

Client: Kara Rose PR Yellow News
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How to glamp without the camp

It started with the odd tepee or safari tent, but glamping is moving ever more upmarket in Yorkshire. Sarah Freeman talks to those preparing for a new season of outdoor luxury.

Some campsites don't allow dogs. Others even seem a bit sniffy about small children. Not at Camp Katur. Here, should you wish, you can bring your own horse.

You can also relax in a wood burning hot tub while sipping from Champagne pre-ordered from the bar and book a tent which not only has fairylights but its own private toilet and log burner.

The site on the Camp Hill estate, near Masham, which welcomed its first visitors almost 12 months ago, was started by Kerry Roy, who until a couple of years ago was spending her days driving up and down the country as a product trainer for a baby car seat manufacturer. When we meet, on a particularly blustery day in North Yorkshire, she's spent the morning trying to tempt an owl out of one of the hobbit pods.

"Bit of a difference isn't it? I just went to check everything was OK and there she was just sat there. I'm saying she because she had these great big eyelashes. She was incredibly tame, she even let me stroke her. To be honest I wasn't entirely sure what to do, so I've left her there for the moment."

It's a few years since glamping entered the public consciousness thanks to celebrity festival goers like Kate Moss. They might have been prepared to stand in mud in Hunter wellies to watch Coldplay but they sure as hell weren't going to spend the night on a roll mat. Suddenly most of the big festivals were giving a field or two over to luxury tepees and regular campsites started to catch on. Those who like their camping complete with a pitch black, midnight dash to the toilet block thought it all a bit soft and there were others who suspected it was little more than a middle class fad.

They were wrong. Glamping has not only survived, but in Yorkshire it seems to be thriving. Just as Kerry was finalising her plans, Bivouac on the Swinton Park estate was just opening.

"I did panic a little, but I really needn't have done. We've got a really good relationship and if one of us is full, we'll always recommend people try the other. I know some people thought glamping was a bit of a fad, but if anything I think it's becoming more popular. You might not persuade grandma or grandad to go to a normal campsite, but if they know they are coming somewhere which is more like a home from home then it's a chance for the whole family to go on holiday together."

Working with a limited budget, Kerry's plans really began to take shape when she was introduced to Robert Ropner who runs Camp Hill. When Rob took over the estate from his father, the grand 10-bedroom house had been in the family for four generations, but there was no longer enough agricultural land to support the property. They had already diversified into corporate team building, and the addition of a glamping village which someone else would run was the final piece in the jigsaw. It has been a hectic 12 months and while Kerry is wary of expanding too fast, as she prepares to open for the new season there have been some new additions to the site.

Last year the collection of Hobbit pods, safari tents, yurts, bell tents and teepees could accommodate 54 guests. This year it will be 70. Kerry has already ordered a number of new tents and there's a unidome on order which will have one completely transparent panel.



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"I know I'm taking a bit of a risk, but I thought there would be something so lovely about waking up in the woods to the natural light. We'll be tucking it away in the trees, so it will be quite private. As long as you wear pyjamas I reckon you'll be alright.

Last year the site hosted two weddings, but they already have 14 booked for the next 12 months and the number of repeat bookings suggest that at least most of the guests have liked what they see.

"I think anyone who starts a business like this becomes a bit obsessed with TripAdvisor and it's hard not to take even the smallest criticism personally, but I'm doing my best not to."

With Kerry also a fan of VW Campervans – she has a sky blue one called Sid – there is very much a retro feel to the interiors on Camp Katur and she already has her eye on what would be the site's crowning glory.

"I would love a tree house," she says. "It would be amazing, but they are so expensive that it's almost impossible to justify, at least at the moment."

If Kerry is a newcomer to the glamping business, Caroline and Christian van Outersterp are veterans by comparison. The couple, along with their four children, were one of the very first on Yorkshire's glamping scene – some say they were the very first. Prior to launching Jollydays, the couple had run a fireplace business and their only really experience of hospitality was the restaurant which sat alongside their London showroom.

"Initially we did look at sites down South, but they were really expensive, that's when we saw a gap in the market, to bring it north and make it affordable," says Christian.

They leased a part of Buttercrambe Woods on the edge of the Wolds and after a successful five-day holiday in a Bell tent, a vintage British design created in 1858 by Henry Hopkins, Jollydays opened for bookings in 2009. The experience includes a nightly camp fire and the cake tent, stocked with everything to satisfy the sweetest teeth.

However, four years on, with the van Outersterps about to open their second site at Market Weighton, which will be even more high end, the market has definitely changed.

"When we started out bell tents were quite unusual, but it wasn't long before anyone who had a field had thrown a few up and were renting them out. They've definitely been subject to fashion and we have phased them out because what we are finding is that, actually, what people want is more luxury not less.

"This year we are introducing woodcutters' huts for the first time at the new site all the structures will be fully insulated so we can open all year round.

"The woodland there is really beautiful in the snow, but that's no good if that water pipes freeze," says Christian.

"We are going to start small in Market Weighton and the hope is to bring new structures onto the site each year.

"One thing we've always been conscious of is not overcrowding the land. When people come here they want to feel like the space is their own."



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The last few years have been a huge learning curve for the van Outersterps and while the aim is to give guests an escape from the usual nine to five, running a campsite, particularly a five-star luxury one, is a time consuming business.

"We've been pretty lucky this year. Although it has been incredibly wet, the grounds is not too waterlogged, but there was a lot of clearing up to do after the storm.

"When everything is open to the elements you spend most of your time maintaining the tents, but I wouldn't want it any other way.

"Starting Jollydays was one of the best things we have ever done."

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