



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Lorraine Kelly on Phillip Schofield



Nigel Farage on the Tories



What to eat for a good night's sleep



Magazine

New evidence puts pressure on police over teen who plunged from balcony

Gabriel Poggrund Whitehall Editor
The Metropolitan Police is under pressure to explain failures during its investigation into the death of a teenager who jumped from a flat.

Zac Bretler had been in a confrontation with a gangster and another man who was found to have "lied" about what happened on the night. The 19-year-old died of "drowning and multiple injuries" after leaping from the fifth floor of an apartment block opposite M16 headquarters and landing in the Thames in November 2019.

Detectives discovered he had adopted an alter ego as the son of a Russian oligarch and become involved with two men who claimed he owed them a share of an inheritance of millions that he had invented.

'HE'S NOT ALLOWED TO RUN AWAY'



PAGES 6-9

Scotland Yard initially believed Bretler had committed suicide but a coroner's inquest delivered an open verdict. Sharma later died in the same flat in mysterious circumstances but his death was not investigated.

Today, Bretler's parents, both 61, have released evidence that poses fresh questions about the police's inquiry. It includes: ● A text sent by Sharma on the day of Bretler's death in which he assured Sharma that the dispute would be resolved "one way or another"; ● A message hours later from Sharma who said: "He's not allowed to run away now"; ● Crime scene photographs of blood-like stains in the bathroom and bedroom of the property that were never swabbed or forensically tested; ● A detective's admission that Sharma had "lied" about his actions on the night. Sharma's false statements

included the claim that he had left before Bretler's death and driven straight home. In fact, he had returned to the property and later walked down to the Thames where he spent six minutes peering into and around the section of the river where the teenager fell. His father said his son was as "good as gold" until the time of his GCSEs when he had a "late-onset Continued on page 2 >

Gove warns that democracy is in danger if young can't get houses

Minister fears a swing to authoritarian leaders

Caroline Wheeler Political Editor
Michael Gove has warned his party that it must urgently appeal to young people – or risk them turning their backs on capitalism and democracy.

The housing secretary, 56, said the expectation that young people had 30 years ago that they would work hard and be rewarded by getting a foot on the housing ladder no longer existed. He said: "If people think that markets are rigged and a democracy isn't listening to them, then you get an increasing number of young people saying: 'I don't believe in democracy. I don't believe in markets'."

Bank of Mum and Dad, and in many cases an inheritance from grandparents, most young people cannot afford to buy their first home. He said: "It's a barrier to young people feeling that democracy and capitalism are working for them. It's simply harder for us to make that case if people ... feel that they're being shut out."

NEWMAN'S WEEK



"And you can see that in polling with people saying: 'I just want someone to fix this. I'd be prepared to have an authoritarian leader who would just fix this', and that is a danger."

Gove, who is leading a campaign to introduce leasehold and rental reforms, said that a failure to address the housing crisis, as young people face sky-high private sector rents and rising house prices, could spark a rise in populism. House prices have doubled, even tripled, in many parts of the country, while wages have failed to keep pace. Without the so-called

HOPE LOST IN GAZA

FAMILY HANDOUT VIA REUTERS



Hind Rajab, 6, who went missing in Gaza 12 days ago, was found dead yesterday alongside members of her family. She had made a call to rescuers saying: "I'm so scared, please come." The family's car appeared to have come under fire as they fled Gaza City. Rafah assault 'will be the end for us', page 16

King: I take comfort from your best wishes

Roya Nikkha Royal Editor

The King has spoken of taking "the greatest comfort and encouragement" from the public outpouring of support following his cancer diagnosis.

Charles, 75, who is resting at Sandringham with the Queen, 76, after starting his cancer treatment last week, expressed his "heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes."

"Thousands of people, including many who have survived cancer or are undergoing treatment, sent their best wishes. Buckingham Palace has received "more than a dozen sacks" of post for Charles since he revealed his diagnosis on Monday.

The Prince of Wales is also in Norfolk with the Princess of Wales and their children for half-term. While there, he will discuss with his father how best to support him.

William, 41, who has been helping to care for Kate, 42, since her abdominal surgery last month, is to resume a full-time schedule of public engagements next week.

The King, patron of two cancer charities, Macmillan and Marie Curie, said it was "heartening to hear how sharing my own diagnosis has helped promote public understanding and shine a light on the work of organisations which support cancer patients and their families across the UK".

William's duty dilemma, page 5



The unthinkable thought through.

S-RM

YOUR FIRST CALL FOR CYBER SECURITY AND INVESTIGATIONS

search: your first call

February 11, 2024

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Travel

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR

Sneak off-peak

Your **11-page** savvy-travel guide to great value getaways outside high season

Plus France's most romantic city (it's not Paris) **26** Weekend in Tromso **35** Win a luxury UK break **37**

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Travel

Peak season will mean different things to different holidaymakers. For a lot of trips, especially within the UK and Europe, the July and August of school summer holidays are when prices are highest and flights and hotels busiest. But carnivals, Christmas and other events can spell peak too – as can dry seasons in countries where monsoon can stop play, or where too much water and foliage will make the wildlife harder to spot. So there are reasons why peak season attracts higher prices – but there are also plenty of reasons why off-peak trips represent the canny choice. Seville, say, is a different Seville in February to the one you'll find in July – but quite possibly a nicer one.

The tour operator Intrepid reported a 61 per cent increase in shoulder-season travel to Europe last year, citing anecdotal evidence that travellers were seeking better value, fewer fellow visitors and lower temperatures than in the July-August peak. The same applies in the southern hemisphere, even if our spring is their autumn.

Here's our pick of the best off-season trips for 2024. Please ignore them all. You don't want low season to become the new peak do you?

LONG HAUL

GO WILD IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

The best time to visit the Amazon is when it's dry, July to December; but in green season (Jan-June) at Cristalino Lodge in the southern Amazon, the Cristalino River reflows and a 11,400-hectare reserve comes to life again. At the heart of its merry carnival of life – giant river otters, tapirs, monkeys, more than 600 bird species – is an ecology of understated woody glamour. Like the BBC crew who stayed while filming otters for last year's *Earth's Great Rivers*, you'll paddle canoes and hike. Unlike them you'll experience the new Valley Trail, Cristalino's most beautiful route yet. This trip also includes Pousada Trijuncao in the Cerrado and jaguar-spotting in the Pantanal, plus time in Rio. **Details** Thirteen nights' all-inclusive from £8,433pp, including flights, transfers, guiding and activities (niarratravel.com)

SPIRIT OF JAPAN

As a weak-kneed yen brings visitor numbers back to pre-pandemic levels, the Japanese government has begun muttering about overtourism. So maybe some of the two million visitors a month in spring's high season would be interested to know that autumn's leaf colours are just as impressive as the famous cherry blossom. This self-guided trip that takes in



Be canny with your booking dates and you can save cash and swerve the crowds, says James Stewart. Just don't tell everyone...

the Unesco-listed pilgrims' paths on the Kii peninsula offers the fascination of Japan in a single journey: futuristic Tokyo's yin to Kyoto's historic yang; Shinto shrines and hot onsen pools among copper leaves; accommodation in temples and traditional ryokan inns. **Magical. Details** Fourteen nights' B&B from £3,160pp, including transfers and some extra meals (insidejapantours.com). Fly to Tokyo

HIMALAYAN SPA STAY

Mention the monsoon (June to September – traditionally India's low season) to Indians and they'll tell you that's the time to make for Himalayan health retreats: greater

humidity, open pores, more efficacious treatments. Although I reckon that being cocooned in luxury up near the roof of the world can hardly damage your sense of wellbeing. Opened last year, the Six Senses Vana weaves together programmes of ayurvedic treatments and Tibetan medicine, watsu massage plus plain old yoga, acupuncture and reflexology. It's one for you if you're looking for self-discovery – and if you like to travel light, as guests are provided with organic kurta pyjamas for their stay. **Details** Three nights' full board from £1,422pp, including transfers and treatments (sixsenses.com). Fly to Dehradun via Delhi

A KIWI ODYSSEY

New Zealand's pandemic staycation boom shows no sign of ending. That's why you're taking a road trip in an antipodean autumn (March-June): empty roads, stable weather for walks, warm days. This new odyssey hands you a 4x4 for a tip-toe, self-drive exploration but sensibly schedules in guides for the big stuff: hikes in the Rotorua and Tongariro national parks, boat rides in Milford Sound, a fly-hike-jetboat combo in the Mount Aspiring National Park. **Details** Twenty-two nights' B&B from £3,988pp, including trips and car hire (discover-the-world.com). Fly to Auckland

CENTRAL AMERICA WITH THE KIDS

The secret to off-peak prices during peak school holidays? Think creatively, advises Liddy Pleasants, founder of the family specialist Stubborn Mule: "In Guatemala and Belize there are a few showers in July and August but plenty of sunshine and prices are 20 per cent cheaper than in high season [Nov-March]." That's a

grand per person saved on this bespoke fortnight. It's one giant TikTok opportunity for teens. They'll toast marshmallows over lava, canoe on Lake Atitlan, play Indiana Jones among jungly Mayan ruins near San Ignacio and, off Placencia, snorkel in Belize's best marine reserve. You may prefer calmer, colourful Antigua town.

Good luck keeping up.

Details Fourteen nights' B&B, including flights, transfers, guiding and activities, from £4,100pp (stubbornmuletravel.com)



GREEN SEASON IN THE OKAVANGO DELTA

Between December and April zebras and wildebeest migrate through Botswana's Okavango Delta trailed by lions. Birdlife is at its most spectacular in newly verdant bush. Wetlands are a maze of channels for mokoro canoe trips and thunderstorms crackle before afternoon showers refresh the air. If rain is near-guaranteed, so is the sort of natural drama that's lacking during the May to October dry-season peak. But park your visit until the

Japan's Mount Fuji in autumn; canoeing in the Okavango Delta, Botswana, below

end of this year and you'll get to experience Natural Selection's new riverside lodge, Tawana, which opens in the stellar Moremi Game Reserve in May. You're there for three nights – your remaining time is split between the Okavango's North Island and Selinda Explorers Camp on the Great Plains. **Details** Eleven nights' full board, including flights, transfers, guiding and activities, from £13,072pp (theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk)

SRI LANKA ON FOOT

Two centuries after the first tea bush was planted, the plantation country of Sri Lanka has been reimagined with the 185-mile Pekoe Trail walk. The occasional shower aside, it remains cool and pleasant from June to August, when monsoon season affects the celebrated resorts of the south. On this new bespoke trip, expect day walks through forests and among tea terraces, plus accommodation in new luxury stays such as Kandy's W15 Hanthana Estate. There are 22 stages to complete, but it's your itinerary, your choice. I'd pair it with a safari in Wilpattu National Park and **Continued on page 6**



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Travel OFF-PEAK TRIPS SPECIAL

→ Continued from page 7

Rome in Ridley Scott's new *Gladiator 2* – with nary a tour group in sight. Also the sea around Gozo is warm(ish).

The place is big on historical romance, so book Roselli AX Privilege, a central 17th-century boutique hotel with a Michelin-starred restaurant, spa access and the best rooftop bar in town.

Details Five nights' B&B from £699pp, including flights and transfers (kuoni.co.uk)

ITALY FOR STROLLING

All set for a shoulder-season stroll through colourful villages stacked above shimmering sea? Then to Italy we go; no, not to Amalfi – it's busy even in spring and autumn – but the neighbouring Cilento coast. This new self-guided trip heads down the coast through the Cilento National Park. Luggage is transferred ahead, so you're unburdened to experience a heady mix of history – in the Unesco-listed Paestum or the craggy fishing village of Acciaroli, which

“ In late February the hairpinning ascents remain free of traffic

(locals say) inspired Ernest Hemingway to write *The Old Man and the Sea* – and nature, where Tyrrhenian seascapes meet mountains. Good food is a given.

Details Eight nights' B&B from £1,389pp, including flights, transfers and some other meals (headwater.com)

OH MADEIRA

A good walk is a superlative escape at any time but especially so when it's on Europe's loveliest subtropical island in winter.

Consider the benefits of this new easy self-guided walking holiday along the crinkle-cut valleys, coast and mossy laurel forests of east Madeira. The

20C averages of winter are Goldilocks temperatures for walkers – not too hot, not too cold – when you're clocking up four to ten miles daily. Also visitor numbers are low, so trails are empty and small family hotels are welcoming. It's a no-brainer.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,059pp, including flights and transfers (walksworldwide.com)



Sample pintos in San Sebastian; right, cycling on Mallorca

SURF'S UP IN SAN SEBASTIAN

Tourists surf in summer; actual surfers live for the consistent swell of autumn and spring. By happy coincidence, these off-peak times are when the Basque surf town of San Sebastian is at its most appealing. There's space in its celebrated pintos bars, such as La Cuchara de San Telmo and Bar Txepeta, and daytime temperatures hover around 18C in November. Stay at the Villa Soro boutique hotel, a beautifully restored 19th-century pile with fires, honesty bars, calm and luxe that is a ten-minute jog from the surf schools at Zurriola beach. Prices here drop by nearly two thirds during the off season.

Details B&B doubles from £97 (hotelvillasoro.com). Fly to Bilbao

LAPLAND TWO WAYS

As southern Europe sweaters, you want a Scandinavian summer – the midnight sun and happy Swedes living their best lives. You also hanker for frozen Lapland, where winter



is peak season. This short break gives you the best of both. Over three days you'll come to understand the Swedish concept of *friluftsliv* – basically, embracing the outdoors through mountain-biking, rafting and a three-course wilderness dinner among the forests of Arctic Sweden. Yet you bed down on ice-block beds and slug cocktails from ice glasses in the bar of the year-round IceHotel.

How do they maintain such temperatures in summer? Solar power, of course. **Details** Three nights' B&B from £1,105pp, including flights and transfers (best-served.co.uk)

SERRIA VIEWS ON MALLORCA

The latest luxury stay amid the hotel boom on in Mallorca is the Valldemossa, from the mini-chain Il Mallorca. When it opens on February 29, the former manor house on the outside lovely Valldemossa village will provide a dozen rooms of pared-back rustic chic, an outpost of the De Tòkio fusion restaurant in Palma and panoramic views over the Serra de Tramuntana. The launch coincides with the start of cycling season in those mountains, where hairpinning

ascents remain free of traffic and temperatures are friendly. In spring the hotel has room rates that are half those of high season, and it offers a sports detox package. **Details** B&B doubles from £234 (valldemossahotel.com). Fly to Palma

POST-SKING SUNSHINE

A new Sky Alps flight to Bolzano (from Stansted until April) then from Gatwick) has been touted as great news for skiers, but that would be to miss a trick later in the year. Alta Badia in June – post-skiers, but pre-summer – is the Dolomites of dreams; all quiet corkscrew peaks and slopes speckled by wildflowers. The sunshine on eight days in ten beats every other range in the Alps. Rent an e-bike on Col Al, Piz la la or Piz Sorega and you'll potter among the big views to refuges serving Michelin-approved cuisine for the price of a limp baguette in French mountain resorts. You're right, it's beautiful – which is why you're kipping in refurbished apartments at Pralongia, one of the oldest mountain refuges in the region.

Details Half-board doubles from £308 (pralongia.it). Fly to Bolzano

UK OFF-SEASON SKYE

Here's a win-win for a winter break. Kinloch Lodge has launched a deal offering an extra night free if you book two nights before the end of February. And you should. Not just because rushing the finest stay on the island seems a great shame and it's the former family home of Lord and Lady Macdonald, now under Isabella Macdonald, with recently refurbished rooms, stellar food and whisky by the fire. But because Sky in winter reverts from holiday playground to an island of myth – along the Quiraing path you half expect to see wizards, and snow dusts the Outlin hills.

Details Three nights' half-board from £500pp (kinloch-lodge.co.uk)

Oystercatchers at Norfolk's RSPB Snettisham



EASY RIDERS ON THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

There's a trend of thought among cyclists that tends towards the masochistic: the steeper the better. Count me out. Here's a new trip for easy riders in the Channel Islands.

Yes, we know the islands are Crown dependencies outside the UK, don't write angry emails. But we're of the same British family. The self-guided itinerary is ideal in early autumn, when temperatures are pleasant and seas warm. Hopscoching from Jersey to Guernsey and spending a day on car-free Sark, potentially the loveliest island of all, gives you a dreamlike week of cycles and swims, pints and prawns for lunch. In other words: Brit ish.

Details Six nights' B&B from £1,449pp, including flights, transfers and a bike hire (headwater.com)

NORFOLK BIRDLIFE

Birders at their Snettisham Spectaculars – the sight of tens of thousands of migrant waders whirling above Norfolk's RSPB Snettisham reserve as the highest tides of early spring and late autumn cover mudflats. It's quite a sight. It's also early – on its website the RSPB recommends arriving at times of day no holidaymaker should see (as early as 6.15am). Still, that means longer days on an empty Norfolk coast of epic wide green horizons before hunkering down at the

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