

THE AZORES, PORTUGAL

The Azores archipelago lies in the Atlantic Ocean, between Portugal and America. Made up of nine beautiful, volcanic islands, the Azores are an adventure lover's haven, with hundreds of blue lakes surrounded by forests of cedar, and green slopes carpeting the emergent tips of underwater volcanoes. Chapters Experience Holidays provide adventurous tours and trips around the world, including to the Azores. For more information visit www.chaptersholidays.co.uk.





WHAT'S ON

Helen Taylor previews the inspirational events you need to get booked in...



PHOTO: Bruno Long

Jan -
May

BANFF MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL UK AND IRELAND TOUR

The UK tour of the best new films from the world's most prestigious adventure film festival continues with multiple locations in its path. Make sure you don't miss it. Some of the films being shown include *Dog Power*, *Dream Ride* and *Doing It Scared*.

When 'n' where: Dates throughout the UK and Ireland, from January to late May.

How: Tickets cost about £14; see www.banff-uk.com.

14
Mar

AN EVENING OF ADVENTURE WITH MICHAEL PALIN AND GUESTS

Much-loved actor, writer and traveller Michael Palin, joins the Royal Geographical Society for an unforgettable Evening of Adventure to discuss his travels across Pakistan and the remote mountainous regions of the Hindu Kush. Expedition leader Spike Reid and TV presenter Benedict Allen will also be talking.

When 'n' where: Tuesday 14 March. Royal Geographical Society, London.

How: Tickets cost £20; see www.bit.ly/eveofadventure.

17-19
Mar

SHEFFIELD ADVENTURE FILM FESTIVAL

Sponsored by the British Mountaineering Council and showcasing over 100 adventure, travel and extreme sports films from around the world, the Sheffield Adventure Film Festival has plenty to offer both the epic adventurer and the armchair traveller. Some of the films on the list include: *The Accord*, a film about an Icelandic surfer and his relationship with the North Atlantic wind, *Beulah*, a backpacking trip to explore the north-west tip of Scotland, and *Four Mums and a Boat*, about a group of women who began an extraordinary journey across the Atlantic Ocean.

When 'n' where: Weekend of 17-19 March. The Showroom Cinema, Sheffield.

How: Tickets released late January; see www.shaff.co.uk.

22
Mar

BRISTOL WILDERNESS LECTURES - ON FOOT ACROSS LAKE KHUVSGUL

Mountain guide, adventurer and documentary filmmaker Joe Johnstone tells of his successful solo, unsupported crossing and return crossing of a frozen Lake in Mongolia, a total journey length of 185 miles which he carried out on foot, documenting the lives of the nomadic people he met along the way.

When 'n' where: Wednesday 22 March. The University of Bristol.

How: Tickets start at £8.50; see www.wildernesslectures.com.

23
Mar

HORIZON LECTURES, SARAH OUTEN

Exceptional British explorer Sarah Outen has spent the past four and a half years completing her London2London Via the World expedition. Sarah has cycled across three continents, rowed across the North Pacific and North Atlantic, and kayaked along the treacherous Aleutian Island chain from Alaska to Russia – a total of 20,000 miles. Before setting off on her expedition around the world, Sarah also became the first person to row solo across the Indian Ocean and has since been awarded an MBE. Sarah is speaking across the UK from March to April. Find out if she's speaking near you at www.sarahouten.com.

When 'n' where: Thursday 23 March. Amey Theatre, Abingdon, plus other dates nationwide.

How: Tickets cost £12.50; see www.horizonlectures.co.uk.

28
Mar

TRAVEL GEEKS: CYCLING

Experts from across the cycling world offer their top tips and advice on exploring by bike, including cycling holidays, self-guided or guided tours and the ultimate destinations for those travelling on two wheels. For experts and beginners, families and independents alike.

When 'n' where: Tuesday 28 March. Intrepid Travel UK, Brixton, London.

How: Tickets cost £10; see www.natgeotraveller.co.uk/events. **AT**

HOT STUFF

Rob Slade and Helen Taylor take a look at some of the latest gear hitting stores in the UK

MORA COMPANION KNIFE £15

www.morakniv.se

Originating from Sweden, Mora is a family-run company that has been going for more than 125 years now, so it would be fair to say the team knows their stuff. In the Companion Stainless Steel Knife, you have a tool that has been created specifically with all types of outdoor adventures in mind.

The 2.5mm thick blade is made from high-quality Swedish stainless steel and is said to offer durability and longevity in abundance. A soft-friction grip handle is made from TPE rubber in an effort to ensure the knife feels safe and steady while you work with it. The ergonomics have also been designed so that you can get a firm and solid grip without the risk of your hand slipping.

The Companion Knife comes in a variety of bright colours including orange, green and blue and at just £15 it's not too hard on the bank either. The knife also comes with a handy, protective polymer sheath for storage, and it even has a belt clip so that it is always in reach when needed. **RS**



VESTERGAARD LIFESTRAW GO £35

www.lifestraw.com

This brand-new product by LifeStraw combines the convenience of a personal water bottle with a two-stage water filtration system. It removes 99.9% of waterborne bacteria, including E. coli and salmonella, enabling you to scoop questionable water from a river or pond and drink on the go. It also filters out chlorine, bad-tastes and odours.

The bottle is great for hiking, backpacking and travelling when you aren't near a water source, or even if you are, ensuring that your water is safe to drink. It comes in five different colours and a useful carabiner for attaching it to your belt or bag. The filtration system is also detachable, making the bottle perfect for everyday use. **HT**

THE HEALTHY BACK BAG BIG BAG IN DEEP FOREST £65

www.thehealthybackbag.co.uk

We've been a fan of these bags for many years and the Big Bag in the Deep Forest colourway is no different. We'll be honest – this bag isn't for climbing mountains, but it's perfect for casual travellers who need a comfortable, stylish bag, that'll hold all their personal items including important travel documents like passports, tickets and guidebooks.

But forget all that for now, the most important thing about this bag is its unique chiropractic benefits – a bag that doesn't tug at your shoulders. The bag has been specially designed to hug your back and follow with curvature of your spine with its teardrop shape. At the end of a long day exploring you won't have those nagging aches in your back, but you'll be ready to go again the very next day. The bag comes in a variety of colours and is available in three different sizes. **HT**



YELLOW PUBLICATIONS 'AROUND & ABOUT' LAMINATED MAPS £12.99

www.yellowpublications.co.uk

Only recently did I become aware of Yellow Publications, a company that originally started out publishing tide tables in the South West, but I'm glad I did. The firm offers an alternative to standard walking maps in the form of their compact, laminated versions. The mapping is sourced from Ordnance Survey and there are a number of different styles and ranges.

We were sent a box set from the 'Around & About' range which consisted of three laminated maps covering routes up Ben Nevis, Snowdon and Scafell Pike – the Three Peaks set. These particular maps come in 1:16 000 scaling and represent a great option for anyone considering taking the challenge on. When folded down, the maps will easily fit into any pocket and the lamination should also help with weather protection. **RS**

ENGLAND

THE SURREY HILLS

Helen Taylor talks of a place offering breathtaking views just a stone's throw away from London



Within touching distance of London, the Surrey Hills offer some of England's most accessible and spectacular walking trails. What they lack in size, they certainly make up for in beauty and in 1958 they were rightfully designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

From the chalky slopes of the North Downs, in the west, to the densely wooded Greensand Hills, there are plenty of walks to try, and most feature breathtaking panoramic views due to the undulating, open nature of the landscape. Although none of the Surrey Hills are particularly tall, they make for enjoyable and restorative weekend exploring. Peaks in the area include Botley Hill, Hog's Back, Holmbury Hill, Gibbet Hill, Colley Hill, Newlands Corner, Box Hill and the tallest, Leith Hill.

At 294m, Leith Hill is the highest peak not only in the Surrey Hills, but in South East England. To reach the

peak, follow a beautiful trail through Leith Hill Woods, including a colourful rhododendron wood, before arriving at Leith Hill Tower and enjoying glorious views of the surrounding countryside, London's iconic skyline and even the English Channel.

To the north east of Leith Hill, The Box Hill Hike also makes for great weekend walking. The walk consists of an eight-mile circular route starting from the Box Hill Café, traversing steep hills, valleys, open grassland and stretches of woodland. Points of interest include Broadwood folly, a cylindrical shaped tower with a curious tree growing out of its top.

If you fancy something a little longer, the North Downs Way is a 153-mile, long-distance walking trail that passes through both the Surrey Hills and Kent Downs AONB, from Farnham to Dover. Or, for something a little different, try the six-mile 'Inspiring Views' circular walk, which showcases creative artworks by five local artists including sculptural benches, poetry and soundscapes. **AT**

BEYOND THE HIKE

Want to experience more beyond the hiking trail? Chapters Experience Holidays offer a huge range of activity trips in the UK including multi-activity weekends, navigation skills and landscape photography experiences. If you want some down time after your hike, check out the company's South Downs Spa Experience break. Head to www.chaptersholidays.co.uk to find out more.