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In the News

Cruise Ships

New cruise ships holding up to 6600 passengers are to be built. They will be powered by liquefied natural gas and will be launched by 2022. The vogue is for the launching of ever bigger ships.

The once dangerous Northwest Passage which foiled Arctic explorers is becoming a tourist destination as the sea ice thaws. Large-scale luxury cruises will travel the route between the Atlantic Pacific oceans for the first time this summer. Passengers will travel from the Gulf of Alaska and the Beaufort Sea to Greenland. Climate change has brought the decline in the extent of the sea ice, making the route accessible. The sea ice is reducing in extent and thickness making it easier to navigate the passage and the window of opportunity for it to be navigated as lengthening each year Environmental campaigners are concerned opening up the route could bring the risk of oil spills and pollution .

Aircraft Travel

Airline passengers who might have thought larger aircraft would bring wider seating between seats will be disappointed. A proposal put before the U.S. Senate, which would have required airlines to define specifically how small a plane seat can be and force airlines to keep within defined parameters has not been passed, would have set a benchmark for the rest of the world. Seat widths have shrunk from 18.5 inches to 17 inches since the 1990s, but the proposal was defeated by a vote. Average size in an economy carbon seat is currently about 17.2 inches wide with a seat pitch of 31 to 32 inches.

Sun Exposure and Malignant Melanoma.

More than 10,000 people aged 55 years and over were diagnosed with malignant melanoma. The increasing UK population, with people living longer, means the numbers of people being diagnosed with melanoma continue to climb. It is believed the increase in over 55's being diagnosed is linked to the sun, sea, and sangria generation which benefited from cheap package holidays and a holiday boom dating from the 1960s. The desire to have tanned skin is over riding, even at the expense of sunburn. Melanoma is the fifth most common type of cancer in UK. The number of people dying from this is also increasing. Getting sunburnt, just once every two years can triple the risk of the development of malignant melanoma. Sunburn, in this instance, is not only raw and blistered skin, but any pink reddening of the skin which is a sign of skin damage. It is important that travellers and particularly older travellers avoid strong sun and use appropriate sunscreens and barriers, especially when they're holidaying abroad in strong sunshine, with long bright days.

BREXIT

Under current rules, Britons can visit any EU country and expect to receive the same health services at the same cost to a local. The future of this service depends on whether an exit agreement will include "reciprocal health care".

There is a precedent for such an agreement. Non EU countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway can belong to the European Health Insurance Card (Ehic) scheme even though they are not members, because they are part of the single market of the EEA.

Bob Atkinson of comparison website travel supermarket.com said "Reciprocal health agreements form an important part of premiums, although other things like the cost of repatriation are also factored in."A healthy couple travelling to Australia, for example, where Britain has a health agreement, will pay £21 for cover on a two week trip but £38 in the United States, where there is no agreement

New Health Risk around Paris

A new health hazard has been reported in the environs of Paris. British tourists heading for the French countryside are being warned to be wary of certain specific animals which are known to spread Lyme disease to humans. Chipmunks became popular domestic pets in Paris after gaining publicity through a film –Alvin and the Chipmunks. Many were later released in the European woodland and are now being blamed for spreading the debilitating disease to people. Campers, hikers and picnickers planning trips to the wooded areas have been urged to show caution and avoid feeding these animals. Some have already migrated through the Channel Tunnel and around 1000 are living in south-east England. These chipmunks are unafraid of human contact and attract vacationers trying to feed them who may come in very close contact. Siberian chipmunks are listed as an invasive species. In wooded areas, around Paris in particular, they are common. More than 10,000 have been counted in the Senate Forest south of the capital and 12 separate colonies are established in France, with the total number of being in the region of 150,000. The number of new cases of Lyme disease in humans in France has risen threefold in the past 10 years from 10,000 to 27,000.

Zika Virus

The impact of zika virus on world tourism is now being felt. After an initial fall off in interest and flights

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to Brazil, bookings have recovered due to the Rio Olympics, but later bookings for the country have declined. Pregnant women are advised by the Foreign and Colonial Office against travel to a number of countries in South and Central America and the Caribbean, with the latter reporting a downturn in bookings from the UK for honeymoons and weddings. Four people have been affected in Florida by the virus from home-grown mosquitoes and are recommendations that pregnant women and those who might become pregnant while in this location should consider very carefully if they should this area.

Brexit and the EHIC Card

The UK decision to leave the EC brings with it the possibility of the demise of the EHIC document and with it British access to reciprocal health arrangements in the EC and countries such as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Possession of the card gives the owner free or discounted medical treatment in any European union country. It entitles travellers to the same level of medical treatment as a citizen would get in that country. It does not cover transportation to hospital or repatriating. Travelling British citizens may lose this right when the UK departs from the EU. The card is not however a European Union initiative. It applies to a wider group of nations within the European economic area, so the likelihood is that new negotiations will be required if the arrangement is to continue.

According to FCO it would cost up to 25,000 if an ear ambulance is needed from southern Spain to the UK which emphasises the need for private travel health insurance cover to be bought prior to vacation.

Hospitals and Medical Personnel under Attack

As Yemen's military conflict continues medical facilities are repeatedly coming under fire. The wreckage of hospitals and clinics highlights the fact that this war is being fought at the disregard for international human humanitarian law. Drs without Borders has treated 20,000 people in Yemen since March. Three of the clearly marked health facilities have come under attack in violation of laws of war and the protection these laws afford to medical spaces patients and personnel. Patients have been killed and injured and also staff members. Pregnant women have been giving birth in caves rather than renting hospitals.

Hospitals and medical facilities in Syria have also been regularly bombed by Syrian and possibly Russian aeroplanes. Many patients and medical personnel have been killed and medical facilities in places like Aleppo are now almost non-existent due to bombardment and siege cutting off supplies and the replacement of doctors and nurses.

Safe Travel for People with Dementia

The Scottish dementia working group has launched an information video to help people with dementia travel safely. The video is aimed at patients and their families and carers. The video gives tips on using a range of transport options including bus train and aeroplane. It suggests adjustments that can be made to the travelling environment to make it more comfortable and dementia friendly and the services which might be accessed when travelling by public transport.

Telemedicine in USA

Sometimes considered an inefficient approach to providing healthcare, telemedicine – when patients, confer with experts in another city or location via video conference – is proving to be a valuable tool in closing access gaps for isolated Americans. Only 10% of doctors practice in rural USA regions, but a quarter of US residents live out with cities, which limits their ability to find local doctors and adequate care. Several non-profit health systems have now been launched providing digital appointments for people in rural areas in Utah and Idaho. In 2015 United Healthcare, the nation's largest insurers started covering digital appointments in the same way as for in-person visits. The Department of Veterans affairs is also now spending funds on digital health services to help treat 700,000 veterans half of whom live in rural areas. One report states that doctors were able to significantly lower blood pressure in 100 veterans living in underserved areas by using telemedicine appointments alone.

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