



# GO MILD IN THE COUNTRY

Madonna once sang in the 1980s, “We need a holiday / Some time to celebrate.” And she’s right, it would be so nice. Okay, enough of the Queen of Pop’s lyrics...but she did have a point. For centuries the annual holiday has been seen as a time to rest our bones, salve our minds and replenish our weary souls with good times. So why do holidays now often feel so much more stressful than the nine-to-five?

According to recent research, it takes more than two days before we can physically relax into our annual break. However – work stresses aside – it’s often because we insist on making the most of the holiday by cramming in sight after sight and shoe-horning activities in between. We end up needing a rest from the holiday itself.

So, this year, let’s get back to basics and enjoy a proper break from the rat race. In recent years, record numbers of holidaymakers have been booking camping trips. The UK is blessed with some fantastic campsites, and none more delightful than the gorgeous Alde Garden, an eco-friendly yurt and tipi campsite in the depths of Suffolk.

Alde Garden and its neighbouring (and equally gorgeous) Badger Cottage is the realised dream of Marie and Mark. The couple have worked on their sustainable camping project for more than two years and finally, last spring, after a winter of dedicated digging, planting and building, Alde Garden is up and running. But don’t come along expecting a sprawling campsite open to the masses: Alde Garden offers a more bespoke camping experience. Home to just a handful of yurts, tents and tipis, Alde Garden is placing itself in the camping market as a quiet retreat, offering peace and tranquility and an antidote to modern life.

## Yurts a go-go

Yurts have become big business over the past few years, but you need a rare dedication to source and build your own. Marie and Mark hand-built the beautiful Barn Owl Yurt (named after the owl that flies by every evening) after learning the art on a course in Devon. Its sturdy bentwood frame is in the traditional Mongolian style. The interior is built around a traditional wood-burner and comes complete with a handmade four-poster futon and an old-fashioned wooden washstand. At night, while snuggled up in bed, guests can gaze through the transparent ‘crown’ and watch the stars twinkle in an unblemished Suffolk sky.

Behind the yurt sits a majestic North American tipi, which looks truly awesome as the sun sets. The nearby bell tent is set behind the campfire area and is the perfect accommodation for a large family. Again, attention to detail is what makes Alde Garden so special: solar-powered fairy lights line the walls of the tents, with lanterns and coloured jars of wild flowers adding colour and warmth. There were three roll-out beds for my kids and a large comfy futon for me and my partner. We felt at home immediately and, unlike regular camping, it felt spacious and is comfortable enough to stay for a week.

Tracey Davies recommends yurt living as an ideal way to wind down from a hectic nine-to-five. Alde Garden, hidden deep in the Suffolk countryside, offers comfort under canvas to the work-weary.



Nestled away in a glade at the top of the garden sits a lone gypsy caravan, evoking a scene straight from the pages of an Enid Blyton book. Recently restored, this hand-carved, glossy green and yellow caravan sleeps two and is as wildly romantic as it is quirky. There’s space for free camping and there are plans to build a cob house and a wooden tent on stilts for the coming season. Although families are welcome here, the camp’s vision is more quiet retreat. However, it is the perfect rural getaway for children, with ducks and chickens roaming free and pockets of wild garden to hide in. My children loved every minute of their stay.

Marie and Mark have consciously designed Alde Garden to be as sustainable and ecologically sound as possible, but certainly not at the expense of comfort. They plan to introduce a composting loo, but right now there are hot showers, toilets and a big communal fridge.

As we sat around the campfire on the last evening, toasting marshmallows with our new-found friends, I felt engulfed by the magical spirit of Alde Garden. It’s more than getting back to basics, it’s about living a simpler life, if only for a few days. Whether it’s eating freshly laid eggs for breakfast, or soaping up under a solar-heated jungle shower, a few days at Alde Garden is a wonderful escape from everyday life – a place you’ll wish to return to time and time again.

Alde Garden has a collection of bikes available to use, free of charge. Saxmundham is a leisurely three miles away or, if you’re more energetic, visit the beautiful Dunwich beach, 11 miles away. Saxmundham has a market every Wednesday and a craft market on the first Saturday of each month.

No visit to Suffolk is complete without a trip to the UK’s most traditional seaside resort. Southwold is 15 miles north along the coast. With swathes of buttery sandy beaches laced with candy-coloured beach huts and a clutch of fine, often organic, restaurants, Southwold is an essential seaside experience for any family.

Ten miles southeast of Alde Garden is the Peter Pan-inspired Thorpeness, a gorgeous Tudor village with an impressive 60-acre boating lake fit for watery frolics. From here you can see the famous House in the Clouds, a beautiful stilted house overlooking the village.

Alde Garden has been created with not only an understanding of the land, but also a genuine passion to be as sustainable and ecologically sound as possible. Marie and Mark have successfully created a calm, natural retreat among some of the country’s finest scenery. To get there, Saxmundham is the nearest train station and has direct links from Ipswich and London. Marie and Mark offer free transport from the station to the camp site. For more information see [www.aldegarden.co.uk](http://www.aldegarden.co.uk).

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