

REACH FOR THE STARS

We find the best places in the world to see the wonders of the heavens

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Piper calls the tune

Billie gives an astonishing performance in brutal play

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THE BECK STROKE

REBECCA ADLINGTON appears to stroke fellow swimming legend Mark Foster's leg live on air - leaving viewers of the BBC's Olympics coverage on the edge of their seats. The two-time gold medal winner sparked speculation that she may be having a fling with her co-pundit by letting her hand stray towards him early yesterday. The 27-year-old split from

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MPs fight May's bid to expand grammars

Selective schools 'belong in the dustbin of history', says Labour

OPPOSITION MPs have vowed to fight Theresa May's plans for new grammar schools, with Labour saying they belong in the 'dustbin of history'.

The prime minister is said to be on the cusp of sanctioning the first new selective state secondaries for decades.

But Lib Dem leader Tim Farron said he hoped to scupper the scheme by persuading 'modernising' Tories to vote against it.

Angela Rayner, Labour's shadow education secretary, said: 'Selec-

tion belongs in the dustbin of history and has no place in modern society. There must be no going back.'

Former grammar school pupil Mrs May (pictured) sees them as a way to help bright pupils from humble backgrounds rise to the top.

Downing Street said any announcement about opening more of them would come



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Hands up: PM wants to help brightest



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The lowdown on Brighton's new sky-high ride

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Things are looking up

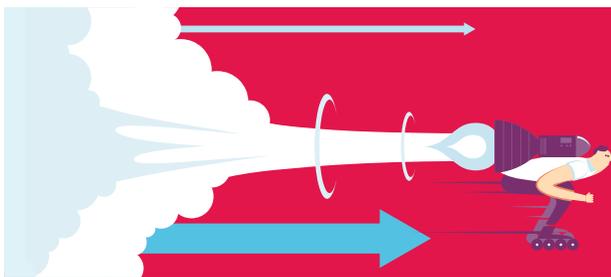
With next month's solar eclipse on the horizon and a sprinkling of meteor showers due this week, an awe-struck **Richard Mellors** picks the best ways to see the stars around the world

Astronomy gastronomy

FEELING an urge to don an astro-tourist hat? Then head to Tenerife, The Teide Observatory has eight new telescopes and guided tours to tempt you (from £9, volcanoteide.com). Book on to the Ritz-Carlton Abama for its inaugural Celestial Michelin picnic. You'll get an eight-course hamper on the beach and a guide by an astronomer (picnic from £255pp, doubles from £250 per night B&B, ritzcarlton.com).

More stargazing: **Page 24** »

PIC: TENERIFE TOURISM CORPORATION



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Look up from The Downs

DARK Sky Reserves are protected areas certified for their stargazing prowess. Britain's newest such space is the South Downs National Park, which gained the classification in March. See its Sussex reaches by hiking a section of the South Downs Way with Sherpa Expeditions (from £640 for eight nights' B&B, luggage transfers and notes, Apr-Oct only, sherpaexpeditions.com), stopping in sleepy towns each night including Rodmell village, where Virginia Woolf used to live. Or head to Uppark House and Garden – a National Trust country pile near Petersfield – and celebrate the 150th anniversary of sci-fi writer HG Wells' birth on September 21. Recalling The War Of The Worlds, experts from the South Downs Planetarium will lead starry-eyed searches for Venus, Mars and Saturn (entry £10, nationaltrust.org.uk).



United States of Eclipse

NEXT summer's total solar eclipse has been billed as 'America's biggest tourist event of all time' and it's easy to see why. On August 21, 2017, the path of totality (wherein the Moon obscures the sun) will stretch right across central USA from Oregon to South Carolina. For the best viewing, head to some of the US's least-populous states such as Wyoming and Nebraska.



Get close to the universe: Clockwise from top, Moon viewings at Kielder Observatory; Finn Lough Lodge Bubble Domes in Northern Ireland; a PurePod in New Zealand



The UK's largest is Norfolk's LAS Equinox Sky Camp, a camping-only event in Kelling Heath Holiday Park from September 30 to October 2 (free entry, pitches from £19.50 per night, las-skycamp.org). Expect stalls, talks, telescope tours and real ale. Up at Northumberland National Park (another Dark Sky Reserve), the large observatory at Kielder stages weekly events – from educational family evenings with roasted marshmallows to new-Moon viewing under cosy blankets (kielderobservatory.org). Stay at Beacon Hill Farm, which opened its observatory this spring (from £655 per week for a six-person cottage in September, premiercottages.co.uk).

Your own galaxy quest

Experience the eclipse cowboy-style by checking in at Oregon's Long Hollow Working Cattle & Guest Ranch (six nights from £1,122, including full board, transfers and ranch activities, ranchrider.com) or book onto The Travelling Naturalist's Grand Teton & Yellowstone Solar Eclipse tour (15 days from £4,995, with flights, transfers and full board, naturalist.co.uk), covering Wyoming and Utah.



Peace in a pod

NEW Zealand's PurePods are stargazing meets supperclub: you only find out their exact location upon booking. Just launched is the Manakau PurePod, a glass-roofed hideaway along a South Island trail near Kaikoura (from £267 per night, purepods.com). When the clouds about Mt Fyffe clear, expect views of the Southern Cross. Back in

our own hemisphere, Northern Ireland's lakeside Finn Lough Lodge (from £195 per night B&B, finnough.com) has two Bubble Domes, secluded temples with transparent ceilings, four-poster beds, underfloor heating and, er, vintage record players.

Special stargazing events

TO really enter into the astronomy spirit, attend a stargazing festival.



Astronomically luxurious

FOUND in Kruger National Park, South Africa's contemporary Singita Lebombo safari lodge (from £1,185 per night with transfers, full board and activities, singita.com) boasts a devoted star deck following its recent makeover. A wine-tasting studio and second 25m pool have also been added. Equally gobsmacking is the world's largest overwater villa (or so it claims) in the Maldivian resort of Gili Lankanfushi (from £8,400 per night, gili-lankanfushi.com). The private reserve was re-opened in winter by astronaut Buzz Aldrin – one of the first men to walk on the Moon. Along with sky-surveying opportunities, it offers a 63m pool, spa and cinema.

Finally, don't go meteor-free

METEOR showers (aka shooting stars) occur when the Earth travels through a comet's debris stream. Particularly impressive are the Perseids, which are extra-prolific this year. The peak time will be this week (August 9-15), with Friday the best day. You could see up to 150 meteors per hour – campsites.co.uk offers camping sites from shepherds' huts to bell tents dotted around the UK.

Adventures in the sky: The luxe Singita Lebombo safari lodge (left and below); meteor showers, which can be seen this week

