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TO-DO
LIST
2024**

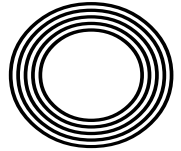
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SWEET EMBRACE
Dulux Colour of the Year 2024

TOP DESTINATIONS
for adrenaline junkies in the New Year

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Photo credit: Channel 4/Dave King



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Editor's notes...

DECEMBER 2023



Nik Allen, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION** Halstead Braintree. Recently, I had an eye-opening conversation at a local networking event. As we discussed our respective businesses, it struck me just how impactful our print editions have been over the years.

Since the launch of our very first **VISION** magazine in Brentwood back in June 2016, we've embarked on an incredible journey. Today, we proudly publish 14 monthly editions across Essex and East Herts.

These 14 editions combined boast a monthly print run of more than 91,000 copies.

But, when I reflected on the bigger picture, I couldn't help but be amazed. Since 2016, we've put our heart and soul into this venture, and the numbers tell an incredible story: more than five million copies printed! I'm particularly proud that our magazines are 100 per cent recyclable.

In a world increasingly dominated by digital content, this impressive figure is a testament to the enduring power of high-quality printed media. There's still a place at the table for the tactile, the tangible, and the timeless. I hope you enjoy reading this month's edition... and have a very merry Christmas!

Nik Allen

This is your town's hyperlocal magazine, delivering to homes and businesses every month.

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The harmonic voice of ALED JONES

From the almost impossibly angelic beginnings of teenaged Aled Jones MBE's first steps into the limelight, the Welshman has forged a career well beyond *Walking in the Air* and the limitations of chorister melodies.

Now 52, the presenter and actor has presence and popularity... and retains the ability to knock out a chorus or two!

Aled Jones was the 15 year old with the pitch-perfect voice whose icy vocal tones enchanted the public when Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman* was released back in 1982.

Walking in the Air was a track that became a festive anthem every bit as perfect and poignant as *White Christmas* or *Jingle Bells*, sitting as a symbol of childhood enchantment for an entire generation.

While others have confronted fame early, only for it to fade away, this was just the start for Jones. In adulthood, he gained acclaim hosting programmes such as *Songs of Praise*, where his likeable persona and warm, engaging demeanour endeared him to audiences.

In radio, Jones found a different but equally impactful avenue for his talents. As a presenter on Classic FM, he has brought the genre to a broader audience, with a tone that's knowledgeable yet approachable.

The star, who is married to Claire Fossett with whom he has two children, Emilia and Lucas, has also presented *Cash in the Attic*, *The One Show*, *Daybreak* and *Weekend* on terrestrial television.

Despite such a prolific and diverse array of work, Jones still strives to capture new audiences – as well as satisfying his loyal fans – and his latest musical endeavour is arguably his most innovative yet.

The Welsh singer recently released an album, *One Voice – Full Circle*, that transcends mere songs; indeed, it harmonises both his past and the present in that he duets with his younger soprano self.

The result is a hauntingly beautiful collection of tracks that showcases the evolution of an artist, proving beyond doubt that the singer has lost none of his talent along the way. From *Bright Eyes* to *Ave Maria* and *Scarborough Fair*, the mix of innovation and imagination is real.

"This project was like a journey through my own life – revisiting the voice that introduced me to the world, but with the perspective I have now," he explains. "It's a celebration of how far I've come and the enduring love I have for music."

Looking ahead, Jones, who appeared on *The Masked Singer* in 2022, is set to embark on a tour next year to promote the new project.

"Music is a very personal thing to a lot of people, and most of us listen to music by ourselves, and that is a lovely thing because it feeds our own interpretation and imagination in what we hear.

"Ultimately, though," he continues, "when the time comes to share songs and immerse ourselves in the collective celebration of music, we reach much further into our understanding, and from that can draw out very special memories.

"That's the thing that keeps me coming back!"

Photo credit: Ken McKay/TV/Shutterstock

THE ULTIMATE FESTIVE FLICKS

TAKING A LOOK AT THE TOP FIVE HIGHEST-GROSSING CHRISTMAS FILMS OF ALL TIME

Christmas movies have long been a staple of holiday cheer, embodying the spirit of warmth, family and festive joy. Many films have graced the silver screen, but a select few have transcended typical holiday fare to become phenomenal box office successes.

(All figures adjusted for inflation)

ONE: HOME ALONE (1990)

Box office takings: £1.1billion

Kevin McCallister, a mischievous and resourceful eight-year-old, is accidentally left behind by his family during Christmas vacation and turns his home into a fortress to fend off bumbling burglars.

This family comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, blends slapstick humour and holiday warmth, becoming a perennial favourite and the highest-grossing Christmas film ever.

TWO: HOME ALONE 2: LOST IN NEW YORK (1992)

Box office takings: £915.95million

The sequel to the original hit follows Kevin as he mistakenly boards a flight to New York while his family heads to Florida. In the Big Apple, he again encounters his previous assailants and must outwit them in this hilarious, uplifting adventure.

THREE: DR SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS (2000)

Box office takings: £587million

This live-action adaptation brings the whimsical world of Dr. Seuss to life. Jim Carrey's portrayal of the Grinch offers a perfect blend of comedy and emotion, exploring the true meaning of Christmas beyond the commercial frenzy.

FOUR: A CHRISTMAS CAROL (2009)

Box office takings: £552million

This animated rendition of Charles Dickens' timeless classic uses state-of-the-art motion capture technology. It narrates the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge's transformation from a miser to a kind-hearted man after being visited by three supernatural beings on Christmas Eve.

FIVE: THE GRINCH (2018)

Box office takings: £544million

Illumination's 2018 adaptation of Dr Seuss' classic tale reimagines the iconic green recluse with a heart two sizes too small. Voiced by Benedict Cumberbatch, the Grinch's journey from a Christmas-hating hermit to a holiday hero has charmed audiences worldwide.



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MOTORING

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YOUR WINTER CHECKLIST TO ENSURE YOU'RE PREPARED FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

If your car broke down or you got stuck in a really bad traffic situation during the winter months, would you be able to keep yourself and your family warm and safe until help arrived or you were able to be on your way again?

What to keep in your car during winter:

- ✓ A torch and batteries – do not think that you can rely on the torchlight on your smartphone
- ✓ Warm clothes such as a coat, hat and gloves, and blankets
- ✓ Ice scraper and de-icer to keep your front and rear windscreen clear
- ✓ In-car phone charger
- ✓ High-visibility clothing
- ✓ Jump leads or jump-start cables
- ✓ An empty fuel can
- ✓ Food and drink, including a hot drink in a flask
- ✓ Shovel in case of a snowstorm or blizzard
- ✓ Two warning triangles
- ✓ A pair of sunglasses to minimise glare from the winter sun

POWDERY checklist

Before each journey during the colder and darker months of the year, it can be a good idea to go through the POWDERY checklist.

- P is for petrol (or diesel).** Do you have enough petrol/diesel? Do you know where you can fill up?
- O is for oil.** Check your oil levels before you leave.
- W is for water.** Check both your radiator and your screen washer.
- D is for damage.** Check your wipers and lights for signs of wear and tear. Make sure your windscreen and windows are free from snow and ice.
- E is for electrics.** Check that your lights, indicators and controls are working as they should.
- R is for rubber tyres.** Make sure that your tyres are well inflated and free from damage.
- Y is for you.** Are you fit to drive? Have you slept well? Are you taking any medication that could affect your ability to drive safely?



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CARE for your SPARE



HOME & DIY

Having a spare room is a luxury. If you're lucky enough to have one, but it needs some TLC, see our tips below for how you can revive it before your next guests arrive.

A COMFY BED: Sleep for a night on your existing spare room bed to check if it's okay for your guests. If it isn't, but you can't afford a replacement, get a new mattress or mattress topper.

SOMEWHERE TO WRITE: Every guest room needs a work surface of some kind to use as a dressing table or desk. If space is tight, think about a drop-down version or even a high-level wide shelf.

THE PERFECT CHAIR: A big armchair is a lovely idea if you've got the space. If you haven't, choose a compact version and add some inviting cushions.

HANG IT UP: Hanging space is more useful than a chest of drawers. If there's no space for a wardrobe, get some coat hooks or a clothes rail. A rail with a shelf is ideal.

SOFT, WARM LIGHTING: A good bedside lamp is essential. A slim, unobtrusive floor lamp is also a great addition.

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL: A good-sized mirror, preferably full-length, is a fundamental element for a spare room.

SAVVY SUITCASE STORAGE: Your guests will want somewhere to easily access their bags. Foldable luggage racks are great and can be hidden away when not in use.

FINAL TOUCHES: A rubbish bin is always practical for any guest room – but choose something pretty. And don't forget a carafe of water. Add seasonal decorations such as fairy lights at Christmas; Easter eggs for spring; low-maintenance green plants like snake plants, succulents and orchids in summer; and pumpkins for Halloween.



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Dulux Colour of the Year 2024 Sweet Embrace

HOME & DIY



This is one of the most greatly anticipated announcements in the world of interior design: Dulux Colour of the Year 2024 has been revealed as Sweet Embrace.

What colour is Sweet Embrace?

Sweet Embrace is a delicate pale pink that is both soft and comforting. A metamer colour, meaning it changes tone with the light, in the early morning it appears crisper before turning into a more blush pink as the day goes on. Referred to as a 'modern neutral', Sweet Embrace can help to unite the different elements in a room and create an uplifting atmosphere.

Why was Sweet Embrace chosen?

This colour was chosen by the experts at Dulux as a shade that represents the global mood and a universal need for clarity and joy. Marianne Shillingford, colour expert and creative director at Dulux, said: "While being a beautiful stand-alone colour, it's a hue that matches perfectly with so many other shades, so that decorators can use it as

a backdrop to build a totally individual space upon."

Ways to use Sweet Embrace in your home

- 1 Paint your window frames**
As a metamer colour, Sweet Embrace is a perfect colour choice for painting your window frames, enabling you to capture its light-changing qualities throughout the day.
- 2 Colour-drench a room**
Colour-drenching involves drenching a whole room in one shade to create a sense of calm cohesion. This means painting all the surfaces rather than just the walls, and it can make a room appear more spacious and contemporary.
- 3 Update your woodwork**
This versatile shade is ideal for use as an alternative to white to update the woodwork in a room, such as the skirting boards and door frames.
- 4 Embrace the ombre paint technique**
Ombre is making a big comeback in 2024 and, as a neutral colour, Sweet Embrace has the ability to seamlessly blend into other soft shades to create a stunning sunset effect.

Photo credit: duluxdecoratorcentre.co.uk, ArzonGlobal



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'Essex has always been a part of who I am'



Photo credit: BBC/Jack Barnes/Kieron McCarron

While Adam Woodyatt owes much to his long-standing role as Ian Beale in the BBC soap opera *EastEnders*, we reveal why the actor likes to heap equal praise on the influences of his childhood, and in particular, his time spent in Essex.

Adam Woodyatt was born in Walthamstow in 1968. Although the Victoria Line suburb had renounced its ties with Essex three years previously, the outgoing schoolboy would soak up the influences of Chingford and South Woodford in his early life.

Perhaps it is an appreciation for that simple 1970s suburban upbringing – Woodyatt attended Forest School in Epping Forest, before the family relocated to Wales – that permeated so perfectly into his authentic portrayal of the rugged, pessimistic businessman Ian Beale.

“Essex has always been a part of who I am,” he begins. “It’s in my blood and has significantly shaped my approach to life and acting. I love its honesty!”

The actor, who is half Welsh, frequently travelled to London for castings as an aspiring young actor, and was working as a butcher when the call to join *EastEnders* came. Since 1985, his portrayal of Beale has captivated viewers, and his return to Albert Square this year excited fans.

“Ian is hapless in many ways, though ultimately always trying to do the right thing, and I think there’s a fair amount of that in me too,” says the actor, who recently volunteered to work in a fish and chip shop in Southend-on-Sea to pass the time.

Beyond the confines of Albert Square (and serving up cod), Woodyatt’s versatile talent has illuminated stage and television screen alike. And recently, his stint away from full-time acting has offered the star the chance to tour his native Essex... in a camper van, no less!

He said: “Feeling free, getting on the road, and hunting out all those childhood places of old, has been a magical ride for me, and one I want to continue taking.”



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LOCAL FEATURE

An ancient structure of remarkable history

Discover Greensted Church in Ongar, a unique hidden gem with a story that spans more than 1,000 years.

Celebrated as the world's oldest wooden church, its walls have stood for more than a millennium, offering a glimpse into the early periods of English Christian heritage.

Tracing its origins to the ninth century, the church's earliest timbers, dating to around 1060, mark it as a distinguished survivor from before the Norman Conquest. These timbers, visible even today, underscore the church's enduring presence and historical significance.

Originally a modest structure, perhaps built for a Saxon nobleman, Greensted Church has evolved through the centuries. It bears the marks of various architectural styles and religious practices that have influenced its design over time.

The church's walls, crafted from vertically set split oak trunks in a technique known

as 'stave construction', are particularly noteworthy. This method is complemented by the 19th-century brick chancel and Victorian restorations, together presenting a harmonious blend of various historical periods.

Greensted Church's connection to St Edmund, the martyred king of East Anglia, further elevates its historical importance. As the site where his body reputedly rested in 1013 en route to burial, the church has long been a focal point for pilgrimage and reflection.

More than a religious site, Greensted Church stands as a cultural beacon, embodying the continuity of faith and community. It serves as a serene witness to the evolving landscape and societal changes surrounding it.

Venturing into this sacred space, visitors are transported beyond the confines of the present. Each step within its walls is a journey through time, connecting the present to a past that remains vibrantly alive. Greensted Church is not just an architectural marvel; it's a living narrative of faith's resilience and the understated elegance of history.




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24, various times



Photo credit: Bocking Arts Theatre

There's nothing quite like a pantomime at Christmas, so this is the perfect festive treat for all of the family. Come and see *Cinderella: A Magical Pantomime*, with all the usual suspects, such as Buttons, the Prince, the wicked stepmother and the ugly stepsisters.

Tickets start from £10.95 per person. To book, visit www.theinstitutebraintree.co.uk/what-s-on

BREAKFAST WITH FATHER CHRISTMAS

Earls Colne Recreation Club, Green Farm
Meadow, Halstead Road, Earls Colne,
Colchester, CO6 2NG
Thursday, December 21, 9am

The big red man himself has managed to fit in some time to visit Halstead just before his special day, so if your little one would like to meet Father Christmas and spend some quality breakfast time with him, don't hesitate to sign up.

Tickets cost £12 per child. To find out more and book, visit www.allevents.in/halstead/breakfast-with-father-christmas/200025624372404

HEDINGHAM CASTLE WEDDING SHOW

Hedingham Castle, Bayley Street,
Castle Hedingham, CO9 3DJ
Sunday, January 7, 11am – 3pm

Have you got a wedding coming up, but don't know where to start? Come to Hedingham Castle for this special event, showcasing the spectacular building as a potential venue.

Register for this free event via www.bit.ly/3SZj9Et

THE BIG SING SOUL CHOIR

Queens Hall, Chipping Hill,
Halstead, CO9 2BY
Tuesday, January 9, 10am – 12pm

Fancy trying something new as part of your resolutions in 2024? Why not take part in a soul choir? The Big Sing is a community choir that aims to bring the community together. Their fun weekly rehearsals will not only allow you to sing, but will leave you feeling uplifted and wanting more!

Find out more and book your free space online at www.bit.ly/3RISoZv

GLAM ROCK NIGHT

The Pub, 2 East Street, Braintree, CM7 3JJ
Saturday, January 13, 8pm – 11.45pm

Feel the spirit of the 70s in this special glam rock night at The Pub, set to feature Jardin's Braintree. Travel back to a time of glitzy clothes and dazzling lights with performances of the music of David Bowie, T. Rex, Slade and more.

No booking necessary. To find out more information, visit www.bit.ly/3sN9mGW

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE COURSE

Braintree Community Centre,
19-21 Bocking End, Braintree, CM7 9AH
Tuesday, January 16, to Tuesday, March 5,
10am – 11.15am

Learn British Sign Language at a beginner level with this special weekly course, which consists of eight 75-minute sessions.

A 50 per cent deposit is required of £40, then £5 per week (with the total price coming to £80).

Register your interest via www.braintreecommunitycentre.org.uk/events/british-sign-language-jan24



Photo credit: Braintree Community Centre



The magic of MERLIN

FIRST DATES BARMAN MERLIN GRIFFITHS HAS A RENEWED TASTE FOR LIFE

It's perhaps slightly crass to state that many a romantic liaison has been made comfortable with the aid of an alcoholic loosener, but the evidence is there in pubs, bars and restaurants the length and breadth of the country, every day of every week.

One dining space in particular – that of the *First Dates* restaurant – has used the expertise of a master mixologist to great effect. This responsibility fell to Merlin Griffiths, who this year celebrated a decade on our screens.

“The time has flown by in a haze of romantic splendence,” jokes the 48 year old. “I’ve seen thousands of people pass through, and it’s a thrill to witness a happy ending.”

And many there have been – a recent study found that three per cent of first dates ended in marriage, with the Channel 4 show boasting numerous weddings and even the patter of tiny footsteps.

As the trusty barman charged with easing the nerves of hopeful romantics, Griffiths – who has a wife, Lucile, and young child – knows his role is significant; though as a pub owner himself, he is used to the responsibility bestowed on a good host.

“It’s an underrated occupation, I think. It’s a job that requires you to be present, engaging, interesting, knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects and, on occasion, firm with how punters are behaving! There are also extreme antisocial hours and it’s a physical job where you’re always on your feet, but I love it.”

Griffiths’ sense of perseverance was put to the test in 2021 when the *First Dates* barman was diagnosed with bowel cancer. He underwent surgery and recently celebrated the milestone of a year ‘all clear’.

“It has been a tough road, but one I am now emerging from. While there have been some very sombre moments in there, what the experience has done is to reinforce in me a desire to appreciate everything around me, to fight, and to achieve.”

Treatment has meant Griffiths has been unable to engage in one of his favourite hobbies. A keen cyclist, he previously completed the John O’Groats to Land’s End cycle ride in nine days. Many years ago, before his big break, he was a cycle courier in London.

“I love cycling” he comments. “It was a great way to stay fit, but you were taking your life in your hands on a daily basis.”

“Dealing with a rowdy pub customer or a feuding couple of *First Dates* seems tame in comparison!”

Griffiths’ taste for innovation was played out at Royal Ascot last year when he launched the first no-alcohol bar.

He’s also set his ambitious sights on opening a new pub, The Dog & Gun in Walton, which is expected to open soon.

He says: “It seems to be a time when opportunities are coming along, and for the first time in a couple of years I can fully commit to them.”

“I am lucky that I work in an industry that will always be here. We are social creatures – certainly in this country! – and there’s nothing better than watching people converse and interact.”

To keep up to date with everything Merlin is up to and ship his bar kits, visit www.merlingriffiths.com



new year monthly GARDENING CALENDAR

- January**
 - Plan and prepare for the year ahead.
 - Take stock of inventory (seeds, pots, etc) and assess your garden layout.
 - Put out water and seeds for the birds.
- February**
 - Start sowing seeds indoors, such as tomatoes, peppers and aubergines.
 - Add compost or organic matter to your garden soil.
- March**
 - Sow cool-season crops such as lettuce, spinach, carrots and beetroots directly in your garden.
 - Protect tender plants from late frosts.
 - Clean and tidy your greenhouse.
- April**
 - Transplant seedlings that require a longer growing season, such as tomatoes, peppers and herbs.
 - Plant perennial flowers and pot-grown fruits, such as strawberries.
 - Turn over the soil in your garden to loosen compaction.
- May**
 - Regularly water your garden and apply mulch around your plants to conserve water and stop weeds.
 - Use bedding plants to fill your garden with colour.
- June**
 - Monitor your garden for weeds and remove them.
 - Regularly fertilise your plants with organic fertiliser.
 - Water and mow your lawn frequently.
- July**
 - Water your plants deeply and less frequently.
 - Monitor plants for aphids and spider mites.
 - De-head bedding plants.
- August**
 - Harvest your summer crops, preserving excess produce through canning, freezing or drying.
 - Start planning your autumn garden by removing spent plants and amending the soil.
- September**
 - Directly sow seeds of salad greens, rocket and Swiss chard.
 - Harvest mature summer crops.
- October**
 - Prepare your garden for winter by harvesting the remaining autumn crops, removing any debris and dead plants and adding compost or organic matter to replenish nutrients.
 - Trim and shape your hedges.
- November**
 - Clear up fallen leaves, especially from lawns, ponds and beds.
 - Plant tulip bulbs for a spring display next year.
 - Wrap young plants and trees to protect them from frost.
- December**
 - Reflect on your year's gardening journey and plan for the year ahead.
 - Order seeds and supplies for the year to ensure you have everything you need.

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DRAIN ME!

Is your garden flailing rather than flourishing? If yes, this could be because you have not implemented a good drainage system. Essential for preventing waterlogged soil, erosion and unhealthy plant growth, here's how to improve the drainage in your garden.



SPIKE YOUR LAWN

If the soil in your lawn becomes compacted, then this can cause winter waterlogging. To prevent this from happening, spike or aerate the soil so that rainwater can flow down into the ground more easily. This can be carried out with either a garden fork or a lawn aerator tool.



GROW MORE PLANTS

One of the simplest ways to improve the drainage in your garden is by growing more plants. For best results, plant vegetation that is compatible with your soil type. For example, some hydrangea species are great for regulating wet soils, while clay soil benefits from species such as geranium.



BUILD RAISED BEDS

Raised beds that are made from either bricks or timber provide a great solution to poor garden drainage and offer a much better environment than the boggy earth below. Make sure you fill them with lots of quality, free-draining topsoil to help your plants thrive.



CREATE YOUR OWN COMPOST

Soil that has high organic matter content is better for drainage as it allows excess water to easily drain through it. By creating your own compost, you can have unlimited access to organic matter that is perfectly suited to your garden and its soil.



INCORPORATE SLOPING SURFACES

Surface water is a problem in many gardens but can be easily managed with the use of sloping surfaces. For example, you could combine steps and raised beds, create depth with tiered planters, or arrange large slabs of rocks to help direct water.

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TORN tights

Tights are a winter staple, keeping your legs warm and protected from the elements. However, they are arguably one of the most frustrating garments to keep in good condition.

HOW TO PREVENT RIPPED TIGHTS

Clip and file your toenails

To prevent holes or rips in the toe section of your tights, make sure that you keep your toenails clipped and filed. Also, consider buying tights with reinforced toes.

Remove any snags

If you notice any thread sticking out from snagged areas on your tights, then these need to be removed as they can easily turn into holes. While wearing your tights, simply pinch the area around the loose thread and use scissors to cut it off as close to the base as possible.

Wash your tights in a mesh bag

Always put your tights in a mesh bag before placing them in the washing machine. Alternatively, handwash your tights and then allow them to air dry. Never wash tights with underwired bras as they can easily become snagged.

Put them on gently

Before putting on tights, remove any jewellery such as rings or bracelets. Then sit down and, holding your tights at the waist, gently gather each leg with your thumbs until you are at the toe of your tights. Next, gently slide your feet in, one at a time, and pull your tights up, keeping your thumbs inside to avoid snagging.

HOW TO STOP A RIP/RUN FROM GETTING WORSE

Nail polish

One of the most popular ways to stop a run from getting any bigger is by applying nail polish. Clear nail polish is best as it won't show as much, but any colour will work.

Hairspray

Hairspray works by temporarily stiffening the fibres of your tights and is a great method if you are in a rush as it dries almost instantly.



FASHION





THE DISCOVERING Cider

England's Pioneering Role

For decades, cider was seen as a mass-market drink that lacked sophistication – knocked back rather than savoured. But the new breed of English cider makers is changing all that.

AN ANCIENT TIPPLE

Cider predates the Roman Empire, and even champagne owes some of its methods to the early days of cider making. Perhaps that's why, years later, cider makers are fighting back.

A NEW TYPE OF CIDER

Cider is now giving wine and champagne a run for their money in a rapidly changing landscape that has seen makers using locally sourced ingredients and experimental methods.

The process mirrors that of wine making, right down to the fact that cider is aged in oak barrels. Indeed, many types of fine cider aren't carbonated at

all, but are more similar to white wine.

More attention is also being paid to the land where the apples are grown. Much like grapes determine the profile of wine, so too does the soil, the landscape and the climate influence the apples used to make this new breed of cider.

THE FREEDOM TO EXPERIMENT

Liam Tinston of Tinston Wines & Ciders in Sussex points out that cider making lacks the strict rules found in wine making. This freedom enables producers to experiment and produce drinks that defy consumer expectations, resulting in a staggering variety of ciders on the market to suit most tastes.

CHAMPAGNE'S NEW RIVAL?

Osip, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Bruton, Somerset, has teamed up with well-known local company Pitton Cider to create Osip cider. Together, they've created a tippale that tastes like a high-end sparkling wine. Restaurateur Merlin Labron-Johnson and cider maker Martin Berkeley selected the apple varieties together, and the blend of juices was then 'keevied'. This traditional artisanal fermentation process carbonates the drink naturally, using the juices' own sugars.

Such is its increasing popularity and the skill required to make the drink, that cider could very well be many people's drink of choice this Christmas.

Like wines, ciders exhibit diverse flavours based on their origin and the apple varieties used. Finding your favourite wines requires tasting and exploration; discovering your preferred ciders demands a similar journey.

To get going, check out local producers or specialised shops near you – and try them with various foods to find your favourite pairings.

Photo credit: @thefirstingscider.co.uk



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The Windmill at Chatham Green is hidden away in the beautiful Essex countryside, just outside of Chelmsford, near the city's racecourses, where Michelin Star chef Tom Clarke and his partner Nancy invite you to discover exceptional modern cuisine, using foraged, seasonal ingredients.

The menu is kept short and changes frequently to reflect seasonality and sustainability, using only the highest quality ingredients.

With a dedicated restaurant area, the pub still remains a pub, where you can enjoy unique drinks, wines and a selection of real ales at the bar or on the terrace.



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MINCE PIE *Mania*

In the 13th century, Crusaders returned to Britain from the Middle East with a novel pie idea: minced meat, dried fruits, spices and wine. By Victorian times, the meat had vanished, and the modern mince pie emerged. To create your own version of these timeless treats, follow the recipe below. Remember, as well as the ingredients, you'll need a standard 12-hole muffin tin and two round pastry cutters – one measuring 9cm in diameter for the pie bases and one measuring 7.5cm for the lids.

MINCEMEAT

YOU WILL NEED: 225g mixed dried fruits (raisins, currants and sultanas) | 110g Bramley apple (peeled, cored and finely chopped) | 110g shredded vegetable suet | 150g demerara sugar | Zest and juice of 1 orange and 1 lemon | ½ tsp ground cinnamon | ¼ tsp ground nutmeg | ¼ tsp ground cloves | 2 tbsp brandy or rum (optional)

1. Mix dried fruit, apple, suet, sugar and citrus zest in a bowl.
2. Add citrus juice, spices and alcohol (if using) and mix well.
3. Cover and let it sit in a cool place for a day or two to enhance the flavours.

PASTRY

YOU WILL NEED: 175g plain flour | 85g unsalted butter, cold and diced | 2-3 tbsp cold water | A pinch of salt | A little extra flour for rolling

1. Combine the flour and salt in a large bowl.
2. Rub in the butter until the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs.
3. Gradually add the water, mixing until the dough forms.

ASSEMBLING AND BAKING

1. Preheat your oven to 190°C/180°C fan/ gas mark 5.
2. Roll the pastry out until it is about 3mm thick.
3. Using the cutters, cut out 12 bases and 12 lids.
4. Press the bases into the muffin tin and fill almost to the top with mincemeat – no need to grease the tin as the pastry's high fat content will stop it from sticking.
5. Brush the top edges of the pastry bases with a bit of cold water, cover with the lids and press the edges to seal.
6. Bake for 20-25 minutes until golden.



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TRAVEL

For many, the thrill of going on holiday is enough. For a proportion of others, though, it's only half the attraction, and venturing away from home to push levels of bravery and bravado is much more the ticket. With that in mind, then, here are four all-adventure destinations for dynamic daredevils to tick off their bucket list.



ONE: Patagonia. Split between Argentina and Chile, Patagonia is a huge area that surrounds the Andes mountain range, showcasing everything from National Parks to glaciers, hikes, caves and volcanoes.

Combining staggering natural beauty with all the risk and reward of different landscapes and a very different culture, going off-piste in Patagonia could just be the most daredevil thing you can do.



TWO: Iceland. A country of extremes, Iceland is as beautiful as it is challenging, and many adventurers cannot resist the urge to hike and climb around glaciers, waterfalls, geysers and volcanoes.

While dealing with the ice or diving deep into the Silfra fissure is a thrill a minute, it's also rewarding to hire a car and venture off on the Iceland Ring Road (also known as Route 1) – an 800-mile highway that circles the country.



THREE: The Dolomites. We associate Italy with relaxing, restorative experiences around great food and passionate people, yet the Dolomites – and a vast array of climbing, mountain-biking and hiking options – will take you off the beaten track, inviting you to test your mettle against some punishing terrain.

The rewards for adventure seekers are stunning views and crisp-clean air.

FOUR: South Africa. We know Cape Town as a beautiful, cultural city, but it also has a reputation as an adventure junkie hotspot, with surfing, abseiling (off Table Mountain, no less), diving with great white sharks and a prevalence of gyrocopter aircraft flights that can be taken as a way of enjoying the area's stunning coastline.





KIDS



how to make MELTING SNOWMEN BISCUITS

If you're after a tempting but simple festive cookie to make this Christmas, look no further than these cute melting snowmen biscuits. They taste delicious and are a great way to involve kids in the kitchen – but be prepared to get sticky! The below recipe makes 10 biscuits.

YOU WILL NEED:

For the biscuits: 100g butter | 100g caster sugar | ½ tsp vanilla extract | ½ a beaten egg (about 2 tbsp) | 200g plain flour (and a bit extra)

For decorating: 10 standard white marshmallows (not the mini ones) | 100g icing sugar | A tube of black writing icing | Some ready-to-roll orange fondant icing | Chocolate beans

HOW TO MAKE THE BISCUITS:

- Heat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas mark 6 and line a baking tray with parchment paper.
- In a large bowl, beat the butter and sugar together till smooth using a wooden spoon. Then beat in the vanilla extract, egg and finally the flour to make a dough. Chill in the fridge for 15 minutes.
- On a floured surface, roll out the dough with a rolling pin to roughly 5mm in thickness.
- Using a 9cm biscuit cutter or the rim of a 9cm glass, cut out 10 shapes.
- Bake for 8-10 minutes till golden, then cool.

HOW TO DECORATE:

- Put the icing sugar in a bowl. Add cold water, a teaspoon at a time, till the icing is just runny.
- Spread the icing on the biscuits and pop a marshmallow near the edge of each one.
- Use the black icing pen to draw the arms and eyes.
- Use the orange fondant to create a carrot nose.
- Then add the chocolate beans for the snowmen's buttons.



Photo credit: recipesfromapantry.com

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Say yes to Yerba mate

Are you looking for a healthier way to get your daily caffeine fix? Yerba mate provides the energy kick of coffee with the healing properties of herbal tea. Plus, it can even help you to lose weight!

WHAT IS YERBA MATE?

Yerba mate is a type of herbal tea that originates from South America and is made by steeping dried leaves from the yerba mate plant in hot water. It can be served hot or cold and, like black and green tea, it contains caffeine which can help you to feel more alert and focused. Yerba mate has a very distinctive taste that can be strong, bitter and slightly vegetal. In terms of aroma, it has been described as having a eucalyptus smell.

HOW MUCH CAFFEINE IS IN YERBA MATE?

Depending on how you brew it, the average cup of yerba mate contains 70mg of caffeine. In comparison, the average cup of coffee contains 120mg of caffeine and a cup of green tea contains around 25mg.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS?

- There are so many associated benefits of drinking yerba mate, including:
 - > Improved mental focus
 - > Enhanced physical performance
 - > Protection against infections
 - > Weight loss and reduced belly fat
 - > Reduced risk of heart disease
 - > Lowered blood sugar levels

ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

If you are sensitive to caffeine, you may experience some side effects such as an upset stomach, trouble sleeping, feeling nervous or restless or a faster heartbeat if you consume too much yerba mate. However, studies show that most people can safely drink up to 1.5 litres of yerba mate a day.

HOW TO PREPARE YERBA MATE

1. Add one or two yerba mate teabags to a mug – these can be bought online and at most health food shops.
2. Moisten the teabags with cool water.
3. Fill the mug with hot water.
4. Steep for five minutes and then remove the teabags.
5. Flavour to taste with honey, sugar or sweetener.
6. You can also add mint, ginger or orange peel if desired.



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BEAUTY

NINE TOP TIPS TO WINTERPROOF YOUR HAIR THROUGH THIS COLD SEASON

Winter can challenge your haircare routine before you know it, with cold temperatures and harsh conditions transforming your silky tresses into a dry, tangled mess. But it doesn't have to be like that. Follow these tips to keep your hair looking healthy and vibrant all season long.

- 1. Wear a hat:** Cold weather can damage your hair, so when it's chilly, wear a hat with a soft lining.
- 2. Cut back on shampooing:** Daily shampooing removes natural oils, so aim to shampoo your hair no more than two or three times a week.
- 3. Dry your hair before going out:** Wet hair can freeze and break in cold weather, so always make sure your hair is dry before stepping outside.
- 4. Eat a balanced diet:** Foods rich in vitamin C (e.g. citrus and berries) and omega-3 fatty acids (e.g. salmon and walnuts) will help keep your hair healthy.
- 5. Limit heat styling:** Tools like curling tongs and

straighteners can dry out your hair. In winter, try embracing the natural look or, if you've got long hair, experiment with braids and buns. You might be pleasantly surprised by your styling skills!

- 6. Tame the frizz:** Use a laundry dryer sheet to smooth pesky static flyaways.
- 7. Use nourishing products:** Winter is the time to indulge in good-quality moisturising conditioners, hair masks and oils.
- 8. Avoid bleach:** Many hair dyes, particularly blonde shades, can seriously dry out your hair. So think about going natural for the winter – or choose a darker shade.
- 9. Stay hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water will keep your hair hydrated, making it shinier and less prone to breakage.

Winter doesn't have to mean bad hair days. With these straightforward tips, you can keep your hair healthy and glowing all season, whatever the weather.



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And yet, there is now a new take on the idea that has emerged in recent years. Utilising foam-tipped arrows that are fired from low-pouidage bows, competitors created something of a hybrid between dodgeball and archery – dodgebow.

The sport was invented by three friends from Montreal, Canada. The trio had played combat archery and wanted to develop the idea further. Subsequently, the company Dodgebow was created. The sport sees two teams of up to 12 members battle for 45 minutes in a weapon-laden arena filled with inflatables which can be used as obstacles or objects to hide behind.

The aim is for the teams to gather weapons from the centre of the arena, position themselves strategically, and then eliminate each of the

opposing team's players by shooting them. A player can bring back an eliminated teammate by catching an arrow.

Dodgebow, also known as archery tag, is a rapidly growing sport and is already played in more than 30 countries around the world.

There are also extensions to the game, including Bullseye (all opposing team targets can be hit instead of striking out players), No Loyalty (a 'Blue on Blue' hit means the receiving player must change teams), and Capture the Flag (one of three opposing team flags must be taken back to your own base).

Using safe equipment means dodgebow is fun and exciting to play, with emphasis on both working as a team and individual brilliance.



Photograph: dodgebowltd.com

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PUZZLES & TRIVIA

PUZZLES

Answers: see end of The VISION Listings

ACROSS

- 1. Object that gives out heat (8)
- 5. Capital of Norway (4)
- 9. One side of a gem (5)
- 10. Guilty person (7)
- 11. Unfriendly (12)
- 13. In a careless manner (6)
- 14. Requesting (6)
- 17. Importance (12)
- 20. Flexible athlete (7)
- 21. Show triumphant joy (5)
- 22. Obstacle (4)
- 23. Formal curse by a pope (8)

DOWN

- 1. Crack (4)
- 2. Propriety and modesty (7)
- 3. Relating to horoscopes (12)
- 4. Hold a position or job (6)
- 6. Small woody plant (5)
- 7. Be heavier than (8)
- 8. First part of the Bible (3,9)
- 12. Corridors (8)
- 15. Have as a part (7)
- 16. Heed (6)

1		2		3		4		5	6	7
							8			
9						10				
	11									
12										
13						14			15	
						16				
17		18								
										19
20								21		
22						23				

- 18. Third Greek letter (5)
- 19. Volcano in Sicily (4)

DID YOU KNOW?

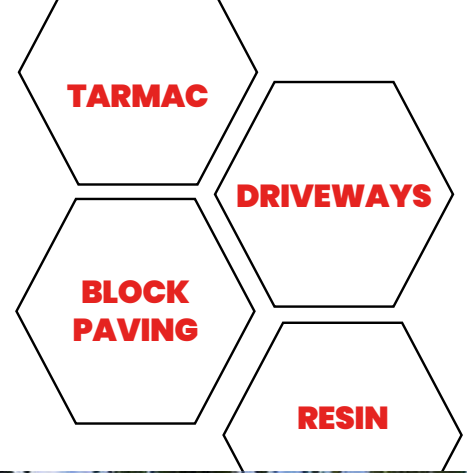
- ▶ Reindeer hooves are specifically adapted for their environment. The cloven shape spreads their weight more evenly, helping them to walk across snow and soft ground, while their sharp edges provide traction in icy conditions.
- ▶ Some types of reindeer do actually have red noses as a result of densely packed blood vessels, which help to regulate their body temperature.
- ▶ In spring, reindeer sometimes form super-herds of 50,000 to 500,000.
- ▶ Reindeer fur is hollow, helping to trap air and providing insulation to stay warm. This also makes them excellent swimmers.
- ▶ Reindeer migrate an average of 12 to 34 miles per day, travelling as much as 3,100 miles each year in their search for food.

SUDOKU

	3			9				7
1		9	2					4
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9	6		1			2		5
		1						
	7		6					
6					4	8		1
4				5			7	



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