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Sleeping in an 18th-century folly stocked with gin and tonic – this is how toffs do festivals

I didn't think I was much of a festival-goer until I experienced Red Rooster

It's that time of year again. Glastonbury's in a couple of weeks. The Isle of Wight Festival's on next weekend. DogFest, at Ragley Hall in Warwickshire, is taking place right now. I understand Guns N' Roses won't be making an appearance on the main stage, but – if you get in the car after reading this – you might still make the “teach your dog to help you with housework” class at 2.45 this afternoon.

I am, generally, not much of a festival-goer. My sister went to seven of the things last summer, actively choosing to while away her weekends washing her armpits with wet wipes, whereas I only went to one, on the basis that I could stay at a friend's house in the Cotswolds and thereby avoid, at all costs, sleeping in a tent.

Come on. We've progressed as a species to the point where we can sleep on memory-foam mattresses and underneath goose-feather duvets. Why would we revert to a cold, hard floor, sleeping in a giant, synthetic sock, freezing all night and yet, incomprehensibly, waking in the morning hotter than any human being has ever been, in an oversized plastic bag that lets all the light in and smells like a gym locker?

I am not a fan of tents. Or sleeping bags. Or that zippy noise that reverberates around campsites when people get up. I camped at a festival once and, on my final morning, unzipped my tent only to see what was, I'm afraid to say, unmistakably a human turd curled on a piece of cardboard at its entrance – a very unholy offering.

All of which is why, when my friend James messaged me a couple of weeks ago, asking if I fancied going to the Duke of Grafton's festival in Suffolk, sleeping in his Grade II-listed Palladian folly, I said I absolutely did.

The festival is called Red Rooster (nicknamed Red Trouser because it's said to be very posh), held in the spectacular, undulating parkland of Euston Hall, and it specialises in blues and country because the Duke knows his music, having spent two years in



I had my own bathroom, with plenty of loo roll, and could swim in a Capability Brown-designed lake

Nashville and a spell as a roadie for the Rolling Stones.

As he once joked, “On my first day on the tour, there were 300 of us at Heathrow Airport and a big list with everybody's passport name on it. I was queuing up and suddenly Keith Richards' guitar tech shouted ‘Who the f--- is Viscount Henry Oliver Charles Ipswich?’ And I'm like ‘Hi, it's me.’ And

he said, ‘Right boys, \$10 on him not lasting two weeks.’” Actually, Harry became affectionately known as Five Names, lasted the full 18 months and has now brought rhythm to East Anglia.

The “Temple”, my residence for the weekend, was designed by William Kent and built in 1746 for the 2nd Duke as a banqueting house; it was also much enjoyed by the 3rd and 4th Dukes, who liked to watch their horses being exercised from it. It's a sensationally pretty octagonal building with a domed roof, stone balustrades and decorated with flint rustications (the technical term, I gather, which simply means bits of flint that stick out from the walls). It was, in

almost every way, the exact opposite of a cheap tent from Decathlon: it came stocked with gin and tonic, White Company bedding and roll-top baths, and we came stocked with rosé, truffled camembert, truffled crisps and truffled salami, which we ate on the lawn, overlooking a sea of tents erected on the parkland in front of us, a bit like pre-revolutionary French aristocrats. We had our own, pristine bathrooms (no portaloos!), a plentiful supply of lavatory paper, and we could swim in the Capability Brown-designed lake and stroll back to the folly in a mere five minutes.

The other very lovely aspect of this festival was the relaxing size of it.

Around 5,000 people instead of, say, more than 200,000 at Glastonbury, which meant no queues. On Saturday afternoon, after a jolly delicious chicken and ham pie and champagne at the folly, we decided we should probably leave it and join in with the festival, so meandered our way down without having to fight past 900 people in pink wellington boots. We didn't have to queue to get a bourbon at the bar. Three of us decided to have a go at axe-throwing and stepped right up to the target (it turns out that I would have made an abysmal Viking). As for the Red Trouser tag, I didn't see a single pair. Instead, families, dungaree wearers, a man with



◀ Aide de camp: Sophie prefers an 18th-century folly to a tent at Glastonbury

▲ Duke joint: the Rooster Festival is in the grounds of Euston House in Suffolk

a hand-puppet and many, many dogs on leads drifted happily about under the ancient yew and cedar trees. We stopped by a couple who had a pair of exceptionally striking beasts, only to be informed that they were silken windhounds – a new type of hound to me. “They're on Instagram,” the owner said genially, passing across his business card (I expect they were heading to DogFest this weekend).

Better still, you could hear, see and get close to the music. We didn't have to push our way to the front of the main stage, weaving our way through men wearing bucket hats, drinking their 86th pint of the day, and nobody blocked anyone's view by sitting on their boyfriend's shoulders.

The headliner was a large 24-year-old from Mississippi known as Kingfish, already a Grammy winner and said by some to be the best blues guitarist in the world. Honestly, what I know about blues guitar wouldn't quite fill a postage stamp but this was some fine playing, and the most electrifying moment came halfway through his set when I noticed various heads twisting to the back of the tent. Following them, I spied Kingfish weaving through the crowd. He stopped a foot in front of me, playing while his bodyguard batted goggle-eyed fans away from his guitar, and I cried because I'd had quite a few bourbons by that point. Afterwards, to discuss this performance, we simply strolled back to our banqueting house for a bottle of Bordeaux and more truffled camembert.

It was magnificent from start to finish, but you can doubtless see the dilemma it's left me with: how can I even consider going to another festival, unless it's staying in an 18th-century folly?