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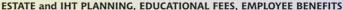






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A NOTE

Welcome to the October/November Edition

October is the perfect month to head out for a day trip to a local beauty spot, to the park, to a wood, or forest or to a stately home. The air is crisp and clean and the sunlight inspiring as the vistas invite us to sit a while and take in the beauty around us.

'Remember, remember the fifth of November' is something all children learn at school. It commemorates an assassination attempt on King James I by Guy Fawkes who planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament with barrels of gunpowder. So, around the country on the fifth an effigy of Fawkes is burned on bonfires whilst spectators enjoy fireworks and eating

baked potatoes and traditional toffees. On Remembrance Day we remember all those who gave their lives to secure the freedoms from tyranny that we continue to enjoy. Many of us have relatives who fought in the First or Second World War or subsequent conflicts and at this time of year we take the time to think about their sacrifice.

Although the days might be getting shorter and the weather colder, wetter and more changeable there is plenty going on this Autumn.

If you would like to promote a business locally - we would love to help by bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience in connecting businesses with local communities, creating eye-catching adverts and making sure each door gets a copy of their directory full of local talent. Give us a call or email for a friendly chat. We are a small local business too, we only thrive if your business thrives, so we do our best to make sure you are seen and recognised by local residents who receive, read, retain and reference Stónesthrow Directories

Here are some dates for your calendar: 26th October - Daylight Saying Time ends; 31st October -Halloween; 5th November - Guys Fawkes Day; 9th November -Remembrance Day.

As always, we ask you to please remember to mention Stonesthrow Directories when calling our Advertisers.

However you decide to spend next couple of months - keep your heart and your business local.

Yours, Stonesthrow Publications.

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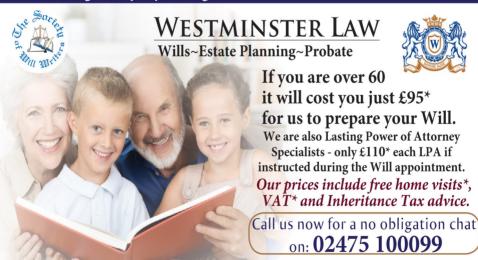


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Whether alone, accompanied by your dog, or within a group, a country walk is good for mind, body and soul.

So shop locally to get the equipment and provisions you need and get exploring, because the great outdoors really is... great!

WHY WALK

Much is made of the benefits walking brings, and there is a reason for that.

Firstly, it's free, which means anyone can do it. It's also low impact, so doesn't put a huge strain on your bones or muscles, making it ideal for those who aren't in peak fitness or have mild mobility issues.

Of course, we all know walking can improve mental health, and if combined with a social aspect (like within a walking group), can really provide simple pleasure and joy.

Other health wins include strengthening the cardiovascular system, significantly reducing the risk of serious conditions, including heart disease and strokes.

Plus, as winter unfolds, the risk of colds and flu intensifies, so engaging in regular walking activities strengthens and invigorates your immune system, transforming it into a formidable defence against these seasonal adversaries.

Finally, as a natural weight-bearing exercise, walking plays a crucial role in maintaining bone health.

GETTING STARTED

To embark on your walking journey, equip

yourself with snug shoes for foot comfort and don appropriate warm clothing to shield against the brisk winter temperatures.

Lightweight waterproofs are handy in case of a shower, and a water bottle for hydration is key, along with a couple of healthy snack bars if you're planning on going a few miles.

Keep motivated by using a pedometer (most smartphones have these inbuilt) and ensure you have access to either a map, guidebook or a GPS app that doesn't require phone signal.

Treats and a water bowl will be key if you're taking a furry friend, and if you're grappling with a long-term condition, the CSP (Chartered Society of Physiotherapists) website offers insightful advice on aligning activity with your needs.

MAKE IT FUN

Though solitude can be a positive aspect of walking for some, for others the activity can be a fantastic way to meet new friends. Unlike cycling clubs or sports teams, walking is an activity those who are less athletic can enjoy while also allowing for conversation and connection on the way. So check out local noticeboards or online resources to find suitable groups aimed at your ability, age bracket, fitness level or similar interests.

Finally, planned walking outings often end on, or have in the middle, a trip to the pub for food and drinks. This allows you to replenish those calories you've lost, slake your thirst, and properly get to know your new buddies. Now that's an exercise regime few can sniff at!





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Eastcote Park offers a vibrant community with the reassurance, safety and companionship you need to live an active and fulfilling life. Close to the village of Knowle but within easy reach of Solihull, this exquisite community offers a range of services and facilities to enhance your lifestyle.



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(*BeastcotePark**

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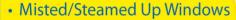
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Volunteers Wanted

Would you like to be an Older Friend to a child for regular outings of just 2-3 hours?

For more details and an application form, please contact:

0845 838 2098*

Volunteer Chris tells us about his role as a friend to a child in need of friendship due to the difficult circumstances he has grown up in.

I first met Luke when he was 10 years old. I remember the impression of a quiet boy that really needed to be liked. He was sensitive, intuitive and in those early years would often give me pictures that he had drawn for me when I picked him up each week. He enjoyed physical activities, we played football and tag in the park, went swimming, cycling and walking. He also liked to talk and I would ensure that either during or around these activities we always had time for conversation.

I focused on being a friend and not a parent, but I would often steer our conversations towards what type of person he wanted to be and whether he had been heading towards or away from being that person in the past week. In his early teenage years, he would often skulk out of his home with his hood pulled over his face and grunt at my questions as we drove to our activity

that week. But by the time we arrived at our destination and as we unloaded bikes from the car or set off on our walk he would open up, and our conversations would often be quite serious about his feelings, how he should react in some of the different situations that he was encountering.

I always enjoyed our conversations, although I often felt that he did not listen or rejected some of what I suggested. But then I would hear my words repeated back to me, often weeks later, or he would describe to me how he had changed his behaviour or tried something that I had suggested instead of just thumping someone.

Friendships have to finish on the younger friends 17th birthday. I always expected it to finish earlier than that - hanging around with a 60 year old man is not very cool for a teenage boy. Our friendship just seemed to get stronger and stronger and I will keep in contact with him. I have a new young friend now. He is 7 years old and a very different character to Luke. I am both excited and nervous as I set out on this

completely new adventure with my new friend.

Chris

If you would like to find out more about volunteering for the Friendship Project for Children then give us a call on 07516 527714 www.friendshipproject.co.uk/







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Bella Venezia Ristorante & Pizzeria Italian

1628 High St, Knowle B93 0JU

01564 779806

Daawat Indian

St Johns Cl, Knowle B93 0JU

01564 779802

Costa Coffee Café

1648 High Street, Knowle B93 ONA

01564 771245

Knowle Indian Brasserie Indian

1690 High St, Knowle B93 OLY

01564 776453

Eros Italian/Greek

1608 High St, Knowle, Solihull B93 0JU

01564 777751

The Red Lion Gastropub

1672 High St, Knowle B93 OLY

01564 771522

Toby Carvery British

1635 Warwick Road, Knowle B93 9AH

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Knowle Fish Bar Fish & Chips

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Ale Rooms Bar

1592 High Street, Knowle B93 OLF

01564 400040

Prohibition Era Bar 1673 High Street, Knowle

B93 OLL

01564 773626

Cheal's British Restaurant & Bar 1630 High Street, Knowle B93 OLB

Please send

any updates to stpdirectories@

hotmail.com

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The Kings Arms Gastropub

2110 Warwick Rd, Knowle B93 0EE

01564 771177

The Black Boy Gastropub

Warwick Rd, Knowle B93 0EB

01564 772655

Freeda's Deli Café

1636A High St, Knowle B93 ONA

01564 779240

Dorridge Fish Bar Fish & Chips

15 Station Approach, Dorridge B93 8JA

01564 775954

The Forest Hotel British

25 Station Approach, Dorridge B93 8JA

01564 772120

Minh's Cantonese Restaurant, Cantonese

8 Station Rd, Dorridge B93 8HH

01564 779929

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1 Forest Rd, Dorridge B93 8HA,

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Skogen Bar, Café

2 Station Approach, Dorridge B93 8JF

01564 772283

The Railway Inn Gastropub

Grange Rd, Dorridge B93 8QA

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Drum & Monkey Gastropub

177 Four Ashes Rd, Dorridge B93 8ND

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Aroma Restaurant Indian

100C Widney Rd, Bentley Heath B93 9BN

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The Dorridge Practice	01564 776262
Arden Medical Centre	01564 739194
Spire Parkway Hospital	0121 704 1451
GP Healthcare Knowle	0121 796 2777

POLICE & FIRE

Solihull Police Helpdesk		0845 113 5000
West Midlands Police	0845	113 5000 or 101
Warwickshire Fire & Rescue		01675 62 007
Bickenhill Community Fire St	tation	0121 380 7527
Solihull Fire Station		0121 380 7521

UTILITIES

Electricity Power Loss	0800 328 1111
Severn Trent Water	0800 783 4444
Transco Gas leak	0800 111 999
RT Fault Line	0200 200 151

TRAVEL

Chiltern Railways	08456 005165
National Rail Enquiries	08457 484950
West Midlands Trains	0333 311 0039
Bus Travel Line	0871 2002233
Coventry Airport	02476 301717
Birmingham Airport BHX	0871 222 0072

HOTLINES & HELPLINES

Samaritans	116123
Consumer Advice	03454 04 05 06
Citizens Advice Bureau	01926 457 900
RSPCA	024 7671 3717







Make this Halloween one to remember with these brilliant events potentially be hosted in your community... and if they're not, how about doing it yourself!

TRICK OR TREAT TRAIL It is not unusual now for local businesses to club together for a Halloween Trail, whereby children follow a map collecting sweets and clues on the way.

If there isn't a trail in your area, why not suggest one to your neighbours - a great way to create community spirit and bring joy to your little monsters

CHARITY EVENT Find or host a charity event with a spooky twist. This could include a haunted fun run, a bake sale featuring Halloween treats, or even a fancy-dress ball.

Encourage participants to donate to a local cause while enjoying the festivities... this is also a great excuse to bust out that mummy costume you've been working on!

ESCAPE ROOMS Most local Escape Rooms will have a dedicated Halloween experience where Participants can work together to solve puzzles, unlock secrets and 'escape' before time runs out.

You can also create your own room at home, choosing themes like haunted mansions, cursed libraries or abandoned laboratories.

A DEADLY DINNER Host a murder mystery dinner with a Halloween twist. Design a script featuring eerie characters and invite participants to dress up and solve the mystery. Either do this at home with your friends, or create a community event

at your local hall.

GHOST TOUR If your town boasts historic sites or heritage landmarks, Halloween is the perfect time to explore their spooky stories. Organise guided ghost tours, sharing local legends and mysteries. This idea combines education with entertainment, making it an excellent option for all ages.

PUMPKIN PICKING Following in the footsteps of our American friends, pumpkin patches have been popping everywhere.

A brilliant day out for the kids, these events allow you pick your own pumpkin, indulge in some spooky crafts and enjoy festive seasonal such as toasted marshmallows and pumpkin spiced lattes.

SILENT DISCO So as not to wake the dead, dance with headphones on your head. That's right, silent discos are not only an easy and affordable way to take a party anywhere, they also won't annoy the local terrors (like moody Martin who lives upstairs).

HALLOWEEN BINGO Bingo nights are brilliant fun for all and can easily be adapted for certain times of year. Dress up, drink blood red punch and work your voodoo to win the top prize.

ZOMBIE PUB (RAWL True, some town centres seem to host a zombie pub crawl every weekend, but this one is strictly for Halloween.

Gather your mates, dress like the undead, visit all your favourite pubs (the older and spookier the better), and forgo eating brains for quaffing delicious IPAs and ales. Terrifyingly good fun.

WHAT'S ON LOCALLY

Bentley Heath Country Market

Date: every Friday / Time: 10am - 11.30am / Venue: Bentley Heath Community Hall Widney Rd, Bentley Heath, B93 9BQ We are a farmers market & craft fair all rolled into one. We are open for business every Friday New producers always welcome! 10am-11.30am Email bhcountrymarket@gmail.com to receive our weekly order email.

Knowle Male Voice Choir

Date: every Wednesday during school terms / Time: 7.30pm / Venue: Dorridge Methodist Church, Mill Lane, Dorridge

Ask anyone who sings with a choir or sings anywhere, and they will all agree, Singing is Good for You. Practices are followed by a refreshing trip to the local pub immediately afterwards. If you are interested in joining our choir please contact us at kmvc14@gmail.com or for more information visit www.knowlemalevoicechoir.org.uk

Friends in Retirement

Date: varies / Time: varies / Venue: Elmdon Heath Community Centre B91 2SF; Hobbs Moat Assembly Rooms B92 8JN; Knowle Village Hall B93 0NH; Bentley Heath Community Centre B93 9BQ; Solihull Women's Institute B91 3DQ; Whar Hall Community Centre B92 0PG FIRS (Friends in Retirement) is a charity where groups of people enjoy a range of activities. Yearly membership is £3 and each activity costs anything from £1.20 to £5. Contact us: www.friendsinretirement.co.uk; email

firs.solihull@yahoo.co.uk; call: 07535 669 018

Donate your old glasses

Working with our sister Lions club in Chichester, your old pairs of used glasses are collected, sorted and distributed each month to eye clinics as far as Papa New Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria and Nepal. Don't worry if your spectacles are broken as they will be recycled for their scrap metal and the funds used to support eye-related projects both in the UK and overseas. Knowle and Dorridge Lions Club are being supported by these opticians in B93: Alan Tyler Opticians - Dorridge, Bannister Eyecare - Knowle, Vision Express - Knowle. Just drop your used glasses into them and we'll do the rest! Thank you!

Knowle Renew Café

Venue: Guild House, Knowle All welcome, no booking required. A shared wellbeing space where you can enjoy a calm cuppa; spend time with a coffee (activities available or bring your own); have a chat with others; join an optional prayer & meditation session. For more information please visit: www.kpc.org.uk

Date: every Wednesday / Time: 2pm - 4pm /

Dorridge Striders and Strollers

Date: Thursdays fortnightly / Venue: Dorridge Village Hall

We meet for a sociable local walk. New members welcome. Contact Margaret on 01564 773856.

Knowle & Dorridge Round Table

Date: every other Tuesday

Knowle and Dorridge Round Table 812 was founded in 1963. We are an organisation run by and for Tablers as a hobby. We bring smiles to the local and wider community by helping and raising as much money as we can whilst having as much fun as we can. We're not just about fund raising. We meet every other Tuesday and indulge in various activities like sports, tours and lots of 'ings' such as gliding, hiking, biking, riding, shooting, kayaking, fishing, rallying, karting, off-roading, making, climbing, bowling, cooking or just enjoying the odd pint (or two). Please email to get in touch: kanddrt@gmail.com

Rapport Social Group

Rapport is a, non profit making, social group for unattached adults age 50+ on their own and would like to meet new friends. We have a varied monthly programme of hosted events, including coffee mornings, lunches and evening meals, cinema, theatre and National Trust visits, day trips, walks and pub nights. For more information contact Jenny Brown on 07725 094123

Free Digital Training for older Solihull residents

Various times and Age UK Solihull are offering free digital training for older Solihull residents who would like to improve their digital skills. Group courses and one-to-one support is available, for both beginners and those who already have basic digital skills. The training can help with online shopping, video calling, searching for information, accessing online learning, downloading and using apps, and more. For more information, contact Ashlee on 07397 718 455 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/solihull/digital-champions

Knowle Probus Club

Date: 3rd Tuesday of the month / Venue: The Solihull Masonic Centre, Warwick Road, Knowle The Knowle Probus club is a luncheon Club for retired and semi-retired Professional or Businessmen living in or around Knowle. We meet for an excellent three course lunch followed by interesting and informative talks. If you would like to know more go to www.knowleprobus.org.uk or Phone Paul on 07713 94228.

Age UK Solihull Weekly Thursday Friends Lunch Club for Over 65s

Date: every Thursday / Time: 12pm - 2.30pm / Venue: Red Lion Pub, High Street, Knowle Run by Age UK Solihull staff and their volunteers. Come along for a hot meal, tea/coffee, social activities and great company. Cost is £8 (£6 for hot lunch and refreshments, £2 for raffle, bingo/entertainment). For more information please call 0121 704 7846 (Mon-Thurs) or

email befriending@ageuksolihull.org.uk.

Dorridge Probus Club

Date: first Thursday of the month / Time: 12 noon / Venue: Copt Heath Golf Club, Warwick Road, Knowle We meet for a friendly chat followed by lunch and a talk focussing on members interests and requests. Probus is a friendly, social meeting point for retired and semi retired men. For more details see our website www.probusclub.net/dorridge.

Drinking cans collection

Venue: Ale rooms, Knowle

Please support Ryan's work by dropping off your empty aluminium cans in the blue bin situated right outside the Ale Rooms, Knowle High Street. Ryan from "We Can" collects aluminium drinking cans, crushes them and trades them for money to help buy food to address food poverty locally.

Ladies Circle

Date: Wednesdays / Time: 11am / Venue: Dorridge Methodist Church, Mill Lane, Dorridge B93 8NY Ladies living locally meet for a coffee & a chat. Every fourth week there will be singing, speakers or games.

Welcome Wednesdays

Date: last Wednesday of every month / Time: 2 - 3.30pm / Venue: Eascote Park Care Home and Retirement Village, Knowle Road, Barston B92 OJA This is a chance meet new people, enjoy a hot drink and a slice of cake, and help raise funds for Age UK Solihull. Everyone is welcome, including carers, older people, and anyone who wants to break up the week and enjoy some company. We ask for a suggested donation of £3 per person to attend, which includes a hot drink and cake. Please let us know if you are planning on coming by calling us on 0121 704 7842 (leave a message) or email to: events@ageuksolihull.org.uk.

Knit & Natter

Date: 3rd Monday of the month / Time: 2-4pm / Venue: Bentley Heath Community Centre, Widney Road B93 9BN

Bring your own project. Just turn up no charge. Contact Dennise on 07899 914 228

Knowle and Dorridge Dementia Cafe

Date: every Tuesday / Time: 10.30am - 12.30pm / Venue: Dorridge Methodist Church, Mill Lane The café aims to provide a supportive and friendly environment for individuals living with dementia and their carers. It is designed to be a warm, welcoming space where attendees from the surrounding areas, they can enjoy a variety of activities, socialise, meet people in similar circumstances and find helpful information and resources. Sessions, including refreshments, are £3 per person and will be guided by experienced care professionals and dedicated volunteers.

South Solihull u3a

Date: 2nd Monday of each month / Time: 1:45 pm for 2:00 pm start / Venue: Venue: Bentley Heath Community Centre, Widney Road B93 9BQ We are a very friendly group of retired or semi-retired people aiming to learn new skills and make new friends along the way. In addition to the monthly meeting when we usually have an invited speaker, we also have a wide range of over 20 activity groups meeting throughout each month. For further information please visit: www.southsolihull.u3asite.uk and contact our Membership Secretary, Richard: membershipssu3a@yahoo.com for an invitation to a 'taster meeting'. We look forward to meeting you!

Charity Quiz

Date: 9th October / Time: 7pm / Venue: Eastcote Park, Knowle Road, Eastcote B92 0JA We will be raising funds for Knowle Donkey Sanctuary. Entry is £10 per team and maximum of 6 in a team. Please contact Nicola on 0121 269 1236 to book your team in.

Gentlemen's Club

Date: 16th October, 13th November / Time: 2.30 - 4pm / Venue: Eastcote Park, Knowle Road, Eastcote B92 0JA

October: a talk about the life of Charlie Chaplin and November: a talk about The First Photographs & Film.

Visit Knowle Quiz Night

Date: 14th November / Time: 7pm / Venue: Knowle British Legion, Solihull, B93 9LU Whether you're a trivia whiz, you've a specialist subject, or just looking for a fun evening out, this event is for you! We welcome all to come along and test their knowledge with teams of between four & six people. Expect a variety of question rounds to keep you on your toes. If you haven't got a ready made team, we'll pair you up with others coming along.

Noël Saturday Artisan Market

Date: 6th, 7th December / Time: 1aam - 5pm / Venue: Station Road, Knowle Join us for a Christmas market to find some beautifully crafted gifts at our artisan market. Step into the magic of Christmas at the first-ever Noel Market – a festive artisan celebration bringing together the best of local creativity, seasonal treats, and holiday cheer. Wander through twinkling stalls brimming with: Handcrafted gifts from talented local makers;

Artisan makers selling one-of-a-kind Christmas gifts.

While we do our best to ensure the accuracy of our listings, events may be postponed or cancelled without notice. Please confirm with the organiser before making any plans for attending events. For your news, events and group meetings to be featured free of charge on our What's On Page please email Ksenia: info@stonesthrowpublications.co.uk



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Why didn't the skeleton go to the Halloween party?

Because he had no 'body' to go with.

What do ghosts wear when their eyesight is bad? *Spooktacles.*





BOO CAT GHOST PUMPKIN SCARY SKELETON SPIDER SWEETS TREAT TRICK WITCH WIZARD

SOLUTIONS:



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ARIES

(MARCH 21 - APRIL 20)

The Libra Sun and communicative Mercury both occupy a pivotal sector of your chart, suggesting that some exciting developments appear to be up for grabs during the first half of this month. The powerful Libra new moon on the 21st challenges you to up your game and reach out to take some risks, but be sure to weight up both sides of any disagreement before making a final decision.

TAURUS

(APRIL 21 - MAY 21)

Your financial situation, earning potential and your values are all your top priorities this month as dynamic Mars in Scorpio challenges you to review these areas of your life. The Sun and Mercury, both in balanced Libra, suggest the possibility of some kind of future joint venture. Venus, your ruling planet, moves from Virgo to Libra on the 14th, indicating that some practical decisions may have to be made before then.

SEMIN

(MAY 22 - JUNE 21)

Love and romance are in the spotlight during October as the Sun and communicative Mercury stir up any issues concerning your relationships. Mercury, your ruler, joins Mars in Scorpio on the 7th, finding balance is a key issue this month and some deep soul searching may well be needed. It may be best to think carefully and weigh all your options before you express your opinion.

CANCER

(JUNE 22 - JULY 22)

Home and family are your top priorities this month, particularly after the 14th as Venus joins the Sun in Libra, the sign of the scales. Jupiter is positive in your sign and the powerful Libra new moon on the 21st highlights a brilliant new beginning and gives you the opportunity to speak your mind as your thinking becomes much clearer and you prepare to forge ahead with an important decision.

(JULY 23 - AUGUST 23)

With the assistance of the radiant Sun and quick thinking Mercury, both in the sign of the scales, October is looking very positive for all levels of communication and negotiations. Your mind should be open but focussed in order to expand your knowledge. Action planet Mars in Scorpio is stirring up the domestic area of your chart, you may need to attend to some emotional intensity concerning important family matters this month.

VIRGO

(AUGUST 24 - SEPTEMBER 22)

Exciting new beginnings are evident as the month commences, the Libra Sun shines brightly on your financial situation and with the assistance of business minded Mercury some pre-planned changes can now be given the go ahead. A positive Libra new moon on the 21st brings your attention to what is really important and helps you to ignore or dismiss what is no longer valid in your life.

I JRR

(SEPTEMBER 23 - OCTOBER 23)

This month's planetary activity turns your attention to your love life. Relationships and romance are highlighted, particularly after Venus, your ruling planet, arrives in your sign on the 14th. Your powers of communication should be at a highpoint, assisting with any important decisions that need to be made. Your new moon on the 21st gives you a strong boost to achieving your goals.

SCORPIO

(OCTOBER 24 - NOVEMBER 22)

The Libran Sun and communicative Mercury start the month in the most introspective part of your chart, indicating that you need to take care of your physical health as your vitality may not be at its best. Power planet Pluto, your ruler, turns direct on the 14th and offers you the chance to reconnect with your determination and courage and clear the path for innovative new projects.

SACITTARIUS

(NOVEMBER 23 - DECEMBER 21)

Venus shines brightly at the highest point of your chart until the 14th, be sure to use this time wisely for connecting with new directions and challenges within your career. Abundant Jupiter, your ruler, offers opportunities in your financial area. It is vital that you steer your energy towards realistic targets that can be completed with hard work and determination.

CAPRICORN

(DECEMBER 22 - JANUARY 20)

Jupiter is strong in your opposite sign this month, indicating that love and romance are both important themes. There is also a challenge to your work and career situation as the radiant Libra Sun and business minded Mercury both illuminate the highpoint of your chart. Try not to give in to unnecessary self-criticism, as your task this month is to balance logic with imagination. Opportunities arrive after the Libra new moon on the 21st.

AOUARIUS

(JANUARY 21 - FEBRUARY 18)

Planetary patterns are urging you to take up a new form of study that can eventually lead to enhanced wisdom and spiritual growth. Venus arrives in Libra on the 14th, indicating that a balanced view is now required to push you forward and achieve your dreams. The powerful full moon in fiery Aries on the 7th brings with it a new dynamic, stirring up your appetite for new beginnings.

PISCES

(FEBRUARY 19 - MARCH 20)

An exciting creative opportunity appears to be up for grabs during October as the full moon in Aries on the 7th is activated by abundant Jupiter in Cancer. This powerful energy challenges you to up your game and reach out to take some risks. Action planet Mars remains in powerful Scorpio all month, indicating that some exciting travel plans are coming your way.

Christine Chalklin, Inspirational Astrologer and Life Coach.
Take a refreshing new look at the year ahead by booking an astrological reading now. Consultations are available on Skype, Zoom,
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If you're looking for an alternative holiday destination, this super slice of Japan might be just the ticket.

When imagining a trip to Japan, your first thought might be of neon lights, futuristic cityscapes and a Lost in Translation adventure in the country's bustling capital city, Tokyo. But much of this magnificent country is far more rural, picturesque and steeped in history and culture.

Once the imperial capital of Japan, Kyoto's allure lies in its deep historical roots. This serene and wonderful destinations has over 1,600 Buddhist temples and 400 Shinto shrines. Each is a masterpiece, showcasing the astonishing artistry of generations past.

Kinkaku-ji, the famed Golden Pavilion, shimmers above a reflective pond, its gold leaf exterior glowing in the afternoon sun as if a mirage. Ginkaku-ji, or the Silver Pavilion may be less ostentatious, but with its exquisite sand gardens and moss-covered grounds it certainly holds its own.

Though Kyoto cannot emulate the neon fever dream of Tokyo, in the atmospheric districts of Gion and Higashiyama, tradition comes alive. Wooden machiya townhouses, stone lanterns and willow-lined canals set the stage for encounters with Kyoto's living icons - the maiko and geiko (apprentice and full-fledged geisha).

In the early evening, the glow of lanterns reveals figures in exquisite silk, moving between teahouses, their footsteps echoing on ancient cobblestones.

For a second, you might think you are in an

immersive theme park, but these districts are not staged attractions, and are far more stunning for that fact.

No matter the season, Kyoto captivates with its natural beauty. In spring, clouds of cherry blossoms (sakura) transform parks and temples into surreal scenes.

Maruyama Park, the Philosopher's Path, and the grounds of Heian Shrine are especially breathtaking under a cascade of pale pink petals.

Summer brings lush greenery and the lively Gion Matsuri festival, while autumn cloaks the city in crimson and gold, particularly in the gardens of Tofuku-ji Temple and Arashiyama's mountainsides.

Once you've explored, it's time to sample the exquisite cuisine. At the heart of the city's food culture is kaiseki, a multi-course meal that elevates dining to an art form. You can of course keep it simple, by enjoying delicate wagashi sweets with matcha in a centuries-old teahouse. And don't miss Nishiki Market, known as "Kyoto's Kitchen," where you can sample everything from pickled vegetables to fresh sashimi and artisanal sweets.

Finally, visit workshops where artisans handcraft Kyo-yaki ceramics, shimmering Nishijin textiles, and intricate washi paper. The city's museums, like the Kyoto National Museum and the Kyoto International Manga Museum, offer deeper dives into the nation's creative heritage. Perhaps attend a traditional tea ceremony, watch a Noh or Kabuki performance, or join a hands-on class in calligraphy or ikebana (flower arranging).

When you leave, you'll be turning Japanese.

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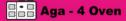
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