

Part 1

The Hotel Royal

- A** Come and enjoy a comfortable break in peaceful surroundings. We are a family-run business and our hotel has been operating for many years in this beautiful location. We pride ourselves on our customer service and we promise to make your stay a memorable experience.
- B** We are conveniently located just off the motorway. If you enter our postcode into your satnav, you will have no problem finding us. When you arrive, there is plenty of parking that is free for all our guests. Our reception staff will be waiting to welcome you.
- C** We offer great value to our customers. Our rooms are competitively priced and offer high levels of comfort. Prices range from £65 to £130 per night. The hotel has been refurbished recently. All the rooms have been re-painted and new modern furniture has been added.
- D** We have a very flexible online room booking system. You can make a booking with us months in advance or on the day that you plan to arrive. Bookings can also be cancelled or changed up to midday on the day of arrival. You will not be charged for doing this.
- E** We have three types of rooms for you to choose from: family rooms, double rooms and single rooms. All our rooms feature comfortable beds with medium to firm pillows and cosy duvets. Each style of room has a fully equipped bathroom with luxury toiletries.
- F** All our rooms have tea and coffee making facilities and a spacious desk that is perfect for adults and children to use. Every room is supplied with a set of towels, and each has a television. If you need a hairdryer or an iron, please contact reception.
- G** Our on-site restaurant serves great food at amazing prices. Breakfast is included in the price of your room and you can eat as much as you like. Children eat breakfast for free. We are also open for lunch and dinner and we have a children's menu.
- H** Guests of any age are free to use our indoor swimming pool. The sauna and steam room can be used by anyone over 14 years of age. There are showers in the changing rooms for you to use before enjoying these facilities. The lockers are free.
- I** If you have time to explore, the Park Shopping Complex is an interesting destination that is easy to walk to. It is surrounded by green space. This site offers big brand stores, a cinema, bowling and a range of restaurants and cafes.
- J** Take a look on our website for what other guests have said about us and what there is to do in the area. All the reviews are from guests who have stayed with us recently. There is also a Question and Answer Page that you may find useful.

Part 2

Read the article by Eleanor Mills.

A Perfect Sport



(Source: © PAL)

The path is full of early morning joggers as I ride my bicycle along Regent's Park Canal in London. At the same time, four older women are setting out on huge inflatable paddleboards on a 167-mile journey from this point in central London, all the way to Nottinghamshire up the Grand Union Canal.

Shilpa Rasaiah, aged 60, is one of these women. She learned to swim five years ago, before taking up surfing and then paddleboarding. Today, she is leading the first part of this 14-day paddle, which will eventually take the team all the way from London to a spot close to Shilpa's home in Nottinghamshire. Personally, I am astounded by how much courage she has.

Shilpa has never attempted anything similar before. Until she started training for this event, she had only ever paddled short distances and even then, 10 miles is the furthest she has ever done. Her biggest worry is that she will suffer back problems with having to travel 167 miles over the coming weeks. To keep her going, her kitbag holds her lunch and several emergency energy snack bars.

They are making this journey to raise funds for two causes. The first is Friends of the Grand Union Canal. This community group is made up of volunteers, who give up their time to pick litter and perform clean ups along the canal. The second is Re-engage, a charity that helps older people to connect socially with others.

Through social media, Shilpa, a town planner and an ambassador for British Canoeing, has found many supporters, some of whom are letting the group stay in their homes overnight. Others are helping with transport and moving the equipment they need. She is grateful for the kindness of strangers, as meeting new people is all part of the adventure for her.

For those new to this sport, a paddleboard is very similar in shape to a surfboard and it is super-buoyant. To make it move, you stand on top of the board, stroking the water on alternate sides with a paddle. It's like walking on water. Beginners take time to master how to balance, and they frequently fall into the water until they get used to it. However, with a great deal of practice, it is possible to skim along, taking in the beauty of the waterways.



If you are interested in taking up the sport, you need a licence to use the canals and waterways in Britain. This can be obtained from British Canoeing, the national governing body for paddlesports. Their membership has more than doubled over the last few years, with nearly half of their members now being women, compared to the past.

Nowadays, paddleboards are produced using lighter materials. As a result of this, female paddleboarders are one of a fast-growing group of enthusiasts. It is proving surprisingly popular with older women as it is low impact. It is a sport for all seasons, and you do not have to spend a fortune on a paddleboard and wetsuit. Personally, I love paddleboarding, which is strange because, like many women of my age, I really didn't enjoy playing sport at school.

Back on Regent's Park Canal, Shilpa is preparing for her first stretch through a tunnel, wearing a torch headlight. The tunnel is approximately two miles long and she will be escorted by a narrow boat to take her through safely. In total, there are five tunnels on this route. We chat about how it is never too late and you are never too old to have an adventure. I am sad that I can't continue with Shilpa as she heads towards the mouth of the tunnel and I continue cycling.

As she sets off to paddle the 167 miles home, Shilpa turns to me and grins. She hopes that by being brave she will encourage other women to have a go. If she can do it, anyone can. She says paddleboarding is difficult to master at first, but that it's worth the effort. I totally agree with her. For me, this gentle sport combines the beauty of the waterways with a sense of calm and freedom.

(Source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/health-fitness/body/epic-midlife-paddleboarding-mission-london-nottingham/>)

Part 3

Read the article by Radhika Aligh.

In the Wild

The Akagera National Park in Rwanda, Central Africa, sits along the border with Tanzania. A recent aerial survey estimated 12 000 animals living in the area; a 100 per cent increase according to a previous survey, when there were less than 6 000. However, despite the growing population, spotting a wild animal is a matter of chance. With a checklist in hand and an experienced guide, we venture out on our day drive.

Routes vary from an hour to eight hours, depending on your ability or desire to sit through bumpy dirt tracks. With some beginner's luck, we got an early sighting of zebras grazing and lazing around on a patch of open land. With a population of close to 3 000, they are among the most frequently spotted animals. The scenic route from south to north, where the African elephants are, is through the Mutumba Hills, which boast breathtaking views of the park.

At the National Park, it takes every person in this 200-plus team to restore and conserve the park and to protect the animals that live in it. I think the most significant work takes place in the control room, as it is where staff receive information about the animals and patrol crews on the ground. Only some of the animals are chipped to track their movements. The only exception is the white rhinos, all of whom have a GPS tracker. Despite electric fences and vigilant rangers, poaching remains a real threat. At their canine centre, staff train dogs to help them patrol for poachers.

Accommodation within the park consists of only a few hotels, lodges and campsites. As far as breath-taking views go, nothing beats the Game Lodge and its panoramic view of majestic Lake Ihema, Rwanda's second-largest lake. The 60-room property, built with sustainable materials, is designed to blend in with its surroundings. There are plenty of lovely spaces to relax after a long day of driving. You can enjoy a drink on the open terrace under the star-filled sky.

Two days later, it's time to head to Volcanoes National Park, home to the endangered mountain gorillas and golden monkeys. The drive takes around five-and-a-half hours, and the roads are well maintained, making every second of driving around the 'land of a thousand hills' an absolute joy. The roadsides are lined with lush greenery and cultivated fields growing bananas. The view is only interrupted by small towns with large churches.

The air gets colder as we approach the mountain range through Musanze, a bustling district with coffee shops, markets and hotels to suit all budgets. Our destination is the new state-of-the-art centre, set up in support of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. This is a research and education hub, where the local population are taught the importance of conservation because they are ultimately the protectors of this fascinating species. It is from here that our tour departs.



After an hour and 45 minutes of walking along narrow and slippery paths in the dense forest, we meet the 28-member strong Kwitonda gorilla family, the second largest in Volcanoes National Park. A few are napping on a small flat area of the forest. A ten-year-old male has separated himself from the troop and is sitting less than two metres away, watching us intently. He grabs a branch to press between his teeth, then throws it away, stands up, slaps his chest in delight and starts to walk towards us. We are only an arm's length from him now. His gaze is friendly, but the guide tells us to step back calmly. He continues to move towards us, as if he wants to pass us, but there is no space. Sensing no threat from us, he gradually retreats a little and sits.

We are told when our one-hour slot is over. None of us wants to leave; we have enjoyed watching these gorillas way too much. Being able to see them so relaxed, exhibiting normal behaviour in their natural surroundings is a privilege. For the most part, it has felt no different to observing humans in terms of the connection and the respect. The sadness of parting is felt by all.

I am overjoyed that the conservation of mountain gorillas is a high priority on Rwanda's agenda, not only because it drives tourism, but because this is only one of two places in the world where you can see them in the wild. To maintain a balance, the number of daily trekking permits granted is limited and costs £1250. I agree this is expensive, but I wouldn't expect to pay any less. Some of this money goes back into the development of surrounding villages, where the growing hospitality industry has also created much-needed employment. By reviving gorilla and chimpanzee tourism, not only are these species offered much-needed protection, but local communities feel the benefits too.

(Source: © Radhika Aligh/Evening Standard Ltd)

Part 6

Is Online Learning for You?

Online learning is a popular alternative to traditional study methods. However, this method of study does not suit everyone.

There are many advantages to online learning. You can plan your studies to fit around your other responsibilities, such as work or family, instead of having to plan your whole day around your studies. You will have the flexibility to create a more balanced lifestyle.

Another important advantage is that the content of online courses is identical to that of the same traditional course. Students therefore receive the same education in either format. Additionally, today's online students have access to many of the same services as on-campus students, including libraries, career services and tutoring.

As you might expect, the cost of online learning courses is much lower than that of traditional courses. There is no need for course organisers to pay for classrooms, the printing of study materials and for lecturers to be present. These cost savings are passed onto the students.

Distance learning provides an alternative to paper-based learning and students don't have to travel to and from lectures, meaning the environment benefits too. Energy is also saved on lighting and heating large lecture halls and on electronic equipment that might be used in classroom settings.

There are many benefits to online learning, but there are some things you should think about if you are not sure about whether it is suitable for you.

You will be completely responsible for organising your studies and you will have to be disciplined. There will be fewer reminders about deadlines, and you will have to check your emails every day so you don't miss anything important. It is also really important not to fall behind with your studies as this is easy to do.

Your home may be a more convenient learning environment for you, but there is the chance that you could get demotivated. You won't have the same contact with, or support from, other students. You have to be sure this method of learning is for you, taking into account the possibility of feeling isolated. It goes without saying that your social life will be impacted too. You will have less time to see friends when you are studying but it should be worth it once you qualify.

Online learning does not suit all learning styles. For example, if you prefer a practical, hands-on learning experience, this may not be for you. Similarly, if you are the type of learner who benefits from face-to-face discussions in small groups, this type of learning may be challenging for you.

Being an online learner, you are completely reliant on your computer and the internet. Technological issues could prevent you from studying effectively. It's really important to have a reliable device and a stable internet connection.

These days, there are so many different ways to learn, so take your time in deciding which method is best for you.

(Source: <https://www.oxfordcollege.ac/news/advantages-disadvantages-distance-learning/>)

