

Blogs



The build up to Easter!

By: KatieP

I really like celebrating Easter with my family and I know that the time is coming up due to the arrival of Shrove or Fat Tuesday, which this year will be on 4th March.

The build up to Easter!

13

KatieP

Sunday, 2 March, 2014 - 22:16

I really like celebrating Easter with my family and I know that the time is coming up due to the arrival of Shrove or Fat Tuesday, which this year will be on 4th March. Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is the start of Lent which is then 40 days before Easter Sunday! It might seem a bit confusing but traditionally many people may give up certain rich or fatty foods for lent which means they will not eat that food again until Easter Sunday.

Shrove Tuesday is better known to me as Pancake Day! On this day people try and use up as much of the rich and fatty foods that they have left in their house so they eat lots and lots of the food they are trying to give up. Pancakes are made of flour, eggs, milk and butter so are quite rich and fatty. That's why it's a tradition to eat pancakes on this day!

I love pancake day and I use it as an excuse to have pancakes for breakfast, dinner and tea! I like to have them savoury with meat or cheese but my favourite ones are sweet ones. I like to have them with orange and sugar, chocolate spread or ice cream!

Sometimes I try to give up certain foods too. Last year I gave up crisps for Lent and the year before I gave up chocolate. It can be really hard though and in previous years I have forgotten! This year I will be in Barcelona for pancake day and I'll be on holiday so hopefully I can find some pancakes. I haven't given it much thought yet though what I might like to give up this year!



Saying goodbye to friends

16

GraceL

Tuesday, 25 February, 2014 - 11:07

As some of you may know, I am currently on my year abroad in Germany as part of my university course. From my introductory course at the beginning of my time here, I had the chance to meet so many new people and make lots of new friends. This can often be hard when moving to a new country, or in fact, just moving homes or schools. It is almost like starting a new life and it can be daunting at first and feel quite lonely. I knew that when I moved to Germany I should be open and friendly and, as everyone says, "say yes to everything"! This is certainly what I have done since moving here and I have made some great friends along the way.

Next week a friend of mine is moving to Spain for the next part of her year abroad as she studies both Spanish and German. I am envious of the weather she will experience in Spain and that she will be living near a beach and have a lot of fun but I also feel for her as she will have to start a new life in another new country. I feel as though, after six months, I now live in Germany rather than just being here for a long visit. I know in my last few months in Germany I will feel a lot more relaxed and at home.

My group of friends and I had a surprise party to say goodbye to our friend leaving for Spain. We made her a scrapbook with photos and memories of her time here so that she could take it with her and so that she wouldn't forget us! We hope that she has a wonderful time and that she will make lots of new friends and settle into her new home.



Tongue twisters!

28

TeresaC

Monday, 10 February, 2014 - 12:08

Tongue twisters are word games which are fantastic to improve your pronunciation when speaking English! Tongue twisters are phrases (which are often difficult to say!) and which use a certain sound. You must repeat them as quickly as possible whilst still making sure you are speaking clearly.

I love to practice tongue twisters with my English classes, and my students love to compete with each other to say a tongue twister the fastest. In return, some of them have taught me some in their language! They find it hilarious when I struggle over the French sounds, and they make fun of each other when they struggle over the English sounds too!

Try repeating the following tongue twisters to yourself. If you aren't sure about the sounds, search for clips on the internet - there are lots of funny clips of people getting them wrong!

My favourite tongue twister is:

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

The repetition of the 'w' and the 'ch' sounds can be very tricky.

Other tongue twisters include:

- Red lorry, yellow lorry. Red lorry, yellow lorry. Red lorry, yellow lorry.

- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers

- She sells sea shells on the sea shore. The shells that she sells are sea shells I'm sure. So if she sells sea shells on the sea shore, then I'm sure she sells sea shore shells!

- Two toads totally tired trying to trot to Tetbury

Here is a link to some people talking about the 'hardest tongue twister in the world'! The men in the video speak very quickly with American accents, so you may need to watch it a few times to fully understand what they are saying: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDE2ynfVxqY>

Here are some of the tongue twisters they mention in the video:

- Toy boat, toy boat, toy boat, toy boat

- Top cop, top cop, top cop, top cop

- Sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick

- Susie sits in a shoe shine shop. Where she sits she shines, where she shines, she sits.

- Pad kid poured curd pulled cod

Note from editor: Have a look at the Tongue Twister section on our Kids website:

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/tongue-twisters> You can listen to lots of tongue twisters and practise saying them.



The 15-minute reading challenge

50

JoR

Friday, 31 January, 2014 - 20:46

My challenge for you is this: to read a book for 15 minutes every single day for a month.

Let me explain a bit, by telling you where the challenge came from. I have many things in common with my dad, like music taste and sense of humour, but sadly reading isn't one of them. I can happily spend a whole day curled up with a book, but my dad can't read a book for longer than about 5 minutes. He reads emails, websites and documents for work, but not books. He is a busy person, with a short attention span, so I think that sitting down to read for just 15 minutes a day is a good way to relax and to introduce him to reading. Giving yourself a goal or challenge is a good way to change a habit or achieve something, so why not try to create a new habit of reading?

My dad is by no means the only person who avoids books. I know lots of people would rather relax on their computers or in front of the TV. Everyone is different and has their own interests, but I think there are lots of benefits to reading, which screen-based activities (games, films, TV) don't have.

Firstly, it's better for your eyes. Looking at screens can be very stressful for your eye muscles, and apparently you should avoid looking at screens for an hour before bed, to get a good night's sleep.

One thing I personally love about reading, is being transported to another world - I often forget the time or things that are going on around me! Reading is a great way to switch off before you go to bed, because you think more about the world of the book, rather than the real world and the problems you have during the day, so you can truly relax. I know you can be transported to a different world in a film or a TV show, but I think books do it better. While watching a film, I often talk to my flatmates, send texts, or paint my nails. A book, on the other hand, commands your full attention.

I also love people. I am nosy, enjoy hearing what people are doing, and finding out what people think. Reading gives me the chance to get to know hundreds of new people! It also teaches you to see things from other people's point of view, and understand other people's decisions or opinions. With a book, you can hear everything a character is thinking or feeling - you really can be inside someone else's head!

So give it a go! Take 15 minutes when you're waking up, going to bed, eating lunch, or having a coffee. If you read a lot, why not try 15 minutes of an English book, or pass the challenge on to someone else? Good luck, and happy reading!

Rhino revolution

KatB



Sunday, 2 August, 2015 - 21:17

'That's Zazu, over there.'

This man knew his audience. Cloaked in khaki and epaulettes, with the kind of dusty tan earned by living a life out of doors, he was pointing at a proud, beaky bird perched atop a nearby thorn tree. And sure enough, there he was: Zazu. Also known as a hornbill, for those less familiar with Disney's *The Lion King*.

Although lacking the film's all-singing, all-dancing cartoon cast, the scenery surrounding us was like *The Lion King* brought to life: baboons racing across roads, staggeringly beautiful skies, lions roaring in the distance. We were in the middle of the South African bush, in the Blue Canyon conservancy to be precise; a place which quickly came to feel like home during my time as a volunteer with a unique anti-poaching project.

The nearby town of Hoedspruit is home of the Rhino Revolution initiative. It was launched in 2011 in response to the devastating impact of poaching upon South Africa's rhino population; it aims to protect and increase rhino numbers through vigilant anti-poaching, dehorning the rhino (and thus making them less valuable to potential poachers), as well as increasing awareness of the challenges facing the endangered rhino. What makes the project I was involved in unique is the use of ex-racehorses to form a mounted anti-poaching unit. Having succeeded on the track, these magnificent horses are put to great use in the bush. They can cover far more ground than guards on foot, whilst being nimble and brave enough to scale terrain too tough for vehicles. Their presence is a real deterrent to poachers; it's like the Revolution's secret weapon.

As a volunteer, my days in South Africa were spent riding over, under and through the thickest, thorniest bush, tracking rhino on foot and on horseback and rattling around the reserve in an authentic, albeit slightly battered open-topped Land Rover. It was absolutely thrilling, and such a rewarding experience. Coming from the wilds of Middle England, I was stunned by the savage beauty of South Africa; there's nothing in the world that comes close to those starlit nights, or the peaceful majesty of game roaming the bush.

What I wasn't prepared for was the sheer majesty of these vulnerable rhino. They have been hunted almost to the point of extinction. It has to stop. Sharing the planet with such incredible creatures is a privilege, one which we have abused for too long - but it's not too late.

Find out more about the Rhino Revolution project here: <http://rhinorevolution.org>

Life in London

-



RosemaryM

Thursday, 30 July, 2015 - 22:24

At the moment, I'm doing an internship in London. It's my first experience of living in the capital city of the UK - and in a busy, tourist-filled metropolis it's easy to feel like a small fish in a very big pond.

I take the tube to work; the London Underground is a great transport network and you can get across London much quicker than if you took a bus, or, in some cases, walked. However, first thing in the morning it's often very crowded on the tube. There's no air conditioning on the trains, and when there are a lot of people on board it can feel very claustrophobic. Occasionally there are delays which can be frustrating when you need to get to work! The tube can be quite expensive, at £4 for a single ticket. Luckily, if you have an Oyster card you pay almost half that!

As a capital city, London has loads of great attractions. Some of them require an entrance fee, but there are lots of things which you can do for free. The Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace is a well-known event, which takes place daily at 11.30am between April and July. You can watch it for free - but you need to get there early if you want a good view! Most museums in London are free for everyone to enjoy, but donations are welcome. Last week, I visited the British Museum. I particularly liked the room filled with old watches and clocks. They even had a miniature replica of the astronomical clock in Strasbourg cathedral, which I visited several times while I was living in France.

One thing I love about London is the free newspapers and magazines. On Tuesdays, a magazine called *Time Out* is published and it has great tips on what events are happening in London over the coming week. If you like fashion, you can pick up a copy of *Stylist* on Wednesdays. Every day, two newspapers are printed. You can pick up a copy of the *Metro* during the day, or later in the afternoon you can obtain a copy of the *London Evening Standard*. The articles aren't too long, and it's a great way to keep up with the news!

As much as I'm enjoying living in London temporarily, it'll be nice to escape the *big smoke* (a slang term for London, due to the amount of pollution) and return home!

Agatha Christie's house

Agatha Christie's house



[FrancesS](#)

Thursday, 23 July, 2015 - 21:22

I love a good murder mystery. It is so fun to watch or read a gripping detective story and try to solve the murder yourself. Agatha Christie is undeniably queen of the *whodunit* genre given that she wrote over eighty books. Many people have fallen in love with her creations – Hercule Poirot, a famous Belgian detective and Miss Marple, an old lady who is also an amateur sleuth.

As I am a big fan of Agatha Christie, I was thrilled to visit her house in Devon called Greenway. I travelled to her house by steam train. We went through a dark tunnel and there was lots of smoke. It was a perfect setting for a murder like in her famous novel *Murder on the Orient Express*. Fortunately all the passengers arrived safely!

After a pleasant walk through the woods, I reached the splendid house. I did a tour and I loved seeing where she wrote her books. Many first editions were on display in a revolving bookcase. However, my favourite part of the estate was the boathouse. There was a lovely view of the river but the boathouse also served a more sinister purpose – inspiration for a crime scene. In the Poirot novel, *Dead Man's Folly*, a girl's body is found in the boathouse. They even filmed the TV adaptation of the book at Greenway.

I really enjoyed my visit to Greenway. It was such a beautiful place and I was fascinated to see where Agatha Christie was inspired to write so many thrilling stories.

Take a break from technology



[RosemaryM](#)

Sunday, 19 July, 2015 - 13:30

In today's world we are constantly surrounded by technology. It's true to say that technology makes our lives easier. However, increasingly scientists are saying that we need to give ourselves a break - otherwise we put ourselves at risk of developing hundreds of health problems. Over the summer the days are longer, sunnier and free from school. With all this free time, why not put it to good use and do something that doesn't involve technology?

To start with, you could learn a new skill. There are hundreds of possibilities: crafts, cooking, learning a musical instrument or a new sport. Maybe you've always wanted to try out that recipe, but haven't had time? Perhaps you fancy learning how to knit, so you can have a new jumper for the autumn? You could use your free time to learn something new - and perhaps it'll lead to an exciting opportunity in the future.

If you just fancy relaxing, why not head to a beach? Take along your favourite book and relax on the sand, or go for a stroll along the coastline (just make sure you're aware of the tides!). If you don't live near a beach, you could go to your local park. Why not take along a picnic, or try and identify some of the local wildlife?

Little things, like challenging yourself to complete a crossword or a sudoku, are a great place to start. You could even get involved in the latest craze: adult colouring books! Colouring is surprisingly therapeutic, and it can be a nice way to escape from the stress of modern life!

Whatever you choose to do with your summer, try something new! You might surprise yourself and find a hidden talent within you; you might make new friends along the way. Next time you find yourself aimlessly channel-hopping, have a think at what else you could spend your time doing.

Nothing beats a real book



RosemaryM

Friday, 17 July, 2015 - 14:00

Call me old-fashioned, but I like a good book. And by that, I mean a real book. One that you can flick the pages of, one that you can put a bookmark in, one that has a battered cover and broken spine.

Last year, I was given a Kindle. I have never actually read a book on it. There's something frustrating about having to charge it up before I can read; with a real book you can just open it and begin. It doesn't feel the same in my hands: it's too light. My fingers miss the familiar ritual of turning the page. I had good intentions of using it on my year abroad; after all, that was why my parents bought it for me. In the end, I didn't use it. I ploughed through the French books that my uncle had lent me instead.

Over the last week, I have been proofreading several e-books, checking them for errors. Reading a screen for a long time makes your eyes feel rather tired. I don't get this problem with a real book! In addition, scientists say that looking at screens before going to sleep is bad for your health - so surely a real book is much better!

E-books are still a relatively recent invention. They are popular too, for a variety of reasons. An e-reader (such as a Kindle) takes up much less room (and weight) in a suitcase: perfect for people who used to have to take several books on holiday. Lots of people don't re-read books; an e-reader means they don't

end up with a house cluttered with books they'll never look at again. People say they're more environmentally friendly: no trees are cut down for paper, no ink is needed.

However successful these devices are, nothing can beat the appeal of a genuine book for me. After all, if I'm short of cash, or don't necessarily want to re-read a book, I can always go to the library and borrow a book. For free!

Becoming a minimalist



BlakeS

Wednesday, 8 July, 2015 - 11:48

I have too much stuff. My bedroom is often very messy. I have shelves cluttered with dusty books I never read and CDs I don't listen to. My drawers are crammed with clothes I never wear. I was getting frustrated that I never had any space in my bedroom. Then I read about minimalism. Minimalism is a style of living where you only keep the most important items and you get rid of everything else. After reading about minimalism I felt encouraged to tackle my problem.

Minimalism recommends that you only keep the bare essentials for living, so I started clearing out a lot of the things which I didn't use. I collected bags of clothes to give to charity. I was able to sell some of my CDs and books online. Although I knew that I would never need these things again, I still found it very difficult to get rid of my stuff. My brain tried to stop me from letting go. I said to myself 'I might need that in the future!' or 'won't I be sad if I get rid of that?' But the thing is, I know I couldn't keep everything.

After a while of clearing through cupboards, drawers and shelves, it actually became quite exciting to get things out of my room and create some fresh space. Since I started de-cluttering my bedroom, I'm no longer tripping over things on the floor. I also feel a bit better, too. They say that a clear, organised bedroom means you will have a clear and organised mind! The main idea behind minimalism is to reduce what you own, and by doing this you can really appreciate the things you have. It's not easy living this lifestyle. We are often told that it is better to have more things. Advertisements try to convince us that we will only be happy by spending more money to buy more stuff. Of course, I'm not a perfect minimalist – I've only just started. I still own a lot of things which I don't really need, but I think this was a positive start to owning less stuff. In the future, I will be more conscious of what I buy. And I will continue to make an effort to get rid of what I don't need.

Devon - a magical county

5

BlakeS

Wednesday, 8 July, 2015 - 11:38

The UK is divided up into smaller regions called 'counties'. My hometown is in the county of Hampshire, which is located in the south-east of England. Since I was a child, my family has taken a summer holiday each year in Devon, which is another county in the south-west of England. It usually takes a three-hour drive from my home to get to our destination in Devon. Devon is a really great place to take a holiday in England, and today I will tell you why I think Devon is such a great place.

First of all, it's on the coast. This means you can spend plenty of time on the beach, which is fantastic if it is sunny. Of course, you should take an umbrella to the beach as well, just in case it rains - which is quite likely during the British summer! But even if it's raining, there's still a lot to do in Devon. There are loads of very pretty towns, so you can easily spend a day looking at the shops, finding a place to eat some local fish and chips and enjoying an ice cream at the end of your day. If you have a sweet tooth, you will be pleased to know that Devon is famed for its fudge and cream teas.

If you're interested in history, you will find plenty of castles and old houses to visit, where ancient kings and queens once lived. Devon is also great if you enjoy spending time outdoors because you will have plenty of opportunities for walking, hiking, cycling, kayaking and surfing. Devon is rich in natural beauty due to its many hills, forests, beaches and bays. If geology is your thing, you will love Devon as it's famous for its 'Jurassic Coast'. This is an area by the sea where the cliffs have a distinctive naturally red colour. Many people come to spend a day exploring the rocks. If you are lucky, you can find fossils of prehistoric animals in the rocks or washed up on the beaches. Isn't that amazing?! There are also many museums depicting the dinosaurs which roamed this land millions of years ago. If you spend some time in Devon, you will probably hear lots about Devon's legends, too. Local folklore abounds with stories of haunted houses, shipwrecks and even fairies and pixies! Overall, I think Devon is a great place for a holiday. There is always plenty to do, no matter what age you are. It's a region where you will discover charming towns, old buildings, castles, theme parks, animal centres and many beautiful beaches. In rain or shine, Devon is definitely worth a visit!

Is women's sport overlooked?

2

RosemaryM

Tuesday, 7 July, 2015 - 19:04

How many sports stars can you name? Whether it's five, ten, or thirty, I imagine that 90% of them would be male. Even in today's society, which claims to have gender equality, it seems that female sports stars simply don't get the same coverage as their male counterparts.

Already, the anticipation is building for the 2016 FIFA World Cup, which will take place next summer in Brazil. But how many people are aware of the fact that the FIFA Women's World Cup has just taken place in Canada? The US team were crowned the winners, after beating the Japanese team 5-2 in the final. England even managed to secure third place! By contrast, the England team in the men's FIFA World Cup rarely make the quarter finals. Whilst the FIFA World Cup enjoys prime-time TV slots, shown on most BBC channels, the FIFA Women's World Cup is sidelined, with little to no media coverage. The only time it made the news here was when an English player scored an own goal!

The inequality doesn't end with football. Just recently, Caroline Wozniacki (a top Danish tennis player) complained that women don't get the same chance as men to play on the show courts (Centre Court and Court 1) at Wimbledon. In this case, I think it's luck of the draw - the further you get in the competition, the more likely you are to play on the show courts. In the opening stages, it is true that it is often only the very best players who will play their matches on the show courts. Women's tennis (particularly at Wimbledon) does get a lot of coverage, though many complain that it isn't as exciting to watch.

During the 2012 London Olympics, a lot of effort was made by female sports stars to promote women's involvement in sport. Victoria Pendleton and Laura Trott promoted cycling whilst Jessica Ennis became a household name for her success in the heptathlon. Rebecca Adlington, a former Olympic swimmer, encouraged women to break boundaries and achieve their goals.

Whilst women's sport is often overlooked, I think that this is slowly starting to change. In the UK, there is a campaign called *This Girl Can*, which aims to get girls and women back into sport, regardless of their age, size, shape or sporting ability. Hopefully this campaign will encourage more people to take up sport (and enjoy it!) and help reduce our nation's health problems.

Note from Editor: If you want to find out more about the *This Girl Can* campaign, have a look at their website: <http://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/>

What is different in the UK?

5

JohnR

Monday, 6 July, 2015 - 11:14

Well I am now back home. It is quite surprising how very little has changed even after so long but there is still a lot of things get used to again! Here are a few things to watch out for when you move somewhere new or are returning home after a long time away:

1. Careful on the road!

The first thing that I did when I got out of the airport was to cross the road ... but I looked the wrong way! In the UK the cars drive on the left hand side of the road whereas in Spain they drive on the right. I almost got ran over because I was still thinking I was in Spain. You have to be very careful.

2. Careful on the road, part 2!

Here's another strange one from travelling on the road. In Mallorca, most of the time, pedestrians have the right of way. That means that they can cross the road by walking on the road without stopping and the car will stop for them. In the UK, however, you have to be careful to wait for the cars to stop or else you might end up in the hospital very quickly!

3. Drinking water.

In Spain, and especially in Mallorca, most people buy large bottles of water to drink. In the UK the filtering of the water means that you can drink straight from the tap. You can also ask for tap water to drink in bars and restaurants and you get it for free. On my first night back I forgot that I could drink water from the taps and spent the night wishing I had a bottle of water. When I woke up I realised how silly I had been. It saves money and is available 27/7.

4. Time is different.

It sounds quite crazy, doesn't it. It is true though, time is different here. In Spain there is a siesta, a small break during the day to have a nap and get energy for the rest of the day. You also might only think about going out for a drink with friends in Spain at 11pm. In the UK that is already passing bedtime! There is no siesta here. You get up early and are in bed before midnight.

It is so crazy to be home, so what are the special things about living in your country?

Retro

1

BlakeS

Friday, 3 July, 2015 - 15:31

It was my birthday recently, and I was very lucky to get some nice presents. Actually, my favourite presents were what you would call 'retro' – things from the past which might seem a bit outdated or old-fashioned today. Let me explain. When I was 10 years old, I got my first video game console: a Nintendo 64. Many years have passed since those days and there are lots of newer games consoles around. Yet I still enjoy playing on my N64. For my recent birthday, my sister got me a racing game for the Nintendo 64, one that I have always wanted to play. It was a great surprise present! The game was made in 1998, but even though the graphics are not very good compared to today's standards, I enjoy playing the N64 because it reminds me of being a child again. I think the simplistic graphics can be quite charming.

Another cool present was a vinyl record. Do you know what a record is? It's a large, black, circular disc that can play music. My favourite genre of music is British electronic and rock music from the 1980s. Vinyl records were popular during the 80s, as this was a time before music CDs! It's really nice to have an original record of my favourite bands. Fortunately my parents have kept a record player so I can listen to the music. I really enjoy playing vinyl records because it's a lot more fun than listening to a CD. You have to carefully place the record on the record player. Then you put the needle on the record, which will read the music. When you start the record player, the vinyl record starts spinning and the music comes booming out! It's an exciting process. You also have to flip the record over half way

through, so you can listen to the other side. In case you want to listen to any 1980s music, let me recommend a few bands. 'Queen' is a very well-known British rock band. My favourite band is called the 'Electric Light Orchestra'.

Of course, I do appreciate 21st century conveniences, but sometimes I enjoy the more simplistic pleasures of old video games and music. Perhaps you think I'm a bit strange for liking these retro things!

A visit to Germany

5

BlakeS

Friday, 3 July, 2015 - 15:24

I've been really lucky this year. Not only did I have the opportunity to live in France, but I have been able to see some other countries with my girlfriend who is doing an Erasmus study placement this year. She has already spent six months in Spain. Now she is studying in Essen, a large city in western Germany. I recently went to stay with her – it was my first visit to Germany! Essen is a very large, urbanised city. Essen has all the conveniences of any large city so I felt immediately at home. I loved the variety of shops, restaurants, shopping malls, cocktails bars, nightclubs, parks and even a lake. There is also a city-wide network of trams, which makes getting around a breeze!

I found the people to be really friendly, and most Germans speak very good English which made life easy for me. I was surprised by the casual attitude to alcohol in Germany, where it seems normal for people to drink beer on the street, on the tram, or even enjoy a bottle of sparkling wine on the train. My girlfriend and I visited two famous local cities, Düsseldorf and Cologne (Köln in German) which are both on the Rhine River. Düsseldorf is an urban metropolis with a great variety of restaurants. We took a boat cruise on the river and went up the Rhine Tower, a really tall building which offers great views across the city. Cologne, as you might know, is world-famous for its perfumes. The cathedral there is an unmissable landmark. We made the effort to climb to the top of one of the cathedral's towers. The spiral stairs seemed endless, but it was worthwhile for the impressive sights from the top.

We also went in a cable-car over the river and sampled a German delicacy called 'spaghetti eis' which is vanilla ice cream with strawberry sauce, made to look like spaghetti bolognese! I also got to try the famous German sausage called 'bratwurst' and also 'currywurst' which is German sausage served in barbecue sauce with curry powder on top. I must admit, I really enjoyed the food! Overall it was a brilliant visit. The only disappointment was the grey and rainy weather, which proves that Britain does not have the worst weather in Europe!

Make a difference

3

RosemaryM

Wednesday, 1 July, 2015 - 12:14

With over seven billion people living on our planet today, it's easy to think that one person's actions won't make a difference. However, from personal experience, I can say that that is completely untrue: each and every one of us is capable of making a difference - however small - to someone's life.

You've probably seen the campaign posters and videos, produced by organisations such as Greenpeace or Oxfam. It's likely you'll have watched adverts on TV, encouraging you to sponsor a family in an underdeveloped country. Perhaps you've even been part of an event or a protest. Charities are always telling us to donate £1 here, or £2 there, to save children dying from malaria or elephants who are under threat from poaching. Realistically, many of us won't actually see the difference that our contribution makes.

Luckily, if you don't want to get involved in a global campaign there are many more ways that you can make a difference. Often, it's the little things that make someone's day. When you next make yourself a drink, why not ask if anyone else would like one? Or how about offering your seat to someone else on the bus? Whether or not they explicitly thank you for your deed, they will certainly appreciate it. Elderly

people, especially those living alone, appreciate it when people make an effort to say hello to them and ask how they are. Sending a card to a friend who is sick should brighten their day.

If you have time to spare, why not volunteer? Lots of places can benefit from an extra pair of hands! For the last seven years or so, I have volunteered every week at my local Guide unit. This has involved running craft nights, going camping, cooking sausages and playing treasure hunts - it's great fun! Care homes, animal rescue shelters and local charity shops also rely on volunteers to help them out.

You may not make a change so big that it will be recognised by people the world over, but it'll be appreciated by someone, somewhere, and that counts for a lot. If more of us made an effort to make a small difference, the world would surely be a better place.

Wimbledon

6

ChloeF

Tuesday, 30 June, 2015 - 21:44

Summer has officially arrived in the UK, and with that means Wimbledon has now hit our screens. Now, I'm sure there are many people who this means nothing to, so let me explain: Wimbledon is a famous tennis tournament which takes place in Wimbledon, London for a period of two weeks each summer. This year it's taking place from the 29th June until the 12th July. Wimbledon, along with the Australian Open, the French Open and the US Open make up the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments, which are also known as Majors.

I personally never used to be a fan of tennis. I was terrible when I had to play it during my PE lessons when I was at school, and was never interested in the sport, probably because I couldn't play it well! However, a few years later I discovered Wimbledon, and by discovered I mean actually became interested and started watching tennis.

The tournament attracts all the famous tennis stars, from the Williams sisters to Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. For Great Britain we have Andy Murray, who's currently ranked world no. 3 and actually won the tournament back in 2013, so British people will obviously be hoping for a repeat of that this year.

If you go to watch Wimbledon live, be prepared to queue; most people get there for 6 am, with some even camping overnight to try and get their hands on the well sought-after tickets. Another staple part of Wimbledon is the strawberries and cream, the classic food which is served during the tournament, which has been a part of the tournament ever since it was launched in 1877. With Wimbledon being played during summer, I think strawberries and cream is the perfect choice of food to complement watching the tennis, in what should be nice summer weather. It's also something typically British, that makes me instantly think of summer and Wimbledon.

I've never been lucky enough to watch Wimbledon in the flesh, so looks like I'll be watching it from my TV again this year. Hopefully one day I'll be able to get tickets, as nothing compares to actually being there and watching it live. During my last few weeks in Paris I managed to watch the French Open final when they broadcast it on screens by the Eiffel Tower, so hopefully they will do something similar over here with Wimbledon. Just hopefully the weather will stay nice for it, as everyone knows what a British summer can be like!

Insomnia

Wednesday, 24 June, 2015 - 10:23

I just could not fall asleep the other night. I just didn't feel sleepy. I can't explain why, but it was really annoying.

I got very bored lying in bed, so I decided to read a book – I thought this would help me get to sleep. But even when I finished reading, I still didn't feel tired. So I listened to some peaceful music. That didn't work, either. I have heard people say if you have a warm drink before bedtime it will help you drift off to sleep. So, I went downstairs and made myself a cup of tea. I had to be really quiet, because I didn't want to wake up my family. After my tea, I got back into bed. Still, I couldn't sleep. I was getting very frustrated by this point!

It felt strange to be awake while everyone else was asleep. The world seemed so quiet, in fact, it was a little bit spooky. When you go to sleep, it feels like one day ends and another begins. But if you stay up late, you realise that day and night are just a gentle transition, a cycle which has no end and no beginning. At 4am, I noticed a faint light coming through my curtains - the sun had started to rise!

Normally, I'm a very heavy sleeper and I would never be awake at this time in the morning. So on this occasion I considered myself lucky to see a beautiful sunrise. As the sun came up in the east, the birds started to sing their morning songs. I knew I needed to get some rest, but it seemed the harder I tried to force myself asleep, the more difficult it was.

Eventually, I just let my mind go free. I stopped forcing myself to sleep. I listened to the birdsong ... and the next thing I knew it was 11am! I was happy that I had managed to get some sleep! I have never struggled with sleeping before, so this was my first experience of insomnia. Fortunately, I have been sleeping well since then.

Cultural differences

9

BlakeS

Monday, 22 June, 2015 - 10:29

Thinking about my time in France, I noticed quite a few differences between the French and the English. While I was working at a French school, I was often in the staff room preparing my work. Sometimes I would hear the school secretary talking. At first I assumed she was talking to me, as there was no-one else in the room but me, so I tried to respond to her. However, I soon realised that in fact, she was talking to herself. I noticed a lot of people do this in France. In the UK, people might think you're a bit strange if you talk to yourself at work, but over there it seemed quite normal. It really did confuse me at times, because I was never sure if people were talking to me or just talking to themselves!

Another area of confusion involved the French language. In French, there are two ways to say 'you': 'tu' is the informal form, while 'vous' is the formal form. This is an aspect of French which, even now, I do not really understand. When I learnt French, I was taught to call everyone vous unless they were my family or a friend. So I was surprised that virtually everyone in France used the informal tu all the time. School children used tu with their teachers and all the staff called the head teacher tu. Even strangers I met in the street would call me tu, and sometimes tu was written on street signs. But I continued to use vous because I didn't want to people to think I was being impolite. To be honest, I'm thankful that in English we don't have to worry about these things!

As you might know, school children in the UK traditionally wear a school uniform but in France pupils do not wear a uniform. It was a culture shock for me to see children wearing Spiderman T-shirts and baggy blue jeans while in the classroom. The final difference which struck me was the relaxed attitude at school. Teachers were never in a rush, and the children and teachers are given long breaks and lots of time to eat their lunch. This is a contrast to the UK, where the school day might seem highly pressured. I found the differences puzzling at times, but I cannot deny what a great opportunity it was to live and work in another country. The UK and France are only separated by a small channel of the sea, but there are many differences between the two cultures!

Museums: do you love them or hate them?

15

RosemaryM

Tuesday, 16 June, 2015 - 17:53

A trip to a museum is not everyone's cup of tea. Some people love going to museums and poring over all the different artifacts on display. Others absolutely hate it and would far rather stay at home, with an episode of their favourite TV show. Increasingly, museums are being seen as outdated and boring by today's youngsters.

Museums are typically seen as educational, either to develop knowledge gained at school in particular subjects, or to enhance knowledge of other cultures. Some museums are very interactive, with quizzes and activities to participate in. Others have lots of information, which many people find tiring to read.

I must admit, I am not often enthused by a trip to a museum. Often, there is just too much to take in - too many things to see and too much information to read. However, there are always exceptions. I have just returned to the UK after travelling around Canada and the USA. Whilst there, I visited lots of museums with my boyfriend. Some were fantastic and really interesting; others were less exciting.

In Chicago, we visited the world-famous Art Institute of Chicago. It was filled with paintings, drawings, sculptures and installations by a huge variety of artists, such as Picasso, Monet, Matisse and Dali. There was a mixture of traditional and modern art, including colourful stained glass windows, tribal art and sculptures and abstract art. I liked seeing the paintings by Monet (who is known for his paintings of waterlilies, a flower which grows on ponds) and some of the strange modern art.

When we were in Washington D.C., we visited a few of the Smithsonian museums. These are all free to visit - which is great if you just want to see a few things, and not spend all day inside. The Air and Space museum was particularly good: it had lots of aircrafts and rockets on display, interesting information and also some interactive sections. We also went to the National U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Naturally, it was sad to read about the horrors of this tragedy which affected so many people. However, it was also incredibly interesting to read the stories of those who survived the Holocaust, as well as those who helped others.

I also enjoyed visiting the Old Fire Station in Philadelphia. Inside there were old fire engines - which looked like horse-drawn carriages! - and equipment which they used to use. You could even try on a fireman's uniform! This wasn't a museum which I would have thought of visiting myself, but it was recommended by locals. It turned out to be a really worthwhile visit!

Last but not least, I also found the 9/11 Memorial and Museum to be of great interest. This museum is dedicated to those who lost their lives, as well as their families, when the Twin Towers in New York City were attacked by terrorists in 2001. It tells you how the terrorists planned the attack, how they hijacked the planes, and ultimately what happened as a result of their actions. Surviving pieces of the towers are shown in the museum, alongside damaged fire engines and donated clothing and shoes worn by survivors. It was a truly thought provoking visit, which made me value my own life that little bit more.

I think museums play an important role in preserving artifacts of historical significance for future generations. Whatever your interests, there is likely to be a museum for you. You can visit waxwork museums to see models of your favourite celebrities (and get photos with the Queen!), science museums for a more hands-on, interactive visit and so much more! Best of all, if you're ever in the UK, many of them are free!

Words to live by

2

KatB

Monday, 8 June, 2015 - 23:50

A recent run of coincidences has got me thinking about poetry.

First, there was a utterly brilliant and totally unexpected birthday present from a very dear friend. Concealed in the inevitably mundane trappings of the postal service - for all non-bank related post, I feel the Royal Mail should consider wrapping their parcels in sparkly, or at the very least brightly coloured paper - was a slim cardboard box. In this cardboard box was a selection of twenty poems: some of which I recognised, whilst others I had never read before. All are beautiful, uplifting and moving. I wish there I could share each and every single one with you. For the purpose of this blog, however, that would be impossible. So here's just a very short taster of one poem by Emily Dickinson to whet your appetite:

*If I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain; ...
By Emily Dickinson.*

In such a simple yet powerful manner, it expresses all that we really want from life: to make a difference.

The second coincidence was stumbling across this article in The Telegraph:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11174094/Poems-to-live-your-life-by.html>

The article explores the idea that poetry, rather than being inaccessible, melodramatic and essentially useless, has a role to play in everyday life, because of the way it can capture snapshots of emotion and experience in a few lines. Plus, the fact that Judi Dench learns a new poem every single day was staggering - as if she wasn't already cool enough!

The third and final reason poetry has been on my mind is because of a poem I had previously scribbled down on a piece of paper, which I rediscovered whilst I was slowly, joylessly packing up my things ready for the move back home. I couldn't (and still can't quite) believe that my time as a language assistant was *vorbei*; after months of early mornings, long weekends, and bright new cities, it was all over. Weirdly enough, the end of the year coincided with two similarly monumental milestones: in the space of four days, I said goodbye to my life in Germany, turned twenty one and ran the Edinburgh Marathon. Needless to say, given that certain Disney films can reduce me to a blubbering wreck, it was an emotional time. And the marathon-induced blisters didn't help matters.

Anyway. Back to the poem. It's a section from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets. Throughout this last year - a year which has been simultaneously memorable, unique and incredibly challenging - I have often found myself returning to the poem for reassurance. For days when it seemed that nothing was going according to plan, everything was falling apart, and I was a complete failure who was only good for staying in bed and watching hours of mindless television. For days when the marathon seemed like an impossible dream, and days when it felt like I was turning twenty one with nothing to show for it. Stupid, I know, but I used to be convinced that I would compete in show jumping ride for Team GB at the Olympics aged a mere nineteen. That particular ambition I now need to let go. This poem - gently, articulately - reminds me that, no matter what, it's all okay. Here, we can only put a taster of the poem:

*'So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years-
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres-
Trying to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure ...'
By T.S. Elliot*

Ten golden rules to surviving life with your parents

2

AnneS

Saturday, 6 June, 2015 - 16:33

I have just finished my job as a teaching assistant in France and there are a few weeks before I will start my new job in Brussels. In the meantime, I'm back living with my parents after 5 years of being away. While I'm in the UK I'm trying to make the most of visiting my British friends and family before I jet off again. On the whole, I am having a good time and am very grateful to my parents for letting me move back home rent-free for a few months. However, moving back in with my parents, albeit temporarily, has brought back some strange family patterns that I thought we'd all outgrown. In an interesting way, it has brought me back to some of my teenage struggles, and I have come up with some golden rules to ease this transition.

1. Always knock

Most people value some privacy in their lives, and if you expect your parents to knock before coming into your room, you should do them the same courtesy, if only to remind them that it is important to do so.

2. Be as clear as possible and follow the rules

Whether you have very set rules in your family or not, try to be clear about your intentions. If you go out, let them know when you think you'll be back and who you're with. Think of doing this as a courtesy to them and to stave off some parental worrying. It might even be a good idea to suggest a rule that seems fair to you. For example, if you are saving up for something, rather than ask for the money you could ask to earn more pocket money if you do certain chores each week and see if they agree with your terms. They will see this as a more responsible approach to the situation and feel pleased for having raised you so well.

3. Do your bit

Everyone knows that chores are not fun, including your parents! But if you chose to do chores without or before being asked to do so, you will feel in control of your own time. Also, this means that you can choose the chores that you prefer to do and may mean that you get to avoid some of the chores you dislike the most.

4. Be polite and try not to rise to it

There is an expression in English, "a little goes a long way" which in this case means that a small gesture can have a big effect. Most arguments can be avoided by speaking to each other nicely. We also say *don't rise to it*, which means try not to let teasing affect you and put things into perspective. Remember, people tend to enjoy teasing because they get a reaction. Don't give them the satisfaction.

5. Avoid criticism

They say that it's easiest to criticize your family because you love them the most, and you know they will always love you no matter what you say. But that doesn't mean you should abuse this. Nobody likes to be criticised, including your parents, so the next time you find yourself sighing at your mother for not knowing how to work the T.V, catch yourself before you do and explain calmly. Remember, she taught you how to walk, talk and hold a spoon. You can remind her of something she's forgotten in a nice way.

6. Identify things that particularly annoy your parents and try to avoid doing them to the best of your ability

No two parents are the same. As frightening as this thought might be, your parents are individual people and certain things will push their buttons (an expression which means to annoy someone a lot) more than others. Sometimes these things might seem illogical or petty to you, but especially if it's easy to do, why waste your energy getting irritated by it? Life will be much easier for you if you make efforts to prevent avoidable conflicts.

7. External venting

Find someone to talk to who is not living with you at home to vent to. *Vent* just means to help you deal with the stress of something by talking to someone about it. You will probably find that your friends are having similar problems, and it might even help you to laugh about some of your strange family rules (even though, from my experience, this is much easier to do once you have moved out!)

8. Find a stress reliever

Whether you start doing yoga in your room like me, going out for walks, or getting out to do sports or activities, it helps to do something that is just focused on yourself. If you make this a regular thing and make it known to your family that this time is important to you, they will probably leave you to it.

9. If it gets too much - pick your battles or retreat

In English we have an expression, *pick your battles* which means that you should try and put silly arguments into perspective and let things go if they don't matter too much. Equally, it means to only speak up and argue your point if it is really important. Naturally, you'll want to pick a good moment to bring something up (after dinner is usually better so no one is hungry!) But if you take a deep breath and realise that it's not a really important issue but you still feel annoyed, retreat into your room and give yourself some time to calm down and gain perspective.

10. Apologise

Sometimes arguments happen; we just can't all get along all the time, but once everyone has calmed down, apologise as soon as possible to clear the air. Even if the apology is just "I'm sorry that we fought", it will feel more resolved. Especially if arguments arise often in your household, you'll want each conflict to be clear cut and not a tangle of all previous arguments.

The disappearance of the love locks of Paris

32

ChloeF

Monday, 1 June, 2015 - 13:20

As Audrey Hepburn once said "Paris is always a good idea", and from having lived just outside this city the past year I must say I completely agree. Paris is a city of wealth and sophistication and is well known as being the most romantic city in the world. Tourists flock to the city to take photos in front of the Eiffel tower, picnic along the Seine, and shop on the Champs Elysees, amongst many other things.

Another thing that is hugely popular amongst tourists is to visit Le Pont des Arts and put a padlock on the bridge with their and their partners initials on, then throw the key into the Seine, which is meant to represent eternal love. How romantic! Well apparently not, as the bridge is struggling to cope with the weight of the locks, and so officials from the city have decided to remove them.

This decision has annoyed a lot of people, undoubtedly many tourists who come to Paris to put locks on the bridge. There are however several other bridges throughout the city which have started acquiring padlocks over the past few years, but it's believed that these 'lovelocks' are to be removed as well; so it looks like the tourists won't have much luck with the padlocks in the coming future!

According to locals, the padlocks are ugly and an eyesore to the city, but personally I don't see it. I understand the need for the city to look after and protect the bridges, especially if they're starting to collapse under the weight of the 'lovelocks', but how can anyone see them as anything but beautiful? For me, it's what the padlocks symbolise; eternal love, and how they represent Paris as being one of the most romantic cities in the world.

A visit to Le Pont des Arts Bridge has become one of the most frequently visited attractions in the city. For me, the 'lovelock' bridge is like the Eiffel tower; you can't imagine Paris without it. I just hope they keep the padlocks and do something with them, instead of just destroying them.

Time goes by so slowly

26

KittyO

Wednesday, 27 May, 2015 - 10:50

Don't you love it when you have a bit of free time? After school or work, during the weekends, or even in your lunch break, it's great to squeeze in a little time for yourself. In general, 'free time' is a luxury; it is 'free' time because it is time spent not working, studying, or running errands. Fundamentally, the beauty of free time is that you don't have to do anything; you are at liberty to choose what you do. Do you relax in front of the television, unwind with a good book, or de-stress by cooking a nice meal? When I have free time, I love to go for a run, draw, or watch some of my favourite television series.

I have just had a whole month of free time at home with my parents. I finished working as a teaching assistant in France at the end of April, and I am just about to start a new job in a publishing agency in Paris. However, this month was not all that I thought that it would be. Before I came home, I had ideas about what I would do and where I would go during this month off. I had plans to get fit, do more art, read more, visit museums and art galleries. And guess what ... NONE of it happened. I was lazy, I watched television all day and I ate way too much chocolate. I've discovered that when you have too much free time, it just turns into 'time,' and trying to pass that time becomes increasingly boring. Apparently, it becomes much more difficult to motivate yourself to do interesting things when you don't actually have anything to do in the first place. It's a strange phenomenon, but I think it's the same for most people. When you only have a little bit of free time, it becomes more precious, so you use it well, but when it's all you have, you simply waste it.

It's not how I planned for this month to go, but it has definitely made me excited to start work, and to start feeling productive again! I have a lot of things planned for when I am there, but if I don't get to do them all it will be ok – because I will probably be too busy to fit it all in!

Places to visit in and around Spain

2

VictoriaK

Wednesday, 20 May, 2015 - 17:44



1. Murcia

I have spent the last 8 months living in Murcia so I feel that I am obliged to put it as number one on my list. On my return from exploring other cities, I always feel like I'm returning home when I step foot in Murcia. The city centre is vibrant and has an incredible atmosphere all year round. Although the accent takes a little getting used to at first, you soon adjust to it and the lovely Murcian people make you feel right at home. Murcia is also home to some gorgeous beaches and amazing coastal views so it really does have the best of both worlds!

2. Gibraltar

I visited Gibraltar during the Easter holidays and although beforehand I didn't know what to expect, I was blown away by the beauty of Gibraltar! From a short cable car ride up to the top of the rock you are met with magnificent views over the coast and not to mention the adorable monkeys which curiously come to greet you on your arrival. (Although make sure to hide all your food or they may get confused and think it's a gift for them!)

3. Granada

If you go to Granada, make sure that you visit the Alhambra, it's incredible and has some incredible views! The city itself is also gorgeous although I *did* find that it was very touristy, even out of season.

4. Valencia

Valencia is beautiful. It's as simple as that! The *river* area is so vibrant and full of life, all the way up to the science museum and beaches. However, I was a little confused by the fact that the river had long been filled in and turned into a park, yet people still referred to it as *The River*.

5. Morocco

Venturing out of Europe for the first time was definitely an experience to remember. The tremendous culture engulfs you as soon as you arrive and doesn't falter one bit throughout the whole stay. Going to Morocco, in my opinion, is an eye-opening experience which you will remember forever.

6. Alicante

I have spent many a weekend in Alicante, making the most of the beautiful beach in low season, before all the tourists arrive. However, now that it's May, each weekend the beach is becoming more and more cramped so I'd definitely recommend a visit in either September, October or April, just after or before the holiday season takes off.

7. La Isla de Tabarca

If you like quaint, rustic places then Tabarca is the place for you! It's just a small island neighbouring Alicante which is home to some amazing hidden beach hide-outs and restaurants.

8. Almeria

The main thing which stands out to me about Almeria is the castle. It's beautiful and was the highlight of the whole trip.

Everyday puzzles

6

KatB

Tuesday, 19 May, 2015 - 15:06

Humans have been, historically speaking, astonishingly ignorant. Not until comparatively recently did we realise that our small blue and green planet is, in fact, round and not flat. Knowledge was the preserve of the elite, much of which was in fact based on superstition and educated guesswork.

Luckily, the scientists of the 15th and 16th century Renaissance dragged mankind - kicking and screaming and clutching to its superstitious ways - out of the Dark Ages. During the eighteenth century, a period known now as the Enlightenment, many political and philosophical revolutionaries challenged existing social systems. And then, in the twentieth century, civil rights movements shocked the world into recognising gender and racial equality as a right, rather than a privilege.

Great minds will always challenge the status quo. Scientists, philosophers, explorers and avant-garde artists: they all contribute to the progress of mankind. They are constantly searching for answers to the really big questions, such as if there could be life on other planets, or if there is a God.

Us normal folk, however, face our own set of unanswerable everyday mysteries. A set of nagging puzzles life likes to throw at us now and again, if you will. You know what I mean - like why does it only rain when I have forgotten my umbrella? Or why is the traffic always worse when I am already late? Why is Justin Bieber famous? And why do my house keys insist on running away from me? I'm sure I left them in my bag ...

If anyone has the answer to any of these unanswerable everyday mysteries, please let me know! (Particularly the last one)

Lascaux caves

2

BlakeS

Tuesday, 19 May, 2015 - 11:28



Have you heard about the Lascaux cave? The cave is located near a town called Montignac in southern France. The Lascaux cave was discovered in 1940 by four French boys who were exploring the countryside. They found the cave walls were covered with colourful paintings of horses, bulls, deer and other prehistoric animals. Scientists have worked out that the paintings are at least 17,000 years old.

Nobody is sure of the purpose of the cave. It might have been a spiritual place, where people came to pray in the hopes of hunting more food. Perhaps the cave was a meeting room and the ancient people thought it would be nice to decorate the walls. It has also been suggested that the images are an astronomical map which helped people calculate the seasons. Even if we don't understand the purpose of the cave, we cannot deny that it is an incredible place. It shows how talented and clever people were, even without our modern technology. These people were not simply 'cavemen', they were an advanced civilisation. It is amazing how the images survived for so long, completely untouched. After the cave was discovered in the 1940s, millions of visitors started coming to see it. This changed the atmosphere inside the cave and a fungus started to grow which began to destroy the original images. Wisely, the French government ordered the cave to be closed in 1963. Nowadays, only scientists are allowed to see the real cave. They are still trying to stop the fungus from destroying the irreplaceable wall art.

To satisfy the tourists, an exact copy of the cave was created. The fake cave is very realistic, and the paintings are astonishing. Although the cave is very small, it is the quality of the images which is so exceptional. When I was in France, I went to see the fake cave, which is called Lascaux II. A small group of us were taken underground to the reproduction cave. It was cold and silent inside. A tour guide explained how the prehistoric artists used natural minerals to create brown, black, red and other colours to paint the animals. They painted the animals to look like they are moving, which is a very clever technique. For me, the cave felt very spiritual, so I think it might have been used for religious ceremonies or festivals. We sometimes think that we are the most intelligent humans to have ever lived on this planet. But the Lascaux cave made me realise that even thousands of years ago people had built great civilisations. We can trace the roots of our current society all the way back to these ancient people. I think it's amazing!

Note from editor: the photo isn't from Lascaux caves.

Word games

3

RosemaryM

Tuesday, 19 May, 2015 - 09:22

I am a huge fan of word games. I will play anything from anagrams to crosswords and word searches to board games. For language learners, playing word games is a great way to revise existing vocabulary and learn new words.

Scrabble, the immensely popular word game, has to be my favourite game. Ideally you need two people or more to play; there are versions for single players but it's better to play with others! Each player selects seven letter tiles at random from the bag. The first player puts a word down in the middle of the board. Players must then link their words to existing words on the board. Each letter scores a different number of points. The game ends when there are no tiles left in the bag and someone has succeeded in putting down all their letters. The winner is the person with the most points. As a child, I played it with

my family. Whenever we visited my grandparents, the game would inevitably come out and a family game would commence. When I'm at home during the university holidays, I often challenge my mum to a game. This year, I downloaded the *Scrabble* app on my phone; I couldn't take the board game with me, so this was a great alternative!

When I was younger, I also played *Upwords*. This game is similar to *Scrabble*, with a couple of exceptions. Firstly, all letters have the same value: 1 point. Secondly, you can stack letters on top of existing letters to change the words which are already on the board.

Yesterday, I played *Bananagrams* for the first time. You can either play against others or just play by yourself. Each player takes a certain number of letter tiles from the bag; the number of tiles varies according to the number of players. You then race against the other players to make words with your tiles and link them all together, like a crossword.

I also enjoy doing the crossword in the newspaper; I usually do it with my mum. These are a good way to expand your vocabulary and learn more synonyms, as you will need them to solve the clues. I also like playing the word wheel game in my mum's paper. You are given nine letters and have to make as many words as you can from these letters. Usually, one specified letter has to be in every word you make.

Eurovision hits Vienna

42

JulieG

Friday, 15 May, 2015 - 11:48

Vienna: home of Mozart, waltzing and exceedingly good cake. Oh, and for one week only the Eurovision Song Contest!

For anybody who hasn't heard of it, this is a singing competition like no other. Every year, the countries in Europe (and recently some others like Russia and Australia) send their best, and sometimes weirdest, singers to compete against each other for the title of best song and the honor of hosting the competition the following year. The winner is chosen by a panel of judges and the public's votes from all around the world.

Last year's winners were Austria, with "Rise like a Phoenix" by Conchita Wurst.

So, that means all the glitz and glamour (and madness) is coming to the city where I live and I can't wait! I'll have to be honest though, when I chose Vienna for the second half of my year abroad, the upcoming contest was only really a small speck in the back of my mind. I mean, watching the performances on TV is fun and there is always guaranteed to be that one crazy band, but normally I end up falling asleep before the end of the show, mainly because the UK never get any points so I know they're not going to win!

But this year, I won't be watching it from behind a TV screen ...

I'm going to be there in person! Well, for one of the semi-finals at least (the tickets for the show you see on TV sold out and were very expensive!) As well as seeing it in real life, I'm going to soak up the atmosphere by heading down to the Eurovision Village in the city centre. It's going to be a week long party, with stalls from each of the countries taking part and lots of activities to get involved in ... and no doubt some crazy fans! I'm also secretly hoping to catch a glimpse of a celebrity or two.

All of this leads up to the big day on the 23rd of May, when the final show will take place (the one you see on TV).

So even though I'm not a huge Eurovision fan, this year it's kind of hard not to be swept up in all the fun! I just hope that the UK won't be too embarrassing this year, especially when I'm in a crowd full of Austrians with the British flag painted on my face.

Lists and learning

3

KatB

Tuesday, 12 May, 2015 - 21:16

Most of us are familiar with the concept of a list.

A list can be long or short, hurriedly hand-written on a torn piece of scrap paper or typed, printed and laminated. And as for the contents of a list, the possibilities are endless! From the humble shopping list, to the procrastinator's best friend, the 'To Do' list, there's even a whole film dedicated to the most ambitious type of list - namely, *The Bucket List*. (Starring Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson, it's well worth a watch.)

I, too, have a list. This particular list is around as long as my arm, and still growing. It's a list of all the things I would like to learn, given the opportunity. The list includes scuba-diving, rollerskating, sign language and how to play the saxophone - to name but a few!

There is no rhyme nor reason to this list; it's just a completely random selection of skills which I currently lack. And sometimes, looking at the list makes me feel somewhat useless. I don't know first aid, I can't sew or knit and I wouldn't have a clue how to change a tyre.

But over the course of my time as a teaching assistant in Germany, I appear to have accidentally picked up some skills I otherwise never would have practised: learning how to plan and lead lessons, speaking more German than I ever have in my entire life and finally understanding the finer technicalities of English grammar. Well, almost.

So maybe it's time to start another list, one of all the things I have learnt how to do; after all, it's important to have goals, but it's just as important to appreciate what you are already good at, especially on the days where you lose sight of how far you've come.

Plus, there's still plenty of time to learn the saxophone. Or maybe I'll start with the triangle and build up from there ... Watch this space!

Where will you be in one year?

9

JohnR

Tuesday, 12 May, 2015 - 18:52

As the programme comes to an end across Europe, all of the Language Assistants are looking to the future. Most are returning to their university courses to finish studying while others, like me, are now looking for new work or are celebrating another placement abroad.

One thing we can all agree on, however, is that a lot can change in one year and our adventure is coming to a close. Good things will have happened and bad things will have happened too. We will all leave with so many memories of unforgettable experiences.

For me, this year has felt like a roller-coaster. From meeting amazing people in Mallorca to losing amazing people back home. From having the opportunity to live independently on a Mediterranean island to being thousands of miles from my family and friends.

The real countdown has begun and my flight is booked for the last day in June. It really has left me torn because there are two sides to a coin: I am very excited to return home but don't really want this incredible journey to end.

I hope I can find another job soon and hopefully abroad. I would love to keep writing like this about my adventures abroad in a blog. This website really has helped me return to love writing stories in private and to pick up my pen again. I can't wait for my next adventure. Hopefully all of you are excited too!

In one year I hope to be working in a job I love abroad and writing a blog about my adventures there. I also hope that I will be able to return to the UK for a while. I am missing my family and my amazingly supportive girlfriend. Off on another adventure!

Life in the city versus life in the country

3

JulieG

Thursday, 7 May, 2015 - 13:50

I have to be honest, life in Vienna is pretty great. Ok that's me being a bit British about it, life here is incredibly fun. Although I am originally a country girl (I come from a small English village), I am loving the city experience. There is so much to see and do and a never ending list of cool restaurants to try and places to explore. But last weekend I decided it was time to venture out of the city and into the Austrian countryside for once, which I had heard was beautiful.

So, in search of rolling green fields and snow-capped mountains we hopped on a train to Innsbruck, a small city in the Tyrol area known for skiing. Even before we arrived, we were treated to some spectacular views on the train journey. Bright green fields stretched out before us, with towering mountains set against a clear blue sky. It almost looked too perfect to be real.

When we arrived in the city, the mountains were even closer, almost on top of us as Innsbruck is nestled in a valley. So everywhere you looked, there one was staring back at you. The view at the end of the street? A mountain. The view from our room? A mountain. It was certainly very different from Vienna!

Even the center of the city is very different, with its narrow cobbled streets and decorated buildings that could have come straight out of a fairytale book. I found myself wondering what life would be like if I had chosen somewhere like Innsbruck for my year abroad, especially when we went to visit a friend in a nearby town, in the very heart of the mountains.

From up there, the views down into the valley were breathtaking. Imagine waking up to that everyday! Everyone seemed really friendly as well, always saying hello as we passed each other in the street (this would never happen in Vienna!). And after a short walk along a mountain path, surrounded by fir trees and the quietness of nature, the country girl in me was re-ignited. I almost found myself wishing that I lived out here.

But then I realized how small the place was and how difficult it might be to get around and that there probably wasn't much to do apart from hiking and skiing! So as much as I had enjoyed the Austrian countryside and experiencing a more "typical" Austria, I was glad I could return back to Vienna and busy city life.

Time to vote

5

BlakeS

Tuesday, 5 May, 2015 - 09:14

In the United Kingdom, a general election must take place every five years. The result of a general election decides who will be in charge of the UK government for the next five years, and who will be the Prime Minister.

The United Kingdom is divided into 650 small areas, called constituencies. The people who live in each constituency can vote for a candidate who is standing in the election. The candidate who receives the most votes will be elected as the Member of Parliament (MP) for that constituency. Most candidates represent a political party. There are several political parties in the UK. The Conservative party is a right-wing party which promotes lowering taxes by reducing the size of government. It is a very well established political party which has governed the UK many times. Well known Prime Ministers from the Conservative party include Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher and the current Prime Minister, David Cameron. The Labour party is a left-wing party which promotes workers' rights and wants greater funding for government workers. These are the two main parties, but there are many other smaller parties. The Liberal Democrats consider themselves a centrist party, positioning themselves as a middle option between the Conservative and Labour parties. The Green party is concerned with environmental issues and believes university should be free for all students. There is also the Scottish National Party which wants Scotland to be an independent country, and a party called Sinn Fein which promotes Northern Irish independence. Finally there is the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) which believes the UK should leave the European Union and wants tighter immigration controls.

The candidate who wins in their constituency will go to Parliament in London. If a political party has a majority of their candidates in Parliament, that party wins the election and will govern the country until the next election. If no party has a majority, then parties must form alliances and cooperatively govern the country as a coalition government. This week, everyone in the UK will have the opportunity to vote for who will be the Member of Parliament for their constituency. This will determine which party will govern the United Kingdom. As you can imagine, it can be difficult to choose which party to vote for. Some people think politics is pointless and boring, or they find the political system too confusing. Personally, I find politics very interesting. I have spent some time considering which party I think will be best to govern my country. I think it is very important to vote.

What are you scared of?

44

RosemaryM

Tuesday, 5 May, 2015 - 08:05



Whether we admit it or not, most of us are scared of something. Sometimes, we grow out of it. When I was little, I hated the dark. I slept with a small nightlight on; my parents would switch it off when I had fallen asleep. Now, I can't get to sleep with a light on; I need it to be dark to fall asleep!

Like lots of people, I'm terrified of spiders. The fear of spiders is known as arachnophobia. I don't mind the little ones, as long as they're not too close to me. It's the spiders with long legs, or those with fat bodies, that scare me! Usually, I leave a jar or cup over the spider and ask my mum to get rid of it! When I was living in France this year, that wasn't an option. I almost screamed when I saw a spider on my toothpaste and had to remove it myself!

I am also scared of clowns. Although they are supposed to be funny, I find their painted faces very creepy and scary! When I was little, I would go to the circus with my family. I loved all the acrobatic tricks and the magic, but I couldn't watch the clowns.

Until this year, I had always loved flying. I still enjoy the take off and landing and going through the clouds. However, when I fly alone I often find myself feeling slightly petrified before the flight leaves. For some reason, I am scared that the plane will crash - even though statistics show that you are more likely to be in a car crash than a plane crash!

There are lots of courses you can take which will supposedly cure your fears. I don't know how effective they are, but I think time is the best cure. Even if you never lose your fear of something entirely, over time you may become more relaxed about it.

It's a girl!

17

RosemaryM

Saturday, 2 May, 2015 - 14:31



Since late last year, the British public has been looking forward to the birth of a new royal baby. When Prince George was born, the media was in a frenzy in the lead up to the birth of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's first child. Now, almost two years later, the build up to the latest royal birth has gripped the nation.

Here in the UK, the newspapers often included special features on what Kate was wearing during her pregnancy; following their publication, the outfits Kate wore sold out quickly. Many people placed bets on whether the newborn would be a boy or a girl. They also bet on which date it would be born, what it would be named and even whether it would be born in the morning or the afternoon! I think it's very silly to bet, as you're likely to lose your money.

Today, in accordance with tradition, a notice of birth was attached to the railings of Buckingham Palace. The notice simply states that the Duchess of Cambridge gave birth to a girl and that they are both in good health. It also bears the signatures of those involved in the delivery of her new child. Lots of people had been gathering around Buckingham Palace and the Lindo Wing (part of St Mary's Hospital, where Kate gave birth) over the past week in anticipation of the event. Many of these people had made signs, decorated with slogans such as "not long to go!", and wore British flags.

The new princess is fourth in line to the throne, after Prince Charles (her grandfather), Prince William (her father) and Prince George (her brother). Her name has not yet been released, but many people think it is likely to be a name with royal connections, such as Charlotte or Alice. In 2013, just before the birth of Prince George, a new law was passed, known as The Succession to the Crown Act. It means that she will maintain her place as fourth in line to the throne, even if Kate and William have another baby boy in the future. In the past, even if a boy had an older sister he would always be entitled to the crown first. The name of the new princess will be announced in the coming days - I hope they pick a nice name!

This afternoon, the BT tower in London displayed a purple banner with the words "it's a girl!", whilst the Royal Navy chose to mark the event by spelling out the word "sister" whilst in formation on board the

HMS Lancaster. Up and down the country, people will be celebrating the birth of this little girl - which could be considered a rather strange thing to do since the majority of us do not actually know her!

Snapshots of Colombia: Public transport in Barranquilla

NatalieA2

Friday, 1 May, 2015 - 19:35



When I first arrived in Barranquilla, the public transport system was a mystery to me. Seemingly hundreds of huge, multicoloured buses whizzing around, suddenly jerking to a halt to eject some poor passenger and racing off again at breakneck speed, with a cough and splutter. The inexplicability of it all was made worse by the fact that there seemed to be no stop signs, and therefore absolutely no indication of where the bus was going, or at what time it would arrive there. Now I know more about the ways of Barranquilla buses, I thought it only fair to share this knowledge - I'm pretty proud to have got this far without getting lost. Too many times!

So, to start: the decorations. The vehicles are painted all colours of the rainbow (the brighter, the better), and often have graffiti-style designs on the side. In fact, this type of graphic is so typical here that even a local design company took it and decided to make T-shirts with it. The inside is decorated according to the taste of the driver, with stickers, quotations, names of family members, drapes and various fluffy items dangling from the ceiling. At night time, the buses are covered with multicoloured flashing lights: enough for a good party atmosphere, which, coupled with the ear-splitting music that pumps out from the driver's stereo system (with extra bass, naturally), is exactly what you get!

As for the destinations, no signs are needed - these are often splashed across the front of the bus, with a card in the front window detailing more specific directions. This is also the reason for the lack of stops - totally unnecessary. If you see a bus passing your way and you want to get on, you stick out your hand and wave it about a bit, and the bus driver will promptly slam on the brakes and wait for you to hop on before continuing on his way.

On the journey itself, there's yet more fun to be had. Vendors often pass through the buses, trying to sell you sweets or water bags (totally a thing here). There are also preachers, come to give you the sermon of the day in return for some small change. However, my favourite moment is when someone comes into the main aisle with a mini stereo and some rap to entertain the crowd. In the UK, we have this but only on the street, definitely not on a bus. There are some quite political lyrics to be heard, and they often finish it off with a bit of freestyle about each of the passengers - great fun!

All in all, a bus journey in Barranquilla is quite an experience - and all that, for less than 2,000 pesos (about 50p). Not bad, eh?

Disney mania

RosemaryM

Tuesday, 28 April, 2015 - 09:34



Most children in Britain have grown up watching Disney classics: *The Lion King*, *Cinderella* and *Peter Pan*, amongst many others. As we grow up, we tend to distance ourselves from what we perceive to be childish films - but we never forget that they were an important part of our childhood. The cycle will begin again when we have children and share the magic of Disney with the next generation. Since the release of *Tangled* in 2010, Disney has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. Now, it is no longer a brand associated only with children; teenagers and adults alike are appreciating Disney in a new light.

The storylines have been updated and modernised to appeal to a wider audience; the entire personality of Rapunzel in *Tangled* was altered so that she was no longer a passive character. Disney's adaptation of *Into the Woods* was arguably a darker fairy-tale; personally, I felt it didn't quite hit the mark. It was a little too creepy for children: some characters, such as the Big Bad Wolf (played by Johnny Depp) and Prince Charming (played by Chris Pine) had rather disturbing personalities. *Into the Woods* was initially a stage musical; for the adult audience, too much content was cut from the original content in order to make it a viable production for a younger audience. *Frozen* was a breakthrough for Disney: ultimately, no male hero was involved and it focused on the importance of family relationships.

In recent releases, the songs have even made the charts! The hit song 'Let It Go' from *Frozen* enjoyed worldwide popularity. The songs featured in *Tangled* were all very catchy! Whilst in France I saw the new release of *Cinderella*. I was slightly confused as contrary to the typical Disney movie, there were hardly any songs!

Children are always aware of the fact that the good characters (often referred to as 'the goodies') always win, and the bad characters (often referred to as 'the baddies') will be punished. As an adult viewer, I think you can also pick up on lessons of morality which you may not have noticed as a child.

Disney films and songs are available in many languages. As a language-learning tool, I think Disney songs are actually incredibly useful. This is because the translations of the songs are not literal; they are adapted in order to get across the true meaning of the song. As such, you can learn more idiomatic constructions.

The 'ideal' woman

17

BethanyS

Tuesday, 28 April, 2015 - 08:24

Every day we are confronted with pictures of people with perfect bodies. The men in adverts have dreamy eyes and large muscles. The women in magazines are slender women with curves in all the right places. These images are shown as beautiful; the bodies are perfect and ideal. These photographs can often trigger the question 'why can't I look like that?' or declarations of 'she's so lucky!'

It seems, however, that the women lucky enough to have the 'ideal' body change endlessly. The most desired body type is different depending on which country you look at and in what year. The Ancient

Greeks thought women should be plump and full-bodied but the people of the Hans Dynasty thought the most appealing females had slim waists.

In many eras and cultures, it was considered beautiful to have pale or fair skin. This was true in the Hans Dynasty, in Renaissance Italy and in Victorian England. In Victorian England, pale skin was a sign of wealth and belonging to a high social class whereas darker skin suggested you had to work outside. Today, different cultures have different opinions on fair skin. It is still preferred in some countries, such as Japan. A lot of people in Japan regard fair skin as beautiful and there is even a market for skin whitening cosmetics. In modern England, however, many women use sun beds or fake tan in order to have tanned, golden skin. They believe it makes them look healthier.

Throughout the 21st century, the 'ideal' body has been very changeable. During the roaring 1920s, the ideal woman was flat chested and had an almost boyish physique. In the following decades, during the golden age of Hollywood, Marilyn Monroe set the standard. The dream woman was curvy with an hourglass figure.

Today, magazines show us photos of people with 'the perfect body'. According to history, this doesn't exist. Every body type was considered perfect and the ideal in some culture at some time. Despite what we see in magazines, we have thousands of years of different ideals to show us that, really, no body type is better than any other. Each and every body is beautiful.

Home comforts

5

BlakeS

Monday, 27 April, 2015 - 12:51

My placement in France is the first time that I have been separated from my family and away from my house for many months. It has been very rewarding to be independent and to have complete freedom over my life. But I have also realised that there are many things from home which I miss.

One of the home comforts I miss is the mugs at my house. I know, it's bit strange, isn't it? The thing is I find it very comforting to have a hot drink from my favourite mug. Another thing I miss is having books to read. Of course, there's plenty to read on the internet. But some days I would just like to feel the texture of the paper and the weight of a good book in my hands. Books are big and heavy items, so unfortunately I couldn't fit any in my suitcase when I came to France. A final thing I miss is having carpet on the floor. My house in France has a wooden floor. It's easy to clean, but it does get very cold. My feet are always freezing, so I have to wear slippers all the time! Also, it has been ages since I could sit down on a sofa, or have a hot bath, or even eat cheddar cheese. These are all things I will really look forward to when I get back home.

But there will definitely be things about France that I will miss, too. I will miss the friends, both British and French, that I have made here. I will miss the French architecture, the beautiful countryside and 3-course lunches. I'm starting to think about all this as my work placement comes to an end. There is a saying, "you don't know what you've got until it's gone." From my experience, I've found this to be true. Some of the smallest things in life are the things you miss the most. Being away from home has taught me to appreciate the little things in life!

Three places that I call home

3

RosemaryM

Sunday, 26 April, 2015 - 09:01

I have just finished my year abroad; I spent it in a quaint town called Colmar, in eastern France. I usually study in Leeds, the UK's third largest city - though it doesn't actually feel that big! I was brought up in a city called Chester and, until going to university, had lived there all my life.

Colmar has been my home for the last seven months. It is a beautiful town in Alsace - a French region which, over the last century, has been both French and German territory. The region has a very interesting history and a strong sense of identity. Alsations (this is the word for people who come from Alsace, but it is also the name of a breed of dog!) are very friendly people. Whilst I lived in Colmar, I worked as a language assistant in a secondary school. I taught English to several classes and over the year I grew quite attached to my students: I enjoyed making lessons that they would enjoy and games that would make them laugh. Telling each class that it was my last lesson with them was odd; it is likely I will never see most of these students again. I almost cried on my last day; I didn't want to leave this beautiful town, nor my lovely colleagues and students, behind.

Leeds is the city where I attend university. I have made several really good friends there (including my boyfriend) and it was hard knowing I wouldn't be there this year. Last year, I shared a house with six other people - it was such good fun and I have some incredible memories of our time together. When I left Leeds in June last year, it was odd to think that I won't return until this September. In just two short years, Leeds became my home: I knew where to go for which things, the good places for a day out, the nice places to eat and who I could turn to for help. It was difficult to leave that support network behind.

Last but not least: Chester. I am lucky to have a great group of friends from secondary school; we still meet up when we're back in Chester and it's always nice to catch up. I've been friends with one girl since nursery - that's a friendship which has lasted for around sixteen years! Being in Chester means spending time with my family - my mother, father, sister and pet gerbil, Fred. Chester is also home to one of my favourite places: Chester Zoo. It's the UK's number one zoo and I still love to visit it.

Now, I'm feeling rather confused. I no longer know which place to call home. This is a strange feeling and also one which makes me feel both happy and sad. On the one hand, it's nice to have several places where I feel at home, with people that are good friends. On the other hand, when I'm in one place I miss the other two - which can make me feel quite sad.

Interrailing around Europe

3

RebeccaW

Saturday, 25 April, 2015 - 16:20

I recently went on my first interrailing adventure around Europe with a friend. I am currently on my Year Abroad in Germany working as an English language assistant and thought the Easter holidays would be the perfect time to do some travelling.

One of the many benefits of interrailing is that it is cheap and you can see lots of Europe in a short space of time. We decided to see 5 cities in 10 days and a ticket for this cost €192, which I think is very good value considering the great distance we travelled! Our destinations were Kraków, Budapest, Vienna, Venice and Lake Constance, which meant we spent over 30 hours on trains! Luckily the time goes very quickly as long as you have a book to read or a film to watch. We also took trains at night so we could sleep and then just wake up in a new city!

A massive benefit of train travel is the beautiful scenery you get to see, which you would miss if you took a flight or went by car. For example, on the journey from Venice to Lake Constance we travelled through Switzerland and saw lots of picturesque mountain scenes.

Interrailing is also a good way to meet new people. We stayed in hostels and met people from all over the world who were also enjoying exploring the sights, food and culture of different European cities. Hostel staff are usually really informative about attractions in the city and hostels usually offer lots of excursions and walking tours themselves, many of which are free!

The most important piece of advice for anybody planning an interrail trip is 'pack light!' Unfortunately I didn't pay attention to this and then struggled to zip up my bag every day! When you are walking around

new cities and looking for the train station you don't want to be carrying lots of heavy luggage! Train compartments are also usually small so don't take too much otherwise your bag won't fit!

Votes for women

7

FrancesS

Saturday, 25 April, 2015 - 11:26

On May 7th the British people will vote in the general elections. As I was trying to decide who to vote for, I realised how lucky I was that I could vote at all.

A century ago, British women did not have the right to vote. Many women felt that this was unfair so they became members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). These women were known as the Suffragettes.

The Suffragettes wanted to be able to vote so they protested in many ways. Some women chained themselves to railings while others went on hunger strike. In my hometown, Epsom, one Suffragette called Emily Davison lost her life to the cause.

Epsom is famous for a horserace called the Derby. Every year the Queen comes to watch the race. In 1913, the Queen's grandfather, George V attended the Derby. Emily Davison also went to the Derby that year to protest for women's suffrage. As the King's horse came galloping down the race track, Emily Davison stepped in front of the horse. She died four days later from her injuries.

Historians debate whether Emily Davison intended to make herself a martyr for the Suffragettes. Some people believe that she just wanted to tie a Suffragette flag on the horse. Doctors also found a return train ticket in her purse which suggests that she did not want to die. All I can conclude is that she must have truly believed in votes for women to have attempted something so dangerous.

When I cast my vote on May 7th, I will be thinking about Emily Davison who died in my hometown so I could have a say in how my country is run.

Life is one big scrap book

3

LauraC

Friday, 24 April, 2015 - 16:45



Whilst being on my year abroad, I have tried to collect small things such as train tickets to my favourite places, attraction tickets, napkins from my favourite restaurants, and I have been taking a lot of photographs. Living in Paris I take the metro every day. I have my own personalised map on which I have circled all of my favourite restaurants, bars, cafes, parks and other things. I even colour coded it to say if these places have free wi-fi, or lunch deals (the most important things of course!). What I plan to do with all these things is make a scrap book.

For those of you that have never heard of the word “scrap book”, it’s an empty book which people tend to take away with them on their year abroad, or time on holiday, and fill it with ‘scraps’ of paper, tickets, maps, menus, photographs etc. It is like a memory book. It is really useful to have if you ever want to return to that place because you will always have the memories of your favourite places and why you liked them so much, all stuck into your very own scrap book!

My scrap book started in September and after 8 months is nearly full! Its dedicated to all of my time in Paris and I even colour coded some of the pages to split them into 'Favourite restuarants', 'Favourite parks' and other things, to make it easier for my future self to find things if I return to Paris (which I really hope I do!)

I would highly recommend creating a scrap book of your time whilst travelling because you’d be surprised at what things make you the happiest, and how happy you can be by just looking at an old ticket which a special date on, or a napkin from your favourite restaurant name on it. It’s the little things that can make you smile, and isn’t it nice to be able to open a book of your life and time as a traveller and just smile?

The everyman's sport

5

KatB

Friday, 24 April, 2015 - 15:37

Freedom is a fundamental human right, one which should be valued most highly.

There are countless instances around the world in which basic freedoms are routinely ignored. Freedom of speech, religious or political freedom, the freedom to marry who you want, to have children or build a career. Freedom comes in many shapes and guises; consequently, given its sensitive and multi-faceted nature, freedom should be treated with respect.

Sometimes, though, freedom doesn't have to be complicated or controversial. Sometimes, freedom - personal freedom - feels as simple as pulling on a pair of trainers on a sunny day, and heading out for a run, out into the unknown.

Well, 'unknown' might be a bit of an exaggeration. Usually, (hopefully!) there is a route to follow, maybe a park to run around or a river to run along. Even on the most often frequented running routes, however, there is something different to see. Here in Germany, surrounded as I am by sweeping stretches of countryside, my favourite route traces the meandering river, along the banks of which wander herds of sheep, sometimes absent-mindedly blocking your way, whilst Canadian geese fly overhead in their characteristic 'V' formation. Having a regular route might seem boring, but the familiarity actually makes the miles fly by!

For a route to become regular, of course, you need to get out and explore in the first place. One of the unsung benefits of running, alongside physical and mental well-being, is the insider knowledge it can give a runner. If you know a town or city by foot, you come to truly know it; you are no longer another tourist, blindly following an anonymous public transport system, but a path-finder ... an adventurer.

This applies to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Running is the most accessible sport in the world. No expensive membership or specialist equipment necessary; just a good pair of shoes, and maybe an iPod if you want to run with a soundtrack. Running is also a great stress reliever, and a sport in which anyone can improve, given a little bit of time, dedication and patience. Nike really did get it right with the slogan 'Just do it!' - you won't regret it.

English food blues

2

VictoriaK

Thursday, 23 April, 2015 - 16:28

Despite my last post being about my love for Spanish food, I still can't help my cravings for some good old English grub! This is what I'm missing right now:

1. Indian

How funny that the first 'English' dish I miss, is actually *not* even originally English! However Indian food is very typical in England and due to our love of it, the country has essentially adopted it as our own, traditional food. I am counting down the days until I can tuck into a chicken tikka masala with vegetable pilau rice, stuffed paratha, onion bhajis, samosas, chicken pakoras and poppadoms. Yum!

2. Fish and chips



Of course this dish had to pop up somewhere! Oh, how I crave battered cod and chips; swimming in tangy vinegar and sprinkled with salt. Where I live, in England there's a chip shop (chippy) around almost every corner, the delicious smell wafts out the door and drifts down the street to lure you in, but beware, as it doesn't end there! After you've had fish and chips, the stench seems to linger for almost a week, just to remind you of your unhealthy, calorie-packed meal in case you tried to forget.

3. Roast dinner

You can't get much better than a roast dinner! Everybody has their own way of cooking them, especially when it comes to the potatoes; roasted or mashed? I personally have both! Roasted meat with a table full of vegetables, including fluffy, creamy mashed potato and roast potatoes; crunchy on the outside but soft in the middle, drizzled with thick, homemade gravy and mopped up with a soft, pillowy Yorkshire pudding. That is the perfect end to a lazy Sunday!

4. Cheddar cheese

Since coming to Spain I've learnt that the only cheese I like is English Cheddar. You can get different maturities which vary from 'mild' to 'extra mature'. My favourite is 'mild' as it's the softest and has a delicate, creamy flavour. The extra mature cheddar is harder and crumbly with a very strong and sharp taste, but it's perfect for cheese on toast.

5. Bacon

I did not realise just how much I adore bacon until I moved to a country which doesn't have it. Although a meat called 'bacon' is sold here, it's *nothing* like smoked English bacon. I love it when it's slightly over-cooked and goes crispy, which accentuates the smoky, salty flavours. In England we often eat it either on a sandwich or with a full fry up English breakfast with eggs, sausages, beans and toast.

6. Hellman's mayonnaise and Heinz ketchup

You can't beat a squirt of Hellman's mayo or Heinz ketchup on ... well, just about anything really! My favourite are egg and mayonnaise sandwiches! I never thought I'd miss such a simple sandwich so much.

7. Cadbury's chocolate

I'm sure that Cadbury's chocolate *must* contain a secret ingredient! I just don't know how it tastes so

different to all other chocolate, it's so much more creamier, sweeter and delicious. I couldn't contain my excitement when I found a Cadbury's creme egg for sale in Gibraltar during the Easter holidays!

Did you know it's Saint George's Day?

2

RosemaryM

Thursday, 23 April, 2015 - 12:01

Shamefully, for many English people the answer to this question will be 'no'. We get very excited about Saint Patrick's Day, and then completely forget that we have our own national day! For me, it's easy to remember the date as it's also my grandma's birthday.

Saint George is the patron saint of England. According to legend, a dragon lived in a lake near a town. People were scared of the dragon and every day they would feed it two sheep. If there weren't enough sheep, a child (chosen at random) would be fed to the dragon instead! One day, the king's daughter was chosen. The king didn't want to lose his daughter; he tried offering money to the townspeople. They didn't want the money and insisted his daughter must be fed to the dragon. The princess waited for the dragon by the lake. Saint George rode by on his horse; he offered to save the princess. He used a cross to injure the dragon before leading it back to the town. He said that he would kill the dragon if the people adopted the Christian faith. The people agreed, and George slayed the dragon.

Over the years, different versions of the legend have been told. There are lots of paintings and sculptures depicting Saint George. The English flag, which is white with a red cross, is known as the Saint George's Cross. Although it is an important day in the Christian calendar, it is a day which passes virtually unnoticed in the UK. It is not a national holiday, nor is it a day with many celebrations. Some towns and cities host special events; English flags might be seen in pubs across Britain. Organisations such as English Heritage are trying to encourage the British public to celebrate England's national day. Hopefully, their work will pay off. I think it's a huge shame that so many people are oblivious to our national day!

Note from Editor: If you want to watch a video about Saint George and the dragon from our Kids site here's the link: <http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/short-stories/george-and-the-dragon>

Allergic to everything

2

JohnR

Tuesday, 21 April, 2015 - 09:49



Spring has arrived. The weather is getting nicer and the new baby animals are in the fields. Everybody is starting to exercise more to get ready for summer and the fields are starting to grow vegetables.

I hate spring. Now, don't judge me just yet because I have a very good reason. In one word: allergies. I am allergic to spring. I have hayfever which blocks my throat and my nose. I spend all day sneezing and

rubbing my eyes until they are bloodshot and I can't see anything. I am allergic to the pollen that is in the air so even breathing is difficult.

Springtime for me is about watching other people go to the park and have a picnic while I sit in my room and try to use up as many tissues as possible. Apparently it is also the funniest thing in the world to see someone sneezing constantly for ten minutes. Just ask my girlfriend who gets a laughing fit every time it happens to me! Luckily, she is sympathetic afterwards.

Now, having hayfever is bad. What makes it worse is that I am also allergic to all animals that have fur. That means cats, dogs, horses, even cows! In spring they start to moult, to change their fur. Everywhere I go now with my tissues I end up covered in dog hair or trying to rip off my beard because some cat hair got into it. My face goes very red and I have to scratch it all the time.

So, imagine you are walking down a street and you see a man with a box of tissues. He is sneezing like crazy, scratching his face with one hand and trying to rip off his beard with the other. Still, I guess it is kind of funny when after the tenth sneeze my voice goes really high-pitched like a child.

Spring doesn't like me and I don't like it. Bring on the summer!