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Vera

FEBRUARY 2025

► **New wave**

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SURFERS**

► **Pull the plug**

**DATING
GOES
OFFLINE
(AGAIN)**



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of what's
onboard



WHY WE'RE MAD
ABOUT CHIWETEL EJIOFOR

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vera

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How real is *The Substance*? Discover how the Bhutanese have all the feels in *Agent of Happiness* and we analyse the latest pop music to reveal the secrets of modern dating.

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We're expanding our partnership with Save the Children - plus, step into our brand-new Relaxation Room at London Heathrow.

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TAKE ME, I'M YOURS!
Enjoy this magazine onboard and at home.



FEATURES Chiwetel Ejiofor feels the love in *Bridget Jones*, meet the surfers making waves in Dubai and we ditch the apps to go dating IRL. So old-school!

CAMEOS



Naomi Pike is the commissioning editor of Elle UK, based in London. She has also written for The Guardian, The Cut, The Sunday Times and Grazia. She spoke with Chiwetel Ejiofor for this issue's cover profile. See p26



Melinda Sheckells is a journalist who covers Las Vegas, travel, lifestyle, art and events. Her work appears in Billboard, Variety, Business Traveler and Grazia USA, among others. This month, she tells readers how to have a winning holiday in Sin City. See p20



Dubai-based **Kristina Sergeeva** works with Seeing Things Studio; she was awarded a Prince Claus Fund Partnership Network Grant for her documentary work, which has shown around the world. We sent her to the beach to snap her city's surfers. See p46

Ink

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RED HOT

FEBRUARY



WORDS: JESSICA PRUPAS PHOTO: LUXMURALIS

Now showing //

Seeing the light in London

► **ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - LONDON'S MOST FAMOUS** church and a focus of the city skyline since 1710 – is getting a glow-up this month. From 22–28 February, artists Luxmuralis will be transforming her Baroque halls with an immersive light show inspired by the cathedral's history, collections and archives. The duo of sculptor Peter Walker and composer David Harper have previously brought to life installations at the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey, and we can expect more of their brilliance here.

📍 FLY TO LONDON

First take //

SERIAL KILLERS ARE IN THEIR FLOP ERA

Serial killers on film used to be suave and cunning – but now they’re being taken down a few pegs, finds Al Horner

ILLUSTRATION: BARRY FALLS

► **WHO DO YOU THINK OF WHEN** you think of a serial killer? Maybe it’s Hannibal Lecter – the genius, chiantipping, human liver-chomping charmer from *Silence of the Lambs*. Or perhaps it’s John Doe – the genius, Brad Pitt-punishing Southern gentleman of *Se7en*. There was a time when these were the sort of movie murderers captivating audiences in crime thrillers – characters who, despite their fondness for blood and gore, often had something likeable about them. Not anymore, though. A wave of recent films has taken a butcher’s knife to Hollywood clichés when it comes to shadowy psychopaths.

Woman of the Hour, for example (available to watch on Vera), about a real-life killer who appeared on a major American TV game show during the middle of a murder spree, purposefully shows its killer as, well, a loser. No *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman suaveness here; the film’s villain, Rodney Alcalá (played by Daniel Zovatto), is instead desperate and pathetic.

Same goes for *Longlegs*, the titular killer in one of 2024’s most acclaimed horrors. In interviews, filmmaker Oz Perkins revealed he set out to make a horror-thriller that didn’t glamorise the psychopath at its centre, instead making him a washed-up glam-rock fan with nothing going in his life. At least Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* was nice to his mum (a bit too nice). There’s literally nothing redemptive

about *Longlegs* or Alcalá. Or for that matter, *The Butcher*, the torturer Josh Hartnett plays in M Night Shyamalan’s latest thriller, *Trap*. Unlike classic movie killers who enjoy their cut-throat pastimes, *The Butcher* is depicted as miserable and perpetually stressed.

Why is this happening? It may very well be a response to the rise in “true crime” – a genre of documentaries, TV shows and podcasts that’s exploded in popularity over the last decade. True crime content has been criticised by women’s welfare organisations as exploiting victims and turning real-life violence into salacious content to be consumed. The emergence of a new type of serial killer depiction in Hollywood movies is a course-corrective to that: “Real-life serial killers are just gross dudes,” said *Longlegs*’ Oz Perkins. “There’s nothing cool or interesting about them. Historically, Hannibal Lecter, John Doe – they’re omniscient, unbeatable forces. What if we show them as pieces of shit, which is what they actually are?”

The movies are just as good as *Silence of the Lambs* and co – but this time, there’s a more responsible depiction of the killers at their core. Isn’t that worth raising a nice glass of chianti to?

© WATCH *WOMAN OF THE HOUR*, *LONGLEGS* & *TRAP*

“**REAL-LIFE SERIAL KILLERS ARE JUST GROSS DUDES, THERE’S NOTHING COOL OR INTERESTING ABOUT THEM**”





As well as playing a starring role, Anna Kendrick made her directorial debut with *Woman of the Hour*.

ALPHAPAPAS

Celebs are great fathers

1 //



Beetlejuice Beetlejuice star **MICHAEL KEATON** has zero regrets about turning down choice roles to stay home for his son. "I always wanted to be a dad," he says.

VERDICT: CLASS ACT

2 //



Rapper **EMINEM** is on record gushing about his daughter Hailie Jade – and adopted kids Alaina Marie and Stevie Laine – since forever. This year he walked Hailie down the aisle. The feeling is mutual – not long ago, Daddy was Hailie's most listened-to artist on Spotify Wrapped.

VERDICT: SHE STANS

3 //



Wrestler-turned-movie star **DWAYNE JOHNSON** says fatherhood is the ultimate role. "Being a father is the greatest job I have ever had, and the greatest job I will ever have," he says. That's BDE (big dad energy).

VERDICT: ROCK SOLID

WORDS: ANDY HILL PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

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Once a competitive bodybuilder, **KATY O'BRIAN** went to great lengths to secure her breakout role in lesbian thriller *Love Lies Bleeding*

PORTRAIT: DANIEL PRAKOPCYK

► **BEFORE SHE MOVED TO** Hollywood to chase her acting dreams, Katy O'Brian spent seven years as a police officer in Carmel, Indiana. She still uses some of those skills. "[Being a cop] teaches you how to listen very actively, and I think that's really important," says the 35 year old. "I also got a lot of life experience from it." By that, she means a razor-sharp sense of when someone is trying to pull one over on her. "Honestly, that really helps with the business side of acting," she says, laughing.

After handing in her badge, O'Brian took up competitive bodybuilding around the same time she started going up for acting auditions. Her impressive physique helped her land a string of roles in shows like *The Walking Dead* and *The Mandalorian*, but her big break came with a role that could have been written for her: a bodybuilder from the Midwest who shacks up with Kristen Stewart in mesmerizing crime thriller *Love Lies Bleeding*. She's since joined Glen Powell's tornado-wrangling team for blockbuster *Twisters* and can next be seen in *Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning*. O'Brian tells *Vera* about zombie makeup, storm chasing and her wild first date with her wife.

Risingstar //

“I made a PowerPoint for the casting director”

You were born and raised in Indianapolis – would you recommend it?

Only if you like NASCAR, flat land, corn and really cold winters.

What attracted you to bodybuilding?

I wanted to get in really good shape, so I started working with a coach and it kind of just went from there. My first competition was a lot of trial and error, because I did a lot on my own. The next year I started training at Mr Indiana's gym and did another competition where I was less responsible for my own diet,



From above: Katy O'Brian with Glen Powell in *Twisters* and starring with Kristen Stewart in *Love Lies Bleeding*

nutrition, posing and all those things. I wound up placing better that year, but it was a non drug-testing competition. I was up against women who potentially could be on steroids and I was dwarfed by a couple of them. I was just like, okay, well, I don't want to go that far.

Did you draw on those experiences a lot for *Love Lies Bleeding*?

It definitely added an extra layer of authenticity. When I first saw the casting call it said, "Queer bodybuilder playing against Kristen Stewart", and then I found out from the breakdown that it was someone from the Midwest moving out West to pursue their dreams. I just thought, "That's me." I made a whole PowerPoint with pictures from my bodybuilding competitions to send to the casting director.

What was your favourite thing about moving to LA?

I love all the really random, obscure things you can do. My first date with my wife was a 20s-themed ballroom dance and pie fight. It was a speakeasy. You had to have a code to get in. They had a costume contest, ballroom dancing, and then, at the end of the night, you throw a tarp on and have a pie fight. Only in LA, right?

What was it like being covered in all that zombie make-up for *The Walking Dead*?

I didn't know that you could just go to the make-up trailer and have it removed. Not just you could, you must! I drove home covered in this zombie goo and blood, and when I showered I realised, "Oh, this is not coming off." I was just scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing. I found out later you have to use an alcohol-based remover. You live and learn!

Did you get caught up in any real storms while making *Twisters*?

Yeah, we were in Oklahoma and we had a lot of weather delays, so we really bonded as a cast and crew. One day we had a sudden burst of 90mph (145km/h) winds that just tore our set apart. The crew came in and pieced it together good as new. It was pretty incredible.

You're reuniting with Glen Powell for a new adaptation of *The*

Running Man. Will it be similar to the Schwarzenegger film from the 80s?

The director, Edgar Wright, is keeping it closer to the book [by Stephen King]. I'm really excited to show my character to the world, because I had way too much fun and I think it's a different side of me people don't usually get to see.

You're also starring in the next *Mission: Impossible* in May. What can you tell us about *The Final Reckoning*?

I don't know how much I can say other than that Tom Cruise always knows how to top his last movie, but I don't know how he or anyone else will be able to top what he does in this one. It's completely nuts.

What's next for you?

I've got to get some lead roles under my belt! It's fun to be supporting and dip in and out of projects, but it'd be really cool for someone to give me a bit more responsibility. I can handle it!

WATCH TWISTERS

66
TOM CRUISE ALWAYS KNOWS HOW TO TOP HIS LAST MOVIE, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW ANYONE WILL BE ABLE TO TOP THIS ONE

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Table read

KING OF THE ROADS

A new coffee-table book explores the history of NYC's most iconic thoroughfare: Fifth Avenue

Although not visible on camera, hundreds of onlookers watched Audrey Hepburn window-shopping.

► **WHAT DO THE GREAT GATSBY, BREAKFAST at Tiffany's and Taxi Driver** have in common? They all feature Fifth Avenue, arguably New York's most glamorous and iconic street. It's the subject of a new book from coffee-table-adorners Assouline; called *Fifth Avenue: 200 Years of Stories and Legends*, it examines the history, cultural impact and enduring mystique of Manhattan's geographic heart.

The street's history stretches back to the early days of the United States: first conceived in 1785 (and then called Middle Road), surveyor and engineer John Randel Jr renamed it Fifth Avenue when he drew up plans for New York's famous grid. Construction only began years later, in 1824, when workers painstakingly paved through fields and marshes, creating a country road a mere seven blocks long.

Now Fifth Avenue is 6.2 miles (10km) long - stretching from Harlem to Washington Square Park - and is home to the Empire State Building, the Tiffany & Co Building (where Holly Golightly famously had break-



Clockwise from below: The 1970 Earth Day Parade, Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany's, models in the Fifth Avenue 1972 Fashion Fair and St Patrick's Day Parade

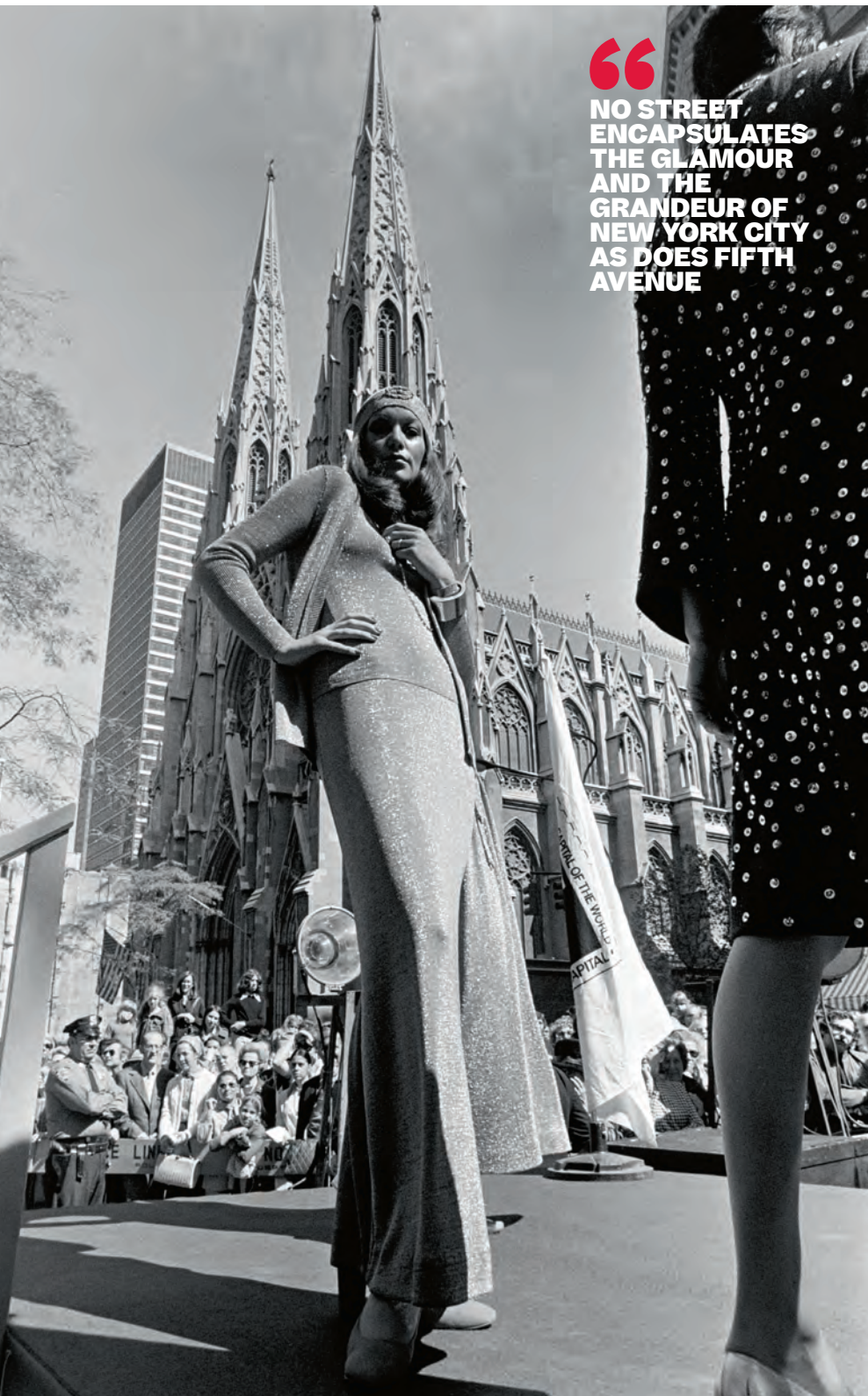


fast) and the Flatiron. Then there's the Plaza Hotel, the grande dame of NYC boltholes, where the Beatles stopped on their first hop across the pond, Truman Capote hosted his 1966 Black and White Ball, and countless fictional characters - from Eloise to Kevin McCallister - stayed.

The book traces all these moments and more with rare archival photography and sharp narration from journalist Julie Satow. The foreword comes from author Jay McInerney, who writes: "Park Avenue is the most glamorous residential address and Broadway has the raffish hardscrabble charm of Damon Runyon's hoodlums and the Theater District's showgirls, but no single street encapsulates the glamour and the grandeur of New York City as does Fifth Avenue."



● *Fifth Avenue* is published by Assouline, assouline.com



“
NO STREET
ENCAPSULATES
THE GLAMOUR
AND THE
GRANDEUR OF
NEW YORK CITY
AS DOES FIFTH
AVENUE

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SET VISIT



Treasure island in Scotland

Based on Amy Liptrot's 2016 memoir of the same name, *The Outrun*

– which stars a typically mesmerising Saoirse Ronan – touches on addiction, mental illness and the fraught takes of finding yourself. It mostly unfolds over the backdrop of Orkney, an archipelago off Scotland's north-eastern coast known for its blustery conditions and brutal beauty. Ronan's version of Liptrot returns home to an outlying piece of farmland on Orkney's rugged coast after completing an alcohol rehab programme. Its near-empty beaches provide quiet places for self-reflection – like the dramatic Bay of Skail, with its curving sweeps of sand and proximity to a creepy-cool neolithic village.

- WATCH THE OUTRUN
- FLY TO EDINBURGH





➤ **FROM MUSTIQUE TO BEQUIA, THE** Grenadines – a chain of miniscule islands snaking across the Caribbean sea – have long been known for their A-list appeal: celebs love their more-exclusive alternatives to nearby St Vincent or Grenada. But some of the beau monde wanted even more seclusion and bigger bragging rights. So, in recent years, they’ve been frequenting Canouan, a lesser-known Grenadine inhabited by just 1,700 people and three luxury resorts – one of which, the Mandarin Oriental, offers the highly refined hospitality of an international brand in a serene castaway setting. It’s seriously quiet here – the pink parasol-shaded deck chairs that line the hotel’s private beach are amply spaced out, so you can enjoy unfettered views of the mountain-lined coastline in peace. And the water – bathwater warm, fringed by velvet-soft white sand. The platonic ideal of a Caribbean beach. Inside the hotel – decorated in a chic, colonial-Caribbean style – there are 26 suites, all overlooking the ocean and featuring a floor-to-ceiling mirror that can morph into a TV or slide open to reveal the dining area and balcony. There are seven dining concepts – including the seashell-garlanded Lagoon Café, where rotating breakfast options include an addictive coconut cornmeal porridge. But the crowning jewel is the spa on the slope of a palm-covered hill, each room set in a standalone villa for the ultimate private pamper. Because why share when you can have your own?

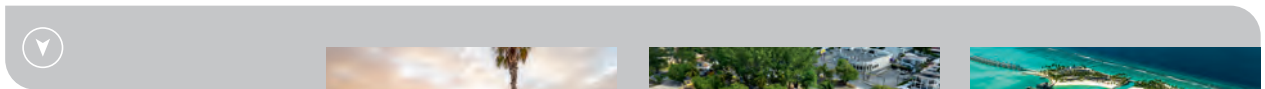


Sleeper hit //

SWEET SOLITUDE IN THE GRENADINES

THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL CANOUAN is one of the Caribbean’s most exclusive hideaways

✈ FLY TO BARBADOS



SANDBOURNE SANTA MONICA

Pleasingly whitewashed and and just steps from the pier, this hotel really embodies the LA neighbourhood’s boho-chic way of life. Take breaks from the pool with the daily pottery classes offered to guests.



THE ROCKLEY, BARBADOS

Set on Barbados’ lively South Coast, this is a laid-back gem of a resort. Its boutique size (just 49 rooms) ensures extra attentive service and the namesake beach – only steps away – is one of the best on the island.



SO/ MALDIVES

Overwater villas and five-star service await you at this island getaway just a short speedboat ride from Malé. The French Riviera-inspired private beach club features cheery striped parasols and a multicolour tiled pool.

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The image displays the WhosOff system across multiple devices. On the left, a laptop shows the web dashboard for 'Kodrive Computing Ltd.' with a sidebar menu and a main calendar view for 'Company > Dec 2022'. The calendar lists employees like Adam Apple, Amya Bionardi, and others, with color-coded blocks representing leave. To the right, a QR code is labeled 'SCAN ME'. In the foreground, three smartphones show the mobile app interface, including a 'My leave' summary, an 'EVENT VIEW' for August 2024, and a 'CALENDAR VIEW' for August 2024. At the bottom, there are 'Download on the App Store' and 'GET IT ON Google Play' buttons.

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Snacks //

A QUACK TEAM IN SAN FRANCISCO

Duck seekh kebab at **TIYA**, San Francisco, is a feather in the cap for the Sarkar brothers

➤ **SUCCULENT**

waterfowl – duck to you and me – infused with delicate spices, ground in-house and massaged into tender cylinders for a good roasting in the clay oven, served beside apricot and chilli chutney, pickled fruit and edible flowers. Lovely. Tiya, a new-ish opening in San Francisco from brothers Pujan and Sujan Sarkar, takes everything you like about Indian food and zhuzhes it up with a cheery blast of West Coast optimism and flawless Cali produce. It’s their first proper collab – Sujan already has a Michelin star to his name – and the space is all confident Mid-Century swagger: eggshell-blue seats, pops of teal, maximalist wallpaper and sleek mustard banquettes. Sticky pomegranate glazed pork belly and the duck

seekh kebab, seen here, are high-flyers from the a la carte menu. Keen to avoid – ahem – a massive bill? Pujan’s tasting menu, with scallop, finger lime caviar and gunpowder seabass, is a snip at \$95. Definitely worth a trip across the pond.

✉ FLY TO SAN FRANCISCO

DRINKS

Lychee martinis are glowing up



round the turn of the century, when fusion was all the rage, a craze

for eccentric martinis took hold. Now, one especially fruity specimen is enjoying a revival. The lychee martini at Verlaine, NYC, keeps it tropical with vodka, lychee and a splash of pineapple. A lychee martini at The

Joneses, Toronto, is somewhat more elaborate, with Empress 1908 gin, lemon, egg white and green pea flour. Not extra enough? London’s Kolamba East (*right*) mashes up Mikolasch vodka with a tart apple and ginger foam, plus lychee pureed with modish clover-like herb fenugreek. We are so back.

✉ FLY TO NEW YORK & LONDON



WORDS: ANDY HILL PHOTOS: NEETU LADHIA PHOTOGRAPHY, MILO BROWN

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Location scout //

GAME-CHANGING VACAYS IN VEGAS

Each season, Vegas outdoes itself with home-run sports events, making it the best place in the world to catch the big game, says Melinda Sheckells





► **LESS THAN A DECADE AGO, LAS VEGAS** didn't even have a professional sports team to call its own. Since 2017, the city has amassed an arena, a hockey team, a legacy NFL franchise and stadium, a WNBA team, a spot on the F1 calendar and a Stanley Cup. The city is also in line for its own Major League Baseball team and stadium, and it hosted last year's Super Bowl. But it isn't just live games that attract sports fans the world over; Vegas's sports hospitality offerings and high-spec big screens mean the city also draws punters who want to simply watch the big-game broadcast and soak in the atmosphere. From the Super Bowl (played in New Orleans on 9 February) to college basketball's March Madness (16 March–7 April), Las Vegas demonstrates to the world why it has earned its "sports and entertainment capital" moniker with a slew of home-run events.

Start your Las Vegas sportscation in the "sportsbook" (betting shop) – the epicentre of viewing and betting action at every Strip resort. Even if you aren't placing a wager, it's the place to watch the game with a beer in hand. All the venues around town compete to one-up each other with bigger screens, more luxurious amenities and over-the-top extras. Unveiled in 2023, the **YAHOO SPORTSBOOK BY WILLIAM HILL** at The Venetian features a massive 46-million-pixel, 1,770ft² (164m²) LED wall that can show 40 events simultaneously. This "book" offers private fan caves boasting 98-inch (2.5m) guest-controlled TVs, dedicated service and seating for eight to 12.

Experience Las Vegas through the eyes of a local sports fan at one of the neighbourhood casinos off the Strip. Located in the southwest, the 205-seat **DURANGO CASINO & RESORT SPORTSBOOK** shows the main event on six massive screens, with the first-ever double-sided centre-hung LED display, and over-the-counter and kiosk wagering options. The adjacent **GEORGE SPORTSMEN'S LOUNGE** serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, and shows every sporting event imaginable 24/7. True to Las Vegas's reputation for elevated cuisine, 24-hour-braised short ribs and eight-ounce flat iron steak with chimichurri are offered alongside sports bar fare.

Located in Downtown Las Vegas, **CIRCA** boasts the largest sportsbook in the world. It offers bottles, bars and stadium food from **PROJECT BBQ** and **VICTORY BURGER WINGS & CO.** Think of it as a sportsbook with nightclub-style service. Outside, the massive **STADIUM SWIM** is a pool

Left: Stadium Swim at Circa Las Vegas

“**VEGAS'S SPORTS HOSPITALITY OFFERINGS MEAN THE CITY ALSO DRAWS PUNTERS WHO WANT TO SIMPLY WATCH THE BIG-GAME BROADCAST**”



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and viewing party wrapped into one. It's open 365 days a year, with six heated pools, lily pads, day beds and cabanas all positioned in front of a 143ft (44m), 14-million mega-pixel screen.

On Super Bowl Weekend, every bar and restaurant in Las Vegas gets in on the viewing-party action. **EATALY LAS VEGAS AT PARK MGM** shows the Big Game at the new concept Eataly Bar – reserve a table and indulge in drinks and pizza delivered directly from the oven. **FLANKER KITCHEN + SPORTS BAR** at Mandalay Bay flips the switch on its 30ft x 9ft LED wall and countless TVs. There's even a hidden karaoke room for those who want their viewing (and singing) privacy. **BEER PARK**, on the rooftop of Paris Las Vegas, features an open bar, endless hors d'oeuvres, a championship food spread and reserved seating.

If you can tear your eyes away from the field, take in the **ALLEGIAN STADIUM TOUR**. One of the top-grossing stadiums in the world and home to the Las Vegas Raiders, the black and silver "death star", as it's known, offers 75-minute tours that get behind the scenes, including the Raiders' locker rooms and field.

The action doesn't end at football: **THE COSMOPOLITAN** resort is bringing back its Hoops & Hops college basketball party during the NCAA men's and women's basketball first and second round championship games (20–22 March). Games air on multiple stadium-style, high-definition

The Allegiant Stadium Tour includes a chance to visit areas normally only open to players.



Above: A steak at George Sportsmen's Lounge and the Flanker Kitchen + Sports Bar

projection screens, and you can test your skills at bar games such as Golden Tee and Super Shot, or shoot some hoops on a hardwood court with a regulation basket. Shoot a different kind of shot by placing a wager at the dedicated sports betting windows or through the BetMGM app.

North on The Strip, one of the city's state-of-the-art concert venues converts into stadium-style tournament viewing as Fontainebleau's **BLEAULIVE THEATER** becomes a college basketball tournament hub with a 70ft-wide LED screen. Whether or not you put down any chips, you can bet you'll have a winning vacation in Vegas this season.

FLY TO LAS VEGAS



18b ARTS DISTRICT

For a break from touristy Las Vegas, visit the 18b Arts District, adjacent to North Las Vegas and East Charleston boulevards. Vintage shops, breweries, coffee roasters, art galleries, restaurants and bars dot the neighbourhood.



RHYOLITE GHOST TOWN + GOLDWELL OPEN AIR MUSEUM

About two hours outside Vegas, Rhyolite's ruins include the bank building, jail, train depot and bottle house. Nearby Goldwell Open Air Museum spotlights massive, oddball outdoor art.



LEE CANYON

Lee Canyon, about an hour outside Las Vegas and close to Mount Charleston, offers skiing and snowboarding. The resort averages about 161 inches (4m) of snowfall annually, and features runs suitable for beginners to intermediates.

3 more Vegas must-dos

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Screen test //

Are symbiotes real?

Could a foreign organism really take over our brains, as befalls Tom Hardy's Eddie Brock in *Venom: The Last Dance*, asks Ralph Jones?

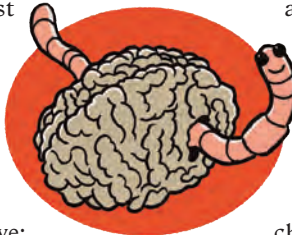
ILLUSTRATIONS: RUBY FRESSON

► **DON'T YOU JUST HATE IT WHEN A SYMBIOTIC** life form from outer space escapes from a lab and takes control of your body, forcing you to help it look for planets where it can kill the locals? This is the premise of *Venom*. With the franchise now on number three, *The Last Dance*, Venom and host Eddie Brock (Tom Hardy) are still bound together, fighting off baddies and saving the world.

It may not shock you to learn that the *Venom* films aren't documentaries. But how scientifically plausible is the idea of a symbiote that is able to take over a human brain and endow it with special powers? In the natural world, symbiotes aren't called symbiotes, which is a term that Marvel coined for its Spiderverse. Instead they are called symbionts. And, yes, they're 100% real.

When real-life symbiosis happens, two organisms attach themselves to one another and operate to some extent like one entity. This can happen inside or outside the host organism. The latter is the case in ectosymbiosis – a kind of relationship, often seen on larger animals, where one symbiont lives outside the host body. Like cleaner fish, who remove dead skin from other types of fish in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Venom's relationship with Brock is a kind of endosymbiosis. Rather than perching on his head, Venom lives inside Brock's actual cells, just like algae lives inside coral.

When one entity is exerting any kind of unwelcome control over its host, the relationship is defined as parasitic. (If you've seen the film *Parasite*, you'll know exactly why.) Some parasites attach themselves to their hosts in order to survive; others simply enjoy the ride. Venom is the latter. Indeed, what is different about Venom, and what makes it an unrealistic organism, is that it transfers its superior alien powers into Eddie Brock, making him close to superhuman. While real symbionts might each enjoy life more because of their partner, they aren't stronger than the sum of their parts. A helpful analogy might



be that if someone stands on your shoulders, you are simply twice as tall; you don't suddenly develop special powers because you are gigantic.

What is terrifying about parasites – and “parasite” arguably describes the relationship in *Venom* most accurately – is that human brains are in fact susceptible to being hijacked by them. Cysticercosis, which seems to have been what

Robert F Kennedy Jr had recently, involves a tapeworm migrating into the brain and slowly consuming its nutrients.

Because we are our brains, we are therefore at risk of being “controlled” by these organisms like Venom controls Brock. The problem is, we don't get any superpowers – our personalities and behaviour may change drastically, and we become seriously ill.

So, yes, various kinds of “symbiotes” exist. But in real life, they wouldn't provide great material for a Marvel film.

VERDICT: We're going with yes on this one.

© WATCH VENOM: THE LAST DANCE



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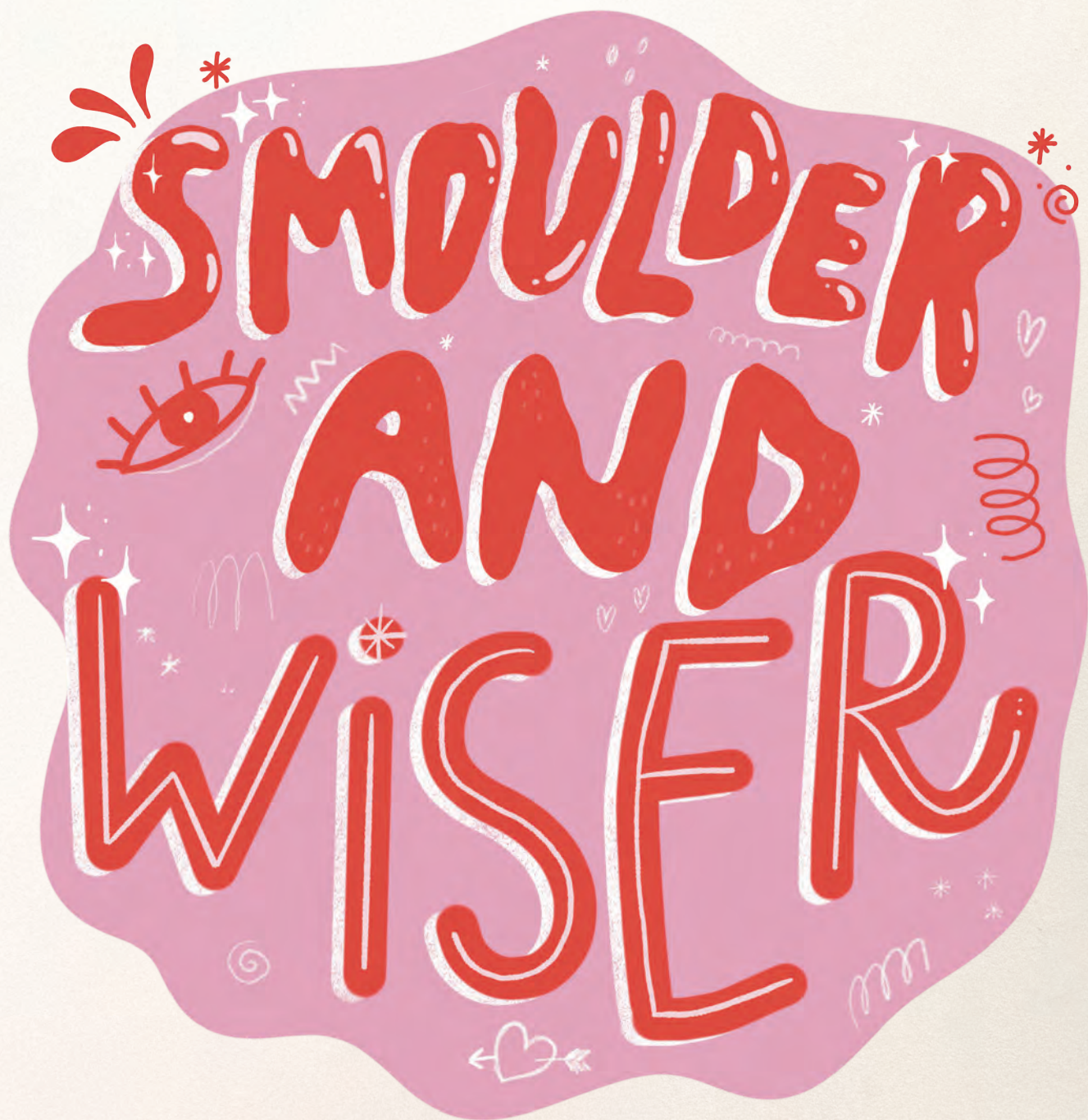
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CHIWETEL EJIOFOR might well be one of Britain's greatest acting exports, on his way to three decades in the business. But, as Naomi Pike finds out, this is a multi-hyphenate fixated on the future, set to define Hollywood's next chapter too



PHOTOGRAPHS: EMILIA STAUGAARD // ILLUSTRATIONS: ANNA KIOSSE

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR





hiwetel Ejiofor and I meet deep in the midst of what he calls “*Love Actually* season”. “During the window from the run-up to Christmas until Valentine’s Day, people talk to me about the film a lot,” he says. His character, Peter, is Keira Knightley’s lovelorn husband; there’s an iconic moment in the film where, having just wed, he and Knightley walk down the aisle and a gospel choir appears as if by magic. It was a viral moment when that word wasn’t much used outside of clinical practices and remains a reference for couples more than 21 years later. “That scene is so brilliant. I remember being in that church and thinking, ‘Well, I’m never going to forget this,’” Ejiofor says, flashing a toothsome smile that makes him every bit the big-screen heartthrob.

That smile is as scene-stealing over Zoom as it is in big-screen projects like *Kinky Boots* and *Doctor Strange*. We’re connecting while the London-based actor is in LA for some reshoots. Dressed in a plain black Under Armour workout T-shirt, he is a passionate conversationalist whose enthusiasm isn’t blunted by the pre-9am meeting time. He’s especially excited about his next role – another rom com, two decades after *Love Actually* rocked the culture.

This is no ordinary love-interest role for Ejiofor, however: for his next turn, he takes on something of a rite of passage as a Bridget Jones suitor, following in the footsteps of Hugh Grant, Colin Firth and Patrick Dempsey before him. As the “quite abrasive” (his words) but pleasingly right-side-of-book-ish (my words) Mr Wallaker, the school teacher to Bridget’s





young son, Ejiofor's acting chops and dreamboat allure unite, a foil to Renée Zellweger's iconically frazzled heroine.

Joining *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* (out Valentine's Day) was a no-brainer for Ejiofor, an actor who boasts an epic CV that spans practically every genre and medium. "I love Renée, and what she and the rest of the cast have brought to this extraordinary world," he says.

It's been nine years since we last checked in with Bridget and things are looking quite different. Based on the 2013 book of the same name, the film finds her in her fifties, a mother of two young children and – spoiler alert – widowed. Ejiofor's character appears when Bridget is navigating a new normal.

"There have always been love interests that have circulated her, that we've all fallen in love with, and they all speak to a different aspect of Bridget and her life," he says, unwilling to compare his role to Mark Darcy or Daniel Cleaver. He adds, "Wallaker is regimented and has this sense of the way the world should be. But, in a way this is the story and in the nature of Bridget, and she's able to unintentionally disarm him so completely."

For Ejiofor, much of the charm of the *Bridget Jones* franchise can be found in its evolution, which has so paralleled our own. "She has gotten older, with different pressures and concerns, and so we can see ourselves



"The connection of the past – to family, to friendships – are all of the things that create personality"

reflected in all of the different places where we might be in our lives – it's comforting in that knowledge that we're not alone. As Bridget's struggles have changed, so have ours." But it's not all big, existential concerns, of course – as always, the comedy comes from the characters fumbling their way through life. "There's still the core of who [these characters are], which is the core of the humour and the way that we look at the world. It's a really important part of the appeal and how it feels true."

Verisimilitude has always been a core concern for Ejiofor. The actor often turns to stories that are based on real-life accounts. His second foray as a director is a case in point: *Rob Peace* (available to watch onboard) is the cinematic telling of the life of a young Black student who, after graduating from Yale University, returned to his home town and was killed in a drug-related shooting aged just 30.

"It was an incredible journey from reading the book [to making the film]. There was something

EX-FACTOR BRIDGET JONES'S SUITORS RANKED



Daniel Cleaver

Bridget's old boss, played to flop-haired perfection by Hugh Grant. After a whirlwind courtship, he inevitably turns out to be a rotten bounder.



Jack Quant

Toothsome US tech billionaire Jack (Patrick Dempsey) cheerfully hooks up with Bridget in a glamping tent at Glastonbury.



Roxster

"Toy boy" is a dated term, but nonetheless a good fit for Roxby McDuff, played by Leo Woodall (*The White Lotus*). He's lithe, carefree and looks damn fine rescuing a dog from a swimming pool.



Mark Darcy

Darcy (Colin Firth) is a good match for lovelorn Bridget and, in the end, they get it together. Criticised by some for being surly, in a way that's – whisper it – really quite hot.



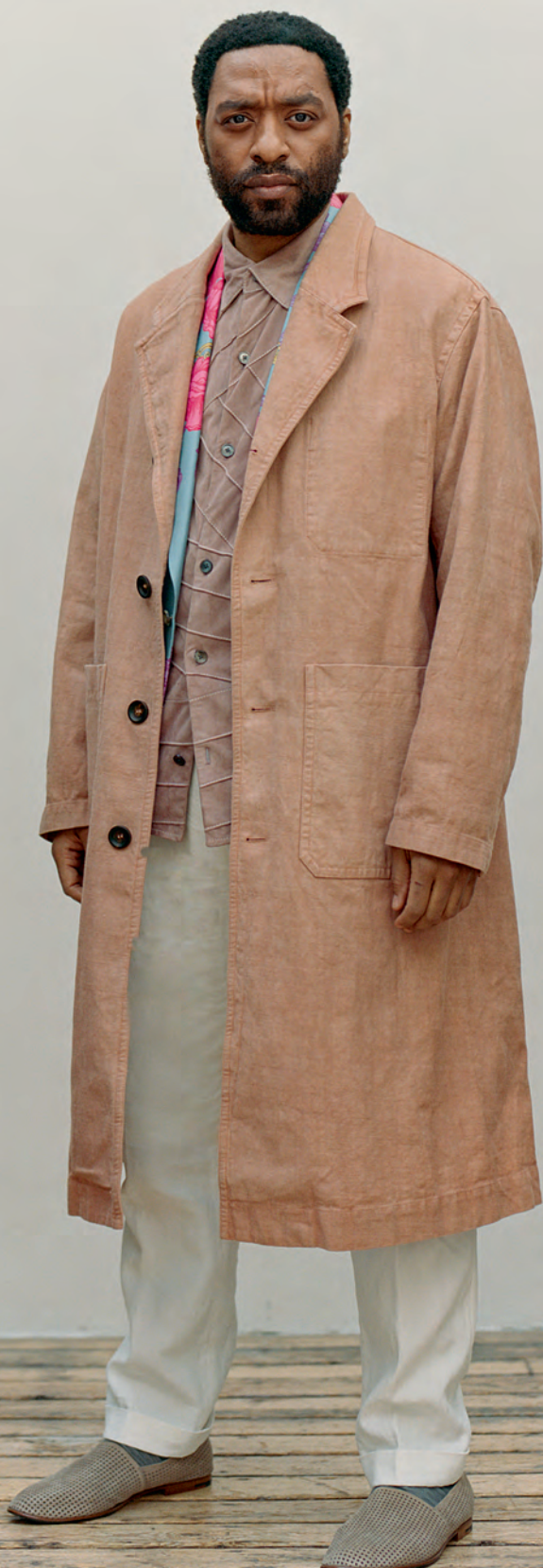
Mr Wallaker

Placid, aloof and serious to a fault, Ejiofor's Mr Wallaker is Bridget's son's science teacher. At first sceptical of our heroine, sir swiftly learns how cute she is under that scatty exterior.

HUSBAND MATERIAL

EMOTIONAL F*CKWIT

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR



CHIWETEL EJIOFOR



about Rob Peace's life that felt like it had always been on the tip of my tongue, but I had never really seen it expressed as clearly with this intersection of race, housing, education and the criminal justice system, and how these things kind of combined to derail the experience of this one truly brilliant individual," he says of choosing to take the lead as director. "I was very curious about how to look at that in a cinematic way on film."

In order to bring a sense of authenticity to the work, Ejiofor shot it in Peace's real-life neighbourhood of East Orange, New Jersey. "It was incredibly rewarding. The people who knew Rob really supported the process. It was extraordinary."

"When Rob Peace's story first came out, the narrative was judgmental of his choices to still be connected to that community," Ejiofor says. "I felt that judgment was misplaced because I feel like it is a very specific, indelible and perfectly honourable part of some people's personality to feel that rooted connection and to always want to hold on... I think that the connection of the past – to family, to friendships – are all



of the things that create personality and are extraordinarily important. They are the building blocks of who we are."

Telling the story of Peace is just one of many remarkable explorations of character that fill Ejiofor's brimming CV. The east London-born actor started in the late 90s treading the boards in the West End. He quickly became a critical darling, most notably for his Olivier Award-winning turn in Shakespeare's *Othello*, directed by Michael Grandage, in 2008.

For the best part of the last decade, though, it's been straight Hollywood for Ejiofor, a pathway that was blazed by his Oscar-nominated role in 2013's *12 Years a Slave*. Since then, he's shared the screen with such industry heavyweights as Angelina Jolie, Mark Wahlberg, Charlize Theron and Joaquin Phoenix, to name but a few. His directorial debut came with 2019's *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, the true story of a Malawian child who built a windmill to save his village from famine.

"I think I'm fascinated by people," he says of his motivation to pursue the stories he chooses to tell. "I've always been interested in what their lives are, the different ways that they interpret the world, respond to the pressures, the traumas, the difficulties, and also the joyful experiences that we all go through. I find that endlessly interesting."

At the start of his career Ejiofor was often found playing Black roles – a freed slave (*Amistad*) and a Nigerian immi-

"I'm still extremely excited about films. And I think there is an incredible opportunity for change"

grant (*Dirty Pretty Things*). Now, he's the love interest in the year's biggest mainstream rom com. Does he think his filmography speaks to changing attitudes in Hollywood, where actors are no longer as subject to typecasting as they might have been at the start of the century? "I've always been very fortunate in the work that I've done, and in the people that I've been able to work with," he offers. "I would say there are probably places where things are improving for Black actors, for representation and in gender and sexuality, and then there are other areas which don't seem to change."

"That's the complicated relationship of cinema as an art form," he says of how Hollywood straddles the worlds of art and commerce. "Those two things are often uneasy bedfellows. The way that the world changes reflects the way we artists change, but there isn't a direct line of how things become more and more progressive over time. Not least in the way that the world is being built at the moment, which feels very business-first."

He says he'd like to see "a little bit of room for things that are more esoteric. Those were things that I think I fell in love with when I was growing up. They weren't particularly popular, but they became loved over time."

As Ejiofor's film career marches towards its three-decade anniversary, the actor shows no sign of feeling disparaged or discouraged by what it can offer him, and retains a



From top right: Starring alongside Juno Temple in *Venom: The Last Dance*, with Keira Knightley in *Love Actually* and as Solomon Northup in *12 Years a Slave*

level-headed approach to fame and success. “I’m still extremely excited about films. And I think there is an incredible opportunity for change,” he says.

“You’re never in a completely safe position in this industry, as you’re always working and striving for whatever that next thing is, and to make it your best work yet. I think that’s still the goal: to look back and think that that is the best I have at this moment. And even if one achieves that, which I don’t know if one will, then I think that feeling of ‘there it is’ would last, if you’re lucky, a couple of months, and then you’d be back looking for whatever the next sort of thing is.”

Another call time beckons for Ejiofor and, sadly for me, an unrelenting notification reminds me that time is running out on our conversation. We finish up by chatting about how his younger self might think of “all of this” – the journey from Forest Gate to Los Angeles, the National Youth Theatre to the Olivier Awards, supporting role to leading man.

“What’s crazy is that my younger self is completely unchanged from when I was about 15 or 16,” he says humbly. “I’m constantly surprised that the thrill, the excitement, the energy, the desire to explore this form of work hasn’t tired. It’s 30 years later, and the years do add up, but whatever that thing is that’s inside of me is very young and it feels just the same as it was then.”

BOOTS THE HOUSE DOWN

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR’S CV



BORN

On 10 July 1977 in east London’s Forest Gate to a doctor father and pharmacist mother, both of Nigerian descent.

EDUCATION

Ejiofor pursued acting while at Dulwich College and then as part of the National Youth Theatre. He dropped out of prestigious drama school LAMDA early on as Hollywood – namely Steven Spielberg – came calling.

KEY WORK

Amistad (1997)

A supporting role in Spielberg’s historical slave drama got the ball rolling on Ejiofor’s epic film career.

Kinky Boots (2006)

Ejiofor proved his acting dexterity – and ability to walk in sky-high heels – as a drag artist who helps rescue a local business.

12 Years A Slave (2013)

A BAFTA-winning, Oscar-nominated turn in the true story of enslaved musician Solomon Northup, directed by Steve McQueen, catapulted him to the upper echelons of acting greats.

Doctor Strange (2016)

How Marvel! Ejiofor got in on the MCU action, playing the role of the jubilantly monickered Baron Karl Amadeus Mordo, who the actor describes as being neither plainly good nor plainly evil.



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The latest dating fad?
Going offline. Social
spaces that encourage
patrons to mix in real
life are on the rise,
finds Andy Hill

DIGITAL ILLUSTRATIONS:
JUSTIN METZ

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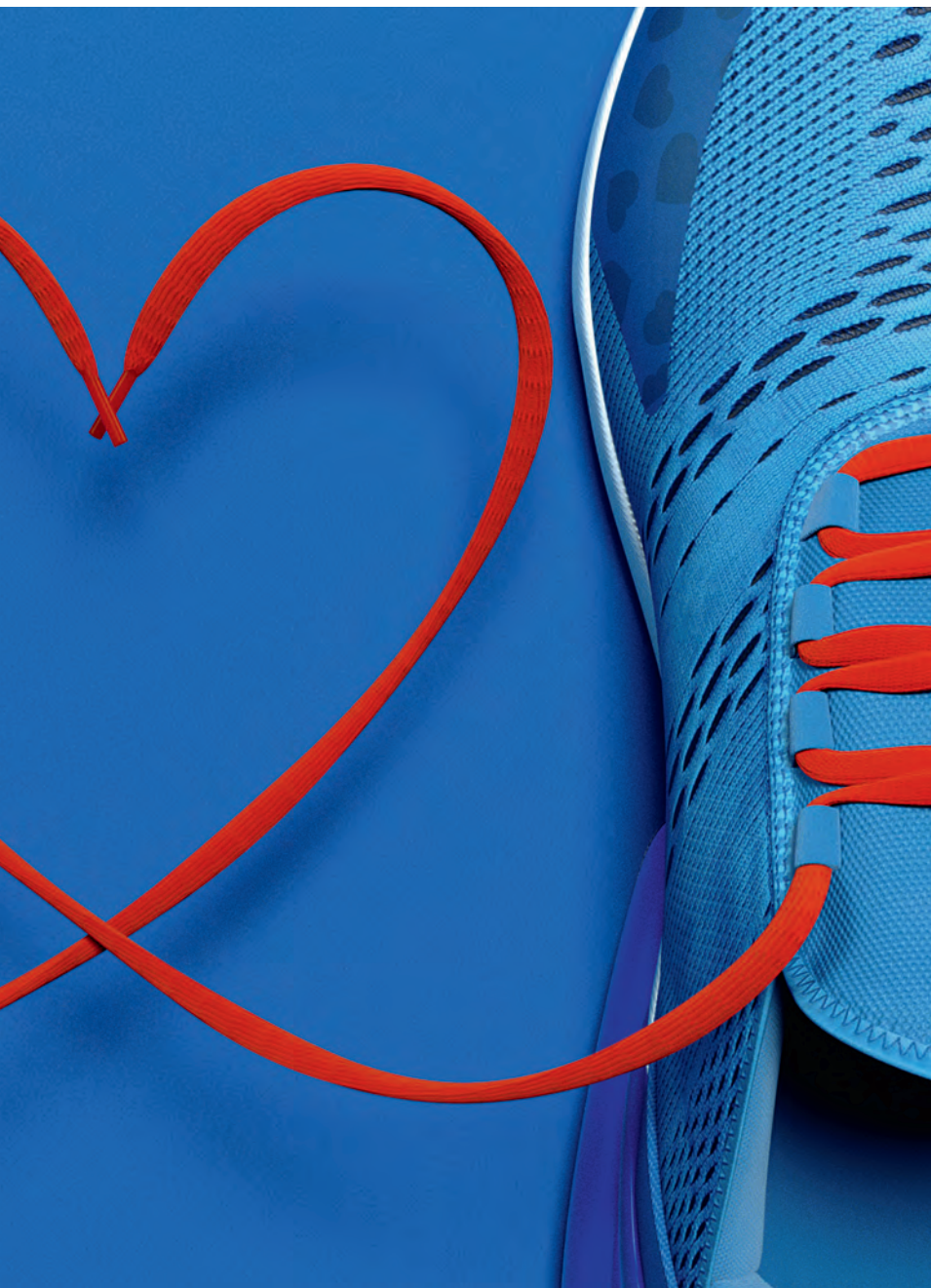
et's not beat around the bush: dating apps suck. Being catfished, ghosted or tricked into looking at some horrid chancer's genitals before breakfast – the grim algorithm-regimented death march through gazillions of phoney profiles is surely the antithesis of real romance. Small wonder savvy suitors everywhere are rediscovering the magic of meeting (gasp) in real life. Here's a few smart, fun ways you can hook up with the ever-elusive "one", sans all that unseemly swiping...



Set pulses racing at running clubs

In these health-conscious times, running clubs have supplanted bars as the niftiest place to meet singles. Dating event app **Thursday** holds regular running clubs at

parks all over London, an inspired way to catch up with your sole mate. **Singles & Friends Running Club** encourages all sorts of pickups in Miami (and



Below: Keep on trucking on at La Camionera in Hackney, east London



Deep dive at lesbian bars

It's hard to put a finger on why the lesbian bar scene rebounded so well post-pandemic. Some argue female sports, like football, are getting more prominence on mainstream TV channels, requiring new public spaces for getting tanked and yelling at screens. Whatever, the number of lesbian bars in NYC alone has doubled since 2022 – check out aptly named **The Bush** if you happen to be in Brooklyn. LGBT-friendly San Francisco has a woman-friendly queer spot by the name of **Mother**. In London, Hackney's **La Camionera** (above) – it means “female truck driver”, a salty Spanish euphemism – is an upmarket hangout for a gay old time.

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supplies runners with a sweet keepsake tee afterwards). While **Lunge Run Club** (left) in NYC is big on TikTok and meets up on Wednesdays. They encourage

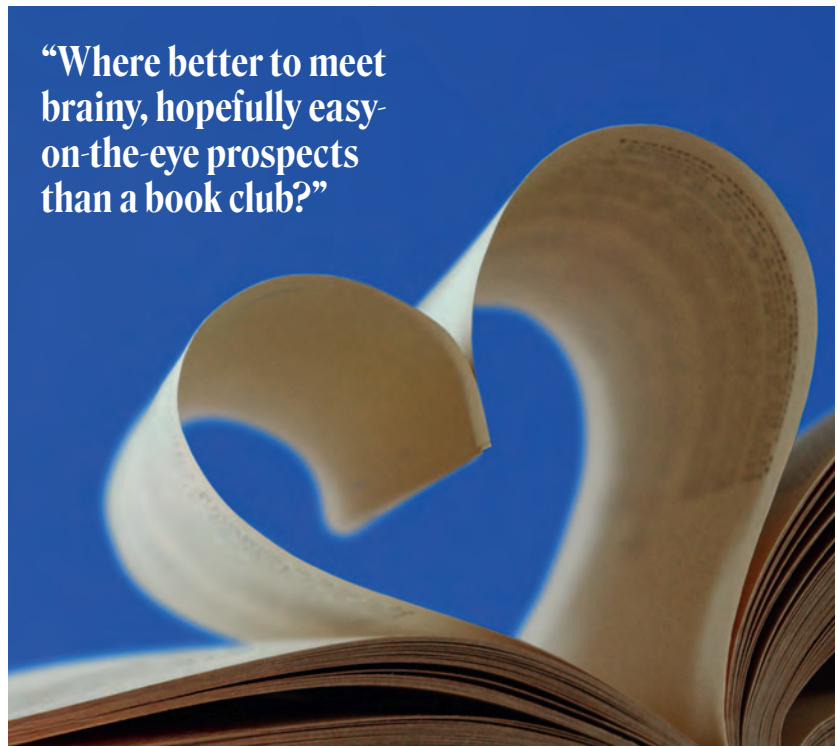
all-black attire to demonstrate singledom and, best of all, you all get to mingle in the bar afterwards. Just pace yourself.

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Flick through book club

Ever heard the term “sapiosexual”? It means you’re attracted to brains. Where better to meet smart, hopefully easy-on-the-eye prospects than a book club? **Tales and Cocktails** in Las Vegas invites cerebral singles to discuss a given work of literature over a bespoke beverage. It’s sponsored, adorably, by the Clark County Library. **The Silent Book Club**, San Francisco – aka “introvert happy hour” – isn’t so much a hookup thing, but still a great way to meet fellow bookworms. Conversely, **Reading Rhythms** in New York City has live music and even hosted a book club 1,100ft (335m) in the air at the Edge viewing platform. Spine-tingling!

📍 FLY TO LAS VEGAS, SAN FRANCISCO & NEW YORK



Get your hands dirty at art classes

If you’re in the market for free-spirited creative types, why not look up a local art class? Social pottery with **OCISLY Ceramics**, Miami, is well worth a spin – see how long you last without referencing **Demi and**

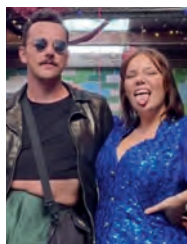
Patrick in *Ghost*. Life drawing is, on the whole, the last place you want any shenanigans, but **Life Drawing Boston** is tailor-made for sharing amused titters over a glass of wine or two – with profits going to

important good causes. Similarly, **Paint ’N Pour**, NYC, is a permanent venue with al fresco easels, decent brunch and (crucially) a bottomless bar. Just the thing to get those juices flowing.

📍 FLY TO MIAMI, BOSTON & NEW YORK

HOW WE MET-CUTE

Rowan and Grace are in their early twenties and have been together five years



Grace: We worked together in the UK. We were friends, both seeing other people. Then I went travelling to Australia. **Rowan:** One night, drinking homemade

wine at a mate’s house, I impulsively booked flights to Australia. To exactly where Grace was – with her partner. They broke up. **Grace:** Rowan and I wound up sharing a

bed in a commune. Everybody shared. It was a cost thing. **Rowan:** But there’s only so long you can maintain that. On Christmas Eve we admitted we were into each

other. We were in an open relationship for a while. **Grace:** Keeping multiple couplings going in a space you share with other people can feel like hard work.



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HOW WE MET-CUTE

Richard and Cornelia are in their mid-thirties



Richard: It was during the first Covid lockdown. I was touring, playing guitar and singing, around Europe and found myself stranded in the Alps.

Cornelia: You happened to be playing a residence at the hotel my parents own, where I worked at the front desk. When the world shut down, we were stuck together, and spent weeks marooned in our happy little bubble, eating all the food and drinking all the wine in the hotel.

Richard: It was such a strange way to get together. At the start we hardly knew each other. But being forced together in that apocalyptic situation was oddly romantic.

Cornelia: And you never went home!
Richard: Well, I did. For a visit. Now we have a six-month-old baby and are getting married later this year.



Get saucy at supper clubs

If there's an easier way of cuffing a snack than at dinner, we'd love to hear it. The modern supper club format – elegant informal dress, tasteful amounts of booze,

sparkling company – makes for a mouthwatering meet-cute. **Gooce** in London is arguably the gold standard, popping up in chic eateries about town. **Matchbox Party** in NYC uses clever tech to seat compatible – and reliably hot – strangers intriguingly near each

other. And **Rosalynn Supper Club** in LA summons disparate groups for hifalutin farm-to-table suppers or bouji hangouts at an R'n'B and caviar mixer, where Angelinos mingle before settling down for a fabulous nosh.

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“Rosalynn Supper Club in LA summons disparate groups for hifalutin farm-to-table suppers or bouji hangouts”



Play the field at sports clubs

The thrill of competition. The rush of endorphins at the climax of a hard-won exchange. Sports clubs – so long as the vibe is just right – are tailor-made for scoring. And, sure, you're a little sweaty. But

so is everybody else. **Padel Play Dates** in London serves racket geeks who return week after week. **Queer Pickleball NYC** (left), as the name suggests, bats for the other side. And **Clubwaka** in Las Vegas promotes

explicitly co-ed – that is to say, mixed sex – kickball leagues on a variety of weekdays to fit into your busy schedule. Remember, kids – love is a contact sport.

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Quicken hearts at speed dating

A few short years ago, speed dating – where potential lovers go desk to desk pitching woo before being shuffled on by a honking buzzer – felt archaic as reciting sonnets at milady's balcony. Suddenly, it's hot again. Why? It's a fun night out and there's usually wine. Plus, as opposed to swiping online, you can properly eyeball the goods. **LinkTing** in London specialises in rapid-fire dating nights for queer and non-binary folks. **We Met IRL** in New York cherry-picks singles aged 25-35, while **Single In the City**, Toronto, hosts well-attended, vibey events – think of it as a party where everybody is on the same page. And it wraps up at 10pm, when the night is still young.

✈️ FLY TO LONDON, NEW YORK & TORONTO



HOW WE MET-CUTE

John and Polly are in their late sixties. They got together in the late 1970s



Polly: I remember a friend asking, who is the chap who always has stars in his eyes when he looks at you?
John: I was never sure of your relationship status.

Back then, so much was unsaid. We met through your former boyfriend. He invited me over, so I paid a visit. At the end, you gave me the most wonderful, slobbery,

surreptitious kiss.
Polly: That's not how I remember it! We overlapped a few times socially. Our first date was going to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Somebody

gave me tickets and I invited you. We kissed each other goodnight.
John: I remember going through your record collection. We share a lot of the same tastes.

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A photograph of a man surfing on a wave. The man is in the foreground, wearing a grey t-shirt with 'Team' written on the sleeve and dark shorts. He has a tattoo on his left arm. The water is splashing around him. The background is a clear blue sky. Large white text 'UAE' is overlaid on the top right of the image.

UAE

As Abu Dhabi opens the longest man-made wave in the world, Jade Bremner meets the grassroots community that has put UAE surfing on the map and those fighting to protect Dubai's remaining natural waves

PHOTOGRAPHS:

**JOHN KURT VALLES
& KRISTINA SERGEEVA**

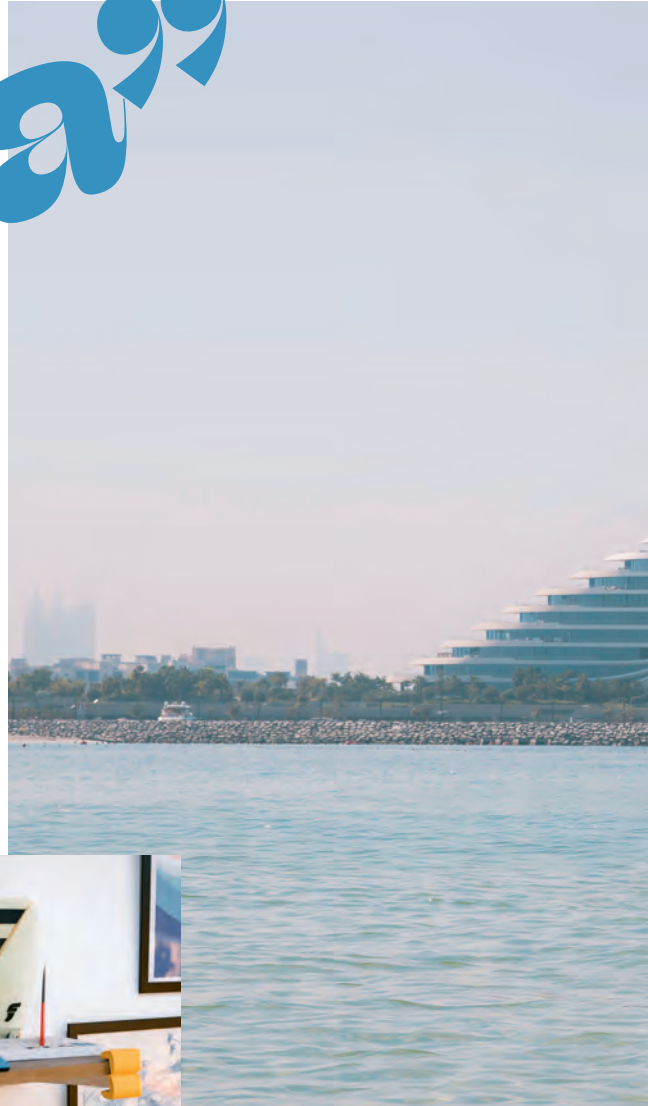
“Yalla yalla”

shouts a man in the line up as a small wave rolls towards me – I turn my board and paddle, and then I’m up and gliding along a glassy face, the spray from the turquoise Arabian Gulf in my wake. I’ve been surfing for years, it’s an addictive and familiar thrill, but this is forever a pinch-myself moment – I’m in one of the most unexpected surf spots on Earth, in the mega metropolis of Dubai, in the Arabian Desert. In front of me are skyscrapers so tall they could pierce the clouds and to the right is one of the world’s most iconic buildings – the blue sail of the Burj Al Arab. As the wave dissipates, I hear the faint murmur of traffic from the epic and chaotic 14-lane Sheikh Zayed Road, connecting all seven emirates, and as I paddle out again, there’s silence and calm until the next wave rolls in.

This unlikely place is now drawing boardriders from around the world, following the pioneering efforts of a group of local surfers and a newly opened artificial wave pool in Abu Dhabi. “Dubai has the reputation that it’s all about the skyline and concrete jungle, but true surf actually comes here, and people are like, wow, we didn’t know that this community existed in this region,” says surfing pioneer Daniel Van Dooren, one of the first people to ever surf in Dubai. Riding waves here is the best antidote to busy big city life. “It’s not bling, it’s down to earth.”

Dan may look like a California implant, with his blond hair and piercing blue eyes, but Dubai has always been his home. He was born in Bahrain and his family moved to Dubai as expats when he was eight months old. He’s now the CEO of Surf House Dubai in the quiet beachside residential area of Umm Suqeim – which has become the surfing epicentre of the emirate.

Chicago Beach Village, where the old-style Arab village of Madinat Jumeirah is now located, is where many of Dubai’s first surfers lived. Waves would regularly roll in, so Dan and his friends taught themselves to surf. “We used whatever boards we could find, because there were no surf shops back then. We’d use broken surfboards, anything that would float, and would share everything with each other. We would just run off the pier, jump in, catch waves, and then just run back round and do it again,” he says. While the waves are less consistent than other global surf spots, with swell created by strong northerly winds that only come in the winter months (October-April), the surf community has grown over the past two decades,



From above: Surf House Dubai, Daniel Van Dooren and Sudesh waxing a board in the studio

thanks to the work of Dan and his business partner Scott Chambers. Surf House Dubai has a gear shop, excellent cafe named Single Fin and a surf school, plus a rental

and board repair centre.

There are now thousands of surfers in Dubai, plus countless visitors who come to catch waves when passing through. “Surfers frequently travel and the UAE is a stopping-off point for those travelling east and west,” he says. The opening of Surf Abu Dhabi, which holds the



Guinness World Record for the longest man-made wave in the world, the biggest wave pool barrel and the biggest saltwater surfing lagoon, has attracted countless pros in the past few months, surfers who would have never dreamed of riding perfect waves in the Gulf. “It’s probably the best wave pool wave in the world,” says Dan, “It’s good for the industry. It’s good for the region, it’s good for business.”

Twenty years after Surf House Dubai opened, “a lot more Emiratis are surfing”, says Dan. Emiratis make up only 12% of the population; the UAE is one of world’s the most diverse countries. “For 20 years we didn’t have many Emirati surfers – there were around five max, and now a lot of the younger kids are looking up to people like Mohammad Sultan Bin Mejren, who has represented his country in surf competitions. He’s a leader and a visionary. It’s amazing to watch.”



“I’m fortunate to have grown up in a family that had a relationship with the sea,” explains Mohammad, dressed in national dress – a full white kandura – when we chat at Surf House Dubai’s laid-back cafe a few blocks from Sunset Beach. People wander in barefoot and in boardies after their beach sessions before ordering colourful açai bowls. As Jack Johnson plays on the stereo, Mohammad tells me his grandfather was a ship’s captain and he spent lots of time on boats and in the water learning to be an accomplished freediver – one of the UAE’s oldest sports. Before pearls were mass-produced in Japan, and oil

From above: Mohammad Sultan Bin Mejren surfing, and colourful boards

“It blew my mind to see people surfing. Even today, I can talk to people who grew up here who have no idea you can surf”

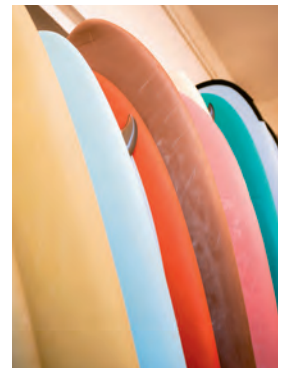
and gas were found in the region, pearl diving was the economic backbone of the country. Local families historically enjoyed wave riding, though it didn’t look like the surfing we know today, Mohammad explains. “Tribes had names for different types of waves – a wave with wind, a wave that’s clean and so on,” he says. But over the years some lost their connection to the sea, and land-based sports like horse riding and football took centre stage.

Mohammad discovered surfing on a trip to California. “I tried to surf as soon as I came back to the UAE,” he remembers, but “everyone laughed at me. They said, ‘Your name is not John, you’re not blond, you’re not going to learn how to do this sport.’” Nearly a decade later

he has the skills to compete for his country. “My goal is to encourage the next generation of surfers,” he says.

Essra Aboushahin is from Palestine but grew up in the UAE, and one of many people Mohammad has helped to surf. She spent time in Australia, but never knew it was possible to surf back home. “I stumbled upon it by accident,” she says. “I was walking along, and when I got to Sunset Beach I saw a couple of people surfing – it blew my mind. Even today, I can talk to people who grew up here who have no idea you can surf in Dubai. So I picked up a board and went out surfing by myself.”

She returned to the beach again and again. “The community is super welcoming, and being in the sea is so fulfilling and



ABOVE BOARD

KNOW YOUR SURFING ETIQUETTE

DON'T DROP IN

Dropping in is taking off on a wave that someone is already on.

HOLD ON TO YOUR BOARD

If you come off, try to hold on to your board so it doesn't hit someone else.

SHARE THE WAVES

If you've just caught a wave, don't paddle back out and catch the next wave. Share waves in the “line up” – an informal queuing system.



RESPECT RIGHT OF WAY

When paddling for a wave, the person closest to the peak has the right of way.

GET OUT THE WAY

If someone is riding towards you and you are in front, duck or move away.

WATCH WHERE YOU PADDLE

Don't paddle through the clean section of the wave, but through the white water, so you don't ruin someone else's wave.

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“Surf House Dubai has shown there is a market for surfing in the UAE”

Essra Aboushahin, Peter “Excel” Figueroa riding a wave, and home time



healing,” says Essra. She now volunteers at Surf House Dubai’s water-based events. “What Surf House Dubai has done is show what was possible and that there is a market for surfing in the UAE.”

The new surf lagoon in Abu Dhabi has legitimised surfing in the region on a competitive front and sparked conversations about creating an Olympic surf team. And there are rumours the UAE is due to get another wave pool soon – this time in Dubai with Wavegarden Cove technology, so surfers of all abilities can ride waves all year round.

That said, there have been numerous challenges for the local surf community over the years. Massive building projects have blocked off the waves, leaving only two beaches where you can surf in Dubai: Sunset Beach in Umm Suqeim and Nikki Beach further north, although the latter charges an annual surfing fee. Sunset Beach itself was threatened by development, but was saved following a petition. “We

got over 10,000 signatures and, luckily, [the authorities] listened,” Dan says. “We could have just accepted it and carried on with some other job but it was our lifestyle, one that we live, love and breathe every day.”

The surfing community feels there is more to be done. Instead of adding breakwaters to the coastal areas, which causes erosion on the beach, the authorities could add artificial reefs – which do the same job but also promote marine life. “I’ve surfed a couple of artificial reefs in Australia and they’re fantastic. On the days where there are no waves the reefs become diving spots, creating another attraction for tourists.”

I remember Dan’s words as I wait patiently for my next wave under the beaming desert sun: “It’s not like that Hawaiian vibe where it’s very aggressive and everyone’s trying to fight for the waves. It’s very relaxed, and everyone’s out there to have fun and enjoy.” Around me, there’s laughter and chatter from the other boarders – Dubai not only looks different from other surf spots, but its denizens know how lucky they are to be able to enjoy the emirate’s last remaining free natural surfing beach. Will the addition of fancy new wave pools mean this small desert nation will soon get its own champion surfer? Maybe – until then, Emiratis are keen to just ride it out.

● *Book a lesson/session with Surf House Dubai at surfingdubai.com*

⊗ **FLY TO DUBAI**



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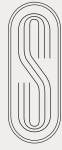
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PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

THE ROMANTIC MINI-BREAK

HOTEL

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

IF THERE'S A better way of rekindling the flame of passion than a swanky hotel stay, we'd love to hear it. Something about the change of scene, bouji decor, posh toiletries, a lovely big bed you can mess up to your heart's content and a fridge full of booze just feet away. The following spots are well worth falling head over heels for.

GUIDE

MARRIOTT HOTEL PICCADILLY, MANCHESTER

THE ONE FOR *high romance*

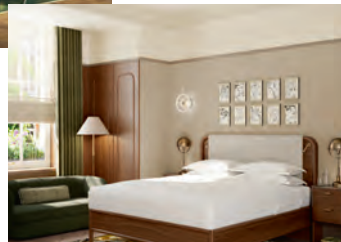
YOU CAN'T MISS the sweeping silhouette of the eight-floor Manchester Marriott Piccadilly, moments from Piccadilly Station and a short stroll into town. Renowned for having among the most generously sized rooms in the city, this is a dreamy location for a couple's break, with access to the swanky on-site Elemis spa, and top-flight food and drink courtesy of the in-house Loom & Ladle Bistro. Following a comprehensive upgrade and investment programme, the

conference facilities are second to none, with 12 versatile spaces suitable for up to 275 guests, and nifty Clever-touch screen tech. As romance is in the air, weddings are also a specialty – there are cosy nooks aplenty in which to canoodle afterwards in the Great Room Bar. Plus it's easy to reach by road, rail or air. Don't miss it.



MONTCALM MAYFAIR, LONDON

THE ONE FOR *sensitive luxury*



FRESH FROM A glossy, no-expense-spared renovation, this historic jewel set in a curvaceous Georgian crescent is an enviable romantic hideaway. The stately 1700s building has been brought into the modern era thanks to the work of architects Holland Harvey and interior designers Studio Mica, with Studio Est adding timeless design and craftsman touches to the public areas. Enjoy tasteful original art, a sumptuous profusion of natural materials such as oak and marble, with sustainable, naturally felled wood furniture from Goldfinger and

embroidered luxury linen accessories. Downstairs, dine in a refined-dining signature restaurant helmed by a Michelin-starred chef – if you can tear yourselves away from the in-room Frette linens and aromatic high-end bathroom amenities supplied by trendy British perfumier Penhaligon's.



“BACK IN THE DAY, GIANTS LIKE WINSTON CHURCHILL AND ELIZABETH TAYLOR STOPPED BY FOR COCKTAILS”



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL AT THE SURF CLUB, MIAMI

THE ONE FOR *old-school glamour*

THE CLUBHOUSE at this splendidly chi-chi retreat on Miami's outskirts was built in the 1930s by celebrated Floridian architect Russell Pancoast. Back in the day, giants like Winston Churchill and Elizabeth Taylor stopped by for cocktails. Frank Sinatra, no less, honeymooned here. The vibe is still very much Old Florida, albeit with the welcome upgrade of a world-class spa and two outstanding restaurants.

Lido, led by chef Marco Calenzo, is all upscale Mediterranean plates in the old Surf Club's ballroom, with ocean views from the terrace and Miami's most expansive champagne menu. Thomas Keller's Surf Club restaurant has bagged a Michelin star two years in a row and serves retro classics like lobster thermidor and beef wellington. Rooms are sumptuously elegant – and South Beach is just a taxi ride away.



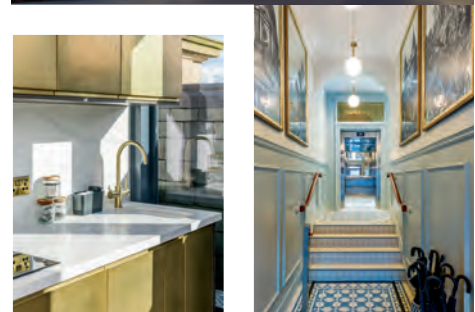
“IT’S LIKE HAVING YOUR OWN POSH FLAT ON THE CROSSROADS OF GEORGE STREET AND FREDERICK STREET”

RIGH RESIDENCES, EDINBURGH

THE ONE FOR *living the dream*

EDINBURGH IS A handsome city, a place you can imagine moving to. With RIGH Residences, you totally can, for a bit anyway. It's not a hotel – more a very attractive corner block of serviced apartments in a knockout location. The service is outstanding, as it happens, the lion's share conducted seamlessly through iPads – check in, guest services, concierge and housekeeping. Everything is sleek and high-tech, down to the wireless bedside phone

chargers and lovely big modern tellies. The decor neatly balances period charm with smart modern conveniences, not least in the impressively equipped kitchenette (Irn-Bru in the fridge, naturally). ESPA toiletries grace the bathroom, which has heated floors. It's like having your own posh flat on the crossroads of George Street and Frederick Street, by the statue of William Pitt the Younger. Except it's anything but a pit.





“BE SURE YOU AND YOUR BEAU TAKE A MOMENT TO BASK IN THE SWISH, UPSCALE NORDIC SPA GARDEN”



GRANTLEY HALL, YORKSHIRE

THE ONE FOR *courtly love*

THE PRETTIEST NEOCLASSICAL love nest you ever laid eyes on, Grantley Hall is handsomely set against the backdrop of the rolling Yorkshire Dales, and is one part 17th-century palace, one part sprawling Georgian country pile. Its centrepiece is surely the Three Graces Spa, with its gorgeous vaulted indoor pool, hydrotherapy pool and snow room. Be sure you and your beau take a moment to bask in the swish,

contemporary designer Nordic Spa Garden with its twin, custom installed ice baths from Brass Monkey, then immerse yourself in the bespoke steam sauna with idyllic views of the grounds. Plus, there's a 3D body scanner and cool cryotherapy chamber. To complement your day of indulgence, enjoy a magical evening in its elegant Michelin-starred restaurant with a 10-course tasting menu by esteemed local chef Shaun Rankin.



Emilia Pérez earned an 11-minute standing ovation at the Cannes Film Festival last May.

¡Bailemos!

Awards darling *Emilia Pérez* is an audacious work – a Spanish-language musical about a Mexican cartel boss (Karla Sofia Gascón) who enlists the help of a lawyer (Zoe Saldaña) to help her disappear after transitioning. Selena Gomez (*pictured*) plays gangster's wife Jessi. Despite being mega famous, Gomez still had to audition for the role – and brush up on her Spanish, since she isn't fluent in the language.

© WATCH EMILIA PÉREZ

65-71// Movies

How close to reality is anti-ageing flick *The Substance*? Tom Hardy takes on *Venom: The Last Dance* and check out *Conclave*, with Ralph Fiennes.

73-77// Television

Feeling good in Bhutan for *Agent of Happiness*, Claudia Winkleman cuts it for *The Traitors* and Colin Farrell waddles on in hit series *The Penguin*.



79-82 // Audio

Dig into our glossary of “modern love” – with accompanying soundtrack – and discover some haunting pianism thanks to the likes of Víkingur Ólafsson.



Vera Loves

We're one of the few airlines that selects their own movies and TV, with lots of new content onboard each month. Look out for anything labelled with a heart – that means we think it's the best of the best. We champion big blockbusters, quirky shorts, binge-worthy box sets and ace docs. Read on for our top picks for February.

A WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Tune into **VERA**, our genre-busting world of entertainment

Welcome onboard

Are you a fan of grime, rock, pop or classical music? Do you like dark movie thrillers or light-hearted comedies? Whatever you're into, we have it onboard. But what if you've got eclectic taste and you like all these things – and more?

Well, on our aircraft you can **create your own bespoke playlists** for music and watchlists for TV and movies. Here's how:

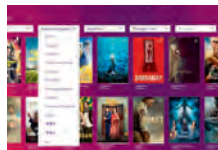
- Select an album from Music, a TV show from TV or a movie from Movies.
- For Music, click on the star symbol next to your chosen track or album.
- For Movies and TV click Save Show/Movie for Later.
- Depending on which aircraft you are on, you'll see a tab or star at the top of your screen.
- Click on it and you'll see the items you've selected.
- Select Music, Movies or TV. Now you can work through your personally curated list of top entertainment at 30,000ft.



Languages & accessibility

Some of our entertainment comes with a selection of different audio languages and/or subtitles, which you can find by using the onscreen controls.

See below for more on your aircraft



Travelling on one of our **A350** or **A339** aircraft? Select the media type – such as Movies – and filter from the dropdown menu at the top of the screen. Then just touch the screen while the media is playing and click on the icon above to select the desired language/subtitles.



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 Not suitable for nervous flyers

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WHAT'S ON MOVIES

AWARD WINNERS GALORE



GLOW UP



We ask tech entrepreneur Jacob Peters, how close are we to real life in **THE SUBSTANCE**?

► **IN NEW MOVIE THE SUBSTANCE**, Golden Globe-winner Demi Moore plays an actor who takes a black-market drug to create a younger, more optimised version of herself. Real-life Silicon Valley tycoon Jacob Peters is CEO of the Superpower healthcare platform, and is part of an anti-ageing scene within tech hoping to slow ageing and ultimately cheat death.

Hi, Jacob! Will ageing be solved in our lifetimes?
It's possible. We'd need about a thousand times the level of investment currently going into solving the problem. But lots of promising developments are happening right now.

Like what?

New compounds – supplements, pharmaceuticals – that counteract the ageing process, reversing molecular and cellular decay. Also new medical

tests that help us understand genetic issues and root problems sooner.

Fancy testing is all very well if you're a tech billionaire, or Demi Moore.

I think the arc of technological progress will soon make quality testing and powerful compounds available to all. Remember, it wasn't too long ago only a tiny elite had mobile phones, or the internet.

Can't I just eat better and exercise?

Lots of people think you can get everything you need from your diet. But there's declining nutrient density in the modern food system, thanks to intensive farming practices, soil depletion, the genetic modification of crops.

Those hardcore Californian anti-ageing guys – visionaries or nutcases?

I can see why people like [anti-ageing guru] Bryan Johnson are polarising. But he's running a pioneering experiment we may all ultimately benefit from.

How soon will we have drugs like *The Substance*?

I think we'll see powerful anti-ageing optimisers within the next 10 or 20 years. Movies like *The Substance* are useful, helping us think through the implications of frontier tech. Anybody working in this space, myself included, has to maintain the highest standards of ethics.

● superpower.com

© WATCH THE SUBSTANCE

“**MOVIES LIKE THE SUBSTANCE ARE HELPFUL, MAKING US THINK HARD ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF FRONTIER TECH**”

FOREVER YOUNG

JACOB'S LONGEVITY HACKS

QUARTERLY BLOOD TESTS

“I am always aware of what's happening in my body; if something goes wrong, it gets dealt with.”

MORNING ROUTINES

“No screens for the first hour of the day. Meditate, hydrate, stretch, eat well and set intentions for the day.”

EAT ORGAN MEATS

“I like beef heart, beef liver. Often avoided in the modern world, but muscle meats are missing key nutrients.”

HOT RIGHT NOW



Venom: The Last Dance ♥

15

Tom Hardy, Chiwetel Ejiofor	109 mins
--------------------------------	----------

▶ **THE FINAL VENOM CHAPTER FINDS TOM HARDY STILL IN PEAK** growl mode as Eddie Brock, once again bickering with his slobbering alien plus-one. This time, they're on the run – hunted by earthly authorities as well as the looming, otherworldly menace of Knull. As their bond fractures under pressure, Eddie and Venom face their most chaotic showdown yet, with the fate of their unlikely partnership hanging by a thread. What it all adds up to is a darkly funny, occasionally unhinged movie that's fully aware of its own bonkers energy. Hardy's all-in performance makes for an undeniably entertaining swan song for Marvel's messiest bromance.



THE APPRENTICE

15

Sebastian Stan, Jeremy Strong	120 mins
----------------------------------	----------

This controversial and divisive fictionalised account of Donald Trump's early career boasts a memorable performance from Stan as Trump. Yet it's Strong's chilling turn as mentor Roy Cohn that steals the show in what emerges as an impeccably acted, award-baiting drama.



CONCLAVE ♥

12

Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci	120 mins
---------------------------------	----------

From the pen of master thriller-writer Robert Harris comes this tale revolving around the election of a new pope. And if that sounds dry, it's really not. The back-stabbing and power struggles within the Vatican walls make for excellent, gripping viewing.



WOLFS

15

George Clooney, Brad Pitt	107 mins
------------------------------	----------

Clooney and Pitt reunite for a slick action-comedy that sees them as rival fixers hired for the same job. Pretty soon things descend into a chaos of double-crosses and sharp one-liners, which makes for a stylish, high-stakes thrill ride.



EMILIA PÉREZ ♥

15

Zoe Saldana, Selena Gomez	132 mins
------------------------------	----------

This daring musical-crime drama is a gem. Centred on a cartel boss who undergoes gender-affirming surgery, it mixes music with thrills, and tugs on the heartstrings, too. If you're in the mood for something a bit different, look no further.



WOMAN OF THE HOUR

15

Anna Kendrick, Daniel Zovatto	89 mins
----------------------------------	---------

Anna Kendrick's directorial debut tells the chilling true-life tale of when serial killer Rodney Alcala appeared on *The Dating Game*. As contestant Cheryl (Kendrick) chooses her date, we learn the full extent of Alcala's evil. A gem that explores the intersection of charm and menace.

Top five

Wild facts about Mila Kunis



She's Ukrainian

Mila Kunis – pronounced MEE-luh koon-iss – was born in Chernivtsi, Ukraine, and moved to Los Angeles with her family aged seven.

1 //

She's a Barbie girl

Mila's first acting gig, at 10, was a commercial for Barbie dolls – a real coup, not least because they let her keep the Barbie dolls.



2 //

She's hard AF

Mila was taught to throw a punch by none other than martial arts legend Chuck Norris, on an episode of *Walker: Texas Ranger*.

3 //

She dated Macauley Cullen

Our Mila went steady with the *Home Alone* star for roughly eight years in most of her twenties.



4 //

She's dinky

At just 5' 4" in stature, Mila shot several of her scenes in *That 70s Show* sat down, or wearing four-inch platform shoes.

5 //

WATCH GOODRICH

PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR



Joker: Folie à Deux

15

Joaquin Phoenix, Lady Gaga

120 mins

QUESTION: WHAT'S MORE DANGEROUS THAN ONE UNSTABLE MIND?

Answer: two of them. Here, Joaquin Phoenix returns as Arthur Fleck, the troubled soul behind the Joker's chaotic grin, and this time he's not alone in his descent into madness. Enter Lady Gaga as Harleen Quinzel, a psychiatrist whose fascination with Fleck leads her to transform into the infamous Harley Quinn. Director Todd Phillips really takes some risks here, masterfully blending psychological drama with the musical elements that have proved so divisive among fans. The result is a sequel that doesn't just follow up on the original but dances to its own twisted tune, presenting a Gotham City both familiar and startlingly new.



THE SUBSTANCE

18

Demi Moore, Margaret Qualley

140 mins

Strong stomachs needed for this acclaimed tale of a woman (Moore, never better) who uses an illicit drug to create a younger version of herself – with, needless to say, horrific side-effects. Unnerving and thought-provoking, it's a wild ride into the psyche's darkest corners. *See opener*



SMILE 2

18

Naomi Scott, Rosemarie Dewitt

127 mins

Esteemed movie critic Mark Kermode reckons Scott deserves an Oscar for her turn in this horror sequel. We'll leave you to decide on that but, no doubt, "committed" is the word as she plays a global pop star tormented by terrifying, unknowable forces during a world tour.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT



Juror #2 ♥

12

Nicholas Hoult,
Toni Collette

113 mins

▶ **AGED A MERE 94, CLINT EASTWOOD DIRECTS JUROR #2, A TAUT LEGAL** thriller that explores justice, guilt and moral compromise. Nicholas Hoult stars as Justin Kemp, a seemingly ordinary family man selected for jury duty on a high-profile murder trial. But, as the case unfolds, Kemp begins to suspect that he might be connected to the crime, which in turns pulls him into an agonising web of truth, deception and self-preservation. Toni Collette shines as prosecutor Faith Killebrew, bringing steely resolve and sharp intensity to the courtroom battles, while Eastwood's direction, as surefooted as ever, keeps the tension simmering, balancing gripping drama with thoughtful introspection.



THE SILENT HOUR

15

Joel Kinnaman,
Mekhi Phifer

99 mins

The suspense is of the strong, silent type in this refreshingly original thriller. The set-up is simple – a deaf cop (Kinnaman) must protect a deaf murder witness from a team of corrupt cops.



STRANGE DARLING ♥

18

Willa Fitzgerald,
Kyle Gallner

97 mins

It begins with a date, during which things quickly get very steamy – after which they start to get very blood-drenched. To say any more is to give too much away, but the film keeps you guessing at every turn.

ROMANCE



FLY ME TO THE MOON

12

Scarlett Johansson,
Channing Tatum

132 mins

Fab romantic comedy starring Johansson as marketing expert Kelly and Tatum as NASA launch director Cole. Tasked with staging a fake Moon landing, sparks (romantic and otherwise) soon fly.



WE LIVE IN TIME ♥

15

Florence Pugh,
Andrew Garfield

108 mins

This one's a tear-jerker, with Garfield and Pugh dazzling in a decade-spanning romance that explores love, loss and fate's quiet interventions. Funny, sad and insightful, it's an absolute gem.



THE DUCHESS

12

Keira Knightley,
Ralph Fiennes

110 mins

This award-nominated period drama from 2008 boasts a top-drawer performance from Knightley as the Duchess of Devonshire, who in the late 18th century navigates fame and forbidden love.

FUNNIES



GOODRICH ❤️



Michael Keaton, Mila Kunis	111 mins
-------------------------------	----------

Keaton is superb in this drama as art dealer Andy, whose life is upended when his wife enters rehab. Left alone with their young kids, he leans on his daughter from his first marriage (Kunis). Heartwarming.



DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE



Ryan Reynolds, Hugh Jackman	127 mins
--------------------------------	----------

The record-breaking hit of last year is here, and it finds our two wisecracking anti-heroes (Reynolds and Jackman) teaming up to save the planet from extinction. Or something.



My Old Ass ❤️



Maisey Stella, Aubrey Plaza	89 mins
--------------------------------	---------

➤ **FROM MEGAN PARK, DIRECTOR OF THE ACCLAIMED THE FALLOUT,** comes this sharp and heartfelt coming-of-age film with a time-travel/body swap twist. The story centres on Elliott (Stella), a teen whose, um, “nocturnal consumption” conjures up an unexpected visitor: her older self (Plaza). As Elliott’s future self doles out advice – some wise, some cryptic – she’s forced to confront her fears about love, identity and the uncertain road ahead. Park’s direction balances wit and poignancy, capturing both the raw vulnerability and awkward humour of growing up, while the film doesn’t shy away from life’s messiness, and its trippy premise allows space as much for introspection as laughter.

Match and dispatch
Is Woman of the Hour a true story?

Oooh, I love a juicy reality show romance. Well strap in, because this is a doozy. On a real-life 1978 episode of blind date TV show *The Dating Game*, Cheryl Bradshaw (Anna Kendrick) is matched with a prolific serial killer.

Is that true? Yes. Violent murderer Rodney Alcala (Daniel Zovatto) was a contestant on the popular Californian show.



Did Cheryl go through with the date? In real life, as soon as the wall parted to reveal her handsome suitor, Cheryl was overcome with ick, telling producers she spotted “weird vibes” coming off of Alcala and so was out.

Is the film accurate? Kinda. For dramatic purposes the director – also Anna Kendrick – spices up the on-set dialogue and fabricates a brief post-show encounter. Savvy, real-life Cheryl Bradshaw wisely dodged that bullet.

© WATCH WOMAN OF THE HOUR

PERIOD DRAMA



Lee 

Kate Winslet,
Alexander Skarsgård

117 mins

15

► **KATE WINSLET IS ON FIRE IN THIS FIERCE AND INTIMATE BIOPIC** of Lee Miller, the model-turned-photographer who swapped the catwalk for combat zones to chronicle World War II for *Vogue*. Framed by a 1977 interview, the film unpacks Miller's leap from glossy covers to gritty trenches – and the bruising toll it took on her. For Winslet, this was a passion project that nearly fell apart – the film took eight years to make, and when things got especially tricky on the funding front, she paid the cast and crew out of her own pocket. It's a level of commitment reflected on the screen, mirroring Miller's unstoppable spirit, making the movie into something more than a simple biopic. Instead, it's the story of a woman who smashed conventions and didn't look back, even when the world tried to box her in.



ACROSS THE RIVER AND INTO THE TREES

Liev Schreiber,
Josh Hutcherson

106 mins

Set in post-WWII Venice, this Hemingway adaptation sees Schreiber outstanding as a terminally ill soldier who meets a woman who offers him hope and redemption while taking a final trip. The result is a haunting meditation on mortality and human connection.



THE IRON LADY

Meryl Streep,
Jim Broadbent

105 mins

12

Streep won an Oscar for her turn as Margaret Thatcher in this biopic that finds the ageing ex-PM looking back on her life, career and marriage. Britain in the 80s is brilliantly realised but it is Streep who shines here – she utterly inhabits the role.

Movie quiz
Take on our featured films

1 //

Comic caper *Wolfs* is the sixth film in which friends Brad Pitt and George Clooney star together on screen – can you name the other five?

2 //

What is notable about main cast members of *Venom: The Last Dance*, Tom Hardy, Juno Temple, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Rhys Ifans and Stephen Graham?

3 //

Jacques Audiard, the director behind much-feted musical thriller *Emilia Pérez*, has twice won Best Film not in the English Language BAFTAs – for which films?

4 //

Vatican-based thriller *Conclave*, based on the novel by Robert Harris, features Ralph Fiennes and Stanley Tucci, who have previously appeared together in which two films?

5 //

Toni Collette and Nicholas Hoult reunited for Clint Eastwood's courtroom drama *Juror #2*, 22 years after playing mother and son in which movie?

● *Answers on the right*



ANSWERS: 1 THE OCEAN'S TRILLOGY; CONFESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND AND BURN AFTER READING 2 THEY ARE ALL BRITONS PLAYING AMERICANS 3 A PROPHECY AND THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED 4 RAID IN MANHATTAN AND THE KING'S MAN 5 ABOUT A BOY PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

OUR COMPLETE MOVIE LISTINGS*

Make your choice from the A-Z of our pick of the BEST OF THE BEST

NEW RELEASES

A-C

- Across the River and into the Trees
- Am I OK?
- Anyone But You
- The Apprentice
- Arcadian
- Asphalt City
- Back to Black
- Bad Boys: Ride or Die



Beetlejuice Beetlejuice

- The Bikeriders
- Blink Twice
- Boy Kills World
- Civil War
- Conclave
- The Critic

D-H

- Daddio
- Dandelion
- The Dead Don't Hurt
- Deadpool & Wolverine
- Dead Talents Society



Despicable Me 4

- A Different Man
- Dream Scenario
- Drift
- The Exorcist: Believer
- The Fall Guy
- Firebrand

- Fly Me to the Moon
- Fresh Kills



Furiosa: Mad Max...

- The Garfield Movie
- Gasoline Rainbow
- Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire
- Girl You Know It's True
- Goodrich
- Grey Matter
- Harold and the Purple Crayon
- Hit Man

I-L

- The Idea of You
- I'll Be Right There
- Insecure
- Inside Out 2
- I Saw the TV Glow
- It Ends with Us
- I Used to Be Funny
- Janet Planet
- Joker: Folie à Deux
- Juror #2



Kensuke's Kingdom

- Kinds of Kindness
- Kneecap
- Laroy, Texas
- Lee
- Lisa Frankenstein
- Little Bone Lodge
- Longlegs
- Love Lies Bleeding

M-Q

- MaXXXine
- Midas Man
- My Old Ass
- My Spy: Eternal City
- Napoleon
- One Fast Move
- The Outrun
- Ozi: Voice of the Forest
- Pinkfong and Baby Shark's Space Adventure
- The Present



A Quiet Place: Day One

R-V

- Reverse the Curse
- Riddle of Fire
- Rob Peace
- Saturday Night
- The Silent Hour
- Sing Sing
- Smile 2
- Someone Like You
- Space Cadet
- Starve Acre
- Storm Chasers
- Sting
- Stange Darling
- The Substance
- Summer Camp
- Tarot



Thelma



Transformers One

- Trap
- Tuesday
- Twisters
- Unicorns
- Unsung Hero
- Venom: The Last Dance

W-Z

- The Wasp
- The Watched
- We Grown Now
- We Live in Time
- White Bird: A Wonder Story
- Wolfs
- Woman of the Hour
- Young Woman and the Sea
- 1992

VERA CLASSICS

- Argo
- Arthur
- Batman
- Chef
- The Damned United
- The Duchess
- Dunkirk
- Edge of Tomorrow
- Forrest Gump
- The Hangover
- Horrible Bosses
- The Iron Lady
- I, Tonya
- Moneyball (2011)
- Practical Magic
- The Queen
- Saving Private Ryan

- Selma
- The Social Network
- A Star is Born (1976)
- Star Trek
- Superman
- Warrior

INTERNATIONAL

- Beomjoedosi 4
- Born to Fly
- The Count of Monte Cristo
- Crossing
- The Delinquents
- Drishyam 2
- Emilia Pérez
- The Ex-Files 4: Marriage Plan
- Golmaal - Fun Unlimited
- KINGDOM: Return of the Great General
- The Roundup: Punishment
- Shayda
- When Fall is Coming
- YOLO
- 12.12: The Day

INDIAN

- Bachelor Party
- Coat
- Dhak Dhak
- Garudan
- Ghoomer
- Gulmohar
- Jawan
- Joram
- Kaagaz 2
- Kill
- Main Atal Hoon
- Naguvina Hoogala Mele
- Ondu Sarala Prema Kathe

- Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video
- Sam Bahadur
- Shaitaan
- Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai
- Tarla
- Tiger 3
- Yaariyan 2
- Zara Hatke Zara Bachke

NIGERIAN

- Aburo
- Ajosepo
- American Japa
- Farmer's Bride
- A Ghetto Love Story
- Insecure
- Last Call
- What About Us?
- When the Poor Smile
- Wrong Number

SHORT FILMS

- Favourites
- Favours
- Meat Puppet
- The Therapist

DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY SHORTS

- Entitled
- Eulogy for the Dandelion
- Haud Close Tae Me
- The Honeys and Bears
- Lay Me Low
- Old Mother Blackbird
- Swim
- Walks With Me

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WHAT'S ON

TELEVISION

FEBRUARY

SHOWS TO PUT A SMILE ON YOUR FACE

HAPPY NATION

Lessons in joy from Bhutan

► **THE AWARD-**winning documentary *Agent of Happiness* follows two civil servants in Bhutan. Their job? Measuring public happiness, data that feeds into their nation's GNH index – which is like GDP, but for happiness, and has been an important factor in determining government policy and priorities since 1970. Here are some findings from their uplifting quest...



“**ONE THIRD OF THE COUNTRY'S POOREST GROUPS REPORTED CHEERFULNESS**”

Sample questions from the happiness survey

- Do you own a tractor?
- Do you own a washing machine?
- When was the last time you cried?
- Do you trust your neighbours?

increased by about 3%.

Present focus
Bhutanese often think of happiness as a “now” phenomenon. Today's mood matters more than the long-term picture.

Money isn't everything
Some 42% of the richest Bhutanese aren't happy. Whereas a third of the poorest groups reported cheerfulness.

Any happy surprises?

Pandemic positives
Many, including the prime minister, anticipated a decline in happiness due to the pandemic, but that wasn't the case. Happiness

Men are happier
Women reported a slightly lower level of overall happiness, although their happiness has increased faster than men's since 2010.

© WATCH AGENT OF HAPPINESS

HOW HAPPY IS BHUTAN?

SAMPLE SIZE: 11,000

9.5% deeply happy

6.4% unhappy

45.5% narrowly happy

38.6% extensively happy

WHAT MAKES BHUTAN HAPPY?

Healthcare
91% now have access

Nature
60% of Bhutan must remain forested

Home ownership
58% of rural Bhutanese own their own homes

Urbanisation
50.5% of urbanites are happy, compared with 46.4% in the countryside

MUST WATCH



The Traitors ❤️

15

Box set	Up to 71 mins
---------	---------------

► **YOU KNOW THE TRAITORS, RIGHT? IT'S THE REALITY GAMESHOW HOSTED** by Claudia Winkleman in which strangers gather in a Scottish castle for a game of trust and betrayal. Remember those words “trust” and “betrayal”. They play an awful big part in what makes *The Traitors* so gosh-darned addictive. Anyway, among the contestants are secret Traitors, plotting to “murder” the Faithfuls and claim a hefty prize pot. The Faithfuls must outwit, outlast and unmask the Traitors before it’s too late. With its intense mind games, shocking twists, not to mention Winkleman’s razor-sharp hosting, the show blends strategy, paranoia and high drama into gripping, addictive telly.



LOST IN THE SHUFFLE

Documentary	100 mins
-------------	----------

Ever wonder what secrets playing cards hold? Every single day, right? In this wild, mind-bending ride through magic and mystery, magician Shawn Farquhar traces their history, solves a murder mystery and explores the art of illusion across six countries. *See right*



EVERYBODY STILL HATES CHRIS ❤️ ⚠️

Comedy	30 mins
--------	---------

Everybody Still Hates Chris picks up where its predecessor left off, revisiting the humour of growing up in 1980s Brooklyn with one major difference – it’s now animated. Narrated by Chris Rock himself, Terry Crews and Tichina Arnold reprise their roles as Chris’s no-nonsense parents.



THE PENGUIN ❤️

15

Box set	Up to 68 mins
---------	---------------

Colin Farrell reprises his role as Oswald Cobblepot in *The Penguin*, a dark, character-driven series set in the world of *The Batman*, focusing on Gotham’s underworld in the power vacuum left after the events of the film. This is season one.



BRASSIC ❤️

15

Box set	Up to 48 mins
---------	---------------

A cross between *Shameless* and *This Is England*, *Brassic* is a sitcom centring around grifters in Lancashire. As the seasons have worn on (we’ve got the whole of series six onboard) they’ve started to dream of a life away from home.



ANJELAH JOHNSON-REYES - SAY I WON'T ❤️

Comedy	115 mins
--------	----------

Sharp wit and even sharper storytelling are the hallmarks of Anjelah Johnson-Reyes – actor, comedian and former NFL cheerleader – who in this genuinely hilarious comedy special blends stand-up with musical flair and heartfelt reflections on life and love.

Deal with it

The bonkers iconography of playing cards

♠ The ace of spades – once considered the “lowest” card – was elevated to greatness during the French Revolution, when all the real kings and queens had their heads lopped off.

Despite playing cards going back 1,000 years, the Joker was developed by players in the US only 150 years ago during the Civil War to spice up an archaic game called euchre.



♣ 52 cards in a deck stand for the 52 weeks in a year, and four suits – hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades – represent the four seasons.

The King of Hearts is also known as the “suicide king”, because he seems to be stabbing himself in the head. But magician Shawn Farquhar believes all is not what it seems and there may be an ancient cold case murder to solve. Talk about sleight of hand.



WATCH LOST IN THE SHUFFLE

THRILLERS



Vigil

15

Box set

57 mins

► **DCI AMY SILVA (SURANNE JONES) AND DI KIRSTEN LONGACRE (ROSE Leslie)** return in season two of *Vigil* – all of which screens here. Following on from the scintillating first season, they’re still navigating the murky waters of military secrecy and political intrigue. While many of the tensions remain the same (which is a good thing), the plot is a new one: after a deadly incident during a weapons test at a Scottish airbase, the duo are thrust into an investigation stretching from the Highlands to the Middle East. Uncovering a conspiracy that involves advanced drone technology and high-ranking officials, Silva and Longacre face both deadly tech as well as tackling deeply personal stakes.



A BLOODY LUCKY DAY



Crime & thrillers

60 mins

Yikes. A taxi ride turns into a nightmare when a driver unwittingly picks up a serial killer in this tense South Korean thriller series. Think a gripping cross between *The Hitcher* and *Collateral*, and you’re there. It’s based on a “webtoon”, don’t you know.



CONTINENTAL FROM THE WORLD OF JOHN WICK

12

Crime & thrillers

Up to 97 mins

This spinoff from the *John Wick* franchise explores the origins of the movie’s iconic Continental Hotel in 1970s NYC. Featuring a resurgent Mel Gibson chewing the scenery in full-on baddie mode, it’s as stylish as it is gritty. Oh, and there’s plenty of gunplay in it.

COMEDY



Changing Ends

Box set	Up to 24 mins
---------	---------------

► **TV FUNNYMAN ALAN CARR HAD AN INTERESTING UPBRINGING. IT'S** not just the fact that he was brought up in Northampton, more the fact that his dad managed Northampton Town FC. And if the idea of Alan Carr's dad managing a football team is causing a certain amount of cognitive dissonance, then you're well on the way to an appreciation of this autobiographical sitcom, which mines that childhood for comic gold as the young Alan must deal with his emerging sexuality (spoiler alert: he's gay), his struggles to fit in and enjoy sport (very funny) and, of course, his idiosyncratic family. Needless to say, the whole thing is an absolute hoot from start to finish, and we're showing the entire second series.



MR BIG STUFF



Box set	25 mins
---------	---------

Ryan Sampson and Danny Dyer play estranged brothers, trying (and failing) to fix a sibling rivalry that's likely beyond repair. Glen's a neurotic suburbanite, while Lee's a prescription-popping alpha male.



HERE WE GO



Box set	29 mins
---------	---------

This sitcom introduces us to the hilariously chaotic Jessop family – as filmed through the lens of youngest son Sam – who stumble through life with endearing ineptitude. This is series two.

MAESTRO CLASSES



BBC MAESTRO: BRIAN COX - FILM TV AND THEATRE

Factual	30 mins
---------	---------

Legendary actor Brian Cox shares decades of stage and screen wisdom in this masterclass. From character development to commanding presence, Cox offers candid insights and anecdotes.



BBC MAESTRO: DAVID WALLIAMS - WRITING BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Factual	30 mins
---------	---------

David Walliams, one of the UK's most beloved children's authors, breaks down the art of writing stories that captivate young readers. He offers humour, warmth and practical advice.



BBC MAESTRO: STEVE MANN - DOG TRAINING

Factual	30 mins
---------	---------

Canine behaviour expert Steve Mann offers a step-by-step guide to understanding and training dogs. From basic commands to correcting behavioural issues, Mann shares practical techniques and insights.

DOCUMENTARIES



MADE IN ENGLAND: THE FILMS OF POWELL AND PRESSBURGER

12

Culture | 131 mins

Who are the best filmmakers the UK has ever produced? Quite possibly Powell and Pressburger, the subjects of this documentary in which Martin Scorsese celebrates the legacy of his heroes.



SUGARCANE ❤️

15

Documentary | 107 mins

Director Julian Brave NoiseCat sheds light on accusations of child abuse at boarding schools for Indigenous peoples of Canada. Its tale of resilience and the fight for justice is poignant and unmissable.



Agent of Happiness ❤️

12

Documentary | 94 mins

➤ **IF THE JOB TITLE “HAPPINESS AGENT” IS A NEW ONE FOR YOU,** you’re not alone. Feature-length documentary *Agent of Happiness* reveals all, following Amber Kumar Gurung, one of Bhutan’s official assessors for the Gross National Happiness index, as he travels around remote villages and bustling towns in order to measure the well-being of his fellow citizens. Filtered through Kumar Gurung’s warm, thoughtful perspective, the film offers a rare glimpse into Bhutanese culture, where happiness isn’t just an abstract ideal but a measurable national priority, and Kumar Gurung’s encounters with locals – each with their own joys and struggles – reveal profound truths about contentment, community and purpose. *See opener*

Snooze fest
A sleep masterclass



Sleep psychologist **Stephanie Romiszewski’s** *BBC Maestro* course is all about helping you nap happy. Here’s her words of wisdom...



Adapt to new time zones

“Set your watch to the destination time while flying. Stick to the meal, movement and light times of your destination – eat breakfast and move your body, where possible.”

Expose yourself to light

“Light exposure is your absolute best friend. It’s free and available to all of us. Light exposure is key in the first two thirds of the day, especially when you wake up in the morning.”

Try not to worry

“Even if you’re struggling with your sleep, or feeling anxious about it, you’re still alive and you’re still thriving. I have treated all different types of people – sleep problems don’t discriminate.”

Seek regularity

“Routine is everything to our circadian rhythms. We should be waking up and getting up at exactly the same time every day.”

© WATCH BBC MAESTRO: STEPHANIE ROMISZEWSKI - SLEEP BETTER

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WHAT'S ON AUDIO

FEBRUARY

THE MUSIC WE LOVE

► GHOSTING?

Breadcrumbing? Flags? Thanks to technology and evolving social mores, today's dating landscape is a minefield of hyper-specific behaviours. Luckily, Gen Z has put these confusing phenomena into words. Can their music also help us understand this wild new world of love? Our *Modern Love* playlist is a textbook of Gen Z relationship advice.

Pink flags

A pink flag is the softer cousin of a red flag: behaviour that just hints at trouble down the line.

Tom Grennan's *Little Bit of Love* is a perfect example. He spends the entire song apologising for hurting your feelings. Is this the sort of relationship you want? An endless loop of anguish and apology? Hardly. Similarly, thanks to *I'm So Happy* ("Every time I laugh, feels like I could cry"), we can probably discern that **Emily Burns** isn't a long-term prospect for anyone who values emotional stability.

Rizz

The opposite of a pink flag, rizz is a smooth, irresistible quality that you only find in the best partners. Listen to how slick and effortless **James Vincent McMorrow** sounds on *Tru Love* and



Clockwise from top: Ella Mai, Snoh Aalegra, Tom Walker and Tom Grennan

you'll get a perfect idea of what rizz is. **Snoh Aalegra's** *Do 4 Love* is also rizz incarnate, so start there if you enjoy setting yourself unrealistic expectations.

Pure simping

To simp is to fall for someone so hard you embarrass yourself. **Harry Styles's** *Adore You* is a perfect example. "I'd walk through fire for you"? Slow down a bit, mate, we've only been out for one Nando's. Same goes for **Ella Mai's** *Boo'd Up*, in which Mai falls so head over heels that she literally loses the power of speech in the chorus. Let's all calm down.

Hard launch

So, you've navigated the pink flags and weeded out the simps. You are finally ready to hard launch your relationship by going public, usually on Instagram. And this calls for nothing but classic love songs. Think **Taylor Swift's** *Lover*, **Tom Walker's** *Better Half of Me*, **Clinton Kane's** *I Guess I'm in Love*. All these songs burst with a celebration of NRE (new relationship energy). Ain't love beautiful?

IT'S COMPLICATED

Stuart Heritage gives a glossary of modern love terms and the songs that embody them



🎧 LISTEN TO VARIOUS:
MODERN LOVE

FRESH SOUNDS



Jelly Roll ❤️

Beautifully Broken (Pickin' Up the Pieces)
COUNTRY

➤ **JELLY ROLL'S 10TH ALBUM IS JUST WHAT YOU'D EXPECT FROM A BLOKE** with such a colourful past. Suffice to say that at 40 years old, the Nashville rapper/singer has enough hard-knock life experience for another couple of dozen albums after this one. His style is a blend of country soul with hip hop swagger, two genres famed for their narrative content and, sure enough, Jelly's got stories – not just singing his tales but living every one of them. Whether he's confronting his demons head-on or raising a glass to second chances, he keeps it bracingly real, making for an outing that isn't just an album, it's a survivor's guide.



TYLER, THE CREATOR ❤️ ⚠️

Chromakopia
HIP HOP

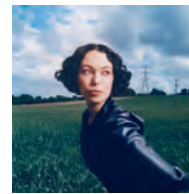
Tyler, The Creator's eighth album is a kaleidoscopic swirl of hip hop, jazz and neo-soul, narrated by his mother, Bonita Smith. *Chromakopia* blends lush synths, soulful melodies.



HALSEY ❤️ ⚠️

The Great Impersonator
POP

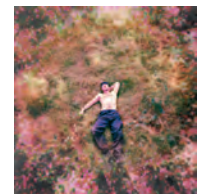
Halsey has, over the course of five albums, carved quite a niche for her confessional electro-pop. This album blends pop, rock and folk into an exploration of life's struggles.



KELLY LEE OWENS ⚠️

Dreamstate
BREAKING ARTISTS

Hot on the heels of collabs with Daniel Avery and St Vincent, Welsh electronica wizard Owens's latest features team-ups with Bicep and Tom Rowlands of The Chemical Brothers.



MAVERICK SABRE ❤️ ⚠️

Burn the Right Things Down
R&B & SOUL

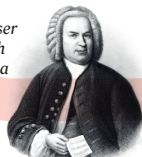
Neo-soul meets introspection on the fifth album from Irish singer and rapper Sabre. With emotional lyrics and lush instrumentation, *Burn...* covers love, loss and hope.

Guess who's Bach

A Baroque icon in numbers

275 YEARS

since composer JS Bach died of a stroke



1,128

works composed

20

children fathered



In a recent US survey, Bach was almost as familiar as Pitbull (84% name recognition)



"Bach! A colossal syllable"

Leonard Bernstein

🎧 LISTEN TO VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON, CONTINUUM

PEDAL TO THE METAL



MYLES KENNEDY

The Art of Letting Go
ROCK

Myles Kennedy's third solo album targets the sweet spot between bluesy rock swagger and heartfelt balladry. Known for his powerful vocals and sharp songcraft, Kennedy dives deep into themes of resilience and reflection.



BRING ME THE HORIZON ⚠️

Post Human: NeX GEN
ROCK

British metal behemoths Bring Me the Horizon are already in their 21st year and make a noise roughly akin to a Godzilla attack on Tokyo. This seventh studio album is the follow-up to *Post Human: Survival Horror* and is just as likely to terrify the livestock.

Chat Pile

Cool World
ROCK

➤ **HAILING FROM OKLAHOMA, FUZZ** merchants Chat Pile are comprised of four dudes, all of whom have adopted pseudonyms (Raygun Busch, Luther Manhole, Stin and Cap'n Ron) and who, more to the point, take sludge rock's narcoleptic edge and sharpen it into something uncomfortably precise. *Cool World* finds Raygun and co trading local dread for worldwide anxiety, diving headfirst into global societal decay, environmental ruin, and the sheer absurdity of existence. It's loud, raw and unflinchingly bleak – but never without a knowing wink.

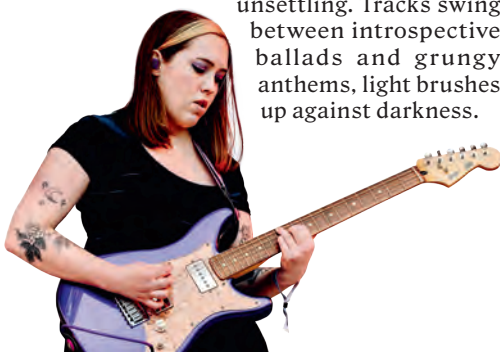


FANTASY POP

Soccer Mommy ♡

Evergreen
ALTERNATIVE

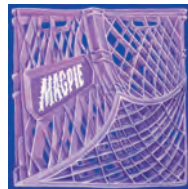
➤ **FOR HER FOURTH ALBUM**, Nashville's Soccer Mommy – aka Sophie Allison – crafts a shimmering alt-pop set that, if you'll pardon our poetic imagery, feels like staring into a cracked mirror: beautiful, distorted and a little haunting, all at the same time. Known for her knack for pairing morbid lyrical themes with bright, almost sugary melodies, Allison dives deeper into that contrast here, layering dreamlike synths, gritty guitars and bittersweet vocals to create an atmosphere that's both ethereal and unsettling. Tracks swing between introspective ballads and grungy anthems, light brushes up against darkness.



BASTILLE ⚠️

& (ampersand)
ALTERNATIVE

Indie poppers Bastille's fifth album blends indie-pop flair with history-class storytelling, with tracks inspired by figures such as Emily Dickinson and Edvard Munch – all linked by the mighty ampersand. And you know what? It works a treat.



PEACH PIT

Magpie
ALTERNATIVE

Canada's Peach Pit specialise in music they themselves describe as “chewed-bubblegum pop”. This fourth LP is an indie-pop delight that goes as big on surrealism as it does on feelings. Check out the title track, *Every Little Thing* or *Am I Your Girl*.

Classical moods
Piano men hit all the right notes



BRUCE LIU
Tchaikovsky: The Seasons

Pianist Bruce Liu breathes new life into *The Seasons*, presenting each month's composition with sensitivity and skill. From the lightness of spring to winter's chill, Liu's virtuosity transforms these classics.



VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON
Continuum

The man described as a “breathtakingly brilliant pianist” by *Gramophone* magazine reimagines sacred works by Bach. His piano interpretations are sublime, creating an emotional and transcendent listening experience.



TOM ASHBROOK
Nocturnes

British composer Tom Ashbrook forges a unique neo-classical, piano-led path, creating cinematic soundscapes of jaw-dropping beauty. He describes this, his third album, as “a soundtrack to our time”.

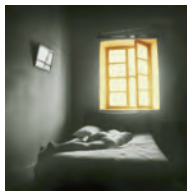
BOYS IN THE BAND



THE CURE ♥

Songs of a Lost World
ALTERNATIVE

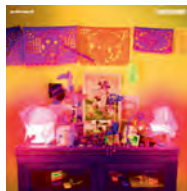
Some 16 years after *4:13 Dream*, The Cure return with a goth-rock epic steeped in loss, regret and fleeting beauty. Robert Smith's melancholic soundscapes unravel with haunting grace, balancing cathartic grandeur with moments of sharp levity.



SUEDE ⚠

Dog Man Star (30th Anniversary)
ALTERNATIVE

Suede's Britpop classic still resonates, its sweeping drama and poetic lyrics perfectly capturing the band's golden era and encapsulating the heady days of its creation. This lush reissue features remastered tracks, rare demos and live recordings.



UNDERWORLD ♥

Strawberry Hotel
DANCE & ELECTRONIC

The grand old men of British electronica unleash their 11th album, and it's a sweeping, immersive statement that's both intricate and expansive. Perfect headphone food, it's a set that showcases their ability to craft cinematic technoscapes.

Courteeners ♥

Pink Cactus Café
ALTERNATIVE

▶ **THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS OF MANCHESTER INDIE** stalwarts Courteeners have known each other since they were knee-high (oh, okay, 10 years old), picking up guitars and forming a band in 2006. As Yoda might say, strong their bond is, and over the course of seven albums that bond – and not uncoincidentally their output – has got better and better. For this latest, they dive deeper into their signature festival-ready swagger while embracing fresh sonic territory with new collabs and experimental flourishes. Frontman Liam Fray's storytelling remains sharp, weaving tales of love, loss and late-night revelations against a backdrop of shimmering guitars and layered production.



Nice and spicy
The hottest Latin tunes



Chencho Corleone and Jay Wheeler
CINCO ESTRELLAS

Veteran reggaeton singer Chencho Corleone has been cranking out hot and heavy cuts like this doozy for over quarter of a century. *Cinco Estrellas* – which literally means “five stars” – relates the story of a saucy suitor who ignores our Chencho when he messages her (leaving him on read, the sheer nerve) then hits him back after dark. They meet up in a five-star hotel and leave “DNA” all over the place. *iAy, caramba!*

Emilia
NOVIORGANGSTA <3

Pop, trap and cha-cha-cha collide on this irresistible bop by Argentine chanteuse Emilia, an ode of sorts to her real-life boyfriend, rapper-singer-songwriter Duki, who also appears in the video for this one. The theme? Everybody loves a bad boy, especially a pretty one, and Emilia goes weak at the knees over her man's face tattoos, fondness for “lean”, and the “Glock” he sleeps with under his pillow. Her only gripe? “Hope my father never listens to this song.” Naughty, naughty.

Rauw Alejandro & Mr Naisgai
PASAPORTE

Last year was a tumultuous one for Puerto Rican singer and rapper Rauw Alejandro. He broke up with his girlfriend, Rosalía, and his long-term manager. The result? *Pasaporte (Passport)*, a lively EDM-inflected club banger celebrating impulsiveness and newfound freedom, celebrating the restorative magic of travel and jumping on a plane. Which is obviously cool with us.



LISTEN TO VARIOUS:
LATIN TAKEOVER

TITAN
MADE IN GERMANY

PREMIUM LUGGAGE –
HANDMADE IN GERMANY



TITAN-BAGS.COM

CHARLES TYRWHITT

Well-dressed men rejoice, Charles Tyrwhitt's new shirt of the season has dropped. Exclusive to Charles Tyrwhitt, the Westminster Weave, *pictured*, is certainly a looker. Swoon over its dobby-textured weave, contemporary cutaway collar, discreet navy piping and subtle tone-coloured buttons. And it's versatile. Crafted from naturally stretchy, mid-weight 100% cotton to serve you well in all seasons, it's available in nine colourways, with that indispensable Charles Tyrwhitt non-iron finish. The Westminster Weave works a treat socialising or holding court in the office. And it's also available with a classic double cuff – so you're ready for whatever 2025 has up its sleeve.

● charlestyrwhitt.com



WHAT'S HOT NOW



PEAKY BLINDERS: THE REDEMPTION OF THOMAS SHELBY

Flat caps at the ready for a spectacular dance version of hit show *Peaky Blinders*. With pyrotechnics, live band and sparkling story by creator Steven Knight, the tour takes in Paris in March, then Southampton, Birmingham and Norwich, before two weeks at Sadler's Wells, London, in August.

● peakyblindersdance.com

WATCHES OF SWITZERLAND

After a century in the game, Watches of Switzerland knows all about quality timepieces. Like this men's IWC Pilot Performance Chronograph, inspired by the Mercedes AMG Petronas Formula One team, with a Ceratanium® case, luminescent black dial and black rubber strap. Talk about racy.



● watches-of-switzerland.co.uk

WORDS: ANDY HILL



PAVONA

Savour first-class cocktails with a mouthwatering Mediterranean menu in an elegant Art Deco-inspired space at Pavona, London. Just a short hop from West Hampstead station, Pavona is all about cosy neighbourhood vibes, with live DJs bringing the party each and every weekend.

● pavona.co.uk



CHRISTOPHER WARD

Christopher Ward creates Swiss-made mechanical watches at surprisingly affordable prices. Take the C65 Dune. Durable and sophisticated, its box-sapphire crystal and minimalist looks recall sports watches from the 1970s, while the Swiss movement delivers precision without a battery. And at 38mm, it'll grace every wrist.

● christopherward.co.uk

BUYS GUIDE

THE VERY BEST IN FASHION, SMART LIVING AND GREAT NIGHTS OUT

ART DE PARFUM

“Take me with you” is the romantic tagline for this award-winning hand luggage-friendly perfume line, with nine niche scents inspired by visionary founder Ruta Deguyte’s globetrotting adventures. Each evokes a destination – Paris, the South Pacific – with impeccably balanced fragrance notes. Plus they’re sustainably produced and cruelty-free, eschewing problematic ingredients like oud oil and ambergris. Take it with you.



● artdeparfum.com



ESIM

Hate getting ripped off by crazy international roaming fees? Can't be bothered with fiddly physical sim cards? eSIM.sm is the answer. Its industry-leading Global Plan is a breeze to set up, works in more than 150 countries and you only ever pay for the data you actually use. So you can stay connected – and travel light.

● esim.sm/global-esim



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CREDITS

VIRGIN ATLANTIC NEWS AND VIEWS



“
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INCREASINGLY
TOUGH PLACE
TO BE A CHILD

Offering mental
health and
psychosocial
support

YOUTH MOVEMENT

Help us give **SAVE THE CHILDREN** a helping hand

► **WE'RE DELIGHTED TO REPORT THAT** we're expanding our partnership with Save the Children, the world's leading children's charity. How? By not only providing regular funding to their Children's Emergency Fund, but also by leveraging our cargo and logistics capabilities to support the organisation in its humanitarian and life-saving efforts. "Our collaboration with Save the Children is rooted in a shared commitment to ensuring that children affected by disasters receive the care and resources they need," says Holly Boyd-Boland, our Vice President for Corporate Development. "Our goal is to support communities during times of crisis, ensuring

assistance is provided effectively during disasters and conflict." Gemma Sherrington, Interim CEO of Save the Children UK, adds: "With crises becoming more frequent and lasting longer, the world is an increasingly tough place to be a child. From the conflicts in Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine to the climate-induced hunger crisis in East Africa, Save the Children works to ensure that children survive and rebuild their lives in the face of disaster." Your generosity in supporting this endeavour is vital – thank you for donating any loose change you have to our crew as you disembark today.



● savethechildren.org.uk



► **AIRPORTS ARE SELDOM RELAXING** places. So we've teamed up with cool Brit brand Aromatherapy Associates to introduce a little Zen into your journey. Customers with access to our flagship London Heathrow Clubhouse will discover our brand-new Relaxation Room, which is scented using the Aromatherapy Associates Atomiser Connect. Wafting out of its dual chambers are the soothing scents of Deep Relax and De-Stress Mind – just the ticket before take-off.

Once you're settled in, it's all about unwinding. Scan the QR code for a guided breathwork session while you sip herbal tea. Ask our concierge team for your very own sleep kit and inside you'll find an Aromatherapy Associates Rollerball – available in either Deep Relax or De-Stress Mind varieties, simply roll it over your pulse points and inhale the magic of aromatherapy.



Meet Virgin Atlantic's Alliances & Partnerships Senior Manager KATE LEIGH



The role

I am responsible for all of our partnerships with airlines

around the world. That means negotiating and troubleshooting on a day-to-day basis, but also strategising longer term, planning where our customers might want to travel in the coming years.

The lowdown

Customers who book through our partners still get Virgin loyalty points, smooth connections and access to Virgin Atlantic customer service. SkyTeam Elite customers get access to Business Class lounges – both our own and partner airlines. My job is making sure this runs like clockwork, through making deals and relationships.

The buzz

We partner with 70 airlines, spanning the globe; 37% of customers on our flights are there through partnerships. I love meeting my opposite numbers at airlines in other countries – there's so much to learn getting absorbed in different cultures. I love travel, and my job is about helping people travel well.

WORDS: ANDY HILL PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN



LIGHT-WEIGHT!
BEHOLD OUR PLANET-FRIENDLY BOOZE BOTTLES

We're always looking for smart ways to cut down weight, in turn trimming Virgin Atlantic's carbon footprint as part of our wider mission to become a net-zero airline by the year 2050. Our latest weight hack? Aluminium alcohol bottles. "In Upper, we've just launched Baileys Original Irish Cream in aluminium bottles," says Virgin Atlantic



drinks head honcho Shiada Drysdale. "They're five times lighter than the traditional glass Baileys bottle, with an expected

44% carbon reduction." Longstanding vodka partner Sapling, a climate positive UK-based spirit brand that plants trees for every bottle sold, also supplies its premium vodka in 5cl aluminium bottles for Economy and Premium. Not only is it substantially lighter, aluminium is also much easier to recycle. Worth popping a bottle for.

We are the face of seamless travel.



BETC

No matter where you're heading in the world, SkyTeam member airlines offer you more convenient connections, more fast-track services than any other alliance thanks to SkyPriority, the broadest set of loyalty benefits at 970+ airports around the globe.

To learn more about how SkyTeam can make your travel smoother visit skyteam.com



PRETTY FLY FOR A WIFI

Now you can post selfies, binge-read your favourite e-book, brag about your hols to your mates, or even catch up on some work while flying above 10,000ft with **VIRGIN ATLANTIC**



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1 // Turn on your WiFi-enabled device and connect to the "Virgin-Atlantic" WiFi network.

2 // If you don't automatically connect to the WiFi portal, don't worry. Just take a look at the safety card in your seat pocket to see what type of aircraft you're on.

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- An A330neo, A350-1000 or 787-9, open your browser and navigate to virgin-atlantic-wifi.com
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3 // Then just follow the onscreen instructions to buy a session and get browsing!

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