

# 52 New Things

The least famous Nick J. Thorpe in the world and his journey to conquer the boredom of modern life



**NICK J. THORPE**



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# Contents

Foreword	vii
1 Make a Small Change	1
2 Use a Bidet	6
3 Grow a Manly Beard	8
4 It's all About Bread	11
5 Go Microlighting	16
6 Try Skinny-dipping	19
7 Get Something Waxed	23
8 Call Grandad	29
9 Fast	34
10 Get Eye Surgery	42
11 Throw Some Clay	46
12 Get into Ear Candling	50
13 Enjoy a Fish Pedicure	54
14 Go Somewhere New	58
15 Go Swimming	63
16 Take a Dance Class	67
17 Have Your Portrait Painted	71
18 Try Viagra	76
19 Conquer Curry Hell	81
20 Do a Lap of a Ring Road	85
21 Walk an Alpaca	89
22 Get a Tattoo	92
23 Make Something Useful out of Wood	96
24 Conquer a (Silly) Fear	100
25 Dine in the Dark	105

## 52 New Things

26	Break a World Record	110
27	Seven Days of New Food	114
28	Grow Your Own Food	119
29	Go to a Festival	122
30	Walk on Broken Glass	127
31	Do Something Illegal, Legally	131
32	Walk Home	134
33	Have a Colonic	139
34	Go Hovercrafting	143
35	Give Up Some Time	151
36	Try Hypnotherapy	155
37	Go Clubbing	160
38	Challenge the Norm	165
39	Learn a New Language	170
40	Have a Different Night Out	174
41	Brew Your Own Beer	180
42	Turn off (Reality) TV	185
43	Travel from Land's End to John O'Groats	186
44	Do Something on Your Own	193
45	Buy a Motorbike	198
46	Live on a Boat	202
47	Try a New Sport	208
48	Go on a Road Trip	213
49	Release a Single	222
50	Spend More Time with Your Family	229
51	Write Something	233
52	Move Abroad	236
	Resources	239
	Acknowledgements	242



# 1

## Make a Small Change

WE LIVE in the age of the grand idea. Until a couple of decades ago the only people who could really make their big ideas happen easily were those with enormous amounts of hereditary money or sponsorship from the Royal Family. Sir Walter Raleigh, he of the New World fame, was an aristocrat and politician, while Sir Ranulph Fiennes, arguably the greatest living explorer today, had inherited his father's baronetcy before he was a year old. Occasionally an industrious individual would work hard enough to make their idea or invention hit the big time, but in general the privileged few won out over the common many. But all that has changed now. The combination of globalisation, cheap travel and the digital revolution has made it possible for anyone to pursue their idea anywhere in the world, and Instagram the hell out of it while doing so.

This very modern phenomenon has democratised adventure, and led to a new wave of explorers and risk-takers. People have skateboarded across Australia and cycled over the Andes; they've motorcycled across the Arctic and ridden horses the length of Africa; celebrities have completed 43 marathons in 51 days while teenagers have sailed around the world; they've even driven a black cab from London to Mongolia (okay, that was me). We live in the age of extreme ironing and nettle-eating,

space skydives and Alpine wingsuiting. Nothing is off-limits. The point is that it has never been easier to challenge yourself and achieve the previously unthinkable.

But actually, something strange is beginning to happen. People are starting to shun these adventures and shy away from new experiences. It seems that with all this opportunity and excitement comes an enormous sense of pressure. I'm sure this is undoubtedly amplified by social media and its crack-like ability to make people broadcast absolutely everything about their lives with a false spin. Such is the pressure on people to seem like they are living their lives and having a brilliant time that apparently more and more of us are doing the complete opposite and shunning not only social media but the liberation and excitement of exploration and new experiences.

I think the problem is that anyone under the age of 40 has grown up in the knowledge that the world has never been more accessible, and adventure has never had more potential. However, both are achingly just out of reach for many of us, meaning people still have to save for months and years to pay a travel company to take them on a tour of Antarctica or to see the orang-utans in Borneo. Sure, it is an amazing, sometimes life-changing experience, but it takes years to achieve, and can often come to dominate leisure plans. The age of the big idea was meant to open our minds and change our lives, but it has actually had the opposite effect.

Sometimes the smallest actions can have the largest impacts. I'll give you an example. I have a friend called Peter Small. I've known Pete for almost two decades, and he is a smashing chap, probably one of the most upbeat, energetic people I've ever met. Unfortunately, he is also useless at timekeeping. He would turn up late to everything from football matches to parties, dates

## Make a Small Change

to dinners. So we sat him down and had a chat with him, and urged him to be just a little bit better about being on time. He agreed to try.

A few months later Glastonbury tickets went on sale. Having missed out on them for the last few years because he was – yup, you guessed it – too late to buy tickets, we didn't hold out much hope of him joining us. Staggeringly though, he not only got up on time, he managed to get a ticket. He came along that year for the first time and experienced Glastonbury in all its glory. At one point he started talking to a group of girls that someone vaguely knew, one of whom he got on with very well. Four years later and he was married to that girl on a beach in Cyprus, and is now rarely late for anything. I'm not saying that the small change he made at our behest to be on time more often was directly responsible for him meeting the love of his life, but it *was*.

So I decided to try something new every week for a year. It would be one thing a week for 52 weeks. In my case, I started with a very small change to kick things off. I foolishly gave up crisps. I did it because, to be frank, I bloody love crisps. I love how salty they are, I love how crunchy they are, and I love how moreish they are. I love their smell, their flavours, their variety and even their packaging. But I gave them up. I started the new year, and my new project, by not eating crisps. It was a small step, but it was a challenge nonetheless. And I did it. Apart from the occasional drunken pork scratching, I stopped eating crisps, and I felt tremendous for it. I put this squarely down to one thing: it was an achievable aim. There is no point aiming to skydive from space tomorrow if today you are sat at your desk reading the *Daily Mail* and shoving (delicious) Monster Munch into your face. It just won't happen.

Something wonderful happened about two months into

## 52 New Things

my 52 New Things journey. While vanity searching one day I found another blog run by a lovely woman in America doing exactly the same thing I was doing. She was part of a mummy blogger network and was encouraging her friends and readers to try something new every week. She wasn't trying to learn a new language or row across the Atlantic, she was trying new meals out for her kids, or speaking to a neighbour she'd never spoken to before. I watched her blog grow as others chimed in with stories about new knitting patterns, tentative attempts at a salsa class, attending their first music concert and even buying a dog. The women on this blog shared their tips and experiences and learnt and grew from one another. There was no judgement, no retribution, just love and support from the group. And the key to it all? Simplicity. These women were making accessible, achievable changes to their lives that were not only positively impacting them and their families, but were also enormous amounts of fun.

I maintained contact with this group of visionary bloggers, and soon started to notice other similar projects from around the world. People found my site and sent me links to their progress. I got emails from as far afield as Australia and Chile, and as close to home as Brighton, England. I'd like to think that they were all inspired by my tremendous website, captivating copy and zany social media antics, but while some were undoubtedly fans the majority just happened to be doing the same thing as me at roughly the same time. I wish I could say I kick-started a global movement, but actually I think all I did was accidentally put a clever name on it.

Amazing people have been doing amazing things for ages, and the best bit is they are continuing to do so. I still get sent links to new 52 New Things projects being set up all over the



## **Make a Small Change**

world all the time as more and more people discover the joy and pleasure of breaking out from the mundanity of modern life and recapturing the inquisitiveness and curiosity of youth. They may not be trekking across the Himalayas, but they are changing their lives and those of their loved ones in small but incredibly meaningful ways every single day with very little effort. And that means people like you can do something new and amazing too ... if you really want to.



## 7

# Get Something Waxed

WE'VE TRAVERSED through some fairly gentle new things thus far, exploring the hidden delights of the humble bidet and sticking two fingers up at nutritionally bereft snacking. So now it is time to start getting down and dirty with some proper new things, fresh experiences that excite and terrify in equal amounts. Like the time I had hot wax liberally applied to my nether regions and ripped off again seconds later by a young, sullen and surprisingly vicious woman from Eastern Europe. It doesn't matter who you are, where you hail from or how hairy you are, having solidified wax forcibly removed from your balls is one of the most unpleasant experiences imaginable. That a flourishing industry has grown up dedicated solely to relieving grown men and women of their body hair is bad enough, but to do so around the nether regions is just downright barbaric.

Saying that, it is telling that the infamous 'Back, Sack and Crack' blog and video is by some distance the most popular piece of content I've ever generated. The video has thousands of views and in fact, more than half of the traffic to my website today comes from people searching specifically for male waxing, proving that it wasn't just me who was interested in the idea of having a silky scrotum. Here is the account in all its glory:

## 52 New Things

‘Now, if you just roll onto your front and pull your cheeks apart, I’ll start on the back bit.’

Numbly obliging, I did as I was asked and in doing so caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror: naked, lying on a table in the middle of a salon in London’s Soho, pulling my buttocks apart so a young lady could wax the most unholy of cracks. This, I glumly realised, was something of a low point.

When I opened up the 52 New Things project to suggestions from the great and good of the Internet, I always knew there would be a high risk that I’d end up doing something hideous and painful. Sure enough, within a few days of the site going live I had been bombarded with all manner of suggestions for hideous and painful new things. In hindsight, I should have probably known that friends and colleagues would hijack the facility and repeatedly suggest I get a back, sack and crack wax, that most intimate of male hair removal. Although every instinct cried out otherwise, I decided to call their bluff and press ahead with the suggestion. After all, it really was a truly new thing.

One bluff called and an ill-advised Internet search later, I was all booked in. My friend Scott, who by now was regretting both making the initial suggestion and subsequently agreeing to accompany me in a moment of pride-filled madness, paled visibly when I told him that his days of having a hairy undercarriage were numbered.

We arrived at the salon and took our seats in the surprisingly calming waiting area. I was due to be waxed by the male owner (at his request, I might add), something I was a little unsure about. I’d thought about it a lot but I just couldn’t work out what was worse: having my most intimate areas waxed by a man, or having my most intimate areas waxed by a beautiful young woman. Either option presented a whole host of issues

## Get Something Waxed

and dilemmas, most of which you can guess and none of which I'll go into here. In the end, the decision was made for us as Fernando was nowhere to be seen and we were duly led into our treatment rooms by two Polish girls called Kasia and Carol.

I am not familiar with the process of sleeping with a prostitute, having always somehow managed to attract girls without needing to pay them. However, as I stripped off in that tiny little room and draped a flannel-sized towel over my groin, I began to get a vague impression of what it might be like: cold, stark and deeply, deeply humiliating. Carol put me at ease by making small talk about where I'd come from and what the project was all about. Suddenly, without warning and in one swift movement, she'd whipped off the towel and liberally applied talc to my groin area. She then started lifting, moving, parting, tugging and generally getting a good, hands-on feel for the area in question.

Having sized up the lay of the land, she muttered a warning that she was about to apply some 'warm' wax. Scalding, more like. Scalding, burning, molten wax, all over my right testicle and groin. I thought it was going to sink through my skin, into my body and onto the table below. But then, just when I was about to wipe the stuff off with my bare hands and throw it at the wall, it cooled dramatically.

Carol began to test the tackiness, presumably judging when it was dry enough to remove. It felt a little bit like I'd been anaesthetised down there, with every prod and touch feeling distant and muffled. It was actually quite calming in a way and I began to relax slightly, the weird plinky-plonky music distracting me from the pretty lady caressing Little Nick and the Brothers Grimm. The serenity was broken with a quick heads-up from Carol: the wax was set and she was about to remove it. Was I ready? 'Well,

when you say ready, what exactly do you mean?’ I asked. ‘If you mean ready for th—’ I didn’t get any further.

American novelist William Faulkner once said that given the choice between pain and nothing, he would choose pain. Sadly old Bill Faulkner lived in the early 1900s when wax was just used for candles and making moustaches look tremendous. Had he been around long enough to experience solidified wax being ripped off one of his gonads he probably would have chosen the painless experience of nothing every time.

It is hard to describe what it’s like to have the hairs ripped out of your balls by their very follicles. Every man has got it caught in his flies at some point or another. So take that pain, remember it, double it, double it again, then times it by a billion and you are getting close to what it feels like to have your testicles waxed. The pain is unimaginable and utterly pure. It feels like your skin is coming off with the wax and your mind is utterly focused on how to stop this all-consuming, gut-wrenching agony. And then, three or four seconds after it started, it disappears as quickly as it arrived, leaving nothing but a faint throbbing and one bastard of an adrenalin rush.

As Carol proudly displayed the results of the first wax (think furball in a pile of cat sick), I honestly contemplated giving up and going home with one bald testicle and the rest of my pride intact. But before I could make my excuses the sly woman had homed in on Mr Left and liberally applied round two. RIIIIIIIIIPPPPPPP. My virgin forest was razed to the ground by the imperialist hand of the Polish waxer. I risked a glance down, wiping away the beads of sweat as I did. Horrified, I realised that at this precise point I had an actual manzilian.

It took another couple of applications to fully level the area. At one point Carol’s hand slipped, meaning it took her four

## Get Something Waxed

attempts to rip the wax off. I have no shame in admitting that a little tear escaped at this point. I looked down and saw, with some satisfaction and immense relief, that she appeared to have finished. The area was mostly clear and, although red in places, largely tidy. I lay back and waited for the command to turn over. Instead I felt Carol reach for Little Nick and apply what felt like a plaster to the entire length.

‘Ah,’ I thought, ‘this will be the cooling strip to alleviate some of the raw pain. How nice of Carol to do that without me even asking. Hang on, why is she removing it so quickly? Oh no, OH NO. PLEASE NO. SHE’S WAXING MY KNOB.’

After that, my spirit was broken. I numbly flipped over onto my front and, as requested, pulled my buttocks apart to allow this stranger to wax my butt crack. Humiliating doesn’t even cover it. I felt used, shamed, alone. The sensation of wax against a part of me that had never seen the light of day was strange but relatively painless. Even the back waxing was bearable and, weirdly, slightly relaxing after the trauma of the front side. It was at this point that I could have sworn I heard faint screams from the other room, confirming in my mind that Scott was also being tortured in similar circumstances, something that I drew odd comfort from.

After applying some much needed lotion (which under different circumstances would have been a hugely enjoyable experience), she left me to get dressed. I stood up, peeled the paper sheet from my sweaty back and took my first look at my newly waxed body. It looked ridiculous. Hair covered my chest and met my snail trail, but was abruptly cut off in a straight line with nothing but raw pink skin underneath. I couldn’t see the appeal of this hairless monster that I had created – did people honestly choose to do this on a regular basis? I offered to compare results

with Scott, but he looked so pale and shell-shocked that I felt he'd probably been traumatised enough for one day.

Having had time to digest my experience, I've come to realise that it was oddly empowering in a strange way. Society's tastes have shifted markedly in the last two decades, no doubt in line with the voyeuristic and challenging nature of the Internet. Body hair that was once a given is now almost invisible, while men are as likely to be found in the local salon as women. It is now as normal to find a man with a manicure as it is a woman in a trouser suit, both of which were unthinkable at points in our recent past. In terms of the current fetish for hair removal, my main conclusion is that it is enormously painful to have done and I'm not sure the end results are necessarily worth the pain – unless you take all your clothes off regularly for a living. Which I don't. Yet.





## Is there more to life than the daily grind?

For one man, the monotony of this very modern life became too much to bear. So he set off on a journey to try something new; in fact, one new thing every week for a year. Some were small. Some were painful. Some were life-changing. And some should come with an advisory note from the publisher to not try these without expert supervision. No, seriously. Please don't.

He put his all into trying new things, often with hilarious and touching consequences. He embarked upon bizarre adventures, met a cast of characters and laughed and cried along the way.

Ultimately, he realised what really matters in life.

**This is his journey.  
It might just inspire you to try something new.**

“An inspiring and entertaining book about the small things in life and how little changes have big impacts. A must for anyone looking to shake things up.”

**Pip McCormac, *Red Magazine***

“*52 New Things* follows in the great tradition of Bill Bryson and Tony Hawkes and is every bit as hilarious and engaging. Once you start there's no putting it down as it entertains, confounds and thoroughly inspires. Simply put, this is one of the must-read books of the year.”

**Thomas Patrick, [www.ThatFilmGuy.net](http://www.ThatFilmGuy.net)**

“Nick J. Thorpe's *52 New Things* is a blast, and the adventure many of us dream of having. Ideal for anyone stuck at a desk job and dreaming of breaking a world record or recording a Christmas single, *52 New Things* is a tonic.”

**Harry Wallop, author and journalist, *The Telegraph***

“Nick J. Thorpe gives new meaning to the idea that one should go everywhere and do everything. An inspiring read.”

**Lotte Jeffs, Features Editor, *ES***

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This is **NICK J. THORPE**.  
He is still trying new things.

