

# Life *Almanac*

From swifts and stage lights to bookish escapes and garden days out – here's everything clever, cultural and quietly fabulous happening this August.

## *Noted & noteworthy*

### August's nature marker – the swifts' quiet exit

As August unfolds, the familiar cries of swifts begin to fade. By mid-month, they've left for Africa – no fuss, just gone. It's one of those subtle shifts in the season that you notice when you're really paying attention. Their departure marks a gentle reminder: summer's still here, but she's not staying forever. So, light the candles, pour the wine, and make the most of those warm, golden evenings while they last.

WORDS: CAROLINE BLIGHT & EMMA COXON. IMAGES: VARIOUS BRANDS AND SHUTTERSTOCK.  
★ Research of 2,000 British adults was commissioned by Tea India and was conducted by Observant in September 2024.



## Mindful Moment

Savour the in-between

August is summer's exhale – that golden pause between the buzz of July and the to-do lists of September. The big plans are behind you, the woollies are still in storage, and the days feel made for dawdling. Think slow mornings, sun-warmed pages, and maybe a chilled glass of something blush.

No hustle, no agenda – just a quiet nudge to breathe it all in and enjoy the art of simply being.



Podcast pick of the month – *The Working Class Library*

What makes a bookshelf truly inclusive? In this smart, heartfelt podcast, Claire Malcolm MBE and journalist Richard Benson explore literature from a working-class perspective. Each episode sees a guest author bring a book that shaped them – whether overlooked classic or modern memoir – and discuss its place in a library that reflects real lives. Thoughtful, warm and packed with discovery, it's essential listening for curious readers. Available on Spotify and Spreaker.



## MUST-WATCH SERIES

Discover mystery in the stacks

We are off to 1946 London to meet accidental sleuth Gabriel Book (Mark Gatiss, right) who owns an antiquarian bookshop in Archangel Lane. Don't let the quiet surroundings and his everyday appearance fool you, Gabriel loves nothing more than helping police solve mysterious crimes – the stranger and more confusing the better! With three main cases in the series, each storyline spans two episodes and there are plenty of familiar faces in the all-star cast. 'I can't wait for viewers to immerse themselves in the world we've created,' says Mark who created the show, which has already been recommissioned. A spin-off book is also out this month.

● *Bookish*, available to watch on U&alibi from July.



## This month in 1996

When Britpop ruled the world (and our CD players)

August '96. Knebworth. Two nights, 250,000 fans, and Oasis at full swagger. The Gallagher brothers were at their peak – all anthems, attitude, and enough bucket hats to carpet a field. But it wasn't just a gig. It was the moment Britpop became legend – when we danced,

shouted the lyrics, and believed that music could change everything. Now, with Oasis touring again, it's the perfect excuse to crank up *Don't Look Back In Anger*, dig out that old band tee, and remember where you were when "mad for it" was practically a lifestyle choice.



## Sun, stories & starlit reads: your guide to this summer's best book festivals

Looking to combine culture with a weekend away? These five upcoming literary festivals are the perfect excuse to pack a tote bag, grab your sunnies and indulge in a few days of ideas, inspiration and really good storytelling.

### 1 THEAKSTON OLD PECULIER CRIME WRITING FESTIVAL

**Location:** Harrogate, North Yorkshire  
**Dates:** 17-20 July

If you love a good whodunnit, this one's a must. Set in the elegant Old Swan Hotel (Agatha Christie famously stayed here), it's a long weekend packed with headline authors, smart panels, and behind-the-scenes insights into the world of crime fiction. This year's big names include Lee and Andrew Child, Val McDermid and Mick Herron.  
[harrogateinternationalfestivals.com](http://harrogateinternationalfestivals.com)



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### QUEEN'S PARK BOOK FESTIVAL

**Location:** Queen's Park, London  
**Dates:** 30-31 August

Tucked into a leafy corner of Northwest London, Queen's Park Book Festival is a smart, welcoming celebration of books, voices and ideas. Expect big names alongside rising stars, all in a relaxed, local setting with plenty of charm. It's thoughtful, diverse, and just the right mix of culture and conversation.  
[queensparkbookfestival.co.uk](http://queensparkbookfestival.co.uk)

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### NEWARK BOOK FESTIVAL

**Location:** Newark, Nottinghamshire  
**Dates:** 10-13 July

This friendly, four-day celebration of books and creativity brings together authors, poets and performers in venues across town. There's something for everyone – from writing workshops and street theatre to big-name panels and family-friendly fun.  
[newarkbookfestival.org.uk](http://newarkbookfestival.org.uk)

### 3 EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

**Location:** Edinburgh, Scotland  
**Dates:** 9-24 August

Set in the heart of a city that lives and breathes culture in August, this world-class festival features over 900 events. Expect thoughtful conversations, fresh voices and a brilliant mix of fiction, non-fiction and big ideas – all running alongside the city's other iconic festivals.  
[edbookfest.co.uk](http://edbookfest.co.uk)



### 5 THE IDLER FESTIVAL

**Location:** Hampstead, North London  
**Dates:** 11-13 July

A little bit bookish, a little bit Bohemian – The Idler Festival takes place in the walled gardens of Fenton House and

features talks, poetry, philosophy, and leisurely conversations with the likes of Michael Palin, Emma Thompson and Rowan Williams. It's a gentle reminder that learning can be joyful, and slowing down isn't a bad thing at all.  
[idler.co.uk/festival](http://idler.co.uk/festival)



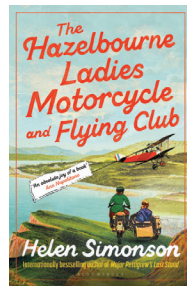


## SUMMER READS: *3 to pack*

Fresh fiction for your beach bag: Smart, soulful, and just the thing for lazy mornings, shaded deckchairs, or one-more-chapter evenings.

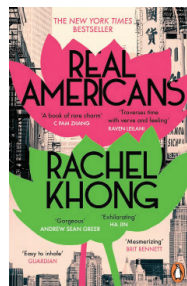
**The Hazelbourne Ladies Motorcycle And Flying Club**  
by Helen Simonson  
(Bloomsbury Publishing)

From the author of *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, this post-WWI tale follows a war widow who joins a trailblazing crew of women learning to fly and ride motorcycles. Set in Sussex with a cast you'll wish were real, it's a heartwarming ode to midlife reinvention.



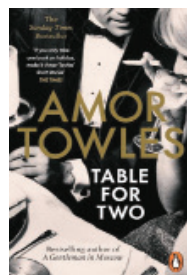
**Real Americans**  
by Rachel Khong  
(Penguin)

Ambitious, elegant, and emotionally spot-on, this novel explores legacy, identity, and the long arc of family across continents. It's one of those rare books that makes you stop and think – and then pass it to a friend with the words, "You have to read this".



**Table For Two**  
by Amor Towles  
(Penguin)

Short stories with big heart from the author of *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Think 1930s Manhattan, a dash of dry humour, and characters so well-drawn you'll miss them when you're done. It's pure escapism with a martini twist.



## CULTURE FIX

Nature in the frame

Renowned sculptor, photographer, and environmentalist Andy Goldsworthy (right) is taking over the upper and lower galleries in the Royal Scottish Academy building for the summer, where some of his most captivating pieces will be displayed. And in true Goldsworthy tradition he will also create several major new works on site. Famed for his meditative work which is rooted in themes of nature, impermanence, time, and the passage of seasons, this extensive exhibition honours five decades of work, showcasing over 200 pieces.



● **Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years, Royal Scottish Academy, 26 July – 2 November**



## The bright side

Kindness is the new cool

Apparently, science now backs what we've always known: giving compliments feels really good. A recent study\* found that 90% of women regularly dish out kind words – even though many feel society's getting a

bit less friendly. The bonus? These little kindness hits boost happiness on both sides. So yes, telling that woman in the coffee queue her earrings are fabulous isn't just polite – it's basically brain medicine.

### IT'S RAINING COMPLIMENTS



## Blooming great day...

Have a brilliant day out at Balgove

If you fancy getting your hands a little muddy without sacrificing an ounce of style, Balgove Larder – just a stone's throw from St Andrews – has your perfect day covered. Their gardening and floral workshops run for a cosy two hours in the estate's enchanting Victorian walled garden, led by Head Gardener David and florist Aileen, both masters of their craft and storytelling alike. You'll pick up savvy tips on everything from organic veg

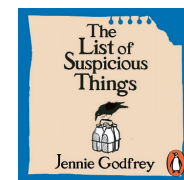
growing to flower arranging that lasts well beyond the workshop. And while the classes are beautifully bite-sized, why not make a proper day of it? With tea, treats, and plenty of fresh air, it's soul-soothing, hands-on pleasure with a sprinkle of well-earned indulgence. Workshops run May to October, starting at £35.95, and private bookings are on offer if you want to rally the girls for a green-fingered getaway.

● [balgove.com](http://balgove.com)



## AUDIOBOOK SPOTLIGHT

Unmissable listen:  
**The List Of Suspicious Things**  
by Jennie Godfrey (Penguin)



It's Yorkshire, 1979, and 10-year old Miv is trying to make sense of the world around her – including the terrifying real-life crimes the adults seem to be ignoring. This gripping, deeply moving debut captures the clarity and confusion of childhood against a backdrop of fear and injustice. Miv's voice is unforgettable: sharp, funny and heartbreakingly wise. A brilliant pick if you loved *Shuggie Bain* or *Eleanor Oliphant*. A coming-of-age mystery with a northern soul – and a lot of heart.

## Stage spotlight

Theatrical triumphs to see this summer

### Evita

Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's iconic musical *Evita* gets the Jamie Lloyd treatment with Rachel Zegler, most recently seen in the live action *Snow White*, as Eva Perón. While the staging may be visionary, the famous score remains as rousing as ever. As a symbol of hope for many Argentinians, Perón did not let her poor upbringing stop her becoming the most powerful woman in Latin America. 'Evita has been such an important musical to me since I was a little girl, when my dad and I would sing *Don't Cry For Me Argentina* together on my back patio,' Rachel said. 'The stage has always felt like home to me, and I can't wait to make my West End debut in such great company.'

● **Evita, The London Palladium, 1 July – 6 September**



### Nye

If you missed the sold out first run of *Nye* last Spring, there's a second chance to see this thought-provoking account of Aneurin "Nye" Bevan's life. Michael Sheen returns to play Nye, whose memories are recounted in flashbacks as he lies on his death bed. From stammering schoolboy to campaigning at the coalfields all the way to the House of Commons where he led the battle to create the NHS, the cast morph seamlessly into the people who shaped his life. And as the morphine kicks in, watch out for the surreal song and dance number...

● **Nye, National Theatre's Olivier Theatre, 3 July – 16 August; then Wales Millennium Centre's Donald Gordon Theatre 22-30 August**

