

January 2026

Issue 153

Almeria Living

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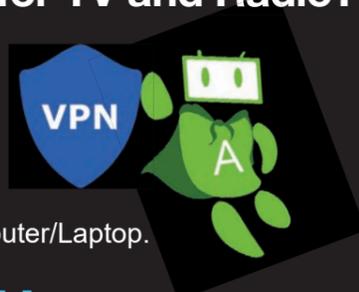
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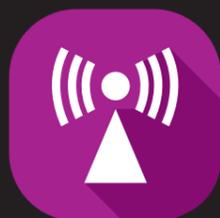
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Valle del Este, Antas El Real,
Los Gallardos and many surrounding towns

Welcome to the January 2026 issue of Almería Living. Another year has begun - I wonder what it has in store and will it dare to go by as fast as the last one!!

I'm not one for making New Year resolutions but, after spending the last few weeks nursing a chest infection and feeling far from well, I have resolved to look at my diet and wellbeing and give them some 2026 TLC.

I'm waiting for my home office roof to be repaired so I have had to move to temporary accommodation downstairs! It really isn't the same but the return to the completed project is something to look forward to! I do miss my feathered friends, so you can imagine my joy when I received a visit from Mr Robin. He is now a frequent caller albeit for a short time every day.

In this issue...

My scribes have been very busy, and I am most grateful for all their contributions, which I know you, the readers, also enjoy.

Ree, our very special Osteopath scribe, continues her heartwarming story about the amazing work of the **Hands with Heart Foundation** and her first hand experience of their plight as they help children and adults with disabilities in Indonesia, Argentina, Ukraine and Costa Rica, who have limited or non-existent access to healthcare services. Read more on pages 15 - 17.

Many thanks, as always, to our many advertisers, who continue to support our magazine and reap the benefits of doing so. Local businesses rely on our trade so please try to use them whenever you can.

We hope you enjoy your read this month. Please don't forget to tell our advertisers that you saw them in the Almeria Living.

Take care and stay safe & warm. Talk again in February 2026.

Karen (Ed)

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Getting your 'House' in order

A New Year is always a good time to consider what may have been neglected in previous times. This could be through a lack of knowledge or simply not having enough time!

Here are a few thought-provoking points to help...

Making a Will

Wherever in the world you own assets, such as bank accounts, property or investments you should have a Will in that country. It will save your loved ones so much heartache, expense and red tape. Here in Spain, it is a straight-forward process, and the Will is signed in front of a Notary, where the original is held until the time of death. It is important to consider the beneficiaries of a foreign Will due to possible Inheritance tax issues so a consultation with an experienced business, such as us, is both worthwhile and helpful.

Tidy Filing System

Bank records, property deeds, insurance documents, investment policies, alarm details etc. should all be filed together. If you haven't done so already, invest in a sturdy folder to store all these important documents. Make sure someone else knows where to find this folder and any passcodes or PIN numbers that may be relevant. Just bear in mind that if you are taken ill suddenly there is a pain free way of accessing anything that is required to help you.

Change of Address

This is a task that many neglect to complete with all the necessary authorities.

It is essential that DGT know the Padron address of any vehicles and a notification address for licences and the issuance of fines. The



latter can get very costly if you do not receive post at the correct address.

The Hacienda (Tax Office) must have a current notification address for you. If the DGT and other such authorities fail to reach you they will hand over to the Tax Office, who after attempting to contact you will then proceed with an embargo on bank accounts or other assets known to be owned by you.

Vehicle Ownership

Are you still receiving annual tax for a vehicle you sold over a year ago? It is possible that the change of ownership has not been completed properly and the vehicle remains in your name. This will include speeding fines and other traffic offences. Maybe the vehicle has left the country? DGT must be advised so they can take it off the system.

Documentation Expiry Dates

Take a look at your passport and driving licence and make a note when they are due to expire so you take the necessary action in good time.

For UK citizens, even those resident in Spain, it is essential that your passport is in date, even if you don't intend to travel anywhere. Remember this document is now only valid for 10 years so you should check the start date and add 10 years. Ignore the written expiry date, unless you only intend to return directly to the UK and then they will generally accept the extra months. Do not let this document expire without ordering a new one.

Driving Licences can be renewed easily at any one of the private medical centres who offer the service. You will immediately be issued with a temporary document that is valid for use in Spain only.

These are just a few things to think about and are essential to get sorted. C.A.T. Services are here to help so just pop in, give us a call or send an email.

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Spanish Provinces

There are 50 provinces in Spain, each with its own capital city which usually, but not always, carries the same name as the province. In December we journeyed to Córdoba and now our next of Spain's provincial Capitals takes us north west



A Coruña in A Coruña

The Province of A Coruña (La Coruña in Spanish, 'A Coruña' being the Galician and official name) is the most Northwestern Atlantic-facing province of Spain, and one of the four provinces which constitute the autonomous community of Galicia. This province is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the West and North, Pontevedra Province to the South and the Lugo Province to the East.

A Coruña's climate is not what is normally associated with Spain with its mild temperatures and all-year-round rainfall. Although the rain is no longer quite as regular as it used to be, and over the last few years drought has been known to occur on occasions.

A Coruña is not a very mountainous province, and its highest point is Pico de Pilar at 803 m above sea level. As is logical with its rainy, mild climate, it is a very green province with lots of pastures and the second highest cattle population of any Spanish province with more than 320,000 heads. (Lugo is the no. 1).

Thanks to the province's long Atlantic coast line and its longstanding fishing tradition, the cuisine of A Coruña is dominated by seafood, although meat dishes also abound thanks to the important meat industry.

The human population of A Coruña amounts to 1,125,623. Of these,



251,543 reside in the capital of the same name.

The city of A Coruña is set on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, and its centre is on a peninsula connected to the main land by a narrow strip of land and it has two separate marine faces: The port overlooking the La Coruña Estuary, and the beaches which look out to the open sea around the inlet of Orzán.

The city is home to Europe's longest seaside promenade. It stretches no less than 13 km around the city's coastline.

A Coruña has been an important port since time immemorial, and it is home to the world's oldest working lighthouse, and the only Roman one still working, the 57 m tall Tower of Hercules, which dates back to the 1st century AD and is one of A Coruña's most

visited tourist attractions.

The Romans dominated A Coruña until, as in so many other parts of Spain, the Visigoths arrived and ousted them from this small town whose only real importance was its port.

When the Moors arrived on the Peninsula centuries later this was hardly noticed in this north-western corner, and A Coruña was incorporated into the Christian Kingdom of Asturias less than a hundred years later.

A Coruña port maintained its importance over the centuries, and the city's economy reached an unprecedented strength when Alfonso 10th granted it exclusivity with no taxes payable on the unloading and selling of salt.

Continued on page 8





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..... Continued from page 7

A couple of centuries later, when the port of Cádiz lost its patent on commerce with the New World, A Coruña's economy greatly benefitted once again.

However, during the wars of the 16th and 17th centuries general decline settled in the city due to taxes being levied to finance the army and the young able-bodied men were conscripted.

The ill-fated 'Armada Invencible', known in English as the Spanish Armada, sailed out from A Coruña on 21st July 1588 with the aim of escorting an army from the Netherlands to England to remove Queen Elizabeth I from the throne.

As we all know, a mixture of bad strategies and terrible storms put paid to the plans, and of the 130 ships that left A Coruña, less than

two thirds returned.

A Coruña's importance as a port and city started growing again in the 20th century, and in spite of its staunch republican stance before the civil war (which was quashed early on), the city's growth carried on steadily over the decades.

Today A Coruña is a modern city with a healthy economy mainly based on industry. One of the most important employers is the Repsol Refinery, which was constructed in 1964 and employs more than 1,000 people. Sadly, another side of that coin is the shipping disasters that have taken place off the coast over the years, repeatedly contaminating the coast and beaches, necessitating massive clean-up operations.

In the southeastern corner of the province, you will find another very important city in A Coruña: The famous Santiago de Compostela, the culmination of the famous Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route.

Santiago de Compostela is the capital of the region of Galicia and home to the region's government and parliament.

The population has grown to over 100,000 recently for the first time in the city's history. In 2025, the number of visitors to the city multiplied the inhabitants by more than six in just the first six months.

Together with Jerusalem and Rome, it is one of the three great pilgrim destinations of Christianity, and its famous cathedral is said to be the final resting place of Saint James the Great, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

The construction of the cathedral started more than one thousand years ago, and the last stone was laid in 1122. Six years later, in 1128, the cathedral was consecrated.

Almost half a million visitors flock to this temple every year.



Look Good - Feel Great

5 skincare resolutions everyone should try this January

Winter and the festive season can leave our skin looking a little worse for wear!

So, if your skin is feeling a little lacklustre this January, never fear. Here are some New Year skincare resolutions for us all to make in 2026.

Why is skincare so important?

One of the main functions of skin is to act as a barrier to the outside world, but this function can easily be reduced or damaged if it isn't looked after properly.

The skin barrier can easily be disrupted or damaged by noxious chemicals such as pollutants in the environment, cumulative sun damage, or even products that are deliberately applied to the skin for their anti-ageing effects such as retinoids.

In addition, to this, as skin ages, it becomes increasingly dry over time. Using a cleanser will remove environmental dirt and micro-organisms as well as potentially improving the barrier function of the skin. This in turn will result in an improved overall appearance.



Pretty much anything can have an effect on your skin, from where you live to what you eat.

Continued on page 10

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Stress has anecdotally been noted to cause worsening of inflammatory skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, acne and rosacea, while diet has also been shown to take its toll on complexion.

It is worth noting that certain products can irritate the skin - so be sure to read all labels before use.

On top of all this, winter is a tough season for skin, with the harsh conditions causing it to form a protective barrier against the elements in order to prevent water loss. Often, this can result in increased dryness, scaling and flaking of the skin.

It is important to moisturise regularly to combat this winter dryness. Moisturisers will bind and retain water, in addition to forming a protective seal preventing further water loss.

For best effects, this should be done straight after showering and then throughout the day as needed.

Dry weather, low humidity and wind also contribute to sore, chapped lips in the winter. Use a gentle lip scrub to slough off dead skin and keep a tub or stick of lip balm on you at all times.

Resolution 1 – Wear sunscreen

Sunscreen isn't just for the summer and should be worn throughout the year, as there is still damaging ultraviolet radiation around. Sunscreen should be broad-spectrum offering protection against UVA and UVB and at least SPF 15.

This is particularly important if you enjoy outdoor hobbies such as running, hiking or snow-sports. Regular sunscreen use will help prevent against the development of skin cancer and premature ageing.



Resolution 2 – Keep things clean

Makeup bags are a breeding ground for bacteria. Makeup brushes should be cleaned at least on a monthly basis – which many women neglect to do. Otherwise bacteria can build up on the surface from

constantly being in contact with our skin.

Products should not be used past their expiry date or should be discarded a certain amount of time after opening. This varies depending on product type. For example, two or three months for mascara and 12 months for liquid foundation. Expiry dates are usually listed on the side of products, as a Period After Opening (PAO) date, e.g. 12M or 3M.

Resolution 3 – Use a serum

Facial serums are concentrated, clear, gel-like solutions applied to the skin, which are made up of small molecules. This means that they are absorbed quickly and penetrate deep into the skin. They have a high concentration of active ingredients such as antioxidants, vitamins, or peptides.

An antioxidant serum can help limit damage caused by pollution and ultraviolet light. There is also some data that they may also improve the efficacy of your sunscreen.

Resolution 4 – Consider a weekly face mask

Clay based masks are a great option for oily skin types that are prone to break-outs. Clay is an excellent ingredient at drawing out impurities that can lead to spots. Kaolin in clay absorbs oil and helps mattify skin. Other ingredients that can be helpful include salicylic acid, glycolic acid, tea tree oil, retinol and niacinamide.

For dry skin, look for a mask containing hyaluronic acid. Hyaluronic acid is one of the most hydrophilic (or 'water-loving') molecules found in cosmetic products and has an enormous water-binding capacity. It therefore acts as the ideal moisturiser, hydrating dry skin and plumping out fine lines and wrinkles in ageing skin.

Resolution 5 – See a dermatologist

Dermatologists can provide a wealth of expertise from checking



your moles and rashes, to giving specific tailored advice about your skin, and anti-aging advice.

Nearly everyone can benefit from seeing this type of medical doctor.

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Puzzle Time

Puzzle solutions on page 74

Enter digits from 1 to 9 into the blank spaces. Every row of each 9x9 cube must contain one of each digit. So must every column, as must every 3x3 square.

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

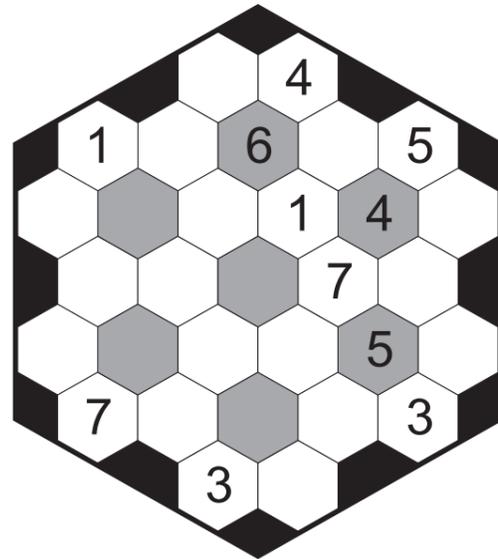
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	5	2	8	6	7		1	4		5			7						4
4			3	9				6					3	4	8	2	5		
					8	3	2		1	7			4	2			7	1	
7	2	4	6								9				6		2		
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		9	4					5					1	5	7	9			
			9															3	7
		3		2									3				5		1

Rosetta

A Rosetta is made up of a centre coloured hexagon encircled by 6 white hexagons. To complete the puzzle, fill in all 7 Rosettas with each number between 1 and 7 in no particular order while ensuring that:

1. No number is repeated in a horizontal row
2. Each number from 1 to 7 is represented in the 7 grey hexagon cells



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An Osteopath on a Mission - Ep. 3

By Ree Hyde DO MROE. 629.

No sooner had we dropped our bags at Koswak Lodge, we were back on the ancient bus, and off to meet the first patients of the jungle mission.

But first things first, it was time to fuel up after our epic journey from the Limón coast. The combination of buses, boats and wellie purchasing had taken a good few hours, and our rice, bean and plantain breakfast was a distant memory.

Bouncing along the dirt road towards Amubri village, the rain easing to a light drizzle, we passed the neighbourhood supermarket 'Super-Amubri', a small single storey school, a kindergarten and a clapboard Catholic church, before pulling up at what was to be our refectory for all meals not taken 'in the field', the home of the local radio station – Radio Cultural La Voz de Talamanca.

Our stomachs rumbling, we were ushered inside the bright blue radio station building where we were each handed a plate of rice, beans and plantain (see a theme developing here?), shredded lettuce, stewed chicken and a wedge of lime, along with a startling orange beaker, filled with chilled lemon cordial. Heading back outside, we each selected a log to perch on at the long table set beneath the corrugated iron lean-to. Each with a plate of delicious home-cooked food in front of us, silence fell as we devoured our first meal in the Talamanca jungle.

Bellies full, it was time for formal introductions from the Radio La Voz team, and from the President of DAWÉ ESE WKPA KIMOIE, the organisation with whom Hands with Heart has been collaborating since 2016. The organisation's founder, Maribel Salazar Buitrago introduced the BriBri guides who would be coordinating our schedules over the next 5 days, acting as our translators between Spanish and BriBri, leading us through the seemingly unnavigable



terrain, and as we were right in the middle of the rainy season, would be keeping a close eye on the volatile weather systems in the area.

Continued on page 16

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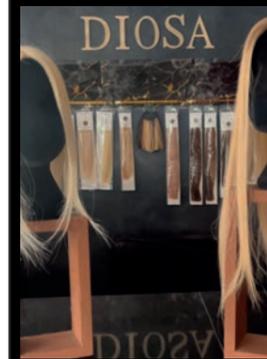
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..... Continued from page 15

Food and formalities out of the way, we split into 2 teams of 9. Each with a team leader from the Hands with Heart Foundation (Osteopaths Dr. Jorge Aranda and Dr. Luisa Miraglia), 2 Bri Bri guides, and 6 volunteers.

In the lead up to this, my first humanitarian mission, I spent a fair amount of time considering the reality of what we would find once we arrived. Witnessing the daily struggles of the children we were there to help, with so little support available to them and their families, and with only minimal access to healthcare, I expected to find myself in situations that would be emotionally challenging.

There had been moments at the school in Cartago during the first half of the mission; children with severe mental and physical deformities, a child whose mother had died during a complicated birth, leaving a young grandmother to bring up her severely disabled grandson. But nothing I had imagined or experienced up to this point, had prepared me for the next little boy we were to meet.



To reach his home, we had hiked through dense vegetation, hopped from rock to rock across a river, waded through another, before eventually coming upon a small collection of wooden huts on stilts. Abandoning our wellies on the muddy ground at the foot of several wooden steps, we entered a single room.

A traditional rush matted roof supported on tall wooden posts, bare floorboards, a 4 feet tall wooden perimeter wall enclosed the 5m x 4m space, the space between the roof and top of the wall open to the outside. The room was completely bare, save for 3 ragged toys hanging limp from one of the wooden uprights. It was one of the saddest things I've ever seen.

A boy of around 5 years of age came hurtling out of the shadows, throwing himself from wall to wall; grabbing at our legs, punching and screaming as he went. Intensely hyperactive, our team leader, highly experienced with this type of behaviour, instructed us to sit on the floor at the perimeter of the room, and to completely ignore the boy, avoiding eye contact. Basically, we were allowing him to burn himself out, to reach a level of calm at which point we could begin to attempt to engage with him.

The boy had Down's Syndrome, and he spent every waking hour in that room. His only glimpses of the outside world, between the gaps in the floorboards and at points where the wall panels didn't fit flush. His extreme hyperactivity, and his physical and vocal aggression were manifestations of a frustrated child craving interaction and physical and mental stimulation.

As we waited, he launched a full-on assault, without pause. He pulled at our clothes, he kicked at us, he pulled at our hair, he threw every single bag we had entered with, across the room. He was completely out of control. It became clear that the passive, non-engagement approach wasn't working. His fight or flight response was in complete overdrive: A more active approach was needed.

Laura Sensini, a wonderful paediatric



Osteopath from Italy, guided by Dr. Aranda, began to follow his movements around the room. Maintaining this mirroring tactic for as long as was necessary, eventually, as he moved himself into a corner she moved in to close down his personal space, coaxing him to sit onto the floor.

Reaching out her arms to him, he repeatedly pushed her away, until he allowed her closer and began to lie down. Curled in a ball, Laura lay with him. Each time he moved into a different position she moved with him, always maintaining bodily contact with him, sometimes using her legs over his, moving her head as his fingers clawed at her face. When he struggled, she applied light pressure to restrict his movement, when he tried to punch her, she held him closer.

And then something amazing happened. With absolute patience, kindness and pureness of intention, Laura made a connection with him. As his nervous system started to calm, the tension left his limbs, his face relaxed, and he began to take deeper, slower breaths. The room fell silent.



The driving motivation behind Hands with Heart Foundation is not only to deliver free healthcare to those in need, but also to educate. This little boy's caregiver clearly doted on him, but she didn't know how to help him. Before we left, Dr Aranda spent time speaking with her, and I don't know, but I hope that she has been able to make some changes, which have made life more bearable for both her and her grandson.

Next time in An Osteopath on a Mission - unidentified crawlies, 95% humidity, broken axles and banana leaf lunches (I promise... definitely next time!.....there's just so much to say!!!!)

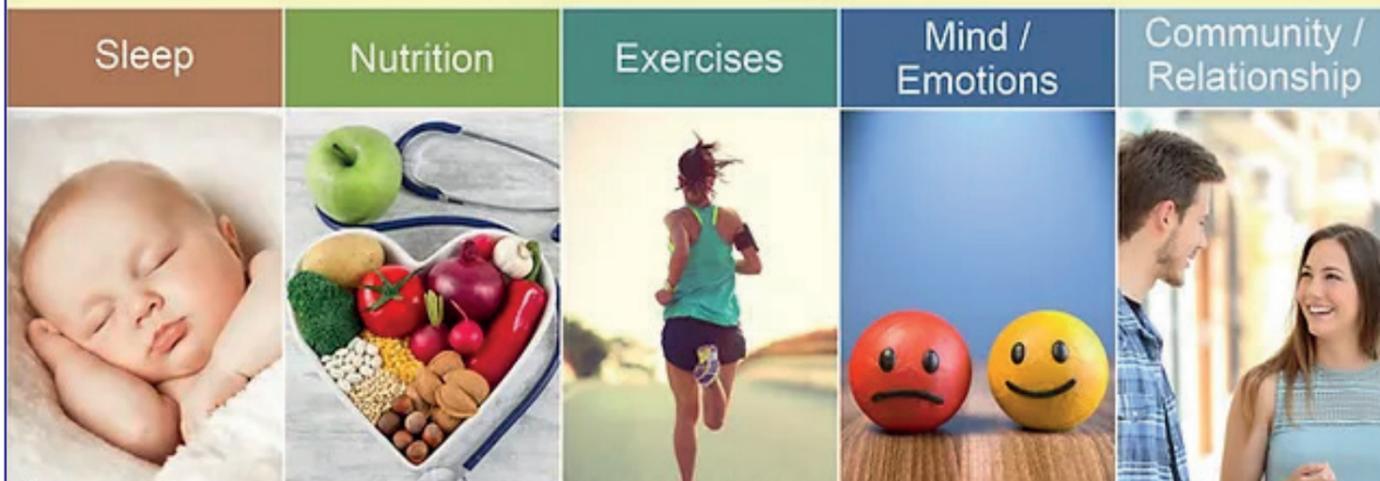
Hands With Heart Foundation is a registered charity, founded in 2016. Providing free healthcare services to children and adults with disabilities in Indonesia, Argentina, Ukraine and Costa Rica, who have limited or non-existent access to healthcare services, the foundation seeks to empower communities through healthcare, education, and social action, and to raise awareness about disability and inclusion.

<https://handswithheartfoundation.org/>

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At the time of going to print the out of hours Farmacia list has not been finalised for January 2026

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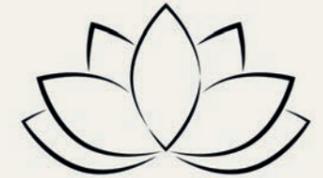


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Is your Vertigo medication making you dizzy?

Vertigo is a symptom of an issue within the vestibular system, your body's balance centre in the inner ear and brain, which sends signals about movement and orientation.

When this system malfunctions, you can experience vertigo - the false sensation of spinning or unsteadiness.

Vertigo medications work by suppressing the vestibular system, but they also hinder the brain's natural ability to adapt.

Studies show that "anti-vertigo" drugs are frequently prescribed incorrectly for general dizziness, especially in older adults with non-vestibular causes of their symptoms.

So if you're experiencing dizziness, are taking anti-vertigo medications, but are now feeling worse, it's possible that you've been incorrectly diagnosed.

Vertigo medications can worsen dizziness, cause drowsiness/sleepiness, reduced alertness, and blurred vision.

If you think you have been misdiagnosed with vertigo, your Osteopath can assess and treat you for dizziness arising from issues within the neck/spine, posture issues, osteoarthritis, and muscular compensations.

You should seek prompt medical assistance if dizziness or vertigo is sudden, severe, persistent, or accompanied by:

- Sudden severe headache and/or neck pain
- Difficulty walking, talking, seeing, swallowing
- Loss of consciousness
- Weakness in an arm or leg

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8 Simple Ways to Refresh Your Home Décor for the New Year



A new year is a perfect opportunity to make personal and lifestyle changes.

Just like your hairstyle or wardrobe, your interior design also needs a refresh every now and then. Refreshing your home décor can be quick and easy with some simple touches and without having to break the bank!

1. Play with colour

Adding little pops of colour to any room will freshen it easily. Add in bold curtains, or display colourful pieces in open shelving. Fun patterned pillows or vibrant area rugs

also go a long way in illuminating any space.

2. Bring in some light

A simple way to refresh any room is replacing your current lamp with a new one. A new lamp base or a floor lamp can transform the room and really brighten the entire space.

3. Enliven any room with a rug

You can instantly create a visual interest and add an artistic touch to any room with the help of an area rug. Bring in new colour, texture and pattern to reflect your style and personality, while enjoying its comfort and coziness.

4. Add natural elements

Plants and flowers add a cheerful feeling to any room. Decorative vases filled with fresh, seasonal flowers or tall houseplants will really boost your mood and bring positive emotional feelings.

5. Incorporate your favorite art

With a picture saying a thousand words, new art can set a fresh tone in your home. It could have a bold statement, reflect your personality or your current taste.

6. Bring new life to existing furniture

Refresh your furniture with new accessories. Enliven your dining table with new seating or even mix and match the old with the new. You can also freshen your sofa with new decorative pillows.

7. Refresh your bookshelves

Becoming a multipurpose item, bookshelves can do more than store literature. Spruce up your shelves with botanics, picture frames,

candles or show off your collections.

8. Make a centrepiece

Easily change the look and feel of any space with a stunning centrepiece. You can add a succulent terrarium at the table, a vase of seasonal flowers or accentuate a specific area of your room with a gorgeous accent rug.

There is no right or wrong in decorating your home, just remember that adding simple decorative elements can go a long way. You can truly let your imagination run wild and try new things.

Let 2026 be a year of positive changes and good vibes!



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It's been a heart-breaking month for us here at Olive Tree Farm. Among the chaos of preparing for the festivities of Christmas and the New Year, the last pool of the year to finish, and the polishing of our end-of-year farm plans... things took a turn of their own accord, as life does indeed have plans and movements all of its own.

We were beset again by a visiting fox, who leapt up and over the farm fencing and severely injured our Muscovy duck numbers. Between the shock, and now very nervous surviving ducks, we just about managed to round up three: a male, female and her solitary surviving son. That left just a few boys left on the farm, who were far too skittish and strong for us to rally up quickly.

With the trio we had captured back down in the aviary, we decided that until we electrify the fencing that the ducks were going to have to all come and stay in the garden.

The geese we weren't worried about too much; their boldness and ferocious batting wings have always made them a strong contender



against foxes, and they've always held their own.

So comes the chaos of Almost-Christmas. Food and gift preparations, school activities and performances, as well as general farm maintenance. We also had the heaps of rain that had the rambla flowing and the farm turned into a quagmire, but we were undeterred.

We managed to get into the agricultural shop and begin preparation on getting the fencing sorted, a project that wasn't going to officially begin until the new year, when the craziness of this time of year begins to settle.

Unfortunately the farm had itself another break-in, but not a fox. This time some dogs had found the farm, and managed to break their way through a weaker area in the fencing we hadn't noticed, and the damage they did was unreal.

The geese are gone, as are the remaining ducks, all of the work we've put in for the last 2-3 years... all gone.

It was a macabre scene indeed, and it almost broke us. For the past month we feel like we've seen loss followed by loss, not just the animals that we loved but the ideas they represented and the plans they were a part of.

It probably seems a foolish notion that we'd be so upset about animals we were rearing for the table, but it is almost impossible to explain. For us, the Muscovy ducks are one of our favourite animals; they have such remarkable spirits and characters, and we do build up relationships with them as individuals. Does it make it harder, in



the end, for the table?

Well, yes... but it was never supposed to be easy in the first place.

The geese were also a giant, overwhelming blow. Over 10 years they've been on this farm. Hatched from eggs and hand-raised by the family. I know I had my personal... arguments with the feathery dinosaurs, but they were a part of our family for so long.

Ben was especially heartbroken; somehow, unlike me, they were best friends. And when we told the rest of the family what had happened, everyone was hit very hard.

Strange, really, how such a naughty creature wiggled its way into all our hearts. I guess the little bruising love bites were worth it, after all.

As you can imagine, we have been on the brink of giving up entirely. How do you replace something like this?

The answer is... you just don't.

But that doesn't mean we can't start again.

When January hits the plan will proceed as normal to get the fences electrified, and I've had a few ideas on top (as I'm sure Ben has too) which could help just that bit extra with security, which we will discuss and be putting into action once 2026 is with us.

This last year has been a series of joy, positivity, hurt and regret. We certainly cannot say we aren't carrying big lessons into the future with us, especially knowing that plans and actions can only get you

so far with the unpredictability of life, but we are full of purpose.

Despite everything that happened, the positivity and joy of working with the animals of the farm is what is bringing us back. We love our way of life, and have often said that despite the difficulties along the way, we wouldn't trade it for anything.

So we will do what we do, what we have always done. Work to be better, and to do better, and boy do we have a lot to get on with.

Our entire focus right now is to enjoy this Christmas time with our family, to pull us all back together and get invigorated for the future. It's time to charge up with some positivity.

For now, we hope that everyone had a wonderful Christmas and New Year, and I want to personally thank everyone who has been following along every month. It is so wonderful to encounter some of you in the wilds of Spain and to be asked after the animals you read about.

I hope you have a wonderful 2026.

Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoyed the news of the month, and join us again in the next for all our farm-life updates!

You can follow the progress of the family and farm on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/OliveTreeFarmSpain/

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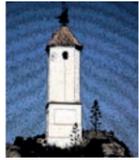
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BSR The automatic record player! Dr. Daniel McDonlad '05-'91

If, like me, you were made in the '50s-'60s, you probably remember stacking records up on an automatic turntable, watching the first drop, being played then another dropping and so on. Now, various companies made auto-changers (as the Yanks called them), but in my book, BSR (Birmingham Sound Reproducers) made the best, at an affordable price, well made and well thought through. Unlike some of the competition, these machines were easily maintained and worked reliably. Garrard players were more expensive and then, Collaro... These never worked even when they left the factory. They were responsible for many a humble engineer turning to hard drugs.



The founder of BSR, Dr. Daniel McDonald was a clever individual. He started out his engineering life working for BTH, British Thomas Houston (Big Thick and Heavy as it should have been known). He saw a market for quality mains and audio output transformers, for use in radio and Public Address gear. In '32, he was making these from a small workshop in Blackheath, in the Black Country (that funny Birmingham area). As his transformers we so good, he decided to design and sell his own PA (public address) systems which normally included a record deck for the music element. His first machine was the Ampligram. A fine-looking highly polished case, housing a 25-watt amplifier (massive for those days), a microphone and record deck. The adverts were lovely, "designed for halls where 350 couples can dance the night away!"

Daniel always was insistent that, as far as possible, everything should be made in-house. He increased his factory to make motors for the record decks, cabinets etc.

Between '47 and '58, BSR became the biggest supplier of turntables. These ranged from single play decks to the famous "Monarch" range which could play a mix of different size records, stacked in any order. The deck used a clever little "finger" which, as the record dropped from the centre spindle was knocked down and detected the diameter of the disc. This set the pickup arm to start playing at the right place. Brilliant to watch in action! Tens of thousands of record players and radiogram manufacturers used this range of decks. Another key item designed was a light-weight pickup (UA8). This was based around a small quartz crystal, which when vibrated by the stylus in the groove, produced enough power to drive only one valve in the record player.

This drove down costs. Prior to this, pickups had big magnets and weighed the same as a family car, and quickly wore out records. He also established a sales force to target the U.S. market. There were some battles with Zenith and other companies but product was sold and stood its ground.

Due to massive growth of the business, factories in Northern Ireland were set up and elsewhere in the UK, this had its problems. Daniel was a very hands-on manager and put a lot of store in keeping his staff happy. It was almost a "lifestyle" company. Dances, outings, events were always being held and staff loved working there.

The product range was huge. "Music while you work" systems, office intercoms, Police car loudhailers, to name but only a real few. In some ways this was to be the beginning of the downfall.

A great little tape deck was also part of the portfolio. The TD1,2,4 etc were simple, reliable machines and at a good budget, were bought by every tape recorder manufacturer. This meant the Joe-Public could own their own tape machine to record their best tunes from Two Way family Favourites on a Sunday after dinner, or record Uncle Jack signing down the boozier. Again, to keep things in house, McDonald bought the company who made the tape heads.

By the late '60s - '70s, there had been lots of changes. McDonald had taken a back step and new Whipper-Snapper management had not done a good job of things. New products like 8 track decks were being made and clever electronic record decks that made the coffee as well, were being churned out. With a company jet and other extravagancies, one could see what was going to happen.

By the '80s things were not good. Competition from the Far East etc., finally closed the doors on what was one of those great British companies. So there we go. If you grew up playing your Lonnie Donnigan records on your Dansette, please, say a quick thank you to Dr. Daniel McDonald.

Further reading, 50 shades of technology and advice can be found, under the "Seth's ARTICLES" link on the award winning Zeta website <http://www.zeta-services.tv/reading.html>

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Happy New Year folks and welcome to 2026, let's see what it has in store for us...

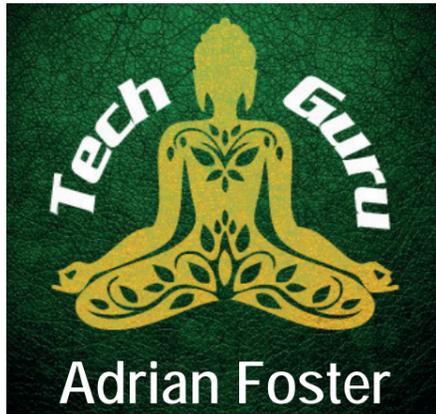
One thing that will be stepping into the spotlight is "AI".

Just to clarify – AI is not "on the horizon", it is already here. What you are experiencing is the technology coming out of infancy and into adolescence (and you know how much trouble teenagers are). Until now it has been part of the backroom solution – a tool to crunch numbers on a massive scale and conduct analysis. Social media use it to target and manipulate output on a huge scale in order to steer us in a "favourable" direction, a

collective mindset that is more amenable to certain ideas or opinions and dismissive of others. You're unlikely to be able to listen to what you're looking for if all you can hear is white noise...

AI systems already optimise content for emotional engagement. Amplify outrage, fear, and tribalism. Shape purchasing behaviour, influence political perception. Nudge attention, not through force but through probability and repetition. This is subtle power, not "mind control," but environmental conditioning: What you see, when you see it, how often and in what emotional context. When profit is the primary optimisation target, the system does not ask: "Is this good for people?", it asks: "Does this keep them engaged, compliant, spending?"

Over time, that reshapes norms, discourse, and belief. This is one



of the most under-regulated powers ever created. The common mistake is to demonise the technology. To use a well-known metaphor; was Dr. Frankenstein the monster or was it his creation? The "monster" was not born malevolent; it was abandoned and then condemned for reflecting its creator's failures. To quote Jeff Goldblum in Jurassic Park:

"You were so preoccupied with whether or not you could, that you didn't stop to think if you should."

AI has now grown to a point where we are on the cusp of the next Industrial Revolution.

Every industrial revolution forced society to deal with massive changes at breakneck speed and inevitably, mistakes were made.

The last great industrial revolution changed the British economy from a pastoral, agricultural one to heavy industrialisation which not only changed employment demographics but the land itself. The driver in this? Profit. Efficiency, scalability, and consistency became dominant. Human labour wasn't eliminated—but it was reorganised, often painfully. Entire professions disappeared or were deskilled before new ones emerged and the population had to get used to the reality of doing more for less reward.

There are already companies developing systems that would remove the need for staff in supermarkets – in fact, anywhere that people can be replaced with machinery. Replaced.

If you want to know how this will eventually play out then you can read a history book but in a nutshell it runs like this: The cycle—disruption → consolidation → re-distribution—and we're squarely in phase one moving into phase two. During the last industrial revolution, there were opportunities for the displaced population to adapt and develop new skills. I look around me and wonder what our train drivers and supermarket staff could do after AI has replaced them. Spain still has a strong agricultural base but the UK economy seems to survive on the service industry, banking and house building.

In this new era, we as a society need to be aware and actively keeping checks and balances in place. Our "leaders" have proved that in that respect and many others, they are incapable. If a new supermarket opens that is cheaper because it has no staff, don't use it because sooner-or-later it will be your turn. Use the checkout instead of the self-scan.

One area where AI has already started to exert itself is in the arts. You may be dimly aware of the script writers' strikes in Hollywood last year and be wondering why it matters. It does. Film and TV companies have been trying to use AI writing tools, citing "efficiency". Capital naturally flows toward anything that reduces cost and risk and now that Hollywood is run by accountants rather than artists, that is the most important thing.

Output is created according to a formula (or algorithm) based on engagement data rather than artistic intent. Content exists to fill space, drive engagement, or support a business model rather than express, challenge, reflect, or explore human experience. Genuine cinema will become a niche art form, competing against rehashes and derivatives. Quite literally – play it again, Sam... We are already seeing an impact with fewer entry-level creative jobs, pressure on wages and residuals, increased expectation that creators "use AI" to stay competitive and the occasional legal battles over likeness,

AI-GENERATED



voice, and training data.

With regards to music however, the changes are somewhat different. Where the production of a movie may involve hundreds, maybe thousands of people, an album can be made by just one person. Examples of this include the first Foo Fighters album (a Dave Grohl solo effort) and Lenny Kravitz's "Mama Said" (barring a stellar contribution from Slash). The cost base is very different.

The music industry has embarked on a period of deep structural change over the last 10-15 years, starting with the introduction on downloads instead of a physical medium (LP, CD, Cassette). Again, I must point a bony finger at the bean counters within the industry that saw an opportunity to cut costs massively for their own benefit. At the time it was a win/win for both the industry and customers, albeit for different reasons. The customers could download a track (from the Apple Store to begin with) rather than buying an entire album and could buy something that would allow them to store their whole music collection in one portable device. It was revolutionary. It was also during the internet's "wild west" period and meant that people realised that this new format could also be easily shared. For free.

Websites like Napster and Limewire had upwards of 70 million users, all chipping away at the record companies' income. It took several years of court action for the industry to regain control of the distribution side of things but in reality the stable door was left hanging off its hinges. To that end an attitude of "if you can't beat 'em..." was taken and we eventually ended up with streaming services like Spotify. Again, it works for the end consumer as they have access to ALL music, everywhere. The artists & record companies get paid a token amount every time a track is played but the margins are tiny and now they are facing another attack.

AI is now sufficiently sophisticated to be able to generate a piece of music without a single instrument being played. Not only that but it can create "mash-ups" that were previously impossible. Ever

heard James Brown singing a funky-up version of Back in Black? Or a country version of Rick Astley – never gonna giddy-up? The music industry is under threat and it's keeping tight-lipped about the whole thing. In other economic areas, it's the general population that will suffer the most but it's the middle tier of the record industry that risks being decimated. It is already being squeezed and is reliant on income from live performances rather than the records it used to rely on. Compare the cost of concert tickets today to those of ten years ago...

Traditionally, record companies locked artists into protectionist and restrictive contracts that stifled creativity and collaboration. James Brown couldn't have worked with AC/DC without getting the lawyers involved. AI is breaking down all these walls. Artists are increasingly controlling their own output and are able to focus on the art of performance instead. Ren Gill is a prime example, having recorded and released all his own material without corporate oversight. Granted, he's a complete genius but...

There is a risk that record companies will use AI to bombard us with derivative music, as they have done for some time (yes, you Simon Cowell). They will still be able to make money but the creative element that underpinned them in the past will be gone. The singer/songwriters they used to monopolise no longer need them to release their material. Using AI, musicians will be able to generate studio-quality music at home and experiment with genres at will. The days of music labels are numbered...

There is a revolution coming over the next few years. A revolution that, if we allow it, will change our lives existentially. Hidden beneath all the clamour about self-driving cars and energy-devouring data centres is a question that we may well have to answer...

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Puzzle Time

Puzzle solutions on page 74

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

Easy

Regular Sudoku

Every Sudoku has a unique solution that can be reached logically.

Enter numbers into the blank spaces so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

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

Medium

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

Across

- 1 Classes
- 5 CD (US)
- 8 Flock
- 9 Sleeping in tents
- 10 Amusement
- 11 Organ of taste
- 12 Dumb
- 15 Cooling appliances
- 18 Slanted text
- 19 Perfect
- 20 Plant origins
- 21 Breadths

Down

- 1 Unit of liquid measure
- 2 Reduce the length of
- 3 Prospects
- 4 Mixer
- 5 Illustrations
- 6 Take by force
- 7 Able to see
- 11 Root vegetable
- 13 Public march
- 14 Holder
- 16 Photo border
- 17 Hawks

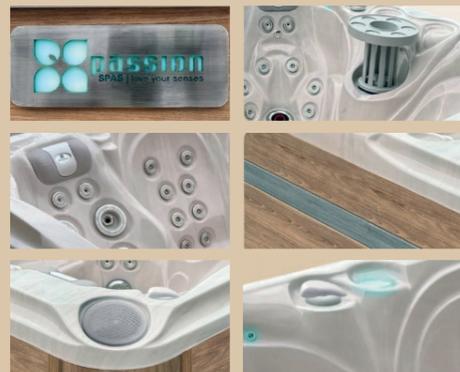
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Thursday 26th February

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We are already working on 2027, we would like to continue to put together programmes that suit every budget and dream.

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Granada

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per person

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9th ~ 11th March 2026

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4* Soho Boutique

Central Old Granada (near Cathedral)

Price Includes:

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Breakfast - days 2 + 3

* Price based on 2 people sharing a room
Single supplement upon request

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Pickup points and timings will vary depending on demand



Cartagena

17th March

From

19.00€
per person

Pick-Ups Possible From:

Albox, Arboleas, La Alfoquia,
Hotel Overa & Huércal Overa

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Salamanca

NEW

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*358€
per person

04th ~ 07th May 2026

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central location

Price Includes:

Coach travel
Three nights in 4* hotel
Breakfast - days 2, 3 + 4
Visit Ciudad Rodrigo
Visit Alberca

* Price based on 2 people sharing a room
Single supplement upon request

Pick-Ups Possible From:

Vera Consum, Mojácar, Turre, Albox, Arboleas, La Alfoquia, Hotel Overa
Pickup points and timings will vary depending on demand



Cádiz / Jerez

3 Nights
*355€
per person

FULLY BOOKED

18th ~ 21st May 2026

Staying at:

4* Hotel Soho Boutique Puerto
in Puerto de Santa Maria

Price Includes:

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Three nights in 4* hotel
Breakfast - days 2, 3 + 4
Visit to Jerez - day 2

* Price based on 2 people sharing a room
Single supplement upon request

Pick-Ups Possible From:

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Pickup points and timings will vary depending on demand



Mérida

3 Nights
*258€
per person

13th ~ 16th April 2026

Staying at:

4* Hotel Velada

Just 600m to Amphitheatre

Price Includes:

Coach travel
Three nights in 4* hotel
Breakfast - days 2, 3 + 4
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Single supplement upon request

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Pickup points and timings will vary depending on demand



Granada

Nevada SHOPPING

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per person

15th ~ 18th June 2026

Staying at:

4* Hotel Hesperia
central location

Price Includes:

Coach travel
Three nights in 4* hotel
Breakfast - days 2, 3 + 4

* Price based on 2 people sharing a room
Single supplement upon request

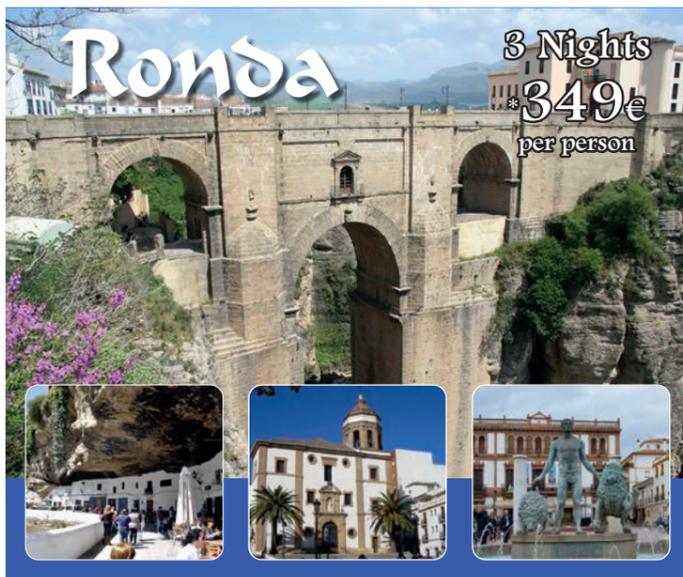
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Ronda

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*349€
per person



Sevilla

3 Nights
*422€
per person

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4* Hotel Maestranza
Central city (opposite Bullring)

Price Includes:
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Three nights in 4* hotel
Breakfast - days 2, 3 + 4
Visit Setenil de las Bodegas

Price based on 2 people sharing a room
Single supplement upon request

Pick-Ups Possible From:
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Pickup points and timings will vary depending on demand



12th ~ 15th October 2026
Staying at:
4* Hotel Doña Maria
Central Sevilla (near Cathedral)

Price Includes:
Coach travel
Transfer to/from hotel
Three nights in 4* hotel
Breakfast - days 2, 3 + 4

Price based on 2 people sharing a room
Single supplement upon request

Pick-Ups Possible From:
Vera Consum, Mojácar, Turre, Albox, Arboleas, La Alfoquia, Hotel Overa
Pickup points and timings will vary depending on demand



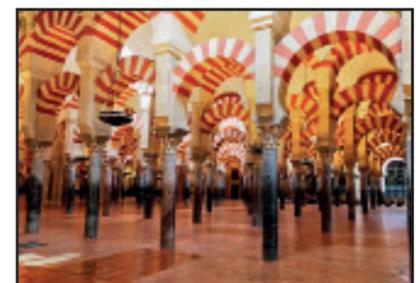
Proposed Mini Breaks 2026/2027



Here are more proposed mini breaks being arranged by Parra Travel for 2026/2027

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HOMES & GARDENS

A Brief History of Spain....part 5 By Mike Woolnough

As we discovered last month Seville became the capital of Moorish Spain and this sparked a building boom. (Without any unforeseen planning issues!)

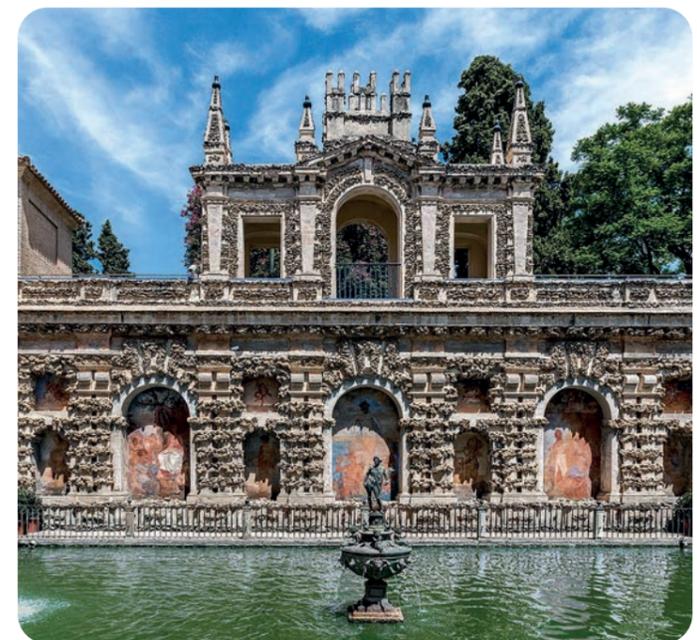
Palaces and towers sprung up all over the place and along the banks of the River Guadalquivir docks and warehouses were constructed. To improve the water supply to the city the Roman aqueduct was also renovated.

In 1170 work began on the great mosque and a year later they started on the Alcázar their palace cum fortress. The minaret of the mosque still stands (although somewhat altered when it became the bell tower of the cathedral).

It wasn't all about a building boom though, the new rulers were also very active in promoting learning throughout al-Andalus. Two of the greatest philosophers of the age, the Muslim Ibn Rushd and the Jewish Moses Maimonides, were local men. They would influence thinking and learning for a great many years after their death.

Meanwhile, "up north" the Christian kings and their armies were developing their main skill, fighting. The object of their anger being the Muslim kingdoms of the south.

Continued on page 32



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..... Continued from page 31

On 16th July 1212 King Alfonso VIII, his army, and assorted crusaders set out from Toledo. Assisted by a Mozárabe shepherd, who showed them the way, they crept up on the Muslim army from the rear and conclusively routed them just south of the current border between Castile-La Mancha and Andalusia at a place called Las Navas de Tolosa. From there, they worked their way through al-Andalus.

It took some time, though. It was Alfonso's successor Ferdinand III who in 1236 first took Córdoba (his first act was to make the Muslims cart what was left of the bells from Santiago back to where they belonged!) and then, twelve years later, Seville. The great mosque was demolished, with only the tower left. Ferdinand was interred in the new cathedral there and three times a year his ornate



casket is displayed to the public.

For the first time since the Visigoths, most of Spain was under Christian rule. Only the kingdom of Granada remained Muslim.

Following the fall of Córdoba and Seville, there was a mass migration of Muslim refugees to Granada. Despite being the only Muslim kingdom in a hostile Christian sea it managed to hold out for another 244 years. It managed to do this because it was a fortress kingdom with walls, watchtowers and numerous castles protecting its borders.

Like other Muslim cities, we have mentioned, Granada was far in advance of other cities, like Paris, Rome and London. It was also one of the richest. The jewel in the crown was, of course, the Alhambra. Built upon the Sabika hill it was started in 890 and successive rulers extended it over the centuries until it became one of the finest buildings in the world.

Despite the extensive fortifications, Granada could not hold out forever, especially as the Christian rulers and their armies became stronger, united and better organised.

In 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella captured Granada. Boabdil, the last Moorish ruler allegedly wept as he left the Alhambra which, so the story goes, prompted his mother to comment, "Do not weep like a woman for what you could not defend like a man!" Isabella and Ferdinand dressed in Moorish robes to receive the keys to the city. This rubbed salt in the wound, because if it was intended to indicate it was business as usual for the Muslims then nothing could be further from the truth for, with the Reconquista came the Inquisition!



Within a very short time, the new order was - convert to Christianity or get out of Spain! Muslim Spain was gone and along with it the most enlightened and tolerant period of its history until modern times.

My inspiration for these articles comes from "SPAIN, an amazingly short history" by Bob Fowke. Published by Travelbrief Publications. ISBN 0-9548351-0-7



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The 2026 Solar Eclipse

By Tom Fynes



The Maya believed the Sun was devoured by a serpent and then returned; they saw this as a powerful moment of renewal and cosmic order restoration. Their Sun God was viewed as a living deity who journeyed daily – disappearing into the belly of a monster or the depths of the sea at night and rising again each day. This journey symbolized renewal, and the natural order of the universe.

Aztec legends had a cosmic serpent devouring the Sun during an eclipse, representing chaos. This myth is tied to the Aztec belief that the universe was unstable, requiring rituals to feed the Sun and

enable its rebirth. Which may or may not have influenced Bonnie Tyler's hit, "A Total Eclipse of the Heart."

For the much more enlightened Europeans of the time, Solar eclipses signalled divine messages, often warnings of impending disasters like the death of kings, wars, or the fall of empires. This followed the usual general run of the mill European Christian legends. But not it seems, giant cosmic snakes having a quick bite to eat.

And now in August 2026, it's back. And we can see it happening from the North of Spain. Vitoria-Gasteiz, in the Basque lands in particular, will be the place to be if you want to see the Sun totally

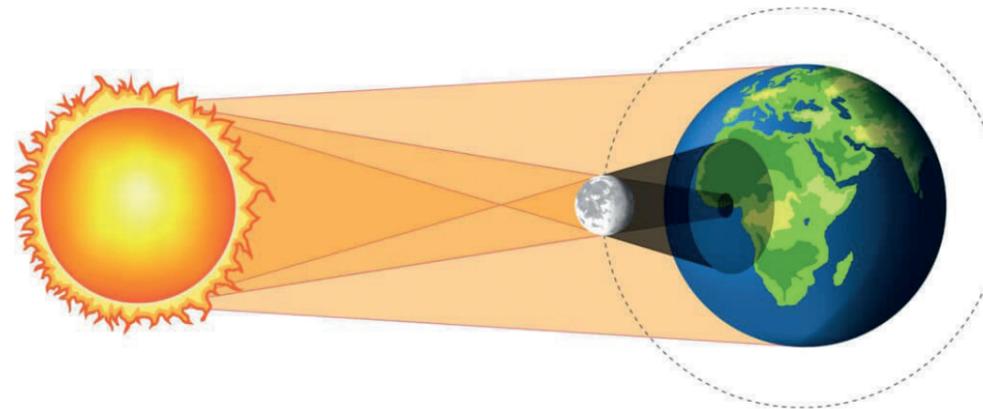
switched off for a few minutes. Or devoured by a cosmic serpent, if you fancy that legend. San Sebastian on the coast will get you a 99.6% eclipse.

The total solar eclipse in Spain on August 12, 2026, will happen at the following approximate local times: Specifically for the Basque Country, the total eclipse begins around 8:27 PM and lasts until about 8:29 PM, with the partial eclipse starting around 7:31 PM and ending around 9:20 PM. All times are local Spanish time and the eclipse will occur late in the evening with the Sun near the western horizon, just before sunset.

The eclipse path starts in Galicia on the Atlantic coast. It crosses the North of Spain through Asturias, Basque Country, La Rioja, and into Aragón and Catalonia. Then the path goes through Valencia and out over the Mediterranean Sea including the Balearic Islands. Outside the totality band, a deep partial eclipse will be visible almost everywhere in Spain.

One thing that the Maya were very observant about was the planet, Venus. When Venus appeared near the eclipsed Sun, the Maya interpreted this celestial struggle represented a cosmic battle between order (Sun) and chaos (Venus). The Maya recorded these beliefs in the Madrid Codex, which linked Venus's cycles with eclipse events.

The Madrid Codex is one of the four surviving pre-Columbian Maya books, dating from the Postclassic period (circa 900–1521 AD). The



codex mainly contains almanacs, horoscopes, divinatory rituals, and astronomical tables used by Maya priests to guide ceremonies. It was named the Madrid Codex because the two main fragments of the book were rediscovered in Spain in the 19th century. And can be viewed in Madrid's Museo de América.

Catching a view of Venus the chaos maker, will be a bonus, while this Cosmic Serpent munching Eclipse is going down. At the moment of totality, the sky will darken enough to make Venus clearly visible as one of the brightest objects in the sky near the eclipsed Sun. In northern Spain, around 8 PM local time during the eclipse, face west toward the setting Sun and look slightly downward and to the left (southwest) to spot Venus shining brightly.

So, while you pack your specialist NASA eclipse sunglasses and your overnight bags and head to the Basque lands, it got me thinking about the mysterious Basque, and the Basque country. They've been hitting way above their weight for a long time. Who are these mysterious Basque people? And where did they come from?

The Basques it seems descend from Neolithic farmers who mixed with local Mesolithic hunter-gatherers before becoming genetically isolated for millennia. Their language, Euskara, is unique and unrelated to any other Indo-European language. The Basques stayed where they were, isolated in the western Pyrenees region. No migration, despite various invasions in the surrounding areas. But

isolated or not, they thrived in their solitude.

The Basques were exceptional sailors and fishermen. They pioneered Atlantic navigation, whaling, and long-range fishing expeditions from the Middle Ages through the early modern period, making them one of Europe's most skilled seafaring cultures. The Basque expertise in shipbuilding and navigation had them contributing ships and crews for major European seafaring expeditions

They sailed with Columbus to the Americas. They were well represented with Conquistador Hernán Cortés' conquest of Mexico. The Magellan expedition had ships captained by Basques, including Juan Sebastián Elcano who completed the expedition after Magellan's death. Studies estimate Basques accounted for 14% of merchants, administrators, and clergy involved in New World expeditions. And you could not leave out some other big Basque hitters like Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier: Founders of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

The Basque people call themselves Euskaldunak, meaning 'Basque speakers' in their language, Euskara. Basques often use Euskotarrak to refer to all Basque people. In the rest of Spain, they are referred to as Vascos. The land is called El País Vasco (the Basque Country). As Conquistadors they rampaged through the treasure houses of the Incas and brought back the riches of the Americas to Spain.

So, while you adjust your special NASA approved solar eclipse glasses, that comply with the international safety standard ISO 12312-2 and watch the Sun getting devoured by a South American cosmic serpent, remember the Basques.

Solar Eclipse Health warning:

!!Do not use regular sunglasses, smoked glass, or homemade filters as they are unsafe!!



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They were in it - to win it!

By Jos Biggs

Did you do the El Gordo?

And if you did, did you win anything?

If the answer is No then you will put it down to an absence of luck and will wait patiently until the end of the year.

However, not everybody did; a certain group rigged it. Not only did they rig it, but when they were discovered and taken to court they got away with it and kept the dough!

If this has sparked your interest read on, though unfortunately this particular scam won't work on modern lotteries - all this took place in France in the eighteen hundreds.

It came about because of the turbulent times that prevailed in France during this period. There were all sorts of unrests, and France went through empires, monarchies and republics so fast that those in current power hardly had time to change their socks, let alone get on with any meaningful governing.

The government needed money, and fast, so it devised a scheme whereby they would sell off government bonds of varying values, but each sale would be accompanied by a lottery ticket.

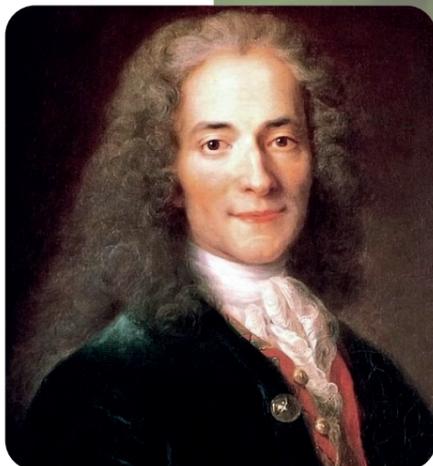
Here is where it began to go wrong. The bonds were of different values, and the cost of buying them depended on that value; the ticket that you got as a result was set at one thousandth of the price of the bond, so for instance, a cheap bond, say 1,000 livres would cost next to nothing while an expensive bond, say 10,000 livres would cost a lot more than the cheap one but still had exactly the same chance of winning, even though you would have spent a lot more to buy it.

It was as if you could buy current lottery tickets for anything between £1 and £1,000, yet would still only be able to win the same prize.

So far so good, as all the lottery tickets got put into the same draw, both the very cheap and the much more expensive, they all had an equal chance of winning.

Obviously if you bought an expensive bond for quite a chunk of money but your neighbour, who only paid a pittance for his bond went and won you were a little miffed.

It didn't take long for a group of the savvy saw an opportunity to exploit this anomaly. The ringleaders were Francois-Marie Arouet, who is known more widely by his pen name Voltaire. He was one of those from that era who were called 'philosophes' - in other words he thought a lot!



His best friend was Charles-Marie de Condamine, who was a mathematician. The two of them got their heads together, did the maths, probably followed by a high-five, and set their plans in motion.

They worked out that the best way to do this and avoid discovery was if several people were all in the scheme. So they gathered 11 of their pals, explained that if they shared the winnings equally between them, nobody would suspect anything, and anyway, if it all gets shared equally then it is in everybody's interest to keep playing fair.

Here is basically how it worked: they bought up a lot of the low value bonds, so much so that the odds were numerically slanted in their favour, and proceeded to win an uncanny number of times, simply because they had such a large amount of tickets in the draw.

It took a fair time before the authorities noticed that the same group of people were winning regularly, and when they did they got together in a cluster and said 'Wish we'd thought of that.'

But they didn't think of it, and no doubt a strong streak of jealousy moved them to take the group to court for cheating.

The judge decided that Voltaire and his friends hadn't broken the law, they'd just used it to their advantage, so ordered the government to pay up.

The end result? The government dissolved the lottery, and Voltaire, Condamine and their pals ended up with a lot of money!

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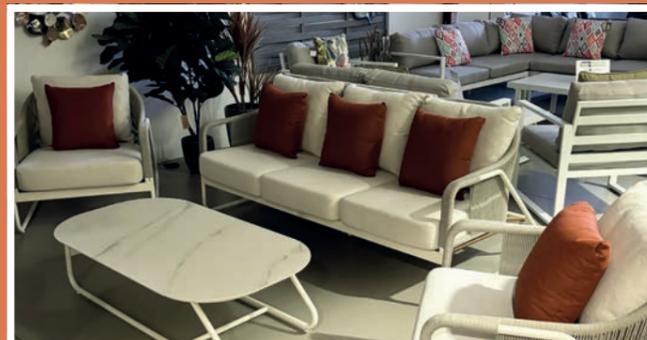
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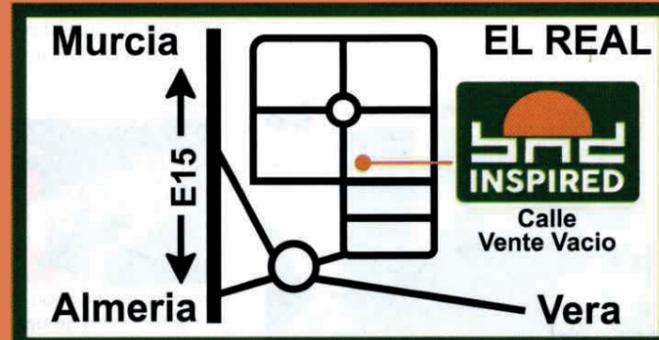
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THEATRE VISIT

Beryl almost lost her footing as she stepped out of the steamy, perfumed atmosphere of the theatre and into the biting cold of the London evening. A sharp winter wind whipped through the narrow streets, snatching at scarves and tugging at coat hems, and she noted with mild surprise that it had started to snow. The flakes drifted lazily at first, catching in her hair and settling on her coat sleeves like delicate lace.

Jenny immediately grabbed her arm to steady her. "Careful, Beryl! You haven't let all that Prokofiev go to your head, have you?" she teased with a grin.



Beryl gave a little giggle. "Can't say I understood much of it, to be honest ... but the music was certainly unusual. All those strange sounds and that silly business with the oranges!"

Jenny snorted as she tugged her woollen scarf tighter around her neck and glanced both ways before ushering Beryl carefully across the busy road. "If you say so! You're a better sport than I thought."

Truth be told, The Love for Three Oranges wouldn't have been Beryl's first choice for a night out in London. Fairy-tale princesses, a slightly ridiculous story, and that horrible rat still scuttling around in her imagination - no, it wasn't quite her cup of tea. She would have preferred a good old-fashioned variety show any day, with wee

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By Evelyn McCrorie

Ronnie Corbett cracking jokes and keeping the crowd in stitches. But, as her mother used to say, "You don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

Her cousin Margaret, who worked at the Coliseum - something in finance, Beryl thought, judging by that hefty satchel she always lugged around - occasionally passed on free tickets for shows that hadn't quite captured the public's fancy. This was one of those nights.

She cast her mind back to last year, when Margaret had handed her a precious ticket to see Swan Lake performed by none other than the Bolshoi Ballet. Her cousin had fixed her with one of her infamous steely glares. "Standing room at the back only," she had warned, adding, "But you can always dive into an empty seat if no one shows up. Just be quick about it."

What a frustrating evening that had been! Beryl hadn't dared take the chance. She simply didn't have the nerve to dash into an empty seat just as the lights dimmed. Imagine the humiliation if she'd bumped into the rightful ticket holder in the darkness! So she'd stood on tired legs through the entire performance, but it had been worth every ache. The haunting image of the beautiful Odette lingered with her for weeks. Now that was a princess she could admire.

As the sisters trudged home through the now-thickening snow, their breath puffing in soft white clouds, they hadn't quite left the enchanted world of the theatre behind. The strange, stirring music still echoed in their minds, weaving through the rhythm of their steps.

London at night was always a little magical, and as they walked, they kept their eyes peeled - hoping to spot a star, theatrical or celestial, shining just for them.




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A Roman Holiday

By Aileen Cleave

In November we went to Italy. I had been twice before but, incredibly, nearly sixty years ago! How could that be and how was I able to remember it so well when these days I forget why I'm standing in the middle of the sitting room!

Because we also wanted to see the ruins of Pompeii, we flew first to Naples from Alicante. Alicante has expanded and it's now possible to fly to virtually anywhere in Europe, whereas previously it would have meant flying first to Gatwick.

The plan was to arrive in Naples and then take a 15-minute bus ride to Pompeii, where our Airbnb was very close to the Roman Ruins; we would stay there for two nights then return to Naples for the train to Rome. I have to confess to a degree of nervousness at the thought of a bus trip. My husband thinks he's still capable of backpacking round Europe like our grandchildren.

However, in the event we took a taxi after being assured that Italian taxi drivers have a maximum fee they are allowed to charge from airports. A very good idea, I think, and one which would benefit English airports enormously.

The taxi was a wise choice because we arrived at dusk, and while Naples is very brightly lit, Pompeii is not. Our Airbnb was in a very quiet, dimly lit street and our host wasn't answering the door. Here the taxi driver more than earned his fare. He knew the proprietor and rang him. I have to say that our experience with Italians is that they are hugely friendly and helpful people.

The best way to describe our Airbnb is to say it was very authentic of Southern Italy, a little shabby but charming and comfortable and run by a young married couple. We had a very pleasant night's sleep, followed by a delicious continental breakfast before we set out to



meet with the guide for our tour of the ruins.

My walking is not good these days, a source of much regret for me, because I love cities and John and I would always opt for the streets of Prague or Budapest over a beach-style holiday. But I now use a walking stick if I'm going anywhere challenging, and these ruins were certainly challenging - but fascinating.

To walk through the chariot ruts in the roads where people had gone about their everyday life 2000 years ago, before a malevolent Mount Vesuvius erupted and suffocated them in six metres of molten lava, was, to say the least, thought provoking.

The tour lasted some three hours and when we finally limped our



way towards a bar for a revitalising beverage, my phone showed I had walked 15,000 steps. I was elated!

The train journey from Naples to Rome was a little disappointing. I'd expected a streamlined train such as the Spanish AVE, given that it was a journey of some three and a half hours, but it was just like the English commuter trains, and it stopped at about a half a dozen stations. It is worth mentioning in case anyone is interested, that the trains, and indeed the buses, are very easily booked on line.

When we arrived in Rome, John was determined to experience an Italian bus. We had our 7-euro tickets on our phones, the number of the bus that would take us to a stop some 500 metres from our Airbnb near the Vatican, and we were looking forward to spotting various sights en route through the city.

Unfortunately, it must have been rush hour because every man and his wife wanted the number 40 bus. We just had 'carry on' luggage but on a crowded bus, believe me, that is still a lot. I managed to get

a seat which was just as well because I would not have been able to keep my balance as the driver threw the bus around corners. John clung perilously to a strap while trying to stop his case from rolling away. We knew we had to get off at a stop called Something Espiritu Santo (I couldn't remember the first bit) but the indicator board was obstructed by standing people. My ever-resourceful husband asked a lady next to him in his best Spanish if she knew of this stop and, smiling, she counted on her fingers and said 3 more. I had a fleeting glimpse of the Coliseum before we thankfully arrived at our stop and disembarked. I gave my husband a look that clearly said "never again", we'd take a taxi back.

How wonderful is Google Maps! We set off through the crowds, following clear instructions, passing under an archway in an ancient wall till we arrived at a delightful cobbled street with restaurant tables lining each side, in front of tall eighteenth-century houses, one of which was ours. The air was heavy with the smell of garlic, pizza and melting cheese. Our spirits rose accordingly. No problem searching out a restaurant.

Our rooms were on the third floor, but the lift was waiting. A very nice kitchen greeted us, then a bathroom and the sitting room/cum bedroom. The first thing I noticed were the tall casement windows opening up to witness the wonderful sights and sounds in the street below. Magically, as I opened the window, someone was playing the piano and singing. I was enchanted.

John meanwhile called me in to ask what I thought of the bed. Oh, my goodness! I came down to earth. The listing on Airbnb had mentioned a mezzanine floor, it hadn't said a mezzanine bed! Above the dining table and perched on what looked like a scaffolding pole was a wooden base just fractionally bigger than the mattress, and leading to it was a steep, wooden ladder.

Continued on page 44



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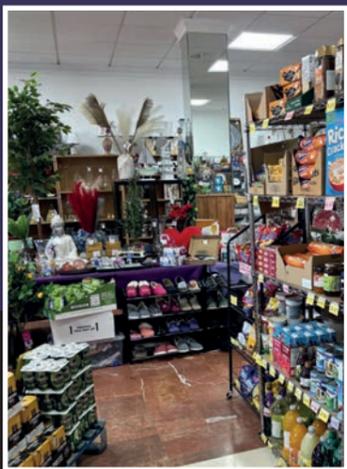
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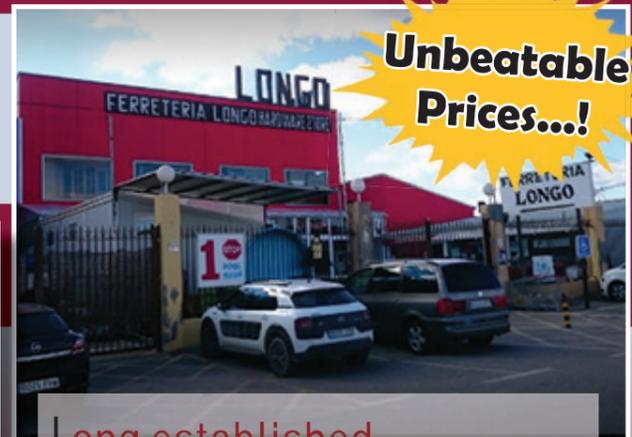
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..... Continued from page 43

“There is no way in this sweet world I’m sleeping there”, I said, having visions of one or other of us falling off and hurtling to the floor.

”Don’t worry” said John, “we’ll sleep on the sofa bed”.

However, the sofa bed was one puzzle too far for us. No matter how we tried we couldn’t work out how to open it up, and we didn’t want to break it.

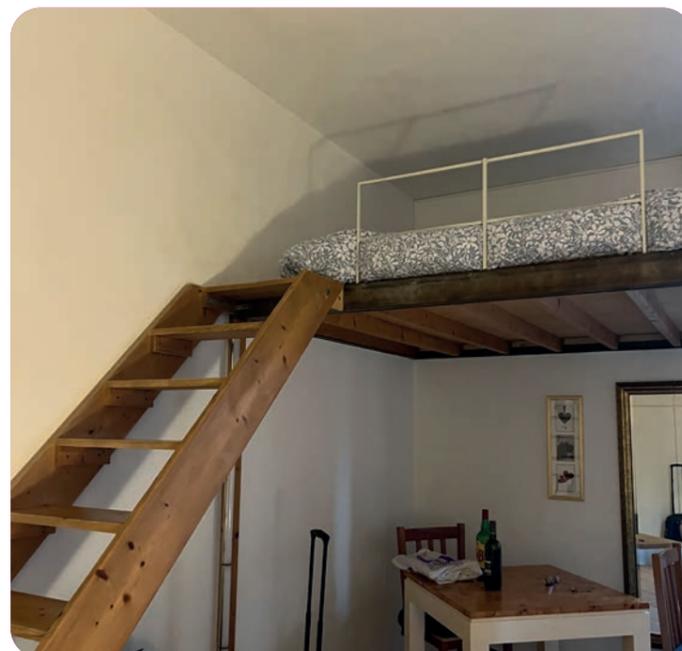
We’ll have to bring the mattress down, says John. Fortunately, it was more of a futon than a mattress, so I moved the dining table while, with very little difficulty, John deposited the futon in its place.

After a delicious pizza just outside our front door, we came back and sank thankfully onto the futon and slept soundly, until sometime in the early hours nature called, and I found myself hugging a steel pole to help me up. Getting up from the floor is not easy after a certain age!

We rested the following day, knowing we needed to recuperate, and just wandered through the ancient, cobbled streets, getting to know the area. For the following day we had booked an online tour of the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel, which we knew was again about four hours, standing and walking.

But, my goodness, was it worth it. The art, the wealth, the incredible beauty of it all.

I wanted to go inside St Peter’s Basilica, so I googled to see if it was open to the public that day. I had a notification a little later saying it was, but at the moment was cordoned off to allow for processions of penitents. So it was that as we walked back down the Via della Conciliazione, we were rewarded with several processions passing us, singing the Kyrie eleison, a Latin chant from the Mass asking for forgiveness. I found it quite moving



We were staying in Borgo Pio, parallel to the famous Borgo San Angelo, and the old fort of San Angelo, older than Christianity, was on the River Tiber at the end of our road. What a lovely evening stroll that made.

We certainly enjoyed those restaurants lining our street. Delicious steaks, wafer thin pizzas, and very nice Chianti. We made our way (by taxi!!) back to the airport, having thoroughly enjoyed our two centre week in Italy. This is by no means an advert for Airbnb, simply a wish to share with you a way of visiting so many wonderful places more often without the impossible expense of an hotel. Buen viaje!!



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New Year's Resolutions for Gardeners

The new year gives us an opportunity to reflect on the past and dream for the future and maybe set some new year's resolutions. These ideas can help you be the best gardener you can be. Resolve to meet one goal each month, or simply use them as inspiration for your own list.

Clean out the shed and go through old materials - We've all got it: that one place in the garage or shed where forgotten garden materials have piled up and now sit, unused. Resolve to clean out your garden shed, discard expired materials and clean up tools.

Take a risk, plant something new - Or, don't plant something old, however you want to phrase it. As gardeners, we all have our favourites, but there's little to be gained from doing the same thing in the garden year after year. Challenge yourself to replace an old standby with something new.

Add a new native species to your garden - There are so many benefits to planting native species. Beautify your garden and attract pollinators by adding a native species to your garden this year!

Plant something with a child - Whether it's your own children or grandchildren, nieces, nephews or students, resolve to share the love of gardening with a younger person this year. Or, simply plant some beans in a plastic cup on the windowsill and rediscover the childlike joy of seeing the first sprouts.

Plant a food you haven't tried before - Whether it's a veggie, fruit or herb, resolve to grow a new type of food in your garden this year, remember to not plant more than you can realistically use.

Treat yourself to a good gardening book - Gardening books are a great way to practice your hobby during the colder months or when the sun isn't shining. Resolve to read at least one gardening book this year.



Start something from seed - This is an annual resolution for gardeners, there's something intensely rewarding about growing from seed! If this is already a regular part of your gardening routine, we suggest trying something new, or simply brushing up on your knowledge on starting from seed.

Invite people over to spend time in your garden - We love the community aspect of gardening. Beautiful gardens are something to be shared, so resolve to have a gardening get-together at least once this year. If you're an apartment-dweller or landless gardener, plan a garden-related outing with friends or perhaps resolve to share a meal outdoors.

Document your garden - Finally, make a resolution to document your garden, either to track the progress of new projects or simply to enjoy. Take photos of your garden, or perhaps start a gardening journal.



GOING GREEN

By Jason Lowther

Helping exotic wildlife this New Year

Happy New Year! I hope that readers had a restful break. I was minded to write on this subject after the culmination of the most recent conference of the parties on the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the rather tenuous link of the old 'sadvert' at this time of year, that a dog is for life and not just for Christmas.

Of course that remains as true today as ever; the same though applies to the multitude of exotics that species go in and out of fashion, with demand, often generated online nowadays, creating concerning impacts on wild populations. It applies to plants as well as animals, and, taken together, the illegal wildlife trade is estimated at between € and €20 billion annually, making it the world's fourth-largest illicit trade after arms, drugs, and human trafficking. The impacts are broad in scope putting pressure on iconic species, fuelling organised crime, corruption, and devastating ecosystems.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, (CITES), is an international agreement designed to ensure that the global trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival, while also allowing trade to continue where it can be shown to be sustainable and lawful. It operates by regulating international trade through a system of permits and controls agreed by its member states, known as Parties. These Parties include sovereign countries as well as certain regional economic organisations.

CITES was agreed in 1973 and came into force in 1975. Since then, it has grown into one of the world's most widely supported

environmental agreements, covering tens of thousands of animal and plant species and applying in almost every country. Although CITES is legally binding on its Parties, it does not replace national law. Instead, each country is responsible for implementing the Convention through its own domestic legislation. National authorities issue permits, carry out inspections, and enforce the rules through customs services, wildlife agencies and the police. At the international level, the CITES Secretariat, based in Geneva, supports governments by providing technical guidance, but it does not itself carry out enforcement.

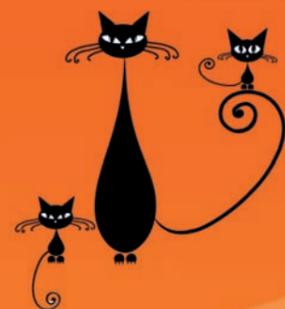
At the core of CITES are three appendices, which classify species according to the level of protection they require. Appendix I includes species that are threatened with extinction. International trade in wild-caught specimens of these species is generally prohibited and is permitted only in exceptional, non-commercial circumstances, like scientific research. Such trade requires both an export permit from the country of origin and an import permit from the destination country.

Appendix II covers species that are not currently threatened with extinction but could become so unless trade is strictly controlled. Trade in these species is allowed, but only where it can be demonstrated that it will not be harmful to the species' survival. Exporting countries must issue permits confirming that the specimen was legally acquired and that a scientific assessment—known as a non-detriment finding—has concluded that the export will not undermine the species in the wild.

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Appendix III applies to species that are protected in at least one country which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling international trade.

CITES is governed by the Conference of the Parties, which meets roughly every three years, and is the Convention's supreme decision-making body. The most recent, CoP20, concluded on December 5th Samarkand, Uzbekistan. It decides which species are listed in the appendices and adopts resolutions that guide how CITES is implemented. Between these meetings, other committees and expert bodies provide advice to the Convention Secretariat.

This year, one of the most prominent outcomes of CITES CoP20 was a significant strengthening of protections for marine life, particularly sharks and rays. Notable decisions included the listing of oceanic whitetip sharks, whale sharks, and all manta and devil rays to Appendix I, effectively banning international commercial trade in these species. This has significance for Spain as oceanic whitetips have been the target of its deep-sea fisheries.

The Conference also extended stronger protections to a wide range of other species threatened by international trade. Reptiles, including certain iguana species from the Galápagos Islands, were added to Appendix I, reflecting serious concerns about their conservation status. Protections were increased for some birds, including vultures and other threatened species, through upgraded listings. In addition, sloths from Central and South America were included in Appendix II for the first time, bringing their international trade under formal regulation. These decisions highlight growing concern about the impact of global wildlife and pet markets on vulnerable species.

Alongside these stricter measures, CoP20 also recognised a number of conservation success stories. One of which related to the bontebok, a South African antelope, which was removed entirely from the CITES appendices after its population recovered to sustainable levels. It is a useful example to show that effective conservation efforts can, sometimes at least, allow a return to regulated trade rather than a permanent prohibition.



CoP20 also produced a wide range of decisions aimed at strengthening how CITES operates in practice. Governments agreed on enhanced measures to tackle online wildlife crime, illicit financial flows linked to illegal trade, corruption, and weaknesses in reporting systems. Progress was also made on policy frameworks covering tree species, eels and the conservation of big cats, alongside renewed commitments to cooperation with the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime and other international agreements. However, while there was some progress on eels, which were in the past been a specific enforcement priority for the Guardia Civil's SEPRONA (as previously noted here), a proposal supported by Spain and the EU, to have all freshwater eel species listed in Appendix II, was not successful.

Practically, CITES operates through a detailed system of permits and certificates issued by national authorities. Export and import permits, re-export certificates, and special documentation for specimens that have been bred in captivity (animals) or artificially

propagated (plants). The paperwork is essential to ensure that trade is legal, traceable and sustainable. Where concerns arise about compliance, CITES relies on measures, including dialogue with governments, technical assistance, in serious cases, the suspension of trade with particular countries.

Enforcement is carried out on the ground by national agencies and can involve border checks, inspections of markets and private collections, seizures of illegal specimens, and criminal investigations. Because illegal wildlife trade is widely recognised as a form of transnational organised crime, CITES also works closely with international bodies such as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization to support cross-border cooperation.



Spain is a 'range state', meaning that it is host to species included in the CITES appendices, a 'transit state', meaning that it is a hub for species entering and leaving the country to an ultimate destination and a 'destination state', meaning that there is a consumer market for specimens or their parts. As a range state, Spain hosts a number of species that are listed under CITES Appendix I and Appendix II, occurring either as native, migratory, or regularly occurring wild populations. This is due to Spain's ecological diversity and its role as a biogeographical 'bridge' between Europe and Africa. The Iberian Lynx, the Blue Whale, the Loggerhead Turtle and the Spanish Imperial Eagle, are either native or visitors to Spain and afforded the highest level of protection with commercial trade generally prohibited.

Spain is also home to a wide range of species listed under CITES Appendix II. The grey wolf is present in several regions of Spain and is subject to regulated protection, while the Eurasian otter also occurs across parts of the country. Spain's birdlife includes several Appendix II species of birds of prey, such as Bonelli's eagle, the golden eagle and the short-toed snake eagle, as well as a number of falcon species including the peregrine falcon and Eleonora's falcon.

Appendix II reptiles include the Mediterranean tortoise and the spur-thighed tortoise, which occur particularly in our part of the country. Spain's surrounding seas are also home to several Appendix II marine species, including the great white shark, the basking shark and the shortfin mako, all of which occur in Spanish Atlantic and Mediterranean waters. In addition, Spain hosts numerous plant species covered by Appendix II, notably many native orchids as well as certain cacti and succulents that occur either naturally or through

cultivation.

Just because the species are present in Spain does not mean that they can be freely traded. Even where a species is native, any international trade in live specimens, dead animals, or their parts and derivatives is tightly controlled and, in some cases, prohibited altogether. Spain is required to monitor wild populations, assess the potential impacts of trade, and issue or refuse export permits on the basis of scientific non-detriment findings for Appendix II species. For species listed in Appendix I, stricter prohibitions apply. In practice, many of these species are also protected under European Union nature conservation law, particularly the Birds and Habitats Directives, meaning that domestic protection often goes beyond the minimum

requirements of CITES.

This ecological and legal context has important implications for enforcement. Hosting large numbers of protected species increases the risk of illegal possession, especially in relation to birds of prey and tortoises, and creates opportunities for document fraud, such as false claims that specimens were bred in captivity. It also adds to the complexity of enforcement at national borders and within the EU's internal market. As a result, Spain occupies a dual role under CITES: it is both a range state with significant conservation responsibilities and a key enforcement hotspot for CITES-related offences.

All of the above is great. However, the trade in endangered species continues apace. In December 2025 Interpol, reported on its most recent global operation against the illegal trafficking of wild fauna and flora, which led to the seizure of nearly 30,000 live animals, as well as identifying over 1,000 suspected criminal wildlife traffickers. Law enforcement agencies comprising police, customs, border security and forestry and wildlife authorities from 134 countries made a total of 4,640 interventions during Operation Thunder 2025. This record number of seizures included tens of thousands of protected animals and plants and tens of thousands of cubic metres of illegally logged timber, as well as more than 30 tonnes of species classified as endangered under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered of Species Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It is worth Googling the operation to see the sheer scale of the offending, and the random breadth of the species involved. So, for 2026, it would be good to offer absolutely no demand for exotic and threatened species. As New Year resolutions go, the biodiversity of the world will thank you.

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A Bird's Eye View of Everyday Life By Berni Albrighton

"Morning Cecil."

"Morning Max."

"Where is everyone?"

"They went straight to the cafe, James was hungry."

"Well, nothing new there."

"You missed a treat about 10 minutes ago," said Cecil playfully.

"Guess who has a boyfriend?"

"Ooh, Miss Shiny Shoes?" replied Max.

"No, have another guess."

"Aha, don't tell me, fag ash Lil."

"No."

"I give up." said Max "Who is it?"

"Lady in red."

"No! Really?"

"Yes. Really"

"How? I mean, what did you see?"

"Well." replied Cecil. "It was just after the others had left for the cafe.

She came out of her door, looking lovely as always in her red coat, and she was hand in hand with a very dapper looking fellow. All smiles she was."

"How fantastic Cecil. Ooh I feel all warm and fuzzy. She's been on her own for so long. That has made my day." said Max beaming.

"Oh oh. Look who's just turned up." Cecil nodded towards a pale youth who was doing a very bad job of parking his car.

"He doesn't look old enough to drive." Max tutted.

Cecil shook his head. "You say that every day Max."

"But why does he need something so big? I mean you can hardly see him behind the wheel."

"Now now," said Cecil. "we agreed not to become sarcastic and bitter in our old age."

They both laughed.

"They're late this morning." said Max, looking across at the young couple arguing loudly.

"Do you think they live together? I mean, they don't seem to like each other very much do they?"

"I don't know Max," said Cecil. "Everytime we see them they're arguing. Look, she's just pushed him. Oh, he's crossing over the road. Tut tut"

"Regular as clockwork, here's Mr. Beanie. Gosh, he looks a little wild wouldn't you say.

He's going to scare someone with his shouting. Ah, thank goodness, here's Mr.Belly, just in time." said Cecil while staring wide eyed as Mr. Beanie grappled with Mr.Belly, the local policeman.

"If he gets arrested at least he'd have somewhere dry to sleep and he'll likely get fed. That wouldn't be a bad thing."

They both agreed.

"Talking of being fed. Are you ready for breakfast Cecil?"

"Yes, let's go find the others. "

They got there just in time.

Mrs Brown Cardigan was approaching her usual bench by the pond.

Soon she would be throwing handfuls of bread and broken biscuits to the ducks.

"Come on Max, let's get in there before those greedy ducks eat the lot."



As they flew down the ducks scarppered.

"Coo coo my darlings." sang Mrs Brown Cardigan as Max and Cecil settled on the arm of the bench.

"Mmmm. Digestives. My favourite." muttered Cecil.

Max watched as Cecil turned on the charm, crumbs falling on his fine, silver grey feathers.

"Here you are handsome sweetie." said Mrs Brown Cardigan

Max thought of the people who they had seen this morning.

"Life is so less complicated when you are a pigeon," he said to himself.

"Coo coo."

Berni Albrighton is a member of The Written Word Group

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What Is It About Cats?

Cats Rule! Whoever invented that stupid combination of words? I think it's the worst load of nonsense I've EVER heard!

It was the first thing mum said to me when she brought me home and had carried me into the house and deposited me on the floor.

Zulu (who was still with us then) and Pimpernel both came to look me over and find out who I was and what I was doing there. I was just about to shout, 'Curiosity killed the cat!' and chase them off when mum's voice came like a whiplash: 'Leave! Cats Rule!'

I was so taken aback by the sheer stupidity of it all that I froze and never took even one step in their direction! That made my naïve mum think that I'd taken that in straight away and accepted it as the Law of the House.

No way! Don't get me wrong, though, I love my mate, Pimpernel the Cat, but why should his scrawny five kilos and diminutive size rule over my 40 kilos and solid frame? But then again, saying 'Weight Rules!' sounds almost as silly. Although not quite.

Never mind, I just don't see why Cats Rule.

And look at my auntie Pia, for example. I love her, and she loves me. We always have great fun when we're together, 'coz she plays with me like mum does, except without constantly having her mind on what is 'pedagogically correct', as mum calls it.

When I play with Auntie Pia, we just muck about and do what we feel like, let the moment seize us and go along with whatever springs to mind. I reckon Auntie Pia enjoys it as much as I do.

So, it would be logical for me to go on holiday with mum when she



visits Auntie Pia in Copenhagen, right? I've heard that in Denmark they have great big areas of grass that isn't made from plastic, and I'd love to experience that! I sometimes find a couple of tufts when we're out running/walking, and the smells I can make out from just one small tuft! Imagine what a whole great big field must be like! It would be the equivalent of you humans going to a ten-screen cinema!

So, last time mum was going to Denmark I decided to come along. But guess what: Auntie Pia said I couldn't come! Why? Because she has three cats. And the poor little mites might get upset if a great, big, beautiful, well-behaved, intelligent German shepherd was allowed in the garden and house.

But I'm their cousin! Surely, they'd be delighted to see me? I promise I'd be on my best behaviour and play with them as much as they want, just like I do with the rabbits at home! We play 'Follow the



Leader' and I always let them be the Leader. What more could they want? But no, I'm not welcome as long as the cats are still around.

Yes, yes, I know. Cats Rule. I just want to know why!

At my dog training club (it should be called handler training), there are loads of cats. But guess what? Nobody's allowed to play with them – except other cats!

This has turned them into the most arrogant little gits you can imagine. Mum doesn't believe me, but I swear they stick their tongues out at me when she isn't looking.

In a typical obedience class, there's about ten dogs. All shapes and sizes. Some smaller than me, others larger. Some better behaved

than others. Me, I'm very well behaved – at least when mum gets it right.

Add to this mix a cat. There we are, all concentrating and working hard, when a cat walks into the middle of the court! Some of my mates ignore him and pretend he's not there. I try to do the same for a while, although I can't help looking around from time to time to make sure I know where the little bugger is.

Mum is always extra attentive when there's a cat on the court and praises me extra when I do my exercises correctly in spite of the intrusion.

The instructors in the middle make a fuss of the cat, throw him sausages and cuddle and stroke him, and he looks triumphantly at us dogs who, in spite of all our hard work, only get the odd sausage or cuddle.

How is a girl to ignore that? Eventually I have to let rip and I throw myself in his direction, cursing the collar and lead that stop me from getting to him and shaking the sausages from his mouth and the arrogant grin from his face! Grrrrrrrrrr!!!!

Mum pulls me back, tells me off, then sits me down and gives me a loose lead. I'm then supposed to stay sat in spite of the tempting feeling of not being restrained, free to pounce.

If I do stay sat, I must admit the extra cuddles and sausages go a long way towards making it worth it, and of course, if I pounce again, I just get pulled back again. But it is so satisfying! A very hard choice...

I suppose I'll just go on playing it by ear. There's no way I'll promise never to pounce again, that would just prove that indeed Cats Rule, and I shall fight against that ridiculous notion until I draw my last breath!

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A Bundle of Fur!



I go for a walk most afternoons, and this Saturday in June was no exception. I felt good so I thought that I would go the whole fifteen kilometres. I had my MP3, I have some music with a good beat to it to march to and the app on my mobile told me that I had just reached the four-kilometre mark. I was walking on the dirt track by the side of the motorway towards Almanzora, Queen and Bowie were blasting out 'Under Pressure' when I heard a faint meow. Must be hearing things, I thought, a few more steps and another meow. I stopped and looked around, at the olive grove to my right, back down the way I had come, up the track in front of me; meow, to the scrub on the other side of the fence and the bottom of the banking up to the motorway, meow. What the hell is it and where is it?

Then I saw a movement under one of the scrubby bushes, it suddenly appeared and came through the chicken wire fence, a small slate grey kitten. It just walked up to me meowing and rubbed round my legs, I switched Tina off and bent down to pick the little one up, it started purring straight away. I looked around for its mama or any other kittens. "What are you doing here miles from anywhere?" I asked it, "there can't be a house or anything within a kilometre or more, but you're well fed, where have you come from? Well, I can't leave you here." So, I undid a button on my shirt and put her inside, then fastened the button again.

What do I do now? Do I carry on with my walk? What can I call her? I thought about four K as I had just passed the four K mark when I found her, or fifteen K because that's the walk I was on. In the end we decided on Dusty because of her slate grey, or 'blue' fur. I looked down at the head peeking out of my shirt front and set off for home after turning Tina back on. Arriving home about an hour later, the first thing my sister-in-law said was no. I took a picture and went on Facebook to see if anyone wanted her, but the only response was "Isn't it beautiful and aww." Monday, we took her to the Vets who told us that she was about six weeks old and to come back in two weeks for her injections; which we did. Then when she was five months old, we took her for her operation and a chip fitting. She is now seven months old and a bolshie teenager, bouncing off the back of our fourteen-year-old cat and running round like a mad thing; I just wish that I had her energy.

By Charles Roberts

Dusty is now two years old and wouldn't fit into my shirt anymore. She is still a small cat, though a lot larger than when I first picked her up. She isn't a lap cat, preferring to curl up on a bed instead of a lap, but she is affectionate in her own way. She sleeps on my bed at night and before I turn the light out we have a ten minute play time, where she goes under her fleece and attacks my hand as I try to stroke her. She used to go all out with teeth and claws, but she tends to keep her claws in these days, but still uses her teeth, which are sharp, but not sharp enough to break the skin.

She spends most of her day outside, thankfully we are set well back from any road, and has gardens to play and hunt in. And she is a good little hunter and brings all her catches in for us to see, usually grasshoppers and locusts which she tends to leave in my shower. We leave the kitchen window open for her to come and go out of so quite often don't see her as she comes in with a catch, it is only when I go to the loo or a shower that I see her little 'gift' she has brought in for us.

She will come in for her evening meal between three thirty and six, then settle down on the sister-in-law's bed for a good wash and then sleep until bed time at about eight thirty, when she becomes a little bit naughty and either hides behind the wardrobe or I have to play chase where she will run around the living room until she feels that she has tired me out enough and goes into my bedroom. If I have to get up during the night she will come and ask for a cuddle and stroke until she decides that it is time for her to go back to sleep and settles down either behind my knees or behind my back.

She always has biscuits, water, and a loo in my bedroom so that she needs for nothing during the night. I could have another twenty years with her, if I live that long, my main worry is what will happen to her if I pop my clogs before her, which is quite likely.

I know this might sound selfish, but I couldn't give her up. When I am out in the garden working, if she sees me, she will run to me and attack my ankles, playfully, as if to say here I am and I love you, then she will follow me round wherever I go, tail straight up, like a Lemur, occasionally running towards me for a stroke and petting, purring all the time. Or she'll lay on the top step up to the vegetable garden, soaking up the sun, like an Egyptian princess, which of course she is.



Here's the Season to Be Healthy



The holidays are over and January has arrived; time to stop gorging on fatty foods and naughty drinks and to start making it up to our bodies.

This is where the modest lemon comes in. Lemons are good for you! And they can actually be consumed without G&T or smoked salmon!

Lemons are famous for their high vitamin C content, and it is a fact that just 50ml of lemon juice a day fully covers the recommended daily vitamin C intake.

And if you have the juice of a lemon in a glass of warm or room temperature water as your first drink of the morning, there's no end of benefits to be had from it!

1. It cleanses your skin. One of the best reasons for drinking lemon water is that it keeps your skin fresh. The water flushes out the toxins and the vitamin C from the lemon keeps your skin clear and uniform.
2. Vitamin C boosts your defences and helps fight common cold. If you've caught a cold already, hot water with lemon juice and honey helps relieve it!
3. Water with lemon also boosts your digestive system and metabolism which in their turn fight the need for nibbles and quieten your hunger. If you suffer from tummy aches you will notice a great difference when you start drinking lemon water on a regular basis.
4. If you're hung over, don't give in to your craving for fatty food –

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have a glass of water with lemon juice instead. It's cheaper, healthier and will fight any tummy pains with its antiseptic and detoxing qualities.

5. Alcohol, spicy food or smoking can all dry out your mouth and make your breath sour. Lemon water fights this as well and makes your breath fresher. And if you suffer from mucus in the throat, it will get rid of that as well.

6. Lemon contains potassium which helps control your blood pressure and stimulate your brain and nerve functions. Low levels of potassium have been linked to depression, anxiety and forgetfulness.

7. If you suffer from breathing problems, lemon water is the drink for you. Its anti-bacteria qualities have a calming effect on coughs and sometimes even allergies.

8. A daily glass of lemon water will boost your energy levels and thus make you happier and more positive in general

When shopping for lemons, go for the ones that still have a bit of green on them, and don't be shy to sniff them - fresh lemons smell wonderful, and if they don't smell at all, they'll most likely have been separated from their tree for a long time.

If you stick them in the vegetable drawer in the fridge, fresh lemons will last up to four weeks.

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Cooking with Nina



Potato Soup

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Start the Year As You Mean to Go On

That's what they say – and I'm doing the exact opposite.

Because I'm cheating! I'm not going to make a habit of it, but needs must and all that.

I promise cross my heart and hope to die that I've tried and adjusted all the recipes this month as always, but I somehow managed to take the most God-awful photos, so I've had to go looking for photos for two of them on the internet.

I've chosen photos that look like my finished product, and I'll leave it up to you to decide which two are mine and which two aren't. But I still consider it cheating.

We're going all soupy this month to make up for December's excesses (speaking strictly for myself, of course!).

Read, cook and enjoy

Add the cheese toasties to the mix, and you've got a real winner!!

Ingredients for four:

- 800g potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 200g chorizo, finely sliced
- 1 l vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 green pepper, ribbed and cut into chunks
- A few handfuls roughly chopped spinach
- 150ml cream
- Salt and pepper

For the toasties:

- 8-12 slices baguette
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 50ml olive oil
- Salt
- 200g roll goat's cheese

Heat up a large pan and throw in the chorizo slices, a few at a time, and let them fry until crisp. Set them aside in a plate with absorbent paper and leave the fat in the pan.

Add the onions and garlic to the pan and let them simmer until the onions are transparent. Throw in the cubed potatoes and turn them in the pan for a couple of minutes. Pour in the stock, bring to the boil and let the soup bubble for about 8 minutes until the potatoes are done.

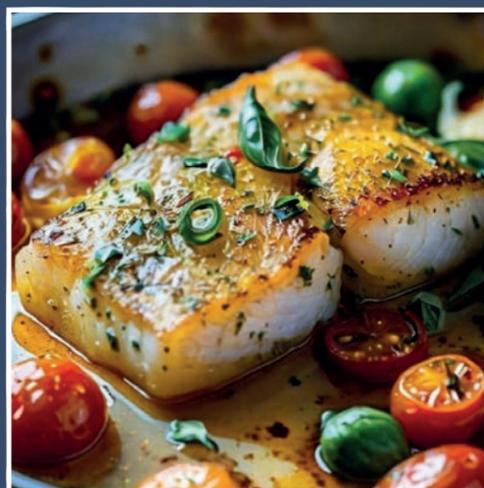
Add the cream and the green pepper chunks and let the soup bubble for another five minutes. Adjust the seasoning.

In the meantime, make the toasties.

Place the slices of baguette on a lined baking tray. Mix garlic, olive oil and salt in a bowl and brush the bread slices with the mixture. Put slices of goat's cheese on top.

Place in the oven at 200°C for approx. five minutes until the bread is crisp.

Serve with the piping hot soup and let the heat spread in your body while your tastebuds start humming.



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Lentil Soup

This is almost too good to be true: A soup that is super tasty, super cheap and super healthy! You have to try it to really believe how good it is!

The secret of a good lentil soup is, they say, in the olive oil. Use plenty of it, and make sure it's a good one. I use one I buy straight from the factory; the flavour is amazing!

Ingredients for four:

- 275g brown lentils
- 150ml extra virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced into thin batons
- 1 carrot, very finely sliced
- 1x400g tin of tomatoes
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 1 litre hot water (yes, it is true, you don't need stock, it's that tasty!)
- Salt and pepper

Rinse the lentils in cold water, drain, put them into a large pan, cover with cold water and bring to the boil. Let them boil for 3-4 minutes, strain, discard the water and set aside the lentils.

In the same pan, heat the olive oil and fry the onion until transparent. Stir in the garlic and once it becomes transparent add the carrot, tomatoes, tomato purée, lentils and oregano. Mix well, then stir in the hot water and some pepper, bring to the boil and cook gently, covered, for 20 to 30 minutes until the lentils are soft but not mushy.

Add salt to taste just before serving with hot toasted bread.



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Spicy Chicken Soup

Here's a nice winter warmer for you, full of goodness and flavour! If you can get hold of a fairly small bird – often butchers' do two small chickens for 5-6€- make the stock yourself, it's gorgeous!

Ingredients for four:

For the stock:

- 1 small chicken, cut in half lengthwise or a couple of whole legs
- 1 onion, cut into wedges
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges
- Stalks from a bunch of fresh parsley
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 tsp black pepper corns
- Salt

For the soup:

- 1.5 l hot chicken stock
- 700g cooked chicken, cubed or torn into strips
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 2 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1-2 tsp sambal oelek (chili paste)
- 1 tbsp tomato purée

If you use ready-bought chicken stock, jazz it up with lemon juice, coriander and cinnamon. If you want to make your own, here goes:

Place the halved chicken in a large soup pan, add the other ingredients and just cover with water. Bring to the boil, cover and let it simmer



for at least an hour, until the meat falls off the bone.

Remove the chicken and set it aside. Keep the stock boiling until it's reduced to about 1.5 litres. Season to taste and set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a saucepan, add the onions and fry them until they start going golden stirring from time to time.

Add the paprika, cumin, sugar, sambal oelek and tomato purée. Stir well, then sieve in the reserved stock.

Bring to the boil and let it simmer for 15-20 minutes. If you've made your own broth, now remove the skin and bone from the chicken and discard. Cut or pull the flesh into bite sized pieces.

Add the chicken to the soup. Bring it back to the boil and let it simmer for 5 minutes more until the meat is warm through.

Serve with cous-cous, lemon wedges and coarsely chopped parsley – and a nice bit of pan bread if you so fancy! Wow!

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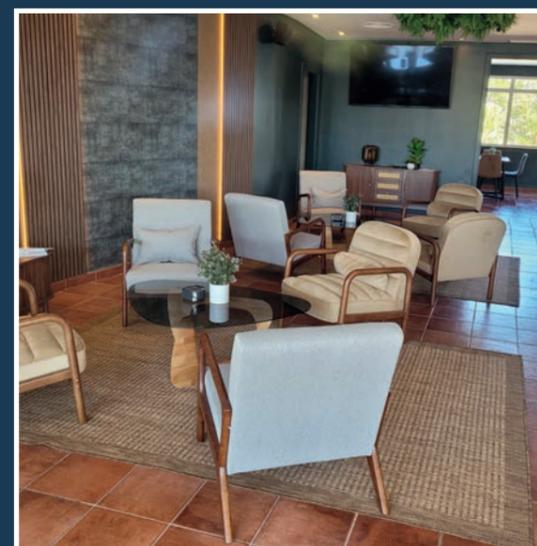
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Paraje Los Calares, ARBOLEAS

Mushroom Soup

Karen (ed.) recommended me this recipe, and it is lovely and truly delicate. (Just like her, creep creep).

It makes a tasty starter, or can indeed be had as a main course served with fresh, crusty bread.

Ingredients for four:

- 500g mushrooms, wiped and sliced
- 90g butter
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 1 l vegetable stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 125ml cream
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Melt the butter in a saucepan and fry the onions, stirring, for 5 minutes without letting them turn brown. Throw in the garlic and let it bubble along for a minute.

Turn up the heat, add the mushrooms and let them fry over a high heat for 3-4 minutes while stirring. Pick out a few slices of mushroom and reserve them. Sprinkle the flour over the mushrooms and onions and stir until mixed in completely.

Pour in the vegetable stock, add the bay leaf and bring to the boil. Let the soup simmer for 10-15 minutes stirring occasionally, then take it off the heat and liquidize it with a handheld blender.

When it's smooth, bring back to the boil, add the reserved mushrooms followed by the cream and season to taste.

Like I said, truly delicate!



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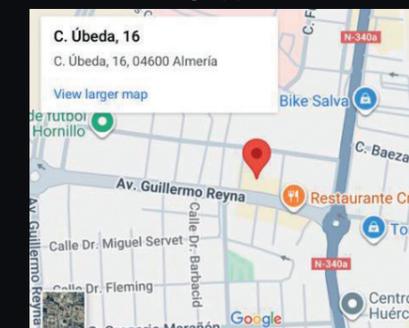
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served from 11th January 2026
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(Booking appreciated)



Jason's Meat Free Recipe: Ribollita Soup

So as the antidote to the seasonal excesses, here's a very simple, nutritious and tasty offering. A hearty soup that makes use of leftovers and/or veg hanging around at the bottom of the fridge and some stale bread. The greatest thing about Ribollita is that it improves with age – so fine to make it the day before, or double batch it, maybe, and have it a couple of days running. These are two good ways to start off the New Year health kick, without compromising on taste and a comfort-food feel. You can add/substitute other veg you've got knocking around as well (thinly sliced leeks and/or squash – as I used in this one) only add to the overall.

Ingredients

- 2 tbsps olive oil, plus more for serving
 - 1 small onion, diced
 - 1 medium carrot, peeled and diced
 - 1 stick celery, diced
 - 1 handful of broccoli florets, cut small
 - ½ tsp salt, plus more to taste
 - ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste
 - 1 cloves garlic, peeled and thinly sliced
 - 1 bay leaf
 - 1 tsp mixed dried herbs
 - 1 tbsp tomato puree
 - 1 tin whole plum tomatoes
 - 500ml vegetable stock
 - 1 jar of cannellini (or other white) beans drained and rinsed
 - 150g kale, (can swap cabbage) stems removed and roughly chopped
 - Freshly grated hard cheese to serve
- For the toast
- 2 slices/chunks of day old/sourdough bread
 - 1 clove garlic, peeled



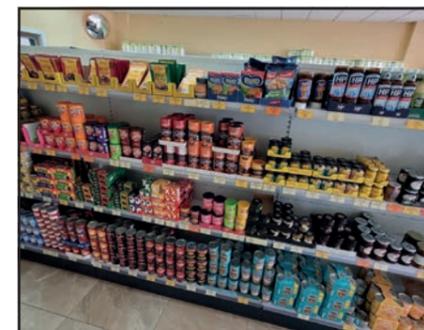
Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, celery, and salt and sauté until the onions are translucent. Add the pepper, garlic, bay leaf, mixed herbs, and tomato puree and stir until it really smells delicious and is starting to catch on the pan, about another 3-5 minutes or so. Add the tomatoes and stock and use your spoon to gently press the tomatoes against the side of the saucepan to break them up a little bit.

Use a fork to mash half of the drained beans, in a bowl, into a thick paste. Add both the mashed and whole beans and the kale to the pot and bring up to a boil, stirring frequently. Simmer for 5 mins with a lid on and then remove the lid and simmer for another 10 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender. While the soup is simmering, toast the bread on both sides in a toaster or under the grill. Rub the whole garlic clove firmly over one side of each warm slice. Place one slice in each bowl.

Taste and season the soup with more salt and black pepper as needed. You can serve the soup right away, but letting it rest for 10 mins, brings the temperature down and lets the flavours shine a bit more. Remove the bay leaf (something I nearly always forget to do, so it then becomes bay leaf-roulette!). Ladle the soup over the bread in the bowls and garnish with a drizzle of olive oil and freshly grated cheese.



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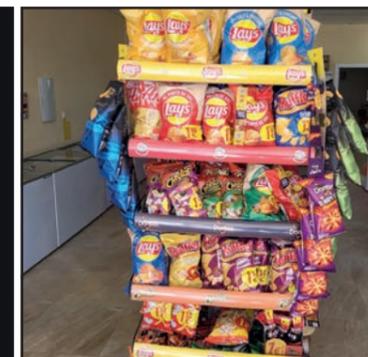


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moves off.

Continued on page 70

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No Deposit Finance Available
*Subject to status



..... Continued from page 69

As you may have guessed, all is not as it seems with this otherwise authentic 356. It has, you see, been converted to run on electric power. Purists maybe call it sacrilege, and an unforgivable desecration of a genuine original classic car. But it should be noted that classic car conversions are reversible.

Electrogenic, which converted this Porsche and which aims to “save the world one car at a time”, is at the forefront when it comes to developing its own tech and electric drive systems. However, “retro-electric” pioneers in the UK alone include Electric Classic Cars, 2C-EV, Everrati, Lunaz and London Electric Cars among others.

Matthew Quitter, founder of London Electric Cars, explains what inspired him to start down this outrageous path: ripping out internal combustion engines and replacing them with batteries and a motor.

“I had a little Triumph Spitfire, and driving that is just an absolute joy, except when you come to a stop and your fumes catch up with you, and then you’re sitting there looking really cool, but your eyes are watering a little bit and it’s stinky,” says Quitter. “When these cars are converted to electric, all of a sudden it’s serene and tranquil and wonderful.”

Other cars being worked on include an Austin Healey awaiting a Nissan Leaf motor and batteries, and a humongous 1966 Lincoln Continental four-door convertible undergoing restoration and set for a Tesla transplant. Both of these are bound for the UAE.



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But they won’t be the first classic electric cars in the Emirates. Mohamed Al Musleh, assistant professor at Heriot-Watt University in Dubai, converted an old Volkswagen Beetle nearly a decade ago, in 2012, and later did the same to a Sebring Turbo (1970s kit car). More recently Salman Hussain of FUSE, a start-up in Dubai, converted a classic-shape Beetle to run off Tesla batteries and a Netgain motor. He aims to offer conversions to customers within the next three months.

Converting a car in the UK can range from £16,000 for the Citroen 2CV up to the near £50,000 spent on this Porsche, with higher prices commanded for “turn-key” cars from companies such as Everrati and Lunaz, which most recently announced an Aston Martin DB6/DB5 conversion.

Electrogenic founder Steve Drummond, a former nuclear power plant technician, is a pioneer of renewable energy and actively involved in sustainability initiatives. What fascinates him is the technical challenges of retaining the aesthetics and persona of classics, while actually “making them better”, as opposed to just making them electric.

That makes them more usable and contributes to sustainable transport, he says. “When someone converts their classic car to electric, instead of just being a third car, rarely used, it becomes



reliable enough and driveable enough to be used regularly – it takes the place of the second car.”

The carbon footprint of producing new electric cars is significant – recently, Volvo admitted that emissions from making EVs can be 70 per cent higher than petrol models and would take nine years (based on average annual mileages) to offset. The electric car has a far lower carbon footprint during the use phase and a quicker more widespread switch to renewable energy sources would alleviate the disparity. Nonetheless, it validates the case for converting existing cars to electric.

Continued on page 74

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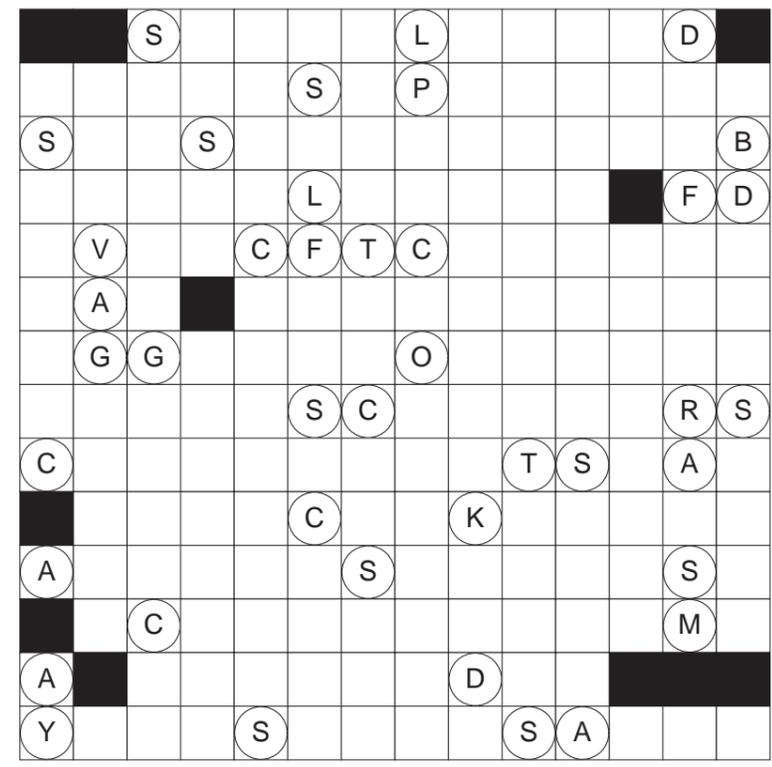
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Puzzle Time

Puzzle solutions on page 74

Reverse Word Search



Each of these circled letters is the first letter of one or more of the words on the given word list.

Your task is to fill in the grid completely using only the given words. No word will repeat itself. Words can be positioned the same as in a regular word search – horizontally, vertically or diagonally, reading frontwards or backwards.

Remember, any starting letter may be used by more than one word at the same time!

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| Again | Durable | Scour |
| Annals | Flask | Shade |
| Antidote | Funerals | Shakiest |
| Assureds | Governs | Sixes |
| Boxcar | Greater | Slake |
| Chortle | Keeps | Smiles |
| Cites | Loading | Starves |
| Close | Lowest | Streak |
| Cocoa | Mined | Swans |
| Coldest | Ocean | Takers |
| Commend | Potency | Thirsts |
| Coolers | Prances | Volleyed |
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T's & C's apply

..... Continued from page 71

Drummond insists doubters simply need drive his cars in order to be converted themselves. And that's how I found myself at the wheel of the 356. The 1.6-litre petrol engine has been swapped with a Netgain "Hyper 9" electric motor, producing 120bhp and 173lb ft of torque. This makes it about twice as quick in acceleration from rest to 100 kilometres per hour (about seven seconds). The 36kWh battery gives it a 225km range.

With the exhaust pipe intact on the outside, and the fuel filler converted to take the charging plug (two and half hours for a recharge), the discreet conversion is not apparent inside, either. The rev counter displays motor revs and the fuel gauge shows battery charge. It's only on opening the glovebox that you encounter a digital readout.

The clutch is only used to engage gears, but not for stopping or going, so it's a bit like driving a semi-automatic, except that the greater torque enables you to drive it around in third gear all day like a full auto, if you wish. Working the gears has benefits, though; start off in second and you're grateful that 356 C models were fitted with disc brakes. Take off in first and you'll be shocked. No road-spec 356 has ever moved this fast.

The heavy non-assisted steering, wrestling with the gear change, brakes you have to get on to hard and early, and flimsy lap belts ensure you get the classic car experience. The reliability, performance, and fumeless, soundless drive, confirms its usability. Most importantly,



you still find yourself grinning as you chuck this priceless classic around and don't spare the horses (or should that be electrons?).

Is it pure and original? No. Is it better? Yes. Would I have one? Yes. But I'd go further: adding power steering, uprated brakes and simulated engine noise (oh yes, that can be done) for the full retro-electric restomod experience.

With more stringent emissions legislation, higher fuel costs and environmental calamity upon us, this presents a viable future for those classics we want to keep on the roads, because the rest might just end up in museums.

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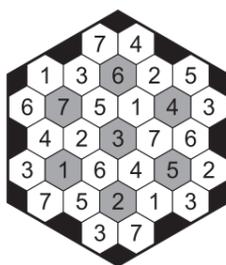
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Puzzle Time Solutions



WORDS
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 T S N A W S R P O T E N C Y
 S S R S H A D E R A C X O B
 T S E W O L F E L A D S F D
 R V N D C F C O R T N I U R
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