

**B**E PREPARED." The tent in front of me might have been constructed by the same company that specialises in Baden-Powell's canvas models but there's little chance that I'll have to put the Scouts' motto into practice myself.

As I pull open the canvas doors of the safari-meets-Scout-style structure, the scent of a cornucopia of fruit and flowers drifts out to greet me. There's a plump bed dressed in Rajasthani block-printed linens, a worn leather sofa strewn with faux-fur blankets, a liberal sprinkling of tea lights and a living flame portable heater.

If that isn't cosy enough, behind curtains at the back is a bathroom with fluffy towels and a proper, hot rainfall shower (plus water-flushing loo, a boon for any seasoned camper who'll be well acquainted with the chemical version).

And if anything goes wrong, there's the sanctuary of a pub at the end of the field – and crucially, it will deliver the bacon roll and coffee that I've pre-ordered in the morning.

It's chic and pristine, yet this tent has done its fair share of service over the past four summers in its spiritual home just outside the gates of Glastonbury Festival. In fact, I've craned my neck longingly on more than one occasion while lugging my shabbily mud-flecked nylon into the festival, wishing that I had several thousand pounds to splash on a few nights' camping – with porters, dining room and bar – at the Pop-Up Hotel.

This year, its Somerset-born founder Mark Sorrill wants to get back to nature, popping his beautifully crafted canvas rooms into England's prettiest corners at more accessible prices, for a month at a time. I'm in the Sussex village of Plumpton at the foot of the South Downs, where around half a dozen of these suites and bell tents will be ready to welcome guests later this week, in a field behind the Half Moon pub. Another site opened last week in Devon's Taw Valley, with the Fowey estuary in Cornwall slated for August.

The appeal extends beyond the canvas, though – Mark's aim is for guests to get out and explore the bucolic locations and their local food producers. My neighbours include a field full of gambolling lambs and their mothers, while across the road the chalk ridge of Rudyard Kipling's "blunt, bow-headed whale-backed" South Downs rises sharply to a cerulean sky, promising invigorating sea views beyond Brighton below that will reward an energetic hike up.

The chalky landscape foments more than just dramatic views. A 10-minute drive west takes me to Ridgeview, the award-winning vineyard whose Grosvenor Blanc de Blancs 2006 sparkling wine famously beat the likes of Tait-



A luxury campsite has popped up in the South Downs, putting **Sophie Lam** at the heart of the national park's natural assets



Downs and out: the sublime Sussex scenery, top; the interior and exterior of the tents, above; Ridgeview's sparkling wines, inset

tinger and Charles Heidsieck at the 2010 Decanter World Wine Awards, spearheading a revolution in English winemaking.

"We're only 88 miles as the crow flies from Champagne", business development manager Tom Surgey tells me as we stroll around the pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay vines. "We

share the same terroir; we have a similar climate." He also points to dozens of paraffin candles, which he explains will save the vines from late ground frost – catastrophic at this time of year as leaves start to unfurl after winter's hibernation.

Temperature gauges activate a rather less sophisticated text message system

that alerts a member of staff to hotfoot it down to the vineyard in the dead of night. "The candles are lit at regular intervals and the ground warms up. It's a really magical experience. We've got a photographer who is going to come next time it happens," he tells me enthusiastically, as I picture a fairytale glade of flames in the night.

After touring the wine vats, cellars and bottling room, we go up to the newly renovated tasting room, with widescreen views of the South Downs that enhance the creamy fizz of the Grosvenor, Fitzrovia, Bloomsbury and Cavendish varieties. It's inspiring stuff, and hard to believe that some of the world's best sparkling wines are being produced only 50 miles south of London. Back at camp, a glass of the Bloomsbury slips down all too easily in front of the Half Moon's crackling log fire. It also turns out to be a fitting prelude to some of Sussex's finest produce.

There's fresh fish landed earlier in the day and brought in on local boats but I can't resist the wild garlic and broad bean risotto, a dish that tastes as good as the spring setting looks outside. The pub is also primed to host campfire suppers, while in Cornwall there will be a cider bar and in Devon breakfast hampers can be delivered.

Back in the tent it's more than a little chilly but I light the fire and fall asleep easily, only to be woken just before dawn by an alarmingly clamorous cockerel. Rather than trying to drift back to sleep, though,

I am stirred by nature's circadian rhythms. Whereas at home daybreak would be heralded by the first planes making their descent into Heathrow, it's the crowing that switches on the daylight here, prompting the sheep to start bleating and birds to start chattering.

I'm almost tempted to get up and stride to the top of the Downs. But the bed is so snug, and there's the promise of a hot shower and a bacon roll in a couple of hours' time, so I hunker down and close my eyes to the sublime soundtrack until breakfast arrives.

#### The Details: South Downs

The **Barefoot Pop-up Hotel** is in Dorset until May 31, in the South Downs May 1-31 and Cornwall August 3-31.

Prices start at £299 for a three- or four-night break for two people, available Friday-Monday or Monday-Friday (thepopuphotel.com/barefoot).

The closest train station for the South Downs site is **Plumpton**, with a direct service from Victoria taking less than an hour (southernrailway.com).

**Ridgeview Wine Estate**, Ditchling Common, Sussex (01444 241441; ridgeview.co.uk). Tours £15pp; booking advised.

**Half Moon pub**, Plumpton (01273 890253; halfmoonplumpton.com).

**South Downs National Park**: southdowns.gov.uk

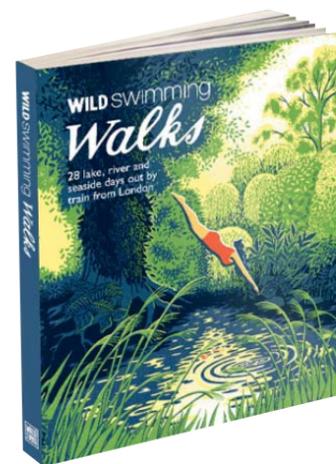
#### STAY Beside the seaside

Valencia's Las Arenas beach has a new addition, Hotel Balandret, a boutique hotel with nautical-inspired interiors. The 20 rooms and one suite are decorated in shades of blue, white and stone; some have balconies and sea views. But the main focus at Balandret is the restaurant. Chef Albert Lluch, who previously worked at the Ritz in London and Michelin-starred El Celler de Can Roca in Girona, heads up the kitchen, serving a menu that continues the Balandret's aquatic theme with a focus on Valencian seafood – think fresh mussels and grilled octopus. balandret.com



#### FLY Take off from Luton

If the recent good weather has got you in the mood for planning a summer holiday, Luton airport has just the ticket – several new easyJet flights are starting up to sunshine destinations. Twice-weekly services to Antalya in Turkey and Portugal's second city, Porto, started this weekend, while on Friday the first direct flight from the UK to Essaouira on Morocco's Atlantic coast takes off. It will also operate twice a week. There will be even more choice later in May, when flights begin to Split on Croatia's Dalmatian Coast and Bodrum, Turkey. easyjet.com



#### READ Make a splash

Fancy an outdoor swim that's a bit more adventurous than your local lido? Wild Swimming Walks is a new book of 28 strolls, all accessible by train from London, that offer the opportunity for an al fresco dip. Suggestions are divided into lakes and ponds, rivers and sea, with walks ranging from gentle strolls of just a few miles to energetic full-day hikes. Take a dip in the sea in Sussex, hop in the River Cam, or make a splash in some of London's (not-so-) hotspots, Hampstead Ponds and the Serpentine. Published on May 4, £14.99. wildthingspublishing.com