



inspiring UK getaways

Discover a Mongolian Yurts campsite nestled in the Wye Valley, Wales. With Peruvian alpacas & 80 acres of land to explore... does it get any better?

What do you do with a stunningly beautiful valley in Wales apart from fill it with sheep? Peter and Amanda Copp faced exactly this question when they bought an 80 acre farm in the Wye Valley, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Their answer was to import some real Mongolian Gers (that's yurts to you and me) from Ulaan Bataar in Mongolia and open an eco-friendly yurt campsite.



Using wood felled and milled on the farm, they built a communal building. They then sited 5 yurts on decks nestled into the south facing bank of the meadow, bordered by a tree lined stream. As the name implies, Hidden Valley Yurts is tucked away in the Vale of Usk in Monmouthshire and offers guests a chance to unwind in complete peace and tranquillity.

The woodwork in the yurts is traditionally hand painted (a bit like canal ware decoration) and rain becomes a wonderful excuse to snuggle down by the stove and admire the yurt's construction with its lattice walls, crown and roof poles.



But while the campsite has always had sustainability at its core, with solar powered heating and reed bed drainage, Amanda was determined this wasn't going to be a 'no frills' sort of retreat. Luxury camping was the aim, with comfortable beds, hot showers and a full size bath, together with a well equipped kitchen complete with dishwasher (nicely avoiding the need to nag children into helping with the washing up.

Each yurt has a kingsize bed, a mix of day beds and futons and a woodburning stove in the centre. The thick wool insulation keeps the heat in, but also keeps it cool in hot weather. On the deck outside the yurt, there is a bbq, seating area and a fire pit or chiminea.

There are plenty of hammocks and chairs on the huge

deck overlooking the central camp fire area and boules pitch. And, with no vehicles allowed in the yurt field, this is a real chance for the children to play safely while the adults chill out on the deck. The gentle brook that borders the campsite offers hours of enjoyment – TV and computer games are easily forgotten with dens to build, the stream to dam, trees to climb and starlit evenings spent around the campfire.

The area offers easy access to the Brecon Beacons for walking, climbing and horse riding. The Wye is great for canoeing and the Forest of Dean is stunning. If eating out is your idea of the perfect holiday treat, there are an outstanding number of top class restaurants and gastro pubs within ½ hour – including Wales' only Michelin star restaurant, The Crown at Whitebrook.

With 80 acres of old meadows and ancient woodland to explore, alpacas and Jacob sheep to meet, plus miles of walking, this gives your car a holiday too! One of the most frequently used words in the visitor's book is 'freedom'... for most of us, especially the children, this is the biggest treat of all.

For full details of Hidden Valley Yurt holidays, go to www.hiddenvalleyyurts.co.uk where you can find prices, pictures, testimonials and much more. If you become particularly attached to the yurt lifestyle, Peter and Amanda also sell them as another part of their business. Hopefully it can squeeze into your back garden, which we assume isn't quite 80 acres!

The Farm... Amanda & Peter farm under an environmental scheme called Tir Gofal (Care of the Land). This means they farm to encourage a diversity of species for plants, birds and wildlife. Many rare birds have been spotted as well as otters, dormice and crested newts. Don't forget your camera!



yoga eco-retreat

If the frantic pace of modern life is starting to get you down, a few days of yoga and meditation could be just what you need to recharge your batteries and refresh. From Monday 17th to Sunday 23rd August, you can escape the daily grind with a retreat hosted by experienced yoga teacher Laura Gilmore, at a reward winning eco-resort in the heart of Snowdonia.

Laura, Director of Bristol City Yoga, has been practising yoga for almost 20 years, so whether you're a complete newcomer or an expert, you're in capable hands. She teaches both Hatha and Ashtanga yoga. Ashtanga puts special emphasis on flowing movements, while Hatha is more concerned with static poses and more appropriate for beginners.

The retreat is also open to families, with special sessions for kids and parents, whilst the adult only classes preserve the quiet for those without kids.

Each day begins with meditation and posture practice, followed by a light breakfast and an opportunity to relax for a while or catch an extra 40 winks. There are more yoga sessions after lunch, or mountain walks, and the day ends with the chance to chat and share experiences around the fire or in the hot tub! You can take everything at your own pace – there's absolutely no pressure to do more than suits you.

Accommodation and three meals a day are included in the cost. All meals are prepared using locally sourced ingredients and are suitable for vegetarians. For full details of Laura's retreat, head to www.bristolcityyoga.co.uk

The retreat will be held at Cae Mabon, an environmentally friendly venue in the heart of north Wales which hosts yoga, storytelling and meditation events throughout the year. Visit www.caemabon.com for details of this and other retreats which are taking place throughout the year.

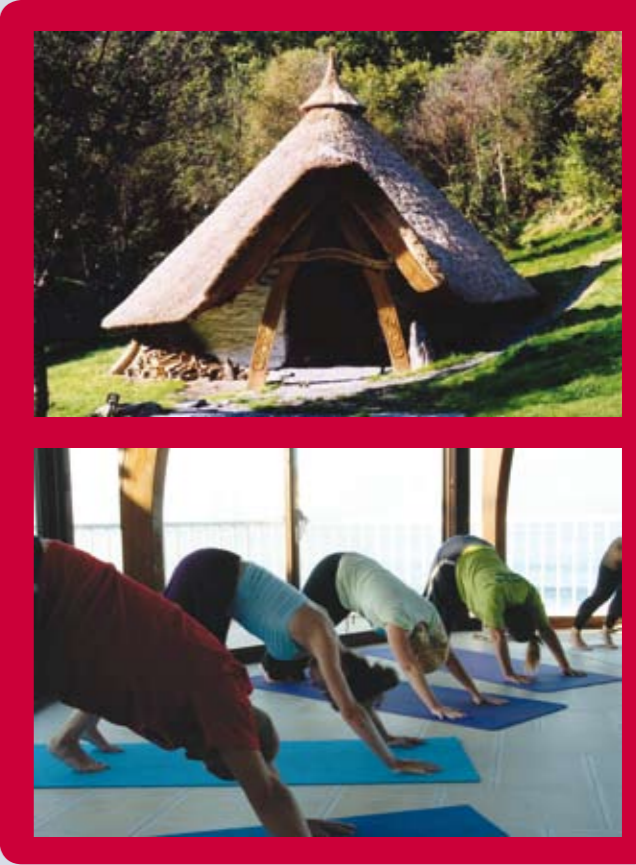
wild green travel

Do packed tourist beaches and post-holiday sunburn leave you cold? Next time you take a break, why not go wild instead!

Wild Green Travel is a Scottish-based tour operator with a focus on local and organic produce, protecting wildlife and forging strong relationships with Highland communities. It offers visitors the chance to experience incredible food, breathtaking views and warm Scottish hospitality.

There's a wide range of tours on offer, with something to suit everyone. Sample fine whiskies on the Isle of Skye, paddle a sea kayak around the islands of Loch Carron or go seal-spotting with a local fisherman, then finish the day with a spectacular dinner and traditional Gaelic music.

While you're drinking in the sights (and the whisky!) you can also



learn about Scotland's struggle for independence, visit a 2000-year-old Celtic fort and see Ben Nevis – the highest mountain in Britain. Holidays to nourish both body and mind!

Whether you're planning a group trip or a holiday by yourself, Wild Green can give you an insight into amazing culture and scenery right here in the British Isles. You can leave your passport at home, but don't forget to pack a camera!

fuelled by chocolate

Now, this is a unique way to fuel your travels further afield! In 2007, two enterprising British men drove 4000 miles across the Sahara desert to Timbuktu in vehicles fuelled by chocolate. Andy Pag from London and John Grimshaw, from Dorset made the journey using trucks salvaged from a scrapyard. There was no need to stop at petrol stations enroute as they were running on biodiesel made by extracting the cocoa butter from waste confectionery, removing the fatty acids and neutralising its pH.

To offset the carbon emitted during their journey, they took along equipment to allow the people of Mali to convert waste oil products into fuel. The journey used the equivalent of 80,000 chocolate bars that would otherwise have ended up in landfill.

Now that's a lot of chocolate - certainly enough to satisfy most chocoholics on a 4000 mile drive!

Articles by **Cat Hackforth**