

Life Almanac

June has a way of making ordinary life feel a little more vivid. The longest days of the year are here – light that lingers until 10 o'clock, the scent of cut grass drifting through open windows, gardens at their most extravagant. There's a particular pleasure in June: everything feels possible, unhurried and full. It's the ideal month to step outside yourself – into a gallery, a festival, a story, a new idea – and come back feeling rather more alive than before.

Noted & noteworthy

June's nature marker: The elder in bloom

Look for the flat-topped clusters of tiny cream flowers arching over riverbanks and hedgerows this month – that's elder, and it's one of summer's most generous gifts. The blossom is fleeting, lasting only a few weeks, but while it lasts, it perfumes the air with something between honey and hay. Pick the flowers early in the morning, steep in water, sugar and lemon, and you'll have elderflower cordial to taste like captured sunshine. Brief, beautiful and gone before you know it.

WORDS: CAROLINE BLIGHT & EMMA COXON. IMAGES: TATE MODERN FOR FRIDA KAHLO; YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART; PAUL MELLON COLLECTION FOR GWEN JOHN; MICHAEL WHARLEY FOR HELEN GEORGE; AH XIAN FOR RISING VOICES; THE CHRISTOPHERS COURTESY OF NEON; AND SHUTTERSTOCK



What's on: June almanac

From contemporary art to open-air opera, West End revivals to award-winning TV, there's no shortage of things worth doing this month. Add a first major retrospective of Gwen John in Cardiff and rising voices from across the Asia Pacific at the V&A, and there's plenty to get stuck into. Here's where to start.



GOSSIP TELLY

The runaway hit drama *Rivals* returns for an extended series of 12 episodes, which promise to build on the crazy ride of series one. Amidst the hedonistic glamour (and soundtrack) of the 1980s, the personal lives of our Rutshire heroes spiral into chaos as Tony Baddingham (David Tennant, above) is determined to dismantle his rivals piece by piece. He sets about weaponising scandal and manipulating those closest to him. As well as old favourites returning there are some new faces in the shire – Hayley Atwell plays Helen Gordon, the ex-wife of Rupert Campbell-Black (Alex Hassell) and mother of his two children, while Rupert Everett plays her husband Malise Gordon, Campbell Black's former show-jumping coach and mentor. *Rivals 2*, from Friday 15 May, Disney+.

Asian odyssey

More than 40 artists from 25 countries across the Asia Pacific region are represented in this stunning exhibition. With more than 70 works spanning sculpture, photography, painting, ceramics, weaving and body adornment – many of which have never been exhibited outside the region – it reflects the interconnected, ever-changing cultures of one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse parts of the world. Across geographies and communities, *Rising Voices* reveals both diversity and commonality in art-making and reflects on a changing relationship to the past and the mark it has made on residents. *Rising Voices: Contemporary Art from Asia, Australia and the Pacific*, 16 May 2026 – 10 January 2027, V&A South Kensington.



How to be 60

Kaye Adams and Karen MacKenzie tackle relationships, money and health with high-profile guests, direct questions and infectious laughter.



Is it Hot in Here?

The menopause conversation has shifted considerably, and Dr Naomi Potter is one of the most reassuring voices leading the charge, demystifying what's really happening.



Fashion Neurosis

Designer Bella Freud – great-granddaughter of Sigmund – invites a guest to lie on a couch and talks to them about clothes. Except it's never really about clothes, but identity.





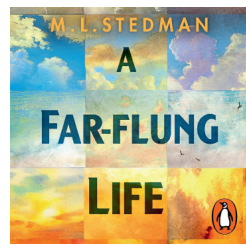
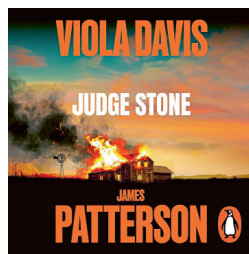
Seasonal highlight

Something rather wonderful is happening this summer. The **King Charles III England Coast Path** – a magnificent 2,700-mile walking route tracing the entire English shoreline – is finally complete, offering everyone the freedom to explore it properly for the first time. After a 16-year labour of love, the finished path is the longest managed coastal trail in the world. Combined with the Wales Coast Path and Scotland’s open-access shore, it unlocks all 6,830 miles of Britain’s mainland coastline to walkers. The benefits go well beyond the scenery, too: experts tell us that walking alongside water is one of the finest things we can do for our mood and sense of wellbeing. From dramatic clifftops to peaceful salt marshes glinting at sunrise, the whole glorious edge of England is waiting.

AUDIOBOOK SPOTLIGHT

Judge Stone by Viola Davis and James Patterson

Narrated by Academy Award and EGOT winner Viola Davis, this gripping legal thriller follows a Black female circuit judge in a small Alabama town as a high-profile case puts her principles under impossible pressure. Davis’s narration brings both authority and raw vulnerability to every scene. Timely, absorbing and impossible to pause.



A Far-Flung Life by M.L. Stedman
Fourteen years after *The Light Between Oceans*, M.L. Stedman returns with another sweeping, emotionally devastating novel set on a vast sheep station in outback Western Australia, where a single moment sets an entire family on a course from which they cannot escape. Epic in scope, intimate in feeling, and exactly the kind of story that makes you want to clear your diary and just listen. (This is also our book club pick. Turn to page 160 to find out more.)



Broadway hit

The 1988 classic comedy film with a horror twist makes its way over from Broadway to the West End for a limited run. Based on Tim Burton’s beloved movie classic, this wildly funny musical tells the tale of Lydia Deetz, an unusual teenager sharing her home with a pair of newly-deads and the demonic ghost who does not need any help with confidence: Beetlejuice. He wants nothing more than for you to call his name three times so he can come to life and cause major mayhem. With a spectacular set and toe-tapping score, this spooky adventure into the afterlife promises to have audiences hooked. **Beetlejuice**, from Tuesday 26 May, Prince Edward Theatre.



MUST-READS THIS MONTH

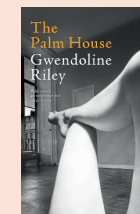
A Hymn to Life by Gisèle Pelicot (Bodley Head)

When Gisèle Pelicot walked out of the Avignon courthouse in December 2024, she had just done something extraordinary: chosen to waive her anonymity in France’s biggest ever rape trial, so that others might feel less alone. This is her story, told in her own words for the first time – a life lived with love and purpose, then shattered, and then, somehow, rebuilt.



The Palm House by Gwendoline Riley (Picador)

If you haven’t read Gwendoline Riley before, start here. It follows a long friendship between two middle-aged Londoners trying to hold on to what matters as the world shifts around them. Riley writes about ordinary life with such precision and dark humour that you find yourself laughing at things that are also, somehow, heartbreaking.



The Best of Everything by Kit de Waal (Tinder Press)

From the author of *My Name is Leon* comes a novel about Paulette, a nursing auxiliary from St Kitts, making her life in 1970s England, whose carefully mapped-out future is upended in the opening pages and never quite goes to plan again. Funny, sad and full of unexpected kindness.



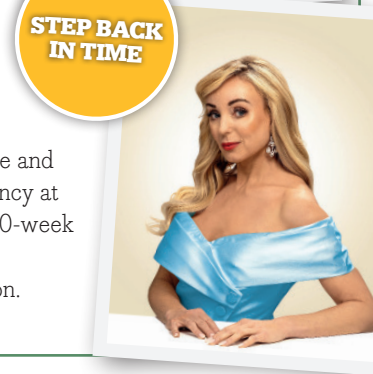
POIGNANT CINEMA

Ian McKellen plays Julian Sklar, a once famous pop art legend who is broke and estranged from his kids Barnaby (James Corden) and Sallie (Jessica Gunning). His children fear they will miss out on an inheritance and plot to create their own, by employing talented art preservationist Lori Butler (Michaela Coel) to become his assistant. They want her to find the incomplete paintings from his famous *Christopher* series and complete them herself to sell at auction. But will she be able to smuggle them away from him? And ethically, how will she feel when she understands why those pictures remain unfinished? **The Christophers** in cinemas from Friday 15 May.



Musical classic

Turn back the clock for a trip to the golden age of musicals with all the glamour you would expect from Cole Porter. Helen George (below) and Felicity Kendal (top) star alongside a full-size orchestra to shmooze us into a bygone era. In this lavish new production of *High Society*, plans for the society wedding of the year descend into chaos all while a sharp tabloid reporter hunts for scandal amongst the guests – of which there is plenty! “I can’t wait for audiences to enjoy a sparkling evening of comedy, romance and sheer musical joy,” says Helen. After a residency at the Barbican, the show embarks on a major 20-week tour of the UK and Ireland. **High Society**, 19 May – 11 July, The Barbican Centre, London.



STEP BACK IN TIME

Make a day of it

Indulge your creative senses with a day of art, music or opera this June.



1 FRIDA: THE MAKING OF AN ICON EXHIBITION

25 June – 3 January 2027

This summer, Tate Modern invites us to rediscover the towering talent behind the icon. The first major UK exhibition dedicated to Mexican artist Frida Kahlo in eight years brings together more than 130 works – self-portraits, jewellery, garments and personal memorabilia – alongside pieces by the artists she inspired. This will be an utterly unmissable exhibition. tate.org.uk



2 THE GRANGE FESTIVAL, NORTHINGTON, HAMPSHIRE

2 June – 12 July

One of the loveliest ways to spend a summer evening: world-class opera performed in a stunning neo-classical Hampshire mansion, with a 90-minute interval for picnicking on the lawns as the sun goes down. This year's programme includes *La Bohème*, *Eugene Onegin* and Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, alongside Ballet Black celebrating their 25th anniversary. Come early, dress up a little, bring the champagne, and stay late. thegrangefestival.co.uk



3 MELTDOWN, SOUTHBANK CENTRE, LONDON

11-21 June

To mark its 75th anniversary, the Southbank Centre has chosen Harry Styles to curate this year's Meltdown – the world's longest-running artist-curated festival. Following in the footsteps of iconic curators including David Bowie, Patti Smith and Grace Jones, he takes the reins for 11 days this June. Expect music drawn from his eclectic range of influences, from pop, soul, electronic and rock to underground scenes and emerging young British talent. Much of the programme is free and open to all. southbankcentre.co.uk



4 GWEN JOHN: STRANGE BEAUTIES EXHIBITION, NATIONAL MUSEUM CARDIFF, WALES

Until 28 June

The first major retrospective of Gwen John's work in 40 years, this is one of those exhibitions that reminds you why a long day trip is always worth it. John – the quietly brilliant Welsh painter who spent much of her life in Paris and was shamefully overlooked for decades – is at last given the space she deserves. More than 80 works, many rarely seen, tell the story of a fiercely independent woman with a singular, luminous vision. Closing 28 June, so there's still time. Free entry. museum.wales/cardiff



Mindful moment

Take the long way home

June light is too good to waste on the direct route. This month, give yourself permission to go the long way – down a road you haven't tried, into a park you usually walk past, along a towpath that leads somewhere you don't know yet. Not as exercise, not as errands: simply as looking. Notice what's flowering, what's been painted, what's been left on a wall. Walking without purpose has a particular kind of magic.

It's one of the oldest forms of thinking – and one of the most underrated.

This month in history

25 June 1903: Marie Curie's great day

On 25 June 1903, Marie Curie walked into the Sorbonne in Paris and defended her doctoral thesis on radioactive substances – becoming the first woman in France to receive a doctorate in physics. It was a moment of quiet revolution. She had already discovered two new elements. She would go on to win two Nobel Prizes. The examiners that day declared her work the greatest contribution to science ever made by a doctoral thesis. She was 35, Polish-born, and entirely unintimidated.



John Constable at 250

This June marks 250 years since the birth of John Constable – and across England, galleries and landscapes are celebrating the man who taught us all to really look at clouds. Constable's great achievement was insisting that the English countryside – muddy, ordinary, everyday – was as worthy of serious art as any classical scene. His skies remain among the most honest and joyful things ever painted. Step outside this month and look up. He would have wanted you to.



WORDS OF WISDOM

'The question is not what you look at, but what you see.'

Henry David Thoreau