

SHORT STAY

Timber-clad pods offer a cosy alternative to traditional camping at Cynefin Retreats, a countryside-cocooned sanctuary where the only thing to distract you from the view is the task of toasting homemade marshmallows over an open fire, writes Lydia Winter

[HEREFORDSHIRE]



WHAT'S THE DRAW?

There's really only one word to describe this clutch of cool cabins in the Wye Valley on the border between England and Wales: lovely. The four one-bed pods are utterly beautiful in both design and location, sitting within a dark sky reserve – one of only four in the entire world – and equipped with wood fires, hot tubs and some of the most sink-in-able beds we've come across. Each cabin faces a slightly different direction, giving you the

feeling that you're the only person for miles around, while floor-to-ceiling windows provide optimum views over rolling hills – ideal for just taking a moment to sit and breathe. These cabins are the latest venture from the folks behind Castara Retreats on the Caribbean island of Tobago. The founders have swapped palms for pear trees and endless sunshine for, erm, somewhat unpredictable weather, but the ethos is the same: a focus on eco luxury that maximises the landscape it's set in.

CYNEFIN RETREATS



COST: From £150pn

ADDRESS: Whitney-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR3 5HU

NEAREST TOWNS: Hay-on-Wye and Hereford

GETTING THERE: Cynefin's remote location is its main draw – driving is the easiest option

TO BOOK: cynefinretreats.com

A HUT ABOVE: Cabins at Cynefin Retreats provide direct access to the surrounding countryside; [right] floor-to-ceiling windows provide fantastic views.

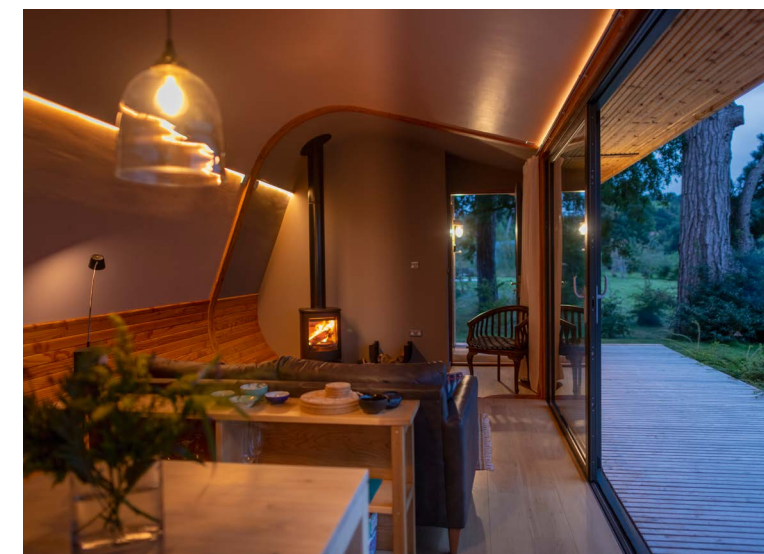
WHAT TO EAT?

The cabins are self-catered, although homemade marshmallows are provided for toasting over the open fire. But man cannot live on marshmallows alone, so thankfully the owners have provided an honesty box with a few locally sourced bits and bobs. Beyond that, either make sure you get some food in, or head to the nearby town of Hay-on-Wye, where you'll find cute restaurants and pubs aplenty. Hay Deli is a cornucopia of locally grown and made produce, so pop in to pick up sausage rolls, breakfast pastries, beers and more. If you're driving down from London, you may well pass through Hereford; stop for lunch or dinner at The Book Shop, a frankly excellent restaurant with a focus on locally reared meat, creative cooking and brilliant wines.

WHAT TO DO?

If there were ever a place to sit and soak up your surroundings, this is it. Read a book on the terrace, star gaze with a bottle of red wine at night, or watch the sun go down from your hot tub. But if you're craving a little more, Hay-on-Wye is just a ten-minute drive away. While we've mentioned it's got great food, it's better-known for its book shops and the annual Hay Festival. Richard Booth's Bookshop is the biggest and best, with both new and second-hand tomes – it's a warren you could easily spend hours in. Antiquing, too, is a major pastime here, so don't forget your credit card. And because you're right by the Brecon Beacons, you're in prime position for long walks through the verdant Wye Valley, too. Lush. ♦

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[Cynefin] Alex Treadway; [Hay] Sam Hardwick; [Wye River] Daniel James

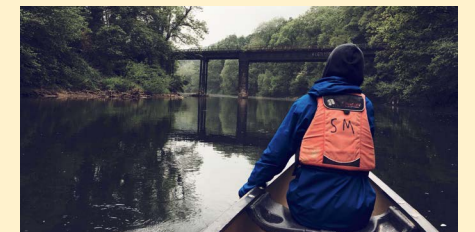
LOCAL HEROES

From a destination literary festival to epic outdoor adventures, use your stay at Cynefin as an excuse to explore its surrounding culture, countryside and cuisine...



HAY FESTIVAL

From 21-31 May 2020, the great and the good of the literary world will descend on Hay-on-Wye for a weekend of talks, food and live music. Last year saw the likes of Simon Schama, Fatima Bhutto and more take to the stage hayfestival.com



KAYAKING ON THE RIVER WYE

The Wye Valley is home to more than great cheddar, it's a great place to set off down river on an adventure by kayak, too. There's a good mix of easy and difficult waters, and the area's the ideal training ground for beginners. hay-on-wye.co.uk



EAT AT CHAPTERS

Fantastic producers abound in this region, and to make the most of them book in for a tasting menu at Chapters. Housed in a chapel – hence the name – the restaurant focuses on ethical sourcing and sustainability. Roasted acorn and rye bread; whipped Hereford Hop cheese with leek jam; and Welsh lamb with aubergine. Absolutely yes. chaptershayonwye.co.uk