

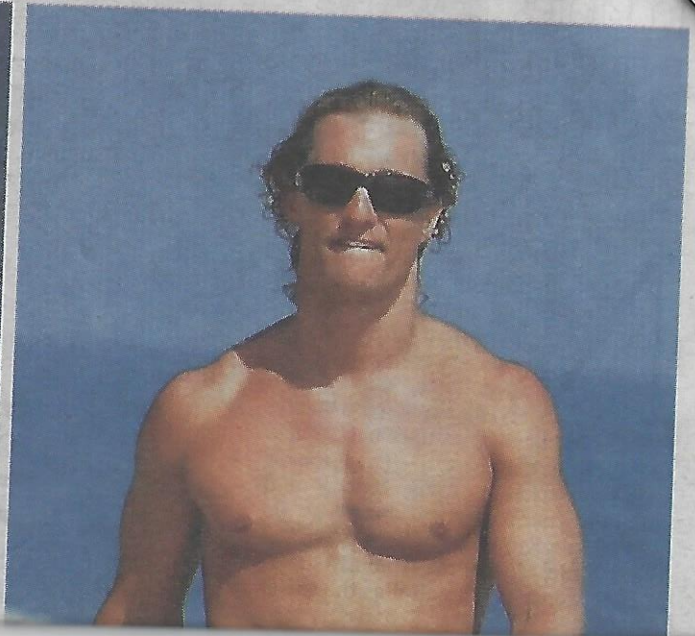
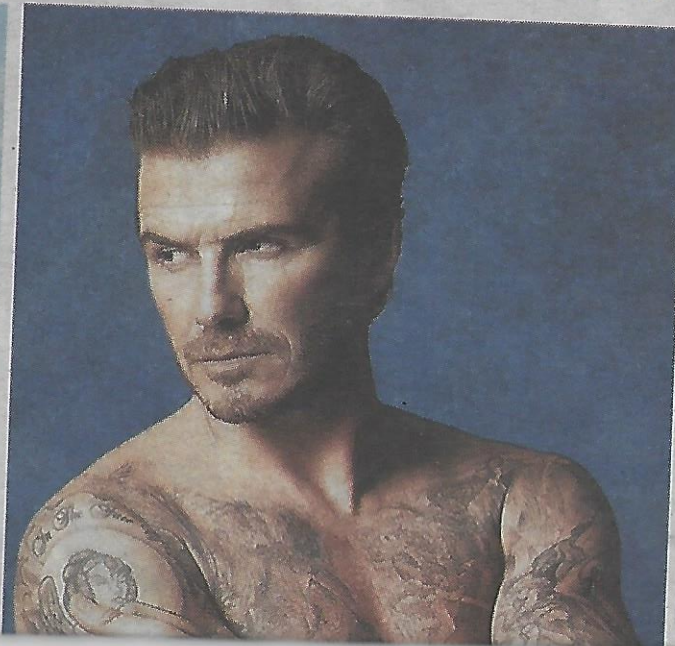
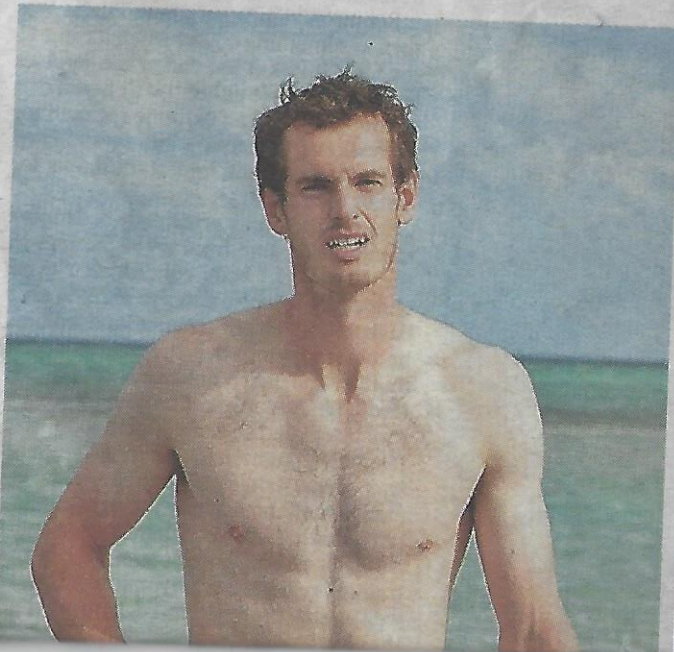


50 fabulous breaks in France

Plus Frank Skinner: 'Why I never got married'

Weekend

Travel
Starts on
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◀ dessert crêpe, while in Plerguer you can learn about cider production at Cidrerie Sorre with a multimedia exhibition, then enjoy a tasting.
Details Two nights' B&B from £252pp, including return ferry crossing (brittany-ferries.co.uk)

BEST ECO-FRIENDLY OPTIONS

39 Go green in the Pink City

France's speedy rail network is a pleasure to use, so make the most of Ouigo, a direct train service that launched its five-hour route from Paris Montparnasse to Toulouse last summer (ouigo.com). One-way tickets cost from £16, which, when combined with Eurostar tickets, can make for a cheap and eco-friendly trip south. Explore the old town in La Ville

Rose, so called for its pink-hued architecture, and pedal out along the Canal du Midi with the city's bike-share scheme for £1 a day. Albert ler is a family-run hotel with an EU Ecolabel for its environmental responsibility and dedication to the Slow Food movement.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £577 (hotel-albert1.com)

40 Auvergne spa escape

Escape to the volcanic region of Auvergne, in central France, an area that remains largely unexplored by tourists. A four-night Wilderness Wellness Experience allows you

to enjoy the Instants d'Absolu Ecolodge & Spa, next to the Lac du Pêcher and near the Pinatelle forest, which has been developed using low-impact, environmentally friendly materials. The converted farmhouse has 12 calming rooms, with beautiful views over the remote landscape, and a spa. Hop in the outdoor hot tub that overlooks the lake or unwind with yoga and expert-guided nature walks.
Details Four nights' full board from £1,330pp, including spa treatment, yoga sessions and guided walks (peakretreats.co.uk). Fly to Clermont-Ferrand with Ryanair

41 Saddle up in Paris

The French capital is leading the way with its green initiatives, which have already led to a ban on old cars. This year the capital is on schedule to complete its five-year plan to double the length of its cycling paths to 620 miles. Grab some wheels from the Vélib' bicycle-share scheme

— the latest incarnation includes electric bikes, and there are more than 60 stands (velib-metropole.fr). Plans are also afoot for a fleet of eco-friendly water taxis to take to the Seine (seabubbles.fr).

Elsewhere, Promenade Plantée, in the 12th arrondissement, is a disused railway replanted as an elevated garden. Stay at the eco-friendly Hôtel Gavarni, which is powered by electricity from renewable sources and serves organic breakfasts.
Details Room-only doubles from £135 (sawdays.co.uk). Take the Eurostar to Paris

42 Normandy eco retreat

Reduce your carbon footprint by taking Brittany Ferries' LPG-powered ship *Honfleur* from Portsmouth to Caen-Ouistreham. Launching this summer the 1,680-passenger vessel will be the most eco-friendly operating in the English Channel. From the ferry port it's an hour south to the unspoilt department of Orne, where Perche dans le Perche has a new eco-property, in addition to its already popular treehouse — Hilltop House is set in a ten-acre nature reserve with a wood-burning stove and views of Perche national park.

Details Seven nights from £846, sleeping six (perchedansleperche.com). Return ferry from Portsmouth to Caen from £115 each way for two people plus a car with Brittany Ferries

BEST OF THE REST

43 Chic shopping in the capital

Credit cards at the ready — La Samaritaine, the art deco and art nouveau department store, reopens its doors in April. It closed in 2005, but the luxury retail group LVMH has invested more than £400 million in bringing the landmark building in the 1st arrondissement back to life. You'll find plenty of designer labels, as well as refurbished art nouveau features including its glass roof, enamel tiles and ornate ironwork staircase. The development also incorporates a 72-room, five-star hotel from Cheval Blanc with a Dior spa and a restaurant led by the acclaimed chef Arnaud Donckele (projet.samaritaine.com).
Details Cheval Blanc has B&B doubles from £928 (chevalblanc.com). Fly to Paris with Air France or British Airways

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creations and leau woman amateur cartoonists. Also visit exhibitions by artists such as Robert Kirkman, the creator of *The Walking Dead* (day passes from £14; bdangouleme.com).
Details Le Saint Gelais has room-only doubles from £80 (hotel-saint-gelais-angouleme.com). Fly to La Rochelle with Ryanair

46 Strike gold in Landes

Why not try your hand at the art of gilding at Les Prés d'Eugénie, one of France's best hotels, in the rural Landes area of southwestern France. With this three-night craft break you'll learn how to use gold leaf to enhance a baroque mirror from the master gilder Nicolas ▶

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