo1d customers can choose from different mattress types.

Lighting wise there's a spotlight in the pop-top with a USB socket. There are four spotlights along one along the roof near the door; they touch on and touch off. Then there's two spotlights also with USB C and A ports at the back of the seats. The lights under the bed are dimmable and then there's strip lighting under the kitchen too.

FACT FILE

HILLTOP ERYRI ADVENTURER

Price from £52,950 (as reviewed £56,950)

Base vehicle Renault Traffic Extra LWB 2-litre, 150hp manual (170hp auto available on Extra Sport model)

Berths 4

Travel seats 5

Length 5.40m

Width 1.96m

Height 1.97m

Gross weight TBC

Payload TBC

VERDICT

This is a solid practical camper and the fact that Hilltop offers Renault base vehicle options for customers is great – not everyone wants a vee-dub. The price is another big factor, with the standard model coming in at around £53k – and that includes features like the lithium battery, solar panel and more. The model we reviewed was £56,950 (with the Vanshades blinds, stitched leather seats and the Wallas hob all being options). Plus, you can get the specification tailored towards your needs. If you're interested, get in touch with Hilltop and book into view the workshops and demonstrator models.





BÜRSTNER HABITON

The most innovative campervan to be launched this season...

Words ■ Peter Vaughan

Sometimes the things you want don't fit. Like squeezing into your favourite jeans after Christmas, or eating that second portion of sticky toffee pudding... And so it is with putting a fixed single bed layout into a six-metre Mercedes Sprinter panel van. It just won't go. Well, not without a bit of magic!

There was plenty to shout about when Bürstner launched its new-season model range; new lower prices, a new flagship motorhome and, perhaps grabbing even more headlines, the Habiton campervan – a Sprinter panel van that seemed to achieve the impossible. No wonder it was a shoo-in for the Best Campervan Innovation award in the

2026 Out & About Awards in association with Creation. Nothing else could come close in terms of never-been-seen-before design.

On the outside, it doesn't look remarkable, although the minty green version (one of six exterior paint colours available) is visually arresting. Even the Habiton X four-wheel drive model doesn't grab your attention as once it might, simply because there are now so many 4x4 campervans to choose from.

Open the sliding door and the layout of half-dinette lounge (with optional overcab sunroof), centre kitchen and washroom and rear bedroom might have you wondering what all the fuss is about. And then you notice that, while the offside bed is



clearly adult-sized, the nearside mattress looks like it was designed for a child. This is where the clever bit comes in.

In the daytime, one bed is indeed severely truncated, but at night it becomes a full-sized berth. The extra space is created by first folding the dining table vertically against the wall, then lifting up the seat squab and sliding the bench towards the cab. That creates the space for the washroom, too, to change positions, again sliding along floor rails in the direction of the cab. Now there's room for two adults to comfortably sleep lengthways at the rear of the campervan, with the extra space and better access that provides compared with rivals that have transverse beds.

So, that's the innovative bit, but the Habiton (like the Signature coachbuilt motorhome) also introduces a new level of personalisation.

That starts with the base vehicle – 150 or 170hp, rear or four-wheel drive, manual or automatic, 3,880kg or up-plate to 4,100kg or down-plate to 3,500kg. Then there are chassis options – an electric closing sliding door, LED headlamps, fog/cornering lights and a

PROS

- Unique sliding washroom/dinette
- Single beds in a 6m Sprinter
- Many personalisation options
- 4x4 model available

CONS

- So many options, price could go north of £90k
- No lounge when the bedroom is occupied
- Small kitchen without an oven

360-degree parking camera.

You'll certainly want the Comfort Pack 6.0 (£2,560), which adds cab blinds, a flyscreen door, lithium battery, framed windows, ambient lighting and a kitchen worktop extension. And there's a Comfort Pack for the chassis, too (£1,110), adding the electronic parking brake, high beam assistant, wireless charging, etc.

Next, you'll fancy the Self-Sufficiency Package (£1,280) with its 150Ah lithium battery and 150W solar panel, while there are Winter Packs for the habitation (£930) and chassis (£1,110). And then you can choose your graphics (five designs) and wheels (three styles, steel or alloy).

If you need a four-berth, then of course the Habiton is offered with a pop-top roof – one that not only has a double bed but is heated, as well, and can optionally be insulated to keep that heat in.

But it's the interior décor that perhaps signifies the most personal taste. There are six upholsterys on offer (two fabric, four leather), and that's before we look at the furniture. Here, there are two options for the cabinets, while the fronts can be pine, oak or walnut.

The washroom isn't just different because it doesn't stay in one place. It has a folding basin to give you more room for showering and then it offers a choice of three types of loo – a conventional chemical Porta Potti, a composting Trelino or bag system Clesana.

Without ticking every box we ended up with a £91,315 price tag for our ideal two-wheel drive Habiton, but for a Merc that's still a competitive figure considering what's on offer here.



FACT FILE

BÜSTNER HABITON

Base vehicle Mercedes Sprinter

Price from: £71,295

(Habiton X £83,995)

Berths: 2 (4 with pop-top)

Travel seats: 4

Length: 5.93m

Width: 2.04m

Height: 2.73m

Gross weight: 3,500kg

(Habiton X 3,880kg)

Payload: 670kg (standard model)

VERDICT

If you're looking for a Mercedes Sprinter campervan, the Habiton has to be seen, simply because it's a one-of-a-kind design. Factor in all the options and no two Habitons are likely to be the same, either!



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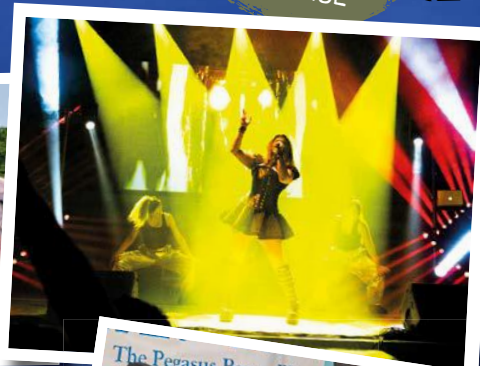
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CARADO CV600 PRO

A classic fixed bed design at a reduced price...

The Carado campervan range – identified by the ‘CV’ prefix – covers all the usual bases offered by continental brands, so there are 5.41m, 5.99m and 6.36m-long variants, all with fixed bed floorplans (plus the novel CV541 Pro in which you sleep upstairs). Entry-level models are all based on the Peugeot Boxer, while the higher-spec Pro and Pro+ models switch over to the Fiat Ducato.

The CV600 is the classic layout in the six-metre panel van, so it has the usual half-dinette lounge with swivel cab seats (no overcab sunroof or full-height walk-through here), a central galley and washroom

and a transverse double bed in the rear. The really good news is that Carado has now slashed two grand off the price, so you can pick up a CV600 Pro from just £53,590.

While you can still buy the base CV600 from £49,490, there are many reasons to upgrade to the Pro version, which is much more in tune with UK customers’ preferences. Pro upgrades include a 90-litre fuel tank, folding cab blinds, a 3.75m awning in black, colour-coded bumpers, a gloss black skid plate, front fog lights, leather steering wheel, Techno dashboard trim and 16in bicolour alloy wheels as standard.



Words ■ Peter Vaughan



The Pro spec also adds the Basic Pack (normally £780), so you also get a 70cm by 50cm rooflight in the lounge area, a window and clothes rail in the washroom, a wide entrance step and a rotating extension leaf for the table.

The CV600 Pro is based on the 140hp Fiat with manual gearbox, but the automatic transmission is optional, priced at £2,770. Standard equipment also includes ESP, Hill Holder, Traction Plus, Start & Stop, M+S Camping tyres, swivel cab seats with height and tilt adjustment as well as lumbar support, and a Fix & Go kit (rather than a spare wheel). It can be further enhanced with the Chassis Pack (parking sensors, electrically folding mirrors, electric parking brake – £1,580), Safety Pack (driver assistance systems and adaptive cruise control – £1,460), and Digital Pack (automatic air-con, wireless phone charging, 10in display with sat-nav and reversing camera – £2,810).

Habitation spec includes a flyscreen for the sliding door, two Isofix points on the rear seat, a 95Ah AGM leisure battery and Truma Combi 4 gas-fired blown-air heating (a Combi 6 E gas/electric unit or Combi 4

PROS

- No tall furniture for through view on the offside
- Fridge accessible inside and out
- Reduced price makes for a good-value package

CONS

- Overhead cupboards stop you sitting up in bed
- Options can push up the price
- Shower has a curtain

diesel are optional at £610 and £660, respectively). Water tanks are 100 litres fresh and 90 litres waste. Aesthetically, there's Visby Oak and Sand Grey furniture, while the exterior is white as standard, with four different greys offered at extra cost (from £680).

The most significant option, though, is probably the pop-top roof (£4,940), which includes a 2.06m by 1.43m double bed. Of course, the main sleeping space is the transverse double at the rear of the camper, measuring 1.97m by 1.57m/1.50m (all figures are manufacturer's own). A cut-out for your foot in the bulkhead under the bed eases access.

While there's a huge number of campervans offering this type of layout, Carado's version feels more spacious inside than some as there is no tall furniture along the offside, giving a through view from the cab to the bedroom. The long, low-level galley also means there's more worktop space for the cook, while placing the 84-litre compressor fridge at the front of the unit, facing forwards, makes it as easy to reach from outside as it is inside the campervan. The galley includes a combination two-burner hob and sink unit, while low and high-level storage includes a variety of cupboards but just one drawer.

Opposite the kitchen, the washroom has a fixed basin with a useful worktop area adjacent, a swivel cassette toilet and a rooflight. It's a reasonable-sized space but the downside is that you'll have to deploy a curtain when showering.



FACT FILE

CARADO CV600 PRO
Base vehicle Fiat Ducato
Price from £53,590
Berths 2/4
Travel seats 4
Length 5.99m
Width 2.05m
Height 2.61m (2.81m with pop-top)
Gross weight 3,500kg
Payload 501kg

VERDICT

Carado campervans have built up a reputation for quality and practicality at a good price – now reduced by £2k for the Pro models. The CV600 Pro feels more spacious than some rivals but it lacks the swing-wall washroom and overcab sunroof of the latest designs (including the more expensive CV600 Pro+).



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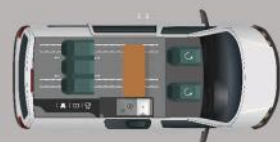
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