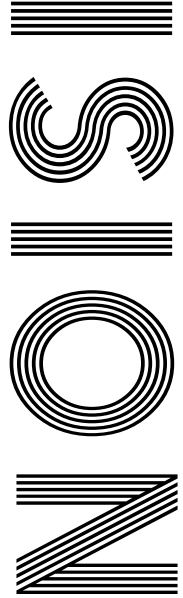


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At the time of print all content in **VISION** was relevant and up to date according to COVID-19 government guidelines

Editor's notes...



Nik Allen, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION** Rayleigh. We're now entering the final chapter of 2020, a year with many 'unprecedented' times. In fact, that word 'unprecedented' I have heard more times this year than ever before. The message has certainly become more positive recently, with the hope of a vaccine being close to being rolled out. It really does feel like the positive ending to a Hollywood style 'disaster' movie, and hopefully it's the positive news we all need to end 2020 and write it off as a year most would want to forget.

For me, I'm taking the positives (as always). We've made a lot of changes in business and in our personal life, and some of the old ways (pre-COVID) I don't want to go back to. I've certainly enjoyed the flexible working from home more; in fact, my team and I have found that we are more productive than working in an office at times. In our personal life, we've enjoyed more walks as a family exploring the beautiful Essex countryside we have on our doorstep. At home we sometimes get caught up in the day to day, and weeks go swooshing by, but these months of lockdowns and more time at home certainly make me appreciate the little things in life that are most special.

However your year's gone, let's look forward with positivity to 2021. Wishing you all the very best.

Nik

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At 77 years young, Joe Biden's journey to the White House has been a long one, but the US Presidential Election winner won't delay in attempting to bring back together a fractured nation.

.....

After a tumultuous four years as the most powerful man in world politics, it perhaps shouldn't have come as too much of a surprise to find Donald Trump refusing to go quietly in the aftermath of a US Presidential Election defeat that left Democrat Joe Biden at the door of The White House... albeit without a set of keys.

Republican Trump's assertion of ballot box fraud in light of what, admittedly, even his fiercest critic would deem a farcical voting process, will mean the intricacies of the November 3 election will play out in the Supreme Court. And yet, where US politics is concerned, we shouldn't be surprised – four years ago all similar accusations of malpractice were shot across the bow by those same Democrats who are now up in arms over Trump's claims. His suggestion was that thousands of new voting papers were added to the mix, that some were in the name of people long deceased, and that many duplicated votes were received after a chaotic postal vote system that allowed individual states to decide their own rules.

When the dust settles, however, 77-year-old Biden will be inaugurated as the leader of the free world. A lifetime ambition, the Pennsylvania-born former lawyer has been at the forefront of politics for well over five decades, having become a senator in January 1973. Re-elected six times, he was vice president to Barack Obama for eight years, and considered running in 2016, but made way for Hillary Clinton.

He is a passionate advocate of raising the minimum wage and investing in green energy, notably in rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement that Trump controversially left. He promotes criminal justice reform and grants for minority communities, and will also look to expand Obamacare, enlarge the free college system, and challenge China's questionable environment and trade practices. And, most notably, he brings with him to the top table of world politics Kamala Harris, America's first female, first black and first South Asian vice president.

Here in Britain we will look on with interest to see if prime minister Boris Johnson can configure the same buoyancy, trust and commercial parallels he enjoyed with Trump. Our long-term alignment with the States on corporate, social and political levels has been essential for the economy, and now more than ever before the government will be seeking reassurance that this can continue under a new regime.

Despite a desperately narrow winning margin, Joe Biden will enter The White House having achieved the most votes ever for an incoming president – more than 77 million. And yet those celebrating the supposed new dawn of American politics should be wary. Putting aside the somewhat ambitious legal claims that will fill the scrolling new tickers over the coming weeks and months, it remains the case that, even in defeat, Trump's vote total was more than any other elected president in history, Obama included. The brand of confrontational, partisan politics that he popularised continues to resonate with America, and with the Senate still under the control of the Republicans, Biden knows he'll have to fight hard to steady the United States' uneasy global reputation.

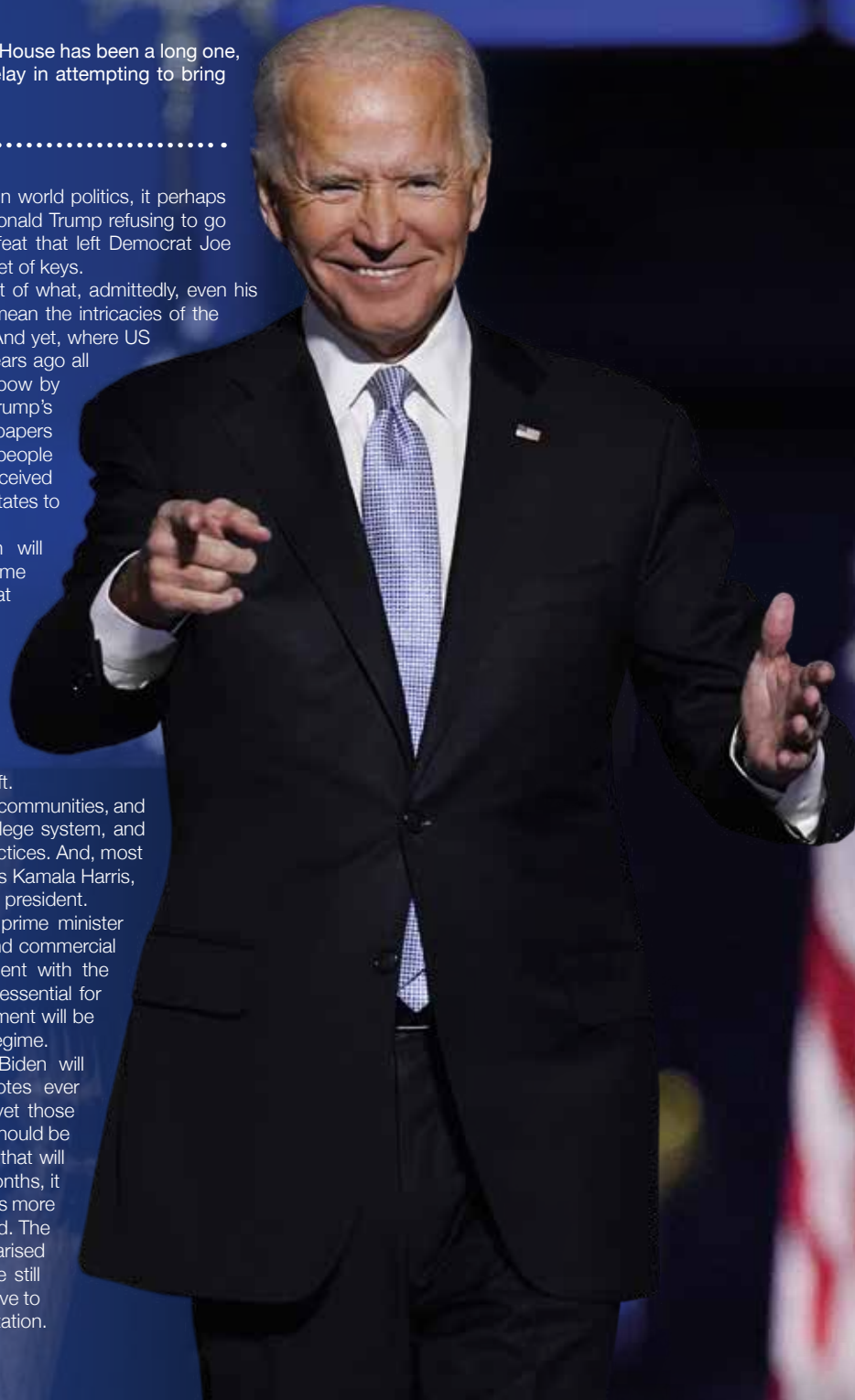


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BIDEN: his time

THE WORLD AROUND US

Part 2

In the second of our environmental series that looks at the key drivers in the health and well-being of the planet, we're looking at the legacy of our rainforests.

At the end of the 1980s, the realisation that the world's rainforests were being removed at an alarming rate truly propelled a green revolution – one that continues to thrive today.

Where eco awareness and the preservation of our planet are now a part of everyday life, the way we embraced the saving of the Amazon rainforests had never before been seen.

The realisation that deforestation was claiming an area the size of 20 football pitches every minute – for the acquiring of timber and repurposing of land for cattle ranching – was profound, but the deafening screams of those early environmentalists are now just faint murmurs. So what has happened to those green expanses?

Sadly, the problem still exists. A quarter of the Amazon has disappeared, probably never to return, while some speculation suggests the remainder may be felled within 50 years if tighter restrictions are not forthcoming.

Globally, one in four people depends directly on forests for their livelihood, and as many as 120 prescription drugs worldwide are derived directly from rainforests.

And yet, there are two sides to every story. Many South Americans will point to the economic necessity of monetising a natural resource, just as the UK has done with oil and gas. Even the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has called the destruction of these plant- and animal-rich expanses “cultural”; and in a country that has more than 20 million people living in poverty, it's not difficult to see why resistance is strong.

To conclude, it seems that while the days are gone where almost every other charitable programme was driven towards preserving these incredible habitats, it's simply a case of having our attention diverted to other ills. Three decades after we first reached out to our rainforests, the battle to save them lives on.

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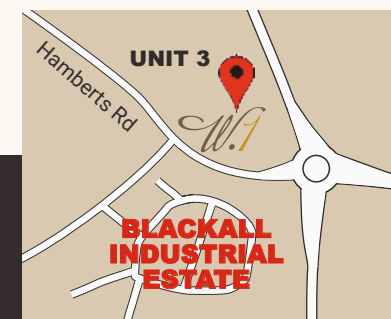
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HOME & DIY



If you spend all day every day in the winter months longing to return to the comfort and cosiness of your bed, then you may be interested to find out what the best bed sheets are for winter warmth.

From fleece to flannel, cotton to silk, keep reading to discover what fabric you should choose for your winter safe haven.

Cotton: Although you may think that cotton is more fitting for the summer, if you are the type of sleeper who ends up kicking off your covers halfway through the night, then cotton might be the ideal material for you all year round. A natural fabric, cotton is known for its moisture-wicking abilities, meaning it is great for regulating your overall body temperature. If you have sensitive skin, opt for organic cotton sheets which are both breathable and good for the environment.

Flannel: Synonymous with warmth, flannel is one of the most popular choices for winter bedding. A cross between cotton and fleece, this fabric is soft, airy and breathable, making it the perfect choice for anyone who loves a bed that is warm but not overwhelmingly so.

Fleece: Arguably the warmest material you can choose for your bed sheets, fleece is a synthetic fabric that is ultra-soft and built for insulation. Often used in winter sports gear, fleece is designed to insulate heat in even the coldest conditions, meaning it is ideal for those below-freezing winter nights.

Silk: This may be the last fabric that you would think of when it comes to choosing winter bedding, but silk has the unique ability to retain heat while at same time remaining lightweight and smooth to touch. Opt for pure silk bedding if possible as this has moisturising properties; something that your parched winter skin so desperately needs.



Chic OR UNIQUE

THE RETURN OF SHABBY CHIC AND HOW TO PULL IT OFF

The revolving circle of décor and design has, over the years, gripped a nation of amateur interior designers. Shabby chic, a style that first came to prominence in the 1980s, is making a concerted return to prominence.

Its invention was as a rebellion to the hard, shiny, ultra-modern, clean-cut image of three decades ago, when yuppies and electronica ruled the roost. The term 'shabby chic' was thought up by fashion journalist Min Hogg.

And the concept hasn't strayed too far since – from distressed furniture to unmatching fabrics and colours, a rustic, rugged essence that's based on comfort and quantity, rather than image and minimalistic posturing.

To achieve the shabby chic look really is to open your imagination, either by pooling existing items or exploring flea markets, thrift stores and antique shops.

Many people think repainting and running a grooved spatula across an old set of drawers is the sum total of shabby chic, but it's about much more than that. Soft background colours flatter furniture and make items the focal point of a room, so think about using whites, beiges or even light greys.

Pastels – baby blues, pale pinks, grainy greys and warm yellows – work best, while that base of brightness means retro, darker shades of wood can match and contrast, be that on tables or chairs. Meanwhile, wicker and throws soften edges and enhance comfort, and wrought iron provides structure.

As far as the walls and surface tops go, flowers, mirrors and pictures using worn frames will assist you in topping off the perfect shabby chic room, with knick-knacks, signs and cushions adding to the mix.

Past that, the only limit is your imagination. And the best thing about shabby chic is that it needn't cost the earth – adding wear and tear to your own items is cheap, if not free.

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LOCAL NEWS

from your neighbourhood



Community show their generosity through café scheme

A coffee shop in Rayleigh has thanked its customers for backing a scheme to help those struggling during the pandemic.

Café No.11, on London Road, launched the Pay it Forward scheme, where customers can pay for items on the menu which can then be reclaimed by members of the community who need extra help.

Once the customers have paid for the item, they write it on a slip and attach it to the café's chalkboard, ready for others to benefit.

It allows those struggling during the pandemic a chance to have a treat, thanks to the generosity of others.

Items prepaid for include cakes, coffees, full English

breakfasts and even gift cards worth as much as £25.

The shop posted on social media, encouraging people to come forward: "We truly have such incredible customers. Our Pay it Forward board had been up for less than a week and we ran out of space."

"We've had people as far as Scotland reach out wanting to add to the board and, most recently, a very kind lady put a £25 gift card on the board."

"If you know someone going through a tough time or isolating at home and finding it difficult, please feel free to use the notes on the board and ask for it to be takeaway and you can drop it off to them."

"This board is from the community, for the community."







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Police appeal after tools stolen from van

Police have launched an investigation after thieves broke into a van in Rayleigh and stole tools.

The thieves forced open the rear door of a Vauxhall Vivaro parked in Websters Way on Monday, November 2, at around 10.50am.

Once inside, they took three bags of tools, which have an estimated value of thousands of pounds.

Essex Police are now calling on any witnesses or anyone with information to come forward.

A police spokesperson said: "If anyone saw what happened or has CCTV or dashcam footage, they are asked to contact us on 101, via live chat on Facebook or by calling Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111."

MARK FRANCOIS MP



Member of Parliament for Rayleigh and Wickford



Despite the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I recently joined forces with the Rayleigh branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL) to pay tribute to the fallen for Remembrance Day. This year, more than ever, it was vitally important that we as a country and as a community honour those who gave their today so that, as a nation, we could have a tomorrow.

I laid a wreath at the Memorial Wall, at the RBL Hall on London Hill. While there, I was accompanied by the chairman of the Rayleigh RBL, Steve Cowland. Furthermore, we were diligently supported by the branch secretary, Margaret Read. I should note that we observed social distancing; however, we were determined that our tributes would be paid.

Over the course of the Remembrance period, I laid several wreaths in my constituency, not just in Rayleigh. I also laid wreaths at the war memorial in Hockley (supported by Hockley Parish Council) and at the new war memorial in Hullbridge (which was recently relocated as part of the Barratt David Wilson development). In addition, a wreath was laid on my behalf at the war memorial in Wickford (with the kind assistance of the Wickford branch of the RBL).

My father was a D-Day veteran who fought in the Second World War to keep our country free from Nazi tyranny. This year is also the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, and I know that local councillor Bruce Smart and his friends, including his colleagues



on Rayleigh Town Council, have run a campaign in Rayleigh to commemorate that epic struggle as well. Despite the pandemic, we should never forget the sacrifices that were made to defend our way of life. COVID-19 or not, we will remember them.

Motorcyclist rushed to hospital

Police have launched an investigation after a motorcyclist had to be rushed to hospital following a collision in Rayleigh.

Police officers and paramedics were called to Hockley Road shortly after 10am on October 24 following an incident involving a motorbike and a car.

The serious incident also led to the air ambulance being called, with it landing in a nearby field.

In total, there were two police cars, an ambulance and the air ambulance in attendance.

The collision led to heavy traffic in the area.

A police spokesperson said: "We were called to reports of a collision involving a motorbike and a car in Hockley Road at around 10.05am on Saturday, October 24.

"The motorbike rider has been taken to hospital for treatment.

"We are asking anyone who might have information about the crash, or dashcam or CCTV footage to call 101 quoting incident 358 of 24 October.

"Crimestoppers can also be called anonymously on 0800 555 111."

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NEWS FROM

RAYLEIGH TOWN MUSEUM

The late Sir John Eliot, an Essex man and a former chairman of London Transport, was an amateur historian who once quoted the great French historian, Théodore Gosselin (otherwise known as G. Lenotre), by asking: “How near is history?” and, “How near is yesterday?”

What he meant was: we are always close to history, in both senses of the phrase, as it is the biggest part of the fabric of our society and community.

I have selected a local historical site (Rayleigh Castle, to be found next to the Windmill) from so many (the Dutch Cottage, the Windmill, the Martyrs Memorial, the Green Plaques, Holy Trinity Church) as an illustration of this quote.

My wife and I recently took our youngest grandson, Noah, to see where the original castle had been built in the early Norman period by Swein, son of Robert FitzWimarc. We wandered, entirely on our own,

around the line of the lower area traditionally called a ‘bailey’ or walled courtyard. We stood and looked at the ‘motte’, or large mound, on which the original wooden castle was built. It holds a commanding position over the surrounding countryside and was built as a defensive area. In this quiet, rather pleasant, place, the November sun was shining and, but for coronavirus, the world seemed a very delightful place to be.

It was good to reflect on what it was like when the few hundred citizens of Rayleigh, at that time, were farming and working in the shade of this protective building.

For more than 900 years, the original names of Robert and his son have survived in the names of The Sweyne Park School and FitzWimarc School. How near is history?



Florist features in music video

A florist in Rayleigh added some extra colour to an international artist’s live music video recently.

Courts of Rayleigh, based in Eastwood Road, created a huge 27sq foot flower bed for award-winning indie-rock artist, Beabadoobee, as she performed a live video stream of *Fake It Flowers*.

The opportunity came about as the creative director for the video, Tommy, is the nephew of Courts of Rayleigh owner, Gillian Fautley.

Speaking about the experience, Gillian said: “I have

done big projects before, like weddings and events, but never anything like this.

“It was completely different working to set, and having to assess aesthetically what looks good on camera, and a lot of adjustments were made throughout the day.

“It was a really fun experience and a learning experience. The band loved it and we were really proud of it. It took around four hours to set up. My apprentices and the rest of the team did really well.”





News from THE ROTARY CLUB

Rayleigh Mill

Traditionally, the Rotary Club of Rayleigh Mill, together with the local military and service organisations, honour the war dead at a parade and church service on Remembrance Sunday. This year, owing to coronavirus restrictions, the service was cancelled. The members of the club, however, were anxious to continue to pay tribute to those who gave their lives in service for this country. So on

Tuesday, November 3, president Geoff Kittle and a party of members attended a brief, poignant wreath-laying ceremony at the Rayleigh War Memorial on London Hill.

Coronavirus has curtailed many of the activities of the club. In normal times, one meeting a month is designated as a social meeting. This much-loved event is an evening when there is no, or very little, rotary business discussed.

This year, things are different. Thanks to the ingenuity of our senior vice-president, John Cuthbertson, we have had an online 'Would I Lie to You?' night. Members had to supply two personal anecdotes and the other members had to choose the one that was true. There were a few surprises.

John also organised a 'Show and Tell' evening where



the members presented an article that had a particular significance to them and they had to explain that significance. There was a rich and varied collection of objects, including a battered bugle, a signed photo of William Shatner, a scroll from the Norwegian King, a mummified stomach, a marine iguana thigh bone and photos of a coal truck that turned into a charabanc at the weekend.

It was another interesting evening when the personal revelations served to give some additional little insights into the lives of our fellow members.

Theatre school to expand online

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 rules and regulations are having a huge impact on families.

Razzamataz Rayleigh is part of a large franchise that has been working with children for the past 20 years and understands that performing arts can be crucial in helping young people to make sense of the world.

Catherine, principal of Razzamataz Rayleigh, said: "For many students our Saturday live sessions are the highlight of their week, so with the onslaught of COVID-19, we thankfully managed to successfully move many of our classes temporarily online where children could continue to connect with their friends, to access their singing, dancing and acting lessons in small, virtual, interactive groups."

Catherine explained that she had been contacted by parents whose children didn't currently attend her Rayleigh school but who had been desperately looking at ways for them to still be engaged, stay fit

and actively learn in small class sizes.

In response to this, Razzamataz Rayleigh decided to open up any future online classes to anyone aged between four and 18.

Catherine continued: "We want to reach out to all families to help keep their children motivated and inject a bit of happiness into everyone's lives."

Private online singing and dance tuition is now also available to anyone throughout the year.

When permitted, Razzamataz Rayleigh will be launching new Saturday afternoon sessions, with a free taster on January 9, 2021, 2.30pm - 4pm at The Swayne Park School, to which anyone aged six to 18 is invited to come along to and try.

Places must be reserved in advance. Call Catherine on 07787 570760 or 01268 683512. Email rayleighwest@razzamataz.co.uk or visit rayleighwest.razzamataz.co.uk

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SAYING THANK YOU ON
Boxing Day

THE ORIGINS OF BOXING DAY, DECEMBER 26, EXPLAINED

Our appreciation of Boxing Day in the modern era is, it's fair to say, somewhat different from how it would have been played out by our forefathers. Nowadays it's a date for hangovers, sporting events, ridiculously early opening hours at clothes retailers and furniture stores, and the continuation of a blizzard of relatives... some welcome, others less so.

The reason we call it Boxing Day remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. It has been celebrated for almost as long as records go back, and certainly the giving of Christmas 'boxes' has a large part to play in the provenance.

One popular theory dates back to the Middle Ages, when churchgoers would collect money for the poor in alms boxes. These were opened in honour of Saint Stephen, whose feast falls on December 26.

Other records reference Roman tributes to the day, though in the 19th century the tradition

of looking after those less fortunate over the festive period certainly came to the fore. The term appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1832, taken on by the Victorians who embraced the giving of gifts and the looking after of established tradespeople, employees and other service providers, as atonement for a driven and at times brutal regime focused on self-preservation and self-improvement.

What can be certain is that Boxing Day is very much a British tradition. It's unsurprising to see the event celebrated similarly in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, but elsewhere, the US included, it's largely regarded as a second day of Christmas rather than a named day in its own right.

This Christmas, perhaps when it's good for us to reflect on what has been a challenging year, perhaps the pure, selfless, charitable tradition of Boxing Day should return to the fore... but remember to go about your goodly deeds with a glass of something warming.



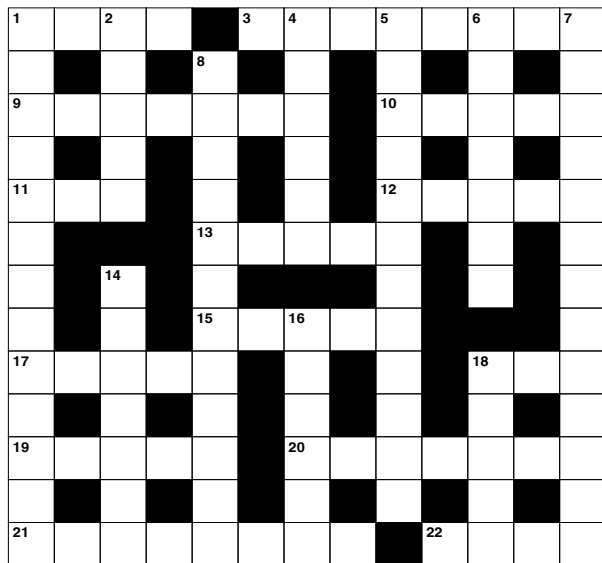
PUZZLES & TRIVIA

ACROSS

1. Set of playing cards (4)
3. Neck injury (8)
9. Genuine (7)
10. Kick out (5)
11. 17th Greek letter (3)
12. The beginning of an era (5)
13. Enclosed (5)
15. Bird sound (5)
17. Turned to ice (5)
18. Statute (3)
19. Exposes secret information (5)
20. Country whose capital is Reykjavik (7)
21. Longing (8)
22. Refuse to admit (4)

DOWN

1. Shamefully (13)
2. Showing a willingness to achieve results (3-2)
4. Doglike mammals (6)
5. Planned in advance (12)
6. Sanction (7)
7. Unenthusiastically (4-9)



8. Food shop (12)
14. Proportionately (3,4)
16. Banner or flag (6)
18. Lessen (5)

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Hummingbirds are the only birds that are able to fly backwards
- ▶ The short-horned lizard squirts blood from blood vessels around its eyes when defending itself. This is because the blood vessels rupture under pressure
- ▶ A giant panda will typically eat for around 12 hours a day
- ▶ Elephant ears help to keep the animals cool by radiating heat
- ▶ Young jaguars are blind at birth. They learn to hunt by living with their mother for two years or more
- ▶ Wolves can go for more than a week without eating
- ▶ A fox can communicate with other foxes by using its tail
- ▶ The bald eagle has a wingspan of around eight feet

SUDOKU

							2	9
1	8			2		5		
			5	9		8		
	7	4					8	
			9		6			
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		2		4	3			
		7		8			4	2
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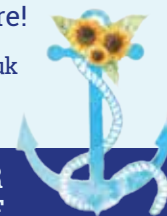
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SOME OF THE BEST PLACES TO VISIT FOR WALKING HOLIDAYS IN THE UK

In troubled times, there's nothing nicer than putting on a pair of sturdy walking boots and disappearing off into the yonder; and the UK has some of the most stunning scenery ready to be explored.

Here are five very different walking holidays that will help you blow away the cobwebs:

For art... Talk to the Welsh about Dylan Thomas and they may well point you around his home town of Laugharne, with spectacular views over the Taf Estuary. His *Poem in October* documents a walk he took on that very route, and now outdoors philosophers can do the same.

For wildlife and nature... The wilds of Cumbria offer spectacular views wherever you are, but head to Howgill Fells for a hike that brings you out at the highest waterfall in the UK. Peaceful, breathless and beautiful in every way, it's a wondrous place to relax.

For foodies... Cornwall's love of everything homely

and rustic extends through to its walks, with the route along the South West Coast Path greeting intrepid walkers with all manner of villages and enclaves. From five-star restaurants to cosy pubs and comfy cafés, fantastic food is around every corner.

For geology... When the Earth was created and rock types were being dished out, Dorset was clearly hogging space at the front of the queue, with the 27-mile route along the Jurassic coast from Weymouth to Swanage providing all manner of stunning ecological features, not least the spectacular Durdle Door.

For wild winter walks... If you're brave enough to venture out to the Highlands, then you'll find a variety of walks, low climbs and vistas that are simply unparalleled. With a backdrop of lochs, remote islands, wild forests and icy peaks, there is little clean-air inspiration Scotland cannot provide.



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As film icons go, there are few to rival James Bond; and as Bond actors go, there are none to rival Sir Sean Connery.

In a year that has been unkind on so many levels, fans of film perhaps felt an added sense of injustice at the end of October when it was announced that Sir Sean Connery had passed away, at the age of 90.

Of course, in many respects, the actor's work was done. Connery was the smooth-talking, sumptuously styled Scot who legitimised, developed and truly delivered 007 into the golden era of film. The first man to step into the secret agent's shoes, with 1962's *Dr No*, Connery, a former bodybuilder who finished third in Mr Universe in the early 1950s, proved to author Ian Fleming that he had the fervour and finesse to carry off the role, having previously been dismissed as "an overgrown stuntman".

It seems perverse that someone who would go on to become so decorated in the indulgence and luxury of 1960s cinema may have been cast aside before it even began, but it's fair to note that the actor's previous engagements had been in rather less salubrious guises, notably in crime drama *Hell Drivers*, fantasy adventure *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* and outward-bound action flick *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*.

That, within a decade, Connery would have elevated his worth from tracking the movements of a man swinging through the jungle to starring in iconic movies such as *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger*, *Thunderball* and *You Only Live Twice*, is remarkable.

What made Connery's sumptuously smooth portrayal of Bond so impressive was that, unlike the modern-day 007s, he interspersed international espionage with an array of other lead roles. Seventeen movies were made across the nine years he portrayed Bond, a sequence that ended in 1971 with *Diamonds are Forever* (although he did agree to reprise the character in 1983's *Never Say Never Again*).

"I got to the point where I felt I had nothing left to prove as far as Bond was concerned," said Connery. "It was a delightful run where the evolution of 007 and everything around him had gathered such pace with every new movie; yet in myself I thought I had probably evolved as much as I had wanted, and it was time to let someone else have a go."

Away from Bond, twice-married Connery flourished in the likes of *Murder on the Orient Express*, *A Bridge too Far*, *Highlander*, *The Untouchables*, *The Hunt for Red October* and as Indiana Jones' father in *The Last Crusade*.

There are the ones that got away too – he turned down the role of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* despite being offered a \$30million bounty; he also rejected playing Architect in *The Matrix* trilogy. The truth is, Connery, who was knighted in the year 2000, was always focused on how he saw himself – as an actor, and as a person... how else can you explain turning down a direct invitation to join Manchester United by legendary manager Sir Matt Busby.

"I was 23 at the time and although I had the contract offer in front of me, I had long decided that football would take a backseat to acting. I felt I had more chance of doing something special, something unique, in the acting world; I felt I could give more and put smiles on more faces, my own included."

Sir Sean, you succeeded.

The Ultimate Bond?



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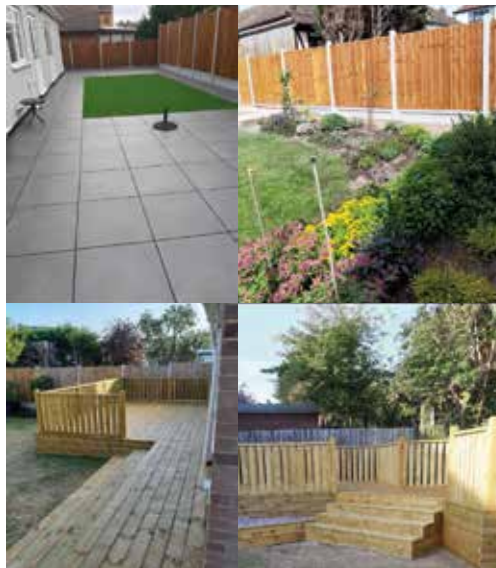
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GARDENING

Holly

DECEMBER BIRTH FLOWER
OF THE MONTH

If you were born in the same month as Christmas, your birth flower is the festive holly. A popular plant for the season of winter, holly is instantly recognisable by its prickly leaves and ruby red berries. Plus, it's easy to grow and is great for garden security.

What is the symbolic significance of holly?

In ancient Celtic cultures, the Druids regarded holly as a symbol of fertility and believed it to have magical powers. Today, holly has been adopted as a symbol of Christmas by Christians, with the sharp leaves said to symbolise the crown of thorns worn by Christ and the berries representing his blood.

What does this birth flower say about your personality?

Those born in December are said to be fiercely protective. Not a fan of criticism, you are naturally defensive and are not afraid to stand up for yourself when required. You also love to make a home feel warm and inviting, both your own and those of your friends and family.

How to grow holly in your garden

The holly plant is fairly easy to grow and will thrive in both sun and partial shade, although it prefers moist but well-drained soil. You can choose to grow holly on your lawn, in a shrub border or even to make some hedges. Holly does not require much pruning, although if you want to cut some as a festive decoration, do so in early winter before its berries are eaten by birds.

Interesting facts about holly

- It is evergreen
- It can be grown in pots and containers for up to five years
- The berries are mildly poisonous
- Legend says that holly protects from thunder, lightning and witchcraft
- Real holly plants bloom scented flowers in spring

A GUIDE TO Rose pruning

If you want to ensure that your roses are as happy and healthy as possible, you need to make sure you prune them annually. You can carry out this task any time between November and March, although getting out the clippers in late autumn can help to stimulate new growth over winter.

STEP ONE: DE-HEADING
The first thing you need to do is prune off any dead or fading flowers from your rose bush as this will ensure your bush looks tidy. You can choose to leave every second flower if you want hips to decorate your bushes over winter.

STEP TWO: REMOVE BROKEN STEMS
Now you should look to remove any dead or broken stems and branches from your rose bushes, as a harsh winter could rip them off and cause damage to the healthy stems. Aim to cut any broken or diseased stems at least six inches into healthy wood.

STEP THREE: CUT OUT SUCKERS
Suckers are shoots that grow directly from the rootstock and rob the energy supply from your roses. Therefore, it is vital that you cut out suckers as close to their point of origin as possible. It is also a good idea to seal the area of the cut with some tree wound sealer.

STEP FOUR: CLEAN UP
You must always make sure that you remove all leaves and cut branches from the surrounding area after pruning as you never know what diseases and pests could be lurking in there.

TOP ROSE PRUNING TIPS:
> Never prune newly planted roses as they need at least one growing season to become established
> After pruning, spray with lime sulphur to eliminate fungal spores and eggs from pests
> Use bypass shears rather than anvil blades to achieve a cleaner cut.



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Festive treats



Although you may want your pet to be able to enjoy your festive food with you, the majority of Christmas fare is both toxic and dangerous for dogs and cats. However, that doesn't mean they can't tuck into a treat or two over the upcoming weeks.

minutes until brown | Leave to fully cool

Festive Feline Titbits

YOU WILL NEED: 1 small chicken breast | 1 apple | 300g oat flour (you can make this by whizzing up oats in a blender) | 2 eggs | 1tbsp catnip

HOW TO MAKE: Preheat your oven to gas mark 6/200°C | Cook the chicken for 25 minutes until cooked through | Leave to cool and then shred into thin strips | Peel and cut the apple and slice into small pieces | Place the apple in a pan and add water until the apple is covered | Simmer for 20 minutes until the apple has softened | Add the chicken, apple, eggs, flour and catnip to a blender and whizz until combined | Roll out the dough to 1cm thick | Cut into your preferred Christmas shape or design | Place on a lined baking tray and bake for 15 minutes until golden | Leave to cool completely

Festive foods you should not give to your dog or cat include: Chocolate | Mince pies | Christmas pudding | Onion gravy | Bones from carcasses | Anything too fatty or salty



PETS

Ageless Aims

ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL ENTERTAINMENT IDEAS FOR FAMILIES WITH KIDS OF VERY DIFFERENT AGES

Having children across a broad age spectrum can often be taxing when it comes to keeping them all amused and happy, but here are a few ideas that work right across the board, from tiny toddlers to troublesome teenagers.

Cooking up a treat

Whether baking a cake, preparing a stew for dinner or simply working together to get a few sandwiches on plates, the kitchen has always been a staple for family life (and the odd party).

Cooking creates a true bond among children, not least because they can enjoy the fruits of their labour afterwards.

Scoters, bikes and trikes

From balance bikes to mountain bikes and any sort of wheeled machinery in between, venturing out on a ride is a great way of connecting our kids with the outdoors. Follow an established route, explore a new area, set up a treasure hunt or simply go off-piste into wooded areas – getting outdoors is great fun.

An English country garden

What better way to embrace the best playground of them all than by getting the kids involved in tending to the garden? From mowing the lawn to planting, clearing out the shed or even trimming back the bushes, the view from your window will be all the better for a family afternoon in the yard.

Paint it black

Whether it's throwaway pieces of art on paper or a more serious dollop of paint on canvas to be hung on the wall, being creative makes a fantastic family bond. And because art is subjective, you can tell your competitive brood with absolute sincerity that those Pollock-like splashes of colour that come from your two-year-old are in no way inferior to the Picasso-esque portrait painted by your eldest, the art student.



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Cooking UP A Treat



FOOD FINESSE WITH POPULAR CHEF JAMES MARTIN

When James Martin bade an extremely tearful farewell to his *Saturday Kitchen* colleagues in March 2016, it was imagined the chef would be turning his hand to new projects after 10 years fronting the popular BBC weekend cookery show.

Of course, as these things often materialise, the popular *Yorkshireman* reappeared less than six months later fronting a copycat culinary conflag over on ITV.

Regardless, the 48-year-old's switch to commercial TV has also spawned a run of cookery series, reaffirming his place as one of the most popular chefs on television.

Of course, life on the small screen is already a secondary career for Martin, who excelled with wooden spoon in hand from a young age. Indeed, he was almost asked to leave a cookery class at the age of 12 for serving flambéed chicken and mangetout while his prepubescent classmates struggled to create fairy cakes. He went on to study catering at Scarborough College, coming

top of his class for three consecutive years, and was then offered a job working in London with Antony Worrall Thompson, one of the judges for his final exam.

His accomplishments, however, weren't served up to him on a plate – as a *Yorkshireman*, Martin was taught from birth that “you don't get owt for nowt”. The hard graft paid off, it seems, as he was made head chef of the first Hotel du Vin in Winchester when he was just 22.

Two years later, he began to appear on our screens in shows such as *James Martin: Yorkshire's Finest* and *Ready, Steady, Cook* – his affable nature and dry, self-deprecating humour making him an instant hit with viewers.

From weekend shows to cooking adventures at home and overseas, the chef's fascination with food is unrelenting, as evidenced in his recent return to our screens for *Saturday Morning with James Martin*.

“It's been a great ride so far,” he says, “and the stove is still warm.”



Photo credit: Ken McKay/ITV/Shutterstock



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THE ULTIMATE Champagne GUIDE

With Christmas fast approaching, what better time of year to find out everything you need to know about champagne? From how to store it, to how long it lasts, to how to pick the best bottle for your celebration.

How to store

If you can manage to keep champagne in your home long enough to actually have to store it, you need to make sure you are doing it correctly. One hard and fast rule is that you should store champagne horizontally to keep the cork moist, as a dry cork can lead to shrinkage. You should also store bottles in a cool, dark and humid place.

How long can you store a bottle for?

If you have an unopened non-vintage bottle of champagne, it can typically last for between three and four years. Vintage champagne, however, can last up to 10 years. You will notice that champagne changes as it ages, becoming a deeper golden colour and losing some of its fizz.

Understanding the labels

If you have ever looked at the label on a champagne bottle, you will know that they are covered in confusing terms that can stump even the most avid wine lover, so let's take a closer look at what they all mean:

- > **Brut Nature** = Zero grams of residual sugar per litre
- > **Extra Brut** = Less than 6 grams
- > **Brut** = Less than 12 grams
- > **Extra Dry** = 12–17 grams
- > **Sec** = 17–32 grams
- > **Demi-Sec** = 32–50 grams
- > **Doux** = 50 grams or more
- > **Non-vintage/vintage** = Non-vintage denotes grape juice from multiple vintages; vintage will only be produced in a good vintage year and matured for at least three years before being released.
- > **Grand Cru/Premier Cru** = These refer to the classification of the vineyard. Grand Cru is top, Premier Cru is second.



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BEAUTY

WAYS TO JAZZ UP YOUR Christmas beard



Whether you have designer stubble or a full-on Santa beard, there is no excuse not to get festive when it comes to your facial hair this Christmas. From baubles to bells, sweets to knits, check out these six fantastically festive beard decorations.

is the festive beard design for you. Best for bushy beards, all you need to do is adorn your beard with canes and you are good to do.

1. Beard Baubles: If you want a weird and wacky Christmas beard design, then look no further. Mini baubles hanging from your whiskers will ensure you start trending on social media sooner rather than later.

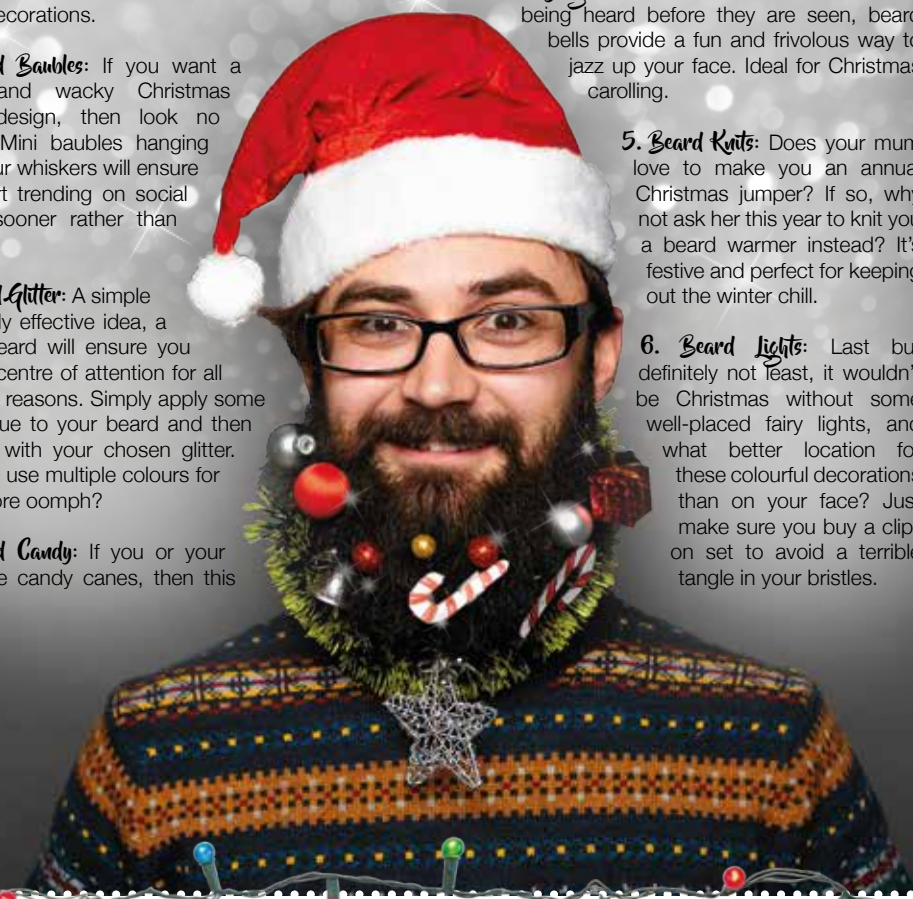
2. Beard Glitter: A simple yet highly effective idea, a glitter beard will ensure you are the centre of attention for all the right reasons. Simply apply some glitter glue to your beard and then sprinkle with your chosen glitter. Why not use multiple colours for even more oomph?

3. Beard Candy: If you or your kids love candy canes, then this

4. Beard Jingle Bells: For those who don't mind being heard before they are seen, beard bells provide a fun and frivolous way to jazz up your face. Ideal for Christmas carolling.

5. Beard Knits: Does your mum love to make you an annual Christmas jumper? If so, why not ask her this year to knit you a beard warmer instead? It's festive and perfect for keeping out the winter chill.

6. Beard Lights: Last but definitely not least, it wouldn't be Christmas without some well-placed fairy lights, and what better location for these colourful decorations than on your face? Just make sure you buy a clip-on set to avoid a terrible tangle in your bristles.



Bob's story – Knee replacement surgery



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Bob McIntock had knee replacement surgery at the Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital after 10 years of pain in his left knee.

Bob McIntock has been involved in sport as a participant, teacher, coach, facility manager and event organiser for over 50 years.

Bob, former chief executive of Brentwood Borough Council, is currently chairman of the Active Brentwood sports partnership.



Bob McIntock

right. I am exercising and walking without pain and can play football with my grandsons".

Mr Sunil Kumar is a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital. He specialises in all aspects of knee surgery including minimally invasive partial and total knee replacements, cruciate ligament surgery reconstruction, cartilage surgery and sports injuries.

Mr Kumar is just one of a number of specialist consultants at the hospital who between them have countless years of experience in orthopaedics, general surgery, men's and women's health, children's services and cosmetic surgery.

Brentwood Hospital offers a wealth of exceptional clinical services for both patients who have private medical insurance and the self-pay market.

Tracey Howson, Brentwood Hospital director, said: "Our Hospital has established itself as one of the leading not-for-profit providers of private



healthcare, looking after people for more than 60 years from Brentwood and the surrounding areas."

"Today, we continue to put people before profit, working in partnership with the NHS to benefit the community. We put customers at the heart of everything that we do."

"With excellent patient satisfaction rates, we are proud of our reputation for clinical excellence and outstanding care. Many of the most experienced, skilled consultants and healthcare professionals in the region choose to practice at our hospital."

10 years ago, Bob's left knee was beginning to limit his opportunities to participate in physical activity. By the end of 2019 he was restricted to a

15-minute walk only. In January 2020 he came to the Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital and met with consultant orthopaedic surgeon and knee specialist, Mr Sunil Kumar. Bob was immediately seen for x-rays which identified the problem as severe bone on bone arthritis. He was told that a total knee replacement would be the best

course of action to get him back to his old self.

Bob was offered physiotherapy during his time at the hospital and was given a tailored exercise programme to support him back to fitness after surgery.

Bob saw his surgeon, Mr Sunil Kumar, daily during his three day stay in hospital, and saw him for two follow up appointments to check his progress after. He undertook a month-long programme of physiotherapy and an on-going recovery exercise programme.

Post operation, Bob experienced some pain but exercised regularly, as instructed by the Nuffield Health physiotherapy team, to restore the maximum movement. Eight months later, Bob is delighted to say "I have the same range of movement in my new left knee as I have in my

For further information or to book an appointment with Mr Sunil Kumar, contact Nuffield Health Brentwood Hospital on **01268 955 035** www.nuffieldhealth.com

Physiotherapy appointments can be booked by telephone on **0345 0454845**

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Christmas

plants that care and cure

There are several plants that are synonymous with Christmas, from the decorative poinsettia, to the "kiss me quick" mistletoe, to the evergreen holly and ivy. However, did you know that each of these plants has its own healing properties?

Holly: Often used to decorate your table for Christmas dinner, in terms of medicinal use, you should only use the leaves of the holly as the berries are poisonous. Holly leaves have been known to treat digestive issues, rheumatism, fever, bronchitis and high blood pressure.

HOW TO TAKE: Dry out your holly leaves, crush and add a few teaspoons to a cup of hot water.

Mistletoe: Either a blessing, or a curse depending on who you are standing in close proximity to, mistletoe has been used for centuries to treat medical conditions such as epilepsy, hypertension, headaches and the symptoms of menopause.

HOW TO TAKE: Only use the leaves and stems as the grains are poisonous. Steep in cold water for 12 hours, strain and drink up to three times a day.

Poinsettia: The perfect plant to decorate your home over Christmas, the poinsettia is known for its ability to clean air, and in particular, to remove formaldehyde from insulation, plastic bags and other household items.

HOW TO TAKE: Simply place a poinsettia in your home and let it work its magic.

Ivy: The leaves of ivy are both anti-inflammatory and anti-rheumatic, plus they contain antioxidant properties. Ivy is also said to help settle your stomach, boost your immune system and increase oxygenation of the body.

HOW TO TAKE: The leaves of ivy can either be consumed or applied topically. To make ivy tea, simply soak 4 fresh ivy leaves or 2 tbsp of crushed dried ivy in 1 litre of cold water, bring to the boil and then filter immediately.

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Why the Help to Buy: Shared Ownership continues to create homes out of houses

For all its speculation, criticism and conjecture, the housing market represents one of the most stable industries in the UK. Only amid the perils of negative equity in the 1990s did the bricks and mortar of people's fortunes really begin to crumble; yet for large periods outside that time, investment in property has largely been deemed a safe one.

Of course, as a result of this, the market has become much more competitive, and the growing difficulty with which first-time buyers, in particular, are able to get on board means the government's introduction of Help to Buy schemes has gone a long way to guiding people along the footpath to realising those dreams.

The concept is simple – if you cannot afford the mortgage on what would be 100 per cent of a home, Help to Buy: Shared Ownership will allow you to buy a share of the property, which could be anywhere between 25 and 75 per cent of its value.

You would effectively pay rent on the remaining share. This means the initial deposit is smaller and mortgage finance more accessible. On the plus side, owners still enjoy a decent proportion of true investment and, along with that, benefit from rises in market price over time.

The criteria to get involved is sensible. Those applying need to earn less than £80,000/year (£90,000/year in London). Furthermore, you would need to be a first-time buyer, or have owned before while being unable to buy now; or perhaps are in an existing shared ownership arrangement and are looking to move.

Variations to the rules exist for the over-55s and disabled applicants, but for the most part the success of the scheme, which is being repackaged and relaunched for 2021, is evident in the millions of people who have stepped onto the property ladder since its launch four decades ago.



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Having just made the crossing to France and finding ourselves out on the expansive French motorways, many UK drivers would have experienced the strange sensation of a succession of drivers on the opposite carriageway flashing their lights frantically.

No, this isn't a friendly welcome from our continental neighbours, nor is it some kind of automobile backlash resulting from failed Brexit negotiations. Instead, what's happening is that you are blinding other road users with your incorrect headlamp alignment.

In the UK, headlamps are configured to shine to the left, towards the edges of the road and away from the middle. This is to guide motorists away from curbs and ditches, while preventing oncoming drivers from being blinded by our lights.

That means in France, or any country that drives on the right, that same light is actually being shone directly into drivers' faces.

With various advancements in headlamp

technology over the years, new cars are often fitted with a switch control that automatically redirects the headlamps for driving abroad. However, many cars still don't have this function, therefore it pays to know what to do when driving abroad, for both your own safety and that of others.

If manual headlamp realignment cannot be done from the control panel of your car, the most common solution is to buy a set of headlamp unit lenses (or glasses). These deflectors are attached and block out a small amount of your beam, thus keeping light away from other drivers.

These days, it's not a request that headlamps are configured properly, it's the law. 'Do it yourself' beam deflectors – the sort your dad might have made out of black sticky tape in the 1970s – are no longer legal, and deflectors must be operational as soon as you head off the ferry, even in daylight hours.

It's not worth taking the risk when driving abroad... be safe at all times.

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