

# Happy glamping

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**Glamping is becoming a popular way to escape urban living and enjoy the countryside. Edward Busby explains what glampers are looking for and how rural businesses can take advantage of the opportunities**

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When people go camping, they want to head out into the countryside, lighting fires, cooking, and sleeping in tents or under the stars. They want to escape from cities, with or without their children and as urban lifestyles develop this demand will increase.

What 'glamping', or glamorous camping, sites provide is a natural outdoor experience with the comfort of a bed, bathtub or deck, bypassing the rigours of traditional camping.

## Starting operations

Even though there is a small market for urban glamping, it is predominantly a rural business. The land on which you operate will ideally be deep in the countryside, preferably away from road noise, train tracks and light pollution. When surveying your land for the right spot there are some key points to bear in mind.

- You will need vehicle access a short walk from your site, as well as a water supply.
- For safety and insurance purposes, if the site is on a working farm then ideally you will direct your clients around the working areas, locating them somewhere discreet and out of the way.
- You should also be thinking about areas that harness your land's unique selling points, such as a beautiful view, woodland or water.
- If you are thinking of having multiple sites, then make sure they are adequately spaced to ensure your clients' privacy.
- Think about where the sun rises and sets.

Glamping has developed so rapidly in recent years that planning protocols have only just started to catch up. Although some local authorities apply different policies, planning permission is necessary, especially as a large investment may be involved. Local development plans and neighbourhood development plans could have an impact on your application.

For most sites, you will be seeking planning permission for temporary structures, because most glamping sites are movable. However, when it comes to considering cabins and treehouses, you will be looking at securing full permanent permission.

However, do not let this process discourage you, because it is by no means prohibitive. If your national planning policy framework has been updated recently, then it is likely to encourage eco and rural tourism; Wales and Scotland have different systems and their own distinctive considerations.

When dealing with your local planning officer and with highways and environment agencies, take a conservative approach. Glamping is considered to be very low in terms of impact.

Also look into your local development plan and see how your business can benefit the parish view for the area. Do not shy away from your neighbourhood; engage the community, because glamping can directly benefit other local businesses as well.

## **Safety**

It is imperative to consider this from the outset, and when commissioning or building a site, appropriate safety features should be included.

When locating your site, speak to your insurance provider. If a company already provides you with a farm policy then see what advice it can offer regarding the working farm. It is usually enough to direct your clients around busy areas with clear signage, and where possible have them avoid livestock; otherwise, you should fence off the area in use.

Public liability insurance is another must, and it is advisable to insure your structures against storm and fire damage as well. If there are any dangerous areas such as old mineshafts or shooting ranges, you can inform your guests of places to avoid.

You should have a member of staff on site or within easy travelling distance at all times in case of problems. People do understand that problems occur, but they also expect a prompt response. It is essential to get your business's reaction to problems right, as bad feedback from unhappy clients can be very damaging and could be associated with a company for a long time.

## **Facilities and furniture**

You will need a small car park, which is best located a short walk from the site so that your clients will feel removed from their everyday lives. Small touches such as thinking about how your clients will carry their belongings from the car can help create a distinctive experience.

A log burner inside the construction and a fire pit outside are attractive features. Hot water and good cooking and washing-up facilities are essential; however, these do not need to include a washing machine or dishwasher.

People will be expecting to find at least the same quality of furnishings and contents that they have at home, or better. Bathroom facilities are a great opportunity to exceed expectations, but white flushing toilet systems are not necessary; composting toilets have made considerable advances in recent years and flushing systems are neither eco-friendly nor low-impact.

You do not need a 240V electricity supply, either ? a high-quality solar panel and 12V spotlights will be perfectly adequate. Providing plenty of lanterns and candles so people have an alternative option will also add to the ambience. Illuminate outside walkways with 12V fairy lights, which are not too intrusive, and make for a safer and more pleasant environment.

When it comes to entertainment, let nature and the fire do the work for you. It is a good idea to supply board games, books and cards, but you should stay away from wifi and 240V outlets as this is generally what clients are looking to escape.

## Costs and income

Set-up costs will vary considerably depending on styles and structures. A reasonable starting sum is around ?27,000??30,000.

However, you could easily increase this depending on the design and interior furnishings or finishes that you choose. These figures will generally not include laying roadway or building car parks.

Our glamping sites, using canvas structures in this price bracket, will look to turn over around ?15,000 each a year, when running well, resulting in about ?10,000 profit; this is based on a seven-month season under canvas.

Other sites using timber will have a longer season of between nine and 12 months, although operating through the winter comes with its own set of challenges. We find that, if all is going smoothly, these sites turn over ?20,000??25,000 a season, with running costs at around 33% of this amount.

Annual maintenance will be required with any construction, and remember that canvas has a lifespan of four or five years. Other running costs will include cleaning, changeovers, sundries and fuels.

One good member of staff doing changeovers can manage up to four sites. It is best to structure a working week so you only have two arrival and departure days, such as Monday and Friday, because this can make the staff position easier to fill. This member of staff can also do the stock-taking and ensure that supplies are kept topped up during the week.

Most people use agencies for marketing, but you can still take your own bookings; agencies will tend to charge around 26% of turnover for this service.

Seek the unique With a little investigation, you will see the more distinctive you can make your site, the more it will captivate clients. In an increasingly competitive market, it is essential to set yourself apart, so avoid off-the-shelf looks and products. Seeking advice from planning and glamping consultants in the early stages is a good idea, while employing bespoke building companies is advisable.

**Edward Busby is co-founder of [Crown and Canopy](#) , a business based in rural Herefordshire that specialises in creating bespoke glamping retreats and glamping consultancy**

### Further information

- Related competencies include [Land use and diversification](#) , [Planning](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Land journal* (May/June 2017)