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## Letter from the Editor

Hello again and welcome...

If there is ever a month designed to make me hibernate at home, it is January. It is cold and grey – that's both the weather and my skin – and general lethargy rules the roost. Top of my 'to do' list is blankets, tea, and endless TV.

For a day or two, this can be blissful. But because January somehow feels like the longest month of the year, that cosy cocoon quickly becomes too much of a good thing.

I am sure I am not on my own here. So, what is the answer?

According to online wellness advisers (who do not look like they have had a down day in their lives), the solution is simple: get outside. Ignore the weather, pull on a generous number of loose layers – ideal if you over-indulged at Christmas – and plant yourself squarely in the middle of nature. And it must be proper green space; 30 minutes around the block, dragging your reluctant pooch, does not count.

You might think that an hour or two outdoors will not make much difference and that once you're home, everything will feel the same. But a bit of distance from your winter den, combined with a boost of oxygen, really does something for your motivation.

Maybe you'll tackle something small, like finally sorting out that drawer full of mismatched gloves. Or it is the home project you have been putting off for months. And if you do decide to go big, any home-improvement company or tradesperson will be delighted to help you start the year with some new ideas.

*And the thought I will leave you with this month:-*

*"Fresh Air  
Drives  
Fresh Thinking"*

Until next time...

*Sheila*

## Inside...

- 4 time of year  
Overcoming gym anxiety
- 6 books and more  
Happy, Healthy New Year
- 8 home interiors with katherine sorrell  
Time for a brush up
- 10 finance  
New Year money resolutions
- 12 cook!  
Courgette & Feta Fritters
- 14 time of year  
Watch the birdie!
- 16 motoring  
UK Drive : Fiat 600
- 18 travel : uk cycling destinations  
Along for the ride
- 20 a short story by alicia & murray clarke  
The Chosen Few
- 24 gardening with caroline knight  
Just one thing
- 26 health with susannah hickling  
Rise and shine
- 28 coffee break  
Grab a coffee (no biccie this month!)

## Get in touch...

The Village Breeze is a local community magazine and business directory distributed monthly to 8,000 homes and businesses in Appleby Magna, Donisthorpe, Linton, Measham, Moira, Oakthorpe and Overseal.

**Deadline for next issue**  
15th January, 2026

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# Overcoming gym anxiety

**Many of us will be resolving to work out more this year. But for some people, the biggest barrier isn't time or motivation – it's walking into the fitness centre itself.**

Statistics show that Google searches relating to 'gym confidence' and 'overcoming gym anxiety' – also known as gymtimidation – have risen by 1,600% and 300% respectively year-on-year.

## What is gym anxiety?

Individuals feel nervous, self-conscious or overwhelmed about working out in a gym setting. Navigating unfamiliar equipment, wearing gym clothing, not knowing proper exercise techniques and working out alongside seemingly more experienced gym-goers can be a huge source of anxiety.

These feelings most commonly stem from a fear of judgement, lack of confidence or feeling out of place. Studies show that other factors, such as changing in front of others and concern over equipment cleanliness, can contribute.

However, while gymtimidation can be enough to put you off, there are ways to manage and overcome it, so that you can make the most of your workouts.

## Focus on your goals

Remember why you started and set achievable, personal goals to stay motivated. Start with beginner-friendly workouts or classes to build confidence.

## Familiarise yourself

It can be helpful to get to know the gym environment ahead of time.

- If you'd feel calmer understanding the layout of the gym, you could book a guided tour. You may even be able to take a virtual tour.
- If you're worried about not knowing how to do certain exercises or use equipment, watching tutorials can be helpful. Remember, too, that gym staff are there to help.

- Visiting during off-peak hours, when gyms tend to be less crowded, can help reduce feelings of intimidation.

## Don't over-complicate things

In our 24/7 world, we have access to an endless supply of exercise information – from social media to magazines – and for those with gym anxiety, this information overload can feel even more intense. Workouts don't need to be fancy. Select, say, five or six exercises you feel comfortable with and build your workout from there, introducing new exercises as your confidence and fitness grow.

## Bring a buddy

Exercising with a friend can provide support, make the experience more comfortable and keep you motivated. You might also like to join a fitness class of like-minded people – from Pilates and yoga to Zumba and spin, there's plenty on offer.

## Feel comfortable

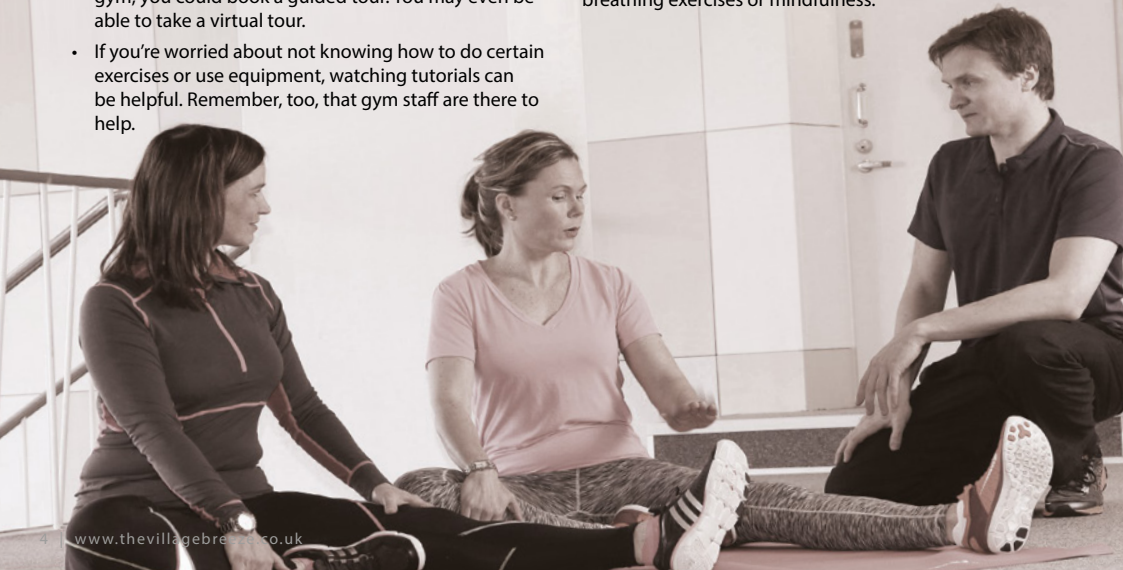
Remember that you don't have to look or dress a certain way to exercise or be accepted at a fitness centre. So, wear whatever you feel best in, be that a baggy t-shirt and tracksuit bottoms or tight-fitting Lycra.

## Be patient

Overcoming gym anxiety takes time. Recognise that everyone starts somewhere, so be kind to yourself as you build confidence and establish a routine.

## And relax...

It might also help to have some relaxation techniques you can fall back on if things get too much, such as deep breathing exercises or mindfulness.







# Funeral Planning

Funerals bring people together, not just to say goodbye, but to share stories, offer comfort and celebrate the life of someone close to you.

Established over 200 years ago, FM & J Wait has become a trusted name for funeral care in Staffordshire. Serving the communities of Lichfield, Burton upon Trent and Swadlincote, their teams are here to support families through life's toughest moments.

Over five generations, they've built their reputation based on trust, integrity and compassionate care. Their services offer a meaningful farewell, shaped by what feels right for you. Whether you choose a quiet farewell, a small gathering, or a grand celebration of life, their team can help.

If you have any special wishes for personalising the service, they are here to listen and support you. On the day, the service will be conducted with the utmost care and respect, creating the service you hoped for.

As a Dignity funeral director, FM & J Wait are part of a nationwide network of trusted funeral directors. It also means they can help you with Dignity Funeral Plans, which allow you to plan a funeral ahead of time.

You can personalise it with your choice of transport, music, flowers, and more. This can ease the stress on your family by reducing tough decisions and financial pressure during an emotional time.

Arrange an appointment with their Funeral Plan Consultant. They'll guide you through your options, explain how it works, and discuss payment methods. Locking in prices today is a simple way to make things easier for loved ones in the future.

Emma Sheehan, business leader, said, *"We're honoured to be serving local families with high standards of care, integrity and openness. We're here to support people through every step of the funeral arrangements, to try and make a difficult time a bit easier."*

Their team are here to support the community and let people know that they are never alone on this journey. They also support food banks, host coffee mornings, and hold Christmas memorials. This helps them build real connections with local people at the heart of the community.

To arrange a funeral service with FM & J Wait, visit [www.dignityfunerals.co.uk](http://www.dignityfunerals.co.uk) to find your nearest branch.

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DIGNITY

# Happy, Healthy New Year

As we head into the next twelve months full of good intentions, here are some guides to help you feel your all-round best.

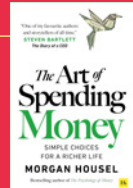


## BOOK - Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before? by Dr Julie Smith

From building confidence to managing stress, clinical psychologist and online sensation Dr Julie Smith shares all the skills you need to get through life's ups and downs. Written in short, bite-sized entries, it offers solutions that might just change your life.

## BOOK - The Art of Spending Money by Morgan Housel

Money can't buy you happiness, it's said. Well, according to best-selling author Morgan Housel, it can! Armed with his insights, you'll learn to sidestep common spending traps, make smarter investing choices and wield money to its fullest potential to enhance your enjoyment of life.



## BOOK - The Pivot Year by Brianna Wiest

If you're in the pivot period – bridging the space between where you are and where you want to be – this is a book of daily meditations on finding the courage to become the person you'd like to be. You just need to convince your mind to act consistently on what your heart already knows.

## BOOK - The List That Changed My Life by Olivia Beirne

This fiction best-seller takes you on a hilarious, heart-warming journey. Georgia will never, ever take a risk, unlike her braver sister, who discovers she won't be able to complete her 'tick list' before she hits 30 – and turns to Georgia for help!



## BOOK - Hack Yourself Healthy by Julia Bradbury

The TV presenter and author travels the world to explore different approaches to health, while embarking on a rigorous journey to reclaim her own following a cancer diagnosis. Here she shares the ultimate health and wellness hacks.

## PODCAST AND YOUTUBE - Fearnie Cotton's Happy Place

Fearnie delves into life, love, loss and everything in between by chatting with inspiring individuals who have made a change in their lives or helped others find different ways of seeing life.



## TV SERIES - Change Your Mind, Change Your Life

Can therapy change your life? Matt and Emma Willis join people's transformational journeys as they are paired with leading therapists. On BBC iPlayer.

## FILM - The Pursuit of Happyness

A 2006 drama starring Will Smith as a homeless salesman. Based on the true story of Chris Gardner, this film shows that even in the face of overwhelming odds, some people can still transform their lives.



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# Time for a brush up

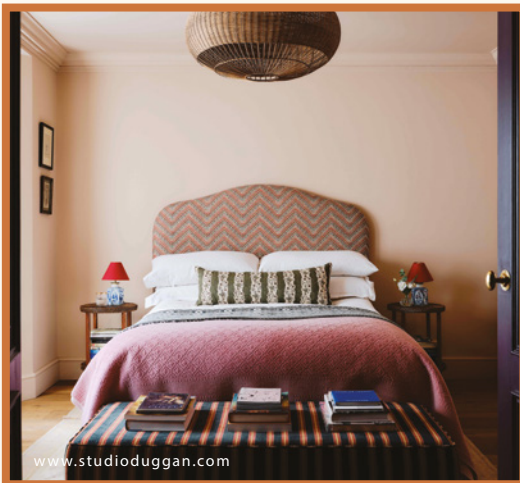


## Use a simple decorating guideline

Pick at least three different shades from the same family. Proportion is vital and one of the most successful ways to achieve this is to follow the 60:30:10 rule. Simply use one main hue over 60% of the room, a feature colour for 30% and an accent colour for 10%. For a brighter, airy look, apply 60:30:10 from top to bottom or, for a darker, more dramatic look, go from bottom to top.

## Where to use colour capping

This look can work in almost any room but is most effective in a space where you want to create atmosphere and intimacy. When applying it to living rooms and bedrooms, especially if you use the darkest tone for the ceiling, colour capping creates a cocooning effect.



Consider colour capping for an intriguing yet tranquil effect.

## No more white ceilings and woodwork

Colour capping involves using varying tones of a single colour right up to the ceiling, creating a sense of harmony without sharp breaks (goodbye, white skirtings and ceilings). The room feels bigger than it really is, because the eye travels seamlessly around it. Flat surfaces gain depth and the whole space feels enveloping and intimate.

The look is surprisingly easy to achieve and works especially well in period homes, where architraves, dado rails and corning can be washed in with the graduating colours, enhancing their detail and character. In modern homes, meanwhile, colour capping provides depth and understated variations of colour where architectural features may be lacking.



In open-plan spaces, it can be used to zone areas for different uses.

However, in rooms that are very dark or have low ceilings, it may be better to stick to a one-colour scheme.

## Choosing colours and finishes

Paint company colour charts and websites make it straightforward to choose coordinating shades of the same colour. Keep the contrasts strong enough to tell the difference between the shades but not so strong they don't harmonise.

Pale neutrals are perfect when you want a light, bright, airy feel for smaller or north-facing rooms, where it's best to avoid stark whites. For warmth and drama, vibrant reds, oranges and mustards fit the bill, while earthy, organic tones of olive, brown and ochre feel relaxing. Pastels like sage, cornflower and dusky pink are elegant in a well-balanced interior.

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# New Year money resolutions



Now is the perfect time to take stock and work out what tweaks you might make for a better financial future.

## 1 Commit to monthly saving

Is your savings habit a bit haphazard? If you want a rainy-day fund, decide how much you can afford to save every month and then open a monthly savings account – they usually offer high interest rates for a year – and set up a standing order from your current account.

## 2 Have a no-spend month

A no-spend month is a month where you don't spend unnecessarily. Resist that pair of shoes, have a coffee at home with a friend rather than go to a cafe: cutting back on luxuries for a few weeks can make big savings. Either January or February, which tend to be quiet socially, is a good month to choose.

## 3 Do your life admin

Making or updating a Will is something we often don't get around to. Make it your New Year's pledge to ensure yours is current. Equally, now is a good

time to set up Lasting Powers of Attorney to manage your health and finances should you lose capacity to make those decisions.

## 4 Prioritise your pension

January is a good time to review your retirement plans and consider whether your pension will be enough to fund them. If you're contributing to a private pension, make sure you're paying in enough – remember the Government tops it up by 20% if you're a basic taxpayer. Pay as much as you can afford and track down any lost pensions. If you're retired, it's wise to review your pension pot to make sure it's performing well. A financial planner can help you make any changes.

## 5 Reduce your debts

Still got a mortgage to pay? Are there other debts that are costing you money in interest payments? It often makes sense to use savings to pay off or reduce your debts, as the interest rate you pay on a loan is always higher than the interest you'll get in a deposit account. Focus on the debt with the steepest interest rate first.

## Do a direct debit audit

When you take a look at your bank account, you might be surprised at how many direct debits you've got set up for things you no longer need. Go through them and consider whether you really want to keep paying your gym membership when you no longer go or whether you want to keep contributing to that charity. Are you paying for a streaming service every month when you never even watch it? This could be a quick way of saving several hundred pounds a year.

## Look for cheaper deals on contracts

Many of us sign up to contracts on mobile phones, broadband, energy and other services. Sometimes a special deal ends and we end up paying over the odds, or we simply don't get around to checking whether we could get better value for money. Spend a rainy January day looking at what you're paying and comparing that with offers from the same or other companies.



# Managing your New Year Debt

We all spend more during the Christmas Period more than at any other point during the year, however heading into a new year shouldering debt can be stressful. The key is to come up with a plan for paying off Christmas debt. Here's a few tips to get started.

Start by calculating your total debt to get a sense of where you stand now and help you set priorities. If you already had some debt, it's a good idea to consider those balances as well. Create a list of all your debts, jotting down the Balance, Interest rate, Minimum monthly payment and Payment due date.

If you don't already have one, create a budget plan by determining your monthly income and expenses. You can also categorise your expenses to get a better idea of where your money is going.

While there are lending products you may be able to use to get out of debt faster (more on these below), you may find that it's effective to start with a DIY debt payoff strategy. One method you could use is to pay off your highest-interest balance first, while making sure to make minimum payments

on all your other debts. Once your balance with the highest interest is gone, target the next highest interest rate and so on.

Depending on your situation, you could consider a balance transfer, this could save both money and time to clear your debt

A balance transfer credit card offers an introductory 0% APR promotion, allowing you to move debt from another credit card or loan and pay it down interest free over a period of time. There's typically an upfront fee of the transfer amount, but even with that

charge, you could save £££'s.

You could also consider a debt consolidation loan. If you have a sizable amount of debt and a good credit rating, it could make sense to consolidate your balances. This can provide you with a structured repayment plan. On average, personal loans charge lower interest rates than credit cards.

However, If your overall debt situation feels like it's out of control, it could be a good idea to speak to someone who can provide you with advice. Citizen's advice is a good place to start.



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# Courgette and Feta Fritters with dip

Enjoy these deliciously crunchy fritters as finger food or part of a meal, in a lunchbox or a burger bun.

## Detail...

Makes 6-8; Preparation time 90 minutes; Cooking time 15 minutes

## You will need...

- 3 medium courgettes, trimmed
- Sea salt flakes
- 4 spring onions, trimmed and finely chopped
- 150g feta cheese, crumbled
- A small handful of fresh dill, chopped
- A small handful of fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- A good grating of nutmeg
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 100g self-raising flour
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Borderfields Gold Cold-Pressed Rapeseed Oil, for frying

## For the yoghurt dip...

- ½ cucumber, seeds scraped out
- 200ml Greek yoghurt
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- A small handful of fresh mint leaves, chopped

## Method...

1. Coarsely grate the courgettes into a colander, toss with a little sea salt and leave to drain for 30 minutes to an hour. Squeeze thoroughly and transfer to a large mixing bowl. Add the spring onions, feta, dill, parsley, nutmeg, coriander, eggs, flour and lemon zest. Season generously and mix well together.
2. To make the yoghurt dip, coarsely grate the cucumber into a colander, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and squeeze out all the liquid. Tip into a bowl with the yoghurt, garlic and mint and mix well. Chill in the fridge until ready to serve.
3. Add a generous amount of the oil in a frying pan and place over a medium heat. When the pan is hot, add spoonfuls (about 1 tbsp at a time) of the fritter mix to the pan and flatten down slightly. Cook for 3 minutes on either side until golden brown. Remove the fritters with a slotted spoon and drain on kitchen paper while you cook the remaining mixture.
4. Serve immediately with the yoghurt mix on the side.

For more recipe inspiration using the Borderfields range of cold-pressed rapeseed oils, visit [www.borderfields.co.uk](http://www.borderfields.co.uk). Recipe created by Rachel Green ([www.rachel-green.co.uk](http://www.rachel-green.co.uk)) with photography © Michael Powell ([www.michaelpowell.com](http://www.michaelpowell.com)).



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# Watch the birdie!

**This month marks the return of the world's largest garden wildlife survey and anyone can contribute.**

The RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch is returning in January 2026 – and you're invited to take part. Last year, more than 590,000 people across the UK turned bird spotter for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with over 9.1 million feathered friends spotted across the three days of the count. This year, the charity is hoping to get even more people involved. So, grab your binoculars and get ready to document the nature on your doorstep!

## **What is the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch?**

Launched in 1979, when children's TV programme 'Blue Peter' asked viewers to post in their bird sightings, the RSPB's annual bird surveys provide valuable data on the types and numbers of birds spotted across the UK. It also identifies which species might be struggling.

The task is simple: sit back, spend one hour over the three days looking out for birds and note down which species you see (only counting the birds that land, not the ones flying by). This could be from your garden window at home or in your local park. Every piece of data is valuable. In the past 50 years, the UK has lost more than 38 million birds; however, the Birdwatch results have helped the RSPB gain an insight into this decline and better understand how to help protect certain species.

## **When is the next Birdwatch?**

In 2026, the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch will run from 23-25 January, with registrations opening in mid-December (visit [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk) to register). After you register, the RSPB will keep you updated with instructions and tips on how to get ready. It doesn't matter if you're a novice birdwatcher or a seasoned pro; anyone can take part. You can submit your results individually or as part of a group.

## **How can you get ready?**

If you haven't already, now is a good time to brush up on your bird knowledge. While you don't need to be an expert ornithologist to participate, it's certainly helpful to get to know your local bird species before the Birdwatch begins. The most common birds sighted in last year's survey were the house sparrow, blue tit, woodpigeon, starling and blackbird, so learning to identify these species would be a good place to start.

If you have an outdoor space, there are plenty of ways you can make it even more bird friendly in preparation for the event. Put out some seedheads and, if possible, provide access to fresh water for birds to drink and bathe in. This way, you'll be making your garden more attractive to feathered creatures, which will hopefully be reflected in your survey results when the Big Garden Birdwatch begins.



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## FIAT

## 600



**Can this compact crossover with a hybrid powertrain beat the competition? Cameron Richards reports.**

#### WHAT IS IT?

When Fiat launched the 500X, an SUV variant of the popular Fiat 500, a decade ago, it didn't quite cut it. The Italian firm has now removed it from sale and designed something with the same cutesy looks as the 500 but with greater practicality.

Its chic styling and bright colour schemes aside, can the Fiat 600 stand out in the overcrowded world of crossovers?

#### WHAT'S NEW?

Originally only available with electric power, the 600 is now offered as a more affordable hybrid with a broad choice of trim levels.

#### WHAT'S UNDER THE BONNET?

The 600 comes equipped with a 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbocharged 48-volt mild-hybrid powertrain, with power outputs of 98bhp or 134bhp.

We're driving the higher-powered version, which also generates 205Nm of torque, and can hit 60mph in 8.3 seconds and a top speed of 124mph. Fiat claims a combined fuel economy of 58.9mpg and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 109g/km.

#### WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

Around town, the light steering makes it easy to manoeuvre and it's quite nippy. However, that light steering feels numb at higher speeds. The automatic gearbox is also hesitant when you accelerate.

#### HOW DOES IT LOOK?

The 600 looks like a 500 that has put on a few pounds, featuring the same bubble-shaped exterior design.

However, the 600 boasts two extra doors, lower wheel arch extensions and chrome detailing around the window seals and below the doors. The 600 logo that runs the width of the chrome strip in the doors gives it a unique presence.

#### WHAT'S IT LIKE INSIDE?

The interior is a nice place to be, with our test car boasting cream leather with turquoise stitching but there are also lots of hard, scratchy plastics.

There are a good number of physical buttons, while storage is excellent. It includes a very deep centre console bin, deep door bins and a centre armrest with storage, but it's a pity the glovebox is tiny.

Space in the back is average but legroom is tight. The car offers 385 litres or 1,256 litres of boot space with the rear bench folded down. That's 35 litres more than a Vauxhall Mokka.

#### WHAT'S THE SPEC LIKE?

The entry-level '600' has all the essentials, such as a 10.25-inch touchscreen display, cruise control, air conditioning and rear parking sensors. Meanwhile, the mid-level 'Icon' boasts automatic climate control, LED taillights, keyless entry with push-button start and 17-inch alloy wheels.

We're driving the flagship 'La Prima', which adds an electrically adjustable driver's seat with a massaging function, 18-inch alloy wheels, a powered tailgate, and heated front seats and windscreen.

Prices kick off at £25,360, similar to the Mokka.

#### VERDICT

With its interesting exterior design, generous boot space and impressive standard equipment list, there's plenty to like. But it doesn't feel special enough to make it a leader in the compact crossover class.



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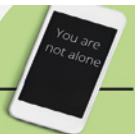
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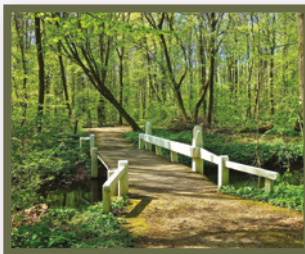
# Along for the ride

**From mountains and woodland to over 19,000 miles of dramatic coastline, the UK is packed with scenery that's best explored on two wheels. Here are five of the best cycling destinations this country has to offer.**

## **CORNWALL** *(pictured above)*

With undulating hills and spectacular coastal scenery, Cornwall is a cyclist's dream. Some of the best routes are the steep climbs between beautiful villages, including the Cornish Way. Running from Land's End to Bude, this route forms part of the National Cycle Network and is best tackled over four or five days.

For a more relaxing holiday, consider the Camel Trail. Spanning 18 miles between Padstow and Bodmin, this traffic-free trail cuts through woodland as it follows an old railway line beside the River Camel.



Criss-crossed with a mixture of undulating gravel tracks and long flat stretches of road, it's ideal for a family day out. Look out for free-roaming ponies and stop for a pub lunch in one of the picturesque villages.

Beginning at Round Hill Campsite between Brockenhurst and Beaulieu, the traffic-free Hawkhill Trail is a great option for chilled days out. The Rhinefield Ornamental Woodland Ride will take you past some of the forest's tallest trees.

## **SNOWDONIA**

Eryri National Park is a beautiful blend of celtic culture, mountain scenery and rugged coastline. The star attraction is Mount Snowdon, the highest mountain in England and Wales. Scenic road cycling routes in the surrounding areas include the Llanberis Pass loop that circles the base of the mountain. Alternatively, the Mawddach Trail and Lôn Gwyrfai are perfect for beginners.



## **ISLE OF ARRAN**

Cyclists will love the hilly trails on the Isle of Arran, an hour's ferry journey from the mainland. The main draws are the spectacular scenery and quiet roads.

The island is packed with trails that range from easy to challenging. Tackle the

55-mile Arran Circular or the less intimidating – and flatter – Machrie Moor route.

## **THE YORKSHIRE DALES**

Boasting limestone cliffs and sweeping valleys, the Yorkshire Dales rose to cycling fame



during the 2014 Tour de France Grand Départ. Pedal down country lanes, drinking in the ancient landscape, and look out for glimpses of the Dales' Roman remains. Intermediate cyclists will enjoy the Settle to Malham Cove loop in North Yorkshire, which carves through rolling countryside and includes a climb up to Malham Tarn. For a greater challenge, the Park Rash climb beckons; it's one of the steepest routes in England.

## **THE NEW FOREST**

As one of the UK's smallest national parks, the New Forest is the perfect size for exploring on two wheels.

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**SCAN ME**



# The Chosen Few

WORLD WAR TWO 1944: Imagine the honour and pride I felt when I first learnt I'd been selected for a covert "Special Military Operation"!

Competition had been very fierce, with dozens of other applicants considered for this prestigious and dangerous assignment.

Prior to the mission, I underwent extensive training to help me achieve a high level of fitness. After all, I'd be flying a long way. I was also fed extra rations to build up my strength.

I must admit to feeling apprehensive. So much could go wrong. So many had failed before me.

At the time, radio communications with our troops in Europe were difficult, and prone to interception by the German army. Top Secret messages were therefore conveyed in person by nominated carriers.

This is where I came in. The cunning plan was for me to be flown out to France with one of the parachute regiments, and dropped behind enemy lines under cover of darkness. I would then be given Highly Confidential information to take back and be analysed by the intelligence officers at MI6. The results could help determine the outcome of the war.

The return journey to Blighty would be the trickiest part of the whole operation. The ever-vigilant German gunners, on the lookout for anything flying in the sky, would try their utmost to shoot me down.

And so, after a day's delay due to bad weather, at 0130, in the early hours of June 6th, I joined twenty paratroopers, brave men and true, aboard a Douglas twin-engine C-47 cargo plane, and we took off from an airfield somewhere in East Devon. Their pale faces had been camouflaged with cocoa, and they carried a variety of equipment to aid their mission, including knives, hand grenades, rubber dinghies, spades and coils of rope.

Soon, the south coast of England loomed ahead. Flying low, we crossed the English Channel, and, dodging the barrage of anti-aircraft fire, passed over the coast of France and headed for Normandy.

I had been strapped onto the chest of one of the highly-trained paratroopers by a specially-designed harness – ready to be parachuted behind the German trenches. A metal canister was attached to one of my legs, into which the secret notes, written on scrolls of paper, would be placed by our commanders in the battlefield.

At 0400, just before dawn, we jumped out of the aircraft into the inky-black sky.

An hour later, having landed without incident, the messages, stamped "Top Secret", were securely fastened to my leg, and I took off – this time flying solo, on my return journey to England. I hadn't travelled far before the Jerry artillery spotted me. A barrage of shells hurtled through the sky towards me. I ducked and dived as best I could, trying to avoid the flak and machine-gun fire.

Suddenly, a stray bullet hit my left wing. Horrified, I thought I was a goner! But, somehow, I managed to fly on, regardless.

Thankfully, in spite of my damaged wing, I returned in one piece, and received a hero's welcome. I'd done it! I was given urgent medical attention and soon made a full recovery.

Only later, did I learn that June 6th 1944 was, in fact, D-Day (codename Operation Overlord). Over 150,000 allied troops were landed on the beaches of Normandy, supported by 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft – the start of the campaign to liberate German-occupied Western Europe.

And I had played my part! Mission accomplished. Soon afterwards, I was awarded The Dickin Medal – the equivalent of the Victoria Cross, by the PDSA (that's the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals).

Oh! I'm sorry – didn't I make myself clear? My name is Percy. I am an animal – a bird ... a homing pigeon! Also known as a CARRIER PIGEON.



*FOOTNOTE: Between 1943 and 1949, The Dickin Medal was awarded to 32 pigeons, 18 dogs, 3 horses and a ship's cat – to acknowledge actions of "gallantry or devotion" during the Second World War.*





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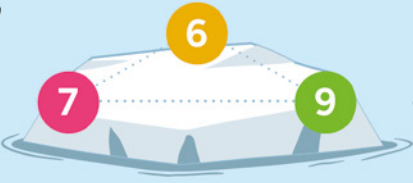
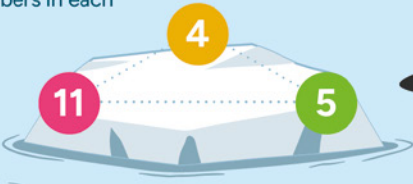
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# CHILDREN'S PUZZLE PAGE

## PENGUIN'S FRIENDLY NUMBERS

Trace the dotted line between the 2 numbers in each group that equal 15.



How do a group of penguins make a decision?  
**Flipper coin!**

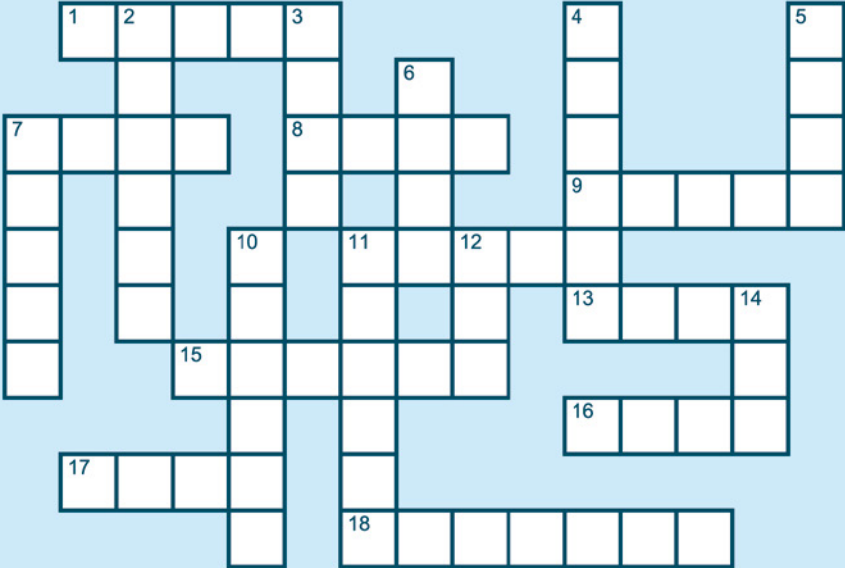
How do you get in touch with a penguin?  
**Give them a wing.**

Why didn't the penguin jump off the iceberg?  
**They got cold feet.**



## PENGUIN WORDFIT

- BEAK
- BLACK
- CHICK
- COLD
- COLONY
- DIVE
- EGG
- EMPEROR
- FISH
- HUDDLE
- ICE
- NEST
- OCEAN
- SNOW
- SQUAWK
- SWIM
- WADDLE
- WEBBED
- WHITE
- WING





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# Just one thing

**Rather than making and then breaking resolutions, let's use January to think about just one thing you'd like to achieve in your garden this year. Of course, there will be dozens of things, but if you can make one of them happen, then you're a winner.**

This realistic aim is yours to choose. Perhaps you'd like to make your garden seating area more attractive. Maybe you wish to achieve a lower-maintenance garden, a more interesting border, fences that don't feel like a prison or a patio that doesn't attract so many weeds. You might want your garden to have a focal point, an incentive for people to explore, or maybe you feel it lacks plant colour. Whatever you choose, keep it simple, make it achievable and it will provide you with immense satisfaction.



## Happy New Year hacks

When planting bulbs, annuals or perennials in large containers, consider including an upside-down plastic pot inside the larger one. It reduces the volume of compost required and helps to keep the drainage holes clear. It also makes the container lighter and easier to move.

Consider putting coffee filter paper in the bottom of pots before filling them with compost, to keep the ground cleaner under the pot and the drainage holes unobstructed.

Plants in pots benefit from being raised off the ground during winter. It keeps them a little warmer and helps to prevent pot-cracks. You can use pot feet or cut some small, flat pieces of wood, such as decking.

If you're purchasing perennials as container plants, choose the largest you can find and split them. You'll get two or three plants for the price of one.

Did you know that bees can see purple and blue more clearly than other colours? They appreciate *Verbena bonariensis*, lavender, *Aubrieta*, *Hebe*, *Buddleja* and *Nepeta*.

You can easily make your own fertiliser using nettles, comfrey, dandelions and even the water left over from cooking rice. Put the plants into a bucket, top it up with water and leave it for

two weeks. Take out the plant matter, dilute the mixture and spray it on leafy plants or vegetables for a boost of nitrogen.

Did you know you should tailor plant food for the required purpose? The three nutrients most important to plants are: nitrogen (N), which stimulates leaf growth; phosphorus (P), for strong root growth; and potassium (K) – also called potash – to feed developing flowers and fruit.

Prepare for the growing season by making a garlic spray to deter plant pests. Grate a head of garlic, steep it in a litre of boiling water, then allow it to stand for 12 hours. Strain and add more water, plus a little mild soap.

## COMMUNITY GARDENING GROUP

### DON'T KNOW ONE END OF A SPADE FROM ANOTHER?

Whether you do or not, you would be welcome at our friendly community gardening group. Formed initially as one of Measham Medical Unit's Social Prescribing groups, we aim to offer exercise and social contact as a means to bolster physical and emotional well-being and improve our public spaces at the same time.

We currently look after 3 sites in Measham, meeting on a Monday at 10am, to work until 11.15am or so, when we head to the Age UK Cafe on Measham High St for tea and biscuits. (Own cost : £1)

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# Rise and shine

## How to ensure a healthy start to the day on cold winter mornings.

### Wake up naturally

Ditch the alarm if you want to begin the day with a spring in your step. This isn't always possible, of course, but the evidence is compelling: a survey of more than 1,000 employees by sleep health website Each Night found that people who woke up naturally felt fully awake more quickly than those who used an alarm. They were also more likely to feel rested throughout the day, eat a healthy breakfast, exercise more and have a positive outlook.

What's more, if you snooze you lose, according to a Japanese study. This found that people who woke repeatedly because they put their phone alarm on snooze were more groggy than those who got up after a single alarm.

To make natural waking succeed, you need to go to bed at a time that allows your body to find its own – or circadian – rhythm. Turning in at the same time every night will help regulate your body clock.

### Go outside

Getting out into the daylight as soon as possible after waking up will help you feel alert during the day and sleepy at bedtime. The fresh air, physical activity and the experience of being in nature will also boost your mood.

### Delay your coffee

Cortisol – your body's main stress hormone – levels are higher when you wake up, providing a natural

energy boost. So it's a good idea to save the caffeine until after your morning walk, when you're more likely to need it. Drink a glass of water when you wake up instead, as being well hydrated will make you feel more energised.

### Splash yourself with cold water

Admittedly, this is not tempting on a chilly morning, but it could really liven you up. Let your shower run cold for a minute and then return it to its usual temperature, or start warm and turn the water to cold at the end. A Dutch study found that people who had a hot shower followed by a cold blast of up to 90 seconds for 30 days experienced a 29% reduction in sickness-related absences from work. Other research has suggested cold showers could help relieve depression and pain.

### Get moving – but gently

Our bodies stiffen up overnight, so a few light stretches to loosen up in the morning will help prepare you for the day ahead. There are plenty of suggestions online. To avoid injury, move around for 30 minutes before doing any exercise routine. This could mean just walking around the house or showering and dressing.

### Have protein for breakfast

Avoid sugar, as this causes blood glucose spikes, and opt for a moderate amount of protein instead. Eating protein and wholegrains for your first meal of the day will keep you fuller for longer and give you steady energy. Eggs on wholemeal toast or porridge with skimmed milk and fruit will set you up nicely.



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# Martin Page

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We meet on **Tuesday 27th January** at Ashby Congregational Church, Kilwardby Street, Ashby de la Zouch, LE65 2FQ.  
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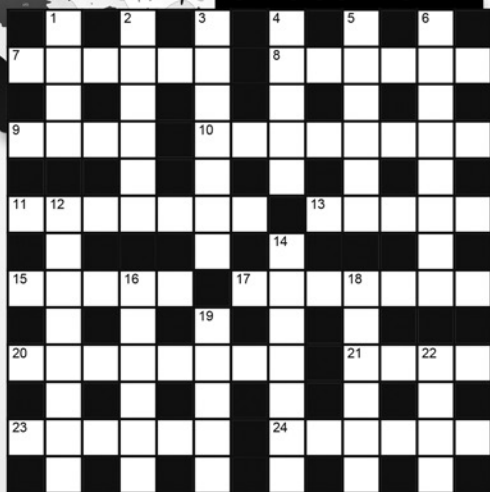


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# Coffee BREAK



## CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- 7 Vegetable (6)
- 8 Not including (6)
- 9 Set of two (4)
- 10 Marvellous (8)
- 11 Mumbles (7)
- 13 Type of lizard (5)
- 15 Concerning (5)
- 17 Fortress (7)
- 20 Garden visitor (8)
- 21 Egg shaped (4)
- 23 Venus for example (6)
- 24 Getting older (6)

### DOWN

- 1 Couch (4)
- 2 Colourful bird (6)
- 3 G.P.s (7)
- 4 Passenger boat (5)
- 5 Sporty (6)

### DOWN cont.,

- 6 Scatter (8)
- 12 Keeps you dry (8)
- 14 Checked cloth (7)
- 16 Emergency (6)
- 18 Worshipped (6)
- 19 Closes (5)
- 22 Female relative (4)

Each letter in this puzzle is represented by a number between 1 and 26. The codes for three letters are shown. As you find the letters enter them in the box below.

## CODEWORD

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24
25	26		

## SUDOKU

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



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
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## GOOD NEWS...

**MICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN** Two 13-year-olds from Devon, Eva Wishart and Emily Smith, launched a £4,000 crowdfunding appeal and raised 250 harvest mice. They then released them in a Tiverton nature reserve in a carefully managed operation. Despite early setbacks – including losses to a neighbour's cat – the pair succeeded in creating a protective ecosystem for Europe's smallest rodent, whose numbers had been badly affected by habitat loss and farming practices. Eva is now hoping to reintroduce common lizards into the nature reserve.

**PATIENTS WON'T NEED PATIENCE** The UK aims to cut clinical trial start-up times from an average of nine months to just ten weeks, by implementing a more efficient, standardised contracting process and cutting bureaucracy. A pilot mRNA norovirus vaccine scheme only took 70 days, proving that faster pharmaceutical development and quicker access to cutting-edge treatments are realistic. Historically strong in medical research, the UK could once again become a global hub for life sciences, the Government believes.

**THINKING DIFFERENTLY** A nationwide campaign wants to highlight and encourage the achievements of dyslexic business leaders. One in three entrepreneurs has the condition, contributing at least £4.6 billion a year to the country's GDP, according to the charity Made By Dyslexia, which teamed up with Virgin Unite and Virgin StartUp. Virgin StartUp has designed a free accelerator programme for dyslexic entrepreneurs to help them use their unique way of thinking to unlock the potential in their business.







# Great Scot

David Tennant's talent has found expression on stage and screen since his teenage years. But his career reached new heights in 'Doctor Who'.

Not only did the BBC series 'Doctor Who' make David Tennant a household name, it also introduced him to his future wife, Georgia Moffett.

He met Georgia – the daughter of the fifth incarnation of the Doctor, actor Peter Davidson – when she appeared in the 2008 episode, *The Doctor's Daughter*, as Jenny, the cloned child of David Tennant, the tenth Doctor.

Georgia, now 41, already had a son, Ty, born in March 2002. David officially adopted him in 2011, the same year he and Georgia tied the knot.

David and Georgia share their London home with Ty, 23, and their other children, Olive, 14, Wilfred, 12, ten-year-old Doris and Birdie, six. During one episode of his podcast, 'David Tennant Does a Podcast With...'; the actor, 54, shared that the couple constantly tell their children they love them. "I'm very glad our kids will be annoyed that we say it too much; it's the better way to be."

## EARLY AMBITION

It was his love of 'Doctor Who' that inspired David to become an actor at the age of about three or four years old. Born David John McDonald in Bathgate, West Lothian, Scotland, in 1971, the son of a Presbyterian minister, David changed his name as there was already an actor called David McDonald.

After graduating from drama school, he landed his first professional acting role in the theatrical production of Brecht's 'The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui'. He became a television favourite as the Doctor in 'Doctor Who', a role he played from 2005 to 2010. Other notable credits include DI Alec Hardy in 'Broadchurch' and the demon Crowley in 'Good Omens', along with appearances in films such as 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire'. Acclaimed theatre roles include *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Last autumn David appeared in ITV's gripping seven-part real-life crime drama, 'The Hack', based on the 'News of the World' phone hacking scandal in the mid-2000s. David played investigative journalist Nick Davies as he fought to expose the truth. (Episodes available to stream on ITVX and STV.)

## RIVALS RETURN

Filming wrapped up last year, too, on the second series of 'Rivals'. Adapted from the late Dame Jilly Cooper's 1988 novel, the popular first series aired in 2024 on Disney+. In the drama, set in the fictional county of Rutshire, the characters vie for business and each other's affections in the cut-throat world of TV executives.

David reprises his role as the egotistical Lord Tony Baddingham, the controller of regional TV network Corinium, in this latest series. He said: "It wasn't like that in Bathgate in the 80s – but apparently it was in the Cotswolds. There was a lot of hair and there was a lot of sex."

Image credit - DAVID IN RIVALS – Stream all episodes of 'Rivals' on Disney+

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