



# PUTTING COMFORT IN CAMPING

GLAMPING HAS ALL OF THE BENEFITS OF CAMPING – SECLUSION, NATURE, SERENITY – BUT WITH A RANGE OF HOME COMFORTS THROWN IN. GISELLE WHITEAKER HEADS TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS.





“A forest garden takes about 10 years to create.”

Left: Inside kushti yurt. Facing page top: Preparing for dinner at Kushti yurt. Facing page bottom left: The lovely forest garden setting. Facing page bottom right: Lanterns and candles provide illumination.

The Mongolian ‘ger’, or yurt, sits in a forested glade, dappled sunlight weaving an intricate pattern on the curved canvas. Entering through the wooden door, I see beams of light filtering through the transparent centre of the dome. Ethnic textiles and furnishing are artfully scattered throughout the spacious interior, housing two double futons and a camp bed, and a warm, woody scent pervades. Outside, a picnic table sits by the fire pit, awaiting diners, and birds flit from tree to tree, merrily chirruping. It’s a peaceful scene within this forest garden in Shovelstrode, a few miles from East Grinstead in Sussex.

This is more than a secluded glamping spot, although there are two yurts and a gorgeous log cabin on offer. Lisa Aitken and Charles Hooper, the owners of Forest Garden Shovelstrode, are passionate about horticulture, self-sufficiency and preserving heritage through traditional rural crafts. They run a variety of traditional woodland craft courses throughout the year and, as the name suggests, they are also engaged in creating a forest garden on the six-acre site, of which 3.5 acres is made up of ancient woodland. “A forest garden takes about 10 years to create,” Lisa explains, gazing fondly across the garden beds and pond. “We’re six years in, so we’re getting there.” A forest garden is an open woodland ecosystem, which uses a mix of common and unusual plants, trees and shrubs, all planted thoughtfully to achieve balance. Many of the plants here are edible, and Lisa points out those currently in fruit as we wander down the slight incline to Kushti yurt, where I’ll be spending the night.

I’m not a fan of camping. I like being outdoors, but I also like a modicum of comfort. That’s why I’m giving glamping a whirl. My trepidation about not having electricity is fading into the forest as I contemplate an evening of peace.

After pointing out the nearby bathroom and kitchen cafe, where guests staying in Kushti, the Savannah yurt or the lovely wooden cabin can book in for a generous full English breakfast, Lisa leaves me to settle in. Nothing says comfort like a cup of tea, so I fill up the kettle with water from the storage container provided and light the gas hob. Within moments, the kettle whistles in tune with the birds, and I take a seat at the picnic table, penning some postcards to friends and absorbing the afternoon sunshine. Each time I look up, my attention is caught by a tiny detail: clusters of bright yellow daffodils; the red painted design framing the door of the yurt; the blue sky overhead; the fresh smell of the forest; a muted bleat from a sheep in the paddock next door. It’s a lovely place to be and I sit for hours, soaking up the ambience.

When the sun sinks into the trees, casting a final golden glow across the site, I feel the temperature drop a few degrees. “We’ve come to welcome you. Try this,” says Charles, opening a bottle of home-made apple wine and taking a seat at the picnic table. “This is last year’s and that one is this year’s,” he says, pointing to a second bottle as Lisa places a bowl of ice cubes on the table. We sit sipping the sweet wine, which is surprisingly good, and shooting the breeze. Lisa and Charles are consummate hosts – naturally gregarious and down to earth, they clearly enjoy what they are creating, and their affection for the place is infectious. I have a relaxed smile on my face by the time they depart, the result of the companionship and the wine.

It’s time for me to get cooking. I could do it the easy way and



Kushti sits in a forested glade.



Bathroom facilities are nearby.



The indoor wood burner keeps the yurt toasty.

light the barbecue, but I like the idea of a campfire. I build a tipi of kindling in the fire pit and lay a few larger logs across the top, soon standing by a crackling fire. When the flames die down, I place the steel grill across the embers and pitch a steak on to cook. I've opted for an easy dinner – a steak sandwich – and it's perfect, imbuing the deliciously smoky flavour of the fire. A handful of grapes from my food stash and I'm done.

There's something primal about fire-gazing, and I spend much of the evening sitting on a log lost in thought, until the moon rises above the trees. Moving inside, I set another fire in the indoor wood burner, which quickly throws out warmth. A chain of solar fairy lights flickers on, sparkling like stars on the ceiling, and I light the dozens of candles dotted around the yurt, wishing I had a significant other to share this romantic moment with. Then I realise I don't need one. That's the joy of glamping: it can be a journey of solitude; an exercise in family bonding; or a romantic getaway. Whichever it is, Kushti yurt is the ideal place for it. ■

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Here are a few more glamping options that tick all the comfort boxes:

#### THE ARK AT LEEWOOD

With the run of a four-acre field between the steep wooded side of the valley and the clear waters of the River Walkham, The Ark at Leewood in Devon is the perfect base for exploring Dartmoor. Somewhere between a traditional safari tent and a sturdy cabin, this original tent is well-insulated and comes full of quirky furniture, warm rugs and an enormous, super king-sized bed. When the sun comes out, soak it all up from the south-facing veranda then cycle the granite trails, go walking over the moors, or stay on site and go wild swimming in the river, where there's also great fishing.



Book through [www.canopyandstars.co.uk](http://www.canopyandstars.co.uk)

#### HOBBIT HUTS AT TOWNSEND TOURING PARK

For those looking for something a little bit different, these underground Mole Manor microlodges or 'Hobbit Huts' in the 12-acre Townsend Touring Park on the Welsh border accommodate up to two adults and three children and come with sofa beds and bunk beds. The site has easy access to Offa's Dyke Path and other walking trails, coarse fishing at the on-site lake, bike trails, rock climbing walls, and a playground. The centre of Pembrokeshire is just a short walk away.



Book through [www.pitchup.com](http://www.pitchup.com)

#### THE MEADOW HOUSE

For a glamping choice much further from home, it doesn't get much better than the Meadow House in the beautiful setting of Candlewood in the hills of southern Wisconsin in the USA. The panoramic views of the outside world make the Meadow House the perfect setting for nature lovers. This prairie-style design includes a full range of amenities, such as the Scandinavian wood stove, custom kitchen with wood countertops, double-sized tile shower, reclaimed barn wood floor and queen-size platform bed, but the glass walls provide immersion in nature, making this a majorly glam option. You'll need to book a long way ahead at this popular spot, so plan accordingly.



Book through [www.candlewoodcabins.com](http://www.candlewoodcabins.com)

#### INFO

For more information about Forest Garden Shovelstrode, see [www.forestgarden.info](http://www.forestgarden.info) or book your stay at Kushti yurt through [www.canopyandstars.co.uk](http://www.canopyandstars.co.uk).