

WEEKENDING



I have never looked forward to Pancake Day so much as this year! I'm already planning lunch next Tuesday to be a bit of a pancake fest. Nothing fancy – lemon and sugar does the job for me every time. I'll be dusting down my trusty crepe pan – check out some stylish kitchen products from johnlewis.com (p40).

I'm also celebrating the first signs of spring, with snowdrops emerging in my garden. They are a reminder that nothing stays the same and that hopefully we'll soon be able to get out and about once more and enjoy a welcome change of scene. Travel writer Oli Smith suggests a few ideas of his own (opposite) for UK travel this year whenever restrictions are eased.

Podcasts continue to be a source of delight. This week, Francesca Specter celebrates being single with her podcast *Alonement* (p34). I'm also loving our podcast *Life on a Plate*, with its different takes on food each week – from Sarah Millican's celebration of KitKat Chunky to Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's tips for how to embrace a healthier lifestyle. This week's guest is author Joanne Harris. I can't wait.

GEORGINA GOLD

Partner & features editor



Dream holidays on our doorstep

Dark skies, long-distance walks and the return of the city break – Oliver Smith reveals what UK holidays might have in store for us when restrictions allow

Optimistic words from Health Secretary Matt Hancock at a briefing last month made headlines across the country, when he said he hoped that many of us would be able to enjoy a 'great British summer'.

In the eye of the Covid-19 storm, the prospect of a normal British summer – of buckets and spades, beer gardens and barbecues – suddenly has an allure as powerful as a Maldives resort or a Caribbean beach. But even if vaccinations are successful

in tackling the virus, it seems likely the UK's tourism industry won't be back to normal for some time. Tom Hall of *Lonely Planet* believes uncertainty surrounding overseas travel will continue – meaning sky-high demand for staycations once lockdowns ease.

"Last summer, we found that trying to book popular spots like the Lake District in July was impossible," explains Tom. "Towards the end of the season, people started looking further afield. Instead of the

Yorkshire Dales they'd try the Lincolnshire Wolds or the Forest of Bowland."

But where 2020 holidays saw a rush on wide open spaces away from infection risk, Tom thinks 2021 could see a few smart souls returning to cities. "Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, York, Edinburgh and London are all extremely popular with visitors from overseas – 2021 could be a golden opportunity for us to see them without the crowds. When else will you be able



**EXPLORE
BRITAIN**
Clockwise
from left:
Salisbury
Crags
overlooking
Edinburgh; a
railway track
hugs the
Cumbrian
coast; Shelton
Tower on the
North York
Moors



Photography: benedek/Getty Images; Phil Motcalfe/Alamy; Martin Williams/Alamy



to visit the National Gallery and have a Turner canvas all to yourself?"

There will also be changes in exactly how Brits choose to spend their holidays. Data from Strava shows a threefold increase in walking among app users in 2020, and arriving on cue is the England Coastal Path – a 2,795-mile long trail spanning the entire English coast, due to be unveiled this year. For those looking to banish the cobwebs after months indoors, there might be no better remedy than the blustery beaches of Norfolk or the balmy airs of Cornwall.

New technology too could bolster this hiking boom. Slow Ways – a project to show how footpaths can be used to connect the villages, towns and cities of Great Britain is launching this year (slowways.uk). So instead of driving from Bristol to Bath, you might saunter among the hedgerows of the Somerset countryside instead. A network of 700 volunteers have

already plotted 100,000km of routes on maps, and plan to test them when lockdowns ease.

"The founding principle is that you should be able walk between any two neighbouring settlements," says creator Dan Raven-Ellison. "We already expect to be able to do it by car – we should expect to do it on foot, too.

'Stargazing provides space for our emotions and thoughts'

We've inherited an amazing network of paths in the UK. If you look back in time, paths are how people got around." Dan emphasises the benefits of walking too: it improves physical and mental wellbeing, inspires creativity, is low carbon and largely Covid-safe. The same can be said of stargazing – another trend in the ascendant, with many escaping the turmoil on planet Earth by turning their attention to the cosmos. Megan Eaves is a delegate at the International Dark-Sky Association and founder of Dark Sky London, which campaigns to lower light pollution in the capital (darksky.london).

"Stargazing gives us perspective," says Megan. "We've been living in constrained spaces these last few months – but we can look up at the sky, which is not only a vast physical space, but also a space for our emotions and thoughts. It calms the nervous system and encourages us to take a breath."

Megan expects a new generation of stargazers will be packing their telescopes and heading out into the darkest corners of the British landscape as stargazing holidays become mainstream. In December 2020, both the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors National Parks were accredited as Dark Sky Reserves – an initiative to reduce the glow of street lights and engage local communities in astrotourism.

Cycling, camping and even rewilding holidays have also been touted for increased popularity. Multigenerational travel is also likely to be a trend, with retiring baby boomers paying for children and grandchildren to join them on holiday (as well as offering childcare support). Tom Hall believes this year that effect will be bigger

3 PLACES TO GO IN 2021

North York Moors National Park

Stargazers heading to the wind-touled moors of North Yorkshire should start at the Dark Sky Discovery Sites at the park centres in Danby and Sutton Bank, or else pop by Whitby's Bruce Observatory, which holds regular events (northyorkmoors.org.uk).

England Coastal Path, Cumbria

Stretching from the Tweed to the Wye, Broadstairs to Land's End, the England Coastal Path will make use of existing footpaths and new, purpose-built stages. One quiet section winds among the industrial heritage of the Cumbrian coast, covering 21 miles from Allonby to Whitehaven (nationaltrail.co.uk).

Cycling Cardiff

The Welsh capital is a stellar choice for a city break: it sees fairly few tourists, has excellent museums and last summer was voted the most bike-friendly city in the UK. Cycle the Taff Trail, pedalling north from the Millennium Stadium beside the rushing river up to Castell Coch (visitcardiff.com).

than ever, with a staycation doubling as a grand reunion after months apart.

"Look out for hotels offering deals to entice multigenerational travellers. Hopefully, it'll be a time for liberation and celebration."

Holidays are usually a chance to get away to unfamiliar destinations. This year's holiday may not be quite so far afield, but it's likely to be more meaningful than ever – a great escape and a return to happier times.

@olismithtravel