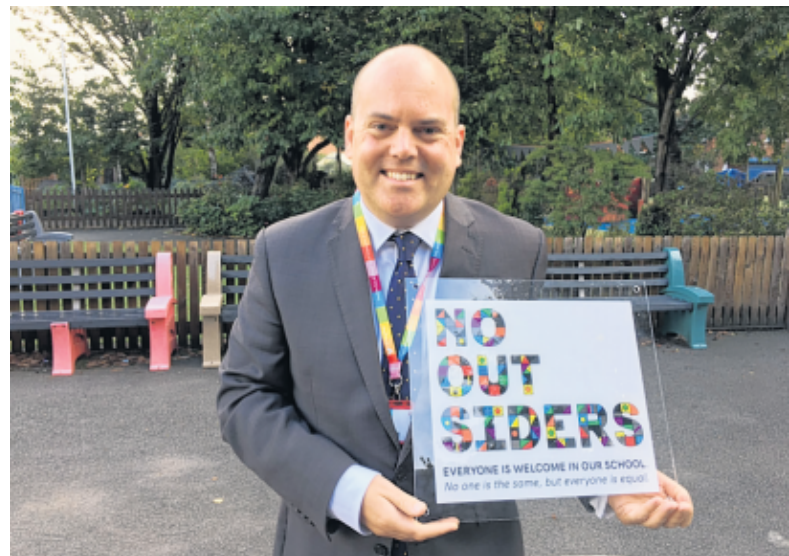


In tomorrow's **i**weekend

## Lessons in diversity

The primary school teacher repairing class divisions



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NEWS

### TRANSPORT

## Up the creek (or canal) with a paddle

Tranquil, easy and cheap - could paddle boarding be the way to commute? By **Matilda Battersby**

Looking into reflections on a dark and uninviting stretch of the Regent's Canal in north London as a cola can floats by, I wonder how I can possibly avoid falling in. I am doing my best to appear nonchalant, having just pumped up an inflatable stand-up paddle board beside the waterway - something that takes a bit of elbow grease but is no worse than inflating a guest air bed - and I smile at curious passersby, trying (but failing) to emit an "I do this kind of adventurous thing all the time" vibe.

As I clamber on to the board and push off, desperately remembering to turn the paddle blade counter-intuitively to face away from me as I plunge it into the cool water, the board wobbles precariously. Before I know it, however, I'm standing up and gliding almost silently down the canal that connects

King's Cross to Camden - and wondering why I had never travelled this way before. On the tow path pedestrians are jostling with cyclists as I sail on by. It's wonderful, and I can't help feeling a little smug.

You would have been forgiven for having never heard of stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) a decade ago. Today, it's one of the fastest-growing sports in the UK, enjoyed by an estimated 900,000 people this summer. Its popularity may be linked in part to photos of celebrities such as Orlando Bloom and Katy Perry doing it in tropical locations. Instagram is full of beautiful snaps of beautiful people looking incredibly athletic as they paddle along.

But the real beauty of paddle boarding is that, like cycling or walking, it's good exercise that doesn't require high fitness levels or strength or athleticism. That said, after a few miles of



Matilda Battersby glides along the Regent's Canal in London RICH HENDRY

paddling I begin to feel the effects. As a reasonably fit but entirely gym-averse human, however, I'm glad to find that I'm capable of travelling a fair distance as a newbie.

While it might be easy to rent a board on holiday, it is increasingly becoming the sport of choice for people who don't live near the coast but who decide to take advantage of city canals or lakes.

While space-squeezed city dwellers are unlikely to invest in full-size foam and fibreglass hard paddle boards, the arrival of excellent quality inflatable boards such as the Red Paddle Co compact model has

been something of a game changer. Instead of having to store a full-size board in a garage or basement, enthusiasts can fold them up and leave them in a backpack that can be taken hiking (although it is quite bulky to wear) and hop on the water whenever the opportunity arises. Perhaps even commuting?

George Shillito moved to Devon to work for Red Paddle Co a few years ago. But when he worked in London he used to take a bus to Paddington with his SUP in his backpack and then paddle down the Regent's Canal to work.

"My colleagues were a bit surprised to see me hop off the river and walk straight into work,

either folding my paddle board away or storing it in the bike rack if I knew I wanted to paddle home at the end of the day," Shillito tells **i**.

Many of the offices that back on to the Regent's Canal have docks that could be used by commuters who choose to pay the £45 annual waterways license rather than use public transport. And with train ticket prices going up, electric scooters banned, the pollution of driving and the dangers of cycling on busy roads, this seems like an attractive if potentially time-consuming option.

As with any sport that also serves as transport, getting proper kit is important. If you will

be taking your phone or a laptop and are worried that you might fall in then a sizeable dry bag is a must. And a natty bum bag that doubles as a life jacket is also recommended for even the most confident swimmers.

The only snag to the tranquillity of my journey down the canal to Camden is having to hop out and haul the board on to the shore to carry it past lock gates.

The board is light but a bit unwieldy and, of course, wet to carry. During this process I manage to sit in a puddle. But I don't fall in - and a damp bottom is a small price to pay for a wonderful morning.



The writer found that pumping up the inflatable stand-up paddle board took a bit of elbow grease but was no worse than inflating an air bed RICH HENDRY

### TRAVEL

## Baby on board: how best to head abroad with an infant

Make life easier with these handy tips, writes **Lisa Salmon**

Travelling with a baby is never easy - as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex may be finding out in southern Africa during their first royal tour as a family of three. While the royal couple (*inset right with Archie*) have the luxury of a nanny and the royal entourage to help things go smoothly on their

trip, of course, other families are not usually that lucky.

Here are seven tips on making life easier from the National Childbirth Trust's postnatal practitioner, Claire Maguire.

#### CHECK WITH YOUR AIRLINE

Infants must usually be at least two weeks old before they can

travel, although some airlines allow them on board at one week. Booking policies differ between airlines, so it's vital to check with carriers and ask what facilities for parents and babies are available at airports and on the flight.

#### KEEP THINGS HANDY

"Check you have enough supplies

of clean clothes, wipes and nappies in your hand luggage," says Maguire. "Always pack more than you think you'll need and it's also worth including a fresh top for yourself in case of any accidents. Toys are also useful to keep your baby distracted on a plane."

#### GET A LIGHTER PUSHCHAIR

This will be invaluable while you are away. If you are flying, you can take it as far as the aircraft door and it will then be stored in the hold and you'll get it back after you land. It may be worth taking a sling

to carry your baby through the airport on arrival.

#### KEEP YOUR BABY COOL

Take a handheld battery-operated fan and keep it in hand luggage.

#### CONSIDER YOUR SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

On long-haul flights, you can ask the airline to provide a bassinet for your baby. You can request a cot for your hotel room or villa, although if you'd prefer to take your own, you can often check travel cots into airline holds for free. If your baby wakes



when the sun comes up, think about packing a portable blackout blind or a thick fabric you can put over the window to keep the light out. A plug-in night light may also be helpful.

#### THINK ABOUT BABY MILK

"Changing cabin pressure on a plane can be uncomfortable for babies so you can soothe them by feeding them milk on take-off or landing, whether by breast or bottle," says Maguire. "If you're formula feeding, ready-made bottles you can buy off the shelf can come in handy."

#### PACK A PLUG

Even if there's no bath in your hotel room, if you pack a universal bath plug you can use it in a shower or sink to bathe your baby.

### FOOD

## Africa's cocoa bean farmers at mercy of global markets

Chocolate makers rely on their crops but producers still struggle, reports **Orla Ryan**

Stand in the supermarket sweets aisle for any length of time and you would be forgiven for thinking your biggest problem is which chocolate bar to choose. Chocolate lovers should savour the selection while they can - the future of the world's favourite dessert is by no means assured. The fate of the bars on the supermarket shelf is inextricably linked to that of the farmers who produce the cocoa beans. And they are struggling with a lack of economic incentives to do so. Roughly 60 per cent of the world's supply comes from two countries in west Africa, Ghana and Ivory Coast, whose equatorial climates support its production.

In early October, the main cocoa season will begin and two million farmers across the continent's western bulge will cut down ripe yellow pods the size of rugby balls, scoop out the white pulpy beans and leave them on reed trays to dry.

As the beans ferment and darken, the smell of chocolate, rich and sweet, rises in the air. Bagged in jute sacks, these beans are then trucked to port and out of the Gulf of Guinea to factories in Europe and America.

Though the large chocolate producers from Pennsylvania to Switzerland cannot make their sweet goods without the output of these farms, farmers often have little to show for their crops. According to last year's Cocoa Barometer, the average African farmer makes \$0.78 (63p) a day from cocoa. If non-cocoa income is included, research by the Netherlands-based Royal Tropical Institute suggests, this can rise to \$3 (£2.43) a day.

Low cocoa income can reflect low international prices but also heavy taxation by Accra and Abidjan, for which the beans have long been a reliable earner of foreign exchange.

In these heavily regulated industries, the state-fixed price that farmers receive from middlemen is between 60 and 70 per cent of the global market price. The small size of their holdings - between two and five hectares - and lack of modern farming techniques can contribute to small harvests for farmers. Many are sharecroppers, taking only a third of the value of the crop, sending the rest to their landlords.

Still, while they might not earn a lot, in villages that often lack water, electricity or decent schools, this cash goes a long way. It is used to fund school fees and medical bills, pay off debts and cover living expenses. Cocoa has not just been a

useful foreign exchange earner but also an effective social security net in Ghana and Ivory Coast. While there are few millionaire farmers, plenty of people benefit from the sale of a bag here or there. Given the importance of African cocoa not just to the global chocolate industry but also to Ghana and Ivory Coast, there is a renewed effort to think about how farmers can better profit from the crop. Without people willing to devote their lives to horticultural labour, there is no chocolate industry.

The Dutch research suggests that young people still see a future in cocoa and that there is not yet a shortage of cocoa farmers. Yet it would be foolish to take this willingness to farm cocoa for granted. Pressure for land and the allure of a brighter life in a city pose challenges. For a new generation to devote their energies to the cocoa farm, it needs to be worth their while. Industry initiatives - and a dizzying array of certifications - are being put in place to improve farmers' income and salve consumer consciences.

There are other, more ambitious, plans to improve the region's income from growing cocoa.



African officials have made clear they want to create an Opec for cocoa, a cartel for the world's biggest bean producers, and work is already under way.

Ghana and Ivory Coast's production decisions often rest on the hopes and dreams of two million individual farmers, often desperate for cash. If the countries wanted to hoard cocoa to drive up the price rather than sell it, who is to say that farmers desperate for cash would not smuggle their cocoa out of the country so they can sell it on the international market?

All of these solutions, industry or government, circle around the same problem: too many people in west Africa rely on the money they earn from cocoa and too few people are willing to pay more to eat chocolate. Too many farmers produce a small amount of cocoa, and too few farmers produce it in market-efficient quantities.

Here is one solution. Steer one million farmers away from cocoa to other crops or factories. Help the remaining producers increase low yields, so that their incomes rise and national output remains roughly the same. Improving farmers' lives is paramount. The challenge is a crucial one, not just for the farmer but also the chocolate lover in the supermarket.

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