

Life *Almanac*

February has a quiet confidence about it. While the world is still wrapped in winter, this month has its own kind of brightness: crisp mornings and days that feel made for small delights. It is a time for gentle plans and thoughtful adventures, for trying something new or reclaiming something you've missed. From creative workshops that spark joy to retreats that encourage rest and reflection, February nudges us towards fresh energy without the pressure of reinvention. However you spend it – exploring, making, learning or simply breathing a little deeper – this is a month that invites you to settle into yourself and look ahead with calm, steady optimism.

Noted & noteworthy

February's Nature Marker: the soft strength of moss and lichen

Look closely on your next winter walk and you will see it: the quiet tenacity of moss, lichen and hardy evergreens holding their colour when almost everything else lies dormant. Clinging to tree trunks, stone walls and shaded paths, they thrive exactly where you'd think nothing could. These small patches of green resilience are February's gentle reminder that growth often happens in the stillness, long before anything begins to bloom.

WORDS: CAROLINE BLIGHT & EMMA COXON. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK;
CATHERINE ASHMORE FOR LA TRAVIATA; AND VARIOUS BRANDS.



What's On: Winter Wonders and Everyday Escapes

A month of cultural pick-me-ups, creative play and soul-soothing retreats. From abstract painting in Brighton to gilded Kintsugi in Hull, and from crafty sewing days to restorative getaways in Wales and Northumberland, February is full of ways to lift your spirits and step into the year feeling inspired.



THOUGHT-PROVOKING CINEMA

Winslet directs

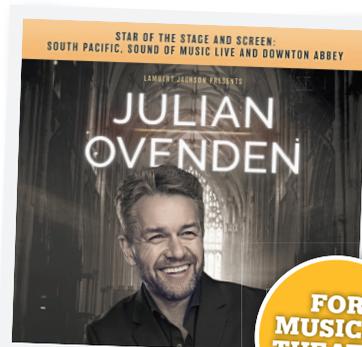
Kate Winslet directs, produces and stars in this new movie, which is a real family affair as it was written by her son Joe, who started writing it aged 19 while on a screen-writing course. 'It just feels great to have directed my first film in the 50th year of my life as a woman,' she says. The story is set close to Christmas when an unexpected turn in their mother's health thrusts four adult siblings and their father into chaos, as they navigate messy family dynamics in the face of potential loss. Clever mum June decides to orchestrate her decline on her own terms – with honesty, humour and love.

Goodbye June, in cinemas now and on Netflix from 24 December.

Musical magic

Church chorus

Musical theatre star Julian Ovenden is touring cathedrals of the UK to perform a breathtaking evening of song. The *Downton Abbey* actor started his performing career singing in the St Paul's Cathedral Choir and had an upbringing steeped in musical tradition. The show includes timeless musical theatre classics: 'I'll be picking a selection of well known songs that will complement the beauty of the buildings,' he says. 'I love performing songs in spaces they weren't written for. It's all about creating an intimate atmosphere and a connection with the audience through the artistry of the words and music.' **Julian Ovenden: The Cathedral Tour**, starts 7 January in Glasgow.



FOR MUSICAL THEATRE FANS



Bold Politics

Zack Polanski brings clear thinking and unexpected warmth to conversations about the issues shaping modern Britain. Less shouting, more substance – thoughtful interviews with the people actually doing the work. Smart, calm and quietly energising.



Missing in the Amazon – The Guardian

A gripping investigative series tracing the disappearance of journalist Dom Phillips and indigenous expert Bruno Pereira. Beautifully crafted, deeply respectful and impossible to pause – it's journalism with both urgency and soul.





FEBRUARY
IN FULL
COLOUR

Seasonal Spotlight

Celebrate LGBTQ+ History Month

February is dedicated in the UK to LGBTQ+ History Month – a time of reflection, celebration, visibility and possibility. This is our invitation: choose a book, a film, a conversation or a walk that explores identity, community and belonging. It might be a local talk, a small gathering, an online event, or simply an intentional coffee with someone you've been meaning to connect with. Let's wear our hearts a little more openly this month, shine a little more light, and honour the many ways we build community, support one another and keep growing. Because reinvention isn't just a solo phrase – it's also a collective one. Find out more at lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk.

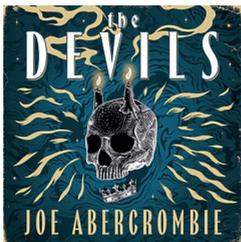
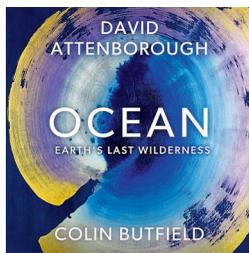


AUDIOBOOK SPOTLIGHT

Ocean: Earth's Last Wilderness, Sir David

Attenborough & Colin Butfield

Attenborough's voice alone is worth the download, but this ocean odyssey is also rich with wonder, insight and gentle persuasion. A soothing, awe-filled listen that reminds you the world is still astonishing.



The Devils, Joe Abercrombie

Dark, witty and wildly entertaining, this fantasy romp – superbly narrated by Steven Pacey – is full of schemers, rebels and razor-edged humour. Perfect when you want to escape to somewhere bold and brilliantly imagined.

Operatic masterpiece

French fancy

The character of Violetta Valéry has won the hearts of audiences time and again through opera's history, and she is widely viewed as one of Verdi's greatest characters. Her story is inspired by the life and death of a real-life Parisian courtesan. It follows Violetta's journey as she falls in love and leaves behind her life of luxury and freedom to follow her heart. But her fragile health threatens to take away the life she has chosen. Filled with heart-rending arias and some of opera's most famous tunes, this spellbinding production will captivate new and long-time opera fans alike. *La Traviata*, 8 January–17 February Royal Opera House, London.

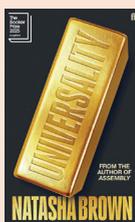




MUST-READS THIS MONTH

Universality by Natasha Brown (Faber & Faber)

Longlisted for the Booker Prize 2025, Natasha Brown returns with a razor-sharp, slyly brilliant novel that unpicks who gets to tell a story and why. Blending true-crime tropes, shifting voices and her trademark elegance, *Universality* is small in size, huge in ideas – the sort of book you read quickly and then think about for days.



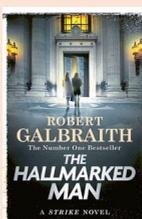
What We Can Know by Ian McEwan (Jonathan Cape)

McEwan looks to 2119 and somehow makes the future feel startlingly familiar. Climate shifts, big ethical questions and very human relationships weave into a speculative tale that's quietly moving and satisfyingly clever – perfect for a winter evening when you want a book with both heart and bite.



The Hallmarked Man by Robert Galbraith (Sphere)

The newest novel in the bestselling Cormoran Strike series sees private detectives Strike and Robin drawn into a case full of long-buried secrets. Atmospheric, clever and satisfyingly twisty, it stands alone beautifully even if you're new to the series. A gripping winter read that pairs perfectly with a blanket and a cuppa.



CIRCUS WITH A TWIST

Skills and storyline

The start of the year means a chance to suspend disbelief with Cirque du Soleil, and this time the talented team brings us *OVO*. A charming ladybird captures the heart of a quirky new insect, and the dazzling show which results immerses audiences in a bustling ecosystem brimming with life. The incredible skills of the cast are showcased as they embody the insects who eat, flutter and court each other amidst a whirlwind of energy and emotion. With stunning visuals, impressive acrobatics and heartwarming story, the company helps us experience the magic and wonder of nature like never before.

OVO, 9 January–1 March, Royal Albert Hall.



Gripping telly

Intrigue Coben style

It's becoming a tradition to kick off the new year with a Harlan Coben adaptation, and *Run Away* continues his successful streak. The starry cast includes James Nesbitt, Ruth Jones and Minnie Driver, and tells the story of Simon (Nesbitt) who had the perfect life: loving wife and kids, great job, beautiful home, before his eldest daughter ran away and everything fell apart. When he finds her on drugs in a city park, he wants to bring his little girl home. But it turns out she's not alone and following a violent row, Simon loses his daughter all over again. His new search takes him into a dangerous underworld and secrets that could tear his family apart forever.

Run Away, 1 January, Netflix



Make a Day of It - February Edition

This month is about charm, possibility and gentle discovery. Things that start with a coffee and end with a sense of 'I'm glad I did that'.

1 PAINT YOUR OWN LARGE ABSTRACT WORKSHOP: WEST HOVE ART STUDIO, BRIGHTON & HOVE

1 February

Enjoy a day of going big and bold with colour as artist Magdalena Smolarska guides you through creating your own large abstract canvas. Expect expressive

techniques that favour freedom over perfection and a studio atmosphere that feels both energising and calming. Ideal for anyone wanting a creative reset and a day spent fully in the moment. Pack enthusiasm and maybe a strong coffee for that mid-afternoon burst. magdalenasmolarska.com



3 TRADITIONAL CHINESE PAINTING: LAKESIDE ARTS, NOTTINGHAM

25 February

Head to Lakeside Arts in Nottingham for a one-day masterclass in Traditional Chinese Painting. Earlier in the month there's also *Textiles for Beginners* and *Introduction to Portraits*. This is a perfect mid-winter escape: quiet, art-soaked, hands-on and exactly the kind of gentle creative reset that leaves you feeling refreshed and inspired. lakesidearts.org.uk



2 SIT AND SEW ONE DAY WORKSHOP: WESTBURY

ARTS CENTRE, MILTON KEYNES

1 February

A calm and creative adult-only sewing day designed for slowing down and making something with your own hands. With expert support and a friendly atmosphere, you will stitch, chat and enjoy the gentle rhythm of textile work. Expect tea, tips and the satisfaction of taking home a finished piece. A lovely moment of pause and creativity in the middle of winter. westburyartscentre.org.uk



4 KINTSUGI - CONTEMPORARY WORKSHOP: HULL MUSEUMS

28 February

A grounding, hands-on introduction to the Japanese art of Kintsugi, where broken ceramics are repaired with gold to highlight, not hide, their cracks. The session is tactile, mindful and quietly transformative, turning flaws into something beautiful. As you mend each piece, the symbolism feels quietly powerful: resilience, reinvention and grace. A soothing way to spend a winter day immersed in thoughtful craft. hullmuseums.co.uk



Retreats for February

A Little Time Away, Just When You Need It Most

February is the perfect moment to step off the treadmill and step into something gentler. These retreats invite you to rest, reset and reconnect with the parts of yourself that get drowned out in everyday life. Think good company, nourishing surroundings and space to breathe. Small pauses, big shifts.

MENOPAUSE RETREAT 2026, BRYN TANAT HALL, POWYS 6–8 February

A weekend of wisdom, wellbeing and deep exhale. Set in the peaceful Welsh borderlands, this restorative retreat brings together expert menopause guidance, gentle movement, skincare sessions and plenty of time to simply be. Three days dedicated to supporting your body, settling your mind and helping you feel completely looked after.

bryntanat.co.uk

4-DAY WOMEN'S WINTER WALKING RETREAT, NORTHUMBERLAND

February 2026 (flexible booking based on your dates)

A women-only, all-inclusive retreat nestled in the wilds of Northumberland. Ideal for solo travellers or friends, this experience combines guided winter walking through coast and hills, optional cold-water dips, cosy accommodation with heated blankets, open fires, hot baths and chocolate. The retreat offers nourishing food, supportive group therapy and lots of fresh air – a thoughtful pause to reconnect and recharge. bookretreats.com



DEVELOP YOUR NOVEL WITH REBECCA HORSFALL, DEVON

9–13 February 2026

A writing retreat for the story you've been carrying. Four quiet days with bestselling author Rebecca Horsfall, offering deeply focused writing time, one-to-one coaching and the kind of countryside calm that lets ideas unfurl. Whether you're polishing a draft or finally giving life to that long-held idea, this retreat gives you space, structure and encouragement. retreatsforyou.co.uk

