

THE FOOD REVOLUTION ISSUE



FARMING AFTER BREXIT

Soil Association's Dr Tom Mac-Millan on why now's the time for 'bold new ideas' for food, farming and the countryside

LUNCH AT RIVER COTTAGE

We head to TV's most famous farmhouse for a vegan Sunday roast and a chat with head chef Gelf Alderson

THE DIRT ON SOIL

Great food needs great soil – all life depends on it, so why aren't we doing more to protect it?

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Welcome to MyGreenPod Magazine! As we prepare for Brexit, this issue looks at the huge opportunity to revolutionise farming and agriculture – and in turn our entire food system. See which brands are getting it right and what experts believe needs to happen next.



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FARMING AFTER BREXIT

Soil Association's Dr Tom MacMillan explains our once-in-a-lifetime chance to mend the nation's relationship with food, farming and the countryside

Around 60% of farm incomes are shored up by European farm payments and post-Brexit support is only promised until 2020, so farmers are bracing themselves for what's to come.

It's estimated that 65% of UK agricultural exports head for the EU and 70% of our imports originate there. As well as involving painful tariffs, Brexit could put an end to the free movement of the EU workers many farms and food processors have come to rely on.

Despite these challenges, post-Brexit changes to farming policy could also present an unprecedented chance for a more ecologically sustainable farming system that sees local food thrive, encourages biodiversity and animal welfare, promotes health and boosts rural economies.

OUR FUTURE HANGS IN THE BALANCE

In February I gave evidence to the EU Energy and Environment sub-committee at the House of Lords, which is looking into these issues. I made the case that the future of our farming, food and countryside hangs in the balance.

Brexit could be hugely damaging if it brings new uncertainty, compromises UK standards or puts even heavier pressure on public spending. Yet it could help if the UK takes the opportunity to raise standards and reorient farming and land use to deliver what the public needs and expects.

A YouGov poll commissioned by Friends of the Earth shortly after last year's referendum found that 83% of us expect the same or higher standards as EU laws when it comes to the protection of wildlife and wild areas.

As the UK leaves the relative security of having guaranteed trading partners, we must stand strong in negotiations with new partners. Watering down standards would compromise opportunities for export and undermine the British public's confidence in animal welfare, food safety and traceability. We have an economic interest, plus a moral one, in aiming high.

WE NEED BOLD IDEAS

It will be a battle to protect existing standards and head off trade deals that would spell disaster for British food, farming and the countryside. Yet if that is all we achieve, we will have failed. Even before Brexit, we face monumental challenges

'Meeting these challenges will require bold new ideas that change the rules; we can't just reinvent the Common Agricultural Policy with a new accent'



Post-Brexit farming policy could boost local food, biodiversity, animal welfare, health and rural economies



Dr Tom MacMillan, innovation director at the Soil Association, sees Brexit as an opportunity to raise standards

IDEAS THAT CHANGE THE RULES, FROM THE SOIL ASSOCIATION

Agroforestry

When you put trees in fields you get more than the sum of the parts. You can produce more – often between 10% and 40% – as the trees and crops catch the sunlight and plumb the soil at different depths. You also lock up more carbon and boost wildlife.

Investing in soil

This is fundamental to farm productivity, food security, climate change and public health. Government policies to restore and protect soil include soil stewardship payments, monitoring and reporting on soil health.

A tipping point for organic

Organic farming encourages wildlife and cuts the use of pesticides and antibiotics. The organic market is growing in the UK, but only 3% of our farmland is organic – what would it take to be more like Sweden (at 16%) or even Austria (nearer 20%)?

A good life for farm animals

Let's insist on truly decent standards of animal welfare – what government's

animal welfare advisers call 'a good life', rather than just 'a life worth living' – and make high welfare systems the attractive option for farmers and investors. This needs to go hand-in-hand with stopping the routine, preventative use of antibiotics.

Backing farmer-led innovation

Whatever happens, this is going to be a time of rapid transition in farming, and we'll rely more than ever on farmers' ingenuity. We need to help farmers work out practical, more sustainable ways of farming and reward scientists who help them. At least 10% of the £450m the UK spends annually on agricultural research should be put into farmer-led projects. Check out innovativefarmers.org for an example of how this could work.

Making the most of public procurement

The UK public sector spends £2.4bn a year on food and catering services. We should make the most of this spending power to drive the demand for food produced to high standards.

FIND OUT MORE

- More on Dr Tom MacMillan is at soilassociation.org/staff-bios/tom-macmillan
- View the Soil Association's campaigns at soilassociation.org/our-campaigns
- More on Soil Association's organic certification is at soilassociation.org/certification

A NEW BREED OF *energy supplier*

Introducing Octopus Energy:
the UK's largest investor in
solar generation



With rising bills and uncertainty over our future energy security, something's got to give. Enter Octopus: a 'new breed of energy supplier'. It's a bold statement, but the five-star ratings from its customers immediately set this supplier apart from the Big Six. We spoke to the team to find out more.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Octopus Energy launched to customers in April 2016. 'It's a market I've been interested in for some time, as it's in such obvious need of change', says founder Greg Jackson. 'In fact, I wrote the business plan over five years ago, but getting the right financial backing is fundamental to building a sustainable business – especially in energy.' Greg and other members of the founding team – Stuart Jackson, Jenny Ashmore, James Eddison and Peter Miller – found that backing

in Octopus Group, a UK-based investment firm with over £6 billion in funds under management and a strong history of getting behind successful UK businesses, including Graze.com, Secret Escapes, SwiftKey and Zoopla.

Octopus Group is also the UK's largest investor in solar generation, and has over £2 billion invested in renewable energy generation in general. 'There are only two companies that can claim more investment in renewable generation in Britain', Greg says, 'both of which are Big Six

'We think it's ridiculous to expect customers to switch their supplier every year just to get decent value.'

energy suppliers whose renewable investments are dwarfed by their investment in – and commitment to – fossil fuels.'

SOURCING RENEWABLES

As Britain's largest investor in large-scale solar generation, it's no surprise that's where a lot of Octopus Energy's electricity comes from. Matt Bunney is responsible for making sure that Octopus Energy has enough renewables to meet its commitment; he complements solar generation with electricity from anaerobic digestion, the process by which organic waste such as manure and vegetable rejects (Octopus doesn't use by-products from the meat industry) is turned into electricity.

While solar generation's at its peak when it's bright and sunny, anaerobic digesters can run 24/7, diverting waste from landfill and helping Octopus source renewable energy 24 hours a day.

CHEAPER FOR MOST

The good news is that Octopus is already cheaper for many families; the Super Green Octopus tariff is cheaper for most homes currently on a Big Six variable tariff – which is the majority of homes in the UK. 'Amazingly, the cost of solar generation has fallen something like 200-fold since the 1980s', Matt says. 'The cost is still falling, which – alongside the simple fact we're a modern and lean business – is one of the reasons we're able to offer such competitive tariffs.'

To use Ofgem's definition, a 'medium customer' on the average Big Six standard variable tariff will save £222 on their annual energy costs if they switch to Octopus Energy – and that number is set to increase following recently announced price hikes by five of the Big Six.

Planet and wallet friendliness aside, CEO

stiff and riddled with inefficiencies caused by legacy systems and hierarchical management', Greg says. 'In short, they're not fit for the 21st century, and they're not fit for UK customers.'

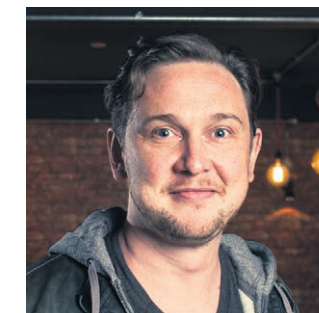
RESTORING TRUST

Lack of consumer trust in energy suppliers has been the biggest challenge for Peter Miller, Octopus Energy's customer experience director. 'Millions of Britons are paying hundreds more than they should be, and yet they won't switch because they think all energy suppliers are the same and it's better the devil you know', he tells us. 'We know we have to work twice as hard to prove ourselves and to earn our customers' trust.'

Every customer gets Greg's email address, and any negative experiences are reported straight to the management team. At the time of going to



CLOCKWISE
Jenny Ashmore,
Greg Jackson,
Stuart Jackson,
Peter Miller and
James Eddison,
Octopus Energy's
founding team



Greg Jackson feels the fundamental thing that distinguishes Octopus from the Big Six is that 'there are no dodgy deals'. 'We don't offer a cheap one-year deal to lure you in before switching you to a painfully expensive tariff', he says. 'We did a lot of work with the BBC's *Money Box* to expose this practice to the public; the Big Six use their existing customers to finance new ones and it just isn't fair. We think it's ridiculous to expect customers to switch their supplier every year just to get decent value. People's lives are busy enough without having to add yet another chore just to avoid being screwed on their energy bills.'

While you might expect a premium price to go hand in hand with better customer service, survey after survey reveals this is far from true in the energy market. 'Big Six call centres are slow,

press, Octopus Energy ranked first on Trustpilot for Electric Power, Natural Gas, and Utilities. 'Instead of asking you to wait on hold to get to the right department, we suggest using email or social media to describe your problem, leaving you to get on with your day while we work on an answer for you', Peter explains. 'If you do prefer to call, no problem, you'll get through to an energy specialist who can do 99% of what you need first time, without having to transfer you to the right department. We have a wonderful team, who joined because they have a real passion for fairness and the environment. Instead of passing you from pillar to post, they can solve most issues immediately – and instead of trying to wring every last penny out of you they want to make sure you're happy. In the end, it's cheaper to ►



We don't see renewable energy as a luxury for those who can afford it. Instead, we're building a business that means every household in the UK can be part of Britain's shift to a more sustainable future – and, for the vast majority, actually save money in the process.'

Greg Jackson, founder of Octopus Energy



- ▶ have happy customers than to spend hours on the phone arguing with them.'

Ease and fairness are central to Octopus Energy's service; its fastest switch took just 31 seconds, which says a lot about how straightforward the process is, and there are no exit fees if you decide the supplier isn't right for you. Customers receive monthly meter reading and direct debit reminders, and the Octopus Energy iPhone app will even take meter readings using your phone's camera.

DISRUPTING THE MARKET

Disruption in the form of smart meters, renewable energy, in-home energy storage, electric vehicles and big data will test the UK energy market's capacity for change – and Stuart Jackson, chief financial officer, is unconvinced it'll be capable of moving at the speed of the most nimble and innovative suppliers. 'As a heavily regulated industry, it's too used to moving at the speed of the slowest', he explains. 'For years the energy market's been abused by big firms who were literally gifted their customers through deregulation. They haven't won customers by being more efficient, providing better service or being more innovative. They've prioritised profits over customers, and fossil fuels over our planet.'

The government has been clear that the energy industry must change, and Octopus Energy has worked with Iain Wright MP and John Penrose MP in its campaign for fairer energy prices. 'We're

'For years the energy market's been abused by big firms who were literally gifted their customers through deregulation.'

starting to see traction in the fight against the exploitative pricing of the Big Six', Stuart tells us. 'The proposed relative price cap is being debated in the House of Commons, with Iain Wright MP quoting our support, and Theresa May is emphatically saying the market needs fixing for customers.' The real challenge is that change needs to happen now; no one wants to head into next winter before fundamental changes have kicked in to create a market that rewards efficiency and great service.

'It's time UK consumers had an energy supplier they can actually trust', Greg says. 'We can be that energy supplier by simply staying true to our commitments to transparency and fairness. In the end, all people want is energy at a fair price that does the right thing by the planet. Combine that with good old-fashioned customer service, and you've got a winning combination.'

FIND OUT MORE

- More on Octopus Energy's tariffs is at <https://octopus.energy>
- See customer reviews at uk.trustpilot.com/review/octopus.energy
- News and updates are at <https://octopus.energy/blog>

Orange FOUR

British built Orange Bikes are renowned for their ability to take on pretty much anything that's thrown at them.

This is the new 2017 Orange Four.

Engineered to be light, active and fun. It features the compact swingarm, with its high-performance single-pivot reliability.

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story to share or know an eco-warrior you want to nominate, now's your chance!

Have a look at the full list of award categories – plus details of how to enter or nominate your green heroes – at peaawards.com.

Good luck!

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DAY OF THE DEAD

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STOP the presses!

Actually, don't – reading a paper may actually be more eco than consuming your news online

Some would argue there's no longer a place for printed communications at all: why waste paper and ink now everything can be published online and accessed for free all round the world?

While digital publishing can reach lots of people, it has its drawbacks. Content is often only skimmed as we navigate distracting pop-ups, and content is presented in bite-sized chunks to allow for an interrupted experience. All this waters down the message that's finally received.

More importantly, online publishing has its own carbon footprint – and it's bigger than you might think. A 2007 report from Stockholm's KTH Centre for Sustainable Communications compared the environmental impacts of reading a newspaper online, in print and as an e-paper.

The study found that, with a reading time of 30 minutes per day, the environmental impact of the web-based paper was generally in the same range as that of the printed one.

'When you factor in all the CO₂ impacts, anything that takes 25 to 30 minutes and you're better off reading a physical newspaper than online content', explains Gareth Dinnage, managing director of Seacourt, the Oxford-based environmental printing company. 'That's for a newspaper press; if you factor our processes into that I suspect that the like-for-like time would drop to under three or four minutes.'

GETTING IT RIGHT

It might sound counterintuitive but, as far as Gareth's concerned, printing can – and should – be the one and only

truly sustainable communication channel. Seacourt is already the proud owner of three Queens Awards for Sustainable Development, with a roster of clients – from Triodos Bank to Patagonia – who put integrity at the core of their business.

'It comes down to brand reputation', Gareth explains. 'Organisations understand that you can't say one thing and do another – you need to show transparency and leadership and be beyond reproach in all that you do.'

Take, for example, a sustainability report from a company pledging to dial its environmental commitments up a notch. The report's words and images will be carefully chosen, but there's more to communication than meets the eye. If that same report were printed on virgin paper using inks full of chemicals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), how seriously could we take the environmental commitments of the company that produced it?

REINVENTING THE PRESS

Most of us accept we need a mass shift in behaviour if we're going to set ourselves on a path to a sustainable future. But is it possible to get a message out to enough people to effect change without compromising somewhere? Absolutely, says Gareth: it is possible and his clients are already doing it.

Seacourt's LightTouch printing process is an alternative to traditional lithographic presses, combining a waterless printing technique with LED drying. It's a revolutionary process that eliminates any need to waste – or pollute – water, and uses energy-saving LED lights to dry ink instantly.

On top of that Seacourt – the first printing company in the world to achieve zero waste to landfill – uses 100% renewable energy and its factory is carbon positive. It specifies recycled papers and uses natural inks with no VOCs.

By cutting water and toxic chemicals out of its printing process, Seacourt has been able to reduce VOC production by over 98.5% and save over eight million litres of fresh water over the last 10 years.

But this is still the beginning of the journey as far as Gareth's concerned. 'We're aiming to be the most sustainable printer globally and to become net positive for the economy, environment and society', he tells us. 'So in effect every print job we produce would have a benefit to the environment and society. That would really be something, right?'

BELOW

Gareth (left) and Nick Dinnage, flying the flag for sustainable printing



FIND OUT MORE

- More on Seacourt's waterless printing is at seacourt.net
- Information about the LightTouch printing process is at seacourt.net/LightTouch
- To discuss Seacourt's sustainability credentials email jake@empathysustainability.com



Introducing some of the latest superstars to be crowned Heroes on MyGreenPod.com. These ethical products are made by companies that are doing things differently (and brilliantly).



WISPER 705 SE ELECTRIC BIKE

Whether you're thinking about getting in the saddle for the first time, want some help climbing that last stretch to the office or haven't been on a bike for years, this virtually silent e-bike offers a simple, no-fuss way of getting from A to B. The 705 SE with a step-through frame (£1,099) is Wisper's best-selling multi-purpose bike. The motor assists you as you pedal, making your daily commute a breeze. Thanks to the Green Commute Initiative (see page 35), buying an e-bike is now easier than ever!

@Ampsbikes
<https://wisperbikes.com>

NAKED FLOORING NATURAL RUGS

Feeling creative? Or struggling to find the perfect rug for your living room? Now you can use Naked Flooring's rug creator app to design and customise your own durable and eco-friendly rug, made from Naked Flooring's natural carpets. Choose from sisal, seagrass, jute, coir or wool, then get designing! Naked Flooring has the largest number of potential combinations of broadloom and borders on the web. Visit mygreenpod.com/competitions for your chance to win £500 to spend on your very own Naked Flooring natural rug!

@nakedflooring
nakedflooring.co.uk



BIOHITE CAMPSTOVE

The BioLite CampStove will revolutionise the way you prepare meals outdoors, allowing you to cook or boil water while converting heat to electricity – whether you're at a campsite, in the park or on the beach! The stove burns twigs or wood pellets to cook or boil water, so you can wave goodbye to gas canisters. This is the first stove that can be used to recharge smartphones, GPS units, MP3 players and digital cameras – all while cooking dinner or boiling water for a brew. A 20-minute charge will provide 60 minutes' talk time.

@biolitestove
bioliteenergy.com

ECO FEMME CLOTH DAY PAD

Make the switch and join the cloth pad revolution! This Day Pad is Eco Femme customers' all-time favourite. Its top and inner layers are made with soft, absorbent organic flannel cotton, and the handwoven fabric backing has a leakproof coating for extra protection. It's easy to wash and the wings close with nickel-free plated snaps. For every Day Pad purchased, one Eco Femme pad is gifted to a girl in India through the Pad for Pad menstrual education programme.

@ecofemme_india
<https://ecofemme.org>



INLIGHT ORGANIC INTENSIVE LINE SOFTENER

Inlight Organic has just given its gorgeous range a face-lift; the artisan creams and serums – including the Hero Intensive Line Softener – are now protected and preserved in UV glass. This award-winning anti-ageing elixir activates and boosts the skin's natural regeneration process to work on laughter lines and wrinkles. It uses an active blend of 20 of the most dynamic plant extracts for promoting skin elasticity and tone – ideal for supporting mature or sun-damaged skin. It's also ideal for topical application in preventing and treating lines, scars and dark patches from sun damage.

@InlightBeauty
inlightbeauty.co.uk

YEO VALLEY MILK

The largest family-owned dairy business in the UK, Yeo Valley has 1,200 acres of organic farmland and 420 award-winning British Friesian cows. Like the rest of the farm, its milk is '100% Yeoganic', which is the company's way of being organic and a little bit more – it goes the extra country mile to look after its land, animals and people. The top six inches of soil support all life on land, and grass-fed livestock help keep it in optimum health (see page 25).

@yeovalley
yeovalley.co.uk



ETHEX POSITIVE INVESTING

Browse and compare positive investment and savings products according to the projects you want to support and the financial return you're looking for. Some offer up to 6% and have a great positive impact across sectors including community energy, organic farming and social housing. You can make money do good by choosing to invest in businesses with a clear social and environmental mission that are changing the world for the better.

@ethexuk
ethex.org.uk



FIRESPIRAL SLINGS WOVEN BABY WRAPS

These woven baby wraps come in designs inspired by universal patterns in Nature. Two different weave structures are available: the Alchemy weave wraps are luxurious, using a looser weave for the ultimate in softness, mouldability and cushion. The Elements weave wraps use a tighter weave; they provide great support but require a little breaking in to reach their optimum softness.

@FirespiralSling
firespiralslings.co.uk

BEC TO THE FUTURE



Brighton Energy Co-op launches its fifth share invitation, showing community energy is still the way forward

Brighton Energy Co-op (BEC) – which was part of the UK's first wave of community energy initiatives – has raised £1.5m and installed 1.3MWs of solar PV since its birth in 2010. The last few years have been as turbulent for BEC as they have for the wider renewable energy sector – but with a portfolio of arrays all signed up to a high Feed-in Tariff (FiT), BEC has a sound platform from which to develop new projects.

FROM CHURCHES TO WAREHOUSES

BEC has come a long way since founder Will Cottrell held its initial public meeting. The co-operative now has 350 investors; it has created 17 separate solar arrays and installed solar PV on a range of sites including churches, warehouses, offices, flats, factories, a school and a university. BEC has been happy to work with any organisation that has a suitable roof, wants to save money on electricity and is keen to reduce its CO₂ emissions.

After covering operational costs and paying a return to members, BEC also provides an annual community fund to support projects with objectives similar to its own. Recently BEC funded a PV array on an off-grid community centre and 30 energy efficiency visits for residents in fuel poverty.

A NEW SHARE INVITATION

The FiT rate for solar PV fell by over 60% in 2016, yet BEC will press ahead with plans to install new solar arrays in 2017. The difference now is that most of the co-op's income must come from electricity sales rather than the FiT.

BEC's next project will be at the University of

'Having firmly applied the brakes on the renewables sector in 2016, the UK government finally seems to be getting it'

BRIGHTON ENERGY COOPERATIVE

Brighton's Eastbourne campus. The co-operative installed a 60kWp array at the Varley Halls last year; it was invited to 'do it again' and add 150kWp of community-owned panels to the Hillbrow & Robert Dodd buildings this spring.

To raise the £115k required, BEC has launched its fifth share invitation. New and existing members can invest in BEC and hold shares for up to 20 years, with 5% of capital available to be paid back each year. Beyond the financial return, members will see the environmental benefits of CO₂ reduction and the social value created by community members coming together to create local renewable energy solutions.

LOOKING AHEAD

BEC director Damian Tow admits concern for energy co-ops that launched recently, as many weren't able to become self-funding before the FiTs were slashed. 'BEC's reached the reassuring position of having sufficient surplus income from arrays on a higher FiT', he tells us, 'so there's budget to pay a manager to administer the portfolio for the next 20 years – irrespective of plans to develop more suitable sites for PV.'

Looking ahead, Damian sees cause for optimism. 'Having firmly applied the brakes on the renewables sector in 2016, the UK government finally seems to be getting it and supporting EVs and grid storage as part of its Industrial Strategy', he says. 'BEC is considering an opportunity to connect battery banks to solar arrays, and is making its first foray into EV charging by supplying electricity to the Brighton-based Big Lemon bus company's new fleet of electric buses.' It was an early starter, but the journey for BEC may have only just begun.

FIND OUT MORE

- More on BEC's projects is at brightonenergy.org.uk/works
- Big Lemon's plans for an electric bus fleet are at thebiglemon.com/electric/



CRUELTY IN COSMETICS

Holly Daffurn reveals the cruel truth behind 'safety tests' for sanitary products and nappies



Sanitary towels and nappies take 500 to 800 years to decompose – and the average woman goes through around 17,000 pads or tampons in her lifetime. Throw in the risk of exposure to toxic and potentially harmful chemicals – plus the environmental problems related to the manufacture of sanitary towels and tampons – and the choice for any eco-savvy woman is pretty obvious.

Most people are aware of the environmental, ecological and health benefits of using washable nappies. I'd also heard animal experimentation was prevalent in the manufacturing of their disposable counterparts – but when an anonymous source offered to send me the safety test certificates for a nappy brand, I wasn't prepared for what I saw.

TESTED ON ANIMALS

If you avoid products that are tested on animals and lead a lifestyle that limits animal cruelty, then you may be as horrified as I was to discover that the production of sanitary towels involves animal experimentation.

A leading nappy brand's declaration of conformity with the EU Acute Dermal Irritation Test for cosmetic products reveals that a sample was applied to a rabbit's 'clipped test site' and 'occluded' – meaning sealed or closed up – for four hours as part of testing (see below). Further research reveals it's common practice to force animals to inhale or ingest the small particles used to make nappies and sanitary products.

The manufacturer stated, 'We can absolutely confirm that we do not test our nappies and wipes on animals.'

That said animals may be used in testing to ensure the safety and efficacy of some raw materials when suitable alternatives are not available and the testing is mandated by regulatory authorities.' So while the finished product isn't tested on animals, the company admits to using animal experimentation on materials used to make nappies – and getting away with it by manipulating language.

PHOTOGRAPHY ISTOCK

WHAT'S IN SANITARY PRODUCTS?

From the same set of test certificates I discovered that chemical tests for lead, arsenic and mercury were carried out as part of the meticulous testing procedure. There's also stringent testing in place to eliminate any possibility of fungi, aerobic bacteria, salmonella, candida albicans and more. While these tests are reassuring, they omit a large number of other chemicals that have been associated with serious medical conditions.

Andrea Donsky, founder of Naturally Savvy and co-author of *Label Lessons: Your Guide to a Healthy Shopping Cart*, has looked into what exactly goes into sanitary products and found indications of dioxins, synthetic fibres and petrochemical additives.

Her research concluded that one sanitary napkin contains as much plastic as you'd get in four plastic bags. Nappies and female hygiene products contain BPA and BPS, which can cause developmental problems in embryos and have been associated with cancer, and DEHP, which has been connected to organ damage.

Odour neutralisers and fragrance are added to many of these products. This is before we even start to consider how plastic prevents the skin from breathing and can trap in heat, potentially leading to bacteria growth and yeast infections.

It's time to look for cruelty-free alternatives that suit you – and the environment. Look out for the Leaping Bunny logo on products certified by Cruelty Free International.

LAB TEST REQUESTED BY NAPPY BRAND

TEST(S) REQUESTED:

Selected test(s) as requested by applicant:

*Acute Dermal Irritation Test

TEST METHOD(S): GB 15979-2002 Hygienic standard for disposable sanitary products

Test environment: Rabbit room of conventional condition. Certificate No. syxk 2009-0079, Shanghai; Room temperature 18-22°C; Relative humidity 45-65%

Test animal: New Zealand White Albino Rabbit, 2.39-2.66kg each

No. of animals/sex: 3/not specified

Observation period: 1, 24, 48 and 72 h after residual test substance removal

TEST METHOD: 0.5g sample was applied to clipped test site and occluded for 4 hours. Test site then wiped clean with lukewarm water.

FIND OUT MORE

- Holly shares resources for environmentally conscious families at naturalmumma.com
- For a chance to win Holly's new book, *The Natural Baby*, visit mygreenpod.com/competitions
- See why Eco Femme's cloth pads are a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes



The Sunscreen that BITES BACK

Introducing the triple-action suncream that repels insects naturally

Howard Carter knows a thing or two about being bitten. As well as surviving a pitch to the Dragons, he's pulled himself through a dose of dengue and a serious encounter with malaria, contracted – both times – while wearing maximum concentration Deet-based products.

The good news for the rest of us is that the experience inspired Howard to find effective, natural ways to keep bugs at bay. He launched the award-winning incognito® in 2007 and has been developing new formulations of organic, natural insect repellent ever since.

The latest product is a suncream that protects against UV rays and insects in one swift, suitcase-lightening application. 'Sometimes insect repellent can interfere with the efficacy of suncream', Howard tells us, 'making it difficult to ensure you're fully protected from both sun and insects.' The new incognito Second Skin Suncream uniquely overcomes this; it's a triple-action sunscreen, moisturiser and insect repellent that frees up luggage space and saves you the hassle of applying three different products. 'It's also far more effective', Howard explains, 'with no conflicting scents that could help attract mosquitoes or other biting insects.'

This isn't the first time a company has combined a suncream – which Howard describes as 'the holy grail of travel accessories' – with an insect repellent, yet nearly all

similar products have been withdrawn from UK and US shelves. 'Previous efforts all went pear-shaped!', Howard explains. 'We've devised a new formula that solves the previous problems; it's the only product on the market that combines natural ingredients to create a multi-action suncream and insect repellent, packaged in renewable sugarcane material.'

LEVEL OF PROTECTION

Second Skin Suncream offers protection from mosquitoes, midges, ticks, fleas, sandflies, wasps and many other insects. The active ingredient PMD – also known as oil of eucalyptus – is recommended by Public Health England and the NHS, and tests show it's 100% effective against mosquitoes carrying the Zika virus, malaria, dengue and chikungunya.

'We source the purest PMD', Howard tells us, 'so it's highly effective as all allergens and impurities have been removed.' It works by camouflaging the user rather than repelling insects, so the cream – which contains other ingredients with repellent qualities – has a dual mode of action.

The suncream element offers the highest medium level of protection you can get; it's SPF 25 and will protect you from both UVA and UVB rays. This broad-spectrum protection is important as UVA rays damage the skin, causing ageing and wrinkling, while UVB rays can lead to skin cancer.

PHOTOGRAPHY LIZZY GREAGG

'Mosquitoes are the most dangerous animal on Earth'

BITES TO WATCH OUT FOR

The worst bite you could get in the UK over summer would be from the Blandford fly, though wasps, mosquitoes, midges and horse flies can all cause distress, irritation and even severe reactions. Ticks, which are arachnids, are the only organisms in the UK that can give you a disease that's fatal, but the list of insect-borne diseases abroad is long.

'Various mosquito species are vectors for a host of different diseases', Howard tells us. '*Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes transmit dengue, chikungunya, Zika and West Nile viruses, whereas *Anopheles gambiae* are the most common vector of malaria.' The tsetse fly, which looks similar to the housefly, is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and transmits the potentially fatal (and very difficult to treat) African trypanosomiasis, or 'sleeping sickness', while Leishmaniasis is a debilitating infection passed on by species of sand-fly.

'Every year the threats are getting more severe', Howard says. 'There are more insects around and they keep moving into

we wash and care for our skin. 'Bacterial colonies create a scent that's particularly attractive to mosquitoes, so keeping clean is a fundamental aspect of remaining unattractive to mosquitoes', Howard says. 'We have a range of products designed to keep skin free of the detritus on which bacteria feed, and which then act as a powerful attractant. Our loofah in particular is aimed at removing these tasty chemicals; for maximum protection, we recommend travellers start using it up to two weeks before they travel and continue whilst away.'

Part of incognito's new Second Skin range of plant-based anti-mosquito beauty products, the suncream is one step in a whole-skin approach to the battle against bites. 'We're an ethical company and want to protect people from two of life's greatest dangers: sun and insect bites', Howard explains.

Women and children generally tend to get bitten more, so it was important for the suncream to be suitable for the whole family. 'All our current products are safe for babies from the age of three months upwards', Howard tells us. 'The



10% OF PROFITS TO CHARITY

Each year, incognito® donates 10% of all profits to charitable causes. Beneficiaries may be individuals on a mission to raise money for a cause close to them, student-led groups passionate about social change, charities supporting local communities or international organisations raising awareness of global issues. 'In 2015 we donated to the Bethesda Hermitage, a wonderful eco-travel lodge in

India', Howard tells us. 'It funnels profits into a variety of charitable projects including its two orphanages, which house and educate over a thousand children, and an institute that teaches vocational skills to women who were unable to finish their education. Since then we have also helped to fund projects supporting the refugees, schools, mental health charities and much more.'

'We are an ethical company and want to protect people from two of life's greatest dangers: sun and insect bites' Howard Carter, founder of incognito

new places. *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*, the Asian tiger mosquito, follow humans around so whenever we build a new city or large town they quickly inhabit our surroundings.'

On top of that, insects are developing a resistance to the active ingredients of conventional insect repellents, such as Deet, pesticides and insecticides, which have been around for over half a century. 'Mosquitoes are the most dangerous animal on Earth', Howard tells us. 'They only tend to live for a short time so they can adapt really quickly, and have evolved over millions of years to become a hugely resistant organism.' They're developing a resistance to active ingredients that have been used in excess, which presents a real challenge – particularly in the fight against malaria.

'Mosquitoes are often overlooked as more of a nuisance than anything else', Howard says. 'A recent survey revealed that 67% of Brits heading abroad hadn't packed insect repellent.'

OUR BEAUTY IS SKIN-DEEP

A proper skincare routine is the best way to keep insects at bay at home and abroad. Mosquitoes are attracted to our kairomones; some of these metabolic byproducts come out of our pores, so our attractiveness is dictated by how

ingredients in this product mean we've had to increase this to two years old, but this should still mean most of the family will be able to use it safely.'

The ethical nature of incognito extends beyond protection from life's dangers and into the company's packaging. 'The plastic used in the new green tubes and bottles is made entirely from renewable sugar cane oil', Howard tells us, 'which reduces carbon emissions.' For every 1,000kg of green plastic produced, 2,500kg of CO₂ is captured, while the production of 1,000kg of conventional plastic, which is made from raw Earth oils, releases 2,100kg of CO₂ emissions. 'Therefore when 1,000kg of green plastic is produced, 1,000kg less conventional plastic is produced', Howard explains, 'leading to 4,600kg of CO₂ being saved.' All-round protection that lightens your luggage and helps save the Earth: what's not to love?

FIND OUT MORE

- Stockists include Holland & Barrett, Harrods, Ocado, Planet Organic, Revital, Robert Dyas, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Whole Foods
- See why incognito's suncream is a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes
- View the whole incognito range at lessmosquito.com



The family festival in Somerset is going organic

Overlooking the stunning Chew Valley Lake just nine miles south of Bristol, Valley Fest (04-06 August) is a feast for the senses – and for 2017 the feast will be organic.

The festival's music, dancing, arts, games and glitter have always been served up alongside the best local produce – and this year organisers are only inviting traders who offer organic food. If you're worried about the cost of feeding your family organic meals for a weekend – or even a day – don't be: stallholders are getting hugely

discounted space so they can pass the savings on.

'It's important to us that organic food is not elitist', says Luke Hasell, who runs Valley Fest on his organic farm. 'As a farmer I care deeply about the land and the provenance of food – and that's what organic is. We want everyone to enjoy the best food along with the best music.'

WHAT'S ON

Acts confirmed so far include everything from experimental Japanese performance art from ICHI and psychedelic orchestra from The Fantasy Orchestra to slick pop songs from BBC Introducing favourites Goan Dogs. The Phoenix Rose, fronted by P.E.A. Awards founder Jarvis Smith, will rock the Lake Stage on Sunday, fusing pop, reggae, hip hop and Indian ragas.

Friday night will feature the return of legendary London club night 'White Wedding'. People are invited to don their most garish wedding outfits – as bride, groom, bridesmaid, vicar or crazy old aunt – and join the kitsch reception, where a special guest DJ will spin classic wedding dance

tunes. Bristol barn-stormers Fitty Gomash will lead a barn dance on the Saturday; the theme is Glitter & Sawdust and festival-goers are encouraged to go all out with the fancy dress.

There'll be plenty to keep kids happy, too – from DJ skills, arts and crafts workshops to a junior disco, carnival parade and plenty of space to run free. The Hogsnorts Farming Academy even offers a glimpse of the farming way of life and gives kids a chance to get to know the animals.

Weekend tickets with camping cost £110 (adults), £40 (13- to 17-year olds) or £20 (6- to 12-year-olds). Children aged five and under go free. Day tickets and weekend tickets without camping are also available for locals and anyone who just wants to dip their toe in – though once you're there you might not want to leave!

FIND OUT MORE

- More on the festival is at valleyfest.co.uk
- Book your tickets at valleyfest.co.uk/tickets
- For a chance to win a pair of weekend tickets, visit mygreenpod.com/competitions



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COULD FARMERS SAVE THE WORLD?

Richard Clothier's revolutionising the food industry from the inside

Farming – and therefore food production – may be among the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, but that presents a major opportunity: greener everyday working practices could be the key to a sustainable future for generations to come.

In fact, with 85% of the UK's total land footprint associated with meat and dairy production, farmers are perfectly positioned to be environmental stewards and pioneers of sustainable business.

'As a sector, food and farming contributes to about 25% of greenhouse gas emissions', explains Richard Clothier, managing director of Wyke Farms, 'but there's huge potential for change. If we expect shoppers to change their lifestyles it could be too late; we have to develop practical solutions to minimise our impact.'

'we have to develop practical solutions to minimise our impact'

PRACTICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

The quest for practical solutions has led Richard to adopt what he calls a 'practical environmentalism' in the day-to-day running of Wyke Farms in Somerset's Brue Valley. He's tackling two of the major challenges facing farmers everywhere – carbon emissions and water usage – in order to make his 150-year-old family business as environmentally sustainable as it can possibly be. A happy side-effect is that Richard's methods are proving a source of inspiration for others in the area, and helping to transform the wider farming sector from within.

The solar panels at Wyke Farms' HQ are a great example: they sit on the farm roofs, visible to staff and visitors alike, powering the ice banks required to chill milk from body temperature. These banks need to work hardest on hot, sunny days, which is precisely when solar panels generate most power. The neat cycle is a perfect advertisement for renewable energy, and many visiting farmers have been inspired to install a similar model on their own buildings.

An addition that's even more impressive – though not quite

as easy to replicate at home – is Wyke's Anaerobic Digestion Plant, which transforms organic waste into clean energy. Cheesemaking byproducts and farmyard manure are mixed with local waste, including apple pomace from nearby cider makers and breadcrumbs from neighbouring bread manufacturers, to generate electricity and gas. The electricity powers the cheesemaking process, with any surplus sold to Good Energy. The biogas is cleaned up and put back into the grid to run Wyke's boilers and power the local town of Bruton.

With all operations powered by solar and biogas, Wyke Farms is the first completely self-sufficient dairy brand. Richard's achievements were recognised last year when Wyke became

'Farmers must be encouraged to strive for net positive and rewarded for enhancing natural capital'

the first dairy brand in the UK to receive the Carbon Trust Triple Accreditation for water, carbon and waste. The farm has also been the Guardian Sustainable Business of the Year for three years running – 2014, 2015 and 2016 – and Richard was named Business Leader of the Year at the Green Innovation and Finance Awards. The ethical production methods are also reflected in the final product: Wyke Farms' cheddars clinch award after award for their great taste, beating off competition from rivals all over the world.

CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Wyke's success has inspired countless other farmers to adopt more sustainable practices, but Richard feels more help is needed from the top. 'The farming sector must address its carbon footprint, focus on soil health, minimise run-off and act on water usage', Richard tells us. 'It's possible to change the entire sector, but we need to work together. Farmers must be encouraged to strive for net positive and rewarded for enhancing natural capital.'

It's unclear how much government support farmers will receive post-Brexit, but Richard isn't letting uncertainty over future policy stand in his way. Wyke is helping to transform the industry from the inside, offering a premium of 00.25p per litre to milk suppliers who adopt greener working practices on their own farms – whether they choose to install small anaerobic digesters, solar arrays or water recovery systems.

'We've also become a corporate member of LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming)', Richard tells us, 'which promotes environmentally responsible farming and helps farmers produce good food to high environmental standards.' Another aim of the partnership is to help inspire positive change that will trickle down through the supply chain. 'It'll signify a step towards the overhaul in farming practices we so urgently need', Richard says, 'while also helping to meet the needs of shoppers who are joining the food revolution.'

The government has to create the right environment to help farmers to feed the world in a greener way. Over the next 10 years world populations will grow; the large Asian and Indian populations are becoming more affluent – we have to find ways to produce the foods that they want to eat in a way that won't harm the environment.' *Richard Clothier, managing director of Wyke Farms*



ABOVE
The Anaerobic Digestion Plant at Wyke Farms transforms organic waste into natural energy

WIN A LIFETIME'S SUPPLY OF RENEWABLE ELECTRICITY PLUS MORE PRIZES*



50% of our food is imported and 60% of the fuel used to generate our electricity comes from a foreign country, often travelling up to 2,500 miles before reaching the UK. But other options are available; making a simple switch to greener energy for your home or business, or buying food from local producers, can make an immediate impact that benefits everyone.

In fact, switching to a 100% renewable electricity and green gas tariff – like the one offered by Good Energy – can reduce your personal carbon footprint by up to a staggering 50%, which is why it's a switch Richard Clothier is promoting. 'We want to get our shoppers thinking about where energy and food come from', he says, 'so we're running a competition with Good Energy to help contribute towards a cleaner, greener future.' The top prize is a lifetime's supply of 100% renewable electricity, worth over £20,000, and 20 runners-up will receive a one-year supply of electricity. 50 Somerset produce hampers – full of Wyke's Somerset Cheddar – are also up for grabs.

To be in with a chance of winning any of the prizes, just pick up one of the 5 million promotional Wyke Farms packs and enter the unique code online at wykefarms.com/goodenergy. Good luck!

FIND OUT MORE

- More on Wyke Farms is at wykefarms.com/green
- See why Wyke Farms is a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes



At a meeting in March hosted by The Prince of Wales, a new initiative was launched to save tropical rainforests from further clearance and degradation as a result of cocoa production. As part of a process kicked off by The Prince of Wales's International Sustainability Unit, the World Cocoa Foundation and The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), 12 of the world's largest cocoa and chocolate companies convened in London to commit to action to halt deforestation and forest degradation.

A BOOMING INDUSTRY

The global chocolate industry is worth tens of billions of dollars each year. It has grown from a discovery made about 3,000 years ago in a Central American rainforest – somewhere in what is present day Mexico or Guatemala – where a group of Olmec Indians were probably the first people ever to taste a chocolate-like food. They discovered the 'beans' found in fleshy pods of a rainforest tree had special properties, and initially consumed them in a drink. Taking on mystical properties, the beans were used in ritual and as medicine. When European explorers came across what the Indians had discovered, they too thought it was very special and took away seeds for propagation in other parts of the world. Today cocoa trees are grown right around the Earth in the wet tropics within about 10 degrees of latitude of the equator, mainly in smallholder plantations tended and harvested by a vast army of mostly poor farmers. On a few hectares each they grow the cocoa trees from which they harvest the pods that emerge from delicate white flowers on the trunks and bigger branches. From these they extract the beans that are then dried out in the hot tropical sun before being shipped to market.

These millions of farmers produce the cocoa that supplies the companies that make the wonderful chocolate products that fill corner shops, supermarket displays and the duty-free shelves at airports all over the world.



The world's biggest chocolate companies pledge to save the rainforests, by Tony Juniper



PRESSURE FROM GROWTH

About 60% of the huge quantity of cocoa we need to satisfy global demand comes from just two countries: the West African nations of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Their national economies and vast populations of farmers – many of whom live below the poverty line – depend on cocoa.

During recent decades the area under cocoa has dramatically increased, replacing much of the tropical rainforests that once stretched in an unbroken belt from eastern Ghana in the east to Sierra Leone and Guinea in the west.

In Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire there is today little of the original tropical rainforest left, and what does remain is under pressure as a result of expanding rural populations seeking livelihoods from cocoa farming. Given this context, this is where the initial focus of the new Forests and Cocoa initiative will be.

These now fragmented and depleted West African rainforests, the so-called Upper Guinea Forests, are nonetheless still of global importance – not least because of the host of rare wildlife species they harbour, including tool-using chimpanzees, forest elephants, pygmy hippopotamus and strange forest birds called white-necked picathartes.

These rainforests also have millions of tonnes of carbon locked away in their vegetation and are important for regional rainfall, with recent prolonged droughts at least in part linked to forest loss. Cocoa is a rainforest species, and the resilience of cocoa plantations is underpinned by the water flows generated by rainforests.

SEEING THE BUSINESS RISK

Reduced rainfall is not only a problem for the poor farmers whose crops produce less when it is drier, however, but also for the cocoa and chocolate companies that require growing supply to meet rising global demand.

The companies at the March meeting include Nestlé, Mars, Ferrero, Hershey's and Mondelez International, which manufactures Toblerone and Cadbury's Dairy Milk. They

agreed that as well as ensuring forests are properly protected from encroachment, the task at hand is essentially about enabling farmers to produce more from the existing farmed land, thereby reducing pressures on the remaining forests.

Many commodity companies have, during recent years, increasingly come to accept that rising output does not need to involve further forest loss – and indeed it mustn't if the rain needed for long-term food security is to be protected. This can be achieved, they've said, through a combination of reduced waste en route to market, better farming methods and supporting smallholder farmers.

Several companies in the cocoa and chocolate sector are already collaborating through an initiative called Cocoa Action to empower growers through education, training, improved market access and supply of higher yielding cocoa trees, and to address the persistent problem of child labour on cocoa farms, which is inextricably linked to the grinding poverty experienced on family farms.

At the meeting these companies undertook to do more to protect forests, too. This is not least because they are all increasingly aware of the extent to which forests shape climatic conditions – both regionally and globally – and realise that deforestation is a highly material and growing business risk. For the same reasons governments are also increasingly interested in partnering with companies to avoid further deforestation; ministers from the two priority countries were at the meeting as well, and expressed their interest in further collaboration on forest protection and restoration.

LOOKING AHEAD

An important part of the forward agenda for the cocoa industry must also embrace the risks that could come from rapid cocoa expansion in Asia and Central and South America, where growing markets in Malaysia, Indonesia, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador could lead to increased pressure on natural forests. There is also momentum for cocoa cultivation to expand in other parts of Africa, where the crop could soon be a driver for further deforestation in Liberia, Cameroon and the Congo basin. The challenge is therefore as much about anticipating future challenges in those and other countries as doing better in those that are already major producers.

The Prince of Wales congratulated the companies for taking

additional steps towards forest conservation and encouraged them to scale up their efforts in the knowledge that it is indeed possible to increase food production while at the same time conserving and restoring the tropical rainforests. 'I have for many years been deeply committed to the protection of the world's tropical rainforests', he said. 'They play an absolutely crucial role, both globally, and locally, in climate change mitigation and adaptation.'

Following the March meeting more cocoa and chocolate companies are expected to join the initiative. The growing group of businesses will work together with the World Cocoa Foundation and the Sustainable Trade Initiative on a further planning and consultation process, including farmer groups and non-governmental organisations, to bring a joint framework to the climate change talks convened by Fiji at the end of 2017 and taking place in Bonn, Germany.

As a result of these efforts, the warm feelings engendered by the world's ultimate comfort food could be all the more pleasant if companies can indeed successfully build forest protection and restoration into how they procure their most vital and amazing ingredient.

FIND OUT MORE

- More on the International Sustainability Unit is at pcfsu.org/
- View Tony's biography, books, articles and speeches at tonyjuniper.com
- Find out why Divine Chocolate is a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes

'The most powerful direct reason for action is that deforestation threatens to undermine the very resilience of the cocoa sector itself, and with it the livelihoods of the millions of smallholders who depend on it, due to the increased climate variability that follows forest loss.'

HRH The Prince of Wales

RIGHT
Cocoa pods near Tai Forest National Park, Côte d'Ivoire

BELOW
Cocoa en route to market

PHOTOGRAPHY TONY JUNIPER, ELEANOR CHURCH, ISTOCK





Plant-based food sales are soaring – and it's a movement Lynette Sinclair saw coming

There are now over half a million vegans in Great Britain – that's three and a half times the number estimated in 2006, and more are almost guaranteed to follow. Celebrities, models and first-class athletes serve as glowing testament to a fully vegan lifestyle, while countless others endorse ditching meat and dairy for one day a week ('Meat-Free Monday') or a month of the year ('Veganuary').

WHAT'S DRIVING THE SHIFT?

A whopping 59,500 people pledged to go vegan in January 2017 – well over double last year's figure. While animals were cited as the main reason for abstaining from meat and dairy, health was the next biggest reason given for taking part.

The benefits of plant-based diets are now hard to ignore: the British Dietetic Association has stated that 'well-planned plant-based, vegan-friendly diets can be devised to support healthy living at every age and life-stage', and researchers at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital recently found exchanging just a small amount of processed red meat for plant protein reduces the risk of early death by 34%.

A UK FIRST

One person who has been on the inside track of the surge in veganism is Lynette Sinclair

(pictured), MD of Devon-based Tideford Organics. The brand has a 20-year history of creating award-winning products tailored to specialist diets; its soups are free from gluten, have no added sugar and come bursting with organic superfoods – perfect for flexitarians, coeliacs, vegans and meat-lovers alike.

Last year, Lynette made a bold move: she cut all meat and dairy from Tideford's products and launched the UK's first organic range of vegan soups, broths and sauces.

The exotic flavours and supercharged ingredients – from spirulina and seaweed to black onion seed and quinoa – have been a hit



with conscious foodies and health buffs, and sales of Tideford's vegan soup range are up 44%. With two new flavours – Pea with Turmeric and Coconut Milk and Gazpacho Andaluz – lined up for summer, sales show no sign of slowing.

CONSCIOUS LIFESTYLES

While the decision to take Tideford vegan was astute from a business point of view, Lynette's wider goal is to help the shift to a more conscious way of living. Tideford sponsored 2017's Veganuary and is also the headline sponsor of Vevolution, a vegan and conscious living festival. Like Tideford, Vevolution champions the new wave of veganism by bringing vegans and non-vegans together to celebrate the health, climate and ethical benefits of a plant-based lifestyle – all while enjoying the best of plant-based food.

And with a range that gets better every season, we suspect Tideford will win a few more hearts – not to mention awards – before the year's out.

FIND OUT MORE

- Tideford's full range is at tidefordorganics.com/range
- More on Vevolution is at vevolution.co/2017
- Take the pledge to eat more veg at tidefordorganics.com

THE DIRT ON SOIL

All life depends on it and all food needs it – so why aren't we doing more to protect our soil?

Great food needs great soil – but it's very easy to forget about what's in the ground beneath our feet and why it's so important to protect it.

One tablespoon of soil contains more organisms than there are people on Earth; billions of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms combine with minerals, water, air and organic matter to create a living system that supports plants and, in turn, all life.

Healthy soil can store as much as 3,750 tonnes of water per hectare, reducing the risk of flooding, and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said that 89% of all agricultural emissions could be mitigated if we improved the health of our soil.

Good soil management also increases disease resistance in livestock and ultimately drives profits for farmers – yet soil and its impact on the health of our animals has, over recent decades, been one of the most neglected links in UK agriculture.

APPROACHES TO FARMING

Over the last 50 years agriculture has become increasingly dependent on chemical fertilisers, with applications today around 10 times higher than in the 1950s. Farmers often think the chemical fertiliser NPK (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) provides all the nutrition a plant requires, but it also has a detrimental effect on the long-term health of the land: research suggests there are fewer than 100 harvests left in many of the world's soils.

Organic agriculture is perhaps the most effective and efficient way to protect our soil. In order to meet organic milk standards, dairy

cows must be outside for as much of the year as pasture conditions allow, and given a forage-based diet – usually in the form of silage – if they need to be housed. The cows' diet must also be kept free from pesticides and GMOs, meaning that the grass – and therefore the soil it grows from – must be kept in peak health using only natural methods.

'FREE RANGE' MILK

A new innovation that hit Asda's shelves in February is 'free range' milk, from cows that have spent a minimum of 180 days outside (compared with the 215 days per year that organic cows typically graze outdoors). While free range milk may not meet the same production standards as organic milk, it gives consumers an extra choice and gets more cows outdoors, so many would argue it can only be a good thing.

'Free range milk presents a great half-way house for shoppers who want milk from a known system with standards in place, but who choose not – or are unable – to buy organic', explains Tim Mead, chairman of Yeo Valley. 'Lower input farming, with less artificial fertiliser and a greater reliance on grass than grain, has to be of benefit to our soils', he adds, 'so it's great to see more farmers moving towards this approach.'

LOVE FOOD?

For over 20 years Yeo Valley has partnered with OMSCo (Organic Milk Suppliers' Cooperative),



'One tablespoon of soil contains more organisms than there are people on Earth'

and farms organically on its own land in Somerset. 'We place a huge importance on the welfare of our animals and fully support all moves to produce food for our country from healthy animals that have been well treated and reared predominantly on grass', says Tim. 'After all, a forage-based diet is one of the key attributes of organic certification.' Another requirement is that steps are taken to protect and enhance wildlife, meaning certified organic farmland hosts 50% more wildlife than the average farm.

All this helps the soil to flourish naturally, and healthy soil is the only starting point for healthy food and a healthy planet. So whatever food you choose, just remember: if you love great food, remember to love our soils, too. It's where all our food comes from.

FIND OUT MORE

- Yeo Valley's family farming history is at yeovalley.co.uk/the-valley/our-family-farming
- Plan your visit to Yeo Valley's organic garden or award-winning canteen at yeovalley.co.uk/the-valley/places
- Find out why Yeo Valley is a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes

Gaining ground on LOSING SOIL

There are three pillars of life: air, water and soil. We destroy these at our peril.

We hear a lot about air quality standards: who wants to return to the days of blackened curtains, when voices were hoarse from lingering smog? We all need clean water and in this country, thanks in large part to the EU, it's guaranteed by enforceable standards. So we have measurable clean air and water standards – but no standards for soil quality.

If I buy land and over the years deplete the soil, leave it bare and allow it to run off in floods, who will stop me from selling it for twice the price once I've exhausted it?

THE IMPACT OF FARMING

The current picture of our soils is bleak. We've spent the last century squeezing every last drop out of them, so they no longer store carbon, topsoil is being eroded as a result of flooding and flood damage is on the rise, leading to an inexorable spiral of decline.

Food produced on depleted soils is low in nutrients, yet 'conventional' farming produces monocultures of cereals that deplete the soils and require chemical fertilisers and pesticides, compounding the problem of soil degradation. Cows are often kept in barns and fed cereals that have been produced in this way. If instead they were raised on natural grassland as part of a healthy soil ecosystem, the resultant ecological cycles would take carbon out of the atmosphere and store it in soils, helping to offset cattle-related methane. Maintaining healthy soils is one of the major ways in which we can tackle climate change.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Meeting our need for healthy soil demands imagination and commitment. The alternative is famine, such as those afflicting remote and distant landscapes. Such a result would be borne from our failure to act on a looming crisis.

Such disasters are not new; the Dust Bowl erosion of the Great Plains in the 1930s was the result of policies that led to the grassland – which traps moisture and holds the soil together – being converted to arable land for cultivated



Ellen Fay,
co-director of
Soils in Crisis,
on the global
challenge of
restoring soil
health

FIND OUT MORE

- Get involved with Soils in Crisis at soilsincrisis.org
- More on food security in Africa is at treeaid.org.uk



crops. The soils blew away in great Aeolian dust clouds and the famine that followed was embedded in folk memory by Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. At the time Congress passed a law that recognised 'the wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forest lands... is a menace to the national welfare'. Despite this warning way back in 1935, ecologist David Pimental says that soil in the USA today is being lost 10 times faster than it can naturally be replenished.

THE UK PICTURE

The issue of soil degradation is a global one, unseen by the masses, largely unremarked upon and insidious. We have an opportunity to take a leading role in managing our national approach and to serve as a beacon for others at a time when disharmony seems to be the order of the day.

The UK loses 2.9 million tonnes of topsoil a year; it's blown away and washed into our rivers and seas along with chemical pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers. Rivers of contaminated mud are pouring into the oceans and we're losing a third of our topsoil to erosion. In what other sector would you accept the loss of a third of your asset?

SETTING A STANDARD

Against this dark background has come a clarion call, originating in the west of England, that is uniting academics, financiers, farmers, retailers, scientists, politicians and environmental organisations. The call, from Soils in Crisis, transcends boundaries between interest groups, with support from the Soil Association, the Eden Project, the Woodland Trust and other strong leaders.

The aim is to identify the risks of the continued degradation of our soils, quantify the costs and map out strategies to stop and reverse the trends in a bid to restore our soils to sustainable health within one generation. This can only be achieved by implementing a minimum soil health standard, such as those we have for air and water, and a commonly agreed method for measuring quality and improvement. Only then will this third pillar of all life have the protection it needs.



SUNDAY LUNCH AT **River Cottage**

Well we couldn't meet the head chef without enjoying a delicious vegan roast, could we?

This wasn't your average Sunday roast. For starters (and mains – and desserts) ours was vegan and, perhaps the best part, the only menu in sight was a drinks list. All we really knew about what we were about to eat was that almost all the ingredients had been produced within two miles of the barn we'd gathered in.

Nestled in the Axe Valley on the Dorset-Devon border, River Cottage HQ is a 17th-century farmhouse – Park Farm – with 66 acres of land attached. The barns have been converted to host dining experiences and cookery courses; around 65 diners can easily fit round the two long trestle tables – and you should expect every event to be fully booked.

Our Sunday Lunch in late February was no exception; 63 people were booked in to eat, though there was no way of knowing even ballpark numbers until we all sat down together. A tractor had ferried us from the car park in small batches, and we were encouraged to look round the farm and enjoy a delicious Kingston Black apple apéritif in the yurt (complete with wood-burning stove and hay-bale seating) before entering the barn and finding our spots on the seating plan.

A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Unless you have specific dietary requirements, everyone eats the same meal – announced to the room by head chef Gelf Alderson (pictured above) just prior to service. On the menu that day was a slow-cooked heifer who, at the ripe old age of 13, had just shuffled off her mortal coil. The diners didn't seem at all fazed that the first thing to digest was a short biography of their lunch, but then if you're not interested in provenance you have no place at River Cottage.

'We don't want to make anyone uncomfortable or unhappy', Gelf explained when we sat down for a chat after service, 'but at the same time we don't shy away from produce. We're connected to the animals and feel a responsibility to make

the most – and get the best – out of each one. Absolutely nothing is wasted.'

Gelf has a captive audience at every sitting, meaning there's an opportunity to challenge preconceptions and revisit foods diners might have written off. 'A lot of people haven't eaten things like liver since they were at school, and they might have avoided it ever since', he says. 'We use the whole animal here, and we want to send people home to their own kitchens knowing how delicious things like offal can be.' Still, the more controversial menu items are reserved for smaller courses; if brains ever appear they do so as a canapé or a fourth course, never as the main event.

VIVA LA VEGGIE!

One reason to trust Gelf with vegan and vegetarian requests is that he was raised veggie; he only changed his diet when, at 13, he felt his calling to become a chef.

Our vegan Sunday Lunch was absolutely stunning: from the most tender purple sprouting broccoli to a main course of leek, mushroom and artichoke ragout – complete with a separate plate of vegan roast parsnips and potatoes – and the most delicious chocolate torte with a toasted hazelnut base and blood orange sorbet.

Every component was prepared and presented

with unbelievable care and consideration, as though each ingredient had been hand-picked and given a sponge bath before ending up on our plates. In reality, local producers deliver what they have to the River Cottage kitchen and Gelf has to get creative; it's a welcome twist on the *Ready, Steady, Cook* style of chéfining and ensures the produce in every meal is at its seasonal best.

OPEN DOORS POLICY

It's a challenge but one Gelf thrives on – and the kitchen is unbelievably calm. The doors are open for the vast majority of service and guests are encouraged to pop in to say hello. 'Most people have never seen a working kitchen before', Gelf explains, 'so it's nice for them to be able to come in and have a look. We talk a lot about ethics and morals here so it's important to instil confidence in our guests. The best way to do that is by being completely open.'

The three-course lunch, rounded off with coffees and petit fours, is extremely reasonable at £55 per head (£15 for under-12s). The portions are generous but the walk back up to the car park will sort you out – though if you can't face it (or want to buy more bottles of Kingston Black apple apéritif than you can carry) then fear not: the tractor will be on hand to bounce you back up the track.



FIND OUT MORE

- To book Sunday Lunch at River Cottage, visit rivercottage.net/dining-and-events/sunday-lunch
- More on River Cottage's cookery courses is at rivercottage.net/cookery-courses
- Browse upcoming events at rivercottage.net/calendar



CHOCOLATE with a CONSCIENCE

Seed and Bean has a kaleidoscope of bold, natural flavours – and scores top marks in the ethics department, too



Jonathan Shorts and Colm Curran had been involved in the organic sector for nearly 20 years before taking over Seed and Bean, the artisan British chocolate company. 'There was a gap in the market for a new bold, creative boutique brand to stand up against the other 'organic' chocolate brands that had, we felt, started to lose their identity and their integrity', Jonathan says. 'We are passionate about the importance of trading fairly, using only organic, natural ingredients and creating totally traceable products of the highest quality.'

The company originally brought together the two elements of cocoa and seeds; it started off making chocolate-covered seeds and beans – and so the brand Seed and Bean was born.

EXPERIMENTAL ARTISANS

The brand launched in June 2005 with the mission to make the most ethical, sustainable and delicious organic British chocolate. While most organic and Fairtrade chocolate sold in the UK is made thousands of miles away and most probably shipped in by specialist transport, Seed and Bean makes its

ethical chocolate at a deliberately small production facility in Northamptonshire, saving food miles and creating local employment.

Seed and Bean's batch size is just 45 litres – a fraction of the 20-50,000 litres per batch of industrially produced chocolate – so each run can be tasted and tweaked. 'Making our chocolate by hand in small UK batches means we're able to ensure first-class production', Colm explains. 'Quality overrides quantity; when it comes to chocolate, we really are artisans.'

The courage to do things differently has seen Seed and Bean make some bold moves: it uses fully home-compostable 'foil' wrappers made from eucalyptus wood pulp, and isn't afraid of creating 'courageous chocolate' using daring new flavours from Nature. They're mixed to transform the simplicity of a pure cocoa bean into what Seed and Bean calls 'kaleidoscopic moments of pleasure'.

Currently, the 23-strong menu of full-flavoured bars includes tastes from Aromatic Fennel, Thyme, Chilli, Lime, Coffee, Coconut, Cornish Sea Salt, Raspberry, Cardamom, Poppy Seed and Hemp. The chocolate is available in milk, white or dark

bars, with the award-winning dark flavours – which contain 58% to 100% cocoa – certified as being suitable for vegans. Some tastes are easy on the palette, some quite unusual and others will electrify your tastebuds – all in a good way, of course. There are no 'hints of' or 'flavourings'; if the real ingredient can't be used then the idea's dropped and the bar's not created. 'The focus has always been on using, where possible, organic ingredients from small-scale suppliers', Jonathan says, 'while at the same time being brave with flavours rarely tasted in confectionery.'

DEVILISHLY DARK

Seed and Bean assures us that its latest concoctions – the 100% Dark Chocolate Bar and the 80% Dark Chocolate Bar – are its best yet. They're definitely a good option for the true dark chocolate connoisseur who enjoys a punchy hit of cocoa. The deep and velvety chocolate delivers the ultimate intensity with none of the bitterness you can get from dark chocolate. The strong flavours mix with the spicy, nutty and woody tones, keeping the chocolate smooth and creamy. The 100% and 80% Dark Chocolate bars are made from 100% premium organic cacao beans grown and cultivated by 396 farmer families in the tropical lowlands of Ecuador – the most biodiverse country on Earth. From that exquisite paradise, the highly regarded Fino de Aroma cacao variety delivers a discernible and unparalleled depth in aroma and flavour.

FAIR TRADE

Seed and Bean works closely with its suppliers, in some cases paying well above the market price for their highest quality cacao beans to ensure the farmers receive their deserved share of the entire farmer-to-consumer process – a difference that profoundly affects the producers' quality of life.

'By applying our knowledge of the market, we aim to help growers produce a far greater yield of a finer, higher quality bean – without compromising on quality.'

FIND OUT MORE

- Find Seed and Bean chocolate in Planet Organic, Selfridges, Wholefoods, WH Smith, Abel & Cole and independents nationwide
- Visit seedandbean.co.uk for a full list of flavours
- The Good Shopping Guide ratings are at thegoodshoppingguide.com

RIGHT
Seed and Bean pays farmers well above the market price

BELOW
The dark chocolate bars are made from 100% premium organic cacao beans



'There was a gap in the market for a new bold, creative boutique brand to stand up against the other so-called 'organic' chocolate brands'

MEET Mitchell & Dickinson

This dynamite duo has developed invisible insulation for period properties

At the end of February, the Green Building Council reported to parliament that 25 million homes would need refurbishing to the highest standards by 2050 – at a rate of 1.4 homes every minute – if we're going to meet our mid-century goal of an 80% cut in carbon emissions.

With a third of UK emissions caused by heating draughty buildings – and four-fifths of the homes we'll occupy in 2050 already built – we're in dire need of a retrofitting revolution.

GETTING STARTED

This isn't a new problem: Mukti Mitchell was on an internship in parliament when, back in 2010, MPs sought ways to insulate Britain's old housing stock. Always up for a challenge (Mukti sailed round Britain on an eco-yacht to promote sustainable lifestyles), he was inspired to tackle the issue head-on.

'Britain has 27 million homes so if we knocked them all down and built new ones it would take 270 years, so that's impossible,' Mukti explains. 'Our old buildings are also an important part of our national heritage and beauty and make many of us happy. Retrofitting insulation is keeping the best of the old and the new: it gives people jobs, is far less

expensive and uses far fewer new materials. Can you imagine how many trees it'd take to rebuild our 270 million windows?'

Mukti joined forces with Paul Dickinson, who was inspired by Mukti's tenacity and commitment to addressing climate change. 'I was told insulation provided the best return on investment anybody could reasonably seek to obtain', Paul tells us. 'I was very interested in getting into the insulation business, as it could help people save money by taking action on climate change, a win-win situation.'

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

Some of the greatest potential savings are locked up in the UK's period properties, so a decent retrofit can make a serious dent in owners' energy bills. 'Insulation can save owners of older homes over a thousand pounds a year', says Mukti.

Paul and Mukti launched CosyHome Company in a bid to make period properties as warm as they are beautiful. 'We offer CosyGlazing – a new, virtually invisible secondary glazing – as well as loft, draught, floor and sloping ceiling insulation', Mukti tells us. 'Together these save up to 50% of the heat from leaking out of your house. It makes you warm, offers a return on investment of 10-20% per year and is good for the planet, too.'

'As a society we need to learn that applying skilled labour to improve properties is much more valuable than throwing away the old and starting from scratch. Skilled jobs are much better than cut down forests.'

Paul Dickinson, co-founder of CosyHome Company

HOW IT WORKS

CosyGlazing saves 70% of the heat lost through windows. It's made from plexiglass, the unbreakable material used for aeroplane windows, which is attached to the opening sashes using magnetic tapes.

Unlike double glazing – which is expensive, changes the look of your windows and only lasts 10 years – CosyGlazing is almost invisible, approved for listed buildings and has a design life of at least 30 years. 'Warmth that preserves the natural beauty of your home without requiring planning permission', Paul summarises. 'What's not to like?'

NEXT STOP: THE WHITEHOUSE?

Mukti is desperate to insulate Buckingham Palace and Paul sits by the phone every day waiting for the National Trust to call. The duo would also like to help churches and other places where unique architecture presents a special challenge. 'I was at the Whitehouse in 2013 and the building manager did actually ask me for a quote to do the windows of the Executive Office building', Paul reveals. 'Fortunately we're too busy in the UK right now to consider US expansion.'

FIND OUT MORE

- More on CosyGlazing is at cosyhomecompany.co.uk/cosy_glazing.html
- All CosyHome Company's services are listed at cosyhomecompany.co.uk
- See why CosyGlazing is a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes





THE REUSE REVOLUTION

A new online marketplace connects builders, DIYers and charities with materials destined for landfill

Reiss Salustro-Pilson and Nigel Van Wassenhoven (pictured) have both worked in the construction industry and witnessed first-hand how much reusable material ends up in a skip and, ultimately, landfill. Frustrated by the wasteful nature of the sector, they launched a peer-to-peer marketplace that keeps surplus and reusable materials from the construction and DIY industries out of the waste stream.

'Globally, the construction industry demands over half of all humanity's resources and creates a third of global waste', Reiss tells us. 'The UK construction sector alone generates 120 million tonnes of waste per year – over half of which is reusable.' It's estimated that 13% of that material – worth over £1.5bn – ends up as 'waste' without ever having been used. With forecasts suggesting the global construction market will grow by 70% by 2025, the problem's only set to get worse.

FROM PAINT TO ROOF TILES

As an alternative to the linear economy of 'take, make and dispose', the Enviromate marketplace makes it easy to recirculate, redistribute and reuse materials that would otherwise end up in the skip. It's open to anyone – from tradesmen to DIY enthusiasts – and allows users to buy or sell anything from a few tins of paint to pallets of bricks, timber and roof tiles. 'We are harnessing and embracing the rise of both digital technology and sharing economy principles to help propel the growth of the circular economy', Reiss explains. 'Reusable materials are kept out of the waste stream and value is not destroyed; instead, it's preserved and also created, through the

sharing and trading of under-utilised resources.' **SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES** Enviromate also connects larger developers to community projects and charities that could benefit from their surplus materials. 'Enviromate Donate is a separate area that lets communities and charities list projects with material requirements, so a developer or wholesaler with a larger surplus can match their unwanted materials to a suitable project', Reiss explains.

Enviromate has helped nonprofit Rebuilt4U to regenerate derelict housing stock and provide affordable housing in some of the UK's most deprived areas. Another charity has used surplus paint sourced through Enviromate to bolster its multi-sensory services for children and young people with additional needs, and a community growing project has used the marketplace to source top soil from a local construction project.

THE IMPACT SO FAR

The overall goal is to increase a product's lifecycle, reduce waste to landfill and decrease the burden on the planet's natural resources – and it seems to be working.

To date over 7,000 tonnes of material have been listed for reuse on the Enviromate marketplace, and the volume of surplus diverted from the waste stream is enough to fill more than four olympic swimming pools, with a gross merchandise volume close to £1m.

It's perhaps no surprise that the platform, which has attracted 20,000 members, has been extremely well received within the industry and beyond; Enviromate was recognised as Pioneer of the Year at 2016's P.E.A. Awards and

shortlisted at 2015's Observer Ethical Awards.

DISRUPTING AN INDUSTRY

Reiss and Nigel have been dubbed 'industry disruptors' for revolutionising the construction sector – and it's an approach Reiss feels should be replicated across all industries. 'Today's world is in urgent need of disruptive and regenerative solutions to new and existing challenges', he tells us, 'be it environmental sustainability, natural resource depletion, poverty alleviation, wealth disparity, access to clean water, public health or the protection of endangered species. Disruption along with existing corporate reinvention is simply our natural human progression: transforming and moving towards a collaborative world driven to redefine current norms and accelerate business under an oath of planet, people, prosperity.'

According to Reiss, we must use and embrace technology to harness resources in an ethical and sustainable way – and inspire others to do the same. 'It will be through education that we can seize the opportunity, along with impactful investing in the future agents of change and pioneers that this world so desperately requires', he tells us. 'Change comes from within and only once we realise this will the world be a prosperous place for all.'

FIND OUT MORE

- More about Enviromate is at enviromate.co.uk
- Search listings on the marketplace at enviromate.co.uk/marketplace
- All 2016's P.E.A. Awards are at mygreenpod.com/articles/p-e-award-2016-winners/



Outdoor LIVING

Why wait for festival season?

THE YORKSHIRE HUT COMPANY

Forget the extension: if you're looking for extra living space then the search ends here.

A shepherd's hut is the perfect environment for living, working or getting away from it all.

Over the last eight years The Yorkshire Hut Company has handcrafted over 40 shepherd's huts from its workshop in York. It has created home offices, studios, extra space for growing families and even a bespoke fishing hut for cricketer legend Sir Ian Botham!

The family business has also designed and built huts for award-winning rental businesses, fitting solar lighting and compost toilets for clients with off-grid getaways and underfloor heating, micro kitchens and even wet rooms for others with luxury glamping sites.

The timber is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, the windows are double glazed and the walls, floors and ceilings have Thermafleece insulation made from locally sourced sheep's wool. From individually stained glass windows and hand-carved plaques to concealed time capsules, wood-burning stoves and bespoke furniture, every detail is crafted by a team of fully qualified experts.

'We believe in diversity in the workplace', says Pennie Lordan, business manager at The Yorkshire Hut Company, 'so our team is made up of craftspeople of various ages. We value experience and recognise the importance of passing skills forward to future generations, so we always employ and train a bench joiner apprentice.' There's even an in-house Yorkshire

welder who makes the chassis and axles, and the large ductile cast iron wheels are cast in a Yorkshire foundry from recycled brake discs. As well as looking gorgeous the wheels mean the huts don't usually require planning permission.

They may evoke the charm of a forgotten time, but the thermal qualities of these shepherd's huts put many modern homes to shame.

FIND OUT MORE

- View a gallery and testimonials at theyorkshirehutcompany.com
- See why The Yorkshire Hut Company is a MyGreenPod.com Hero at mygreenpod.com/heroes

WOWO

For anyone without space in the garden – or without a garden – for a shepherd's hut, fear not: there are other ways to get a taste of outdoor luxury.

Wowo campsite in Sussex offers a whole menu of glamping options, including a range of yurts, shepherd's huts and lotus bell tents. It's camping, but not as you know it.

Imagine driving up to your own bell tent, unzipping the canvas and finding a luxurious space fully equipped with pans, crockery, cutlery, candles, beds – in a tent! – and bedding. While other not-so-happy campers wrestle with damp canvases and leaky tarpaulins, your only concern is whether to give in to the temptation of a wood-fired pizza from the visiting van.

You have your own fire pit – with logs delivered to your spot by tractor – so in a matter of minutes you can be toasting marshmallows, brewing coffee or snuggling up to watch the sun set with a glass of wine.

It might all feel a bit fraudulent if you're used to 'proper' camping, but the beauty of the glamping experience at Wowo is that you're free to enjoy great activities with friends and family.

A central 'village' area brings campers together for free soup and acoustic music on Saturday evenings, and there are daytime workshops for all ages and interests – from foraging and wild herbalism to basketry and pottery.

Still, you may well find your luxury glamping quarters so comfortable that all you want to do is kick back and enjoy the crackle of wildfire – and the clearest sky of stars you're likely to see anywhere south of the Humber.

FIND OUT MORE

- Booking is essential – check the calendar at wowo.co.uk/planning-your-stay
- View all activities at wowo.co.uk/workshops



PHOTOGRAPHY: STAFF CRAGG, PENNIE LORDAN

Lexus RX 450h Premier



According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), UK car sales were at a record high in 2016 – with ‘alternative fuel’ cars representing the biggest growth area. Sales increased by 22.2%, with SUVs topping the charts across Europe. It’s great news – but why are people choosing bigger cars that are unconventionally powered and can go off road? I decided to find out.

A LUXURY HYBRID

The fourth generation Lexus RX 450h Premier (the ‘h’ is for ‘hybrid’) was recommended and the test drive was sorted: Brighton to Dorset to visit the world’s best staff canteen at Yeo Valley HQ in Somerset, followed by an equally highly recommended Sunday lunch at River Cottage (see page 31).

The RX oozes appeal: fat wheels, snarling grill, defined slick yet curvaceous lines with a large back end (did I really say that?) in a stunning range of colours – and we all know that’s a crucial point when choosing a car these days.

Another factor to consider is, of course, the number of miles you get from each gallon of fuel (MPG). For me this was around 36 – with quite heavy driving on an off motorways, up and down country lanes and in and (just!) out of fields. Published figures are 51.4MPG and CO₂ emissions of 127g/km, which frankly is awesome for such a big beast.

MY VERDICT

The RX 450h combines a great sense of luxury with a whole lot of fun, and I really loved driving this car. It has a claimed top speed of 124mph and was plenty fast enough for me to enjoy while giving the family a spacious, comfortable and luxurious ride. It combines a 259bhp 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine with an electric motor mounted on each axle. It costs £59,495,



Jarvis Smith gets some dirt on the wheels of this luxurious hybrid SUV

but offers a generous equipment level as well as the prospect of a £100-a-month company car tax saving for those who might be tempted to buy a six-cylinder diesel alternative.

The RX comes equipped with some great features for comfort and convenience: the satnav was efficient, the music system was a joy to use, the seat position was perfect and the huge sunroof was an absolute treat. All in all the full package really worked for me.

But the real test was the RX’s off-road capabilities: the days of Chelsea tractors posing at the school gates seem to be nearing an end, with drivers more interested in getting downright dirty in off-road adventures these days. So that’s exactly what I did.

THE OFF-ROAD EXPERIENCE

We stopped off at Yeo Valley HQ and Tim Mead, the chairman and a great friend, jumped in to direct me to where his award-winning cows hang out. Wet, rolling expanses of open fields: perfect conditions for this car (and Tim’s cows).

Now, I’m not an experienced off-roader – and, while I took some comfort from Tim’s assurance that a tractor could come and tow us out of any problems, I was determined not to get stuck with this wise farmer in the passenger seat. I’d have died of embarrassment.

Unsure how best to negotiate the bog, Tim offered a few gentle tips and off we went. 30 minutes later – and with a few close calls (down to me, not the car) – I had survived the humiliation of being rescued by locals rolling their eyes at city folk in their city cars. Not this baby.

The RX 450h hit the spot: if you want a luxury SUV that’s kinder to the planet and can handle any adventure – with the likelihood of some wet UK weather thrown in – this is your car. I loved it.

FIND OUT MORE

- View the full spec, range and prices at lexus.co.uk/car-models/rx/rx-450h
- To book a test drive visit lexus.co.uk

Pedal Power

E-bikes are taking off in the UK – and a new tax break could encourage even more people to saddle up

What's not to love about electric bikes? They address all the things that put people off cycling in one clean, green, effortless go. Not fit enough to get up the hill home? No problem – just sit back and the motor will give your legs a hand. Don't want to arrive at your destination all hot and sticky? Fear not – the assistance will kick in as soon as you start pedalling, which could be long before you're close to working up a sweat.

HOW E-BIKES WORK

There are two broad kinds of electric bike on the market: the more basic models work with a cadence sensor, which triggers the electric assistance when it detects the rider is turning the pedals. When the rider stops pedalling, the assistance stops. More sophisticated e-bikes combine cadence sensors with additional pressure sensors, which read the level of force applied to the pedals and adjust the motorised assistance accordingly. 'It's not a free ride', warns David Miall, managing director of AMPS Electric Bikes (manufacturer of Wisper bikes); 'the rider must be pedalling for the assistance to kick in.'

The benefit of an e-bike is that a rider can choose exactly how much effort they want to put in; an electric bicycle will give a rider assistance on journeys of up to 75 miles. Once you're moving you can take your electric bike

anywhere you'd ride a standard bike and it will go just as fast – though UK and European law forbids motorised assistance at speeds higher than 15.5mph. 'Wherever there's a road or track', David tells us, 'there is an e-bike that's perfect for the job – from very serious downhill mountain bikes, which can command up to £10,000 for the latest carbon models, to light and nimble city and trekking bikes starting at around £1,000.'

When you've finished riding you simply plug the bike into a wall socket, as you would a laptop or phone, and it'll be fully charged in about 4.5 hours – adding about 20p to your electricity bill.

REFINING DESIGN

Wisper was one of the very first brands of e-bike to appear in the UK, and David admits that the first electric bike he sold, back in the summer of 2005, 'sounded a little like a milk float on steroids'. While the benefits of e-bikes

have always been clear to see, the design and usability have required fine tuning.

Over the last 12 years all components – from the frame to the motor – have been refined, and today Wisper Torque models are among the most quiet, powerful and sophisticated electric bikes on the market. The goal was to develop a practical, stylish and affordable range of bikes designed for everyday use: the motor is now all but silent and nestles neatly and unobtrusively behind the rear gears. 'For day-to-day commuting, getting about town or riding down country lanes, our bikes are ideal', David tells us.

The design is proving a hit; 'Our customers include children of 14 riding to school, young parents in Chelsea going about their daily business, commuters, motorhome owners, octogenarians and people who simply want to improve their fitness and help reduce pollution in our cities', David says. With six e-bikes in the Wisper range – including a folding bike and a traditional crossbar bike – Wisper seems to have the ideal model for everyone.

It's been a long time coming, but the UK is finally starting to catch up with Germany, Holland, Denmark and other cycling nations, where electric bicycles account for over half the adult bike market. 'People all over the UK have started to discover the health benefits and sheer joy that come from e-bike riding', says David. 'E-bikes are used to ride further and ridden more often than the vast majority of standard bikes. The UK market's now growing at an incredible rate; we have three times as many bikes on order as we did this time last year; the season has certainly started with a bang!'

THE GREEN COMMUTE INITIATIVE

Electric bikes could be about to get even more popular thanks to the Green Commute Initiative (GCI), a revolutionary new version of the popular Cycle to Work scheme that specifically targets e-bikes. This social enterprise is the only Cycle to Work provider authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority; unlike other Cycle to Work schemes GCI has no £1,000 upper limit and no sting in the tail for employees who want to own their bike.

'Whenever I commute or travel in the City I use an e-bike – and I always make sure I'm really smartly dressed in a suit and tie', says Rob Howes, managing director at GCI Ltd. 'When I arrive I

apologise for wearing my cycling clothes. People are always astonished that I can commute on an e-bike and arrive looking smart and relaxed.'

Under the initiative commuters will pay 32-42% less for an e-bike, depending on whether they're lower or higher rate taxpayers. Unlike the standard Cycle to Work scheme, where employees have to pay a hefty fee to own the bike, the cost of ownership with GCI is just £1.

'42% of people who don't cycle to work say it's because they aren't fit enough, there's a hill, it's too far or they don't want to arrive hot and sweaty', Rob tells us. 'All of these concerns disappear with an e-bike. We also know from academic research carried out by Brighton University that people who have access to an e-bike use their cars 20% less.'

GCI is working with the City of London to help get more commuters out of cars and onto e-bikes. 'I see e-bikes as a valuable tool to help us reduce traffic congestion and help improve air quality', says Rory McMullan, behaviour change manager at the City of London. 'I've become a fan

'E-bikes are used to ride further and ridden more often than the vast majority of standard bikes.'

because my 17-mile commute is easily possible and, after a long day at the office, I know I'll have the legs to get home again easily.'

Employers including Heathrow Airport are promoting the scheme because they're aware of the benefits of getting employees out of their cars. A tax break provides an added incentive; employers will save 13.8% of the bike's value in unpaid employer NI. A final bonus is that GCI can finance the cost of the scheme to employers, so cash flow is untouched. 'From a corporate perspective it's a no-brainer', Rob says. 'There's no cash outlay, you'll have happy employees, admin's handled by GCI and you'll still save on tax. There has never been a better – or cheaper – opportunity for employers to help improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion.'

FIND OUT MORE



■ More on the Green Commute Initiative is at <http://greencommuteinitiative.uk>

WISPER

■ Visit mygreenpod.com/ competitions for your chance to win a Wisper 705 SE
■ View the full range of Wisper bikes at <https://wisperbikes.com>





SMOKE without fire

Katie Hill explores Iceland's hot springs and hidden greenhouses with a new buddy

The capital city of Iceland got its name from the plumes of 'smoke' Viking settler Ingólfr Arnarson observed as he landed on the shores of what became the world's northernmost capital. Reykjavik means 'smokey bay', but the clouds that puff and burp from the frozen ground are actually columns of steam, spurting from geysers that channel water boiled beneath the Earth's surface.

Iceland sits on top of the Mid-Atlantic ridge, the 40,000km crack in the ocean floor that was created when the North American and Eurasian plates separated. As you'll remember from geography lessons, tectonic plates can rub against each other, collide head-on or move apart, exposing the lava sea beneath. When this happens, the pressure's released in an eruption of lava that streams to the surface and cools to form new land. And that's what's happening in Iceland.

Between 30 and 40 of the volcanoes on Iceland's central plateau are active, meaning they've erupted within the last few centuries. Four of them could have blown at any time during our visit in February; Katla, Hekla, Bárðarbunga and Grímsvötn are well overdue a major eruption. We all remember when Iceland's other major volcano, Eyjafjallajökull, erupted in 2010, spewing an ash cloud that caused travel chaos across Europe and beyond. That was a mere burp; a full-on eruption – like the one in 1783 that poured out the greatest lava flow witnessed on Earth – can lead to famine at home and even spark revolution abroad.

BUDDYING UP

So are the volcanoes cause for concern? Not for the locals. We wanted to make the most of the three days we had on the island so we took advantage of a 'buddy' system offered by Icelandair until the end of March 2017. As part of the deal, travellers explained what kind of holiday they were after and a volunteer from the airline – in our case Ottar from the IT department – created an itinerary and ferried them round in a battle-proof 4x4. Tourists got a bespoke break tailored to their interests and – arguably the best part – saw it all through the eyes of a local. Though the buddy campaign has ended, you can still take advantage of an Icelandair stopover (see opposite page). The airline turns 80 this year so we're expecting other exciting plans to be unveiled soon.

Back to the volcanoes... We were travelling with our almost-one-year-old and just-nine-year-old daughters, and were keen to know whether to avoid any parts of the island for safety's sake. Ottar wasn't even slightly fazed: the volcanoes were part of the natural landscape and nothing to worry about. No one lived up in the mountains, he assured us, and – even though an eruption could occur without warning – he was confident no one would be harmed if it did. So that was that.

WELCOME TO THE WILDERNESS

As we drove out of Reykjavik we met a wilderness I'd never experienced before. Mountains soared from barren land

sprayed with snow, their craggy peaks jutting greys and blacks into a sky that never quite got light. The only trees in this icy desert are grouped in small man-made spinneys; Ottar shared a local joke that anyone lost in Iceland just needs to stand up. Nothing could live here. Nothing could grow here. And yet it does.

The same geological activity that creates volcanoes provides an endless supply of geothermal energy. Over 90% of homes in Iceland are heated using natural geothermal heat – one of the world's cheapest and cleanest forms of energy. Hot springs are just about everywhere, and the meltwater created by sub-glacial volcanoes provides a huge potential source of hydroelectric power. All this clean energy has made Iceland one of the least polluted countries in the world.

We witnessed Iceland's hydro-electric might at the Ljossafoss Hydropower Station museum. The interactive exhibition was as entertaining for the adults as it was for the kids, and it was impossible not to leave with an intense sense of admiration for how right Iceland has got it.

SUSTAINING LIFE

The advances are perhaps in part due to an awareness of vulnerability on the geopolitical stage. Iceland has no army and there is no fear of attack, yet a war elsewhere could spell disaster for an island nation in the North Atlantic that can't even grow its own trees.

So how can you live off land that's too cold to farm in order to avoid dependency on foreign imports? Iceland's answer was to build greenhouses. Lots and lots of greenhouses. Their artificial lights, powered by geothermal energy, blaze during the long, dark winters, creating fiery orange patches of life that look beautifully absurd in their icy surroundings.

ICELANDAIR STOPOVER

Icelandair flies from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow and Aberdeen – plus Belfast from June 2017. There are onward connections to 18 North American gateways. Return flights to Reykjavik start at £147* from Gatwick (£164* from Heathrow), including taxes.

Long haul passengers en route to North America can opt to stay in Iceland for up to seven nights without incurring any extra flight

costs. In fact, if passengers choose to stopover on their outbound journey then they'll save around £50 per person on APD tax.

Icelandair currently flies via Reykjavik to Anchorage, Vancouver, Edmonton, Seattle, Portland, Denver, Minneapolis, Toronto, Orlando, Washington DC, New York (JFK & Newark), Boston, Halifax, Chicago and Montreal. Flights to Philadelphia and Tampa will start in 2017.

*Prices subject to change; correct at time of going to print.



MAIN
Hot springs keep water in the natural lagoons a very comfortable 38-40°C

LEFT
The Namafjall geothermal field

BELOW
Take a ride through volcanic hills and valleys

Inside the high-tech glass structures you'll find everything from flowers to bananas, and one has even opened its doors to visitors. Step into the atrium at Friðheimar and you'll find a hidden gem of a restaurant, where you can watch your lunch grow before your very eyes. We enjoyed a bottomless bowl of tomato soup, served with delicious fresh breads and cucumber salsa, and washed it down with a Healthy Mary – a delicious twist on a Virgin Mary, made from green tomato, lime, honey, ginger and sparkling water.

Bees fly round freely to act as natural pollinators to the four varieties of tomato that grow under panes of glass a mere 4mm thick. The insane heat required to keep the greenhouse warm in sub-zero conditions comes from a borehole that supplies water naturally heated to around 95°C. The whole restaurant experience was something akin to taking the back off a watch to reveal its intelligent design.

A SECRET SPRING

The same natural hot springs that keep the tomatoes (and bees) alive bubble through to the Earth's surface just a short distance away, keeping the water in the 'Secret Lagoon' – or Gamla laugin – at Flúðir a very comfortable 38-40°C. The Secret Lagoon is Iceland's oldest swimming pool, and more secluded than the more popular Blue Lagoon.

A trip to the Secret Lagoon can be combined with a horseback adventure through volcanic hills and valleys with Eldhestar – 'volcano horses' – at Vellir farm. Both spots are easily accessible from the 'Golden Circle', a road that loops round Iceland's most popular natural attractions. The full circuit can easily be done in a day, and will take you straight past Geysir, the world-famous hot spring in the geothermal valley of Haukadalur. While Geysir isn't as active as it used to be, its neighbour, Strokkur, shoots boiling water as far as 40 meters into the air every few minutes.

OUT TO SEA

You can't go all the way to Iceland without getting on a boat and heading out to sea. You might even spot a whale – though our hopes weren't exactly high when we took to the water for a whale-watching tour.

For starters the minke and humpback are migratory – but more importantly Iceland, alongside Japan and Norway, is one of the only countries in the world in which commercial whaling is legal. Tourists are told whale meat is a traditional delicacy, yet a recent poll revealed only around 5% of Icelanders eat it on a regular basis.

Pollution is an added threat; it's been estimated that by 2050 there'll be more plastic than fish in our oceans. Our guides on the Elfing tour were marine biologists with a passion for conservation, and they were thankfully keen to make tourists understand the need to protect all life in our seas.

While whales didn't make an appearance, white-beaked dolphins swam alongside our boat and gave us a great display as they danced in the water. They looked like they were celebrating something very special – perhaps they'd even enlisted the help of a buddy to share it with.

FIND OUT MORE

- More on Icelandair's stopover service is at icelandair.co.uk/flights/stopover
- Find flights at icelandair.co.uk
- For bookings or customer service call +44 (0)20 7874 1000



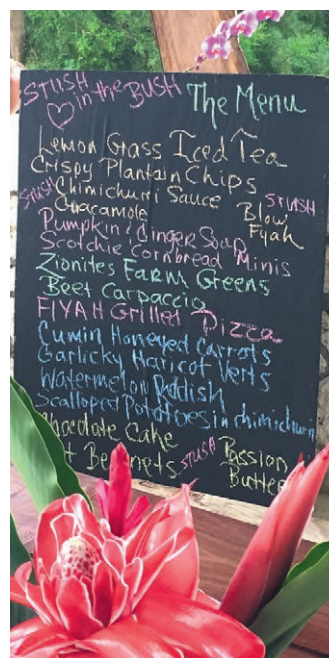
ABOVE
The Rasta movement has ancient links to veganism, and a diet based on unprocessed food that's locally grown



LEFT
Musicians including Amy Winehouse, Snoop Dog, John Legend and Grace Jones have recorded material at Geejam in Port Antonio – and no doubt enjoyed the delicious cocktails

Countries with big personalities can inspire very mixed views from those who haven't visited – and one thing Jamaica has in abundant supply is personality. The island has been calling me for as long as I've been singing *Jammin'* – the lyrics to which were perhaps some of my earliest words. Nearly all of my parents' friends were from the West Indies, so I listened to conversations in patois and enjoyed a diet of ackee, salt fish and friend dumplings until I left home at 15.

Reggae music got me through what seemed to be a major struggle as a youth. Melodies rooted in a deep primal bassline – guided by the voice of love in protest against a history of pain – formed the main soundtrack to my existence. Those same melodies seem all the more urgent in today's mad world. Looking back I could relate to what was being sung; even though I didn't fully understand the words at the time, I could feel the message. My most prolific memory is the music of Bob Marley and the Wailers, which is still deeply engrained in my soul.



You can't bring the farm much closer to the table at Chris and Lisa's Stush in the Bush, St Anne

WHAT'S IN THE WATER?

As my feet touched Jamaican soil for the first time in December 2016, I couldn't help but wonder how this small island has managed to produce so much awesomeness. It's the only country to have created five different recognised genres of music: reggae, mento, ska, rocksteady and dancehall – an achievement so culturally significant that in 2015 Kingston became a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Aside from the music, some of the world's best coffee comes from the Blue Mountain range, an area rich in biodiversity that boasts many endemic species. The coffee beans grow between 2,000 and 5,000 feet above sea level, a Goldilocks altitude at which the beans mature slowly and develop flavours gradually without getting scorched by the West Indian sun.

But perhaps most outstanding of all is the iconic status of some of the individuals born in Jamaica. Alongside Bob Marley, the man who moved masses, is the man who moves fastest: Usain Bolt. Others include Peter Tosh, another member

of the Wailers, whose museum has recently opened in the heart of Kingston. It's a small but beautifully curated celebration of Tosh's life, death and influence, and a must-see for any reggae fans – particularly those visiting Kingston during National Reggae Month (February, to coincide with Bob Marley's birthday on the 6th).

DOING IT RIGHT

The more I learned about the incredible things and people to come out of Jamaica, the more ironic it seemed that this island is so totally dependent on imports – and so far from self-sufficiency. I heard an incredible statistic that the value of all Jamaica's exports is nowhere near the cost of the fuel it imports over the same period. In other words, if Jamaica sold everything it managed to produce in a year, it wouldn't even come close to covering the island's bill for the petroleum products that keep the island's cars, planes, boats and kitchen stoves running – and that are burned to produce electricity.

During our stay, it wasn't hard to spot the divide

between those who recognised the urgency of switching to a more sustainable lifestyle and those who clung to the glamour of five-star luxury, private clubs and jet skis. Jamaica offers both extremes – in perhaps their most extreme guises – so it's no wonder that this island has a constant flow of tourists. They visit for everything from romantic palm-fringed weddings and all-night parties to secluded birdwatching tours and hikes through the cloud forests in the Blue Mountains.

Those who have chosen to establish businesses in harmony with Nature have often been driven by deep personal conviction, and in many cases their success has come against the odds in a country that's not famed its eco credentials. Two glowing examples are Hotel Mockingbird Hill and Stush in the Bush.

STUSH IN THE BUSH

Jamaica may be famed for its jerk chicken (not to mention its jerk goat and, well, jerk anything really), but the Rasta movement has ancient

links to veganism. The *Ital* diet is based on unprocessed food that's locally grown – and you can't bring the farm much closer to the table at Stush in the Bush. Chris and Lisa's restaurant is an extension of their stunning home, in the middle of a 15-acre certified organic farm in the cool peaks of Free Hill, St Anne.

The journey there's not for the faint-hearted, but once close Chris will come and pick you up in his 4x4 and chaperone you for the last leg (meaning booking really is essential). Stush in the Bush is a feast for all the senses; from the beautiful open dining area we were treated to sweeping views of Jamaica's north coast while we devoured plate after plate of fresh plantain and dasheen chips with smashed avocado and a signature Blow Fyah Scotch Bonnet Pepper Sauce. That was just the starter.

All meals are dictated by the seasons and what's available at the time of your visit, and you can absolutely trust Chris and Lisa to create the most delicious and decadent feast, brimming with flavour and bursting with love. 'Stush' means

► ‘fancy’ in patois, and this is posh nosh like you’ve never had it before. It will leave you feeling like you’ve just had your engine retuned.

HOTEL MOCKINGBIRD HILL

Hotel Mockingbird Hill offers a different kind of fine dining experience; the food prepared in the Mille Fleurs restaurant was an absolute treat: fresh, locally sourced ingredients were woken up with Jamaican flavours and presented with beautiful attention to detail.

Nestled between Port Antonio and the Blue Mountains, this hotel has been dubbed the place for birdwatchers to take partners who hate birdwatching. It’s a fitting description. Sit on the balcony with a coffee and you’ll see something of interest; a flock of yellow-billed parrots flew right in front of us as we ate breakfast.

The sprawling gardens of this 7.5-acre property are recommended by *Birds Of the West Indies*; 22 of the 28 Jamaican endemics – plus six Caribbean endemics – can be found there without much effort at all. The black-billed streamer-tailed hummingbird is a regular visitor to the lush gardens – and with no TV or phones on site to distract you, you’re almost guaranteed to catch sight of one of these tropical beauties.

A SPRINKLE OF STARDUST...

Many Jamaicans escape to Port Antonio, Portland to get a break from Kingston. It’s the home of the Blue Lagoon, where the warm Caribbean mixes with icy cold water from underground streams to create a magical experience. The lagoon has drawn Hollywood stars from Errol Flynn and Elizabeth Taylor to Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz – and attracted musicians thanks to its proximity to Geejam, a hotel with its own studio. Amy Winehouse, Snoop Dog, John Legend and Grace Jones have all recorded material there, and no doubt enjoyed the delicious cocktails. It’d be



you’ve absorbed a touch of its stardust. Some won’t want to leave at all – so the good news is that Kanopi House has direct access, and its tree houses are well worth checking out if you want a secluded spot for a romantic break.

ESCAPE TO PORTLAND

Portland was Jamaica’s original tourist spot until the all-inclusive addiction took hold and wrist-tagging hotels emerged to satisfy it. You can raft eight miles down the Rio Grande or taste the best jerk flavours on the island.

Just a short drive away is Holywell – the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park. 3,000 feet above sea level, the cool air provides

ABOVE

The Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park

BELOW (l)

The visit to Bob Marley’s birthplace, Nine Mile

BELOW (r)

The Peter Tosh museum in Kingston is a must-see if you visit Jamaica in National Reggae Month

a welcome break from the heat and there are plenty of short – or long – treks to enjoy.

Another famous attraction in the area is Dunns River Falls in Ocho Rios, which is about as touristy as it gets in Jamaica. It was a lot of fun climbing that sublime and ancient waterfall, holding hands in an okey-cokey chain and navigating this natural and protected oasis sandwiched between two rather large American ladies who had come straight off the cruise ship.

BACK TO THE MUSIC...

Far more thrilling for me was our visit to Nine Mile, the birthplace of the greatest singer/songwriter, recording artiste and inspirational leader of the Rastafarian movement, Mr Robert (Bob) Nesta Marley. To walk, sit and sing on the same land Bob had was magical. We were lucky enough to be in Jamaica for the 40th annual ‘Smile’ concert at Marley’s home in Kingston, which has been transformed into a must-see museum in honour of the great legend himself.

We were also able to attend the UNESCO Creative City music concert on the waterfront in Kingston. From a huge outdoor stage on the harbour the crowd enjoyed a spectacular tour through the island’s musical history, climaxing with performances from reggae legends Freddie McGregor, Toots, Ken Boothe and Sizzla.

Kingston, as far as I can see, has a big music jam every week from now until the end of time. It’s a great city; the backdrop of those gorgeous Blue and John Crow Mountains make it well worth a visit. We enjoyed two nights at the Courtleigh Hotel, which is perfectly located for exploring the capital and serves a fantastic breakfast. It was the perfect spot for us as we soaked up the city’s musical vibes and found our feet on the island.

ONE LOVE

Back in the day Kingston was an area very few tourists would venture into; its reputation for crime kept visitors away, but these days it’s a thriving city with a level of musical culture you won’t find anywhere else in the world.

The movement Bob championed back in the ‘70s, and that lives on around the world today, is one of love: one love and unity. If you’re a person who wants to live love, then Jamaica is the country that will show you the way. You simply can’t travel to this wonderful country and not feel love. It’s everywhere: in its beaches, the culture, the music and, of course, its history – but most of all it lives in the spirit of the people. If I could stir it up in a few words, they would be: ‘as you feel it, live it’ – Jamaica will show you the way.

FIND OUT MORE

- Plan your visit to Jamaica at visitjamaica.com/
- More on the UNESCO Creative Cities Network is at en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home



Competitions

We've got our hands on a bunch of prizes from fantastic companies that are choosing to do things differently. We love them all and we want to give you a chance to get to know them, too – so we're running these competitions so you can have a go and see for yourself!

We've hand-picked this selection of green pearls – including an electric bike, a River Cottage Experience Day and £500 to spend on one-off ethical clothes – to help put (a) spring in your step.

No catch. No pressure. Just enjoy!

You can enter all our competitions and view more prize details – plus any terms and conditions – by visiting mygreenpod.com/competitions. Share them with friends, spread the word and update us with your experiences if you're one of our winners.

Good luck!

To enter visit mygreenpod.com



WIN

A £500 ALMASANTA VOUCHER!

Sick of seeing the same clothes everywhere you look? Almasanta's exclusivity promise guarantees all its customers receive one-of-a-kind pieces. As well as ensuring no one turns up at an event wearing your outfit, you'll also be helping to reduce surplus on the operational side of fashion. One lucky reader will win a shopping spree in Almasanta's online shop, which features ethical, organic, handmade and Fairtrade products.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17

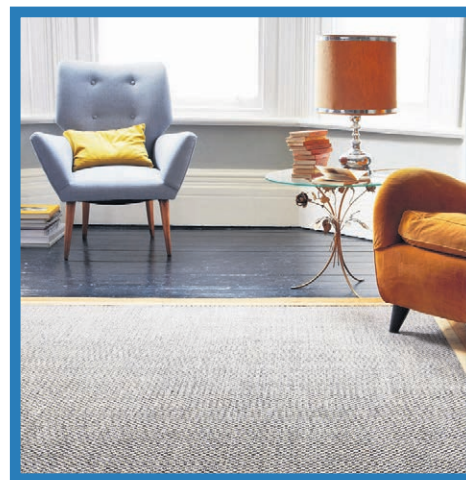


WIN

AN ORANGE MOUNTAIN BIKE (RRP £1K)!

This competition was so popular in our last issue that we've managed to get hold of another Clockwork 120 mountain bike to give away! The lightweight aluminium frame and 27.5 inch wheels provide quick handling and rapid acceleration. You're guaranteed a great ride – whether you're going for a quick blast round the local woods or an epic voyage into the wild.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17



WIN

£500 TO SPEND AT NAKED FLOORING!

One lucky winner will get to experiment with Naked Flooring's rug creator tool and design their very own natural rug! Choose from plant fibre carpets made from sisal, seagrass, jute or coir – or Naked Flooring's award-winning 100% wool carpets – then select your own borders and details. The natural floorings are durable, environmentally friendly and stylish.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17

Competitions



WIN

A PAIR OF WEEKEND TICKETS TO VALLEY FEST!

The magical wonderland that is Valley Fest will return to Chew Valley, Somerset, for the fourth year on 04-06 August – and this time it'll be organic! While delicious local food has always been key to the festival's identity, this year the organisers are only inviting traders who offer organic food, so everyone can enjoy great music and good times with the best food available.

Deadline for entries: 01.05.17



WIN

AN IN-DEPTH HOME ENERGY SURVEY FROM COSYHOME!

Heat loss in older homes can be cut by up to 75%, meaning proper insulation could bag you a return on investment of 10-20% per year. CosyHome Company is offering one period or listed home owner an in-depth home energy survey to provide an overview of the heat lost from each surface of the house, plus advice on prioritising next steps according to their cost-effectiveness.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17



WIN

AN ECO FEMME FULL CYCLE KIT!

Get through your monthly cycle the eco way with these washable pads from Eco Femme! The Full Cycle kit is a perfect introduction to cloth pads, and could make a great gift to welcome girls into adulthood or encourage friends to switch to greener periods. Each kit contains sizes ranging from a pantyliner to a night pad, all with a leakproof backing and ultra-absorbent cotton flannel layers.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17



WIN

A COPY OF THE NATURAL BABY BOOK!

Combining experience with expertise, this is a warm and supportive guide to the joys of pregnancy and parenthood. It's crammed with everything from massage oil recipes and tips for safe aromatherapy to advice on writing a birthing plan and weaning – plus there's a great Natural Dads section. We've got six to give away.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17



WIN

A WISPER 705 SE ELECTRIC BIKE!

Whether you feel inspired to get on a bike for the first time or have been out of the saddle for a while, electric bikes offer a simple, no-fuss solution for getting from A to B. One lucky winner will get the assistance of a motor as they cruise almost silently through busy commuter streets or open country roads on this gorgeous Wisper 705 SE e-bike (RRP £1,099)! It's unisex, lightweight and very simple to use.

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17



WIN

A RIVER COTTAGE COOKERY COURSE AND DINING EVENT FOR 2!

One lucky reader will win two spots on a River Cottage Experience Day cookery course, plus two places at one of the gorgeous dining events at River Cottage HQ, Axminster. The intensive one-day course will teach you all about how to prepare seasonal and ethical produce – and your reward will be a three-course feast in TV's most famous farmhouse!

Deadline for entries: 01.07.17



Positive spaces

Multichrome is the latest addition to Interface's modular flooring system. It features a geometric pattern using neutral or bold colours, grounded with grey tones. Combine with the texture of its sibling product, Monochrome, to transform your space into a positive space.

See Multichrome at [Interface.com](https://www.interface.com)

Save with a cash ISA & get more ladies dancing



Our ethical cash ISA helps you save for your future. It also means we're able to lend to more social enterprises (like Age Exchange in London) so that everyone in the dance class stays as fit as a fiddle.

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