



the picture-postcard village of Llangian – where the tiny cottage shop was a lively buzz of Welsh conversation – for £20.

So sometimes I'm grateful to be indoors. But most British hotels cost quite a lot, on top of which one person generally pays almost as much as two. And these days, Airbnb seems more about pricey boutique gaffs than low-cost spare rooms in the home of an empty-nester.

The old fallback of YHA hostels doesn't work so well these days, now so many rural ones have closed. Yet many surviving hostels have regular special offers, particularly in the off-season, and you get 10% off with YHA membership. Last year I took advantage of such offers for winter rides in the Lakes and Whitby. At £12-15 a night, they were a bargain.

There are many independent bunkhouses and suchlike too, discoverable via Google. I've stayed thus recently in locations such as Rutland Water, Spurn Head and the Yorkshire Dales, cheaply (£20) and comfortably. The budget hotel chains sometimes have specials, too. I've sneaked rooms at Travelodge for under £30 and Premier Inn for little more. Both allow bikes in your room. Sunday nights are often cheapest.

Warmshowers is a website (and paid-for app) for cyclist-to-cyclist hospitality. The idea is you stay for free at someone's house, returning the favour to someone else another time.

It's social and convenient – especially, I've found, in places otherwise hard or expensive to find accommodation. For many hosts, a good guest is a pleasure to have. Both parties can benefit.

Nights under canvas – or polyester, I

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suppose – aren't always idyllic. This tour I had no choice but to camp one night on Llŷn when Lilian was at its height. Fearful at 4am of poles snapping, I removed them, weighed the tent down with my bike to stop it escaping, and sat out the gale in the campsite loo doing sudoku. I was pretty good at sudoku by the time it blew over. The tent survived, but if you see a water bottle blowing around the beach at Southport, it's probably mine.

Camping can be special as well as cheap. My final pitch was up a hill outside Criccieth. There were dozens of caravans and motorhomes next door, but I had the lush tent-field to myself, with awesome views over the bay and Snowdonia to accompany my pasta, pesto and glass of Rioja. Priceless. (Actually, a tenner; I'll take that.)

FOOD FOR (FINANCIAL) THOUGHT

Eating out can soon become a financial toad in the black hole, but self-catering keeps costs down. Budget instant noodles from Aldi and Lidl work as well as camping food pouches from outdoor shops. And in a hostel kitchen, or over my ancient Trangia camping stove, I can control exactly what I'm eating – particularly because I raided my cupboards at home before I came. If cafés are scarce or expensive, boiling water from the morning brew-up can go in a flask for day use.

In many off-piste rural areas I find Co-ops often have tempting reduced-price items from late afternoon, conveniently timed between the end of my ride and the campsite. My favourite bargain was a £3 bottle of wine last year from Hawkshead Co-op, apparently a recognised low-pricer by Lakes locals.

For on-the-go eating, there are often reliable cheap deals on food from the chains. A bacon roll and coffee from Greggs is often my start to a touring day for three quid or so. For lunch, many supermarket meal deals include coffee, sarnie and snack for under four quid. And I've exploited many a sub- ▶

