

Pve overnighted in some rum places while touring. Empty ferries, former jails, military barracks, monasteries, tractor sheds, even a rare-breed tropical spider house in the Amazon – although it wasn’t called that. It was called a ‘holiday lodge’.

But those were abroad. Britain’s non-mainstream opportunities are more thinly spread. When hiking author Alfred Wainwright visited the Lakes in the 1930s, he simply asked farmers in the pub each evening for a barn to sleep in. Now those barns are upscale holiday lets. And it seems apex-predator websites control the accommodation market. Everything’s on booking.com or Airbnb. Otherwise it’s your tent: 30 quid for a field or else wild camping with the midges.

Actually, it’s not quite as bad as that. You can find one-off indoor overnights for your British bike tour beyond the scope of the internet giants. They include historic churches, caving club dorms, homes of fellow cyclists, bothies and more.

The usual suspects

Happy camper? Scotland lets you wild camp. (Some areas, such as Trossachs honeypots, require a day permit: lochlomond-trossachs.org.) Not so in England, where it’s campsites only, often expensive. However, a curated list of bike-friendly campsites for £15 or less is at tinyurl.com/CycleCampingUK. Other options – free apart from the membership fee – include people’s back gardens in welcometomygarden.org, though there’s only a few dozen in Britain.

Tent averse? Staying indoors has a strong appeal when it’s cold or rainy. Most accommodation is indeed on booking.com, from posh hotels down to hostels and huts. Check the websites of the individual establishments to see if the rate is cheaper there, or if there’s a bonus such as free breakfast. Airbnb.com overlaps but does list alternatives. While it’s more boutique guesthouses than spare bedrooms

nowadays, you can find the odd bargain.

Some hotel chains aren’t on either of those – Premier Inn (premierinn.com) and Travelodge (travelodge.co.uk), for instance. While a room tomorrow in York might be £120, an off-season

or Sunday night in Milton Keynes or Bradford a few weeks in advance could be £35. Both chains welcome bikes in rooms (handy for e-bike charging) and offer reliable comfort.

“YHA hostels can still be great choices for cyclists as bases for a cut-price tour”

History is bunk

Hostel options include, of course, those of the YHA (yha.org.uk) – where they survive. Numbers haven’t decreased that much since the 1970s, when cars and alcohol were banned, you got kicked out during the day and had to do a task before leaving. There were about 180 hostels then and around 150 now. But many are now groups only. Just 93 offer private rooms, and a mere 69 do dorm beds. Many rural ones have shut in favour of gap-year-friendly city hostels.

That said, YHA hostels can still be great choices for cyclists as bases for a cut-price tour. They’re less 1930s-boarding-school now, supplying bedding, café bars and restaurants, wi-fi, drying rooms, social spaces, bike sheds, kitchens, →