

Indians embrace campervanning and help to revive country's tourism

Level: Advanced

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.

alien ambitious boost cosy ease eco-lodge footfall harsh
lifeline loan mobile coverage nascent slum it vast vintage

1. warm and comfortable; makes you feel relaxed cosy
2. become less severe, strong, or heavy ease
3. extremely large vast
4. old but kept in good condition because it is interesting or attractive vintage
5. completely different from what you usually do, feel, or know alien
6. spend time in conditions that you would not normally think are good enough for you
slum it
7. a thing that you depend on very much and can help you out of a difficult situation
lifeline
8. environmentally-friendly (green) hotels or other holiday accommodation usually in remote natural areas eco-lodge
9. the availability of mobile-phone networks, service, and connections mobile coverage

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10. beginning or formed recently nascent
11. difficult, unpleasant, and strict harsh
12. the number of possible customers who visit a shop or business or travel as tourists to a certain place in a given period footfall
13. an amount of money that a person, business, or country borrows, especially from a bank loan
14. an action or event that helps something to increase, improve, or become more successful booster
15. needing a lot of effort to succeed ambitious

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

1. The summer fair in the park will include donkey rides, a vintage car show, bouncy castles, music, and refreshments.
2. We can't give a loan of that size without being sure the customer will be able to repay it.
3. He was staying in a posh hotel while the rest of us slummed it at a campsite.
4. The prisoners are being held in extremely harsh conditions.
5. It was in his nascent career in finance that he decided he'd rather be a concert pianist.
6. The festival has been a major boost for the local economy.
7. As soon as the rain finally began to ease, the children put on their rain jackets and rubber boots and went out to play.
8. Older employees found the new way of working alien and rather puzzling.

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Hire firms and campsites are sprouting up across India, as people look to get away from it all after the pandemic

Charu Sudan Kasturi

14 July, 2022

- 1 As the rain came down on the shore of Lake Umiam in the north-east Indian state of Meghalaya, Rishab Baid and his friends sheltered in their cosy mobile home, waiting for the weather to ease before taking a walk along the edge of the vast body of water surrounded by green hills.
- 2 Baid and his fellow travellers – Nabendu Goswami and Kaushal Jain, all 30 years old – grew up in Assam, the most populous state in the country's north-east. Now based in Bengaluru in the south, the friends wanted to reconnect with the region where they spent their childhood, while also having an adventure. Their online searches led them to Camping Co, an Indian start-up offering a range of camping vehicles, from 4x4s retrofitted with tents to vintage campervans.
- 3 While campervanning has been established in the west for decades, where it became a symbol of freedom in the 1960s, the idea of holidaying in a vehicle is alien to most Indians. In a country with a rising aspirant middle class, hotels have traditionally been the preference. "If you stayed in a van, you were thought to be slumming it," says Adyasha Das, an associate professor at the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management.
- 4 Poorly maintained roads and the absence of campsites were also major concerns.
- 5 Now that's changing. At least nine companies offering campervans for hire have launched across India since 2016 – including three in 2020. As the country's tourism sector tries to rebuild after losing 14.5m jobs in the Covid-19 pandemic, campervanning has emerged as a potential lifeline, say travel professionals.
- 6 Bengaluru-based LuxeCamper has partnered with an eco-lodge company that allows caravans at its 15 sites across the southern state of Karnataka, while travellers with Camping Co can pitch up at any of 500 privately-owned homes and farms. Harsh Sharma, co-founder of Camping Co, which is based in Assam's largest city, Guwahati, says the company's vehicles were all completely booked out in May, 2022, compared with 60% in the same month in 2019.
- 7 Improved roads and the availability of mobile coverage in most parts of the country have helped drive the shift, says Tiger Ramesh, founder of LuxeCamper, as travellers can leave the tourist trail without being completely cut off. Campervan hire is also significantly cheaper than paying for a hire car and hotel room for the night – Camping Co's vans start at £32 a day.
- 8 India's nascent campsites usually have toilets and occasionally showers, says Sharma, along with charging points for electronic gadgets.
- 9 The pandemic has served as a public-relations exercise for campervanning, even though India's harsh lockdowns meant people often couldn't take to the roads. "There was a realization of the benefits of travelling by oneself, away from hotels and to remote places," says Ramesh.
- 10 The vans are almost always booked out at the weekends, says Ramesh, and it's only during the monsoon season that demand falls.
- 11 India's tourism industry needs all the assistance it can get. The sector employed about 35 million people before the pandemic, and contributed about \$194bn to India's economy in 2019, the bulk of it spent by domestic tourists, according to government data. However, domestic tourist footfall fell dramatically during the pandemic, from 2.3bn trips in 2019 to 610m in 2020.
- 12 Multiple states have turned to caravan travel in an effort to revive tourism. The southern state of Kerala launched its first caravan park in February, 2022 and plans to set up 120 in all. And the governments of Kerala and Karnataka are offering loans to tourism operators who want to buy caravans or set up parks. Maharashtra is allowing people to use any government-run park or property as a caravan site.
- 13 Das says: "As Indian tourists try out new things, we're seeing the industry and governments adapt."

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- 14 The emergence of camper travel means India's increasingly global young population can experience at home what they've tried abroad. Deena Sivadas 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.
- 15 At Assam's Kaziranga National Park, which is famous for its elephants and rhinos, the couple camped in a village bordering the reserve. "We got to see the animals sauntering around, interacting with nature, away from other tourists," says Akhil. "It was better than any safari."
- 16 As foreign tourists slowly return to India after the pandemic, Ramesh expects their familiarity with campervans will give a further boost to the sector. March – the latest month for which data is available – saw the highest number of international tourist visits in India since at least the start of 2021, though incoming travel is still significantly lower than it was in 2019.
- 17 Meanwhile, Sivadas and her husband say their campervan trip has inspired them to plan an even more ambitious holiday. They've found a service that rents out motorbikes for long journeys. "We want to ride one to the Himalayas," says Sivadas. "We want to push our limits even more."

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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 infrastructure and a lack of comfortable campsites put Indians off the idea of going on holiday in a campervan.
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 trails.
5. Not being able to go abroad or even travel very far from home during the Covid lockdowns encouraged more Indians to seek out new places in their own country by means of campervanning.
6. Foreign tourists are not yet allowed to hire campervans and travel around India.

4 Key language

a. Find phrases that fit with the meanings.

1. something that shows other people you are able to do what you want (paragraph 3)
2. go to places that other travellers might not go to (paragraph 7)
3. go on a journey by car or other vehicle (paragraph 9)
4. the biggest part of something (paragraph 11)
5. see how much we can do (paragraph 17)

b. Use the phrases to talk about the article.

c. Use each phrase in sentences or short anecdotes of your own that are not related to the article.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.



- What advantages are there to campervanning compared to other ways of travelling and holiday accommodation?
- Is campervanning for you? What most / least appeals to you about it?
- Is it better to buy or hire a campervan?
- You've been given the use of a fully-equipped campervan for one month. Where will you go and why?

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6 In your own words

- a. **Read the travel diary that accompanies the article.**
- b. **Write your own travel diary about a weekend away in a campervan. Use your imagination but also include actual events from 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 motorway, 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, and 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 realized 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, and 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.