

'Mingling is part of the adventure': a family trip to Wales shows why hostels are booming

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. When you go on holiday, where do you like to stay?
2. Do you like to meet people when you are on holiday?
3. Do you like to share living spaces with strangers on holiday?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word or phrase to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

bunk rooms

communal

coveted

revival

tween

airy

awkward

incredulously

scuttle

snug

draughty

bleak

mingle

chit-chat

amiably

go-to

private rentals

scepticism

1. _____ to mix and spend time casually with other people
2. _____ cold because air comes in through gaps or cracks
3. _____ shared sleeping rooms with bunk beds
4. _____ uncomfortable or embarrassing
5. _____ holiday homes or apartments rented just for one group
6. _____ showing surprise or disbelief
7. _____ in a friendly and relaxed way
8. _____ doubt or disbelief
9. _____ cold, empty and unwelcoming
10. _____ a child who is not quite a teenager (around 9–12 years old)
11. _____ light, informal conversation

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12. _____ shared by everyone in a group
13. _____ strongly wanted or valued
14. _____ small, warm and comfortable
15. _____ to move away quickly, often to avoid something
16. _____ light, open and well ventilated
17. _____ a return to popularity or success
18. _____ the usual or preferred choice

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. The cabin was so _____ that we could feel the cold air coming through the window frames all night.
2. After months of closures, the small theatre has enjoyed a(n) _____, with sold-out shows every weekend.
3. She answered the question _____, raising her eyebrows as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing.
4. The café is my _____ place for a quick lunch because it's cheap, fast, and always reliable.
5. He stood by the door during the party, clearly feeling _____ and unsure how to join the conversation.
6. The room was bright and _____, with big windows and lots of natural light.
7. Everyone uses the _____ kitchen, so you're expected to clean up after yourself.
8. The kids stayed up late, whispering and laughing in their _____ instead of going to sleep.

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9. She spoke _____ with the new colleague, putting them at ease straight away.
10. That internship is highly _____, so many people apply for it.
11. We booked a(n) _____ for the weekend so we could have the whole house to ourselves.
12. He responded with open _____, questioning whether the plan would really work.
13. After knocking over the vase, the cat _____ out of the room before anyone could react.
14. The village felt _____ in winter, with closed shops and empty streets.
15. There was no pressure to talk; people could choose whether or not to join the _____.
16. The jumper is small but _____, perfect for cold evenings at home.
17. She enjoys parties where people can _____ freely instead of sticking to the same small groups.
18. My niece is a(n) _____, no longer a little child but not quite a teenager either.

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Forget draughty bunk rooms and awkward social encounters, hostels now provide home comforts and a sense of community which private rentals will never match.

Georgie Duckworth

20 January, 2026

- 1 'Penguins? In Snowdonia?' I asked incredulously. "That's right!" came the enthusiastic reply from our newest hostel companion. We were standing in the large kitchen of The Rocks hostel in Capel Curig, chatting amiably while waiting for our teas to brew.
- 2 "Head up Moel Siabod to the lake, and that's where the penguins are. You'll see a sign warning about feeding them," he said. "But even if they're hiding and you don't see one, it's one of the best walks in the area."
- 3 Spotting a penguin in the Welsh mountains seemed unlikely, but my 11-year-old son was thrilled by the idea of a day spent hunting them. And with that, our daily adventure plans were settled, inspired not by an internet search or guidebook, but by the easy exchange of recommendations that happen so often in the communal spaces of hostels.
- 4 Initially, my suggestion to try staying at a hostel had been met with scepticism. My husband, haunted by memories of school trips, imagined bleak dormitories with creaking iron beds and draughty communal spaces, while our sons (one teen and one tween) were unenthusiastic about shared living spaces and polite chit-chat.
- 5 Still, I was eager to give it a go. Lately I'd begun to feel uninspired by holidaying in the UK. Endless scrolling through lists of private rentals was exhausting and downright unaffordable. Seclusion, it seemed, had become highly prized and expensive. Yet I found myself thinking back to childhood memories of hostel holidays: communal dinners filled with laughter and nights spent tearing around with other kids. It made me wonder why privacy was so coveted.
- 6 In the golden era of travel, around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, meeting new acquaintances while away was common. Think of Lucy Honeychurch's transformative trip to Florence in EM Forster's *A Room With a View*, shaped largely by her meeting the Emersons in their guesthouse. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* also reminds us how trips were once far more social affairs – even if the passengers did keep killing each other. By retreating into isolation, have we lost the very essence of

travel: the pleasure of meeting new people; sharing stories; hearing word-of-mouth tips; and stepping outside our familiar routines?

- 7 Hostels offer a gateway to those old ways of travel. First established in the UK in the 1930s to provide affordable accommodation, especially for young travellers, while also encouraging outdoor pursuits and socialising, their core purpose has changed little over time. What has evolved are the standards and the demographics. Today, private rooms are commonplace alongside bunk rooms, and guests range from solo travellers and students to families, couples and groups of friends.
- 8 To my delight, standards at The Rocks were exceptional: bright and stylish interiors ran throughout, with wooden furniture and colourful cushions. The fire in the shared lounge added warmth, while the firepits outside allowed us a night of stargazing and marshmallow toasting. Upstairs, our snug but smart private family room was cosy and warm, with comfy mattresses, soft sheets and Welsh woollen blankets. Even my luxury-loving eldest son was impressed.
- 9 But what about the social element? Would this be an opportunity to meet like-minded folk, or just a series of awkward encounters to be endured before scuttling away to hide in our room? I needn't have worried. Conversations flowed easily between guests, whether cooking dinner in the well-equipped kitchen, eating together in the airy dining room, or gathering around the fire. There was a comforting pattern of change, with people coming and going, and new friendships forming quickly.
- 10 After our daily adventures, we looked forward to returning to the hostel and sharing our experiences. I picked up tips on thermal gloves from an army nurse who shared my despair over cold fingers, and talked 90s rave music with a couple from Spain. The children made friends instantly, disappearing for snowball fights and board games until bedtime. There was no pressure to socialise – some guests retreated to their rooms or books, others dipped in and out of communal life – and that flexibility was part of the appeal.
- 11 After a challenging few years through Covid, hostelling is enjoying a quiet revival. According to Sam Dalley, founder of the Independent Hostels network, "hostelling is in better health than ever. There are more hostels now than at the height of the youth hostel movement in the 1950s."

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- 12 With places such as The Rocks combining comfort with affordability, privacy with community, the future looks bright for British hostelling, proof that meeting new people and sharing experiences can still be found at the heart of travel.
- 13 As we hiked up Moel Siabod, I felt deeply satisfied. The trip had sparked an appreciation for something that I hadn't realised our holidays were missing; a sense of community. From now on, hostels will be my go-to for adventures like this, rather than the closed doors of private rentals. We never did see those elusive penguins, but who knows what adventures our next hostel stay may lead to?

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What do hostels offer that private rentals don't?
2. Which animal does she think is unlikely to be found in Wales?
3. At first, what did the writer's family think of the idea of staying in a hostel?
4. What two novels does the writer use to demonstrate how social holidays were in the past?
5. When were hostels first established in the UK?
6. Was the social aspect better or worse than the writer expected?
7. Who did the writer speak to in the hostel?
8. What did the kids do until bedtime?
9. What is the state of hostelling today?
10. Will the writer stay in a hostel again?

4 Key language

a. Find sentences in the article that have the same meaning as the sentences below.

1. Hostels now provide home comforts. Private rentals can never match those home comforts.

2. Head up Moel Siabod to the lake. the penguins are at the lake.

3. Our daily adventure plans were inspired by an easy exchange of recommendations. Recommendations like this happen very often in the communal spaces of hostels.

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4. I picked up tips on thermal gloves from an army nurse. She was sharing my despair over cold fingers.

5. The trip sparked an appreciation for a sense of community. Until then, I hadn't realised our holidays were missing it.

b. Rewrite the sentences below using a defining relative clause.

where

who

which

that

when

1. This phone has a battery. Other models can't match it.

2. We stopped at a café. You can charge your laptop there.

3. Our decision was based on advice. People shared the advice during the meeting.

4. I spoke to a neighbour. He understood my frustration.

5. It was dinner time. I realised my fridge was broken.

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c. Use the relative below to write your own examples.

where

who

which

that

when

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- I like to stay in places where I can enjoy my privacy.
- When I travel, I like meeting people who are different from me.
- I wouldn't like to stay in a place where I had to share a kitchen.
- I prefer travel recommendations that other people give me.

6 In your own words

a. In groups, design your ideal holiday experience in the British countryside and prepare to present it to the class using whatever visual aids you think will be helpful. Consider:

- Where you will stay
- When you will go
- Who you will stay with
- What you will do
- Whether it will be a private or communal experience

b. Present to the class and explain why this would be your ideal experience.