

GIVE IT SOME WELLLY

What, no cortado? Millennials are flocking to the countryside, swapping urban fads for a better quality of life. By *Alexandra Goss*

No Deliveroo. No Uber. No artisan coffee shop. No phone signal, unless you stick your arm out of the window. You can make your own cold-press in the time it takes to download an email. It's a 10-minute drive to buy a pint of milk and the nearest dry-cleaner, 12 miles away, shuts at 4pm. It sounds like a millennial dystopia – yet more thirtysomethings than ever are turning their backs on urban life and moving to the country.

Exclusive research by Hamptons International, using mortgage data from Britain's biggest estate-agency group, Countrywide, shows that the average age of someone relocating from a city to the countryside (defined as an area outside a town or suburb, encompassing villages and smaller market towns) has fallen below 40 for the first time, plunging from 47 in 2008 to 37 last year.

"Changing priorities such as starting a family, having another baby or seeking a better quality of life have been the traditional drivers for those

making the move from town to country," says Aneisha Beveridge, head of research at Hamptons. "But with housing affordability a problem, more movers are heading to the country sooner, leapfrogging rungs of the property ladder.

"Rather than trading up in the city, from a small central flat to a three-bedroom terrace, they are going straight from the flat to a home in the country that they will live in for years, saving on subsequent moves and costs such as stamp duty."

Air pollution, overcrowding, noise, the ungodly race for school places, dog dirt and litter on the pavements, the perception of high crime rates in cities: all these factors are prompting urbanites to head for the verdant hills.

"It used to be 'Have baby, move to country', but these days it's definitely more 'Have absolutely had enough of the city, move to country'," says Gemma Scott, a partner at The Buying Solution, who recently moved from the capital to rural Buckinghamshire. The appeal of more house for less money – a house that has a garden

with an actual lawn, a spare

bedroom and even, heaven be praised, a utility room – is particularly powerful.

In London, where the market analyst Hometrack reports that the average property costs £479,800, or in popular cities such as Cambridge (£423,500), Oxford (£408,100) and Bristol (£276,800), buying a country pad may be the only way for first-time buyers to scramble onto the ladder at all. Over the past decade, property prices in cities across England and Wales have risen by 61%, compared to only 25% in country areas. "A decade ago, a home in the city cost 44% more than one in the country," Beveridge says. "That premium is now 85%."

Mark Godman, who runs the London-based removal company Gentleman & A Van, has noticed increasing numbers of people in their thirties quitting the big smoke. "Until 2008, 95% of our moves were within London and the M25, with only 5% of clients moving to the countryside," he says. "Today,



one in four moves are clients leaving the capital for the country. They're seeking a calmer and more affordable place in the countryside."

Alongside young families and priced-out first-timers, Godman is seeing more interest from entrepreneurs and the self-employed, who are now more readily able to work from home. "They are in their late twenties and early thirties," he says. "Despite the myths about poor internet speeds, broadband has definitely improved in many rural areas in recent years."

If you're thinking about joining them, read on. After all, you watch Countryfile, you own a Barbour waxed jacket and you've decided that vegan pop-ups, gin distilleries and hot yoga aren't all they're cracked up to be. Here's how to survive in the sticks.

SELECT YOUR AREA CAREFULLY

Do you need to commute back to the city for work? What are the local education options (even if you don't have children yet)? How long would the school run be? How far away are your relatives? Do you know the area or anyone there already? Will you break out in hives if you're more than 10 minutes from a packet of chia seeds or a decent flat white?

"If you're commuting, an hour door-to-door is the magic

SURVIVAL CHECKLIST

DO

- Stacks of research
- Make friends with all generations
- Be prepared to drive to pick up a takeaway
- Befriend a local taxi driver
- Learn to plan ahead
- Get a toolkit and learn basic DIY essentials

- Join the local Facebook group and see if there is a Nextdoor network in your area (nextdoor.co.uk). If you're fleeing the capital, check out the useful website lifeafterlondon.com and its Facebook group, facebook.com/groups/lifeafterlondon
- Invest in a bean-to-cup coffee machine and a wine

number most people can stand, with an hour and a half being the absolute maximum," says James Greenwood, a director at the buying agency [Stacks Property Search](#). "Even in a village just outside a city, a journey that takes 20 minutes on a Sunday evening can take an hour at peak time on Monday morning."

If you're a country virgin, avoid going too remote. "A lot of clients moving out of urban areas like to be part of a community, in or on the edge of a village where they can walk to a lively pub or a shop," says Tom Hudson, founding partner of the buying agency Middleton Advisors. "Few people are comfortable with going straight to a house in the middle of nowhere."

Research is key – everything from train times, season-ticket

fridge (unless you have a wine cellar, of course)

- Buy a good pair of wellies and a snow shovel

DON'T

- Focus on the negatives
- Endlessly tell people that you've moved from Balham
- Comment on the "cheap" price of a pint
- Assume you'll get barberries, pomegranate molasses and harissa in the local Co-op or Spar
- Live on the internet. While online orders are incredibly convenient, make sure you support nearby shops as well

- Buy a top-of-the-range "country outfit": people will laugh
- Plan every weekend with your old city friends

costs, carriage overcrowding and station car parks to flood risk, broadband availability and speed, planned infrastructure works, the strength of the phone signal and how far you'd need to go for a pint of milk or a loaf.

Think years ahead. Your kids may be toddlers, but look at the secondary schools, the bus options and the distance to the nearest nightclub. "How will you cope with being a glorified taxi service for teenagers?" asks Robert Fanshawe, partner at the buying agency [Property Vision](#).

PICK YOUR TRIBE WISELY

A key part of selecting a location is looking at who lives there. You can't expect the same multicultural mix as in a city – or as large a dating pool, if you're single – but some areas are more cosmopolitan than others. Perhaps you want to see everyone from your Shoreditch Psyche class at the farmers' market. Perhaps you don't.

A year ago, Emma Lavelle, 33, and her boyfriend moved from the Manchester suburb of Withington to Todmorden, a windswept West Yorkshire market town where many people grow their own and are "multi-hyphenates", as in artist-musician-maker. "We like music, so moved to a place with an arty community," she says. "My biggest piece of advice is to find somewhere that suits your way of life, with like-minded people."

Despite fleetingly missing a few conveniences – "I was ill for a few days and wished for Deliveroo, and the trains to Manchester and Leeds aren't

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always the most reliable” – Emma hasn’t looked back. “Withington was grey and concrete. We had everything on tap, yet we longed for the countryside. We got a dog – our jackapoo, Evie – and wanted to walk her in fields. I was sick of looking out of the window, where all I saw was other houses and bins.”

Emma, who blogs at fieldandnest.com, has swapped a small Victorian terrace in Manchester for a 1930s semi on a private road, bought as a doer-upper for £140,000. “Now I sit at my dining-room table and all I can see is a panoramic view of rolling hills. We have →



The Cornwall-Leghs are renting a thatched cottage, left, in a pretty village with a pub near Pewsey

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Kenelm Cornwall-Legh with his wife, Victoria, their children and Wilma, the fox red Labrador. The family swapped London for Wiltshire in 2017



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→ been growing our own vegetables – we’ve had potatoes, squash, rocket, spinach, chard and even a dozen aubergines.”

ADJUST YOUR MINDSET

Moving to the country will only work if you embrace it. Befriending the neighbours is crucial – and not just because you want recommendations for a good cleaner or plumber.

“Everything goes a little bit slower in the country, and it doesn’t matter if you’re five minutes late,” Hudson says. “You need to be more engaged in your community, being prepared to make friends of all ages. If you see your 68-year-old neighbour walking his limping dog, stop him and ask, ‘How is Hubert? Is his leg getting better?’”

You need to forget your prejudices, too. While you might think entertainment will involve knitting in the village hall with pensioners, drinking instant coffee, that’s unlikely to be the case. Many villages are vibrant places with chic farm shops, high-end gastropubs and even Botox clinics. In any case, you’re not moving for the Vietnamese takeaways or 24-hour pharmacies. Savour the freshly laid eggs, the wide sky views and the clean air.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Perhaps you’re not convinced that you’re a committed countryphile, or not sure exactly where will suit you. Maybe you haven’t managed to sell your home in the city yet, or the severe shortage of stock means you can’t find what you want to buy. If this sounds like you, consider renting first.

“A few years ago, a friend sold up in London and moved to the countryside, but within six months he realised he hated it, so he moved back,” says Kenelm Cornwall-Legh,

co-owner of the building consultancy and project management firm Run Projects. “My wife and I knew we wanted to move out, so, in December 2017, we left our two-bedroom flat in Barons Court and moved to a rented property in a Wiltshire village near Pewsey.” (The flat is now on sale for £720,000; sellmyhome.co.uk.)

Despite not knowing a soul before they moved – they chose the area because

Cornwall-Legh, 40, needs to commute to the office in west London a few days a week, and the family go on holiday in Devon – he, his wife, Victoria, 31, and their children, Beatrix, 2, and Fred, 6 months, soon settled. “Within a fortnight, I was in a couple of WhatsApp groups. Our social life is better than it was in London.”

IT’S NOT CHEAPER

Yes, it costs less to buy a house, and a pint in the local will give you change from a fiver, but bills are likely to go up in the country, and not just because you’re moving to a larger property and spending more on petrol. “Don’t be fooled into thinking life will be a lot cheaper,” Cornwall-Legh says. “I was surprised. Council tax is high, and babysitters, cleaners and tradesmen can be more expensive because there are fewer of them.”

EMBRACE THE SEASONS...

In summer, there’s no finer place than the British countryside. The sky is bluer, the ice cream is creamier and the grass really is greener. You resolve to learn the names of the trees, the birds and the constellations you can see on those starry, starry nights. Even your commute is a

breeze, as you can be home in time for a glass of rosé in the garden before sunset.

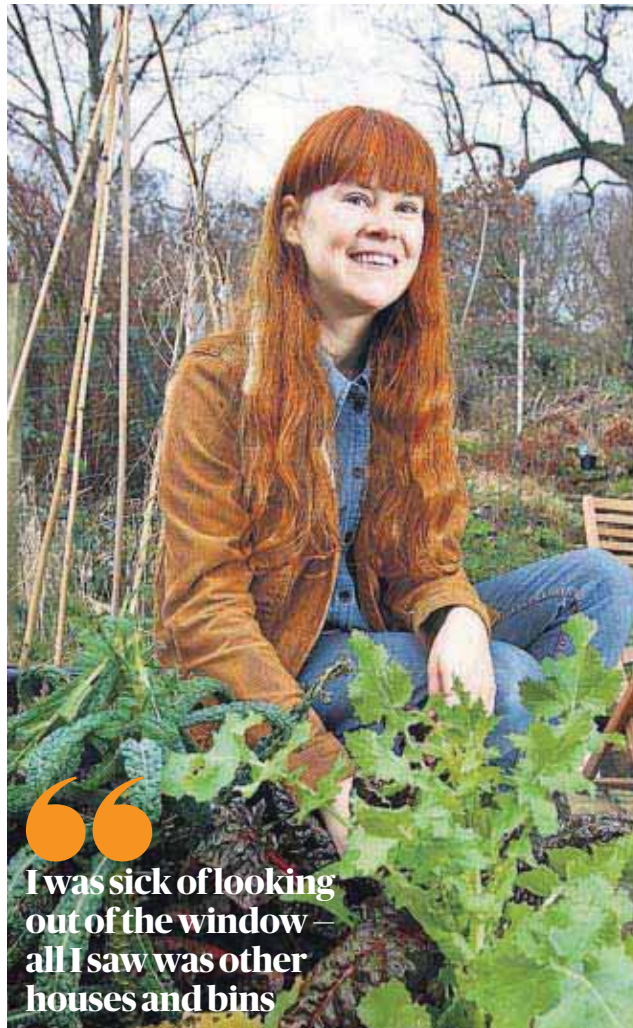
In winter, you leave in the dark and return in the dark. You spend five minutes de-icing your windscreen at 6am, winter tyres are de rigueur and being snowed in for days is a tedious reality. Make sure you can handle this. A Netflix subscription (broadband permitting) is non-negotiable.

... AND THE CAR

You may think the move will make you an eco-god. You can compost your food waste, become self-sufficient in the veg department and buy joints of beef formerly known as Marigold and Daisy from the farm down the road.

Yet many country homes are draughty and poorly insulated, losing heat from gas-guzzling ranges and every nook and cranny. The open fire or ancient woodburner is a source of emissions. Worst of all, you need a car – probably two if you’re a couple – that you will drive constantly. “My carbon footprint is through the roof,” Jemma Scott says. “I used to cycle to and from the office, walk and jump on the Tube or bus. Now I destroy a forest’s worth of ozone in one week, simply functioning.”

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**Emma Lavelle, left, moved
from the suburbs of
Manchester to artsy
Todmorden, West Yorkshire,
with her boyfriend. They
now grow their own veg**