

getting away from it all

A LOVE letter... to my caravan

A static holiday home has brought more joy than jewels ever could, says Miranda McMinn

You can keep your statement bags and cashmere coats, your “because I’m worth it” diamonds and your Scandi designer furniture. The best thing I have ever bought, without any shadow of a doubt, is a caravan.

The minute I set eyes on my beautiful Rye Harbour seaside bolthole, my heart soars. A 41ft 3-berth 2017 ABI Ambleside, this is a piece of kit that seems to have been designed and built purely with midlife women in mind – and since that is precisely what I am, it’s perfect. In fact, it’s the perfect physical representative of where I feel I am in life. There’s nothing cool or ironic about it – it’s not a Silverstream or vintage 70s number. Mine is a proper static.

Inside, it combines the nifty genius of a ship’s cabin with the practicality of a fitted kitchen and the appeal of a giant Wendy house. I am seldom to be found without a damp J-cloth in my hand, smiling as I lovingly wipe down a surface – and I hate cleaning. Outside there is a deck where you will find me parked in a deckchair, cup of tea or glass of wine in hand, grinning elatedly at the seagulls and marvelling at my good fortune. And it’s not just me that feels like this. Every other cagoule-clad, 50-plus woman who walks past gives me a look that shows they feel the same. “Glorious, isn’t it?” one of us says. “Yes, aren’t we lucky?” says the other.

My love affair with caravans (to be precise, static holiday homes) began

with a divorce. I was a single mum of one, and for the first time in my life I was able to make all my own decisions – go where I want, when I wanted, and spend my money as I fancied. And what I saw fit to spend a hefty chunk of it on was my first foray into ‘van life, a 28ft 2-berth 2007 Swift Moselle in a lovely family-run park in Leiston, Suffolk, a short drive from the super-trendy beaches of Aldeburgh and Southwold. I adored that place and we laid down myriad memories of fish and chips on the beach and walks through the bird-filled pine woods, but I didn’t anticipate that I would soon marry again and have two more children (!), and eventually it just became too small, we didn’t use it enough and it had to go. It was a sorrowful day.



Rye Harbour Holiday Park – “my beautiful seaside bolthole”;
Left: Living the dream: Miranda on her deck

just waiting for the likes of me. I checked out the TripAdvisor reviews – rated “excellent”, the place was pronounced friendly and well-run by a brilliant team – and booked a day return train ticket.

It was a bitter December day and I had to force my two youngest to accompany me, bribing them with hot chocolates and Haribo. On the tour of the holiday park

“You will find me on the deck, grinning elatedly at the seagulls and marvelling at my good fortune”

Still desperate to get out of London at weekends I dreamed of a cottage, and spent every night surfing Rightmove and Google Maps so fervently that I knew huge chunks of the UK from the air. Yet what we could afford was inevitably a “project” miles away, and I knew that I would never convince my family to spend hours in the car every Friday night for the pleasure of attempting DIY damp courses and dragging lawnmowers across months-high wet grass, even if it did have a real wood burner.

“Oh god, you’re not going on about caravans again,” said my husband when the subject inevitably raised its head... but I’m afraid to say I was. Thanks again to Google Maps I had found what looked like the ideal site – Rye Harbour Holiday Park, perfectly situated on the edge of a stunning nature reserve with nothing between the site and Rye Harbour beach but half a mile of shingle and an awful lot of seagulls. Camber Sands was a short drive away. This was prime real estate – you’d pretty much have to be Paul McCartney to have a house on this bit of coast and yet, here was a caravan site

we all agreed which was our favourite – inevitably it was the most expensive, but then it was brand new, had a bigger cooker than my own home, a power shower, two loos and a fake wood burner that looks better than the real thing! Yes, we decided,

this was the place for us. I was seduced by the sunset – they loved the slushy machine in the clubhouse. Either way, all three of us knew that we were either going to convince Dad, or since this was my money, I was going to have to go over his head. (For some reason, though all my women friends love it, husbands are generally less in favour of owning caravans – maybe they’re just a bit too big and galumphing to appreciate the whole business of “playing house”, or maybe because caravans depreciate, like cars, so seem a frivolous expense.)

But he came round. He makes a big fuss about it being “my place” but when we’re treating the family to dinner in our postcard-perfect local, the William the Conqueror, gull-spotting on Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, rating the millions of dogs being walked past our deck on their cuteness, watching our girls ride their bikes around in front of the ‘van, or simply giving a wave to the site staff and our fellow caravanners, I know he loves it.

So go on. If you’ve ever been tempted by a static holiday home, just do it! Unlike diamonds or bricks and mortar, it’s not an investment – but your return will be hours and hours of happiness and memories that will last a lifetime. And what could be a better way to spend your hard-earned cash than that? **w&h**



Matilda, left, and Daisy in the dunes

Beach life: Camber Sands is nearby

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