



STAYCATION

Holidaying in the UK this year? You bet I am. With accommodation options as exciting as these, why go anywhere else, says **Tracey Davies**.

Green travel has come a long way since the days of new-age hippies flogging damp tents on the edge of Dartmoor. In 2009, ecologically aware travellers are more likely to holiday in straw-bale cottages or Mongolian yurts than rough it under leaky tarpaulin.

As the UK's green travel industry booms it gets a little more inventive and, in turn, a lot more exciting. Back in the 1980s it was the height of fashion to spend two weeks in a 12th-floor apartment in Magaluf. Yet, 30 years later, the hippest way to holiday is in a fully-equipped tree-house hidden in the leafy wilds of Cornwall.

"Staycation" – along with "credit crunch" – is one of the buzzwords that will define 2009. Despite our questionable weather, a holiday in the UK has much to offer the humble tourist. From fleece-lined North American tipis on the Isle of Wight to a bunk-down and porridge in a converted prison in Oxford, there's an abundance of new, ecologically friendly experiences to be had all over the UK. And it's because of the increased awareness of our environment that the green travel industry has grown 10-fold over the last decade.

ChaNan and Michael Bonser run Eco Retreats (www.ecoretreats.co.uk), an organic farm, tipi and yurt retreat in Machynlleth, Wales. "To run Eco Retreats as an eco-friendly business was a no brainer," says ChaNan who previously trained in the luxury hospitality industry. "Both of us are incredibly passionate about the environment and ethical issues and have lived our lives with strong ethical principles for as long as we can remember." Eco Retreats offers two-

night breaks in a tipi or yurt and includes a reiki session and twilight meditation for each guest. "We focus our business on quality [delivered] in the most stupendous surroundings that Wales can provide, and that is what people come to us for," ChaNan enthuses.

Over the past 20 years our domestic travel industry has gone through some real changes. Up until the late 1970s, British tourism confined itself to seaside resorts and Butlins-style holiday camps. The 1980s were the age of the package holiday, where half the street would decamp to southern Spain to enjoy their full English breakfast in the sun. However, it's the 1990s and noughties that have brought a real turnaround for tourism. Families are being enticed back to holidaying in the UK, partly by economics but also by education. We are far more aware of the impact that air travel has on the planet and we're making a concerted effort to change our ways to reduce our carbon footprint.

Run wild in the country

On top of economic and ecological reasons, there are plenty of other incentives to holiday in the UK. As a nation we work the longest hours in Europe, which not only takes its toll on mind and body, it also adds to the untold stresses of modern life. We need a simpler way to holiday to help rebalance our own busy lives and those of our children.

Kids these days live a more restricted life than that of children of previous generations. It's during the weekends and holidays that children need to unwind and break free from the restraints of school and life in general.

Last year, I took my young family on their very first camping trip to the Sussex countryside. My six-year-old son was let off the leash – metaphorically speaking – and was allowed to run wild. Dressed only in a pair of cut-offs, he found a makeshift rope swing, and with a gaggle of fellow camping



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HIDDEN VALLEY YURTS



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urchins, he had the time of his life. No amount of Nintendo action could have put that smile (or that mud) on his face, and the freedom he experienced was priceless.

While many larger companies are now publicizing their "green credentials", it's the smaller operators who are steeped in good, sustainable business practice. Green holiday lets such as Ecocabin in the south Shropshire hills, has used its extensive knowledge about sustainability and the environment widely in its marketing. "Six years ago, as a cleaner of traditional holiday lets, I was shocked by the amount of waste produced, even by short stays, and the high levels of energy consumption," says Kate Grub, founder and owner of Ecocabin (www.ecocabin.co.uk).

"I was fortunate to secure a government grant to start my own holiday business and, if it was going to be run on environmental principles, it made sense to construct the cabin from natural, sustainable materials too." The Ecocabin is built using locally sourced Douglas fir, insulated with wool from British sheep and furnished with reclaimed and recycled materials. "When I opened in 2005 it was one of the first of its kind. Now, there are many more holiday homes run on similar principles and I am proud to have been a part of starting a national change." Kate concludes: "In addition to environmental considerations, I believe adhering to individual conscience is vital; integrity shines through and is valued by ethically discerning guests."

Small business owners within the travel sector are becoming more aware of their impact on the planet and how this in turn affects their business. Suddenly, it's not all about cash, cash, cash, as even larger companies start to care about the long-term implications of their business decisions. "As organic farmers, UK tourism within semi-ancient woodland was the only sustainable option for us," says Rob Carr, owner of Fishing Hideaway (www.fishinghideaway.co.uk).

co.uk), a fairy-tale log cabin in Whitecloserigg, Cumbria. "Plus it gives us great pleasure in providing accommodation in an environmentally friendly manner." If there was ever an antidote to city living, then Shank Wood log cabin is it. Residing beside the River Lyne among 140 acres of private woodland, it's fully sustainable with solar-powered lighting, a peat toilet and clean-burn wood burner. Instead of a fridge, visitors are encouraged to use the chilly waters of the Lyne to cool their beers.

Yet, to be truly sustainable, businesses also need to consider their supply chain. Kate at Ecocabin offers a "buy local" shopping service, which can deliver a selection of local produce to you during your stay. Others, such as Eco Retreats, greets its guests with a welcome hamper of organic goods.

However, environmentally friendly holidays are not all about wild camping and fleecy tipis. La Rosa Hotel (www.larosa.co.uk) in Whitby, on the east Yorkshire coast, offers a delightfully British seaside break in the form of a beautiful Victorian hotel. In its heyday, 5 East Terrace was frequented by author Lewis Carroll. The old hotel has been decorated and furnished solely with pre-loved memorabilia procured from auction houses, flea markets and car-boot sales and is as curious as Alice's own Wonderland.

The UK's tourist industry is being forced to evolve in order to compete with overseas destinations, which sadly still dominate the holiday market. While Mediterranean resorts offer tempting May to September sunshine, the UK is clawing back business thanks to the increased interest in more sustainable, ecologically aware travel options.

With smart travellers choosing a greener way to holiday, I hope the staycation is more than just a passing trend. The ideology behind it plays a vital role in changing people's perceptions, which in turn changes the way we travel. ▲



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