

S'more, s'il vous plait? 'Glamping' the French way.

European-style upscale camping hits the U.S.

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Early one morning last summer at a new Huttopia “glamping” property in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, I jumped up from my cushy mattress and could barely wait to step outside. There’s nothing quite like the sun’s insistent pink glow through the walls of a tent to nudge you out of bed at sunrise. Unless you’re my teenage nephews, in which case there’s nothing quite like sleeping until the sun’s high in the sky. More about them later.

Huttopia is a 19-year-old French company that builds and manages resort-campground hybrids. I knew about its dozens of locations in France, but I wasn’t heading to Europe anytime soon. So when I learned that its first U.S. camp was opening in Albany, N.H., last June, I booked a New England getaway.

As glamping — glamorous camping — has gained in popularity, we’re seeing more affordable options. No longer do you need to drop \$800 a night for Italian linens under an artfully draped mosquito net. Huttopia’s concept — which features well-designed, Ikea-like tent kits imported from France — is more of an elegant KOA than a rustic Ritz-Carlton.

In fact, these individual accommodations, which include sheets and towels (and thankfully don’t offer WiFi), may be the answer for those of you who like the idea of camping but don’t actually like camping. Poof! No more kneeling in the dirt fiddling with tent posts, searching for that eternally misplaced flashlight or struggling to boil water for your morning joe.

“We provide a getaway in the heart of nature without the inconvenience of traditional camping,” said Nash Abdrabo, Huttopia’s new CEO for North America. He told me that the company will open camps in California and Maine in 2019 and that it plans further expansion across the United States.

When my nephews Zach and Griffin, my beagle Hammy, and I visited the White Mountains last August, we arrived to a quiet glampground with a heated swimming pool and a shiny Airstream trailer where you could buy homemade pizza. The boys grabbed a basketball while Hammy and I stepped into a large tent that serves as the site’s lodge. French music played, and I glanced around to see a pantry (“le garde manger”) stocked with wine, snacks and camping gear. After I checked in, we pulled wagons — overflowing with our backpacks, food and gear — down a



PHOTOS BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Sunrise at Huttopia, top, a “glamping” property in New Hampshire. The author’s beagle, Hammy, and nephew Griffin Goldman, above, take in their surroundings outside their tent.

path to our home for the night, a canvas tent with wooden posts, just a few steps from Iona Lake.

The Trappeur tent, one of Huttopia’s four styles of accommodations, sat on a wood platform that created a large deck and a comfortable indoor living area. The glampy parts: a timed heater on the ceiling and a kitchen with refrigerator, sink, Ikea glasses and

plates, pots and pans, and extravagances like a salad spinner and a Bodum French press. A narrow bathroom separated two rooms just big enough for a queen bed on one side and bunks on the other. We scanned the interior, flipping switches, testing Velcro window coverings and exclaiming over newfound frills, and then we slipped into swimsuits. The out-

doors was calling.

I paddled my stand-up paddleboard around the perimeter of the lake, dodging lily pads and white floating flowers that looked like teacups. A handful of private homes bordered the far side. One resident, who kayaked alongside me for a few minutes, said the locals were glad to have Huttopia as a new neighbor. “It was a camp-

ground before,” he said, “but it’s much more about family now.”

Bien sûr, Huttopia felt wholesome. Guests can rent canoes and paddleboards, take nature hikes, play beach volleyball, watch outdoor movies, and use a communal grill to cook their catch of the day. For parents: beer and wine at the Airstream; for kids: scheduled activities like painting and ping-pong tournaments.

After we spread our wet clothes on a drying rack (how civilized!) my industrious nephews went to the lodge to buy firewood and cheddar cheese Pringles. They gathered pine cones and twigs for kindling and — after many false starts and assistance from the friendly Maine family next door — started a fire. Later, after veggie burgers and grilled zucchini, we unpacked s’mores ingredients, found sticks and skewered our marshmallows. In minutes, our fingers were sticky and chocolatey, our stomachs full. Griffin looked at the fire. “That was a lot of work for a little s’more,” he said.

Inside, we washed dishes. I cleared up some confusion around our linens (folded neatly on top of naked mattresses) by explaining to the boys that what they thought were “thick sheets” were actually crisp duvet covers we’d need to put on the duvets. Pockets lined the canvas walls in lieu of nightstands — handy spots for a paperback or water bottle. We took turns in the tiny bath-

If you go

Huttopia White Mountains

57 Pine Knoll Rd., Albany, N.H.
603-447-3131

canada-usa.huttopia.com/site/white-mountains/

The glampground is located on Iona Lake, about 10 miles from North Conway. There 96 units, from \$65 for the rustic two-person Bonaventure with communal bathroom facilities, to \$170 for the Chalet, which sleeps six and has a full kitchen and bathroom. The most popular is the Trappeur, a canvas-and-wood tent with a kitchenette and bathroomette, at \$120 a night, or \$140 on the lake. (Take note of the strict cancellation policy.) Dog fees are \$4, but some breeds are prohibited. Open mid-May to mid-October; some dates require a two-night minimum.

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room. The sink was the size of a toaster oven, and I bumped my elbows and knees on the walls while using the shower and toilet. Nonetheless, we all felt a little spoiled that we could wash up, ostensibly camping, without a headlamp and a walk in the woods. We closed the privacy curtains to our rooms and turned off the lights. Through the canvas walls, we heard pleasant campy sounds: our neighbors’ fire crackling and popping and our neighbor crickets chirping.

At first blush of hot pink shining through the walls the next morning, I scrambled outside to see steam rising from the lake and a fiery blaze on the horizon. I dropped my paddleboard into the still water and glided past tents of sleeping glampers, toward the rising sun.

Naturally, the boys slept several more hours, and naturally, they awoke ravenous. We ordered sweet and savory crepes from the Airstream (which also sells croissants and espresso in the mornings), and when we asked for water, it came to us in a tall, attractive glass bottle, like you’d find at a bistro.

The morning stretched on, and we packed in fun: splashing in the pool, walking the beagle and shooting hoops. When it was time to leave, we swept the tent, filled the wagons and rolled them back to the car, entirely too clean and rested to say we’d been camping.

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