OURPLACENews

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

JANUARY 2024

Inside this issue...

Global gourmet:

Every country's must-try food revealed on world map, from fish and chips in the UK to hot dogs in the U.S and pavlova in Australia

Feathered friends

How do you get your grandchildren interested in birdwatching?

The strength secret:

How to get seriously fit from scratch - in 12 easy, enjoyable steps

From Arctic art to the Disgusting Food Museum:

Europe's top 10 culture destinations for 2024

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	3
How to get seriously fit from scratch	4-7
Health & Lifestyle News	8-9
Leisure & Travel Feature	
Europe's top 10 culture destinations for 2024	10-13
Food & Drink Feature	
Every must-try food revealed on world map	14-15
Home & Garden Feature	
Feathered friends	16-17
Our Charity of the Month	18

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RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 26th - 28th January 2024

Nationwide

The RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's biggest bird survey and regularly attracts nearly half a million participants.

The records from people counting birds in their gardens provides a vital snapshot of the UK's birds each winter.

The RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 2023 will take place over the weekend of the 26th and 28th January 2024.



To take part in the Big Garden Birdwatch simply spend an hour watching the birds in your garden or local park over the weekend.

Count the highest number of bird species you see at the same time. You can use pen and paper or the RSPB's online counting tool.

Don't count the total over the hour as you may get the same birds visiting more than once.

Submit the results to The RSPB via their website.

Do you have an event near you?

If so, let us know by sending us an email to:

www.ourplace.co



Hogwarts in the Snow - The Making of Harry Potter

Until 14th January 2024

Warner Bros Studio Tour, London.

Celebrate a very magical festive season with Hogwarts in the Snow at Warner Bros. Studio Tour London - The Making of Harry Potter.

Winter has arrived at Hogwarts. Glittering Christmas trees line the Great Hall and a replica festive feast including flaming Christmas puddings is laid out on the long tables; while the top section of the hall is transformed for the Yule Ball with snow, icicles and an orchestra of magical instruments. Around the rest of the studio, special-effect fires roar in the fireplaces, the Gryffindor common room is filled with Christmas treats and the detailed Hogwarts castle model is covered in a special blanket of snow. Get up close to props, costumes and models used in the Harry Potter films. Take a look around the studio's famous movie sets decorated as they were for the festive scenes. And find out how different types of artificial snow and ice were created and used in the films. You can also tuck into a 2-course meal in magical surroundings with the return of Dinner in the Great Hall this Christmas.



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.



The strength secret: How to get seriously fit from scratch - in 12 easy, enjoyable steps

Start with walking in January - then graduate to breathing exercises, circuits and pilates. With a new activity to try each month, you'll soon improve your flexibility and fitness, without feeling the burn.

Don't take this the wrong way, but let's imagine you are heading into 2024 at fitness ground zero: on to a medium to low baseline, you have heaped a month of doing nothing at all. What can you do to return to fighting form as painlessly as possible? Well, a lot - though, I warn you, it will take time.

This 12-month programme starts easily enough, but by December you should have found at least a few activities that really stretch you, or that don't immediately appeal. Don't write them off. The best gestalt fitness advice I ever heard came from an Australian tennis coach, who said: "Whatever you're doing, you need to introduce an activity at which you are not adept."

That said, no one is expecting you to stick with every exercise as the year goes by. How would you find the time to work and sleep? But at the very least you want to end up doing something aerobic, such as running or swimming; something to build muscle, such as weight training; and something that increases flexibility, such as yoga or pilates.

I got expert advice from Lucinda Meade, a 59-year-old physiotherapist and personal trainer whose fixations (muscle preservation, bone density, menopause, living your best life till you die) align with mine, but all of this should work whatever your age.



Health & Lifestyle Feature

January: walking

Public Health England is obsessed with the 10-minute daily brisk walk: from a whole population perspective, this is the most bang you'll ever get for your buck. I suggest an 18- to 19-minute variation: go out of your house, walk for 10 minutes in any direction, then try to get home quicker than that. It's very simple, a little gamified, and basically impossible to fail. Do this daily and introduce minor challenges, such as walking on uneven ground, or going uphill. Head out early: you need the best possible daylight for mood purposes.

The walking technique guru is Joanna Hall (who has a coaching app); she would tell you to be aware of how you are planting your feet, concentrating on the articulation of your back foot. Lift from your hip, and don't bob your head forward. Imagine yourself wearing long drop earrings that you want everyone to see, is her advice. Weirdly, this really works.

February: breathwork



In the 70s, Stanislav Grof pioneered "holotropic" breathing, which he said could give you a trippy, LSD-high. This might not be what you're after, but it does scope out the possibilities of breathwork, which can be quite an intense experience, taking you to the edge of where your body and your consciousness collide.

But you don't have to do it like that; the first time I tried it was with an executive coach, who taught me how to dynamic breathe before a meeting. You inhale sharply like an appalled Miss Jean Brodie, then exhale softly. Ultimately I got on better with a YouTube surfer breather called Sandy.

Meade describes a number of techniques - "hyperventilation, relaxed breathing, meditation" - that, once you've got them, will "benefit you in every way. Your stress levels will go down, you'll sleep better, you'll lose weight, you'll get rid of all the toxins - everything will just work better." The NHS website has a very simple breathing exercise; Jesse Coomer's book A Practical Guide to Breathwork is a fuller physiological inquiry and very plausible. He's also on Instagram.

March: circuits

Between the walking and the newfound groundedness, you'll be ready for something that makes you sweat. The thing with circuits, if you are doing them right, is that the whole hour is challenging and tiring. Some people can induce that commitment in themselves; most of us need the peer pressure that comes from doing a class.

The trend over the past five years has been either for a club-like atmosphere - dark, loud, frenetic, a 50:50 cardio/strength split, where even the weights are done very fast - or for a quasimilitary, outdoor workout, which tends to be a little cheaper.

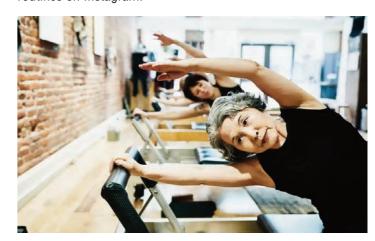
The promised calorie burn is incredible - the gym-based classes routinely vaunt 1,000+ calories per 50 minutes, which I'm not sure I believe, but you definitely end up feeling depleted (in a good way). The best single piece of advice for maintenance? Don't shop around: choose a class and stick with it. The other people are most of the point.

April: reformer pilates

Pilates is a strength and flexibility discipline; the movements are repetitive and sometimes minute. Reformer pilates is done on a bench, with springs at one end to manage the resistance and straps at the other for arm work.

You might be lying down on it, standing up, pushing the bench in and out with your arms or legs; whichever way, you're working muscle tone, balance and flexibility in a very low-impact way, so it's all-ages and great after injury.

Because of all the equipment and the small class size, this really isn't cheap: the best place I've tried, I could not afford. But look for deals because studios are everywhere and some are really good value. Once you have sorted your technique in a class, you can probably move to mat pilates at home, and find moves and routines on Instagram.



Continued on pages 6-7...



May: weight training

"As you get older, there is no other way, in a relatively short time, to build muscle," Meade says. "It's wasting away after you're 40, unless you're a builder." As your muscles get weaker your posture will deteriorate, which is very ageing of itself, and your bones will become more vulnerable, which means more injury, more pain.

Anna Jenkins does online coaching at Wafa - We Are Fit Attitude, a health and fitness club aimed at women aged between 40 and 60, and the members are evangelical. You will need kettle bells and resistance bands in the first instance. Probably, as you get more obsessive, you'll find yourself in possession of a full set of weights.

Personally, I'd just go to a "pump" class in your local authority gym. They're really fun, and you get to hear the club toons all the young people are listening to.

June: running

Ah, Couch to 5k, then back to couch again. Hello old friend: I've sure been here a lot of times, gingerly running for 90 seconds, feeling as if my lungs were going to explode, before steadily working up to a respectable 25 minutes. It's free, it's low drama, zero interaction, and it works. No wonder so many people end up only running.

Try not to do too much, too fast. "Listen to your body," Meade says. "What's the pain of muscles working, and what's the pain that isn't good?" You're starting in June not only for the weather, but because you need to have built up your strength first. "People injure themselves because they've got good lungs but they're weak, so they push themselves but then fall to pieces," Meade says. You need a plan for when you achieve 5k, otherwise, high on self-love, you'll give up. Sign up to an organised 10k.

July: swimming

Swimming is an incredibly good exercise for the low-impact use of every single muscle, and once you have a swim-ethic there's no reason you have to stop doing it. You'll rarely get injured. However, if the smell and harsh echoes of a municipal pool unearth terrible childhood memories of being too cold and not being allowed to go to the vending machine afterwards, it will help to start outdoors.

I went lido swimming with the swimmer and writer Becky Horsbrugh, who said the following: "If you're intimidated by the water, spend your first few minutes of every session just floating.

Once you understand your natural buoyancy, it will give you confidence." Swimming outdoors has massive cold water benefits, even in summer. Wild-water swimming is good for the soul, and people who take up long-distance swimming experience it as a whole new chapter of life, with managed jeopardy and increased prowess combining to rejuvenate even the most jaded old campaigner.



Health & Lifestyle Feature

August: yoga

It is holiday season, and you need something you can take away with you that doesn't rely on a fixed routine. Do start with a couple of lessons so you're doing it right, and choose your style: ashtanga is the fast-paced, shape-throwing one; hatha is the contemplative, sustained posture one; the fashionable class at the moment is vinyasa flow. Note: if the idea of sitting still and holding a pose fills you with dread, that's probably the one you should be doing.

Once you have perfected or at least found relative confidence in your practice, you can just carve out 20 minutes at home, either with a YouTube tutorial (Adriene Mishler is the global leader, and for a reason: she is good, calm and free) or by building a self-practice according to the fundamental basics: include all the movements of your spine (rotation; twists; elongation), then add in balance (standing poses) and coordination (cross-lateral movements).

September: bouldering or parkour

You've got to autumn, you're a whole new you, and you want something to show for it, something cool. Also, to go back to the first principle, something at which you are completely incompetent, which will challenge bits of your body you didn't know you had.



Bouldering is really hip, has great progression - the green grades a child could do; the white ones feel as if they might kill you - and unlike roped climbing, doesn't need a lot of expertise or a partner before you can start. It has a puzzle logic to it, so there's a lot of mental satisfaction too. It's quite expensive, though, and I never found a way to get the price down (it's so popular, a lot of climbing centres don't even have an off-peak).

Parkour, meanwhile, may entail an initial coaching outlay, but sooner or later you could do it on your own, for free. It's exhilarating but you will feel the concrete in your ancient bones if you haven't built up your muscles ahead.

October: fell running

Again, this is a show-off sport for the purposes of self-congratulation, and this month has the year's last trace of daylight, so use it wisely. It helps to live in the right bit of the country: there are active fell running scenes in Sheffield and the Isle of Wight; in south London, not so much.

It's great cardio and it tends to be low-impact because you're not on pavement. It also frees your mind from the relentless smartwatch-measuring of speed and distance; the terrain is too varied, and at times too challenging, to get hung up on that stuff. Even though the uphill is what will kill you, the down is where you will fall over. Ideally, you will have used all that walking to improve the mobility and strength in your feet and ankles, so you won't get sprains. Don't feel bad about being the novice in a club. That one guy who looks as if he's ruining his own run to help you out: he isn't - he lives for this moment.

November: natural movement

There are gyms that will do natural movement classes - they tend to be shorter, 20-minute bursts, and they are sometimes called functional movement - but essentially, you're trying to extend your strength training, which may have become a little perfunctory or instinctive, with unfamiliar moves.

Meade describes these as "crawling and jumping, bear crawls, kneeling to tall kneeling". If you imagine the things that toddlers do just to mess about, you're in the right zone. The internet is lousy with natural movement regimes, which, unlike traditional weight-bearing exercises, are almost impossible to mess up.

The point is to bring your strength and flexibility simultaneously to bear, so you are not trading off between one and the other. A lot of it will feel awkward and unfamiliar, which is part of the point. With balance especially, you have to almost lose it to get the benefit.

December: aerial yoga or pilates

In aerial pilates and yoga, you have an individual silk (it's really more like a big bit of jersey) that hangs in a loop from the ceiling and works like a hammock. Whether you are swinging on it, cocooned in it, or hanging upside down walking your hands across the floor, you are very stable. I've never seen anyone fall off or out of a silk.

Have a look at @theakingmovement on Instagram for a demo. Essentially, you're doing resistance and strength work acrobatically, and at a weird angle: you might be doing a pull-up, but with your feet in the silk and your whole body in the air it looks harder than it is and immensely cool. There's a huge sense of play, and the unfamiliarity of the movements makes you work harder instinctively. You'll need a class, obviously - it's quite a commitment to install silks in your own house, plus what would the neighbours think?

(Article source: The Guardian)



Health & Lifestyle News

The unexpected things that happen to your body when you quit alcohol

The benefits of giving up booze can be surprising in many ways.



Silver Surfers reports that after all the Christmas excess and celebrations, chances are many of us are thinking about taking a detour down sober street and abstaining from alcohol for a while.

And, most likely, you'll be thinking about how much better you're going to feel for it - or at least you hope that'll be the case.

"We've all heard the term 'in moderation' or being reminded to enjoy alcohol but 'responsibly'," says Lola Biggs, dietitian at natural health supplement brand, Together Health.

"However, sometimes there are times in life when cutting out alcohol completely is the aim. Whether it's for a dry January or a complete lifestyle change, removing alcohol from our diet can reveal some interesting symptoms," notes Biggs. "And not all of them feel good initially."

Indeed, the list of benefits from giving up alcohol is lengthy, and it can impact nearly every aspect of your wellbeing, says Nathan Penman, clinic manager at Nuffield Health, "Alcohol is a toxin that our body needs to work overtime to remove from the system, so while it's doing this, other areas get neglected," explains Penman.

Here, experts share a few examples of what you may notice when you go booze-free...

Weight loss without dieting

"Alcoholic drinks contain a lot of calories, which don't contain nutritional value, and aren't necessarily used by our bodies," says Penman. "For example, if someone was to drink six glasses (175ml) of wine weekly (which is in line with the recommended amount of 14 units), this would equate to about 800 calories.

"Cutting this out is reducing a substantial amount of your weekly calorie intake, which will make it easier to achieve a calorie deficit overtime and, therefore, weight loss."

Restlessness

"Initial rises in anxiety and restlessness can often be experienced when you take a break from drinking," explains Biggs. "This is due to the body adjusting to its removal and trying to rebalance brain chemicals, in particular dopamine, a hormone which is involved in feeling reassured. "This is happening while your body is also adapting to new habits, or in other words, the lack of a key habit that nightly glass of red!"

Vivid dreams

"Sleep can also change, as you begin to fall into deeper sleep, even if it takes longer to drift off without the wind-down wine," says Biggs. "With this deeper sleep, more vivid dreams become a little more likely, as there is up to a three-times-increase in REM sleep associated with quitting alcohol."

Sweet cravings

The good bacteria that co-exist with us in our gut lining are influenced by the alcohol we drink, says Biggs. "When we stop drinking, changes can take place in our behaviour which can influence our food cravings," she continues. "Often people notice they start craving sweeter things, even if they do not consider themselves to have a 'sweet tooth' normally.

"Keep meals protein-rich and varied to increase food satisfaction, and over time your microbes will tend to re-align and adapt to the new no-alcohol situ - and you should feel less bound by food cravings."

Glowing skin

Alcohol dehydrates us and damages cells in our skin, notes Penman. "Over time, these damaged skin cells can result in a cracked, dry and damaged appearance, with the potential for more breakouts," he adds. "By reducing your alcohol intake, you're giving the skin time to rehydrate and regenerate, allowing for a healthier glow."

Lower blood pressure

"Drinking a lot of alcohol can affect the muscles in your blood vessels." warns Penman. "This can cause them to become narrower. When your blood vessels are narrower, the heart has to work harder to push blood around your body, increasing your blood pressure. "Lower blood pressure will also greatly reduce the risk of developing heart disease, making it less likely a person will experience a heart attack or stroke."

Improved sex drive

To begin with, alcohol can have a positive effect on sexual hormones such as serotonin, dopamine and testosterone, explains Penman, "However, over time these levels will start to reduce, which in turn lowers the amount of sexual drive a person will experience - and could potentially lead to incidences of depression or anxiety," he continues. "The good news is our bodies are amazing healers and after a period of a few weeks without alcohol, the body will naturally start to increase levels of these hormones again."



Health & Lifestyle News

Physical activity and treating existing depression can help reduce dementia risk. Getting back into the community and reconnecting with people, can also help maintain brain health.

The 3,000 participants had taken part in the online PROTECT study. It was led by teams at the University of Exeter and the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. The study tested participants' short-term memory and ability to complete complex tasks.

The PROTECT study is part of the NIHR Exeter Biomedical Research Centre's world-leading Neurodegeneration research theme. The study is a partnership with King's College London, the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, and the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration South West Peninsula. The Exeter BRC has five core research themes aimed at translating scientific discoveries swiftly into benefits to

Anne Corbett, Professor of Dementia Research and PROTECT Study Lead at the University of Exeter, said: "Our findings suggest that lockdowns and other restrictions we experienced during the pandemic have had a real lasting impact on brain health in people aged 50 or over, even after the lockdowns ended. This raises the important question of whether people are at a potentially higher risk of cognitive decline which can lead to dementia. It is now more important than ever to make sure we are supporting people with early cognitive decline, especially because there are things they can do to reduce their risk of dementia later on. So if you are concerned about your memory the best thing to do is to make an appointment with your GP and get an assessment.

"Our findings also highlight the need for policy-makers to consider the wider health impacts of restrictions like lockdowns when planning for a future pandemic response."

Professor Dag Aarsland, Professor of Old Age Psychiatry at King's IoPPN, said: "This study adds to the knowledge of the long-standing health-consequences of COVID-19, in particular for vulnerable people such as older people with mild memory problems. We know a great deal of the risks for further decline, and now can add COVID-19 to this list. On the positive note, there is evidence that life-style changes and improved health management can positively influence mental functioning. The current study underlines the importance of careful monitoring of people at risk during major events such as the pandemic."

The PROTECT study is conducted entirely online and is open to new participants aged 40 and over. To find out more, visit the study

NIHR has also awarded £1.9 million in funding to develop a new app to monitor brain health in older people. The app is being developed as part of the PROTECT study.

The aim of this study is to help reach people with early cognitive impairment who currently do not get seen by a GP or memory clinic. This is to ensure that those who are in most need are seen as a priority.

(Story source: NIHR)

Counting the days

"You might notice yourself counting days more, being more in tune with the date, and more observant of your bedtimes, as the body starts to get used to no alcohol in the system, and this shift heightens
The PROTECT study awareness," says Biggs.

She says everybody's response to quitting alcohol is unique, but studies have shown that at around seven to 10 days, initial unwelcome symptoms are starting to shift - and increases in general energy, clarity of mind and more steady moods can often be felt.

"Within a month, the body has often worked through the restoring process and the chemical effects of regular alcohol have reset," says Biggs. "This can give you more motivation to continue to bypass a beverage, and stay committed to your aim."

(Story source: Silver Surfers)

Brain health in over-50s deteriorated more rapidly during the pandemic

Research supported by the NIHR's Biomedical Research Centre in Exeter shows that brain health in people over 50 deteriorated more rapidly during the pandemic. This was true regardless of whether they had COVID-19.

NIHR reports that researchers analysed brain function tests completed by more than 3,000 people based in the UK. Respondents were aged between 50 and 90.

The results showed that cognitive decline quickened significantly in the first year of the pandemic. There was a 50% change to the rate of decline across the study group during this time. This figure was higher in those who already had mild cognitive decline before the pandemic.

This trend continued into the second year of the pandemic. This suggests there was an impact beyond the initial 12-month period of lockdowns. The research has been published in The Lancet Healthy Longevity.

What caused the decline?

The cognitive decline seems to have been exacerbated by a number of factors during the pandemic, including:

- an increase in loneliness
- an increase in depression
- a decrease in exercise
- higher alcohol consumption



From Arctic art to the Disgusting Food Museum: Europe's top 10 culture destinations for 2024

Malta's first art biennale, Copenhagen's repurposed Carlsberg district, the first Arctic Circle capital of culture... this year promises a feast of cultural activity.

Germany, various locations

Germany is celebrating the 250th birthday of one of its best-loved painters, the Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840).

His work features mountains, ruins and stormy seas, often with human figures, such as Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog.

There are exhibitions in Hamburg (until 1 April), Berlin (19 April to 4 August) and Dresden (24 August to 5 January 2025), where Friedrich lived for 40 years; he is buried in the city's Trinitatis Cemetery.





Leisure & Travel Feature

His birthplace, Greifswald, has a festival (31 August-1 September) and three exhibitions at the Pomeranian State Museum (from 28 April).

Visitors can also follow in the artist's footsteps - literally, as he preferred to travel on foot, sketchbook in hand - to locations in his paintings, such as Rügen Island or the Saxon Switzerland national park. **germany.travel**

Malta

Move over, Venice: Malta is launching its first biennale this spring. The event has already caused a stir in the art world, attracting submissions from more than 2,500 artists from 75 countries

The final selection has yet to be made, but organisers have promised that "several artists of international fame" will be exhibiting. Under the theme White Sea Olive Groves, the artworks will investigate modern Maltese and Mediterranean identity.

The contemporary art will be shown in ancient settings, many of them Unesco-listed (the whole of Valletta, the capital, is a world heritage site, with 320 historic monuments).

Several venues are being turned into exhibition spaces for the first time, including the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta, the Armoury in the old city of Birgu and the megalithic temples of Ggantija on Gozo. 11 March to end of May, **maltabiennale.art**



Tartu, Estonia

For the third year running, three cities are sharing the title of European capital of culture, among them is Tartu, the second-biggest city in Estonia and the oldest city in the Baltics.

The first written records of the city date from 1030, and it has long been the cultural heart of the country, with the first university, newspapers and national theatre.

Today, it is still full of concert venues, exhibition halls, theatres and museums, and students make up a quarter of the population.

More than 1,000 events are planned for the year of culture, from the opening ceremony on 26 January to a closing celebration on 30 November. Summer is a great time to visit, when Vabaduse Avenue, one of the main streets along the river, is closed to cars (6 July to 11 August). Car-free Avenue will have a hammock maze, art workshops, children's activities and a series of concerts from Estonian and international musicians. tartu2024.ee



Ghent, Belgium (pictured top left)

Ghent is European Youth Capital 2024, and has plenty to offer young visitors.

Top attractions include the Castle of the Counts, a medieval fortress with a moat and a gory collection of torture implements; Werregarenstraatje, AKA Graffiti Alley, a public canvas for street artists; and the Belfry, with 254 steps to climb to visit a dragon, the city's mascot.

Families can also download the Fosfor the Dragon app for a two-hour treasure hunt through the city.

Just outside the centre is the Blaarmeersen sports and recreation park, which has a lake with a sandy beach, a waterpark, a skate park and lots more.

Kids will either love or hate cuberdons: raspberry-flavoured, syrupy sweets that were invented by a Ghent pharmacist and are still sold only in Belgium. visit.qent.be

Bad Ischl, Austria

Another capital of culture is Bad Ischl in the western Austria's Salzkammergut region. Bad Ischl, spa town and summer residence of Emperor Franz Joseph I, has joined forces with 22 rural alpine communities.

They include Lake Attersee, which inspired Gustav Klimt and Gustav Mahler. Among the highlights of the year's programme is Salt Lake Cities, an artists-in-residence scheme to bring 12 disused railway stations back to life with installations, exhibitions and pop-up projects.

Continued on pages 12-13..



Another standout is Reise der Bilder, a three-venue exhibition of artworks that were looted in the Salzkammergut during the second world war.

Other major events include a street music festival, a theatre festival and a festival of experimental music and digital art.



Finally, to celebrate the 200th birthday of the Upper Austrian composer Anton Bruckner, there is a concert in a vast saltworks in Ebensee. salzkammerqut-2024.at

Strasbourg, France

In April, Genoa passes the baton to Strasbourg as World Book Capital. More than 200 book-related events will take place over the next 12 months, such as the Arsmondo Utopia festival - named after the Thomas More book - at Strasbourg Opera House, which has a lineup of opera, concerts, film screenings, talks and debates.

Other venues include the Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame, a sculpture and stained-glass museum, and the , which has work by Magritte, Monet and Rodin.

The city itself has plenty to inspire would-be novelists, with its enchanting island setting (the centre is encircled by the River III and a canal), half-timbered houses and gargantuan gothic cathedral, praised by writers including Goethe and Victor Hugo. 23 April 2024 to 22 April 2025, **lirenotremonde.strasbourg.eu**



Genoa, Italy (pictured top left)

Those who missed the National Gallery's Artemisia Gentileschi exhibition in 2020-21 - it was cut short by the pandemic - could head to Genoa this spring.

The Ligurian city has a major exhibition of the groundbreaking 17th-century artist, with more than 50 of her paintings from all over Europe and the US.



Leisure & Travel Feature

The show is held in the Palazzo Ducale, which in various forms was home to the doge of Genoa from the 12th to the 18th century.

It has a vaulted atrium, a vast hall with enormous chandeliers, a frescoed chapel, dungeons and a tower with views over one of Europe's biggest medieval centres.

It is just one of Genoa's numerous palaces - 42 of them make up the Palazzi dei Rolli world heritage site.

All are open to the public on twice-yearly Rolli days (next event 19-21 January). Artemisia Gentileschi: Courage and Passion, until 1 April, palazzoducale.genova.it

Bodø, Norway

The third capital of culture is Bodø in northern Norway, the first city north of the Arctic Circle to have held the title.

It is aiming to be the most sustainable capital of culture ever, and many events are outdoors - on both land and sea. The opening ceremony on 3 February is on a floating stage in the harbour.



There is a concert in a submerged cave, where audience members must be accredited divers (it will also be livestreamed), and a new 10-metre-high sculpture of poet Petter Dass on an islet, best seen by boat.

On dry land, highlights include a mass-participation outdoor event called Midsummer Mischief, Europe's only land art biennale and Nordland's first winter light festival.

Sámi culture is celebrated with a trilogy of plays by the Southern Sámi Theatre, while Bodø City Museum is becoming a Sámi museum for the year. **bodo2024.no**

Malmö, Sweden

Perfectly timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Abba's victory, Sweden is hosting the Eurovision song contest this year. The host city, Malmö, will be buzzing on the weekend of the final, on 11 May, as Eurovision fans descend en masse, but it has plenty of culture all year round.



The Malmö Konstmuseum showcases Nordic art, furniture and handicrafts; the Moderna Museet Malmö features work by Dalí and Picasso, plus contemporary exhibitions; the Form/Design Center focuses on architecture, design and craft; and, half an hour's drive away, the excellent Falsterbo Photo Art Museum has photography by Helmut Newton, Robert Mapplethorpe, Anton Corbijn and others. Slightly less highbrow is the Disgusting Food Museum, which has 80 stomach-churning exhibits, from Sardinia's maggot-infested cheese to Iceland's rotten shark. visitmalmo.se

Copenhagen, Denmark

The Carlsberg district (pictured) of central Copenhagen has been in development ever since brewing stopped there in 2008, and is finally more or less complete. The area's restored 19th- and 20th-century industrial buildings are complemented by nine high-rise new-builds inspired by San Gimignano in Italy - the city of towers.

Visitors who go for the architecture will find plenty else to keep them there. There are design shops and concept stores, an art gallery, a spa and the boutique Hotel Ottilia. Numerous restaurants include a Danish smørrebrød (open sandwich) cafe, a gastropub in the old malt silo, a burger joint in the boiler house and a "New Nordic" restaurant on the site of natural springs.



And, last December, the Visit Carlsberg attraction reopened as Home of Carlsberg after five years of modernisation. There is a new interactive exhibition, a restaurant and bar, plus cellar tours and tastings. wonderfulcopenhagen.com

(Article source: The Guardian)



Global gourmet: Every country's must-try food revealed on world map, from fish and chips in the UK to hot dogs in the U.S and pavlova in Australia

Each top dish was established by analysing TikTok videos containing hashtags for 2,600 delicacies. The number of views associated with each hashtag was tallied to produce a ranking.

Food is often one of the most exciting parts of going on holiday, especially when it's something you can't find back home.

But what are the must-try dishes, snacks and drinks travellers need to tick off? Look no further than this fascinating world map and accompanying regional maps which unveil every country's must-try local delicacy. They were drawn up by travel insurance company InsureandGo, with the No.1 dish in each country established by analysing TikTok videos containing hashtags for over 2,600 delicacies in 177 countries. The number of views associated with each hashtag was tallied to produce a ranking.

Overall in the UK it's fish and chips that reigns supreme, while the hot dog is No.1.



Food & Drink Feature

America, pavlova is the bucket-list dish in Australia and beaver tails is top in Canada. They're not, incidentally, made from the tails of beavers. They're deep-fried-dough snacks coated in sugar that resemble beaver tails.

In Spain, visitors must make sure they try a snack of fried pork belly called chicharron, while in Ireland it's coddle - a potato and sausage stew - that visitors should sample.

The vital snack in Germany is a thin slice of meat (often veal or pork) called the schnitzel. Neighbouring France's speciality? Snails, or escargot.

In Taiwan, the trending sensation is bubble tea, which InsureandGo describes as 'a globally adored tea-based beverage featuring chewy tapioca pearls'. The firm adds: 'Taiwan crafted the refreshing drink in the early '80s, and since then it has reigned supreme as a must-try delicacy in the country.'

While many of the most popular main dishes across the globe are meat-centric, the study says, there are still 'tantalising vegetarian options worldwide', such as Malaysia's nasi lemak, a rice dish cooked in coconut milk, and pad Thai, which 'reigns supreme as the quintessential Thai street food' and is often served vegetarian.

Globally, it's savoury dishes that dominate the list of must-try foods in each country, the study notes, with sweet treats only coming out on top in 38 locations.

The dessert selections that do make the rankings, however, 'offer a gastronomic paradise for those with a sweet tooth'.

InsureandGo says: 'From crema catalana in Andorra, a silky custard dessert with a crystalised sugar topping, to paneer balls soaked in a thickened sweetened milk known as rasmalai in Pakistan, there are plenty of options for travellers seeking sweet indulgences.'

The series of maps includes a breakdown of the most popular regional dishes in the UK.

In Scotland, it is not a dish but a drink that makes the top of the must-try delicacies list.

Scottish Irn-Bru is a vibrant orange soft drink cherished for its distinct flavour, that also boasts 183million TikTok views.

Moving south, London's classic bangers and mash clocks in at 48.5million TikTok views, making the comforting dish of sausages, creamy mashed potatoes, and rich onion gravy the must-try dish in the capital, says InsureandGo.

In the West Midlands, however, it's a tangy condiment that's No.1 - Worcestershire Sauce.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in Yorkshire and the Humber, it's the beloved Yorkshire pudding that takes centre stage with over 256million TikTok views. The fluffy delight that often goes with traditional Sunday roasts 'represents a unique slice of British gastronomy both shared and celebrated on TikTok', says InsureandGo.

The study also produced a breakdown of the top delicacy in every U.S state, with shrimp cocktail top in Nevada, fried pickles No.1 in Arkansas, avocado toast the must-try in California and the classic key lime pie Florida's pick of the culinary bunch.

According to the study, the top must-try dish of all time is ramen. It's No.1 in Japan, but also top globally in terms of overall views, says InsureandGo, revealing that 'videos of steaming bowls of noodles and broth (have clocked up) over 16billion views on TikTok'.

In second place is the USA's hot dog, with 10.2billion views, followed by churrasco (Brazil, 8.3billion) and bubble tea in fourth (Taiwan, 8.1billion).



The top five is rounded out by bakso, an Indonesian meatball dish that has clocked up 5.6billion views.

Chris Rolland, CEO at InsureandGo, adds: 'As TikTok continues to shape both global travel and food trends, it's fascinating to see how dishes from across the world have captured the hearts and appetites of people everywhere. From tamales in Mexico to stroopwafels in the Netherlands, every trip abroad is a culinary adventure waiting to happen.

'While exploring new cuisines and flavours is undoubtedly one of the most exciting parts of any trip, it's important to be wise when it comes to what you consume while travelling.

Contaminated food or drinks are the most common cause of travel-related illness, so being knowledgeable about food safety before you jet off is incredibly important.

'Check if you can drink the tap water in the country you are visiting, be mindful of general food hygiene and be sure to always wash your hands before handling or consuming food. Make sure you have travel insurance, so you can indulge in those unique flavours and dishes with the peace of mind that you're protected in case of any unexpected situations.'

The full findings and further information on the must-try foods in each country and continent can be found here:

www.insureandgo.com/blog/press-releases/every-countrys-must-try-local-delicacy.

(Article source: Daily Mail)

14





Feathered friends: How do you get your grandchildren interested in birdwatching?

There's no better time to start than Big Schools' Birdwatch. Children are being encouraged to watch and count birds in their school grounds during Big Schools' Birdwatch (from Jan 8 to Feb 19), sending the results to the RSPB to gain a better overall picture of how birds are faring across the UK.

It's important research, as wildlife continues to decline, with one Even if their school isn't taking part, you could opt to do the in six species at risk of being lost from Great Britain, according to the recently published State of Nature report by leading wildlife scientists. Birds are especially badly affected, with almost half of species - 43% - currently at risk of extinction or threatened, warns the charity.

Parents and grandparents may wonder how they can do their bit to encourage their children to get involved in birdwatching, as research shows that being outdoors and having contact with nature has a positive impact on a child's learning, physical health and emotional wellbeing.

society's annual Big Garden Birdwatch (Jan 26-28) with your child or grandchild, counting the birds you see in your garden, local park or from your balcony for an hour and recording what you see, in what is the world's largest garden wildlife survey.

Here, the RSPB offers five ideas to help parents and grandparents encourage their children to get involved and to enjoy birdwatching in years to come.

Help identify birds

Whether you are just watching birds from your window, or have headed to your local park or woodland, it helps if you and your children can identify birds both from their physical appearance and from their birdsong.

For help with identifying what you are seeing and hearing, visit the RSPB website, or seek helpful bird identification guides available online, including Merlin Bird ID.

Feed birds

Feeding garden birds is a great way to get children (and the whole family) interested in the wildlife on their doorstep.

Hang a feeder containing sunflower hearts, which are great for sparrows, finches and tits. Kitchen leftovers including mild grated cheese, unsalted bacon, cooked rice and bruised apples and pears - a favourite with blackbirds - are just some of the household food items which will provide them with the energy



If you have a small outdoor space or balcony, window feeders take up very little space and still allow you to enjoy watching your feathered visitors. You could even make your own DIY feeder, following instructions on the RSPB website.

Remember to regularly clean your feeders to prevent disease.

Make a bug hotel

Help your child make a bug hotel, which provides shelter for insects, which are great for pollinating plants and providing food for bigger creatures like birds and bats. You can use things you may otherwise throw away.

Wooden pallets make a great base, and to create the nooks and crannies and little holes that many insects love, use items like hollow bamboo canes, stones, bricks, old wooden planks, straw or hay, moss and pine cones. Build it somewhere sheltered in part shade and watch as woodlice, ants, bees and beetles move in.



Plant for a bird-friendly world

Planting shrubs and trees is one of the best things you can do for nature in your garden. A tree can provide shelter, food and somewhere to nest for a whole range of species.

Planting a tree or bush which produces blossom in the spring and fruit or berries in summer and autumn will provide a rich source of food for insects and birds.

They will also provide cover for small animals from predators and give species of all kind protection from the weather. Hawthorn, crab apple and ivy are good options. Pots, planters and hanging baskets all provide easy ways to incorporate plants if you have a small outdoor space. Window boxes, either on window ledges or balcony railings, can also be useful.

Build a wildlife pond

Water provides a fantastic home for amphibians, mammals, minibeasts and other creatures that children will enjoy watching. Water is also essential for birds, particularly in winter and in dry

You don't need to spend hours digging a big pond. It can also be a shallow water-tight container filled with water, like a dustbin lid, plant saucer or washing up bowl. To encourage different visitors. add a variety of native aquatic plants like water Forget-Me-Not



For more information on how to register for Big Schools' Birdwatch 2024, a free activity, visit rspb.org.uk/schoolswatch

(Article source: Silver Surfers)



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 <u>HALVED</u> 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 <u>HALVED</u> 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

