

GLAMPERS WANT ALL THE CREATURE COMFORTS

Campsite owners look to push the boundaries to offer customers something different

The concept of glamping – or posh camping – has been around for a long time.

Yurts and tipis were among the first alternatives to the now-familiar tent, and began springing up across the countryside more than two centuries ago.

They allowed the owners of campsites – or glampsites – to charge premium prices for what has traditionally been a low price, low-income market.

Owners with a spare field, good access and planning permission for temporary structures can now turn a piece of grassland into one of these glampsites relatively straightforwardly, and can earn a higher yield than a conventional campsite which earns as little as £100 a night in some cases.

Tom Nowel from Boldscan Glamping Structures, a range of glamping structures from its Somerset base, says that "retiring farmers are now looking to create a high-end product which offers a home-from-home experience.

"We've just launched a new safari tented Tsavo," he said. "It's really a



reaction to our customers telling us that they want more bedrooms and more living space, and in the right location it can also accommodate disabled people with room for hoists and carers to stay."

The Tsavo is a large decked safari-style tent with extended flysheet to give a shaded front deck area. The twin canopy also has a small extension at the rear to accommodate toilet and shower units and measure 11m x 5m.

"We're seeing farmers being able to charge up to £1,400 a week for peak-season occupancy and that's because it's a really high-end market.

"Customers are also interested in making things as bespoke as possible so we can actually print anything on the canvas or the internal walls – even the furniture inside."

The company has been operating for more than 20 years and says that the move towards new and innovative structures is a reflection of campsite owners wanting something different.

"Tipis and yurts have been around since the 1990s and I think what we're seeing now is people – and that includes farmers – looking for something different for their customers that sets them apart."

DIVERSIFICATION "DAUNTING BUT REWARDING"

Francesca Newell is only a few months into her glamping experience project on the family's Monmouthshire Farm.

She decided to recreate the safari experience at the foot of the Brecon Beacons, five miles from Abergavenny.

The business opened in July and has been fully booked throughout the summer.

"I was looking at it for two years but with a family and work it was hard to get it going quickly," she told *BF&G*.

"Finance and planning took a long time, and it was daunting to think about launching a new business but I persevered it so far. Everyone who has stayed with us has loved it and have really enjoyed the opportunity to run a business in the countryside."

Francesca has planning permission for seven of the tent-

bedrooms and with electrical hook up and a hot shower on offer, the Seven Hills Hideaway escape costs about £1,100 for a week at the height of the summer season.

It took Tom Nowel four and a half years to get planning approval for five tented lodges near Edale in the Peak District.

His diversification – called The Gathering – got underway four months ago and runs alongside the family's upland sheep farm.

"We needed to increase our income streams," he said. "It's a Victorian farm in a beautiful location but the farming alone is not paying the bills."

Like Francesca, Tom says he has loved having paying guests in two of the lodges and is looking forward to putting up three more in time for next season.

"It's been wonderful. We do a lot of hosting so we knew we would be ok dealing with people but everything has been really positive so far."