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RISE OF THE STAYCATION



MAKE YOUR UK HOLIDAY
MORE MEMORABLE



WELCOME

Keen to book a staycation, but don't know where to start?
From glamping, luxury camping and touring to fairytale castles and narrowboats... if you are considering booking a break, or just dreaming ahead, we want to help to make your UK holiday more memorable.

In our latest digital book, we bring you tips for planning a UK staycation with a difference. We pick out some trendy spots likely to sell out fast and give you tips on booking with the current uncertainties in mind.

There are stories of travel mishaps and plenty of advice for first-time campers. What are you waiting for, scroll down the pages and check out some places worth considering for a brilliant 2021 UK break.



reach

CREATED BY LISA WALSH

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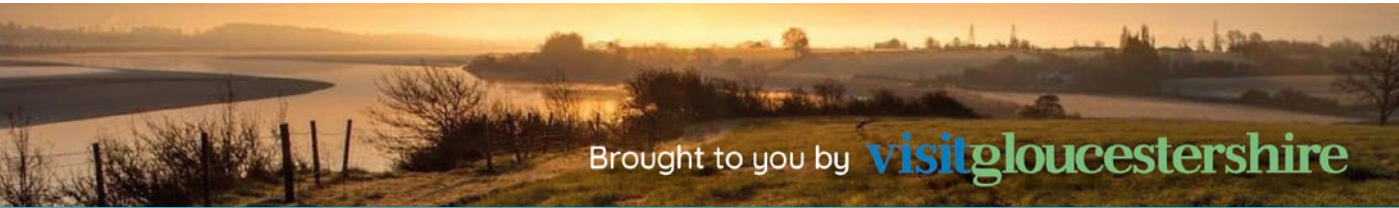
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visitgloucestershire

What springs to mind when you think of Gloucestershire? Most of us picture rolling Cotswold hills, Regency towns and picture-perfect villages. There is, however, much more to Gloucestershire and a lot of people don't realise its diversity as a holiday destination.

In fact there are more than 1,350 places to rest your head for the night from converted chocolate box cottages to swanky hotels, unique AirBnB homes to bed and breakfasts. As things begin to open up, we've compiled a go-to list (starting page 9) to fire up your imagination for a staycation in Gloucestershire and to take the hard work out of planning a trip to the county that many a famous face calls home.

For more inspiration for what to do on a staycation to Gloucestershire, you can connect with Visit Gloucestershire via Facebook www.facebook.com/discovergloucestershire or Instagram www.instagram.com/visitglosuk



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Top tips for planning your staycation

Bearing current uncertainties in mind, if you are considering booking a UK break here are a few points worth considering for a hassle-free UK holiday that won't break the bank.

Go 'off the beaten track'

There are many reasons why tourists flock to popular destinations. But if you're looking to keep your trip as cheap as possible, it's worth doing some research into alternative options, rather than defaulting to the busy well-knowns.

Think outside the 'usual' accommodation box

Self-catering holiday rentals and caravans may be relatively easy to book. But as the restrictions ease, it may also be fun to consider something cheaper to keep the cost down. With so much uncertainty you might not want to fork out for expensive accommodation. Some beach huts to hire are kitted out to enable overnight stays – placing you literally on top of a beach low cost! Checkout www.beachhuts.com

Plan activities in advance

If you plan out what you want to do in advance, you may increase opportunities to make some decent savings.

Even better if you can work out the cost per person, per activity. For example, you are thinking of doing more than one UK break this year, you might be better buying an annual pass or membership with organisations such as the National Trust. Booking through websites such as TopCashback can also mean you get cashback on accommodation bookings and holiday insurance.

Ensure you insure

Before travelling, you might now, more than ever, want to consider travel insurance. Even if you are looking to stay on UK soil, with so much uncertainty still around, it doesn't mean your plans are exempt from being cancelled or affected in some other way.

That's why it's important to investigate holiday insurance options, and check what policies will or will not cover, as well as checking the small print of providers' cancellation policies. Many policies have Covid-19 exclusions.

Watch out for scams

Action Fraud is warning people looking to make holiday bookings this year to watch out for scams.

Think twice before handing over money and personal information. Holiday fraud can vary from fake accommodation listings advertising hotels and self-catering properties that simply don't exist, to 'too good to be true' offers.

Criminals can approach their victims over the phone, via text, email and social media, offering temptingly cheap deals to encourage people into booking a holiday with them. But in reality, the holiday that's been booked doesn't exist.

Do a thorough online search on the holiday company, including any reviews, checking whether the company is an Abta member and being wary of companies that don't provide paperwork.



‘There’s always a challenge ahead when narrow-boating’



The bridge at Chirk Bank

A scenic narrowboat break can also be a daredevil adventure as Ben Mitchell and his family found out following a route through time and nature on their first canal boat holiday.

I call out from our narrowboat to a man on a mobility scooter who is overtaking us on the towpath: “Is that the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct ahead?”

“Yes, don’t worry,” he replies. “There’s a pub on the other side!”

As I edge on to the magnificent bridge, barely wider than our boat with no barrier to my left, I look down over the 126ft (38m) drop to the River Dee below and feel the butterflies gathering in my stomach. I quickly realise this daredevil crossing is enough to turn even a teetotaler to drink.

“Straighten up, you’re going to hit the side,” my panicked partner shrieks at me while my daughter laughs with glee, although I notice



Ben passing through a lock

she’s standing on the side next to the towpath so she could easily step off if a calamity should actually occur.

We edge forward slowly – the narrowboat equivalent of tiptoeing – across the 1,007ft-long (307m) aqueduct which, built in 1795, is the highest and longest in the UK and is now a Unesco World Heritage Site, until we finally reach the canal basin of Trevor and I feel palpably relieved.

But if I thought this was time to relax, of course I was wrong; despite crawling along at an average speed of 3mph, there is always a challenge ahead when narrow-boating.

I am now faced with a 90-degree turn to go under a bridge with only inches to spare on either side, which requires me to utilise my hitherto unused – by unused I mean non-existent – reversing skills to manoeuvre and line-up into position, and move forward into the impossible-looking gap.

We (somehow) make it and, as I adjust the tiller to prevent the rear end scraping the bridge walls, I allow a moment of pride to bubble up inside me. I feel I am gradually getting the hang of steering Amelie, our 62ft long Lautrec Narrowboat.



Daredevil crossing: Pontcysyllte Aqueduct



Just two days earlier, I had stepped onboard a canal boat for the first time and despite a thorough briefing from Paul, one of Chirk Marina's enthusiastic and highly-expert team, I had set out with a huge feeling of trepidation.

To say this floating house steers like a brick would be insulting to bricks, and using the tiller is completely counter-intuitive to a car driver – a turn to the right takes you to the left and vice versa. I soon learnt that you should not steer more than a gentle push, as it will easily send you veering off.

Surprisingly quickly, though, I start to get a feel for it and begin to relax and take in the beautiful views; at every bend I am taken aback at how picturesque the countryside is, every bridge a potential Constable painting.

The canal not only cuts a line through the countryside, it feels like it cuts a line through time, transporting you into a different dimension, away from the roads and hustle of modern life – the prison of lockdown quickly forgotten. It brings you within brushing distance of cows dipping their nose in the water, sheep nursing their lambs, herons standing statuesque on the bank.

We set off from Chirk, just across the border into Wales, for this new High Life route planned by Black Prince Holidays, which takes us along the Llangollen Canal to Ellesmere, before retracing our path and up to Llangollen itself.

We successfully pass through the only two locks on the route with the help of a couple of live-aboard boaters and my daughter's energetic enthusiasm for turning the windlasses to raise

the paddles – as well as learning new driving skills you also pick up a whole new vocabulary while boating.

I had never imagined that a short canal boat trip could take me to such remote and different locations, from the rustic farmland of Shropshire to the rugged Welsh hills of Llangollen, and the huge bonus is because you are fully-equipped onboard, you can moor up wherever you want.

After picking up supplies at Vermeulens Delicatessen in Ellesmere, we stop for the night alongside the majestic Blake Mere, a tranquil lake reflecting the forest that surrounds it, with the only disturbance made by the splash-landing of geese and ducks.

The final waypoint of our voyage is Llangollen, where we climb to the 13th century ruins of Castell Dinas Bran, which overlook the town like a giant silhouetted sheep, before we walk to the manmade Horseshoe Falls.

We finish our day with an ice cream in the town, where I feel jolted back into the 21st century, having to negotiate the bustle of cars and supermarket tills once again.

But we are soon back on the water, negotiating the notorious narrows which lead out of Llangollen and back into the timeless countryside.

How to plan your trip

Black Prince Holidays (01527 575 115; black-prince.com) offer a four-night midweek break from Chirk from £989 in May, based on up to four sharing and including one dog. Diesel is extra and costs around £10 per day.





Stay in a castle and feel like royalty

Looking for a staycation with a difference? How about booking a stay in a luxury castle to make sure this summer break is as unforgettable as possible. Luxury Castle Hire has over 150 castles available in its portfolio. Here, Gordon Homes picks out eight venues that caught his eye...



1. Thornbury Castle, Gloucestershire

The only Tudor castle to be open as a hotel, Thornbury Castle, close to Bristol and Bath, allows you to retrace the steps of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, as you walk along corridors and through grounds they once explored.



2. Carlowrie Castle, near Edinburgh

Just eight miles west of Scotland's capital city, this privately-owned 18th century Baronial castle has only ever been in the hands of two families in its 162-year history, and is nestled among 32 acres of formal gardens and woodland.

3. Langley Castle, Northumberland

Langley Castle Hotel is a 14th century castle, nestling in the Northumbrian valley of the South Tyne. Built in 1350, during the reign of Edward III, the castle has retained its architectural integrity and is one of the few medieval fortified castle hotels in England.



6. Traquair Castle, Scottish Borders

Located near Peebles, around 30 miles south of Edinburgh, this unique property was originally owned by the kings of Scotland and later became the home of the Earls of Traquair. It is claimed to be the oldest inhabited house in Scotland.

4. Eastnor Castle, Herefordshire

First built around 1820, this huge and imposing castle is located near the historic town of Ledbury, nestled at the foot of the dramatic Malvern Hills.



5. Swinton Park Castle, Yorkshire

Owned by the Cunliffe-Lister family since the 1880s, and the ancestral seat of the Earl of Swinton, this beautiful castle in the Yorkshire Dales on an extensive 200-acre estate.



7. Culzean Castle, Ayrshire

Perhaps one of Scotland's most famous castles, this incredible cliff-top fortress on the west coast of Scotland was designed by Robert Adam in the late 1800s and includes rooms where General Eisenhower stayed while president of the USA.



8. Kent Castle, Kent

Looking like it came straight out of a fairy-tale book as it rises majestically out of its surrounding moat, the castle is encircled by 500 acres of breathtaking gardens and parkland and has been impressing people for centuries from when it was first built as a Norman stronghold by the half-brother of William the Conqueror, to a Tudor palace owned by Henry VIII and then as a private residence.

Spend an unforgettable week in Gloucestershire

Summer or winter staycation? We've compiled a list of the most unmissable places to visit, stay, eat and drink in Gloucestershire – some firm favourites and some hidden gems that you might not have thought of visiting before...



De Vere Tortworth Court

WHERE TO STAY

Warwick Knight

Something different, the Warwick Knight was previously featured on Channel 4 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces and is set amongst the apple orchard trees in its home of Longney.

De Vere Tortworth Court

Packed full of history, The Orangery restaurant is a particular favourite of visitors, whilst large open fireplaces set the scene for a cosy evening or two in the winter.

Asphodel Cottage

A chocolate box cottage in the Cotswolds that has stood proudly since 1624. Situated in the

village of Tarlton, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more idyllic overnight stay.

Greenway Hotel

This 16th century Elizabethan manor house can be found just outside of Cheltenham, meaning that you have the serenity of the Gloucestershire countryside whilst being on the cusp of a charming regency town.

Queens Hotel Cheltenham

This grand hotel sits pride of place at the top of The Promenade in the town. It's widely popular for good reason, thanks to its stunning interior and premium location.

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WHERE TO EAT IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Smokey Joe's

Think retro, Smokey Joe's is arguably one of the most quirky cafes in Cheltenham. Reminiscent of stepping into an American diner à la Grease, you can be sure to find the best milkshake in town there or their infamous unicorn hot chocolate.



Quirky Cheltenham cafe Smokey Joe's photo: Anna Lythgoe

Vintage Birdcage Cakery

For years now, this café has drawn the attention of crowds looking for some really great homemade cake whilst showing off the pretty surroundings of the café on Instagram.

Egypt Mill

This bar, restaurant and hotel sits in a prime riverside location just outside of Stroud. Accessed via a bridge over the river, the outside garden space is a lovely backdrop to enjoy a bite to eat.

Rose Tree Restaurant

Despite this restaurant in Bourton-on-the-Water being well-known, it's definitely not one to be forgotten about. Their garden sits right next to the waterside, an area that is often referred to as the Cotswolds' answer to Venice.

The Daffodil

If 1920s aesthetic is your thing then you're bound to fall in love with The Daffodil in Cheltenham; a 1920s cinema that was restored by Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen.

Leaf & Ground

This café, garden shop and deli in Dursley boasts delicious food as well as a farmshop packed full of local goods and little luxuries.

WHERE TO GRAB A DRINK

Woodchester Valley Vineyard

Think a South of France vineyard but in Gloucestershire, quite the luxurious day out.

No. 131

A firm favourite in Cheltenham, No.131 has hotel rooms, a restaurant and an on-site bar aptly named Gin & Juice, home of the popular (and Instagram worthy) candy floss gin.

The Fire Station

The Fire Station offers a unique atmosphere in Cheltenham. We heard their cocktails are most definitely something to write home about during your stay.

Cotswolds Distillery tour

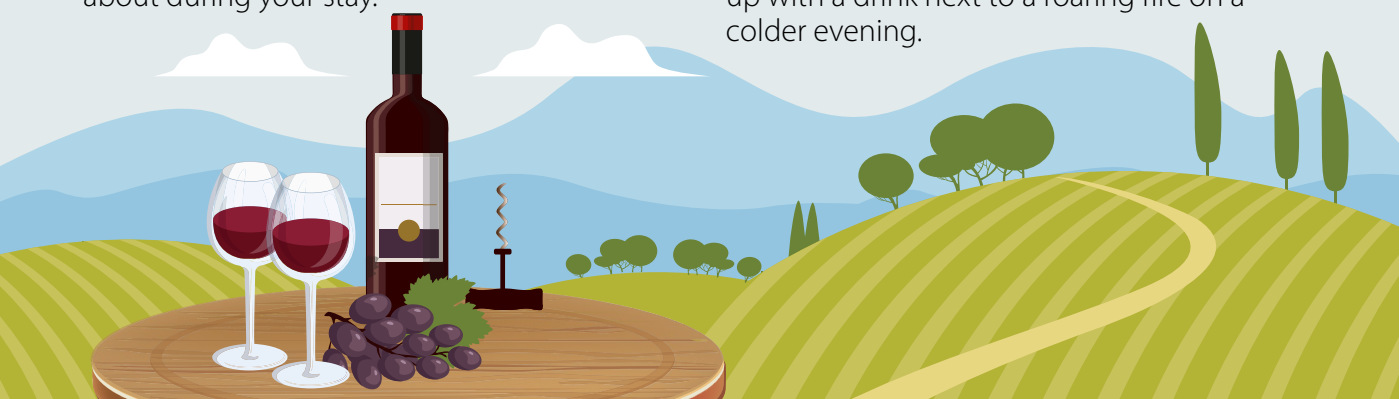
The tour and tasting experience will give you an insight into the secrets of a distillery whilst you can try the spirits and liqueurs as you go.

Téatro

Established in 2017, this bar and restaurant in Cirencester boasts chic interiors and a spacious outdoor space.

The Berkeley Arms

This classically English half-timbered pub in Tewkesbury actually has roots dating back to the 12th century – where better to snuggle up with a drink next to a roaring fire on a colder evening.



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THINGS TO DO AS A FAMILY

Gloucester Cathedral

Gloucester Cathedral usually has a calendar packed full of events and displays. The children will love to see where some iconic Harry Potter scenes were filmed here, just make sure to keep an eye out for trolls...

Everyman Theatre

The Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham plays host to musicals, plays and their ever-popular yearly pantomime. With a passionate team behind each production, you won't want to miss out on a visit to this wonderful venue.

Symonds Yat

A village in the Wye Valley, canoeing and kayaking along the river Wye are just the tip of the iceberg of activities that are available here. Definitely one to get the family active.



Gloucester Cathedral

Clearwell Caves

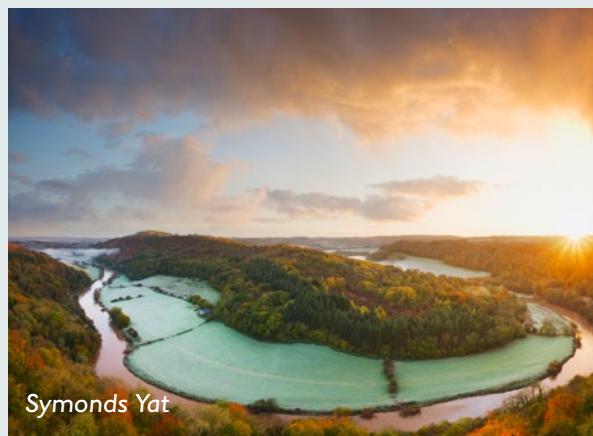
Clearwell Caves in the Forest of Dean gives you the opportunity to explore the caverns and caves below, learning about more than 4,500 years of mining history and sea creatures that lived some 350,000,000 years ago.

Gloucester Ski & Snowboard Centre

Gloucester Ski & Snowboard Centre offers a 230km slope alongside other recreational slopes, ski lifts and a bar - all without leaving Gloucestershire.

WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre

A wide open space brimming with wetland nature, your visit will not only be educational and engaging but will mean that you are supporting the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) charity.



Symonds Yat

WHERE TO ESCAPE OUTDOORS

Cotswold Farm Park

An award-winning attraction where you can get up close and personal with the likes of traditional farmyard animals and rare breeds. There are also many other activities outside for the little ones of all ages.



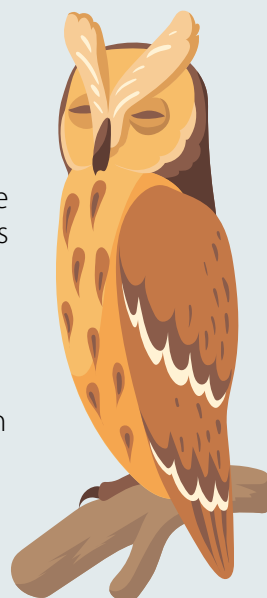
Cotswold Farm Park

The International Centre for Birds of Prey

You can find this attraction in Newent where more than 60 species of owls, eagles and hawks live. There are also some 12 acres of enclosures, gardens and woods to explore.

Chedworth Roman Villa

Chedworth Roman Villa is one of the grandest Roman villas in Britain. A site that offers everything from history to education all whilst you get to breathe in the tonic that is the Cotswold air.



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ATTRACTIONS TO VISIT AS A COUPLE

Snowhill

A picturesque village tucked away in the Cotswolds, Snowhill is absolutely worth stopping by to take in the scenery. Bonus points if you can spot where various scenes were filmed for the Bridget Jones film series.

Coaley Peak

Offering a stunning vista and idyllic picnic spot, you may even be lucky enough to see some brave parasailers as they often take off from there on Sundays if the weather allows.

Aerospace Bristol

A heritage museum and learning centre, you will even get the opportunity to see Concorde up close and personal.

Pittville Park

An ornamental park in Cheltenham surrounded by Regency houses, you can set sail on the boating lake, grab an ice cream and even visit the aviary against the backdrop of the dramatic Pittville Pump Room.

Farmshop/Gloucester Services

Hear us out on this one, the Farmshop is much more than your average services. Somewhere that locals regularly frequent to visit the deli, browse the eco products and marvel at the local produce on offer.

Cheltenham Promenade

The tree-lined Promenade in Cheltenham hosts various boutiques and eateries that are well worth a visit, in our opinion.



Snowhill where various scenes were filmed for the Bridget Jones films

For more inspiration for what to do on a staycation to Gloucestershire, you can connect with Visit Gloucestershire via Facebook www.facebook.com/discovergloucestershire or Instagram www.instagram.com/visitglosuk



7 reasons to love camping



by Susan Griffin

Truly, there's just something about downsizing your life, hitting the road and living a simple existence surrounded by nature that's calming, inspiring and rejuvenating. Not convinced? Susan Griffin puts together a few reasons why it's time to embrace your inner camper...



1. Affordability

Camping is cheap, in the best sense of the word. Even if you're splashing out on a site, you're very unlikely to spend more than £40 a night, with pitches usually costing around £20-£25. It potentially means you can travel more throughout the year or use the money you would have spent on hotel accommodation to treat yourselves to an incredible experience during your trip, or even splash out on the sort of meal you might normally pass up.

2. Deep sleep

It's a bit of a myth that you'll have a terrible night's sleep while camping. I mean, yes, you might get unlucky with noisy neighbours, a deflating air bed or a leaky tent but these things are pretty rare. I always say, the key's in the prep. Don't go minimalist with your sleep set-up but make it somewhere you can't wait to snuggle down into at the end of the day. On top of that, the sort of sleep you get is just deeper. No doubt, it's to do with all the fresh air, and a feeling of contentment.

3. Incredible locations

This sort of ties into the price because you can spend a negligible amount to experience the same views that some people are paying an extortionate amount for in a hotel, and in many instances, you'll be able to experience a view that's only accessible to campers. One memory that stands out is sleeping on the side of a lake in Switzerland with snow-capped mountains in the distance that we would never have experienced otherwise. And on our shores, we've enjoyed incredible countryside and coastal views, and pitched mere steps from a beach or woodland.



4. The simple life

There is something really satisfying about realising you can live a very contented life without a lot of the stuff you typically surround yourself with. Your life becomes a lot less cluttered, literally and figuratively.

Then there's the fact you have simple but necessary jobs to do, like prepping the fire, washing up, and giving the tent a little spruce up - the sort of tasks you can just potter about doing that calm the mind.

And in the evening, there's something very zen about sitting back, watching the fire crackle or looking up to a sky filled with stars and enjoying the company you're in.

5. Trust

It's rarely acknowledged but one of the wonderful things about camping is the unspoken trust between yourself and your neighbours. This is so important when you think about it. You're often leaving your

belongings for hours at a time when you go out for the day, with no way of 'locking up' before you go.

There's a real camaraderie as well, with people ready to help out and loan anything if needed. It can be sociable, a chance to meet lots of people and hear their stories.

6. Food tastes better

I don't know what it is, but whatever you cook up when you're camping tastes better than it does at home. We've got a little two-hob set-up, as well as the trusty camping stove, so I admit there are times when I feel like I'm channelling a TV chef on one of their road trips as I throw a few things into the pan.

7. You're on the go, in a good way

You're on the move a lot of the time when you're camping, from the moment you arrive and need to put the tent up. Even walking to and from the showers burns a few calories!



BEST BIT OF ADVICE...

—“—

Don't go minimalist with your sleep set-up but make it somewhere you can't wait to snuggle down into at the end of the day

—”—

Why it's important to take some creature comforts

Camping shouldn't feel like an endurance test, but a nurturing experience where you're close enough to nature to reap all the benefits but still enjoy some comforts. Having camped in all elements, from storms and gale force winds to 36-degree heat, across Europe and in all four corners of the UK, Susan Griffin shares what she and her partner Michael have learnt along the way.

I've been harking on about the joys of camping for years, not wild camping or glamping, but the middle ground that provides the best of both worlds. Here are a few tips that admittedly might sound a little like a military operation but hopefully they'll help to make your time beneath canvas as calming and contented as possible....

Make a list

I'm a fan of a list at the best of times, not least when it comes to camping because most things will have an important purpose during your trip. It's also the little things that can have a huge impact when you're in the middle of nowhere (like never forget the corkscrew, just saying). Put everything on the list, however obvious it might be, starting with the tent, mallet, spare pegs, the cutlery, plates and pans, right down to bin bags and kitchen towel. Get everything out in your living room before you go and tick it off. If you're not sure whether you need something, play it safe and throw it in so you don't regret it later.



Experienced campers: Susan and Michael

Be snug

One of the common misconceptions about camping is that you're going to be left shivering on the cold, hard ground all night.

I would say to those people, you've never seen our set-up. We have a double airbed, two blankets, a bed sheet, duvet, pillows and then another blanket if things look like they could get extra chilly.

We also take an electric pump that attaches to the car, so the bed's inflated in minutes. No, we do not travel light but then listening to the sounds of the night when you're all cosy is blissful. Ideally, you want to wake up feeling refreshed.

In the early days when we were taking more of a minimalist approach, we only had a blanket to sit on, which meant there was lots of scrabbling around on the ground all the time, as well as numb legs from sitting in awkward positions.

Maybe it's an age thing, but we never leave without our two trusty camping chairs and a couple of tables so everything's off the ground and within easy reach.

We also have a couple of trusty inflatable chairs we put up in the tent, which we love, but aren't exactly a necessity.

Prepare for rain

If you can, borrow a friend's tent at first just to make sure camping's not just a one-off experience.

But when you do buy your own, get one you can stand up in and that has a separate space to your sleeping area, so you've got somewhere to sit when the rain inevitably pours.

A step up from that is a separate gazebo if you think you're going to be camping a lot.

Alternatively, make sure there's a pub within walking distance of your tent. It's somewhere to make a beeline for when night falls and temperatures drop, but it's too early to call it a night.

Keep it tidy

Astronaut Tim Peake has said his family caravanning holidays were brilliant preparation for life on the International Space Station.

Not only do you have to get used to living in close quarters, but it teaches you to keep things tidy and return everything to its allotted space. It's no different with camping. You'll feel a lot better if you know exactly where you're going to find something when you need it.

Also, take a little dustpan and brush to keep on top of things during your stay and clean off your tent when it's time to head home. Like I said, it's the little things.



Fire starter

One of the best things we've ever bought for our camping trips is a foldable firepit because we've got so much use out of it. As it sits above the ground, it keeps the grass from getting scorched and they're easy to carry so you can take it to the beach for sunset BBQs.

One of the joys of camping is sitting with a drink come sundown and looking up at the stars. Not so joyous is trying to feel your way round a pitch-black tent because you don't have any lights.

Ideally you need a couple to hang inside your tent, a couple of lanterns for outside the tent, as well as a torch for when you head off to the toilets in the night. A few solar or battery-operated fairy lights around the entrance make a nice touch, and light the way home like a twinkling little beacon if you've been to that nearby pub.

And, do your prep

If you're just planning on a one-nighter, then it arguably doesn't matter too much where you pitch and a spontaneous stop-off can work, but if you're going for any longer then you've got to do some research, so look at various websites for reviews or ask any campers you know for suggestions.

Look at whether the site's secluded, near a main road, shaded or open to the elements. Is it quiet or noisy, and what kind of crowd does it appeal to? What are the facilities like? Basic's fine but there's no excuse not to be anything other than super clean. What's nearby in the way of a shop or a pub? Is there something particularly special about the site, an amazing view perhaps?



A few solar or battery-operated fairy lights around the entrance make a nice touch

BEST BIT OF ADVICE...

Put everything on a list, however obvious it might be, starting with the tent, spare pegs, plates and pans, right down to bin bags



A spur-of-the-moment trip to Glencoe turned into a lesson on planning

How I learned to love camping

Some people love camping, while others prefer the comfort of a hotel. Until recently, I would have put myself firmly in the second, er, camp. While I sleep more soundly in the fresh air, love the idea of simply rocking up and pitching a tent in the wilderness, and like to think of myself as a hardy, outdoorsy type, my experiences with tents have not always lived up to expectation, writes Liz Davidson. But at least I've learned some lessons along the way. I might have got off to a bad start but I've got this camping lark all worked out now...

Lesson one: spontaneity doesn't always work out.

I learned that in Glencoe, on a spur-of-the-moment camping trip without a sleeping bag or warm clothing. It's a hauntingly beautiful place with a particular resonance in Scottish history.

I was living in Glasgow at the time and had planned to spend the weekend in the city. Some friends were heading off for a camping trip, and I began to feel left out as they made their preparations. At the last minute I decided

to go too. My friends lent me some blankets as I didn't have a sleeping bag. It was summer, after all! How cold could it get?

That night, I lay awake in the tent, freezing, unable to sleep and genuinely believing I would die of hypothermia if I did. I was at the edge of the tent.

Two of my friends lay next to me, snug in sleeping bags and with contented smiles on their faces. I didn't want to make a fuss but eventually started calling out their names, and then pleading, 'wake up, wake up, please!' They didn't. I have never felt so cold.

Lesson two: pitch your tent on a level piece of ground.

Ever slept with your feet higher than your head? I have, and all night I dreamed I was falling... falling...

Lesson three: don't forget your tent.

I once camped on a beach in west Wales without a tent (although I suppose that is not technically camping). There were three of us and I slept soundly all night in the fresh air but at dawn I awoke to find myself eye to eye with a large and hungry-looking crow. At least I woke up in time!

Lesson four: tents have hats.

I did not realise this until I went to the Cambridge Folk Festival a few years ago, a year marred by heavy rain. After waking up with my tent flooded, I discovered that tents have hats. I'd forgotten to put my tent's hat on! The 'hat' is more commonly known as a flysheet – this is a double skin that protects the inner tent from getting wet. Even if you have one, you need to take care that it doesn't ever touch the inner tent because this will cause condensation and water will start to drip on your belongings.

Lesson five: not all tents are waterproof.

The following night, I dutifully put the hat on and my tent still flooded!

The hat didn't even work! In the middle of the night, I gave up and slept on the back seat of the car.

What I learned is that most tents can withstand a light shower but not all tents are waterproof, especially if you buy the cheapest one in the camping shop, like I did.

Lesson six: take a cold-weather sleeping bag.

I learned this at Wilderness Festival. Oxfordshire in southern England in a sleeping bag in the summer wasn't nearly as cold as Glencoe in a blanket in the spring, but I was still too cold to sleep. The lesson here is that no matter how warm the days are, the temperature drops at night. These days, I always take a thicker sleeping bag than I think I'll need. I'd rather be too hot than too cold.

Lesson seven: invest in a good airbed.

Never again will I get that sinking feeling... I'm now the proud owner of a proper airbed, the kind that needs a foot pump to inflate. It's absolute bliss.

Lesson eight: make sure your tent is dry before you pack it away.

From damp comes mould, which sprouts happily inside your tent folds until the following year when you come to put it up. This is not a pleasant discovery.

Lesson nine: don't forget your stove.

Cook your own breakfast and instantly feel like Bear Grylls. Hot coffee, fried egg, beans from a tin. It all tastes great when you've cooked it yourself in the open air.

Having learned from my various camping mishaps, I no longer fear the cold or the damp. Instead, I am free to enjoy all the amazing aspects of pitching a tent for the night – the fresh air, the freedom, the sense of fun and the joy of feeling close to nature.

**BEST BIT OF ADVICE...**

From damp comes mould, which sprouts happily inside your tent folds – make sure your tent is dry before you pack it away





A magical way to spend a night under canvas

The word yurt used to make Elizabeth Davidson think of mud, cold, damp and, for some reason, yoghurt pots. However, a trip to an ancient woodland in Sussex changed her mind.

I think it's because I associated yurts with camping – and I have bad luck with tents, whether it's wonky guy ropes, flooding or waking up freezing cold in the middle of the night. Not to mention the difficulty of pitching one in the first place.

The yurt, however, is a more reliable construction. It uses a wood or bamboo lattice-work frame and is the invention of nomadic groups in the Steppes of Central Asia, where it can be pretty cold at night.

Our yurt was called Kushti and we chose it because it was sumptuously decorated with rugs, carpets, textiles and wall hangings. There were hand-carved stools, a sofa and a wood-burning stove in the centre. I expected it to be cramped and awkward, but stepping in was like entering Doctor Who's Tardis – it was weirdly big inside, and included a kitchen area with a gas-ring camping stove, a bed and ample amounts of seating.

Away from screens, electricity and other modern means of living, nights felt timeless and magical. The only drawback was the



Kushti at Forest Garden, Shovelstrode
www.forestgarden.info

(admittedly short) walk through the woodland to the bathrooms at night. Apart from that, the yurt felt like a little self-contained house.

Kushti at Forest Garden, Shovelstrode, has two yurts and four cabins to hire. It is 28 miles from London and nearby attractions include Ashdown Forest and the village of Hartfield, where Winnie the Pooh author AA Milne lived. You can visit the bridge where Christopher Robin and friends played Pooh sticks.

More yurts to explore



Larkhill Yurts, Carmarthenshire, Wales

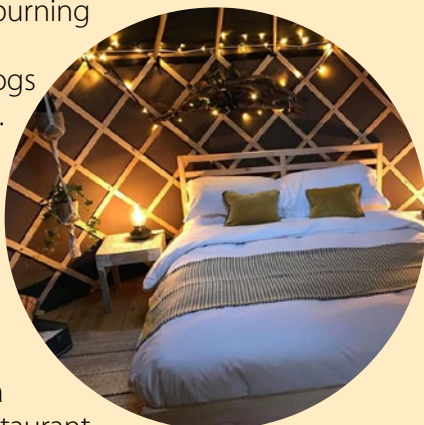
Yurts (and tipis) in beautiful west Wales. Why stay in a castle, when you can have all the romance of a yurt adventure? These fabric-strewn yurts come with a fully equipped kitchenette and shared bathroom. There are three yurts – a Mongolian ger, a Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan bentwood or 'oba', and a northern Iran alachigh – as well as a lavuu (a temporary dwelling used by the north Scandinavian Sami people). There's a children's playground on site, and the Cardigan Bay and Carmarthen Bay coastlines are about a 40-minute drive away.

www.larkhilltipisandyurts.co.uk

Hygge Yurt, The Black Swan, Cumbria

With a Danish twist, this yurt aims to invoke the contented cosiness of 'hygge'. It has wood floors, a log-burning stove and electricity. Dogs are welcome. The yurt is situated in gardens on the bank of the River Eden, and is run by the Black Swan, a hotel and restaurant near the Cumbrian village of Ravenstonedale. Local attractions include the majestic beauty of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales.

www.blackswanhotel.com



Forest Yurt, Eco Retreats, Powys

In a private and secluded location in an oak forest near Snowdonia. It has a wood-burning stove and outside fire pit, plus it comes with its own wood-fired bath so you can truly immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the forest. You just need to fill the bath with water, light the fire underneath and then wait about an hour-and-a-half for it to warm up for a unique bathing experience. A further four yurts may be available to book: Meadow, Ash Valley, Waterfall and River. ecoretreats.co.uk.



Bramble Yurt, Alexander House, Auchterarder, Perth & Kinross

This Scottish site offers a luxurious stay, with your own en-suite bathroom and outside hot tub. A wood-burning stove ensures a cosy yurt, and the views over Gleneagles are truly special. Massages and beauty treatments can be booked. Other yurts and converted horse box hideaways can also be hired. www.alexanderhousescotland.com/glamping



Blackdown Yurts, Devon

Badger, Woodpecker, Buzzard and Willow are set in the beautiful Devonshire countryside by the Blackdown Hills. Two are traditional Mongolian yurts while the others have wooden-clad sides. Inside, they are all decorated with Mongolian hand-painted poles and struts, and furnished with wall hangings and colourful fabrics. www.blackdownyurts.co.uk





Templar Treehouse has its own private hot tub, underfloor heating and stunning veranda

Eight trend-setting sites

Once again, camping looks likely to be popular this year, as travellers seek to avoid crowds and rediscover a sense of adventure. Here, Sarah Marshall picks out eight cool campsites to book in the UK

1. Treetop adventures

Where: Melin Mabes, Pembrokeshire

The quirky Templar Treehouse has its own private hot tub, plus a slide to take you down to the ground. The property features a combination of rustic charm and first-class amenities, with underfloor heating, a modern bathroom, antique kitchen, suspended loungers and veranda with a view to the river. From £152 per night, sleeping two people.



2. Family nostalgia

Where: Fisherground Campsite, Cumbria

For those looking for a more traditional grass pitch option, Fisherground Campsite in Eskdale is a popular choice. There is plenty for the kids to enjoy, including campfires, a paddling pond and the nearby steam railways line. Pitches from £24 per night.

3. Nature calling

Where: Culdees Castle Estate, Perthshire

This pretty Scottish glampsite offers five woodland cabins, each tucked away within the five-acre forest. The huts have been specially designed to be incorporated into the nature of the site, and all have hot tubs available. There are plenty of options for walking, cycling, horse riding, fishing and golf nearby. Cabins from £120, sleeping two.



4. Glam options

Where: Redwood Valley, Powys

This family-run, eco-friendly campsite is set among 25 acres of woodland on the Welsh borders. The site features two yurts and one woodland cabin styled to give a treehouse feel. Treetop cabin from £130 per night; yurts from £110.



5. Fantasy stay

Where: Mad Hatters, Cambridgeshire

This fun-packed campsite features all the magic of a ‘mad hatters’ tea party in camping form. Following an Alice in Wonderland theme, pitches are named after characters from the tale. The Queen of Hearts glamping cabin is straight out of a fairy-tale. Pitches from £18 per night.



6. Desert island escape

Where: Ye Olde Swan, Oxfordshire

For something truly different, try Ye Olde Swan in Oxfordshire. The campsite is located on Thames Island, making it feel like an exotic escape. Fortunately, civilisation isn’t too far away, however. A traditional pub just over the bridge provides pizza and prosecco to the campsite.



7. Pitches for a pooch

Where: Howgills Hideaway, North Yorkshire

This North Yorkshire site offers pitches with incredible mountain views. The site has a relaxed atmosphere with both campfires and dogs welcome, and a mix of walkers and families taking up the pitches. The location is easily accessible for the beautiful Bolton Abbey. Pitches from £24 per night.



8. Cute for couples

Where: NightSky Glamping, Gwynedd

This romantic glamping option provides tented glamping with en-suite toilet facilities and private hot tubs. Aptly named, the campsite is in a location famed for its stunning sunsets and starry nights. There is also a choice of two beaches within walking distance. Bell tent from £70 per night; safari tent from £90 per night.

All sites can be booked through Cool Camping
Visit coolcamping.com





Cool places to stay

Fancy sleeping in a giant golden football, a Jurassic Park bus or a treehouse with a bathtub on the balcony? Look no further, here are three of the most quirky holiday properties around...

The Conker

Where: Powys, Wales

For a totally off-the-grid glamping experience, escape to the wilderness in the stunning Welsh mountains. This giant golden conker features a deluxe micro kitchen, but you can also cook al-fresco with an outdoor wood-fired pizza oven.

www.qualityunearthed.co.uk



The Dinobus

Where: Polzeath beach, Cornwall

Ever slept on a bus? It doesn't sound like it would be the most comfortable place to lay your head but this isn't any old bus. This American school bus has been converted and now offers comfortable beds, cosy furnishings and ski chalet style decor. It's a glamping experience like no other. Just one-mile from the famous Polzeath beach in Cornwall.

www.qualityunearthed.co.uk



Robin's Nest Treehouse

Where: Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire

Labelled as offering 'the ultimate escapism', Robin's Nest is a treehouse in the Lincolnshire villages of Woodhall Spa. You'll adore the lakeside views and the fact you're in the middle of a forest but the best bit? The balcony bathtub! The terrace, which becomes its own little garden is where you can lie back in your bubbling outdoor bath!

www.qualityunearthed.co.uk

Sea kayaking in Scotland.

Photo: Much Better Adventures

More than just a holiday



Active adventure holidays in Scotland to get the pulses racing

Banish lockdown lethargy by sailing, hiking or climbing around Scotland, says Sarah Marshall. We've selected three exciting breaks promising to challenge and inspire in equal measure.

Sail alongside super scenery

Cast off in the peaceful waters of the Inner Hebrides and learn the ropes of yacht sailing while enjoying some of the most dramatic scenery in the British Isles. Designed to immerse guests in Scotland's marine wilderness, this trip also offers a chance to spot whales, sharks, dolphins and a bounty of birds. On land, long walks will reduce the wobbles of days at sea. On the Isle of Rum, visit the crimson Kinloch Castle, a former shooting lodge built in the Edwardian era, and discover the Isle of Eigg, often touted as the UK's most eco-friendly island. Other ports of call include Ardnamurchan and colourful 18th century fishing port Tobermory on the Isle of Mull.

How: Wilderness Scotland (wildernessscotland.com; 01479 420 020) offers a six-night trip from £1,100pp (two sharing), including all meals. Trip starts from Mallaig. Availability in July and September 2022.

Kayak and wilderness camp

In the right light, West Scotland's beaches glow so blindingly white, they could be mistaken for the exotic fringes of an Indian Ocean island. Admire their beauty at water level on a newly-launched kayak trip, skirting secluded bays and sheltered shores, and splice through the clear waters of Highland sea loch Moidart. Although crowds are minimal, paddlers are rarely alone; dolphins, porpoises, seals, and the occasional basking shark will keep them company. After a few hours of physical exertion, pull up on land to wild camp at Smirisary and the islet-filled

Sound of Arisaig. Forage for shellfish and seaweed or dive into the Atlantic Ocean for an invigorating swim. Trips are accompanied by a professional guide, and no previous kayaking experience is needed.

How: Much Better Adventures (muchbetteradventures.com; 020 3966 7597) offers three nights from £560pp (two sharing), including all kit and food. Available until September.

Scramble up icy mountains

There's a tendency to hide indoors during winter months when temperatures plummet and days shrink. But active adventures can be even more rewarding when experienced in extreme conditions. Already a popular pastime in the Alps, ice climbing is set to catch on closer to home, with the introduction of a new itinerary in Scotland. Using crampons and ice axes, ambitious beginners can get to grips with frozen inclines, with a guide for every two climbers, to give encouraging words of advice. Once slippery slopes have been scaled, there's a chance to ascend Tower Ridge, one of the finest routes on Ben Nevis.

How: Much Better Adventures offers three nights from £700pp (two sharing), including full board accommodation. The trip starts from Fort William. Departures from December 2021 to April 2022.



Be a responsible guest

For the earth-conscious, a staycation is the perfect holiday. No long-haul plane rides means your holiday carbon footprint is likely to be much smaller than if you were to jet off to Dubai. Here are some tips for protecting the earth while you explore the best that the UK has to offer.

Opt for eco-friendly transport

With the UK being a small and relatively accessible place to visit, even in the most remote corners, there are myriad ways to get around that won't emit too much carbon into the atmosphere. Rather than driving or flying to your UK holiday destination, why not travel by train or coach. With a London to Edinburgh coach fare on National Rail costing £30.10, compared to a London to Edinburgh flight from Ryanair at £49 (at the time of writing), you could even save some money by taking the eco-friendly route. Rather than driving around the area that you're visiting, why not hire a bike to explore the local sites? As well as being an eco-friendly way to get around, you'll treat yourself to some fresh air and exercise. The National Cycle Network has plenty of ideas for cycle routes across the UK.

Go off-grid and shun wifi

For a truly relaxing and earth-friendly staycation, why not leave your devices behind? According to research by Ofcom, a surge in screen time during the Covid-19 pandemic has seen people in the UK spending 40% of their day watching TV and online video services. Guardswell Farm in Perthshire encourages guests to switch off completely, with no WiFi provided on site. Some of its cottages even run on solar power.

Keep it local

Sustainable and seasonal food is an important part of maintaining a green lifestyle, so why not try to take advantage of local food while you're away? Seaside towns are famous for their seafood, with oysters on the menu in Whitstable and Cornwall famous for its crabs and pilchards. The food will not only support the local economy, but the less it has to be transported, the lower its carbon footprint will be. Take a break from chain restaurants and stop to eat in a local cafe or restaurant, as the food is a little more likely to be locally produced, and you might find a new delicacy to love!

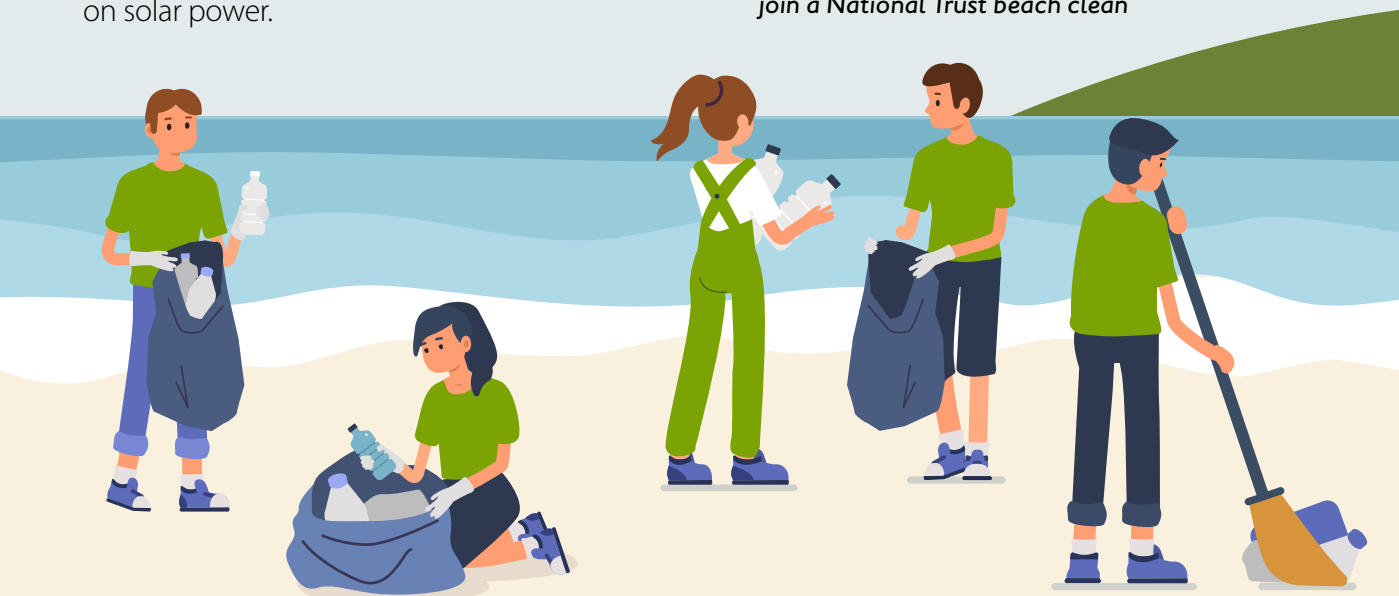
Go on a beach clean

If you really want to make a difference on your staycation, you could join a National Trust beach clean. With the National Trust claiming that their beach clean-ups have unearthed rubbish coming from as far afield as Canada, Saudi Arabia, and the Caribbean, it could even provide a feel-good activity.

Watch what you take home

While bringing home souvenirs for your loved ones is a lovely idea, plastic trinkets from the seaside can create clutter and eventually pollution after they have been thrown away. Instead of bringing items home, why not take some local treats back, like Cornish fudge or Scottish shortbread? Or pick up a reusable tote bag with a design from the area you visited?

If you really want to make a difference on your staycation, why not join a National Trust beach clean



GO where your friends love to go.



♥ Traeth Llyfn, Pembrokeshire ★★★★★



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with only the best recommendations
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Eat



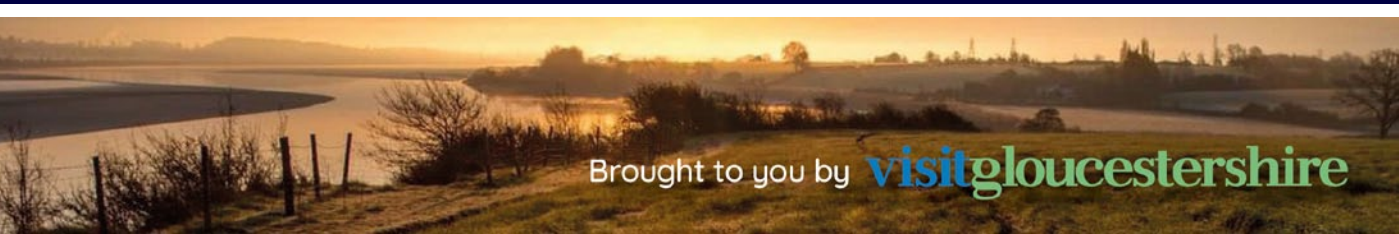
Drink



Do



Chill



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