

NEWS KIDS CAN **TRUST**

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR*



First News

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NO TREES ARE
HARMED IN
THE MAKING
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**FIRST NEWS
TAKES A
LOOK AT THE
YEAR AHEAD**

NEWS **SPORTS** ENTERTAINMENT
INTERVIEWS PUZZLES **COMPETITIONS**

**BUMPER
NEW YEAR
SPECIAL!**

HERE'S
TO AN EPIC

2026

THIS YEAR, PREPARE TO BE WOWED BY A HISTORIC
MOON MISSION, THE WINTER OLYMPICS AND
WORLD CUP, SOME TRULY CRAZY EVENTS,
SPECTACULAR CELEBRATIONS, EXCELLENT
EXHIBITIONS AND FANTASTIC FILMS.
THERE'LL ALSO BE SOME CRUCIAL
MOMENTS FOR NATURE, AND HOPEFULLY
AN END TO SOME LONG-RUNNING
WARS. AND IT'S ALL INSIDE
THIS BUMPER ISSUE!

**NATIONAL YEAR
OF READING**

WORLD CUP

**COP31
IN TURKEY**

**HUGE WALLACE &
GROMIT EXHIBITIONS**

**AMERICA'S
250TH BIRTHDAY**

**POKÉMON'S 30TH
ANNIVERSARY**

**THE SUPER MARIO
GALAXY MOVIE**

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IMPORTANT DATES

WELCOME to this special edition of *First News*, where we take a peek at what the year ahead has in store! From must-see movies and huge sporting showdowns, to cool UK exhibitions and top world events, there's plenty to be excited about. So get out your calendar and grab a pen, as we've gathered all the dates you need to remember. Let's begin with some stand-out special days coming up this year.

JANUARY

1-31: VEGANUARY

A campaign that aims to inspire people to try a meat and dairy-free diet based on plants such as vegetables, pulses, grains, nuts and fruits. See p26-27 for more.

3: MAHAYANA NEW YEAR

The traditional Buddhist New Year celebration.

19: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY

Practise your best speeches in honour of Martin Luther King Jr, a civil rights campaigner who championed equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their colour. He gave the famous 'I Have A Dream' speech at the March on Washington rally in 1963, and was shot and killed in 1968.

**24: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF EDUCATION**

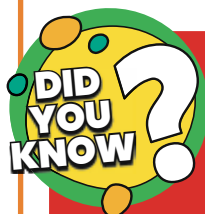
A day to celebrate the important role education plays across the world and why everyone has the right to quality learning.

**25: BURNS NIGHT**

Celebrate Scottish poet Robert Burns and tuck into a haggis.

27: HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

A day to remember the six million Jewish people who were killed in the Holocaust during the Second World War.



RESEARCH from YouGov showed that 27% (a quarter) of Brits intended to make New Year resolutions last year. It also found that younger people are more likely to make them. Will you be coming up with any resolutions for 2026?

All pics: Getty and iStock

FEBRUARY

9-15: CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

The theme of this year's week is 'This Is My Place', which is all about exploring the vital role of belonging in our mental health and wellbeing.

**10: SAFER INTERNET DAY**

Can you spot fake news? Are you media and information literate? Do you know how to keep yourself safe online? The UK's biggest awareness day for online safety aims to help you out!

14: VALENTINE'S DAY**17: INTERNATIONAL RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS (RAK) DAY**

Spread some kindness at school, among your friends and family, and all around you!

17: CHINESE NEW YEAR

When Chinese people celebrate the start of the new lunar year. In the Chinese zodiac, this year marks the Year of the Horse – a symbol of confidence and strength.

17: SHROVE TUESDAY

Get ready to flip those pancakes! In the Christian calendar, this is the feast day before Lent, a period of fasting (not eating, or avoiding certain foods) that represents the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert.

19: RAMADAN BEGINS

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and one of the holiest months for Muslims. It is observed with fasting, prayer and reflection.



MARCH

4: HOLI

A Hindu festival known as the Festival of Colours. It celebrates the triumph of good over evil.

**6–15: BRITISH SCIENCE WEEK**

A ten-day celebration of science, technology, engineering and maths.

THE theme of this year's British Science Week is 'Curiosity: what's your question?' All scientific discoveries come from someone's curiosity!

DID YOU KNOW?

18: GLOBAL RECYCLING DAY**20: EID AL-FITR**

Muslims celebrate the end of fasting for Ramadan.

20: RED NOSE DAY

The funniest day of the year is back! Get ready to challenge yourself and help raise money for children in the UK and across the world.

21: WORLD POETRY DAY**22: WORLD WATER DAY**

A day to raise awareness of how important water is for a happy and healthy life, and how more than two billion people still live without safe drinking water.



29: BRITISH SUMMER TIME BEGINS Clocks go forward an hour at 1am, giving us lighter evenings again.

APRIL

**1: APRIL FOOL'S DAY****3: GOOD FRIDAY**

A Christian holy day, marking the death of Jesus. It's also a bank holiday in the UK.

5: EASTER SUNDAY

A day for Christians to celebrate when Jesus is said to have come back from the dead. People often gift Easter eggs.

**6: EASTER MONDAY**

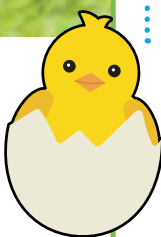
A day of remembrance for Christians and a bank holiday in the UK.

12: INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR STREET CHILDREN

Celebrations take place in more than 100 countries to raise awareness of street children.

15: WORLD ART DAY

Showcase your artistic skills for all to admire!



MAY

3: WORLD LAUGHTER DAY**4: STAR WARS DAY**

May the 4th be with you! (Get it?!)

**4: MAY DAY**

A celebration of spring and a bank holiday in the UK.

11–17: MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

A chance to raise awareness and funds for better mental health for everyone.

18: INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY**25: SPRING BANK HOLIDAY****28: WORLD HUNGER DAY**

How can we all work together to end hunger and poverty across the world?

JUNE

**1–30: PRIDE MONTH**

Celebrate the LGBTQ+ community!

6: D-DAY ANNIVERSARY

A very famous day in history. Back in the Second World War, on 6 June 1944, the Normandy invasion began. The Allies invaded the beaches of northern France to push the Nazis back.

13: TROOPING THE COLOUR

A ceremony and parade marking the official birthday of the British monarch (King Charles right now).

**20: WORLD REFUGEE DAY**

An international day dedicated to honouring people who have been forced to flee their homes. It's also a chance to highlight the rights that they're entitled to.

21: SUMMER SOLSTICE

The longest day of the year. Lots of people gather at Stonehenge in Wiltshire to celebrate.

22: WINDRUSH DAY

A day to honour the contributions of all the migrants who travelled to the UK from the Caribbean on HMT Empire Windrush and other ships in 1948 and the years after.



THE first ship, HMT Empire Windrush, arrived at Tilbury Docks in Essex and had 1,027 passengers on board.

DID YOU KNOW?

JULY



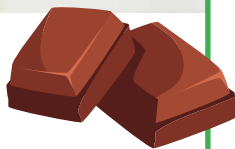
WHAT'S black, white
and red all over?
A newspaper!

1: INTERNATIONAL JOKE DAY**4: US INDEPENDENCE DAY**

Americans celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence (the founding of the United States) with picnics, parades and fireworks.

**7: WORLD CHOCOLATE DAY**

Any day that involves our favourite sweet treat is a good day!

**20: WORLD CHESS DAY**

An annual celebration of the popular board game.

**30: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FRIENDSHIP**

Celebrate your friends on this special day!

All pics: Getty and iStock

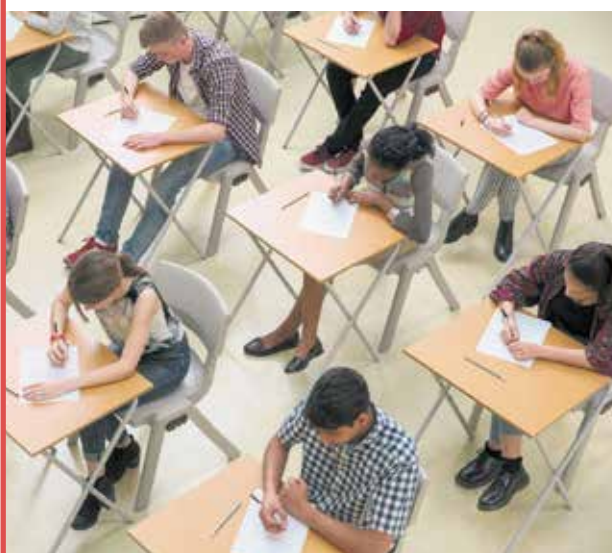
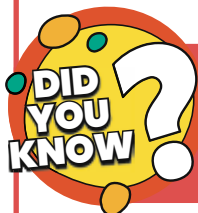
AUGUST

**12: INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY**

A United Nations day dedicated to empowering young people and giving you a voice.

19: WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY DAY

Snap photos of friends and family, or what's around you, and create lasting memories!

**20: GCSE RESULTS COME OUT****31: BANK HOLIDAY**

HALF of the people on our planet are 30 or younger, and this is expected to reach 57% by the end of 2030.

SEPTEMBER

1: BACK TO HOGWARTS DAY

Harry Potter fans mark the annual tradition of young wizards returning to Hogwarts on the Hogwarts Express.

**5: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF CHARITY**

A United Nations day encouraging everyone to volunteer time or donate to charity.

7-11: ZERO WASTE WEEK**8: THE KING'S ACCESSION GUN SALUTE**

A 41-gun salute is fired by the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery in Hyde Park, and a 62-gun royal salute is fired by the Honourable Artillery Company at the Tower of London, marking the anniversary of the King taking the throne.

8: INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY**19: INTERNATIONAL TALK LIKE A PIRATE DAY****20-21: YOM KIPPUR**

The name means 'Day of Atonement' in Hebrew, and it's the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. 'Atonement' means to seek forgiveness.

21: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

A chance to promote peace across the world.

21: ZERO EMISSIONS DAY

A day to think about how fossil fuels and carbon emissions affect the environment, and how we can help to reduce the damage.

21 SEPT – 4 OCT: FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

Everyone's encouraged to buy Fairtrade products to help farmers and workers get paid a fair amount. That means they can then have better living and working conditions, and look after their families.



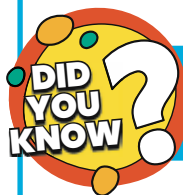
OCTOBER

**1–31: BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

A celebration of black heritage and culture.

4: WORLD ANIMAL DAY**5: WORLD TEACHERS' DAY**

Have a teacher who's awesome? Don't forget to thank them today!

10: WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

AROUND one in seven young people aged 10 to 19 have a mental health condition.

16: WORLD FOOD DAY**24: UNITED NATIONS DAY**

The United Nations was created on 24 October 1945 to bring countries together after World War Two and create a better world.

**25: BRITISH SUMMER TIME ENDS**

Clocks go back one hour at 2am.

31: HALLOWEEN

NOVEMBER

5: GUY FAWKES NIGHT

Also known as Bonfire Night. It marks the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, when Guy Fawkes and his fellow plotters tried to blow up Parliament and kill King James I of England.

**8: DIWALI**

Diwali is a five-day Hindu festival, known as the Festival of Lights. The main celebrations are on the third day, which is 8 November this year. The festival celebrates light over darkness and good over evil.

**8: REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY**

A number of events take place across the country to remember members of the armed forces who have fought and died for their country. Members of the royal family and political figures attend a service of remembrance at the Cenotaph in London.

**13: WORLD KINDNESS DAY****TBC: ROAD SAFETY WEEK**

Organised by the road safety charity Brake, the week aims to highlight how you can stay safe on British roads, as well as the impact that dangerous driving can have. Exact dates still to be confirmed.

20: WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY

A time to celebrate young people coming together, and to improve children's welfare across the world.

**26: THANKSGIVING DAY**

An annual holiday in the US, marked with fireworks, food and parades.

DECEMBER

**10: HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

A day to highlight the rights that everyone should have as a human being – no matter what their race, colour, religion, gender or nationality.

21: WINTER SOLSTICE

The northern hemisphere (including the UK) has its longest night and shortest day of the year. It's also known as midwinter.

**24: CHRISTMAS EVE****25: CHRISTMAS DAY**

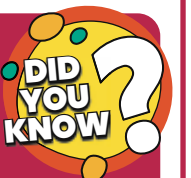
A Christian holiday marking the birth of Jesus Christ. People give gifts and spend time with loved ones.

26: BOXING DAY**31: NEW YEAR'S EVE**

Officially the last day of 2026!

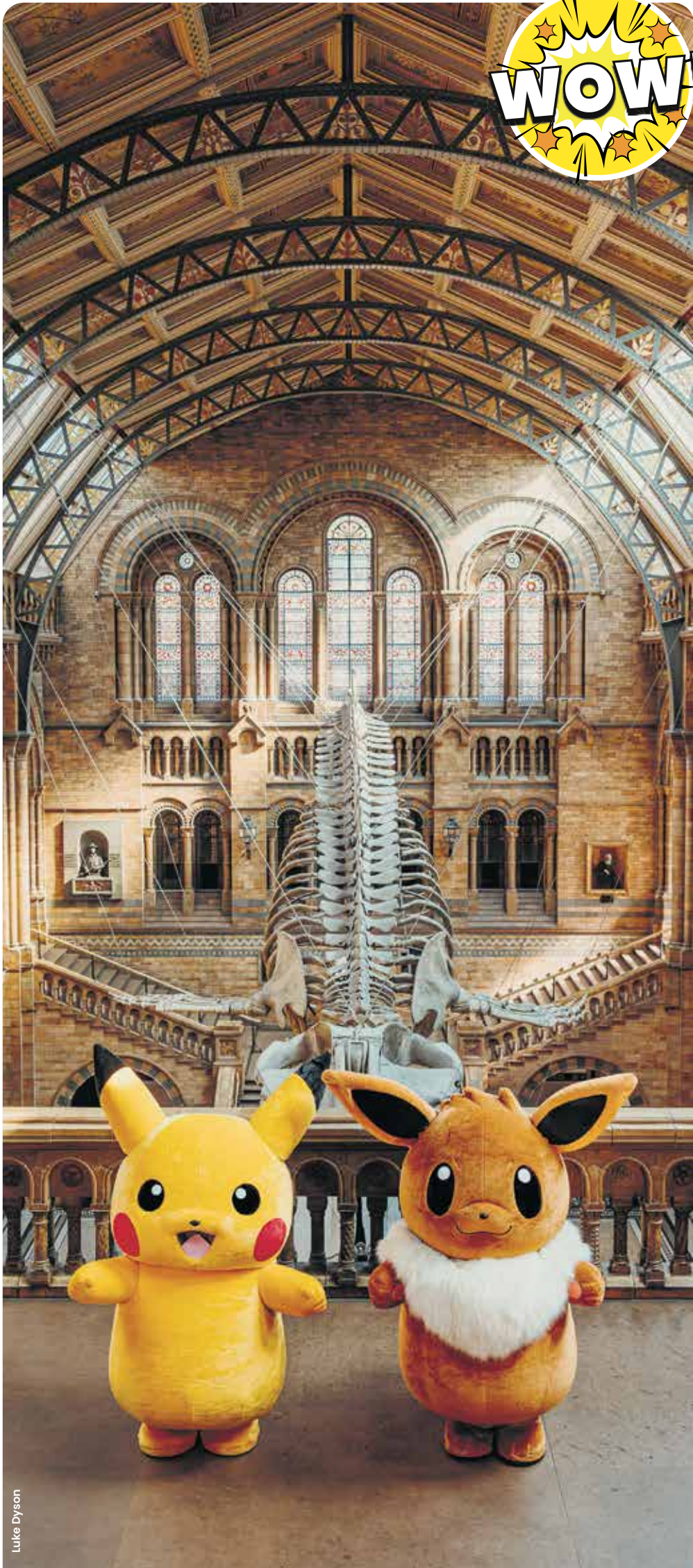


IN Spanish-speaking countries, it's traditional to eat 12 grapes underneath a table at midnight on New Year's Eve to welcome good luck for the upcoming year. Each grape represents a different month.





WOW!



Luke Dyson

PIKACHU and pals get the party started for a big Pokémon birthday. An exclusive pop-up shop is coming to London's Natural History Museum to mark 30 years since the first Pokémon games. Find out how else the famous company is celebrating on p22.



BAFTA / Charlie Clift

SCOTTISH actor, writer, producer and presenter Alan Cumming will host one of the world's most famous film ceremonies, the BAFTA Film Awards. The ceremony will air on Sunday 22 February on BBC One and iPlayer.



Delek Gow Consultancy

WHITE storks are set to make a historic return to east London this autumn. A new species recovery project called Rewilding East London will introduce the birds at Eastbrookend Country Park in Dagenham, with beavers arriving the following year.



ZOOKEEPERS at London Zoo are kicking off the conservation charity's 200th year by counting all of the animals for the 2026 annual stocktake this January. More than 8,000 animals are cared for at London Zoo, and each needs to be counted. The data is then shared with other zoos around the world via a global database, where it is used to help manage worldwide conservation breeding programmes for endangered animals.



IT'S the 50th anniversary of Agatha Christie's death on 12 January. The famous crime writer created the popular fictional detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. She is being celebrated with a host of events, including a special exhibition at the British Library in October.



THIS summer marks the 25th anniversary of the *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* film. Warner Bros Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter is celebrating with a special summer feature that promises magical surprises, spellbinding sets and even more behind-the-scenes secrets from the film series. Look out for further reveals soon!

EVENTS ACROSS THE UK

THERE'S no need to jet abroad with all the amazing events happening right here in the UK! From festivals and carnivals to new exhibitions and free events, there's loads to keep you entertained.

AARDMAN MAGIC

CRACKING installation, Gromit!

Wallace and his trusty pal are coming to the Young V&A next year for a look into the world of Aardman, the creators of *Wallace & Gromit*, *Chicken Run*, *Shaun the Sheep* and more.

Inside Aardman: Wallace & Gromit and Friends runs from 12 February to 15 November 2026, in what is also the studio's 50th anniversary year.

Then starting in summer at Bristol's M Shed you can see Cracking Exhibition Gromit: 50 Years of Aardman in Bristol, which also promises "small art installations and Aardman treasures hidden throughout Bristol Museum & Art Gallery".



David Parry for the V&A

Heritage Open Days

ARE you nosy like us? Every September, you can explore loads of hidden places not usually open to the public.

The aim is to celebrate the UK's heritage and history, with events taking place in castles, museums and tourist sites. Heritage Open Days runs from 11–20 September this year in England. In Scotland, it's called Doors Open Days, in Wales it's Open Doors, and Northern Ireland takes part in the European Heritage Open Days scheme.



Getty

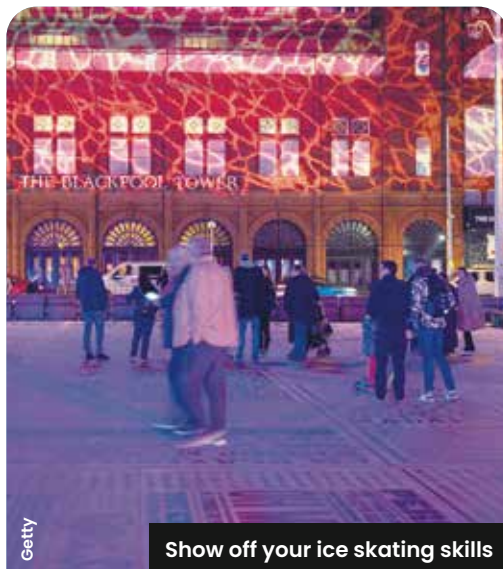
Blackpool Illuminations

WHAT'S claimed to be the world's largest free light show, the Blackpool Illuminations, is back in August!

There's normally a big switch-on event at the end of summer, with the lights shining bright right through to January.

Visitors to Blackpool can see fantastic light displays, lasers and interactive features, all while enjoying miles of family fun along the promenade.

The illuminations began way back in 1879, when Blackpool became the first town in the UK to use electric streetlights.



Getty

Show off your ice skating skills

Notting Hill Carnival

COLOURFUL fun fills the streets of London for two days at the Notting Hill Carnival.

On Sunday 30 August, the festival hosts Children's Day – a chance for families to enjoy live music, parades and performances.

Notting Hill Carnival is a celebration of Caribbean culture and honours the music, food and history of many different communities.

Get ready to dance!

Edinburgh Fringe

THE world's largest performance arts festival will return to Scotland this summer to delight thousands of visitors.

For three weeks in August (7–31), the city of Edinburgh welcomes artists and performers from all over the world to showcase their talents. From famous faces to unknown performers, the festival features everything from theatre and comedy, to dance, musicals and exhibitions.

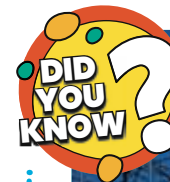
There's usually a funniest joke gong awarded at the end of every festival, but last year, organisers scrapped the award (no joke).

Let's see if it returns this year!



Getty

The streets of Edinburgh are filled with thousands of amazing shows



BLACKPOOL Pleasure Beach is celebrating its 130th birthday this year. Expect more thrills than ever before, including the incredible illuminations (above, left).



istock



Balloons in Bristol

Bristol International Balloon Fiesta

LOOK to the skies between 7–9 August and you may spot up to 100 balloons floating above the city!

The annual balloon fiesta in Bristol celebrates the history of hot-air ballooning and will see people coming from all across the UK and the world to show off their colourful balloons.

The festival lasts for three days, with balloons going up at both dawn and dusk. The spectacular Night Glows are a particular highlight, with dozens of hot-air balloons inflating together and using their burners to glow in time to a soundtrack of music put together by DJs at BBC Radio Bristol.

Diana Memorial Playground to reopen

ONE of London's best-loved playgrounds is set to return in the summer with exciting new features.

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Playground in Kensington Gardens, London, is being renewed with a new ship, treehouse and water play area, plus better access for all children, ready to welcome families back this year.

EXHIBITIONS AND FESTIVALS



Beano Mischief

FROM 14–22 February, Beano fans can join Dennis the Menace and friends on a time-travelling adventure at the Tower of London.

Armed with a comic strip, visitors will follow clues, meet historic characters and fix a broken go-kart time machine in a fun, step-free outdoor experience for all ages.

Ramses & the Pharaohs' Gold

A SPECTACULAR Ancient Egypt exhibition is coming to London.

Ramses and the Pharaohs' Gold opens at Battersea Power Station on 28 February and will showcase 180 priceless artefacts from the reign of Ramses the Great. The exhibition includes royal jewellery, masks and the original wooden coffin that once held Ramses II's mummy.

Many of the objects have never travelled outside Egypt before, giving visitors a rare chance to explore the world of one of history's most powerful pharaohs.



NEON/World Heritage Exhibitions

Kids' Comedy Festival

A HUGE comedy festival made just for children is returning this year.

The UK Kids' Comedy Festival will run from 4–22 February alongside the Leicester Comedy Festival. It's packed with 68 shows for kids aged up to 14, across 35 venues in Leicester and nearby areas.

Now in its eighth year, the festival features family favourites like Comedy Club 4 Kids and Olaf Falafel, plus workshops where children can write and perform their own jokes. A highlight is Loving Laughing – a showcase of Year 6 pupils competing for the title of 'The Funniest School in Leicestershire'.

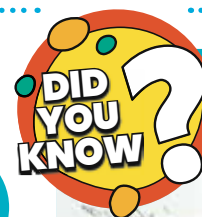
Organisers say the event aims to inspire confidence, creativity and plenty of laughter.

Cosmic Chaos

A BRAND-NEW space exhibition is set to blast off in two UK venues.

Horrible Science: Cosmic Chaos will open at the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester on 13 February, before heading to London in March 2027. Based on the popular *Horrible Science* series, the exhibition will take visitors on a journey around the solar system.

Families will try hands-on experiments and discover weird and wonderful space facts, all while learning science the horrible way.



THE Southbank Centre is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year!



Mrs Armitage on Wheels

Southbank Centre's Imagine festival

A MUCH-LOVED Quentin Blake story is being turned into a live stage show for younger children this year.

Mrs Armitage on Wheels will make its world premiere at Southbank Centre's Imagine festival from 18–21 February. The new musical will feature puppetry and live music inspired by the BBC animated series.

Dr Big Brain from the *Horrible Science* series

NATURAL WORLD

WE'VE got big birthdays, beach cleans and climate action to look forward to this year. Will you be taking part in any of the activities below to help the environment and our wildlife?



TURKEY TO HOST COP31

THE 2026 UN Climate Change Conference (aka COP31) will take place in Turkey.

Australia had been campaigning to host COP31 but dropped its bid and agreed Turkey could hold it instead. The country will still be involved, with Australia's environment minister leading the talks on climate concerns for Pacific island countries.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he was happy with the result, adding that Pacific issues would be "front and centre" of the conference.

COP31 will take place in Antalya, with leaders from across the world in attendance. They'll discuss the climate crisis and rising sea levels, as well as what can be done to help the most vulnerable nations.

World Environment Day

THE Republic of Azerbaijan will host World Environment Day on 5 June.

The day will focus on climate change and how we can all take action to make a difference.

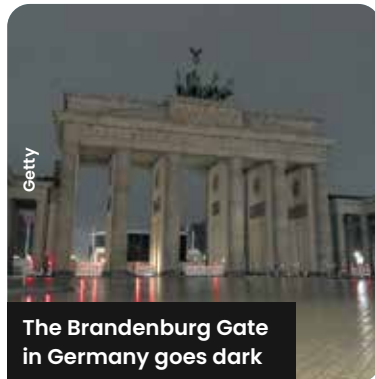


WWF's Earth Hour



EARTH Hour invites people across the world to switch off their lights for one hour to show they care about the planet.

From 8:30pm to 9:30pm on Saturday 28 March, families, communities and famous landmarks will go dark to encourage people to think about the future of Earth and what we can do to protect it.



The Brandenburg Gate in Germany goes dark

Big Garden Birdwatch

THE world's largest garden wildlife survey is back again from 23–25 January.

All you have to do is spend an hour counting the birds in your garden or outdoor space to see how different species are doing.

Over 590,000 people took part in Big Garden Birdwatch 2025, counting a whopping 9.1 million birds! House sparrows took the top spot, but what will it be this year?

To join in, visit rspb.org.uk.



House sparrows are popular garden visitors!

ZSL celebrates 200th birthday!

THE Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is celebrating its 200th anniversary – hurrah!

Sir Stamford Raffles founded ZSL in 1826 and it has since gone on to achieve some huge milestones in history (see below), as well as expanding to include Whipsnade Zoo. A host of events are set to take place to celebrate the momentous occasion.



Guy the gorilla was a famous resident of London Zoo between 1947 and 1978

HAPPY HISTORY

- 1849 – The world's first reptile house opens at ZSL London Zoo.
- 1853 – ZSL London Zoo introduces the first ever public aquarium.
- 1913 – Europe's first Komodo dragons arrive.
- 1931 – Whipsnade Wild Animal Park opened. It was the world's first open zoological park.
- 2015 – ZSL London Zoo opens 'In with the Spiders', Europe's first walk-through spider enclosure.

World Wildlife Day



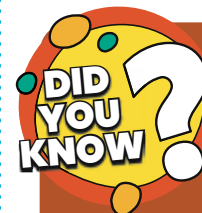
UNITED Nations World Wildlife Day (WWD) is celebrated every year on 3 March to celebrate wild animals and plants.

On this day, people are asked to think about the unique roles that wildlife plays in our lives and on our planet.

Endangered Species Day

ON 15 May, we're all encouraged to learn more about endangered species and discover why wildlife conservation is so important.

Endangered species are animals, plants or insects that could become extinct in the near future if we don't take action now.



IT'S Insect Week between 22–28 June. Organised by the Royal Entomological Society, the week is all about celebrating insects! Did you know that one in three mouthfuls of our food depends on insect pollination?

Great British Beach Clean

EVERY September, thousands of people across the UK head to the coast to take part in the Great British Beach Clean.

The annual event is organised by the Marine Conservation Society and encourages us to clean and record litter on our local beaches.

The findings help with conservation work, encouraging change and also supporting the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC).

To take part, visit mcsuk.org.

World Oceans Day

DID you know that the oceans produce at least 50% (half) of the planet's oxygen?

On 8 June, the United Nations is calling on people across the globe to think about the importance of our oceans and how we can look after them.

Not only are oceans needed for our health, providing the main source of protein for more than a billion people around the world, but they're also an important source of income for many families.



Kew's 30th Orchid Festival

KEW Gardens' much-loved Orchid Festival returns to mark its 30th anniversary.

Between 7 February and 8 March, a spectacular display inspired by Chinese heritage and biodiversity will take over the Princess of Wales Conservatory.

The festival draws inspiration from China's huge landscapes, rich traditions and extraordinary plant life, including the country's many species of orchids.

Highlights include floral displays of dragons, koi carp and pandas, and lots of native Chinese orchids.



Look out for our annual Nature Around Me competition with the National Trust, launching this spring!



The festival marks the start of spring

MORE ZOO NEWS



An African Forest habitat

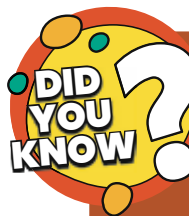
BRISTOL Zoo is building a new habitat called the African Forest, which is set to open this spring.

It will house threatened species including western lowland gorillas, cherry-crowned mangabey monkeys, slender-snouted crocodiles and African grey parrots.

Global Conservation Centre

TWYXCROSS Zoo is investing in a huge new £25 million facility called the Global Conservation Centre.

It'll be used for research, education and conservation work, but there'll also be a brand-new Indonesian-themed land featuring a "world-class" habitat for Bornean orangutans. It's expected to open in late 2026.



ZSL London Zoo and Whipsnade Zoo will carry out their annual weigh-ins throughout August. Every animal is counted, checked and weighed to keep a record of their health. The results are shared around the world to help zookeepers monitor threatened species.



Longleat Safari Park celebrates 60th anniversary

THE famous animal park in Wiltshire is celebrating its 60th birthday, after first opening to the public in 1966.

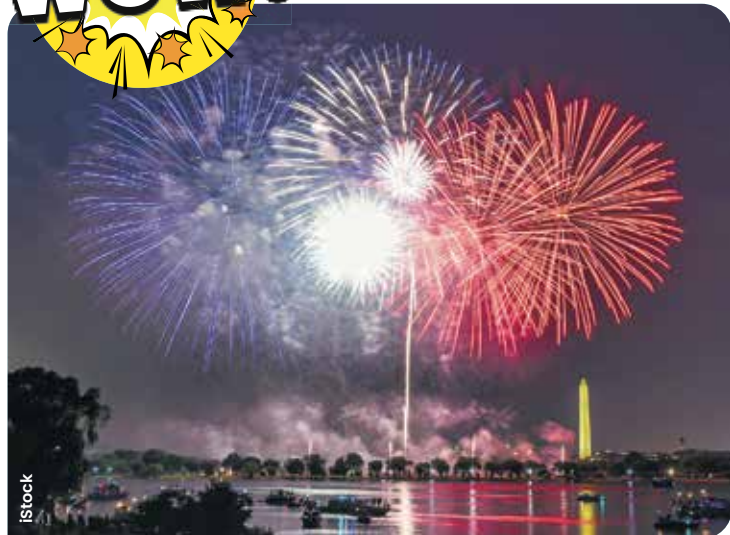
It was the first drive-through safari park to open outside of Africa and is now home to all sorts of wonderful creatures.

WORLD NEWS

THE UK is made up of four countries, but the world is made up of another 191, so we're never stuck for fascinating international stories to bring you throughout the year. Here's just a small selection of things we have to look forward to in 2026, from anniversaries and elections to eclipses and brilliant buildings...



USA: A 250TH BIRTHDAY!



THIS year marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of the USA!

The country will mark the occasion with a year-long series of festivities and celebrations. The plans range from military parades, fireworks displays and new public monuments to the use of special footballs, clothing and on-pitch decorations in the NFL.

The president, Donald Trump, has set up a White House task force to plan a grand celebration for Independence Day on 4 July. Mr Trump also wants the construction of a new landmark in Washington, DC – an arch to rival the famous Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

The birth of a nation

Now the most powerful nation on Earth, the USA was once partly ruled by Britain, which controlled 13 areas known as colonies along the Atlantic coast. These colonies raised an army to fight for independence and in 1775, the American Revolutionary War began.

On 4 July 1776, the United States of America's founding fathers agreed upon a Declaration of Independence, setting out why they wished to split from Britain and what sort of country they wanted their new nation to become (below).



"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

The Declaration of Independence

The USA won the war and Britain recognised its independence by signing the Treaty of Paris on 3 September 1783.

ALSO...



Americans have their say

Americans will vote for who gets to sit in Congress (where the country's laws are made) in the nation's **mid-term elections**. These elections occur halfway through a president's term in office – in this case, Donald Trump's – and give an idea of how well the country thinks the president is performing.



Remembering 9/11

September will mark 25 years since the **9/11 terrorist attacks** against the USA. On 11 September 2001, terrorists hijacked four passenger planes mid-flight. Two of the planes hit the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York (above), causing them to collapse. The attacks killed 2,977 people.



Trump hosts world leaders

In December, Donald Trump will host world leaders at his Trump National Doral Golf Club in Miami for the annual **G20 summit**. The G20 is a group of nations, including the UK, plus the European Union and African Union, which meet each year to discuss the big issues affecting people around the world.

Praying for peace

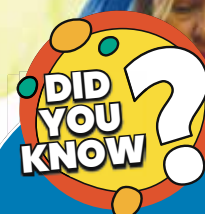
A LOT of the saddest stories in 2025 revolved around the wars being fought in places such as Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

However, there were signs of progress. In October, the USA presented a path to peace that would end the intense fighting between Israel and Hamas, the terrorist group that controls Gaza. The next phase of the proposed peace plan would see Hamas giving up their weapons, Israel's forces gradually pulling back from Gaza, and

a start to the rebuilding of the territory.

The USA is also working to bring an end to the fighting between Russia and Ukraine, but negotiations are difficult. Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, and thinks it should get to keep some of the land that it's taken – something Ukraine insists it won't allow.

Wars bring pain and suffering to many innocent people who are caught up in them, including millions of children. It's our hope that in 2026, we can bring you news of the end of some, if not all, of these wars.



RUSSIA now controls around one-fifth of Ukraine's territory, mainly in the east and south of the country, including big cities like Donetsk and Mariupol.

Ukraine and Russia have been fighting for nearly four years





Australia says that social media does children more harm than good

Australia: Which countries will copy its social media ban?

ON 9 December, the world's first total social media ban for children under 16 began in Australia.

The law, brought in to combat online addiction and cyberbullying, requires platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, X and Facebook to deactivate children's accounts in Australia, or face massive fines.

Polls show that two-thirds of voters in Australia support the ban, but some children think the ban is insulting and that it cuts them off from their friends, some of whom live far away.

This year could bring similar bans in other countries, including Malaysia (also for under-16s) and Denmark (for under-15s).

India: World's largest population prepares for first all-digital census

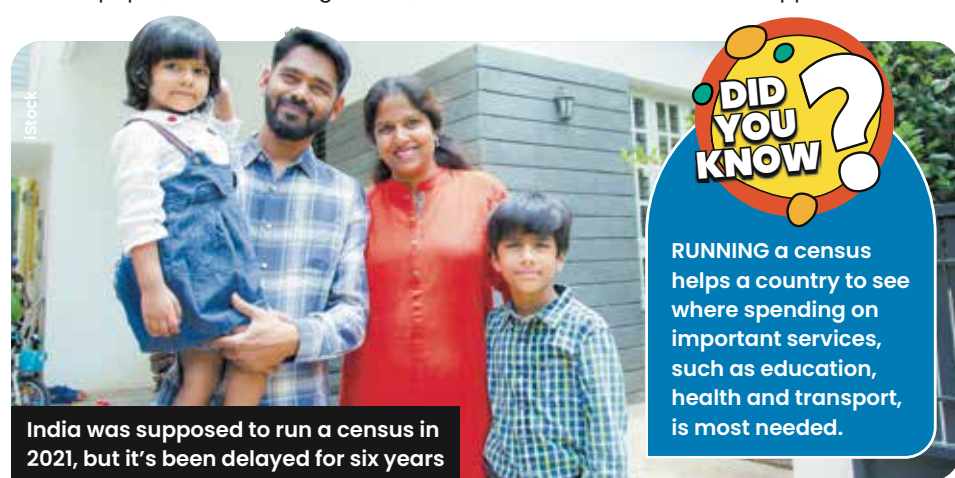
INDIA'S next census will be fully digital.

A census is an official count of a country's population. India is believed to have the world's largest population, at nearly 1.47 billion people. However, counting them all is a huge challenge.

The government hopes that running its census on an app for the first time, rather than on paper, will make things faster,

easier and cheaper. However, there are concerns that internet connection in remote parts of the country might not be good enough, and some people might struggle to use the technology.

In 2026, the first phase of the census begins – from April to September, every home in the country will be mapped. The actual headcount will happen in 2027.



India was supposed to run a census in 2021, but it's been delayed for six years

DID YOU KNOW?

RUNNING a census helps a country to see where spending on important services, such as education, health and transport, is most needed.



Getty

Spain: Sagrada Família will be finished at last!

ITS first stone was laid 143 long years ago, but this year, Barcelona's Sagrada Família is set to be completed.

The church's 172.5-metre high central tower will be finished this summer to mark 100 years since the death of its architect, Antoni Gaudí. Then, it's just the small matter of decorating the indoors (which could stretch into 2032!).



France: Bayeux Tapestry travels to England

FRANCE'S historic Bayeux Tapestry is coming to England for the first time since it was created over 900 years ago.

The 68.3m-long (224ft) artwork depicts the Norman invasion of Britain, including the Battle of Hastings. It's thought to have been created in Kent in around 1070 AD.

The museum that displays it in Normandy is shut for renovations until October 2027, and this autumn, it's being loaned to the British Museum for a year-long exhibition.

Europe's first total eclipse of the century!



iStock

If you get to witness the eclipse, it's important to protect your eyes

EUROPE will get its first total solar eclipse in 27 years on 12 August 2026.

A total eclipse is when the moon completely blocks our view of the sun, causing the sky to go dark for a few minutes as it casts its shadow over the world. Mexico, the USA and Canada had a total eclipse in 2024, but the last time one happened in Europe was on 11 August 1999.

Starting in Greenland, it'll carry on southeast across the Atlantic Ocean. It'll skim Iceland, narrowly missing the UK before sweeping across northern Spain, and carry on towards Egypt. Even for someone directly in the path of the eclipse, it'll only last for just over two minutes.



iStock

The Nile runs through South Sudan's capital city, Juba

South Sudan: Youngest country's very first election

SOUTH Sudan, the world's youngest country, is due to hold its first ever general election in December.

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011, but in 2013, a violent and deadly civil war broke out between those loyal to its president, Salva Kiir, and his vice-president and rival, Riek Machar. The war ended in 2018, but the election has been repeatedly delayed.

The UN has called these past delays "regrettable".

PLUS...



iStock

The CN Tower is the tallest structure in Canada



Bulgaria changes its official currency from the lev to the euro on 1 January.



Canada will celebrate 50 years since the opening of Toronto's CN Tower.



China will host US President Donald Trump for a state visit in April.



Abu Dhabi will open the world's largest Guggenheim art museum this year.

CRAZY BUT TRUE



NOTHING beats a bonkers and brilliant bash to make you smile, and there are stacks of silly shenanigans to come in 2026! We'll be covering plenty of them on our regular Crazy But True page each week, but here's a sneaky snapshot of what you can expect.

DARING DAIRY DASH!

THE world's greatest race returns in May!

People from far and wide will flock to Cooper's Hill near Gloucester to watch brave competitors chase after a wheel of Double Gloucester cheese. The cheese is given a short head start and can reach up to 70mph (113km/h)!

Most contestants end up losing their footing and rolling down the 200-yard (183m) hill because it's so steep.

The race takes place on Monday 25 May.



Ava was a winner in 2025!

MORE FOOD FIGHTS!

La Tomatina

THE town of Buñol in Spain is famous for its epic food fight festival, La Tomatina.

On 26 August, thousands of people will join in the fun, which sees more than 100 tonnes of over-ripe tomatoes thrown in the streets. Prepare to be covered!



Battle of the Oranges

THE people of Ivrea in northern Italy will take part in a huge and very sweet three-day food fight dubbed the Battle of the Oranges, from 15–17 February.

People pelt each other with 900 tonnes of oranges in a playful re-enactment of a rebellion from around 1200 that saved Ivrea from an evil dictator.



Roadkill Cook-Off

EACH September, Americans from across the country travel to Marlinton, a town in West Virginia, for the Roadkill Cook-Off.

As part of the Autumn Harvest Festival, chefs compete to serve up the most delicious meal made from the sort of animals typically hit and killed by traffic. Think fried deer wontons, squirrel gravy, and brain sauce!

They're maybe not the sort of thing you'd like to see in your school canteen any time soon. However, in certain US states – West Virginia included – scooping up roadkill and eating it is completely legal!

It takes place on 26 September.



World Custard Pie Championships



READY, set, splat!

On 13 June, teams from around the world will head to the charming village of Coxheath in Kent to fling pies at each other. Who will be crowned the custard champs?

World Peashooting Championship

SHARPSHOOTERS will gather in the village of Witcham in Cambridgeshire for the 53rd edition of the World Peashooting Championship.

On 11 July, entrants will blow dried peas through a straw or tube at a target and aim for glory!

World Gravy Wrestling Championships

WELCOME to a wild and wacky wrestling competition in a pool full of Lancashire gravy!

On 31 August, competitors will fight for the title. Extra points are awarded for fancy dress and big laughs, and the event raises loads for charities.

WEIRD WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS!**AIR GUITAR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Contestants take to the stage with their invisible instruments, hoping to win over the judges.

- **Date:** 26–29 August
- **Location:** Oulu, Finland

**WORLD BOG SNORKELLING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Competitors take the plunge to snorkel a length of the Waen Rhydd peat bog as quickly as they can.

- **Date:** 30 August
- **Location:** Llanwrtyd Wells, Wales

**LUMBERJACK WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Chop, chop! This tree-mendous contest features more than 20 events, including log-rolling and speed-climbing.

- **Date:** 16–18 July
- **Location:** Wisconsin, USA

**WORLD CONKER CHAMPIONSHIPS**

If you're a crack hand at conker swinging, this contest, held since 1965, is open to kids and adults.

- **Date:** 11 October
- **Location:** Southwick, England

**WORLD SNAIL RACING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Ready, steady, slow! People race their shelled creatures while the snail master keeps the course well-watered.

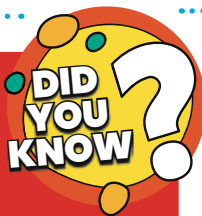
- **Date:** 18 July
- **Location:** Congham, England

**WORLD STONE SKIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Skimmers showcase their skills while raising money for local charities. The championships began in 1983.

- **Date:** 5 September
- **Location:** Easdale Island, Inner Hebrides

GUINNESS World Records Day will take place in November, with hundreds of records being attempted across the world. Maybe you could even try to break one yourself? Last year, celebs including Fury from *Gladiators* (below) scaled The O₂ arena in London to smash a whole bunch of records!

**Splash hits!**

HAVE you ever been to a music concert? Bet you haven't been to an underwater one!

This summer, on 10–11 July, the Lower Keys Underwater Music Festival is being held in Florida for the 42nd time.

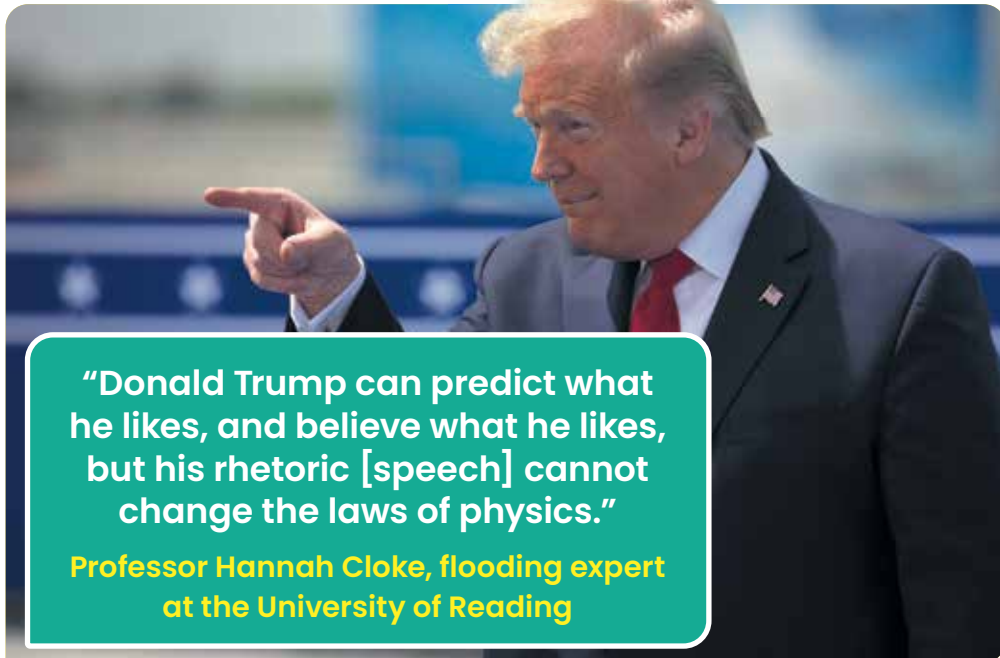
It's an underwater concert in Looe Key Reef, a marine sanctuary, for divers and snorkellers to raise awareness for coral reef protection and sustainable diving.

Their instruments are designed by a local artist, and they don't actually play – instead, the divers pretend, while a playlist of sea-themed tunes pumps out from underwater speakers and an audience watches along.

Important messages about coral reef conservation are played in between tunes like *Yellow Submarine* by The Beatles and *Under The Sea* from *The Little Mermaid*.

SCIENCE

AMERICA always features heavily in the world of science, due to its impressive history of research, technological breakthroughs and space exploration. But science and truth have been under attack since Donald Trump became president again, so this year could bring more bad news for people's health and the fight against climate change. But 2026 should also feature an exciting moon mission and an impressive first for a 49-year-old spacecraft.



"Donald Trump can predict what he likes, and believe what he likes, but his rhetoric [speech] cannot change the laws of physics."

Professor Hannah Cloke, flooding expert at the University of Reading



A car that was mangled during the deadly floods that hit Texas in July last year, killing more than 130 people. Climate change is expected to make floods more common and more severe

SADLY, one of the main things to look out for this year is the continuing assault on science from Donald Trump and the US government.

The US president doesn't try to hide his hatred of electric vehicles, wind turbines and other signs of progress in the move towards clean transport and energy.

As soon as Mr Trump was back in the White House in January 2025, he made lots of decisions that halted spending on climate action, and withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement, the key global treaty that aims to tackle climate change.

"These actions will only worsen the everyday challenges Americans are facing, from high energy bills and food prices to deadly floods and wildfires," the World Resources Institute said, adding that "the US will miss out on green jobs and the exploding clean energy economy".

Science under pressure

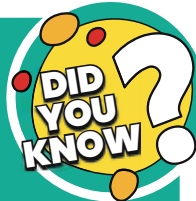
Things didn't get any better as the year went on, and in April nearly 2,000 senior scientists in the US signed a letter asking Mr Trump to end his "wholesale assault on US science". The letter accused the government of "gutting funding for research, firing thousands of scientists, removing public access to scientific data, and pressuring researchers to alter or abandon their work" if it didn't fit with the government's beliefs. There are early signs that US scientists are leaving the country to carry on their research elsewhere.

Why should we care?

But that's all happening in America, so it doesn't affect us, right? Wrong. The US has huge influence in the world,

IN an interview with GB News in November 2025, Donald Trump called climate change a "hoax" and "nonsense". He went on to claim that "if you go around China, you see almost no wind farms. So they make the windmills and they sell it to the suckers."

The truth is that China has more wind farms than any other country, and the wind power generated in China is nearly equal to the total generated in the rest of the world put together.



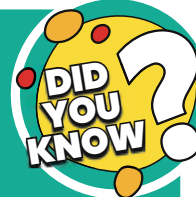
so if it decides that climate action isn't a priority, other countries could follow. US health officials are also waging a war on vaccines that keep people safe from diseases, which is helping anti-vaccine ideas to spread across the world. Many countries were already seeing a rise in deaths from measles and other diseases due to people skipping vaccinations, and the US has also slashed funding for global health programmes and research into new diseases and treatments.

So what's next?

It seems unlikely that Mr Trump's government will change course, but there is plenty of resistance within the US. States and cities there have a lot more power than they do in places like the UK, and even states that voted for Mr Trump's Republican Party are turning to clean energy. Solar and wind power are already cheaper than fossil fuels in many parts of the world, and people can see that cleaning up their cities means that the air is nicer to breathe and that their families can be healthier.



IN August, the US cancelled \$679m (£508m) in funding for 12 offshore wind projects in the US. The US Transportation Secretary Sean P Duffy said they were "fantasy wind projects that cost much and offer little". However, the United Nations says that more than nine out of ten clean energy projects are cheaper than fossil fuel alternatives, create more jobs and are much healthier because they don't create the same harmful pollution.



This report is from the Science Museum in London

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

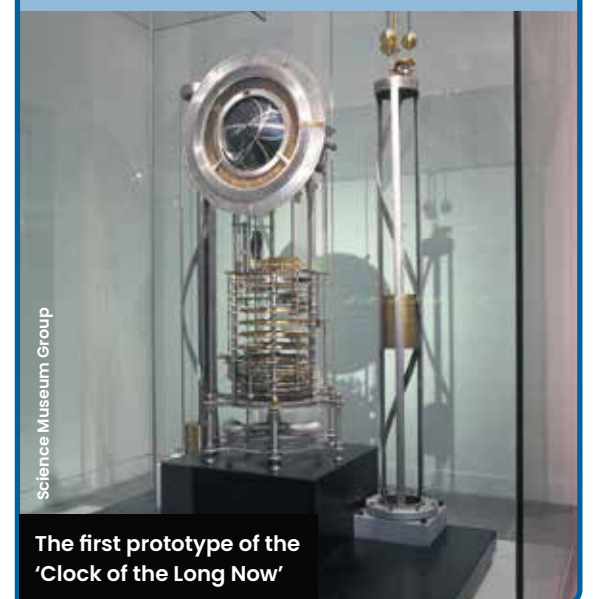
AS we begin a new year, one object at the Science Museum makes us think not just about the year ahead, but 10,000 years ahead!

'The Clock of the Long Now' is a special prototype [first version] designed to tell time for thousands of years, which is longer than most civilisations have even existed.

This clock has already been ticking for 26 years, and unlike ordinary clocks, this one shows not just the time, but also tracks the positions of the sun, moon and stars.

Engineers built this model to encourage us all to think about the future, so as we look forward to 2026, why not imagine what the world might look like in 12,026?

Happy New Year from the Science Museum!



The first prototype of the 'Clock of the Long Now'

MOON RUN!

ARTEMIS II
FOR ALL HUMANITY

NASA

THIS year should finally be the year that NASA's Artemis II mission sees four astronauts whizz around the moon and back for the first time since the 1970s.

Loyal *First News* readers might be getting a feeling of *déjà vu* all over again, as this is the third time that we've had Artemis II in our Year Ahead issue. But this time (fingers crossed) it looks like the mission is set to go ahead "no later than April 2026", but possibly February.

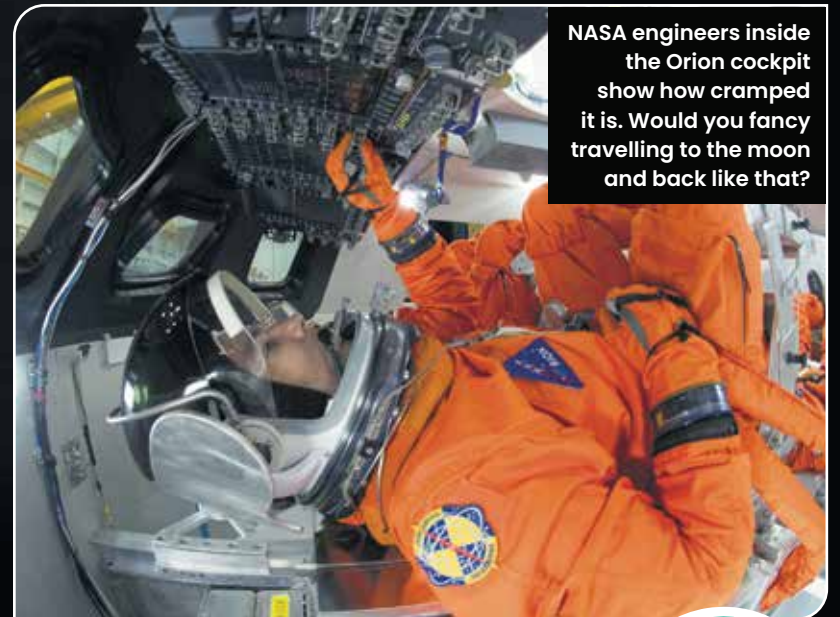
NASA astronauts Christina Koch, Victor Glover and Reid Wiseman, along with Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen, are the four

who've been chosen for the ten-day mission. It's the first ever crewed mission on the new Orion spacecraft, and the aim is to check that everything works properly, so that Orion can be used for crewed moon landings and for the first ever crewed trip to Mars.

If everything does go as planned, the next stage will be the Artemis III mission, which is due to lift off in mid-2027 and will take astronauts back to the surface of the moon for the first time in 55 years. But Artemis III will land at the moon's south pole, which no human being has ever explored before.



DÉJÀ VU – an odd feeling that you've experienced the exact same situation before. It's a French saying that means 'already seen'. Scientists think that it's caused by a failure in communication between the parts of your brain that are responsible for memories (the temporal lobe) and taking in new information (the hippocampus). It can be caused by some health conditions too, such as epilepsy, migraines, anxiety or a severe lack of sleep.



NASA engineers inside the Orion cockpit show how cramped it is. Would you fancy travelling to the moon and back like that?

OVER the course of six crewed moon landings between 1969 and 1972, 12 male American astronauts set foot on the moon. Nobody has been back since then, and no woman or non-American has ever walked on the moon.



One light-day away!

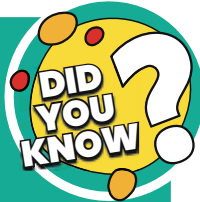
NASA's twin Voyager spacecraft have already set plenty of records between them, but round about 15 November this year, Voyager 1 is set to pass another historical milestone.

That's the date when the craft is likely to be one full light-day away from Earth, which is the distance that light travels in a day. That's an epic 25.9 billion kilometres (16 billion miles), which is the same as travelling around Earth's equator 646,288 times!

No other man-made object has ever travelled so far away from our planet, and it's a huge credit to NASA's engineers that something

they built with 1970s technology is still working after spending nearly 50 years in space.

THE Voyager probes were both launched in 1977, so some of the NASA scientists who work with them now are so young that even their parents weren't born when the Voyagers launched into space!



NASA/JPL-Caltech

An illustration of Voyager 1 in space



Elon Musk wants to take humans to Mars

Musk's Mars mission

ELON Musk is still holding on to hopes of launching SpaceX's first Mars mission in 2026.

Back in May, Musk said that there's "a 50/50 chance" that his company could still launch its first Starship spacecraft to Mars in November or December this year.

In the past year, several Starship test launches were unsuccessful, which led experts to say that the planned mission is likely not happening any time soon. But recent successful launches have raised hopes for both SpaceX and NASA, which needs the Starship spacecraft for its crewed moon landings.

Whether the first mission to Mars happens this year or later, the flight will carry Optimus, the human-looking Tesla robot, and collect data for future flights. Shortly after, Musk wants to send "hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people to Mars".

The SpaceX website is still counting down the months to the mission's planned launch, but Musk does have a habit of being overambitious about how soon things can happen, so we'll have to wait and see whether the mission goes ahead this year.



MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Do you know what media literacy is? Get ahead!



BEING INFORMED

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- This is about **knowing where information comes from and how to tell if it's true.**
- News, videos, posts and stories are everywhere... but not all of them can be trusted.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- If you can tell fact from fake, you'll always be one step ahead!

TRY THIS!

Pick a news story from *First News*. Now check if you can find it on another site (for example, BBC Newsround). What's the same? What's different?



WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?

Liz Moore, Chief Executive of the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT), said:

"Being able to understand news, social media and information is really important for us all in a democracy. Media and information literacy is a key part of citizenship because it helps you think critically, understand different viewpoints and make informed decisions. These skills and knowledge matter when young people discuss issues that affect them and take action to help others. With the plans to enable 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in the next election, they are vital for preparing every young person to take part confidently in democratic life."



BEING EMPOWERED

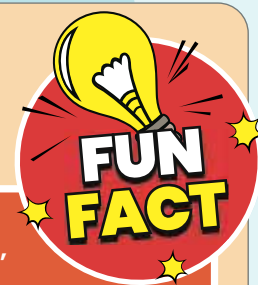
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- This is about **using information to make good choices** and have your say.
- You don't just have to watch and listen – you can create and share too!

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

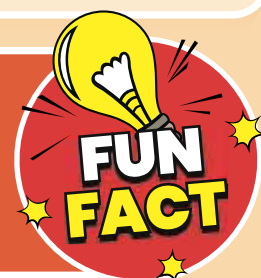
- Your voice is powerful, and what you share online can change how people think and feel.

THE term 'media literacy' covers everything from social media and memes to AI-generated content and fake news.



CHOOSE a favourite topic (like football, pets or space). Collect three facts and make up one dodgy claim. Can your friends or family guess which one doesn't pass the reliability test?

YOU'RE practising media literacy every day, often without even knowing it! Seen a sponsored ad on socials or a misleading headline in the news? By questioning them, you're using media literacy skills!



Discover more

INFORMATION LITERACY

**First
News**

Lead of the game with our *First News* lowdown!



BEING HEALTHY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

● This is about finding good, safe information that helps you look after your body and mind.

● Understanding what works for your own health and wellbeing is an important part of making choices that are right for you.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

● With the right health and fitness information, you can take control of your own wellbeing.



BEING SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

● This is about thinking of others when you're sharing information.

● The things we share or say can have a big impact on people, but we can choose to make sure it's positive.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

● Kindness and fairness can help make the world a better place for everyone.



BEING CONNECTED

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

● This is about understanding how the online world links us all together.

● Algorithms shape what you see and who sees you – it's easy to get stuck in a cycle!

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

● When you know how the connections work, you can make smarter choices.



TRY THIS!

Imagine an online group made just for children your age. Draw or describe what rules, features or behaviours would make it feel safe and positive.



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?

Hermione, a Year 9 student from Oxford High School GDST, said:



"Media literacy is incredibly important, especially for students like us. Learning about misinformation has really opened our eyes; we've come to understand that not everything online is trustworthy. Now, when we're doing homework or research, we know how to find reliable sources and present accurate information. It's something that's been embedded in our lessons from Year 7 onwards, which is great because that's when we're most impressionable. My school does a fantastic job of raising awareness and making sure we're equipped to navigate the digital world safely and knowledgeably."

ENTERTAINMENT

IT'S set to be another mega year in the world of showbiz, with some huge movie releases, new TV shows and theatre tours to entertain us all. Plus, there are some awesome new experiences coming to the UK!

MOVIES



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DID YOU KNOW?

THE Mundo Pixar Experience is coming to London in February! The world's largest immersive Pixar exhibition invites fans to step inside some of their favourite movies!

TOY STORY 5

Andy, Buzz and the gang are back for their fifth big-screen adventure! This time around the toys face a new threat: tech! That's because Bonnie has found something exciting to play with: a tablet called Lilypad. Can the toys win back her affection? We'll find out in June when the movie lands!

THE MAGIC FARAWAY TREE

Based on the book series by Enid Blyton, this story sees a modern family move to the countryside, where the children discover a magical tree! It transports them to fantastical lands where they meet all sorts of wacky and wonderful creatures. Look out for the superstar cast, which includes Nicola Coughlan, Andrew Garfield and Jennifer Saunders! It hits cinemas in March.

POPCORN AT THE READY!

GOAT

You're never too small to dream big! A small goat gets a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join the pros and play the high-intensity game of roball. He's up against some of the fastest, fiercest animals in the world! Check out how he gets on in February.

HOPPERS

An animal lover called Mabel uses technology to place her consciousness into a lifelike robotic beaver! It enables her to uncover mysteries within the animal world beyond anything she could have imagined. See what she discovers in March.

MOANA

The hit Disney movie is being given the live-action treatment, with Catherine Laga'aia taking centre stage as Moana. We're also super excited to see Dwayne Johnson return as Maui. It'll arrive in July.



THE CAT IN THE HAT

The famous Dr Seuss character is back in a magical new adventure! Actor Bill Hader voices the Cat in the Hat who helps a mischievous pair of siblings to fit into their new town. Prepare for even more craziness and colourful scenery in this action-packed story, which is due to arrive in February.

THE SUPER MARIO GALAXY MOVIE

Hands up if you're excited for this super sequel in April?! Our favourite brothers are back, and this time they're being faced with Wario and Bowser Jr's evil alliance! Will Mario and his friends be able to stop the pair's plans for world domination?



© Nintendo and Universal Studios.
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TV CROOKHAVEN

This drama based on the hit global book series by JJ Arcaño promises drama aplenty! Set in a secret school for crooks, it follows a group of students as they are taught to perfect their skills to bring balance, justice and order to the outside world. The gang are also confronted by a terrifying enemy – The Nameless! It will land on BBC iPlayer early this year.

OMG!



© Kids & Family/
BBC Studios and
Christopher Barr

GLADIATORS

Contenders, ready?! Gladiators, ready?! Series three of the hit competition is set to kick off, with even more action in store for fans! Bradley and Barney Walsh are back on hosting duties as some of our favourite Gladiators return to the arena ready to show off their strength, speed and skill. There'll also be some brand-new events to get stuck into. Bring it on!



CAMP ROCK 3

The Jonas Brothers star as boy band Connect 3, who return to Camp Rock looking for a new star to support them on their reunion tour. This latest film in the hugely popular series is coming to Disney+ and the Disney Channel in the summer.

THE *Gladiators Experience* is arriving at the NEC in Birmingham in May. Aspiring contenders can step into the arena to test their own skills in some of their favourite *Gladiators* events!

DID YOU KNOW?



DID YOU KNOW?

THE UK's largest music awards show – the BRIT Awards – is taking place on 28 February 2026 at Co-op Live in Manchester. It's the first time the show has been held outside London!

Getty

Lewis Capaldi

MUSIC

LEWIS CAPALDI ON TOUR

Lewis kicked off his tour in Australia in December but he's coming to the UK and Ireland this year – hurrah! He'll be stopping off in Exeter, Cardiff, Leeds, Newcastle, London, Liverpool, Manchester and Belfast, among other places. Get ready to sing your heart out!

ARIANA GRANDE ON TOUR

The pop princess is officially back! Ariana is taking to the stage with her Eternal Sunshine Tour, performing across North America from 6 June to 6 August, before coming to London's O₂ for ten shows from 15 August to 1 September. These will be the first shows that she's done in seven years!

EUROVISION SONG CONTEST

Vienna in Austria is hosting the 70th Eurovision Song Contest. A whole week of activities will take place around the event in May, with acts from around the world taking part. But who'll be representing the UK?

THEATRE

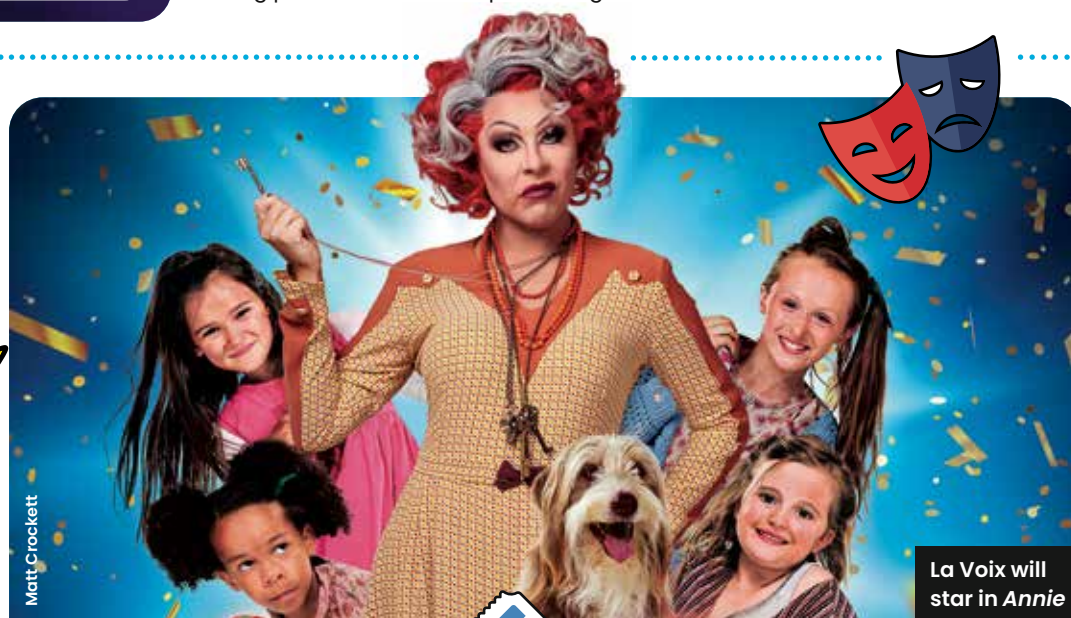


Photo by Sebastian Nevols, © 20th Century Studios

Oliver Tompsett and Samantha Barks star

THE GREATEST SHOWMAN

A brand-new stage adaptation of *The Greatest Showman*, based on the 2017 smash-hit film, is touching down in Bristol in March. It tells the story of PT Barnum, who creates a spectacle of a show that dazzles the world. You'll hear all the classic movie tunes including *A Million Dreams*, *Never Enough* and *This Is Me*, together with some exciting new songs.



La Voix will star in *Annie*

STRICTLY COME DANCING TOUR

The *Strictly* magic continues with this dazzling live tour! Get your scorecards ready and put your dancing shoes on, as some of our favourite 2025 contestants head back to the dancefloor. Among those signed up are Harry Aikines-Aryeetey (Nitro), La Voix, Ellie Goldstein and Vicky Pattison. Legends Shirley Ballas, Anton Du Beke and Craig Revel Horwood are also joining in the fun!

ANNIE

Strictly star La Voix will also feature as Miss Hannigan (above) in the UK and Ireland tour of the musical *Annie*. The show is all about a brave young girl who is forced to live a life of misery at Miss Hannigan's orphanage. Her luck soon changes though, when she's chosen to spend a fairy-tale Christmas with famous billionaire Oliver Warbucks.

DOG MAN The Musical

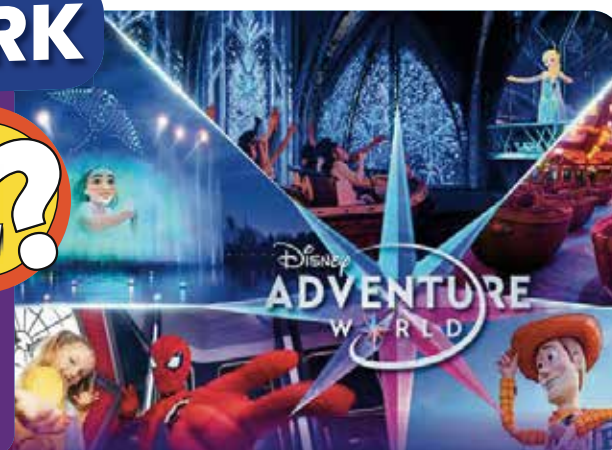
DOG MAN: THE MUSICAL

The hit book series has been turned into a stage show, and it's having its debut European run at the Southbank Centre in London from 30 July to 16 August 2026! With the head of a dog and the body of a policeman, Dog Man loves to fight crime! But can he save the city from Flippy the cyborg fish and his army of Beastly Buildings, and can he catch Petey, the world's most evil cat?

THEME PARK

THE World of Frozen at Disneyland Paris is opening on 29 March. Visitors can enjoy a new Frozen Ever After ride, have a meal in the Nordic Crowns Tavern and shop in Arendelle Boutique. There are lots of other experiences arriving at Disney Adventure World, too!

DID YOU KNOW?

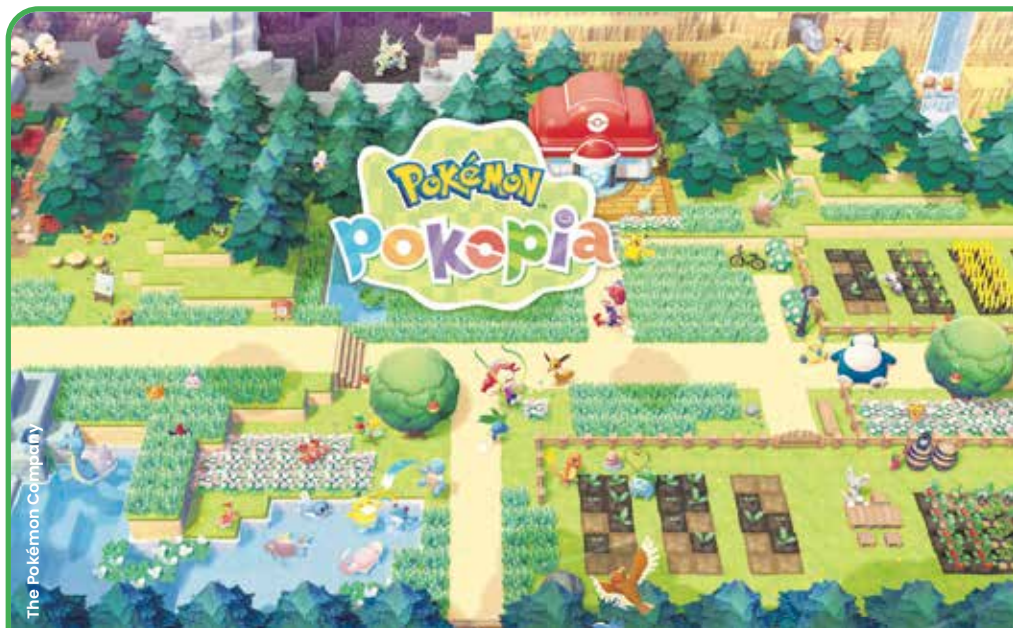




GAME ZONE



FROM brand-new adventures to fresh takes on famous favourites, here's what gamers can look forward to in 2026.



Pokémon's 30th anniversary



THIS year marks the 30th anniversary of the original Pokémon Red and Green games, so let's celebrate in style!

Pokémon has lots of events planned, both online and all over the world, including:

- The opening of a permanent **theme park in Japan**. Set to open on 5 February, PokéPark Kanto at Tokyo's Yomiuriland will invite budding trainers to explore, trade and battle like never before.
- A **pop-up at London's Natural History Museum**. Pikachu and friends will enter the world of dinosaurs from 26 January to 22 March, with exclusive products on offer in the shop to mark the collab.
- A **new game!** In *Pokémon Pokopia*, play as a Ditto to shape an empty world into a thriving home for a variety of Pokémon. It comes to the Nintendo Switch 2 on 5 March.
- A first ever **collab with LEGO**. We don't know much, other than something exciting is coming in 2026. Might we be getting some new sets? Only time will tell!

LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight



LEGO is releasing a new game celebrating everything Batman.

LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight will take players on a story inspired by Batman's long history across films, TV shows and comics.

Players begin the game with Bruce Wayne's early training before exploring Gotham City, solving puzzles, fighting crime and battling famous villains.

Help is at hand from allies such as Robin, Batgirl and Catwoman, and players can also drive a range of iconic Batmobiles.

It will land on PS5, Xbox X|S, Nintendo Switch 2 and PC, with no release date announced yet.



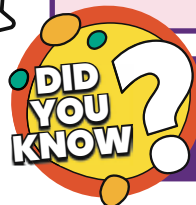
Discover Batman's journey

Star Wars: Galactic Racer

A HIGH-STAKES thrilling racing experience is coming to the Star Wars universe in 2026, set in the lawless Outer Rim after the Empire's fall.

With no Force powers in play, victory depends on skill, strategy and nerve. Players enter an underground Galactic League, racing customisable repulsorcraft across ever-changing circuits, risking everything to climb the ranks and earn glory.

Star Wars: Galactic Racer is coming to PS5, Xbox X|S and PC, with the release date yet to be announced.



THE 2026 BAFTA Games Awards take place on 17 April. The awards represent the best games of 2025, with 64 titles in with a chance of winning big.

Formula E races into Roblox

GET ready to race into the future in 2026 with *Formula E: Electric Lap* on Roblox.

Players can race electric cars inspired by real teams, on circuits based in the likes of London, Tokyo and Miami.

Players must manage energy carefully during races, reflecting how Formula E works in real life.

Developers say new tracks, features and live in-game events linked to real race weekends will be added across 2026.



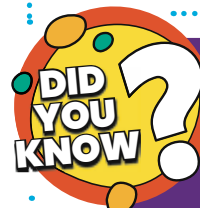
NOW ON
ROBLOX

Danger Mouse

A NEW *Danger Mouse* videogame is coming in 2026.

The side-scrolling action adventure sees the world's greatest secret agent and his sidekick Penfold reliving classic missions across 15 levels. Players can team up in two-player co-op and take control of iconic vehicles and gadgets.

The game celebrates the 45th anniversary of the beloved British series and will launch on consoles and PC in 2026.



MCM London Comic Con returns this year from 22–24 May. The convention features around 500 exhibitors of comics, videogames, sci-fi and anime.

IS IT **FAKE** OR **FACT**?

CAN you tell if a story is the real deal or made up? Every week, we'll be challenging you to see if you can sniff out the news from the nonsense! See what you think of this story, then turn the page upside down to see if you were right.

JRR TOLKIEN CREATED OWN LANGUAGES!

JRR Tolkien, the author behind *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* book series, created his own languages; two of them are called Quenya and Sindarin. He was a philologist, which means he was an expert in languages. This unusual fact is one of many that fans will celebrate on JRR Tolkien Day on 3 January.



Check out more on spotting fake news at:

• first.news/fakeorfact • first.news/spotfakenews

Or get yourself a free copy of our updated 28-page special edition, all about making sense of the news, how to spot bias, fake news and much more! Go to first.news/fake-news



JRR Tolkien was a very clever man, who was also a professor at the University of Oxford. He loved learning about languages and their history, and particularly enjoyed making up his own for his stories.

IN NEXT WEEK'S **ISSUE!**



Do you
want to write for

FirstNews?

Tell us about your
resolutions for 2026!



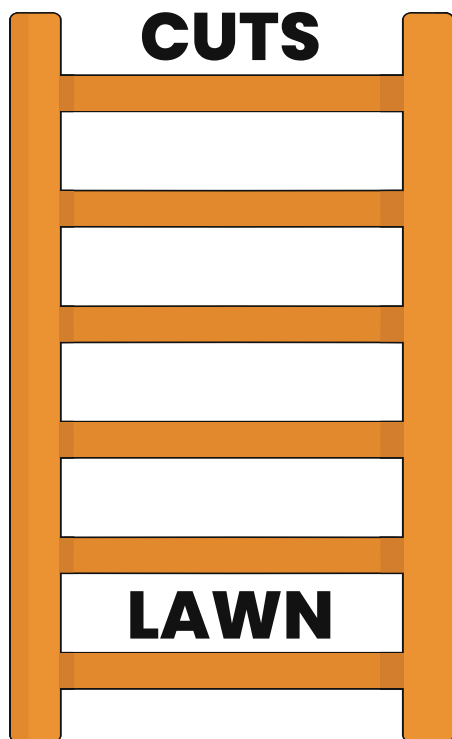
Send us your reports at yournews@firstnews.co.uk

or see our list of opportunities at first.news/junior-journalists



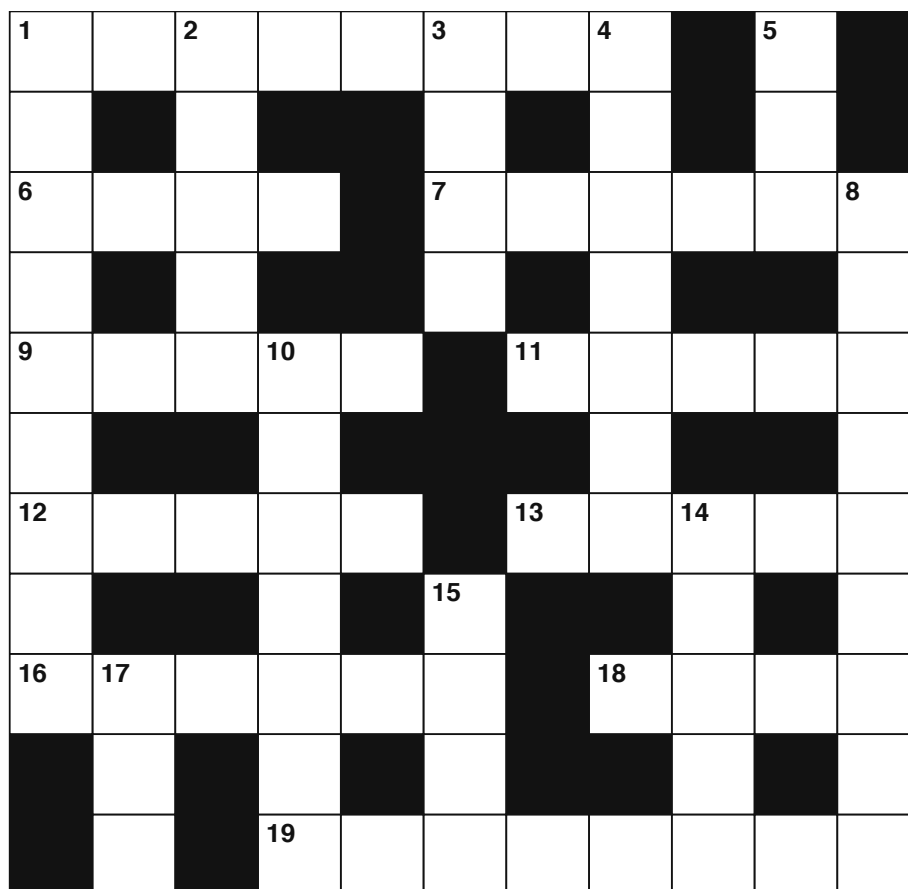
Word ladder

SEE if you can get from the top of the ladder to the bottom by changing one letter at a time to make a new word.



CROSSWORD

CAN you solve our crossword puzzle using the clues below?



ACROSS

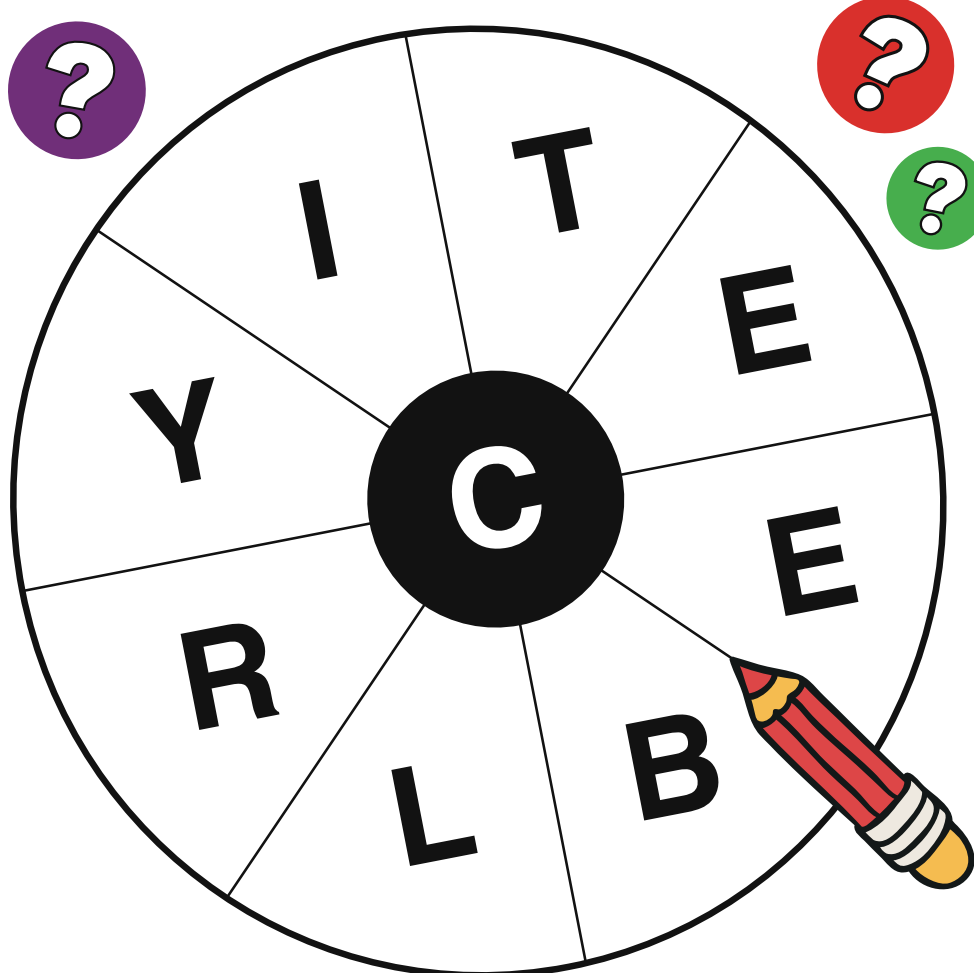
- 1) In spite of the fact that (8)
- 6) Got older (4)
- 7) Talk about other people (6)
- 9) The sum of several numbers (5)
- 11) Set of 12 (5)
- 12) What an active volcano might do (5)
- 13) Dog-like nocturnal African mammal (5)
- 16) Where the King sits on formal occasions (6)
- 18) Finish (4)
- 19) Guess (8)

DOWN

- 1) A flat (9)
- 2) Trick or _____ : Halloween custom (5)
- 3) A desire or impulse (4)
- 4) The study of the past (7)
- 5) Move on snow runners (3)
- 8) Large fruit (9)
- 10) Officially agree to (7)
- 14) Additional (5)
- 15) Greatest (4)
- 17) Something worn on the head (3)

Word wheel

SEE how many words of three or more letters you can make, using the middle letter in each one. And can you find the word that uses all the letters?



Sudoku

CAN you complete our sudoku puzzle, filling in the numbers one to nine?

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



ENJOYING THE PUZZLES?

See the *First News* app for more fun, quizzes and games! This QR code should be scanned by a responsible adult.



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

CAN you find the ten changes we've made to this party scene?



Wordsearch



THESE are all things you'd find at a party. Can you spot them in the wordsearch? Tick them off as you go!



- ☐ Balloons
- ☐ Drinks
- ☐ Cake
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Party bags
- ☐ Games
- ☐ Dancing
- ☐ Buffet
- ☐ Photos
- ☐ Presents



y i p b w z u o v t r y l n f q z o h a w i k i b g g
 c q e s o b t o h v m b v v z a v l a x b x i n u i b
 g a d v j r o j b z z q j p y c a b o t a h u t f j k
 f m t v o t s t j k i t b n f z e b s i l v m q f c i
 z a m p r e s e n t s g q e h e i r z f l c w z e d y
 n n y d z l e a b m o l a e k z r i i i o s d q t u x
 t e h l v d z e g s o x q m c t p o v a o w k p n i t
 k h e k c d x c e o t u e h e e h f g c n u a a s c v
 k w v s x k v j d x x v m a a s o u l g s k a r i k f
 b m v w o l u e j u u z l r g l t u j h h u k t x l l
 f i b y v u m d a e t y o j i x o i m o i c k y x z l
 i d u t l e d a n c i n g x t p s v a u d t e b p b b
 u e n q f d x u h t o i c e c c m f a y n m u a b d c
 n b j g u o c j v p n c u u r a q p z m l n o g u a x
 o b v q o c d t d h i a j q j w k d r i n k s s p x h
 r j d m x a h k m u s i c m e n j e d l a h i f w h d

COMPETITIONS: To enter, email us at win@firstnews.co.uk putting 'competition name' (e.g. Holiday), in the subject box or visit firstnews.comps. First News competitions are only open to those aged 15 and under and residents of the UK & Republic of Ireland, except employees of First News, First Group Enterprises Ltd, Reach plc and any associated companies and their families. Winners will be selected at random from all those with the correct answer. No purchase necessary. First News will not enter into any correspondence. All winners will be notified accordingly. If you are a winner, your details will be securely passed on to the person who is providing the prize so they can post it out to you. If you are contacted but don't reply within 28 days, we may offer the prize to another entrant. No cash alternative for any prizes will be offered. The winner may be required to partake in media activity relating to the competition. Your personal data will be held for a maximum of 12 months after the competition and then destroyed. It will not be used for any other purpose unless you have given us permission. If you would like your data deleted before this, please do get in touch with us. You have the right to complain to the ICO if you believe there is a problem with the way your data has been handled.



IT'S VEGANUARY!

All pics: iStock

VEGANUARY is a charity campaign that encourages people to try eating a vegan diet for the whole month of January. Lots of families, schools, universities, restaurants, shops and celebrities get involved. Each year, millions of people around the world join in the challenge to learn about food, animals and the planet.



■ What does 'vegan' mean?

Someone who is vegan doesn't eat food or use any products that come from animals. That means no meat, fish, eggs, dairy or honey. Instead, vegans enjoy fruit, vegetables, grains, beans, nuts and seeds, as well as lots of plant-based versions of familiar foods such as burgers, yoghurts and ice cream.

■ Why does Veganuary happen during the month of January?

The word Veganuary is a mix of 'vegan' and 'January'. January is chosen because it's the start of a new year, a time when many people like to try new things or set goals. The Veganuary charity asks people to take part in the challenge and try vegan meals for 31 days to see how it feels and what they discover.

■ What happens during Veganuary?

The month is a big celebration of vegan food. Schools, universities, workplaces and restaurants often serve plant-based dishes. Supermarkets and shops stock the shelves with new vegan foods, while celebs and influencers support the campaign, and it's talked about more on social media and in the news.

People who sign up for Veganuary receive free cookbooks, meal plans, shopping tips and information about nutrition to guide them. Many families experiment with cooking together, trying things like chickpea curries, bean chilli or bolognese with plant-based mince. Some people stick with vegan eating after the month ends, while others might cut down on the amount of animal products they eat.

■ Why do people take part?

People usually do Veganuary for three reasons:

- **Animal welfare:** Some want to learn more about how food is made and want to choose meals that don't involve harming animals.
- **The environment:** Eating more plant-based meals can help reduce pollution and the amount of land and water used for farming.
- **Health:** There are lots of health benefits of eating meals full of fruits, vegetables, wholegrains and other nutritious foods.

■ Is it difficult to take part?

It can feel strange at first to change what you eat, but Veganuary is designed to make it easier. Lots of companies launch new vegan foods in January and many restaurants add special dishes to try. Simple swaps can make a big difference: choosing oat milk instead of cow's milk, having a bean burrito instead of a chicken one, or trying vegan chocolate. For many people, the most exciting part is trying foods that

they've never had before. Veganuary encourages everyone to try vegan eating in a fun and positive way, without pressure. You don't have to be perfect – it's just about learning and exploring, not changing your life overnight.

■ Who else takes part outside the UK?

The idea of Veganuary began in the UK in 2013, at a kitchen table in York. Now, it's celebrated internationally and people have taken part in almost every country in the world. The organisers say that North Korea and Vatican City (the tiny country in Rome that's the home of the Pope) are the only two nations that haven't got involved yet.





**TRY THIS
RECIPE AT
HOME!**

PESTO PASTRY SPIRALS

BELLA Ramsey is a British actor known for their* leading roles in lots of highly-rated TV shows, including *The Worst Witch* and *His Dark Materials*. They are also a passionate vegan! Here, they share their recipe for pesto pastry spirals. (*Bella doesn't think of herself as female, so prefers to use 'they/their' instead of 'she/her'.)

Prep time: 15mins
Cooking time: 15mins

INGREDIENTS

- Jus-Rol puff pastry, ready rolled
- Tomato purée or any vegan pesto
- Vegan cheese
- Lots of basil
- Salt and pepper

(Be generous with the pesto/purée/toppings)

METHOD

1. Roll out pastry sheet.
2. Cover with tomato purée/pesto, but leave a space the width of a thumb round the edges.
3. Sprinkle on vegan cheese and anything else you fancy, such as capers, olives, etc.
4. Wash, dry and tear basil leaves (if using fresh) and distribute on top of the cheese.
5. Roll up the loaded pastry sheet lengthways until you have a log.
6. Slice the log into little spirals and lay them flat on a lined baking tray.
7. Shove them in the oven for 10-15mins on gas mark 4/180°C.
8. Eat!

Recipe and image courtesy of Veganuary. Ask a parent or guardian to register for Veganuary's 31 daily emails to receive the full celebrity e-cookbook. Go to veganuary.com.

Always ask
an adult before
using the
oven or sharp
utensils.




Bella Ramsey

Fun facts


- In 2025, more than 25 million people around the world took part in Veganuary.
- Veganuary runs official campaigns in 20 countries around the world, including India, USA, Canada, Chile, Australia, Spain and Germany.
- Thousands of new vegan products and menus have been released during Veganuary, such as the Greggs vegan sausage roll and the McDonald's McPlant burger.
- Veganuary is officially in the Cambridge and Collins dictionaries!



LOTS of other famous people are vegans too, including naturalist Chris Packham, musician Billie Eilish and racing driver Lewis Hamilton.



BOOKS



THIS is a VERY exciting year for books. *First News* asked the Children's Laureate, the author Frank Cottrell-Boyce, to explain why – and just what it all means for you!

What is the Children's Laureate?

THE Children's Laureate is a special role held by an exceptional author or illustrator, for a two-year spell.

It's their job to promote the importance of reading and to champion the right of every child to be able to access and enrich their lives with books. Frank (right) is the Children's Laureate for 2024–2026.

His successor will be named this summer!



DID YOU KNOW?

Just one in three children aged eight to 18 said that they enjoyed reading in their free time in 2025 – the lowest number ever recorded in 20 years of research by the National Literacy Trust. It's hoped this special year will change that!

Frank Cottrell-Boyce kicks off the

NATIONAL YEAR OF READING!

by Frank Cottrell-Boyce

WELCOME to the Year of Reading!

In case you haven't heard, the government has decided that 2026 will be the Year of Reading.

What does that mean?

What's it going to be like?

I've heard all kinds of different ideas already. From teachers making time to read to their classes, to cafés putting bookshelves in their toilets, to a school in Glasgow whose children have decided it would be a good idea to read their favourite stories over the tannoy in their branch of Morrisons to entertain people while they're shopping.

Why are we doing this?

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) has discovered that fewer and fewer people are reading for fun – WHAT?!

Surely that's like finding out that people are forgetting to eat chocolate. If you're reading *First News*, then you probably don't need me to remind you what a good thing reading is. But there are reasons why this has happened.

One reason is that not everyone has access to books. When I was little, living in quite a poor area, there was a library across the road from our flat. Since then, lots of libraries have closed down. Many schools don't have a library. The NLT found that one in 12 children don't own any books. So hopefully the government is going to try to put that right.

Another reason people don't read is because they're too busy scrolling. Of course you can find all kinds of wonderful things on the internet, but the thing about apps like TikTok and YouTube is that they do steal your time. You go looking for a clip about how to air walk, and the next thing you know you're watching someone blow bubble gum bubbles out of their nose and it's past your bedtime.

The beauty of books

Books do the opposite. You open a book, find yourself standing triumphantly on top of a mountain while sitting on a unicorn. Then you close the book and find only ten minutes have passed. Books give you back time.

When we read, our brain is doing a lot of work. This means that the things we read stay with us, become part of us. So you really are making memories when you read.

When you get older, when times are tough, the things you read as a child are still there in your brain to help you through. I remember some of the books on the right so well that I only have to take them down from the shelf to be transported back to the happy days when I read them.

So 'Go All In' for reading (that's the official slogan of the Year of Reading), because whatever you're into, there's a book about it. Whether it's a big, fat book of facts or a beautiful little volume of fairy stories, get into it.

Build that happy place inside your head.

– Frank

Some books I loved when I was small*

(*to be honest I'm still quite small...)



The Happy Lion by Louise Fatio

About a lion in a small zoo in Paris. It's very funny but the pictures – elegant, spindly drawings of Parisian streets – were what really got me.



Just William by Richmal Crompton

My uncle was a sailor in World War Two. Once, he came back from sea with a present for my dad – a *Just William* book. I've still got it!



The Serial Garden by Joan Aiken

Stories about the Armitage family who live in a world that seems very like ours but there's lots of magic about. The stories are REALLY funny.



The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by CS Lewis

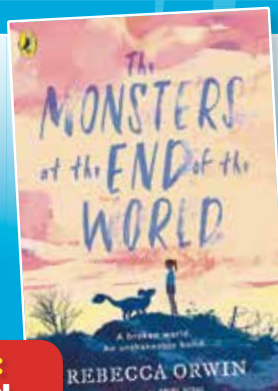
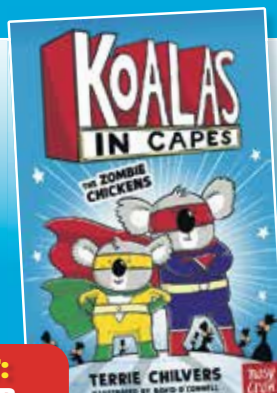
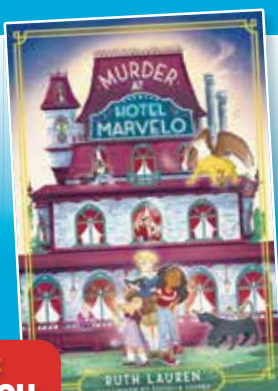
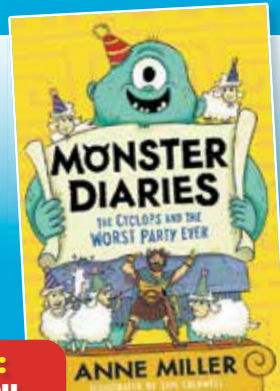
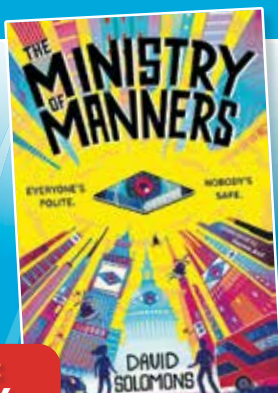
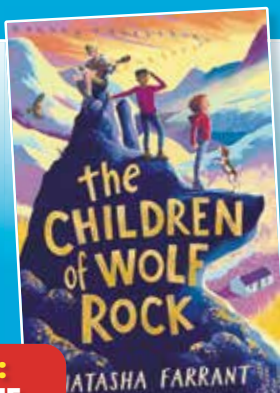
There are lots of books set in magic worlds, but Narnia is the only world you'd really want to live in.



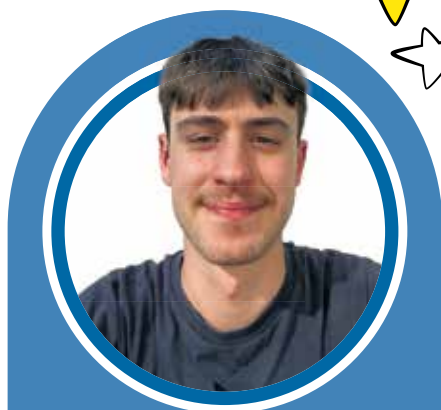
The Weirdstone of Brisingamen by Alan Garner

Dwarves! Elves! Witches! Wizards! And all in Cheshire, just a few miles off the M6 motorway.

15

books we're
buzzing for
at the start
of 2026!**OUT:
NOW!****One Day** by Michael Rosen
and Benjamin PhillipsA picture book about a Jewish man's
daring escape during the Holocaust.**OUT:
8 JAN****The Monsters At The End Of The
World** by Rebecca OrwinSunny seeks to help one of the
creatures that prowl her little town.**OUT:
29 JAN****Oceanforged: The Wicked Ship**
by Amelia MellorA pint-sized pirate in a race against
time to search the seas for treasure.**OUT:
29 JAN****Sandy Fin: Mystery of the Phantom
Diver** by Martin StewartCan Sandy and Lily solve a fresh wave
of strange goings-on in Portwhistle?**OUT:
5 FEB****America As It Happened**
by What On Earth!A brilliant retelling of US history, just in
time for the nation's 250th birthday.**OUT:
12 FEB****Koalas in Capes: The Zombie
Chickens** by Terrie Chilvers,
illustrated by David O'Connell
Superhero koalas fight their foes!**OUT:
5 MARCH****The Story Of Art Without Men**
by Katy Hessel, illustrated by Ping Zhu
Celebrate female artists who
changed the world through their work.**OUT:
12 MARCH****Murder at Hotel Marvelo** by Ruth
Lauren, illustrated by Federica Frenna
A thrilling murder mystery set at a
strange hotel for magic beings.**OUT:
9 APRIL****Monster Diaries: The Cyclops
and the Worst Party Ever** by Anne
Miller, illustrated by Sam Caldwell
The monster tells his side of the story!**OUT:
9 APRIL****We Are Dragon**
by Alastair Chisholm
A powerful new enemy joins the
battle of giant mechanical creatures.**OUT:
30 APRIL****The World's Last Mammoth**
by Mike Barfield, illustrated by
Franziska Höllbacher
Earth's greatest missing marvels.**OUT:
7 MAY****The Ministry of Manners** by David
Solomons, illustrated by Hazem Asif
Alfie and Margot rebel against a
ministry that controls kids with cruelty.**OUT:
4 JUNE****The Children of Wolf Rock**
by Natasha Farrant
Friends at a unique school seek the
truth about a missing classmate.**OUT:
4 JUNE****Six Weeks** by Matt Goodfellow,
illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton
The story of an unforgettable six-week
summer holiday for bike-loving Alfie.**OUT:
18 JUNE****Tales of the Cobb Street
Commandos** by Tony Bradman,
illustrated by Aleksei Bitskoff
Wartime kids vow to defend London.

TELL US YOUR NEWS



HELLO! I'm Charlie, the leader of the *First News Your News* pages.

I absolutely loved featuring your fun and inspiring reports last year, from theatre trips to amazing achievements and everything in between. So, let's carry on doing more of it in 2026!

To start the year off with a bang, Paige tells us about her wonderful Walk4Wildlife, and her dreams for the future of endangered animals.

Also, Michaela describes her joy of winning a UK-wide poetry competition, Ethan runs 100 parkruns against all odds, and Prisha and Manuth meet England's most capped footballer in a special school visit.

If you want to be a junior journalist for *First News* and go to cool press events or write about something that you're passionate about, get in touch by asking a trusted adult to email us at yournews@firstnews.co.uk.

Also, make sure you check out the latest opportunities at first.news/tnopps.

We can't wait to hear from you!



100 PARKRUNS!

ETHAN has cystic fibrosis (CF), a rare genetic condition that causes breathing and digestive problems, but that hasn't stopped him completing 100 parkruns. That's a whopping total of 500km! He tells us about his passion for running.

by Ethan, aged nine

One of my favourite things about parkrun is the friends you make.

Everyone is really welcoming and encouraging. I also really like running; it's fun to do, I find it calming and it gets me out of the house.

I'm always looking to push myself and get a new personal best on the 5km course. Running has also helped with my CF, as it keeps my lungs nice and healthy and is a form of physio.

I like other sports too, especially rugby and tennis – when I'm older I'd like to be a professional tennis player and one day I hope to run a half marathon (21.1km).

My advice to other children with CF is try not to worry too much. There are still loads of fun things you can do, you just have to be extra careful with certain things.

I don't want to stop at 100 – I'd love to get to 250 parkruns and beyond!

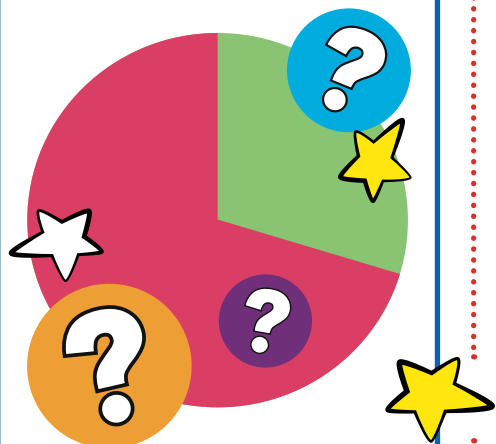


Ethan and his mum Fiona celebrate 100 parkruns

"I'm so proud of Ethan – when he zooms off during parkrun you'd never know that he's got cystic fibrosis and everything he's dealing with."
Fiona, Ethan's mum

Vote in our weekly poll

Every week, we ask you a question about the news! Let us know what you think.



Cast your vote in our polls at first.news/polls

Visit from footie icon



Prisha (left) and Manuth alongside Fara Williams

PUPILS at Wembley High Technology College were paid a visit by Fara Williams MBE, England most capped footballer, after they won E.ON's Trailblazing Heroes competition. The competition asked pupils to create a poster of a trailblazer who inspires them. Two of the winners tell us about theirs.

by Prisha

For the competition, I made a poster about inventor William Kamkwamba. He inspires me because when he was only 14, he built a windmill from old scrap materials, providing his family and neighbours with power to run their homes.

We won our whole year group E.ON water bottles and an E.ON New Energy Academy workshop, which included a visit from Fara Williams. I felt honoured to be in front of England's most capped football player. She talked to us, gave us certificates and advised us on how to achieve our dreams.

by Manuth

My trailblazer is Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist who founded the green belt movement.

Meeting Fara Williams was nerve-racking but I was extremely happy and really inspired by her backstory.

I even got to talk on stage, which made me feel really proud of myself and grateful for this competition.

During the workshop, we learnt lots of green skills, inventing new things to help the world. It also helped us socialise more with one another and bring out our hidden talents!

Our walk for wildlife



PAIGE created her own walking event to raise awareness and money for endangered animals. She talks about her love of animals, in particular rhinos, and how we can all join in to support her mission this year.

by Paige Bavin, aged nine

Hi, I'm Paige, also known as 'Just A Girl Mad About Rhinos'!

I love all animals, and rhinos are my favourite. When I discovered how endangered they are, I knew that I wanted to help.

For the past three years, I've been fundraising for an incredible charity called Dogs 4 Wildlife. They train specialist conservation dogs and support rangers on the front lines in Africa to protect rhinos and other endangered animals from poachers and wildlife crime. These brave dogs and their handlers save lives every day, and I'm so proud to support them.

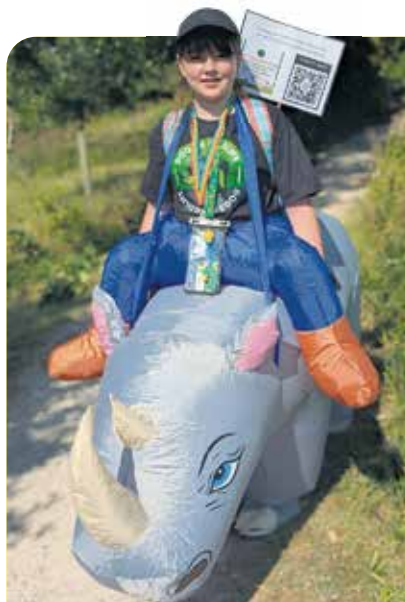
In 2025, I wanted to go further. I didn't just want to raise money – I wanted to inspire other children to get involved. I believe kids are the future of conservation, and together we can make a huge difference. That's why I created my own event: Walk4Wildlife!

I was joined by 29 fellow Young Wildlife Warriors. Each took on their own Walk4Wildlife challenge to raise awareness and funds. I was proud of every single person who took part. One girl, aged just ten, even walked five miles [8km] a day for five days wearing an inflatable rhino costume. How incredible is that?!

Seeing how many children care about animals as much as I do was the best feeling ever. Then, something happened that I'll never forget – I received a letter from Sir David Attenborough. Yes, *the* Sir David Attenborough! His kind words inspired me even more. Around the same time, I was thrilled to be named runner-up at the BBC Lincolnshire Make A Difference Awards.

Since starting this journey at seven years old, I've learnt so much about why wildlife urgently needs our help. If we don't act now, we could lose rhinos, pangolins, and many other species forever. But every action counts, no matter your age.

My dream is for children everywhere to join me. Because only a rhino needs a rhino horn, not us. Let's stop poaching, protect our planet and be a voice for wildlife in 2026 and beyond!



Clockwise from top: Walking in an inflatable rhino costume; Paige receives a letter from David Attenborough; some of the Young Wildlife Warriors

Premier League poetry prize



Check out Michaela's winning poem on the right

MICHAELA, a Year 6 pupil at St Chad's Catholic Primary School, was named the winner of the Premier League's national poetry writing competition. She was surprised with a visit from the Premier League trophy and a special assembly co-hosted by rapper and educator MC Grammar, as part of the Premier League Primary Stars programme.

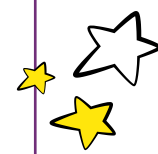
by Michaela

I feel very honoured to be able to win something as big as this, and I feel very excited to have the Premier League trophy visit my school, because I've always wanted to see it.

I love poetry because it just gives me a free place to be creative and a chance to put down my ideas and what I think about something.

My teachers and my family inspired me to write the poem because they teach me that there's no room for anyone to be racist. Like Mother Teresa once said, if we live our life with judgement and hatred, there's no room for love.

I just think that things may be difficult in life, but nothing is ever impossible.



Greatness Comes From Everywhere

By Michaela in Year 6

Greatness does not wear one face,
No single way defines us all,
No single dream, no single call.
Yet side by side, we rise and see,
The strength in our variety.

We are all born in a different way,
How we look and what we say.
Together, stronger, we can truly be,
When every colour shines, honest and true,
Different stories, voices, bold and bright.

Your rhythm may not match my song,
Your path may twist where mine is long,
But side by side, we walk this land,
Not as strangers, but hand in hand.

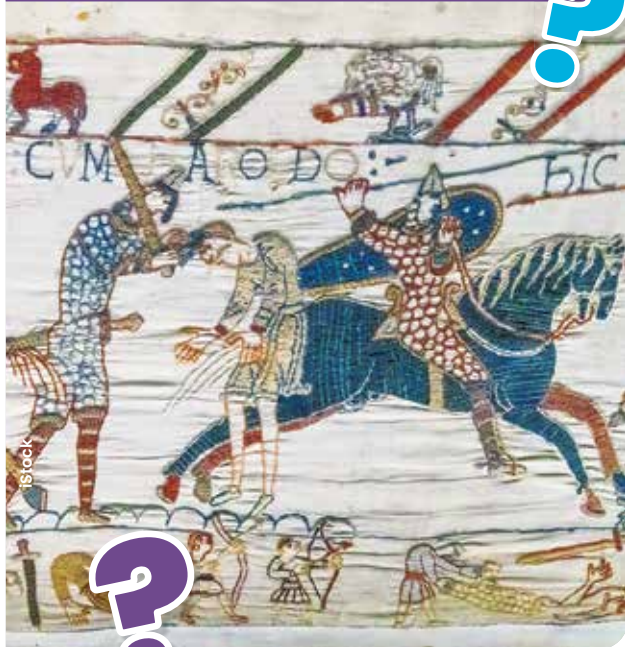
FirstNews Jumbo Quiz

THE answers to all these questions can be found in the pages of this issue. Why not set yourself, or your friends and family, a time challenge to see who can get the highest score in the quickest time? See how well you did by checking the answers at the bottom.

1 What is the theme of this year's Children's Mental Health Week?

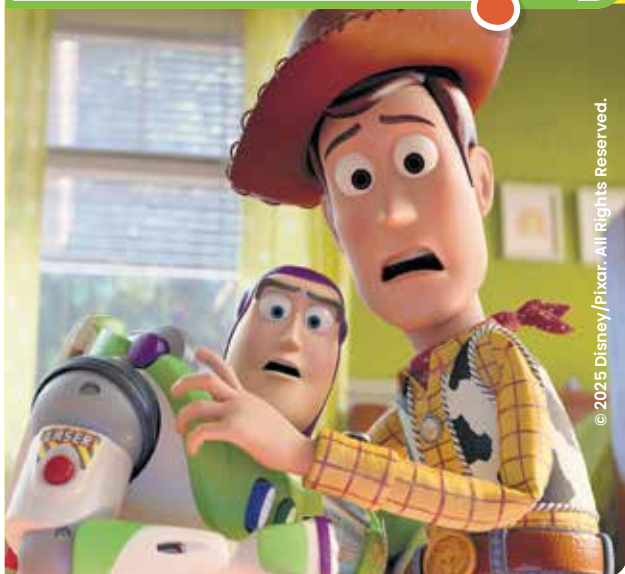
2 Over the course of six manned moon landings between 1969 and 1972, how many American astronauts set foot on the moon?

3 Which country is France's historic Bayeux Tapestry travelling to?



4 Where did the world's first reptile house open?

5 What is the name of the new tablet starring in Toy Story 5?



6 Which animal is marked in the Chinese zodiac for 2026's New Year?

7 When did the idea of Veganuary begin?



8 How old is America turning this year?



9 Who is the only tennis player, male or female, to have won all four Grand Slam titles plus the Olympics in both singles and doubles?

10 When is Black History Month celebrated?



11 Who is the current Children's Laureate?

12 *The Magic Faraway Tree* film is based on a book by which author?

13 What type of cheese do people chase down a hill in the Gloucester Cheese Rolling event?



14 Which country is hosting COP31?

15 Who wrote the *Lord of the Rings* book series?

16 What awards ceremony is being hosted in Manchester this year?

17 What anniversary is the Southbank Centre in London celebrating?

18 How many teams are taking part in the men's World Cup?



21 Who is Alberto Longo?

22 On 12 August, Europe will get its first total solar eclipse in how many years?

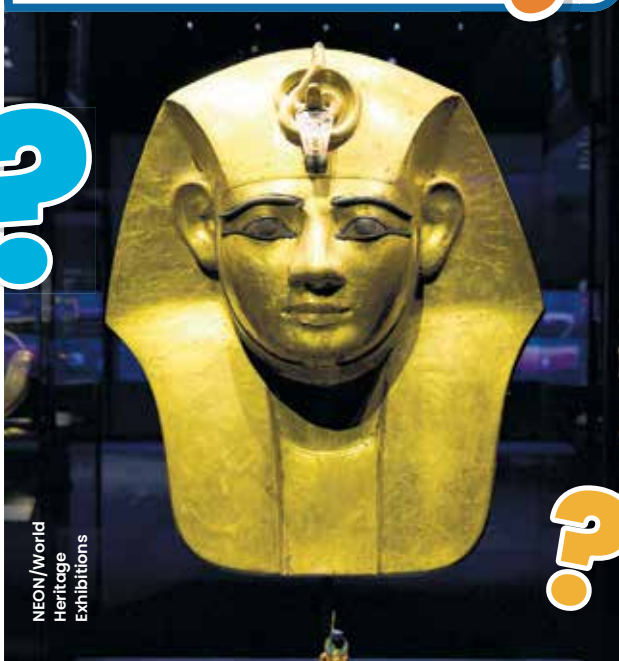


23 Diwali is also known as the Festival of what?



24 What do people typically eat on Shrove Tuesday?

25 Where is the new Ramses and the Pharaohs' Gold exhibition opening?



19 How old is Pokémon turning this year?

20 Who created Wallace & Gromit?



What's your score ?

Head online for more quiz questions!

At home? Ask a grown-up for your **Web ID** to use the app.

At school? Teachers can access the quiz at first.news/school-quiz.

Answers:
1) This is My Place 2) 12 3) England 4) ZSL London Zoo
5) Lilypad 6) Horse 7) 2013 8) 250 9) Serena Williams
10) October 11) Frank Cottrell-Boyle 12) End Blyton
13) Double Gloucester 14) Turkey 15) JRR Tolkien
16) The BRIT Awards 17) 75th 18) 48 19) 30
20) Aardman 21) Formula E co-founder 22) 27
23) Lights 24) Pancakes 25) Battersea Power Station.

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MY POLITICS PREDICTIONS



HELLO! I am a junior journalist and A level student, studying politics, English and psychology. I write a fortnightly column for *First News* about major politics issues in the UK, with a focus on stories that affect young people.

As we look ahead to 2026, the UK is in for a year that could change everything, from how we work to who runs our local streets. As most of you are too young to vote yet, these stories might seem like they're not important at all, but the decisions made in 2026 will shape the country we get in the future.



■ Local elections

It'll be a big moment for UK politics when the local elections are held on 7 May. Voters aged 18+ will head to the polls in England, while it's 16+ in Scotland and Wales. The Welsh Senedd will grow from 60 members to 96 under a new proportional representation system. It sounds complicated but it just means that if a party gets half of the votes, then it should get about half the seats. This is different to the old system, where one party could win most of the seats even if lots of people voted for other parties. It's all about making elections fairer and making sure that more voices are included.

■ Climate change

Another big topic in 2026 will be the environment. The UK government must decide how to cut greenhouse gas emissions for the five years from 2038 to 2042. These rules, called the Seventh Carbon Budget, will include targets to reduce pollution and encourage the use of more clean energy such as solar and wind. People will watch closely to see if the government can stick to its plans, especially after past mistakes. Politicians may debate costs, energy security and how fast changes should happen. The news will also cover how the country prepares for floods, heatwaves and other effects of climate change.

■ Technology and staying safe online

I think politics will feel more connected to kids and teens like us. Even though most of us can't vote yet, politicians know that we care about issues. A big change is that politicians will be more active on social media. They might post more videos, updates and polls on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube so that younger audiences like us can follow and have a voice.

The government might also update more rules to make the internet safer, by stopping fake news, protecting our privacy and reducing online bullying. These changes could make the internet safer and more fun to use, while still keeping us informed about the world around us.

■ Cost of living

There is going to be some good news for families in 2026. From April, wages for many workers will go up, giving people more money to spend on food, rent and heating. Energy bills will drop by about £150 for each household per year and train fares will stay the same. Families with children will get more support because the two-child benefit cap will be removed. This cap meant that families could only get extra government help for their first two children, leaving larger families with less support. Doctors' prescription charges will stay the same and local councils will get extra money to help schools, hospitals and community services. These changes were planned by the government in the autumn 2025 Budget, which aimed at making life fairer, easier and more affordable for everyone in 2026.

■ UK immigration in 2026

Starting in 2026, the UK is changing the rules for people coming to the UK from other countries. If someone

wants to live, work or study here they might need strong English communication skills and may have to wait longer to stay permanently. Some visas now take ten years to get instead of five, unless the person has special skills. Rules for students, workers and asylum seekers are also changing, with the aim of having faster decisions and extra checks. These changes affect people under the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects from unfair treatment.



■ In conclusion

The year 2026 will bring lots of changes, from politics and climate rules to technology, cost of living and immigration. Even if we can't vote just yet, these decisions will shape the country we grow up in. Understanding them helps us stay informed, share our opinions and get ready for the future. I'll be sharing more throughout the year, so keep your eyes peeled!

SPORT

THIS year is set to be an interesting one, with plenty of World Cups and some huge rivalries to keep us on the edge of our seats. It's also a big year for Africa, as the continent finally gets its first ever Olympic event. See the back page for more sporting dates for your diary!

TENNIS TWOSOME

THE biggest rivalry in tennis has seen Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz win all four Grand Slam tournaments for two years in a row.

They won two each in 2024 and then 2025, so will one manage to get the upper hand this year? We won't have long to find out, as the Australian Open kicks the season off on 12 January.

The field is more open in the women's singles, but Aryna Sabalenka is the one to beat at the moment, after winning three of the last eight Grand Slams.



SERENA Williams is the only player, male or female, to have won all four Grand Slam titles plus the Olympics in both singles and doubles!

"I think you're the best!"
"Stop it! I think you are!"

F1 rivalry continues

IN 2025 we had one of the closest F1 championships in years, with the last race of the season seeing a three-way battle for the title.

Lando Norris, 26, eventually won his first crown and brought Max Verstappen's run of four titles in a row to an end. Norris' team-mate Oscar Piastri was right up there too, so fans can't wait to see what this season has in store!



L-R: current champ Lando Norris, Max Verstappen and Oscar Piastri

Allez Africa!*

THE Youth Olympic Games (YOG) is the first taste of a huge international event for many young athletes, and has helped to kick-start lots of sporty careers.

For instance, Welsh taekwondo star Jade Jones won gold at the 2010 YOG, then went on to win gold at both the 2012 and 2016 Olympics.

The Covid pandemic meant that the 2022 Dakar YOG in Senegal was postponed until this year, but now Africa will at last get to host its first ever Olympic event, starting on 30 October.

*That means 'Go Africa!' in French, the official language of Senegal and 19 other African countries.



The 17-year-old Jade Jones (left) on her way to gold at the 2010 YOG



THE 1904 Olympics was the first time that gold, silver and bronze medals were given to the first three places. In the first modern Games in Athens in 1896, the winners got a silver medal, while second place won a bronze!

T20 World Cup

TWENTY20 (T20) is the shortest form of international cricket, and we'll get to see the world's best male and female players going all out for T20 World Cup glory this year.

The men get the ball rolling (or rather flying) on 7 February, with India and Sri Lanka on hosting duties.

If you want to see the action live, the women's tournament is in England and Wales this year, running from 12 June to 5 July. Australia have won six out of the last eight tournaments, although New Zealand are the reigning champions.



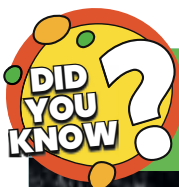
New Zealand celebrate winning the 2024 Women's T20 World Cup

Trio of cups

ALTHOUGH rugby union tends to hog the headlines, many would argue that rugby league is faster, more exciting and generally better (feel free to write to our Your News pages if you want to argue about that one!).

So league fans will be pumped for this year's Rugby League World Cup, which sees the men's, women's and wheelchair tournaments all take place at the same time in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

The action begins with a massive local rivalry, as Australia and New Zealand face off in the first game of the men's tournament on 15 October.



ENGLAND hosted the 2021 World Cup and won the wheelchair tournament (pictured).



Hockey World Cup

THE men's and women's Hockey World Cup will be played at the same time this year, as Belgium and the Netherlands host both tournaments from 15–30 August.

Sixteen teams will compete in each one, but home advantage for the Dutch women will surely make it even harder for anyone to stop them winning a fourth title in a row.

The last two men's finals have gone to penalty shoot-outs, with Belgium winning in 2018 then losing their crown to Germany in 2023.



Belgium's Victor Wegnez scores in the shoot-out in the 2018 final

SPORT

WITH the possible exception of the Olympics, sporting events don't get any bigger than the World Cup, so this summer you're in for a treat. Unless you don't like football, obviously. But there are plenty of other amazing sporting spectacles for you to get excited about. Here's our pick of the bunch, with more on p35.

WORLD CUP

THIS year's men's World Cup will definitely be the biggest ever, as it's been expanded to 48 teams.

Whether that means it's going to be the best ever is another question, as a lot of critics think that there are too many weak teams in the tournament. And with 104 matches to watch (that's 40 more than last time), it'll be an epic telly-fest to keep on top of it all.

The competition will be held across the USA, Canada and Mexico, and there are quite a few countries feeling confident that they can take the trophy away from current champions Argentina. One of those is England, who'll be aiming to lift the trophy for the first time since 1966.

Whoever gets there, let's hope the final is as good as the edge-of-the-seat 3-3 draw and penalty shoot-out that we got last time!



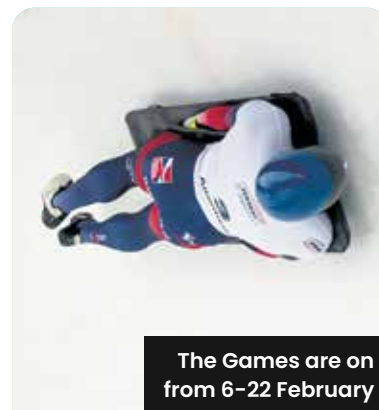
All pics: Getty

You can follow the action from 11 June to 19 July. Can the 38-year-old Lionel Messi be a hero again for Argentina?

Winter Olympics

ALTHOUGH there are worries that the main ice rink venue won't be ready on time, if all goes to plan, the Winter Olympics in Italy should be an amazing two weeks of skiing, skating, sliding, snowboarding and some sports that don't begin with s.

Team GB generally don't win too many medals in winter sports, but the team's Scottish curling stars bagged two medals last time: a gold for the women and a silver for the men. They'll be aiming to be in the medals again this time, but Team GB also has faith in people like skeleton world champion Matt Weston and ice skating pair Lilah Fear and Lewis Gibson, who've been making their way onto podiums recently thanks to their amazing routines to Beyoncé and Spice Girls songs!



The Games are on from 6-22 February

Winter Paralympics

FOLLOWING hot on the heels of the Winter Olympics, around 600 athletes will take part in six sports at the Winter Paralympics.

From 6-15 March, you can see para alpine skiing, para biathlon, para cross-country skiing, para ice hockey and para snowboard, plus wheelchair curling, which will feature mixed doubles for the first time.



Figure Skating European Championships

ICE skating fans are in for a treat at the start of this year, as Britain hosts the European Championships less than a month before the Winter Olympics begins (above).

The action is all happening at the Utilita Arena in Sheffield, with some truly world-class talent on show.

Lilah Fear and Lewis Gibson are the big hopes for the hosts, after their performance in March that won a first World Championship medal for GB in more than 40 years.



Six Nations



THE annual feast of rugby is on from 5 February to 14 March, with Wales hoping that 2026 helps change their fortunes, after finishing bottom of the table with five defeats last time.

Then from 11 April to 17 May, it's the women's turn. England won the title last time, but only thanks to a nail-biting 43-42 win over France in the last match.

Formula E

THIS year will see the debut of the new GEN4 car in Formula E, the all-electric equivalent of Formula 1.

The new model will have 600kW of power when it's in 'attack mode', which is the same as 815hp in a petrol car. It'll make its debut in the 2026/27 season.

Formula E co-founder Alberto Longo said the car "will test our drivers like never before. It's a car built for wheel-to-wheel battles and pure racing action."

In the current GEN3 cars, nearly 50% of the electricity used during the race is created by the car itself via a process called regenerative braking.



Formula E

The GEN4 car is said to be made from 100% recyclable parts

THE current GEN3 Formula E car is already 30% (nearly a third) faster to accelerate than an F1 car, and can go from 0-60mph in 1.82sec!



Beto Issa / LAT Images

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