

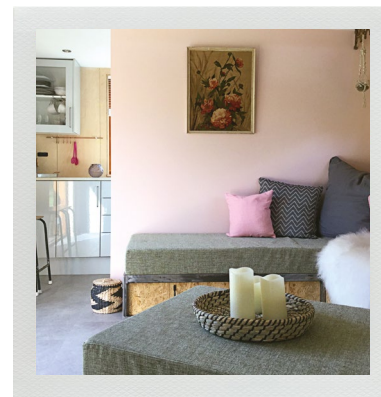


Weekend away

A STAY IN AN ECO-FRIENDLY TINY HOME ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT IS A LOVELY ANTIDOTE TO DAILY ROUTINE AND CITY CLAMOUR

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When the desire to get away for a couple of days arises, it's good to really get away and find somewhere to stay that feels different. The Isle of Wight might not seem like the most exotic of locations, but in a field near Cowes, three little houses have been built that offer something a step away from the ordinary. The brainchild of Helen and Fraser Cunningham (who also run Airstream campsite Vintage Vacations), these holiday homes follow the principles of the US Tiny House movement. With living simply and efficiently as guiding principles, they are powered by solar panels, heated by wood-burning stoves, and have composting loos. After a couple of days living off-grid, we wondered why more houses weren't built like Tiny Homes and why we weren't living in one of them.



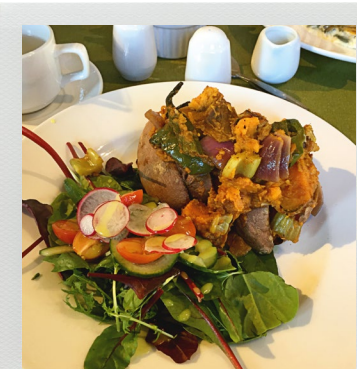
Where we stayed

All three Tiny Homes were built by Helen and Fraser and designed by Fraser's brother, and each is different architecturally. Ours was called 'Hygge' so our expectations for a snug stay were high. Sure enough, the wood-burner was stacked and ready to light, and a freshly made banana and walnut cake in a tin awaited us. A sheepskin rug and a fake-fur throw were also on hand for extra *hygge* points. Once the fire was blazing, the little house warmed up nicely and, wrapped in efficient eco insulation, kept warm for our stay. During the day, it was sunny enough to sit out on the deck to eat breakfast, but once it was dark, prime position was indoors by the fire looking out at the forest and the bright stars of the night sky.



What we ate

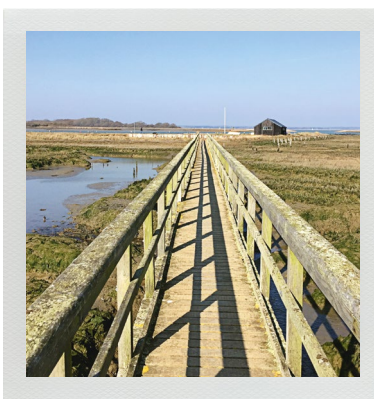
The first thing we do when near the sea is look for a good fish and chip shop. We found one – Corrie’s Cabin – in Cowes, where we demolished a crispy seafood platter (squid, prawns, cod bites deep-fried) and haddock and chips. A search for picnic food followed, and a stroll along High Street in Cowes provided local cheddar, Gallybagger, from Toby’s delicatessen; crusty rolls from artisan bakery, Well Bread; and organic eggs and salad leaves from Rosalie’s grocery store. For an evening meal, Nomad (shutupandfeedme.co.uk) – with its ‘Shut Up and Feed Me’ menu (£25) of international street food (steamed bao buns, quesadillas, soft shell crab sliders) – was delicious and inventive.



What we did

Across the road from Tiny Homes is Parkhurst Forest, a magical stretch of ancient woodland and pine trees. We headed here each morning to wander beneath the canopy for a spot of ‘forest bathing’ (see page 76), hoping to get a glimpse of a red squirrel. No squirrels, but we did stumble upon wonderfully mysterious-looking bivouacs built from branches around elderly oaks. A short drive took us to Newtown

National Nature Reserve (below), an expanse of saltmarsh and wetland that widens to an estuary. Reached by walking along a boardwalk past disused salt pans, it’s an atmospheric and peaceful place, populated by wading birds, osprey, butterflies and dog walkers.



We also saw...

Newport, the nearest town, has seen better days but has some elegant streets and is home to Quay Arts (below, quayarts.org), housed in converted warehouses overlooking the River Medina. It has a rolling programme of exhibitions and events and a fine café/bar with tasty lunch options including, on our visit, Cajun vegetables (left). Osborne House (english-heritage.org.uk) made for



an ideal stop-off on our way back to the ferry: Queen Victoria’s holiday home is surprisingly domestic in scale and visitors can nose around her bedroom and sitting room. In warmer weather, a short walk takes you to the family’s private beach and bathing machine.



The best thing

Coming back to the supremely snug Tiny Home after a day spent in the crisp sunshine was a moment of pure *hygge*. There’s nothing like piling logs into a wood-burner, pulling on your slippers and pouring a glass of red wine to make you feel cosy. The lack of TV was a surprising bonus: instead of its constant chatter, we listened to the crackle of the stove, read books and turned on the radio. Then it was up the ladder to the bedroom eyrie for an early night, comfortably tucked away from the cool night air.

Three nights in Hygge, which sleeps four people (in two double beds), costs £290. Tiny Homes also runs workshops from a studio on site; tinyhomesholidays.com. For more on the Isle of Wight, visitisleofwight.co.uk.