

OUR PLACE *News*

The monthly magazine dedicated to help everyone over 50 get the best out of life!

OCTOBER 2022

Inside this issue...

Oh wow!

**How getting more awe
can improve your life -
and even make you
a nicer person**

Into the woods:

**How an old shed inspired
hundreds of stories**

A fistful of flavour:

'Herbs give a dish that extra zing!'

South American beauties:

**Vibrant cities, mind-boggling landscapes
and ancient wonders**

PLUS...

**What's on • Health & Beauty • Money & Work • Leisure & Travel
Food & Drink • Arts, Crafts & Hobbies • Home & Garden**

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to Our Place - The monthly magazine dedicated to help everyone over 50 get the best out of life!

Every month, we bring you news and features on; Health & Beauty, Money & Work, Leisure & Travel, Food & Drink, Arts, Crafts & Hobbies, Home & Garden, plus... our Charity of the Month!

Our Place was founded with a mission to connect the mature online community to a world of news, features, offers and life changing products they may have missed out on. Bring them all into one place, Our Place.

What makes us special is that we are a vibrant team of all ages, from 21 to 65 who are all passionate about living life to the fullest irrespective of age. We have built strong relationships with some of the best UK age related businesses with the aim of brokering discounted rates for our Over-50s community.

Become a Friend of Our Place and receive our exclusive newsletters. They are a great way of keeping updated with the latest news and promotions. We aim to bring a smile to your face every time you open your inbox by selecting exclusive vouchers and discounts just for you.

We welcome you and hope you enjoy Our Place.

The Editor - Our Place

PS. Do you have an interesting story or article? If so, send us an email by visiting: www.ourplace.co

CONTENTS

What's On	3
Health & Lifestyle Feature	
How getting more awe can improve your life	4-7
Health & Lifestyle News	8-9
Leisure & Travel Feature	
South American beauties	10-13
Food & Drink Feature	
'Herbs give a dish that extra zing!'	14-15
Home & Garden Feature	
How an old shed inspired hundreds of stories	16-17
Our Charity of the Month	18

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Halloween in London

London Dungeon South Bank, London

Delve into the ancient capital's most horrible history at the London Dungeon.

Experience live actors, thrilling rides and exciting special effects during this terrifying 90-minute experience.

The London Dungeon is a walk-through experience that recreates scenes from London's scary history. Take the medieval lift into the depths of the dungeon and begin your journey. Along the way you'll have a close shave with Fleet Street barber, Sweeney Todd, investigate the mysterious identity of Jack the Ripper and discover the dreadful secrets of the torture chamber. Not for the faint-hearted!

Tickets to the London Dungeon cost from £27 per person.

Jack the Ripper Museum 12 Cable St, Aldgate, London E1 8JG

Visit the world's only dedicated Jack the Ripper museum, learn about the suspects and victims of the terrible murders and step back to the year 1888 - the year that Jack the Ripper terrorised the streets of Victorian London.

Set across six incredible floors, the museum shows painstakingly recreated scenes connected to the murders alongside artefacts that have never before been shown to the public. See a realistic recreation of PC Watkins discovering the body of Catherine Eddowes on Mitre Square and visit Jack the Ripper's 'sitting room', containing medical instruments, books and an impressive and fascinating collection of Ripper memorabilia.

Visit a recreation of the Whitechapel police station that was the epicentre of the investigation and inspect a wall of clues, including original newspapers, police artefacts and the 'From Hell' and 'Dear Boss' letters. The attic of the museum is a recreation of victim Mary Kelly's humble living quarters, the room where she lived and died.

Here you will learn the life stories of the women he murdered - a poignant exploration of the domestic and working lives of the Ripper's victims. If you dare, descend to the morgue, where you can inspect actual autopsy photographs and read the medical reports of the nine women that fell victim to the Ripper's knife. With all this evidence, perhaps you will be able to solve one of the most famous crime mysteries of all time!

WINTER CAT WARNING

At this time of year please check under your car and wheel arches for cats trying to keep warm, before you set off on your journey!



During the cold winter months cats will often seek out any warm space they can find. One particularly irresistible lure seems to be the cosy confines of a warm car engine. Unfortunately, cats that seek shelter under the bonnets of cars can then be injured or killed when that car is started. Help keep your own and your neighbourhood cats safe this winter by tapping the bonnet of your car before you start the engine.

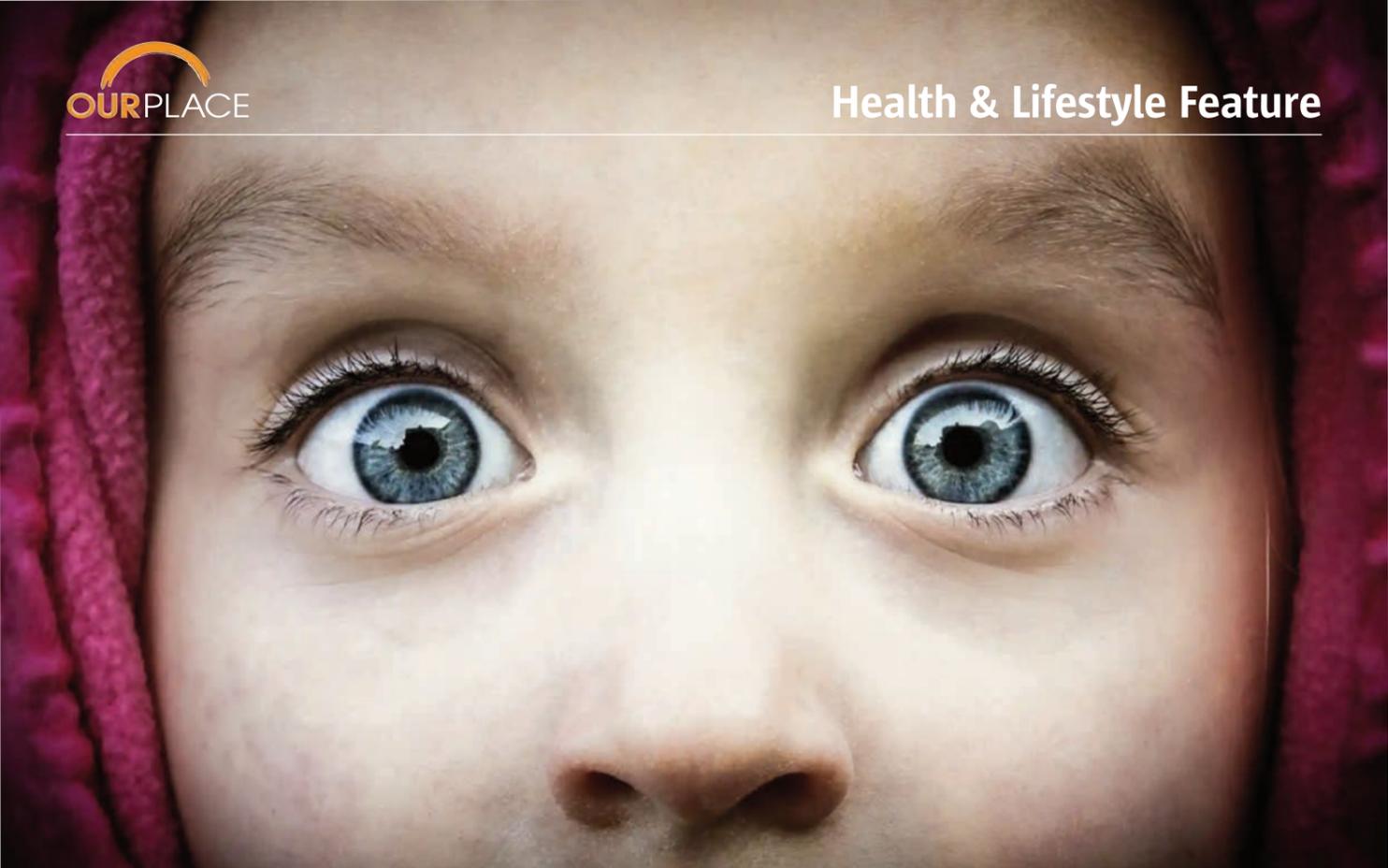
HEDGEHOG WARNING

At this time of year please check for these prickly creatures before lighting your bonfire.



Bonfires are perfect sleeping areas for hedgehogs and every year many get burnt alive. If you are having a bonfire, just make sure you check inside before lighting it. If you do find a hedgehog, move it to a safe place. This year second litters have been born later than usual. This means that there may still be young and underweight hedgehogs around. Remember if they are under 600gr they will not survive hibernation and need to be taken to a local animal rescue centre.





Oh wow! How getting more awe can improve your life - and even make you a nicer person

Whether it's the immensity of the Grand Canyon or the beauty of an intricate spider's web, feeling awestruck is good for you. Here are 10 ways to get awed.

A few years ago I went on a solo walking holiday to Lanzarote. On day one, I walked up a coastal hill path and came across a view I still see in my dreams.

Huge ochre mountains pierced the sky. Craters of black sand and eerie green lagoons dotted the landscape. It was like Mars. My skin rippled with goosebumps. I was briefly, deliciously, insignificant.

The holiday was a week of daily awe walks - intentionally shifting my attention towards my surroundings, allowing myself to be wowed by new details. Many of us have been awe walking (whether or not we called it that) over the past few years, as the pandemic forced us to interact with familiar surroundings in new ways.



The use of green spaces is up on previous years, which suggests some of us have been seeking awe - an emotion that has fascinated philosophers for centuries.

Also referred to as the sublime, awe is felt, according to the Romantics, when our inner, subjective world collides with the objective natural world and overwhelms us.

In 1757 the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke revolutionised our understanding of awe with his text *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.

Burke believed awe was something felt not just during religious ceremonies (as once previously thought) but also in everyday experiences: music, patterns of light or a crack of thunder. Awe doesn't need vastness.

Despite centuries of philosophical fascination, awe has only been studied properly in the past 20 years. It is now a hot topic.

The physiological experience of awe - goosebumps, dropped jaws, caught breath - is wonderful in itself, but research suggests that regularly feeling wonder can have a range of benefits for our physical and mental wellbeing as well as increasing our compassion, generosity and critical thinking ability.

In the words of psychology professor Dacher Keltner, co-founder of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, awe "sharpens our brains".

In 2018 a white paper by the Greater Good Science Center and the Philadelphia-based John Templeton Foundation found that awe experiences are linked with a decrease in markers for chronic inflammation (associated with cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and bowel diseases) and reduced rumination associated with depression.

A 2021 study argued that experiencing awe "awakens self-transcendence", helping people get closer to their "authentic" selves. Awe may even expand our perception of time and, as another study suggests, make us feel less impatient.

"When you hear 'awe', one image often comes to mind: the Grand Canyon," says Keltner. "In our research, people report feeling awe twice a week - and they're not all flying to the Grand Canyon.

More often, awe is about other people. Like, I can't believe how that little girl can rock climb or, I can't believe how kind that guy was, and you get teary.

It isn't just about grand edifices." It's true: I realise that I experience awe staring at the small galaxies of fur on my dog's chest or watching geese land on a pond.

In psychological fields, being made to feel small is known as self-diminishment. This has been shown to help in recovering from PTSD. In pulling us away from our usual self-referential states, awe can increase "prosocial behaviour", which broadly means being more generous and cooperative.

A 2018 study found that participants who reported experiencing awe more often in their daily lives were deemed more humble by their friends.

The message is clear: regular doses of awe may be vital to our wellbeing and make us nicer people. But these discoveries come at a time when society is becoming less awe-friendly.

The mighty pull of social media and its algorithms fixes our gaze downwards. Keltner says: "We recently interviewed 320,500 people from 26 countries about what brings them awe - and no one mentioned their smartphone."

If awe is often about other people, our increasingly neoliberal, individualistic society is making connection harder. During the pandemic we turned to simpler yet deeper sources of pleasure like gardening, cooking, walking and music.

We reminded ourselves of the human need to be moved. "Spotify said streaming patterns had dramatically changed at the peak of the pandemic," adds Keltner. "People wanted emotional music that made them tear up. We were craving a depth of feeling."



The vast inequalities the cost of living crisis is exposing also raise important questions about access. Nature is strongly associated with awe, but people in high-density housing or low-income, time-robbing work may not be able to get to green spaces.

For Keltner, this is why we need to "democratise" the idea of awe. "I used to teach in prisons," he says. "Those guys have the shittiest lives of anybody in the US, but when I talked to them about awe, they told me they found it when the sun would hit them walking outside or by being immersed in sports. Awe can be found anywhere, by anyone, if we're open to it."

Continued on pages 6-7...



Group activities and goosebumps: 10 ways to find more awe

Get into nature and notice

Vastness in nature - tall trees, bodies of water, mountains - is strongly linked to awe. Witnessing animal behaviour (particularly when it makes us feel afraid) can provoke awe too. Tuning into patterns (bark on trees, veins on leaves, a spider's web) may make you feel awe even if you don't expect it to.

... and if you can't, watch nature programmes

Studies have shown that videos can stimulate awe, particularly nature-related documentaries (which are also linked to decreased levels of anxiety). Break up your usual series-watching and watch an episode of Planet Earth or Netflix's My Octopus Teacher. (I often type "breaching whales" or "starling murmurations" into YouTube.)

Observe people with unique abilities

Watch someone do something you find remarkable. If attending live events isn't possible, the internet is your friend. Watch "best of" compilations of football goals, Beyoncé's best vocal performances, ballet dancers, a powerful speech. Who or whatever makes you say "wow" or gives you goosebumps, indulge that feeling more.

Seek new music

Music can provoke strong physical responses. Getting "the chills" means a body is experiencing awe, often found in new music. You might listen to classical music or opera for the first time. A few years ago I was introduced to the composer Max Richter's interpretation of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. I now play it loudly for self-diminishment purposes.



Move with others

Several studies have shown that people are more generous and cooperative after moving in unison with others. This might be doing a group exercise or dance class, singing in a choir, being in a crowd at a concert or sports event, or even running or walking with a friend.

Try understanding a new concept

New concepts are key to awe. Take some time to consider a big new idea. It could be anything: quantum physics, the gut microbiome, the Maillard reaction (the chemical reaction that gives browned food - toast, steaks, cookies - its distinctive flavour), how waves are formed.

Go on an awe walk

A 2020 study showed that participants taking weekly 15-minute awe walks for eight weeks reported less stress and increased emotions like compassion and gratitude. Take a short walk in your immediate neighbourhood and observe details you wouldn't normally notice: plants pushing through concrete or fences, the textures of a wooden bench, the structural patterns of high-rise buildings.



Ask others what makes them feel awe

Awe is subjective. Ask your friends and family what makes them say "wow" - they might send you books, videos or images that will move you. A clinical psychologist I admire, Dr Anne Cooke, pointed me towards a poem by William Martin, Do Not Ask Your Children to Strive. The closing lines did indeed give me goosebumps: "Show them the infinite pleasure / in the touch of a hand. / And make the ordinary come alive for them. / The extraordinary will take care of itself."

Document day-to-day beauty

Every day for a week, photograph something you find subtly beautiful: patterns in your sheets when you get up, your dog's eyelashes, your child's hands while they draw. At the end of the week, take a few minutes to look at them together.

When you feel awe, stay with it

If something makes you feel small, goosebumpy or teary, stay with the feeling. Notice the physical sensations. Resist the temptation to move on to the next thing. Emotions can have muscle memory: if we practise recognising what it's like to really revel in awe, we may open ourselves to feeling it more in our day-to-day lives.

More awe-inspiring ideas

Write about a personal experience of awe

What experiences in your life have most filled you with a sense of wonder and inspiration? A hike through the Grand Canyon? A visit to the pyramids of Egypt? Your child's first steps?

The simple act of writing about awe can be very powerful. The Awe Narrative practice involves reflecting on a personal experience of awe and then writing about it in as much detail as possible. Recalling the experience in vivid detail can conjure up the feelings you had at the time.

A 2012 study led by Melanie Rudd, assistant professor at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, found that people who completed this writing exercise reported stronger feelings of awe, less sense of time pressure, and greater willingness to volunteer their time to help a charity (compared with those who wrote about an experience of happiness).

This practice may be especially useful when the daily grind is weighing you down. Even just a brief reminder of an awe-inducing experience from your past may help lift you out of the doldrums and remind you that the world can be a magical place.

Read an awe-inspiring story

Written words can also evoke awe. The Awe Story practice involves reading a detailed story about climbing up the Eiffel Tower and taking in the panoramic view. The story is told in the second person to make readers feel like they're experiencing it themselves.

Awe-inspiring writing can also be found in literature and nonfiction, such as Stephen Hawking's A Brief History of Time, and in your own writing (a reason to consider recording your experiences of awe as they occur, so that you can reflect back on them when you're in need of an awe boost).

A third 2012 study led by Melanie Rudd illustrates some possible benefits of reading about awe. In this study, participants read either the Eiffel Tower story or a story about climbing an unnamed tower and seeing a plain landscape from above. Those who read the Eiffel Tower story reported greater awe, a greater preference for experiences over material objects, a sense of having more time, and greater life satisfaction (compared to those who read the neutral story). That sense of having more time was what made people more satisfied with their lives.

Life can sometimes feel lackluster and dull, and inspiration can be hard to find. On those days, even a small dose of awe can go a long way in elevating your spirits and reviving your sense of purpose. Awe isn't always a comforting feeling - sometimes it can be downright frightening - but it's a powerful way to cut through the monotony and see things in a new light. We hope that the awe exercises on Greater Good in Action will be a useful starting point as you aspire to make your life more "awesome."

(Article source: Various)

A new start after 60: 'I became an adventure cyclist at 65 - and rode from Mongolia to Scotland'

Within months of retiring as a mental health nurse, Len Collingwood began a 13,000km solo cycle ride. But that wasn't the feat that got him into Guinness World Records...



The Guardian reports that Len Collingwood, a clinical nurse specialist in psychotherapy, retired on his 65th birthday. He had made a deal with his wife, Sally: she would train as a yoga teacher and he would "start out as an adventure cyclist".

Four months later, he set off on a 13,000km cycle ride from Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia to Edinburgh, much of it roughly shadowing Marco Polo's Silk Road. No sooner had he started out than a snowstorm hit. He hid in his tent, wearing every item of clothing he had packed. At -18C it was too cold to venture outside to cook. He survived the next 48 hours by eating a "massive bag of Snickers and Crunchies" his colleagues had given him when he retired.

So it is a surprise to hear Collingwood say that he has never feared for his life. Except occasionally when a car veered too close, that is. Surely there were days on that six-month journey when he couldn't face the saddle?

"Never. There's always something to be curious about," he says. "And I'm very happy in my own company."

Collingwood has minimised his equipment, often using tips from mountaineers. On very wet or windy nights, he might sleep in a culvert. In 2018 he pedalled solo in a single-speed rickshaw from Edinburgh to Istanbul to earn a place in Guinness World Records.

"There are very few records a man over 60 can break," he says.

He turns 71 this year. As we speak, he is perched on the sea wall in Penzance, Cornwall, about to pedal to Land's End to begin the 1,407km trip to John o'Groats. It sounds arduous but he insists "it's not a lot of effort. The gearing is so low, it's just a matter of spinning the wheels."

Still, they don't spin on their own. His daughter - like Sally, a yoga teacher - has suggested weights to maintain muscle mass. He plans to start in the autumn.

His son, an ultra-distance cyclist, keeps him up to speed on the latest technology. They each came to cycling independently of one another. "If there is a shared inspiration, it's the humble bicycle that has the capacity to enable the rider to travel vast distances fast or slow," Collingwood says.

His parents never cycled. His older sister had a bike that he rode back when the handlebars were higher than his head, always going "a bit further down the road, a bit further".

But the biggest influence, he thinks, was a Ladybird book on Marco Polo that he borrowed from Everton library when he was six.

It was the incongruity of Italian clothes and camels that caught Collingwood's eye. The Guinness Book of Records, as it was then, was another favourite: "I would go over and over it."

Collingwood was a precocious reader, but grammar school was not a happy place for him. His family could not afford the uniform and he felt conspicuous.

"I fell in with the rebellious crowd," he says. At 12, he and his friends bought a motorbike to ride around the fields near his home in Ellesmere Port, Cheshire. At 15, he started an apprenticeship in heavy mechanical maintenance. But when he finished, he felt a yearning. "I wanted to do something different," he says.

The local psychiatric hospital, West Cheshire, was looking for nursing assistants. Spurred on by his reading of RD Laing, Thomas Szasz and David Cooper, Collingwood applied and trained.

He spent the next 45 years as a mental health nurse with a specialism in psychotherapy and family therapy. "I've always been earnest of purpose. If something is to be done, it is to be done properly."

The job taught him resilience. "People go forwards and people go backwards. The difficult bit is managing the times when people go backwards," he says. "Don't let the moment spoil the whole thing."

In Mongolia he got a dozen punctures in the space of an hour. But he fixed each one till he was patching the patches.

Collingwood is planning new rides in France next year, and beyond that hopes "to spread my wings further. There is peace on a bicycle," he says.

"The joy is the actual doing of the activity. Going further means you're just doing more of something you enjoy."

(Story source: *The Guardian*)

Success of experimental Alzheimer's drug hailed as 'historic moment'

Study shows cognition in early-stage patients on lecanemab declines by 27% less than those on placebo.



The Guardian reports that an experimental drug has slowed the rate of decline in memory and thinking in people with early Alzheimer's disease in what is being described as a "historic moment" for dementia treatment.

The cognition of Alzheimer's patients given the drug, developed by Eisai and Biogen, declined by 27% less than those on a placebo treatment after 18 months. This is a modest change in clinical outcome but it is the first time any drug has been clearly shown to alter the disease's trajectory.

"This is a historic moment for dementia research, as this is the first phase 3 trial of an Alzheimer's drug in a generation to successfully slow cognitive decline," said Dr Susan Kohlhaas, the director of research at Alzheimer's Research UK.

"Many people feel Alzheimer's is an inevitable part of ageing. This spells it out: if you intervene early you can make an impact on how people progress."

In the study, which enrolled roughly 1,800 patients with early stage Alzheimer's, patients were given twice-weekly infusions of the drug, called lecanemab. It was also shown to reduce toxic plaques in the brain and slow patients' memory decline and ability to perform day-to-day tasks.

About a fifth of patients experienced side-effects, including brain swelling or brain bleeding visible on PET scans, with about 3% of those patients experiencing symptomatic side-effects.

The results offer a boost to the "amyloid hypothesis", which assumes that sticky plaques seen in the brains of dementia patients play a role in damaging brain cells and causing cognitive decline.

A series of previous drug candidates had been shown to successfully reduce levels of amyloid in the brain, but without any improvement in clinical outcomes, leading some to question whether the research field had been on the wrong track.

Rob Howard, a professor of old age psychiatry at University College London (UCL), said: "This is an unambiguously statistically positive result and represents something of an historic moment when we see the first convincing modification of Alzheimer's disease. God knows, we've waited long enough for this."

Eisai and Biogen are expected to apply for regulatory approval in the US and Europe by the end of the year. If approved, healthcare providers will have difficult decisions about whether to fund the drug, which requires infusions every two weeks, and who will be eligible for it because the clinical improvements seen by patients fall just below a widely accepted benchmark.

On a 14-point scale used to assess Alzheimer's progression, patients on the drug scored 0.45 higher than those on the placebo treatment, with an Alzheimer's patient being expected to decline by about 1 point a year.

Howard said: "The accepted minimum worthwhile difference ranges from 0.5 to 1.0 points, [meaning] that there are going to be some very difficult conversations and decisions in the next weeks and months."

The overall benefits will depend on whether patients on the drug maintain a better trajectory beyond the first 18 months, but the latest data cannot answer that question.

There are also questions about whether the drug could slow decline at an even earlier stage. Eisai is recruiting people with a high risk of Alzheimer's who have not yet developed symptoms to take part in further trials to try to help answer this.

The prospect of an effective Alzheimer's therapy will focus attention on the ability of healthcare services to deliver treatments to the almost 1 million people affected in the UK - one in every 14 people aged 65 years and over.

According to Alzheimer's Research UK, only one in three psychiatry services would be ready to deliver a new treatment within a year and, in the UK, many patients are diagnosed at a much later stage than those who took part in the latest trial.

"This will require a radical change in how we deliver our services," said Prof Jon Schott, the chief medical officer of Alzheimer's Research UK and a professor of neurology at UCL.

"If this is licensed and this gets through Nice (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence), the demand will be huge. We're not ready to deliver this at scale and we need to address that now."

(Story source: *The Guardian*)

Do you have an interesting story or article?
If so, send us an email by visiting:
www.ourplace.co



South American beauties: Vibrant cities, mind-boggling landscapes and ancient wonders

TV's Simon Reeve had the trip of a lifetime criss-crossing the continent. Here are his highlights...

Travelling through South America is an amazing privilege, each day rich with experiences. Covering more than 4,000 miles over many months, my journey for my new TV series began in Venezuela in the far north and ended in Tierra del Fuego in Chile and Argentina at the southern tip.

In between, there were so many adventures from Brazil to Bolivia, Paraguay to Peru, Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana.

These days, most travellers tend to go to one place on trips abroad, but exploring a whole continent provides a great sense of satisfaction. It's a throwback to an older type of journey, where people would go on explorations and come back with tales from afar. As a traveller you obviously want to see the sights - the magnificent waterfalls of Venezuela, the famous Inca ruins at Machu Picchu in Peru, and the great beaches of Rio de Janeiro.



But this journey gave me the chance to get beneath the skin of the countries, too. Highlights included canoe trips through semi-lawless gold-mining regions; stays with remote Amazonian communities; interviews with warlord football club owners; a night spent in a metal tube tethered to a mountain in the Andes and, even, an eventful police raid of a Peruvian cocaine laboratory. Not recommended for regular package holidays.

The trip shone a light on the pressures on indigenous people to achieve equality in many of the countries, as well as the often-hard reality of life in sprawling cities. Then there are the environmental strains caused by money-grabbing logging and mining companies, with some species under threat, including jaguars, sloths and beautiful, diminutive golden lion tamarin monkeys.

The sloth, by the way, is a ludicrous but brilliant creature, with many existing in Suriname - they are said to only descend from their sleepy treetops once a week to defecate in the forest, apparently losing up to a third of their weight when they do.

My journey had plenty of ups (paragliding off the coast by the Atacama Desert) and downs (I fell badly ill in Peru).



Yet despite challenging moments along the long dusty roads, joyful memories come mainly to the fore: a New Year ceremony with the Mapuche people in Patagonia - eating delicious pancakes at dawn - and a visit to a Waiapi village in Brazil, where traditional ceremonies included displays with arrows and dances. One day, I would like to take my son there.

So do go - and here are some of my highlights to inspire you...

Into the Guiana Shield (pictured top left)

The section of the Earth's crust in the north-east of South America, from the spectacular tabletop Mount Roraima in Venezuela through Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, is known as the Guiana Shield.

It contains one of the world's most eco-diverse rainforests and is famous for its waterfalls, especially Angel Falls in Venezuela - the world's highest at 979 metres. Mount Roraima is nearly two miles above sea level and so out of the way that it was the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*.

Guyana is just as breathtaking, with its vast rainforests and remote winding rivers. It's the only English-speaking country on the continent, with impoverished jungle settlements as well as wealthy politicians in its capital, Georgetown - where it is rumoured that an oil boom could soon make some even richer.

In Suriname, I visited a vast gold mine in the jungle once owned by the country's vice president, where the jobs are welcomed but the damage to the rainforest is enormous.

Meanwhile, in French Guiana, a department of France where the euro is the currency, I joined a jungle patrol led by the French Foreign Legion. This took us to an illegal gold mine by a remote lake, from where the miners had only just scattered.

Also of great interest in French Guiana was a visit to a key rocket launch site of the European Space Agency. I was taken to a shiny complex from which satellites are regularly fired into orbit, and was even allowed to go in the rocket control room.

HOW TO DO IT: A 13-day Signature Venezuela trip with visits to Angel Falls and the Orinoco Delta costs from £3,500pp (journeylatinamerica.com). Guyana trips are available from coxandkings.co.uk.

Bountiful Brazil

It's the biggest country on the continent, with a population of 215 million. A visit to one of the most remote regions of the Amazon was eye-opening: the villages of the Waiapi people have changed little in centuries, yet their traditional life is under threat from logging and mining interests.

Important projects, however, are being conducted in the forest to show how the region could grow valuable crops for medicines without destroying the environment.

Then, after a long interruption caused by the pandemic, my journey restarted. The full extent of Covid was made apparent by vast new cemeteries by the large city of Manaus. Nearly 700,000 Brazilians died, making it one of the worst-hit countries in the world.

Continued on pages 12-13...



Onwards, my trip led me to Rio de Janeiro, with its wonderful beaches and iconic Sugarloaf Mountain. The scenery may have been great, yet the city was under threat from flash floods and baking heat brought on by climate change.

The good news, however, was that work was under way to monitor these dangers with a high-tech control centre.

A lovely stay in a forest cottage by the Atlantic was followed by a brilliant wildlife tour to spot golden lion tamarins.



HOW TO DO IT: The 15-day Simply Brazil tour covering Rio de Janeiro, Paraty and the Iguazu Falls costs from £4,243pp (theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk). Also try trailfinders.com.

Andes Adventure

Next up was Peru and Bolivia, where I saw the Andes mountains and took in the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu, one of the world's greatest ancient sights.



Since the arrival of the Europeans in South America, indigenous groups in this region have suffered badly and descendants of the Inca people are now among the poorest. I visited some of their communities, where locals highlighted their troubles.

A dramatic day in the company of the Peruvian police was to follow, as they raided a cocaine-making facility. Officers explained that the reality of life for many farmers in the area involved growing coca leaves (the primary ingredient of cocaine).

Another excursion led to the mining town of La Rinconada in Peru. At 5,100 metres above sea level, it's one of the planet's highest human settlements. The miners work hard in search of tiny fragments of gold.

In Bolivia, I moved on to La Paz, the world's highest capital at 3,650 metres above sea level. (pictured top left) There, cholas - indigenous women who wear traditional skirts and bowler hats - told of their long-term battle for greater representation in politics.

HOW TO DO IT: A 25-day Explore Peru and Bolivia trip costs from £3,645pp, excluding flights (intrepidtravel.com). Take a look at explore.co.uk, too.

Peaceful Paraguay

From Bolivia, where a visit to desolate but beautiful salt flats was arranged (these are believed to contain huge reserves of lithium, crucial for electric car batteries, under them), the route continued back into Brazil.



We made a trip to the wetlands of Pantanal, meeting farmers struggling to cope with the risk of flooding caused by climate change. I had a close encounter with a jaguar in this region.

Then it was onwards to yet another country, Paraguay, where Mennonites - ultra-conservative communities who eschew many of the trappings of the modern world - drove around in horses and carts and spoke Low German.

They are successful farmers with vast cattle ranches, which has required the chopping down of large areas of forest.

In this area, I met the Ayoreo people, many of whom are struggling to defend their land against yet more outside logging and mining interests in the Chaco forest.

HOW TO DO IT: The 12-day Paraguay Misiones and Iguazu Tour costs from £3,600pp, excluding flights (responsibletravel.com). Also try audleytravel.com.

Southern delights

Last but by no means least, this South American adventure finished in the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego, shared between Chile and Argentina.



Before getting to the far south, a trip was organised to the beautiful expanse of the Atacama Desert in Chile, one of the driest places on Earth, and the mountains of Patagonia. Here, Mapuche people were in the midst of elaborate New Year celebrations.

The journey moved on to Buenos Aires, Argentina's charming capital with its old colonial buildings and national treasures. I enjoyed the sights, but the rampant inflation dwarfs anything back in Britain.

On finally arriving in the southern tip of the continent, amid the spectacular scenery of Tierra del Fuego, locals explained they have resisted the arrival of large salmon farms, said to have damaged the environment further north.



An optimistic note on which to end my epic adventure.

HOW TO DO IT: A 13-day Chile, Argentina and Patagonia tour costs from £2,999pp excluding flights (mercuryholidays.co.uk). Also try pura-aventura.com.

Simon Reeve's South America is currently airing on Sundays at 9pm on BBC2.

(Article source: Daily Mail)



A fistful of flavour: 'Herbs give a dish that extra zing!'

The parsley and coriander grown by Joe Cottingham bring a hit of freshness to some of Charlie Bigham's most popular ready-to-cook dishes. Sophie Goddard hears about the blood, sweat and tears that go into growing herbs.

Joe Cottingham's day begins hours before most of us are even considering pressing snooze.

"Often it starts at 4am to ensure it's as cool as possible when we begin harvesting," says Cottingham, whose huge range of crops includes basil, beef tomatoes and baby courgettes.

A typical day for him might involve checking how planting, irrigation and harvesting are going, managing the packaging and distribution operation and working with retailers.

Cottingham, who has been in farming for nearly 25 years, is a director at the Watts Farms Group, which operates on eight sites across Kent and Essex.

Growing more than 100 varieties of vegetables, fruits and herbs, the farms have customers that range from supermarkets, hotels and restaurants to people living locally. And, for the past six years,

Cottingham and his team have been responsible for growing the fresh herbs that go into some of the most popular ready-to-cook meals made by Charlie Bigham's, elevating them from tasty to terrific.

"We grow a full range of herbs here - flat parsley, curly parsley, coriander, dill, mint, chives, thyme, rosemary, sage and basil," says Cottingham. "And we supply our fresh coriander and flat parsley to the team at Charlie Bigham's." The herbs are destined for recipes such as the curries and the fish pies.

"Careful use of fresh herbs makes so much difference," says Charlie Bigham, the founder of the food empire that bears his name. "Herbs give a dish that zing of freshness and make it look that bit more alluring."

Watts Farms' locations in some of the UK's warmest spots mean that parsley can be grown for most of the year, maximising freshness and minimising the environmental impact of food miles as buyers don't need to source from overseas.

Herbs are harvested daily and delivered to Charlie Bigham's kitchen near Wells, in Somerset, the next morning. There, they are washed and chopped by a specially trained parsley team using bespoke (read: razor-sharp!) equipment.

This freshness is key, says Bigham. "There are certain herbs that can only be used fresh. And for me, parsley is at the top of that list. Should you have one of those jars of dried parsley at home I suggest you use up what you've got and don't buy it again!"

What's Cottingham's secret to ensuring that the herbs he harvests measure up in the taste stakes? "We grow many varieties and have done a lot of trial work on finding the right ones for the right farms in the right weather conditions. A variety we use in spring would be different to a variety we use now, for example," he says. "It means we grow our herbs in small batches and each year we assess them to ensure we have the most suitable varieties."

But it's not just suitability for the growing environment that matters, he says. "Everything is ultimately driven by taste and flavour, as well as how much life we can get from the plant post-harvest - we want to keep our plants as fresh as we can."



It figures then that Cottingham has become something of an expert when it comes to recognising each herb's specific flavours. "When we're selecting flavours, we're looking for that distinctive coriander or flat parsley taste, but without it being too concentrated or strong. While it's hard to overuse fresh herbs, there's often a soapiness with coriander, for example, that can easily become overpowering or too floral. So we're looking for flavours that leave their mark on the dishes, without overpowering them."

Close working relationships with customers such as Charlie Bigham's make the process an enjoyable and successful one. "We have a great relationship with the team at Bigham's, and Charlie has been out and seen our farms himself," says Cottingham.

"It was lovely to talk to people as passionate about food as Charlie and his team. It's also great for our customers to see what we're doing for them, so they can understand the whole supply chain and how we work.

"We work very closely to get the best possible product we can into Charlie's kitchens and ensure that the meals reaching shoppers are the best quality they can be."

The satisfaction of tasting the end product is a bonus, too. "It's awesome eating the dishes knowing you've played a part in creating them. Our seasons are long and fairly relentless from an intensity of work perspective - a lot of blood, sweat and tears goes into farming. So to actually understand where our herbs are going, what they're being used for and to eat them, seeing how a single ingredient has been turned into a mixture of lots of ingredients. It's really lovely."

Even the best home cooks like the occasional night off, and that's where Charlie Bigham's dishes come into their own. With everything from steak pies to paella and salmon en croute, it has never been easier to feed your family well

How to keep herbs in mint condition

Whether you're growing your own or buying those handy herb pots from the supermarket, keeping them flourishing means less waste, fewer trips to the shop, and that feeling of farm-to-table fulfilment that comes with cooking something you have nurtured. Here are a few tips to keep herbs alive and kicking with flavour.

Perfect parsley

Flat parsley can be planted in your garden in early spring and if looked after will keep giving you wonderful leaves for harvest well into the autumn (writes Joe Cottingham). Plant in a well dug and manured bed or in a compost-filled pot. Make sure to keep the soil moist without overwatering. When you come to harvest take the most prominent leaves, being careful to not cut too low as you want to protect the smaller leaves (the growth point) which will be your future harvests. Pests to look at for: slugs, caterpillars and aphids.

Repot to regrow

Supermarkets often crowd several small plants into one pot to give a look of fullness. In the long term, this means no individual plant can reach its full potential. Repot your herbs into slightly bigger pots with drainage holes and saucers, or separate crowded plants - this is especially common with shop-bought basil - into two pots.

(Article source: *Silver Surfers*)



Into the woods: How an old shed inspired hundreds of stories

A derelict property in Surrey has been transformed into a storybook haven for artists.

The garden designer Anthony Paul has lived in the same black-and-white cottage in the Surrey Hills for more than 40 years. He is surrounded by villages that recall the trees that once defined the landscape:

“Ockley, Forest Green, Ewhurst, Holmwood - these are all forest names,” he says. “The oaks here were some of the finest in England, because we’re on clay - and clay, for some reason, grows beautiful oaks. I call them the lords of the forest.”

Anthony found his home in the pages of the Sunday Times in 1977 while living in London with his long-term partner, Hannah Peschar, a Dutch journalist, and running his own garden maintenance company (he was responsible for the upkeep of Paul McCartney’s patch of land in St John’s Wood). The couple spent their weekends exploring the countryside and plotting their escape from London.



The house they found was built in the 16th century. “At the time,” Anthony explains, “there would have been alders growing along the river, and alder makes the best charcoal, so this would have been a woodcutter or charcoal-maker’s house.

It’s very primitive,” he continues. “It has beautiful oak timbers, a wonderful history and a special atmosphere.”

The Grade-II listed cottage came with a vastly overgrown 10-acre garden that once formed part of a much larger estate and hadn’t been touched for 30 years. “It was a complete mess,” Anthony recalls.

“The river that runs through the garden was choked with fallen trees, there was bamboo that had gone mad and Dutch elm disease had ravaged the elms, so it was quite a challenging, crazy thing to do because we were quite young - I was only 30, Hannah was 33 - and we had no money at all.”

Nevertheless, they put their London flat on the market and sold it to the first buyer who walked through the door. “I really believe that some houses belong to some people, and some people belong to some houses,” says Anthony.

For the next five years, Anthony worked weekends and gradually brought the garden back to “organised chaos, rather than total chaos”.



During that arduous process, he uncovered a small brick shed hidden in the woods on the banks of the river that winds through the garden.

“It was a ruin, completely covered in ivy and bramble,” Anthony recalls. “There were squirrels, mice and bats living in it, but it had these wonderful lead windows and we could see that it had potential.”

The couple didn’t have the time or the money to repair the shed, so they waited. Drawing on his upbringing in New Zealand, Anthony became a self-taught garden designer and established a reputation for creating natural gardens that connect with their surrounding landscape (his client list includes Ringo Starr and Andrew Lloyd Webber).

Meanwhile Hannah’s focus shifted from news reports to the landscape outside, and she began to work with artists to create a public sculpture garden - one of the first of its kind in the UK.



It soon became apparent that their woodsman’s cottage wasn’t big enough to accommodate the artists who came to install their work in the garden. So they renovated the brick shed, transforming it into a Hansel and Gretel hideaway.

Externally, the brickwork has been clad in locally milled feather-edged oak that has been given a soft blue-green wash. The moss-covered roof was patched with clay tiles that Anthony found in the woods, and reclaimed lead windows were added to illuminate the gloomy interiors.

They employed a local carpenter to craft the kitchen, porch and internal doors using wood from one of their Scots pines; the floor was laid with light-reflective maple. Exposed plaster lends warmth and texture to the interiors, which have been furnished simply with natural materials: wood, rattan, linen and little else.

“It is a lovely place to stay,” says Anthony, who takes visitors on a journey through the garden and over a bridge before arriving at the front door. “Deer walk past the window, sea trout swim in the river and owls hoot at night - it has an indescribable, rustic charm.”

Anthony’s final task was to design a deck on two sides making use of timber from storm-felled trees. “Sitting there in late spring presents a panoramic paint chart of graduated greens from oak, ash, alder and hornbeam - all English heartland natives,” he explains.

The garden opened to the public 36 years ago and remains open to this day, displaying over 200 works by more than 50 artists.

Hannah sadly died last year, but Anthony is committed to sharing the unique landscape they co-created. “The sculpture adds drama to the garden,” he explains. “Set against the seasons, it is an ever-changing story - an exciting space to explore.”

(Article source: *The Guardian*)

Please help us rescue and care for vulnerable hedgehogs - **Britain's favourite mammal**

A shocking study has revealed that hedgehogs are rapidly vanishing from our countryside, with numbers **HALVED** in the last 20 years.

I am delighted to tell you that Britain's hedgehog has won favourite mammal in a UK poll.

The UK's only spiny mammal won with 35.9% of the 5,000 votes, more than double that of the Red Fox, who came in second place with 15.4%. The Red Squirrel came third with 11.4%, out of a shortlist of 10 charismatic UK mammals.

Unfortunately, hedgehogs are rapidly vanishing from our countryside as numbers have **HALVED** in the last 20 years, a shocking study has revealed.

Henry Johnson, hedgehog officer, People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) said:

"We Brits seem to love hedgehogs for a whole range of reasons, including their cute appearance, their role as slug controllers and the way they have colonised our gardens with such aplomb. This is why it is so sad to see them decline, with one in three lost since the millennium."

Threats to hedgehogs come mostly from us. In rural areas, our farmland increasingly lacks the diversity of habitats hedgehogs need and the invertebrates they feed on. In towns and cities green spaces are lost to development, paved over or increasingly fragmented. Hedgehogs are also very prone to road traffic accidents.

This is why we have launched this special Annual Appeal to protect Britain's favourite mammal.

At Hedgehog Rescue Rehabilitation and Care Centre we respond immediately to rescue injured hedgehogs. A vet is called in straight away and the hedgehogs are monitored and cared for. Once fit and well they are released back into the wild.

Hedgehog Rescue is now conducting its Annual Appeal. Only by continuing our huge effort and long-life commitment can we give these wonderful animals a safe, happy and contented life.



We care for many hedgehogs here at our rehabilitation centre. Hedgehogs just like these:

'Julie'



'Julie' (pictured left) came in last Autumn, quite small, out in daylight and had ticks. She stayed a few weeks, put on enough weight, and made a full recovery. She was released back to her own territory by the finder.

Baby Hedgehogs

These 2 hedgehogs came in as very small babies and had stayed with us a few weeks, gaining weight and giving us a chance to sort out their health issues. They had several ticks and needed worming. When they were 100% ready, we released them close to where they were found.



These hedgehogs are some of the lucky ones. Others are less fortunate.

As a friend who knows what a wonder animals can be, I hope you will support our Annual Appeal. Your kind gift will help us rescue and care for many more vulnerable hedgehogs - Britain's favourite mammal.

To donate to Hedgehog Rescue, go to:
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/hedgehogrescue>
or write to: Raisemore, Unit 1, Alton Road Industrial Estate, Ross-on-Wye HR9 5NB

