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2024**

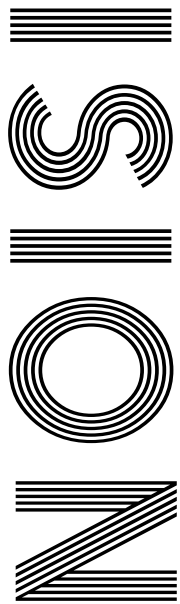
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Editor's notes...



Brett Shohet, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION**Hertford. We are rapidly approaching Christmas and, while the super organised among you might have already ticked off your shopping list, if you're anything like me, you'll still have a way to go!

While ordering online might be considered to be easier, supporting your local businesses comes with a whole host of benefits. Not only will you be helping to keep your local high street alive, but you'll also be making a huge difference to the staff and owner. A purchase from you could make their week or even their month. Money spent with local businesses will also circulate in your community, spreading the joy even further.

I hope you take advantage of the festive period to spend plenty of quality time with family and friends. While Christmas is a time for celebration, it can also be stressful for a variety of reasons, whether that's because of remembering lost loved ones or the financial burden. Please check in on those around you; simply reaching out can make all the difference.

Finally, I'd like to thank all those who have supported **VISION** this year. It's been a difficult time for businesses, so to have such a loyal and generous network behind us has helped us continue to thrive. I hope you have a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Brett Shohet

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 Moray/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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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.



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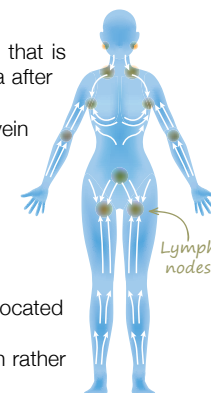


A gentle form of massage that is designed to remove toxins from your body and aid circulation and blood flow, lymphatic drainage massage is becoming increasingly popular among people looking to reverse the effects of a poor lifestyle.

WHAT IS LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE MASSAGE USED FOR?

Lymphatic drainage massage is used to relieve painful swelling in the arms and legs that is caused by lymphoedema. This type of massage is often used to relieve lymphoedema after breast cancer surgery, but it can be beneficial for other conditions, including: Rheumatoid arthritis | Fibromyalgia | Chronic venous insufficiency | Lipoedema | Deep vein thrombosis

More recently, lymphatic drainage massage has become popular as a cellulite-busting treatment owing to its ability to boost the stimulation of lymph circulation. It can also be used to improve digestion, aid sleep, and support faster muscle recovery after exercise.

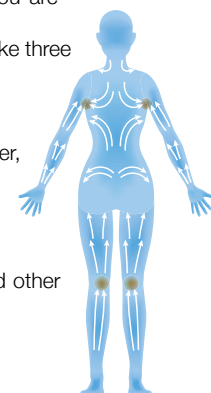


HOW DO YOU PERFORM LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE MASSAGE?

- 1. Use a light touch:** Be careful not to press too hard as the lymphatic vessels are located right under the skin.
- 2. Stretch the skin:** Unlike most other types of massage, you should stretch the skin rather than move along it.
- 3. Massage with the normal lymph flow:** To stimulate natural flow, make sure you are massaging towards your trunk and heart.
- 4. Go slow:** As you massage the lymph vessels, make sure you do so slowly. Ideally, take three seconds to perform each stretch.

WHERE ON THE BODY CAN YOU DO LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE MASSAGE?

Most commonly, this type of massage is carried out on the legs or the arms. However, it can be performed all over the body, including on the neck, shoulders, chest and stomach area.



ARE THERE ANY ASSOCIATED RISKS?

In most cases, lymphatic drainage massage is a safe treatment for lymphoedema and other health concerns. However, you should not undergo this treatment if you have:

A heart condition | Blood clots | Kidney failure | An infection

If you are pregnant, speak to your doctor before undergoing this treatment.



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.



Luxury care in the heart of Harlow

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We are delighted to announce the grand opening of The Jubilee Suite - our new luxury care suite situated within Abbot Care Home in Harlow, Essex.

Our new Jubilee Suite has been expertly designed with kindness, and dignity at its heart, providing person-centred nursing, residential and dementia care. With a variety of excellent facilities and spaces to enjoy, we welcome the people who live here to play an active part in everyday life – as we ensure activities, events and mealtimes are carefully tailored to the personal preferences of each individual.

Abbot Care Home is situated amongst peaceful open parkland and features beautiful, landscaped gardens. The people who live here enjoy a comfortable environment and benefit from the home-from-home atmosphere.

It is important to our team that we work as part of your family, as we plan in partnership whilst providing the same caring support that we would wish for our own loved ones to receive, whilst enjoying a life well-lived, each and every day.

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To find out more about Abbot Care Home and book in to view our newly opened Jubilee Suite, please get in touch

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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.

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 Pilton Cider to create Osip cider. Together, they've created a tipple 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 'keeved'. 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: showingscider.co.uk



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INTERIOR DESIGN PROFILE

MADDUX CREATIVE



HOME & DIY

Sophisticated, playful, beautiful. That's how Maddux Creative describes its decorative style. Full of life and colour, each space it creates is unique, with designs that have won acclaim all over the world.

If you love bold colours, patterns and textures, then Maddux Creative will serve as the perfect inspiration to bring your interior aspirations to life.

THE STORY BEHIND MADDUX CREATIVE

Maddux Creative is run by Scott Maddux, originally from Tennessee, and Jo Le Gleud from the UK. They met on a dancefloor in the 1990s, and brought their shared creative experience together in 2011 when they founded their Peckham-based studio.

The pair describe their work as "an alchemy of design: an intricate tapestry of form and texture. A celebration of colour." Throughout their designs it's clear that these elements are central, using the features of the room to create spaces that are striking and unique. They take inspiration from a range of influences, which keeps things wonderfully refreshing.

RECREATING MADDUX CREATIVE'S STYLE

What's great about Maddux Creative's aesthetic is that there are no set rules, allowing you to recreate

their style in your own home. Some tips to give you a dash of inspiration include:

- > Be brave with colours and textures. Mixing and matching styles can add a quirky touch that keeps spaces fun and unique, so choose the pieces that you're drawn to and which reflect your personal style. Popular colour combinations include pinks and greens, blues and yellows, and reds with greys or gold.
- > Tonal looks can make a striking impression. Choose a solid base colour such as blue or green and add lighter/darker accents in the same shade – using furniture and accessories in different shades to create a multilayered look.
- > Plants and flowers add life and can make your space feel more lived-in – an affordable way to transform your decor.
- > Floral patterns add a classic touch that still feels modern in the right setting. From patterned lampshades to tapestries and cushions, you can use florals or stripes to add some individual touches that will bring the different styles in your space together.

Wonderfully unique and making colour popular again, Maddux Creative provides the perfect inspiration to go bold and have fun with your interior design.

Photo credit: madduxcreative.com



CHRISTMAS TREE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

FRIDAY 5th JANUARY - WEDNESDAY 10th JANUARY

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Midas Touch

ADDING A TOUCH OF GOLDEN GLAMOUR TO YOUR HOME THE AFFORDABLE WAY

Looking to add a touch of contemporary sparkle and charm to your Christmas decor? You're in for a treat! In this DIY project, we'll show you how to transform plain glass vases, jars and votives into dazzling gold masterpieces. The best part? You don't need any special skills, though a steady hand is useful! And it's an ideal project to do with older children.

Get ready

YOU WILL NEED:

Gold foil sheets | Gold foil adhesive | Adhesive brush | A large brush (like a powder brush) for removing excess gold foil | Small glasses or votives (make sure they're clean and dry – washing-up liquid and a piece of dry kitchen towel should do the trick).

All these items are available online or in most arts and crafts shops.

Apply the adhesive

Carefully apply the gold foil adhesive to the areas on your glasses where you want the gold foil to stick. The adhesive will need some time to become tacky.

The time can vary with different makes, so follow the instructions on the packaging carefully.

Apply the foil

Once the adhesive is tacky, apply the foil directly from the paper it comes on. Press the sheet onto the glass where you've applied the adhesive. Then, carefully remove the paper backing, leaving the gold foil attached to the glass. If necessary, use your fingers to smooth it out.

Brush away excess and leave to dry

Using the large brush, remove any excess gold foil and let your decorated objects dry for a few hours. For extra protection, you can seal them with a suitable clear sealant or varnish specially made for glass and delicate surfaces – following the manufacturer's instructions.

Once complete, fill your glass items with a candle, fairy lights, flowers, winter twigs or pine cones. Sit back, admire your creations, or consider giving them as gifts to help spread the festive feeling.

Home Counties Loft Ladders, Quality You Can Trust!

These days most homeowners suffer from a lack of storage space. So many precious items that need to be kept – but where to store it all? That's where Home Counties Loft Ladders come in.

The company, based locally, offers homeowners the opportunity to maximise their storage space with a loft ladder. 50sqft of boarding and a light – all fully fitted in less than a day from just £444! But it's not just the affordability of the package that makes Home Counties Loft Ladders stand out, as manager Jamie Oakley explains: 'Our

watchwords are Quality, Integrity and Value. Quality in the materials that we use for all our installations and the fact that all our loft packages are fitted by time served tradesmen, so our customers are assured of the best job.

Integrity in that we will turn up at the time we say and make sure the house is spotless when we leave, and value in that we offer our services at a price people can afford.

Our business relies on referrals and we get a huge amount of our calls from people who have been referred to us by our existing customers

– that simply wouldn't happen if we didn't adhere to our overriding principles.

At the end of the day the old adage that happy customers lead to more happy customers is true and we work hard to make that happen for

every installation we carry out!

So, if you want to make use of your loft space, call Jamie free on 0808 301 9551 and he'll be happy to pop round and give you a no obligation quote so you too can make use of your loft!



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CLEAR INSPIRATION...

Infinite Glass Ltd has been trading as a glazing company since 2018. As a company we take pride in what we achieve and always strive towards quality over quantity.

Our company can only speak for itself with our growing clientele and the testimonials of clients that have been working alongside us for years.

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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, AkzoNobel



CARE *for your* SPARE

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 thigh-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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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



The Beckhams' very own countryside escape

Few celebrity couples shine as brightly as David Beckham OBE and Victoria Beckham OBE. Yet while global fame has permeated the last 30 years in the spotlight, the simplicities of Hertfordshire, for a while at least, played a pivotal role.

After their early years of fame and flashbulbs, it was perhaps not a surprise that, set among Hertfordshire's quaint villages and serene countryside, the Beckhams sought out (and duly found) an escape from the relentlessness of the media.

It was back in the early noughties, at the peak of David's football career, that the couple purchased Rowneybury House in Sawbridgeworth, a spectacular home quickly renamed Beekingham Palace.

This lavish estate, nestled in the heart of Hertfordshire, became their family sanctuary, symbolising their rise to prominence and a shared love for the tranquillity of the English countryside.

David had played for Manchester United for more than a decade by then, and while the mansion wasn't geographically close to the north-west, it was near to Essex, the county in which both Beckhams had grown up.

"Living in Hertfordshire brought a sense of normalcy to our lives," David reflected in a recent interview. "It was our haven away from the pitch, from the music industry, and everything else that goes with it."

For Victoria, the base was not only a place in which they could raise their children – at the time, Brooklyn was two and Romeo on the way – but also an inspirational, elegant environment that positively influenced her fashion ventures.

"Hertfordshire's timeless beauty and classic English charm has always inspired my designs," Victoria shared.

Rather than hide away from life, the Beckhams, to their credit, embraced everything around them. From community events to pub trips and local sports matches, the serene Hertfordshire landscape became the backdrop of their family life.

Ultimately, the time came to move on, and the family home was sold in 2014 – yet their legacy in Hertfordshire remains indelible.

Photo credit: Featureflash Photo Agency/Shutterstock.com, Shutterstock



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The oldest pub in England fights on for another day

Nestled on the banks of Verulamium Park in St Albans, lies Ye Olde Fighting Cocks, a pub reputed to be one of, if not the, oldest in England.

However, this didn't prevent the popular watering hole from filing for bankruptcy last year, leading to national news stories pushing for its survival.

To lose such an iconic drinking hole is perhaps only put into context when you consider patrons have been frequenting the building since the year 793 AD. That means more than 12 centuries of drink, of clinking, and the odd hangover, no doubt.

In truth, the pub has seen various uses throughout the years, including a pigeon house for the Abbey, and even a cockfighting venue, from which it derives its current name. Naturally, the practice is now outlawed, but the title remains.

Like all buildings of an age, its curious octagonal structure and intriguing history lure in visitors from far and wide. Indeed, entering the pub is like stepping back in time – its low ceilings, exposed wooden beams and a central fireplace create an atmospheric and cosy ambience.

For the purists, an extensive range of traditional ales and more modern palate enhancers serves to promote and preserve the pub's historic social experience.

And as for the bankruptcy, three local investors stepped in to save Ye Olde Fighting Cocks in April of last year. While plans continue to move it further forward as a venue catering to every taste of tipple, it is a place indelibly left in the past, and so it should be. Cheers!



Photo credit: Keith Hider/Shutterstock.com

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YOUR LOCAL EVENTS

CHURCHFITTERS CHRISTMAS CRACKER

St Andrew's Church, St Andrew Street,
Hertford, SG14 1HZ
Friday, December 22, 7.30pm



Photo credit: Hertford St Andrew's Church

An excellent way to herald the Christmas season, this seasonal concert will feature a merry blend of both traditional and modern festive songs.

Doors open at 6.30pm. Tickets for adults cost £19, and there are a limited number of free tickets for under-18s. To book, visit www.bit.ly/3sN10yU

DIVIDE X GOLDEN HOUR GROOVE CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Cinnabar, 88-96 Fore Street, Hertford, SG14 1AA
Friday, December 22, 9pm – 2.30am

This festive club night will see house, R&B, hip-hop and basement garage classics playing out across two floors. The last of Divide's events this year, say goodbye to 2023 with some big tunes.

Attendees must be over 18. Last entry is at 11.30pm. Tickets cost £8.50 and are available to book online via www.bit.ly/3MXmkbl

NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

Hertford Corn Exchange, 39 Fore Street,
Hertford, SG14 1AL
Sunday, December 31, 8pm – 2am

Ring in 2024 with this celebration of 2023, taking place at Hertford's biggest music venue. Iconic covers band Allergy will be playing a variety of songs until the big countdown, and then beyond.

Attendees must be over 18. Tickets cost £12 in advance and £15 on the door (subject to availability).

Book your tickets via www.cornexchangehertford.co.uk/whats-on/new-years-eve-

THE INVISIBLE MEN AUDITION

The Little Theatre, 6 Christchurch Place,
Balfour Street, Hertford, SG14 3BB
Sunday, January 7, Monday, January 8 and
Tuesday, January 9, 7.30pm – 9.30pm

Do you have a passion for acting, and fancy appearing in a world premiere of a new play, organised by The Company of Players? Are you aged 18 years and over? Then why not audition for their new comedy, *The Invisible Men*, inspired by the works of H.G. Wells?

To find out more about the show, which premieres in June, and any other information, visit www.cops.org.uk/event/invisible-men-audition-2

ELIZA CARTHY

St Andrew's Church, St Andrew Street,
Hertford, SG14 1HZ

Thursday, January 18, 7.30pm

Described as the Queen of English Folk, Eliza will bring her trademark powerful voice and expert fiddle-playing to St Andrew's as part of her 2024 solo tour.

There will be refreshments available at the show. Tickets cost £19 from www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on/hertford/st-andrews-church/eliza-carthy/e-lgeypg

NOASIS – THE DEFINITIVE OASIS TRIBUTE BAND

Hertford Corn Exchange, 39 Fore Street,
Hertford, SG14 1AL

Friday, January 19 and Saturday, January 20,
7.30pm

Noasis are the country's foremost Oasis tribute band, with more than 800 performances under their belt and top-notch recreations.

Tickets cost £16.50 per person. To book, visit www.manchestheatres.com/event/noasis--the-definitive-oasis-tribute-band/hertford



Photo credit: Wikipedia



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V DANGEROUS

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.

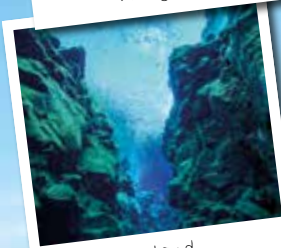
THREE: The Dolomites. We associate Italy with relaxing, restorative experiences around great food and passionate people, yet the Dolomites – and a vast array of climbing, mountain-biking and hiking options – will take you off the beaten track, inviting you to test your mettle against some punishing terrain.

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.



Patagonia



Iceland



The Dolomites



Newton's Apple Tree

WOOLSTHORPE MANOR THE BIRTHPLACE OF BRIGHT IDEAS

Sir Isaac Newton, one of history's greatest scientists, was born on January 4, 1643 (Christmas Day 1642 Old Style) in Woolsthorpe Manor, an old farmhouse near Grantham in Lincolnshire.

Newton lived at the manor until he left to attend the University of Cambridge in 1661. When the Great Plague of London erupted in 1665, Newton returned home. And it was here that he embarked on some incredible work, developing new ideas about light, optics, calculus, motion and gravity.

AN APPLE A DAY

The most famous story about Newton and Woolsthorpe involves an apple. The story goes that when Newton saw an apple drop from a tree in the orchard, he started to think about the forces that make objects fall. This led him to develop his Law of Universal Gravitation. The law explains why things fall to the ground. And it explains why objects in the universe move towards each other.

The law is usually written as:
$$F = G \frac{(m^1 \times m^2)}{r^2}$$

F – force, or the pull between two objects

G – gravitational constant, which is a special number used to figure out the strength of gravity

m – mass, or the size of the two objects

r – the distance between the centres of the two objects

DYNAMIC DISCOVERIES

As well as his work on gravity, Newton developed three laws of motion that helped us understand how things move and interact with each other, and laid the groundwork for much of modern physics and engineering.

WHAT CAN I SEE AT WOOLSTHORPE?

You can see the tree that inspired Newton's work, although it's probably a more recent tree that regrew from its original roots.

You can also visit the manor itself, including a recreation of Newton's workroom. In addition, there's a hands-on science centre.

For more information, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/nottinghamshire-lincolnshire/woolsthorpe-manor or call the National Trust on 01476 860338.



Photo credit: National Trust Images/Jamies Dobson



HISTORY

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HOW TO MAKE A DIY PET CHRISTMAS CRACKER

Do you like to involve your pet in the excitement of Christmas Day? If yes, then you are going to love making them their very own Christmas cracker complete with edible treats and festive toys.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:
A toilet paper roll or kitchen towel roll | Tissue paper, wrapping paper or newspaper | String or ribbon | A selection of edible treats and small toys

HOW TO MAKE:

- > Take an empty toilet or kitchen towel roll, depending on how big your pet is and how many treats you want to include. For medium-sized and large dogs, a kitchen towel roll is best as you can fit more in.
- > Stuff your chosen treats/toys into the toilet or kitchen roll. Don't worry about overstuffing!
- > Cut your tissue paper, wrapping paper or newspaper so that you have enough to wrap your roll, leaving 5cm of paper at each end.
- > Twist off the ends and loosely secure with string or ribbon.
- > You could also make a personalised name tag using a small piece of card and a felt tip pen or by writing directly onto the paper.

NB: Do not stick on any embellishments such as bells or plastic decorations as these are potential choking hazards. Make sure you remove the tissue/wrapping paper once they have got to the treats so that they do not try to eat it. Always monitor your pet when they are opening their Christmas cracker, and do not include a "bang" element as this may scare them.

What to put in your DIY pet Christmas cracker

- > Edible treats such as chew sticks, meaty bites and biscuits
- > Small festive toys such as a felt bauble with catnip or a candy cane plush
- > A small paper hat or festive bow and a pet-themed joke.

V
PETS



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



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



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.



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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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The online betting industry has radically changed not just our lifestyle habits, but the way we view competitive sport too.

From an era where betting was only ever the domain of somewhat scruffy men in high street bookmakers, often with the smell of beer and cigarettes lingering in the air, to a modern reworking where the option of placing money on a sporting event can be done from the comfort of one's armchair.

The online betting market is always a topic of much debate and conjecture. Whether or not you believe there is a moral issue at play, the success of those who pioneered the industry is undisputed. When Denise Coates – who was awarded a CBE in 2012 for her services to community and business – registered the bet365 domain name in the year 2000, neither she nor co-founder John, her brother, could have foreseen the incredible changes to the industry that were to follow.

In fairness, Denise did have some previous knowledge of the industry – her father, Peter Coates, known for his chairmanship of Stoke City Football Club, had run a successful bookmaker firm, Provincial Racing, which she joined after graduating from university with a first-class degree in ergonomics.

Using a £15million loan secured against the company's betting shop estate, bet365 was one of the first to try out the untested online market, at a time when the internet was awash with uncertainty and suspicion over online transactions.

Wind forward 20 years, and bet365 is one of the leading players in the market with annual revenues of more than £2billion, thanks to more than £36billion in betting transactions each year.

Coates rewards herself tidily – her wage in 2020 was said to be £421million, which is higher than all FTSE 100 Index CEOs combined.

It is an amount that reflects perhaps not her workload, but certainly the game-changing element brought about by one of the UK's most powerful female entrepreneurs.



Photo credit: bet365

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Winter SURVIVAL KIT

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?



UNUSUAL SPORT:

DODGEBOW®



The classic 2004 box office comedy film *Dodgeball* involved what most people thought was a new sport, yet its roots actually go right the way back to the turn of the 20th century.

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-poundage 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.



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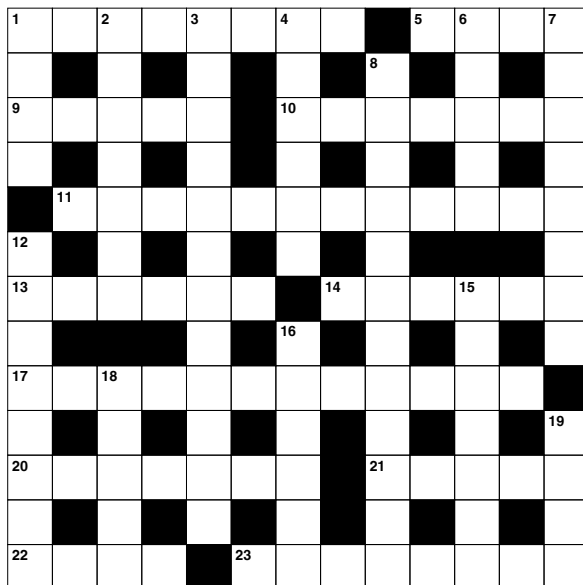
PUZZLES & TRIVIA

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)



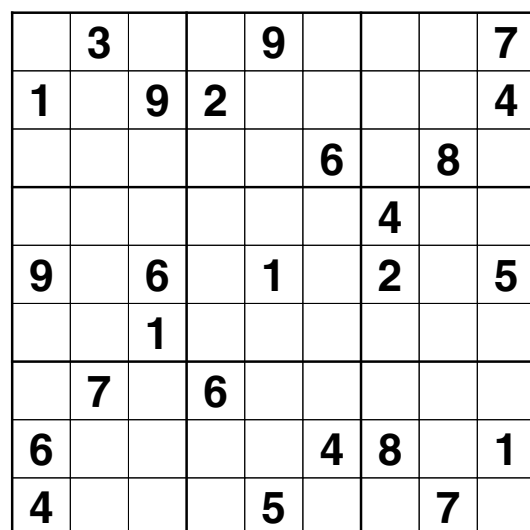
18. Third Greek letter (5)

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.

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