

Indians embrace campervanning and help to revive country's tourism

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Talk to a partner. Use your imaginations to answer the questions below.



- What can you see in the picture?
- Who is in the campervan?
- Where are they going and why?
- What is going to happen when they get there?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

cosy	cut off	domestic	eco-lodge	economy	lifeline
loan	mobile coverage	remote	revive	slum it	vintage

1. warm and comfortable, makes you feel relaxed _____
2. old but kept in good condition because it is interesting or attractive _____
3. spend time in conditions that you would not normally think were good enough for you

4. a thing that you depend on very much and can help you out of a difficult situation

5. environmentally-friendly (green) hotels or other holiday accommodation usually in remote natural areas _____
6. the availability of mobile-phone networks, service, and connections _____
7. separated from civilization and the rest of the world _____
8. far away from other cities, towns, or people _____

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9. the whole of a country's business, industry, and trade, and the money that they produce

10. relating to the country being talked about and not other countries _____
11. become, or make something become, active, successful, or popular again

12. an amount of money that a person, business, or country borrows, especially from a bank

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. The summer fair in the park will have donkey rides, a _____ car show, bouncy castles, music, and refreshments.
2. We can't give a _____ of that size without being sure the customer can repay it.
3. He is staying in a posh hotel while the rest of us _____ at a campsite.
4. Terminal 3 is for _____ flights. International flights leave from terminals 1 and 2.
5. My grandparents' cottage was in a very _____ part of the country.
6. One of the best things about the cottage was that it was almost completely _____ from the rest of the world.

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Charu Sudan Kasturi

14 July, 2022

- 1 As the rain came down on Lake Umiam in the north-east Indian state of Meghalaya, Rishab Baid and his friends sheltered in their cosy mobile home. When the rain stopped, they took a walk along the edge of the lake surrounded by green hills.
- 2 Baid and his fellow travellers – Nabendu Goswami and Kaushal Jain, all 30 years old – grew up in Assam, in the country's north-east. Now living in Bengaluru, in the south, the friends wanted to go to the region where they spent their childhood and have an adventure. Online, they found Camping Co, an Indian start-up offering camping vehicles, from 4x4s with tents to vintage campervans.
- 3 Campervanning has been popular in the west since the 1960s, but the idea of holidaying in a vehicle feels strange to most Indians who prefer to stay in hotels. "If you stayed in a van, people thought you were slumming it," says Adyasha Das, from the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management.
- 4 Now that's changing. There are now at least nine new companies offering campervans for hire. As the country's tourism sector tries to rebuild after losing 14.5m jobs in the Covid-19 pandemic, campervanning is a potential lifeline, say travel professionals.
- 5 Bengaluru-based LuxeCamper has partnered with an eco-lodge company that allows caravans to stop at its 15 sites across the southern state of Karnataka, while travellers with Camping Co can stop at any of 500 privately owned homes and farms.
- 6 Improved roads and the availability of mobile coverage in most parts of the country have helped make campervanning attractive, says Tiger Ramesh, founder of LuxeCamper, as travellers can leave the main tourist routes without being completely cut off. Campervan hire is also cheaper than paying for hire car and hotel room for the night.
- 7 India's new campsites usually have toilets, showers and charging points for electronic gadgets.
- 8 "During the pandemic and India's lockdowns, people started to realize the benefits of travelling by oneself, away from hotels and to remote places," says Ramesh.
- 9 The campervans are almost always booked out at the weekends, says Ramesh, just not during the monsoon season.
- 10 India's tourism industry needs all the help it can get. The industry employed about 35 million people before the pandemic, and contributed about \$194bn to India's economy in 2019. Most of the money was spent by domestic tourists, according to government data. However, the number of domestic tourists fell dramatically during the pandemic, from 2.3 billion trips in 2019 to 610 million in 2020.
- 11 Many states hope caravan travel will revive tourism. The southern state of Kerala opened its first caravan park in February, 2022 and plans to set up 120 in all. The governments of Kerala and Karnataka are offering loans to tourism operators who want to buy caravans or set up parks.
- 12 Camper travel means India's increasingly global young population can experience at home what they've tried abroad. Deena Sivasdas had been on road trips in New Zealand. In January, she hired a campervan with her husband, Akhil, to visit the states of Assam and Meghalaya.
- 13 At Assam's Kaziranga National Park, which is famous for its elephants and rhinos, the couple camped in a village on the edge of the reserve. "We saw the animals walking around, interacting with nature, away from other tourists," says Akhil. "It was better than any safari."

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3 Understanding the article

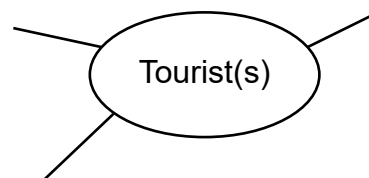
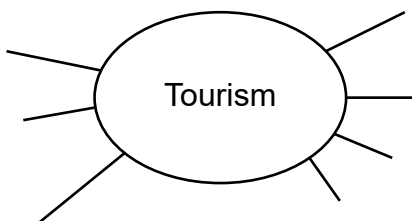
a. Are these statements True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Campervanning first became popular with middle-class Indians in the 1960s.
2. Until recently, poor roads and a lack of comfortable campsites meant that campervanning in India was not very popular.
3. The problem of not enough official campsites has led to different regions coming up with creative solutions.
4. Campervans in India are only allowed to travel on official tourist routes.
5. Because they could not go abroad or travel very far from home during the pandemic, more Indians became interested in discovering their own country.
6. Foreign tourists are not allowed to hire campervans and travel around India.

4 Key language

a. Find all the words and descriptions in the article that contain the word-stem 'camp'. Write them into the box.

b. Now complete the mind maps with the words that come before or after 'tourist' and 'tourism' in the article.



c. With a partner, take it in turns to use the words and collocations you found to make sentences about the article. Continue until you have used all the words and collocations.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.



- What makes campervanning better than other ways of travelling and holiday accommodation?
- Is campervanning for you? What do you like most / least about it?
- Is it better to buy or hire a campervan?
- You can use your friends' campervan for one month. Where will you go and why? What (and who) will you take with you on your campervan adventure?

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6 In your own words

- a. Read the travel diary that goes with the article.
- b. Write your own travel diary about a weekend away in a campervan. Use your imagination but also include things that happened in your previous holidays where possible.

Our travel diary

Names: Rishab Baid, Kaushal Jain, and Nabendu Goswami

Ages: 30

16 April

11am: Camping Co delivered our Tata Xenon van to Rishab's house on the outskirts of Guwahati. The van came with three tents (two inbuilt, and an extra one), sleeping bags, a small stove, pots, and pans.

2.30pm: We reached Lake Umiam after a three-hour drive. Most of it – 80km – was on the highway but the final 16km were on a bumpy mud track with no space for two vehicles to pass each other. The van did well and got us to the banks of the lake, where we parked in the grounds of a hotel. We met a group of bikers in their 50s. One of the group was the owner of a famous Guwahati bakery we had grown up visiting, who shared stories of his travels around the world.

6pm: Under the moonlight, Lake Umiam is stunning. It was created by damming the Umiam River in the 1960s, and is 225 sq km in size. It's surrounded by green hills. As the rain came down, we huddled in the top tent.

17 April

7am: We left Lake Umiam early and drove through the lush green Jaintia Hills, renowned for their waterfalls. We were on our way to the best among them ...

10.30am: "Phe phe" means paradise in the local Jaintia language. And the Phe Phe falls lived up to that name. There were several other tourists there when we arrived after a three-hour drive and a short walk. We stood under the waterfall, getting drenched. Refreshed, we hit the road again.

4.30pm: As we reached our destination, Amkoi village, we realised we had a problem. The final kilometre was down a steep mountainous slope, just three metres wide. We somehow made it safely and the villagers gave us rice and dal. Then we set off on a trek to Shnongpdeng village on the banks of the Dawki River. As we walked down the narrow path with thick forests on both sides, the sun began to set and we used our phone torchlights to find our way.

6.30pm: We reached Shnongpdeng village, and the Dawki River, which marks the border between India and Bangladesh. We had brought tents from our van, so we camped on the riverbank overnight.

18 April

6.30am: We trudged back to Amkoi on foot, wondering how our van would make it back to the top of the slope outside the village.

8.30am: A saviour! A villager in Amkoi who was familiar with the roads drove our van up to the top and we started our journey back.

10.30am: We stopped at Jowai, the district headquarters. Hilly, like the rest of the region, it's a buzzing town with a rich cultural legacy. Unlike most of India, the local community follows matriarchal practices, where daughters inherit the family's assets. For us, it was a much-needed breather: we needed a shower, so we rented a room in a hotel for a few hours, rested, then set off.

3.30pm: Our final stop – at Jiva Veg restaurant in Nongpoh. We ate hot dosas, sandwiches and French fries. It was time for the final stretch of our trip back to Guwahati.

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