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THE words "camping" and "luxury" used to be mutually exclusive on holidays.

A luxury holiday was something you did only on special occasions, after saving for a month and choosing a shortbreak hotel in the city.

To go camping meant searching cupboards and garages for anything and everything that might come in handy (always forgetting at least one necessity for the tent), packing the boot or trailer to bursting point, and filling the backseat with games and CDs for the kids plus a mountain of snacks and refreshments.

To go camping meant driving for hours, arriving on dusk and putting up the tent by torchlight before the drudgery of unpacking, blowing up mattresses, putting snags on the gas barbecue and finally zipping up the sleeping bag. To go camping meant coming home covered in grit and in dire need of a shower, with a laundry full of grubby clothes, a sink loaded up with dirty dishes, and a vehicle begging for a wash and a cut and polish.

Although a lot of hard work for the glory, some of my fondest holiday memories involve camping - waterskiing and campfire charades with friends at Somerset Dam near Esk, travelling Australia in a Kombi towing the Taj Mahal of camper trailers plus a tent for island camping, and weekends away "wilderness" camping on Noosa North Shore and at Woolli's Station Creek in Yuraygir National Park near Grafton. But with age has come wisdom and these days, my favourite kind of camping is glamping - camping with all the comforts of home provided. Just turn up and relax.

Glamping is all about comfort and style in the great outdoors and minimises all the things that can turn you off getting back to nature on a camping holiday.

You know - the uncomfortable beds that make sleep impossible; the mozzies and creepy crawlies that somehow manage to enter a zipped-up tent; the late-night/early-morning dash to the public amenities; the damp that creeps up through the floor; the lack of running water; the waterlogged tents ... the list goes on.

My introduction to "glamping" (though the term had not been invented at that stage) was in the late-1980s at the then Carnarvon Gorge Oasis Lodge, where the first safari tent I had ever seen - complete with ensuite - was set two steps off the ground with a solid timber floor and twin beds.

From Elephant Hills Rainforest **Camp** in Thailand's Khao Sok to Tamborine Mountain **Caravan** and **Camping**, luxury tented, cabin or villa **accommodation** is now my preferred holiday option when you want something akin to a hotel room in the bush, national **park** or **caravan park**.

Today, glamping is becoming more popular nationally and internationally. Campgrounds and **caravan parks** the world over are undergoing facelifts to accommodate the demand for "five stars" under a trillion stars.

As well as safari-style tents, these businesses are building villas, huts and cabins, lagoon-style and family-friendly pool complexes, and even day spas.

So it's no wonder government research shows that women made up 48% of all **visitors** in the **camping** and caravanning sector in the year ending June this year.

Caravan Industry Association of Australia CEO Stuart Lamont said glamping packages were especially popular with groups of women and couples.

"Glamping is something that at first seems ridiculous - but it really is proof that opposites attract," he said.

"Park owners are providing a service that they see the public want, and it is getting more popular every year.

"It's the sort of resort-style retreat that offers that little something different, and a wholesome experience people who went camping as children long to return to - without the composting toilets."

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