

Eastern Daily Press

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Better to have a good, all-round service than Boxing Day trains

Perhaps taking a train on Boxing Day is something that some people would like to be able to do.

But in terms of priorities for train operating companies, it should be – and is – way down the list.

The same goes for most of the public and business owners in our region, who have endured decades of unacceptable rail services.

We all want to see trains running on time, with clean and modern carriages and plenty of space for passengers to sit down. And we want to see a 90-minute regular service between Norwich and London Liverpool Street.

Abellio Greater Anglia knows all too well that those are our demands and it will be expected to work to achieve them during its new franchise period.

If it manages to do these and establish regular services on Boxing Day in the future, we will be eternally grateful.

But it really would be a luxury adornment to the cake.

Alongside the issue of priorities, there are other points to make about Boxing Day trains.

Firstly, the down day gives Network Rail a train-free day to get engineering work done – not all of the work by any means, but at least enough to avoid shunting it onto another working day and causing infuriating disruption.

As we know at the moment, the work is needed and causes a great deal of aggravation when it takes place.

Secondly, is it so crucial that we have our every transport need met – even on Boxing Day?

Arguably it is more important to allow workers the opportunity to have another day off during the festive season.

The spirit of Christmas

What is the spirit of Christmas?

For some, it is all about receiving presents. For others, it is about eating and drinking. For still more people, shopping is the spirit of the festive season.

There's nothing wrong with any of those things, but if Christmas is all about get, get, get, eat, eat, eat and buy, buy, buy, it lacks depth and meaning. Paradoxically, it also creates an empty feeling.

For at the heart of Christmas there is a spirit of giving – a spirit that blesses others and makes us feel better, too.

That spirit was summed up by the unsung heroes who provided meals for those who were spending Christmas on their own.

Across the region, people spent Christmas morning peeling and chopping vegetables, laying tables and cooking lovely meals for total strangers.

Their self-sacrifice provided lonely people with company, conversation and smiles – festive gifts which cannot be bought. It also made the volunteers feel good.

So there, in a nutshell, we have the spirit of Christmas – putting others first. To those who gave, we give our warmest thanks.

City, make us smile!

Many of us have already received what we wanted for Christmas. But there are thousands of Norwich City fans whose festive hopes will be pinned on today's trip to Reading.

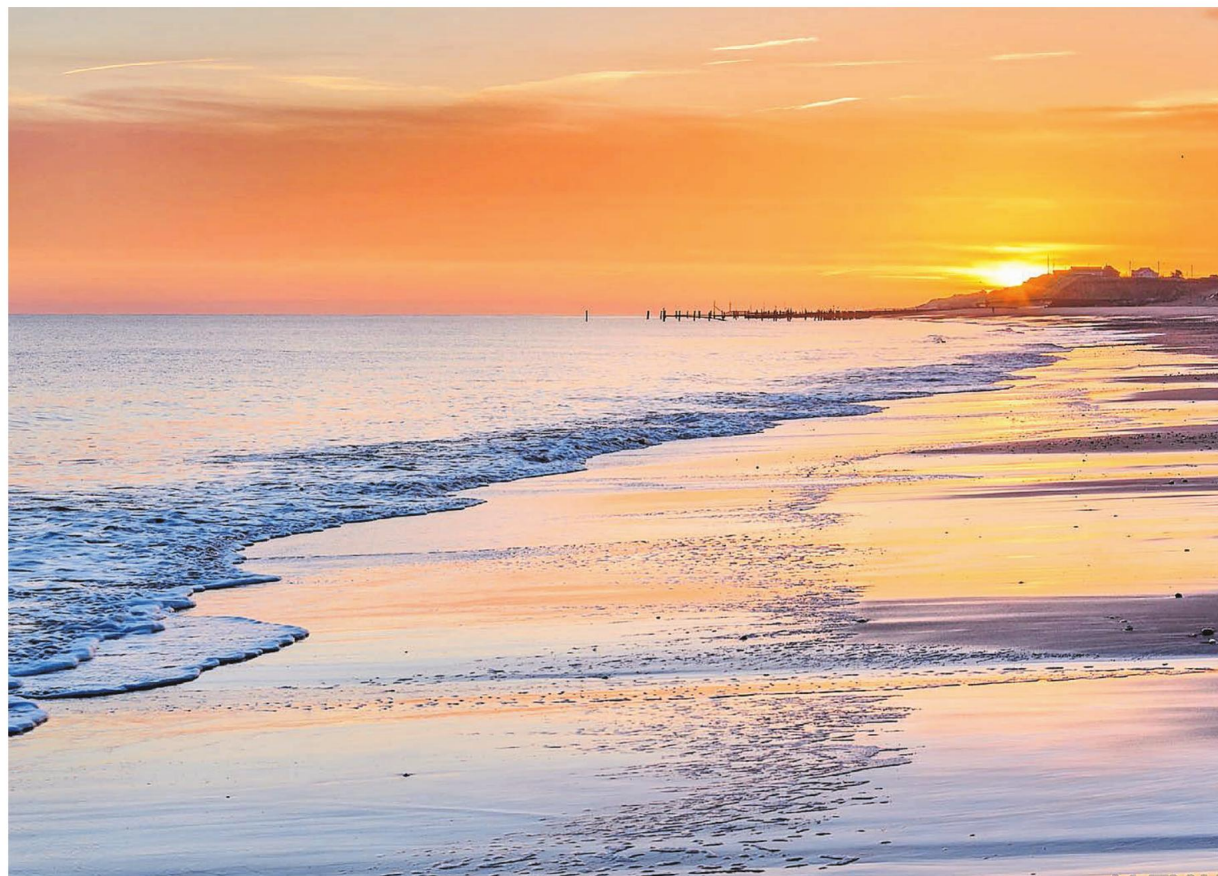
For all we want for Christmas is three points and the beginning of an upturn in performance.

The Canaries' autumn form has been mostly dreadful and the club is stumbling into the new year, while the fans are filled more with resignation than hope.

So confound us, Norwich players. Shake off the recent malaise and show everybody your class and your heart. Starting with Reading, it is time to put smiles back on the fans' faces.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ A chilly, but beautiful, clear sunrise on Happisburgh Beach, taken by Alex Lyons. To see your pictures in the Eastern Daily Press, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Human languages are as varied as our societies

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All groups of human beings everywhere in the world have the same biological relationships with one another.

Everybody has had a father and a mother. Anybody can in principle have a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister.

But the way in which these relationships are grouped together and labelled in different languages varies a lot. In English, the word uncle can apply to four different types of relation: father's brother, mother's brother, father's sister's husband, and mother's sister's husband. So it is no surprise that other languages may have as many as four different words corresponding to uncle. The Australian language Njamaal has two: the word mama is used for father's brother and mother's sister's husband, while karna is mother's brother and father's sister's husband.

Danish distinguishes between two different types of aunt – moster (mother's sister) and faster (father's sister). Norwegians have two words for grandmother: mormor (mother's mother) and farmor (father's mother). Some languages have different words for brother, depending on whether or not the brother is older than the speaker. French has distinct



■ Family matter: English lags behind other world languages in the breadth of its vocabulary for family links. Picture: PA

words for male and female cousins – cousin vs. cousine. In English, cousin is the only term which does not indicate the sex of the person concerned. (We do have parent and sibling, but they're not part of the central system of kinship terms.)

Some of our kinship terms are reciprocal, and some are not. If I am your brother, you're my brother (if you are male). If you're my cousin, I'm your cousin. But if I'm your uncle, you're not my uncle: you're my niece or nephew.

This works differently in other languages. The Njamaal word mabidi can be translated into English as grandfather, great uncle, grandson, granddaughter, wife of grandson, and husband of grand-

daughter. The term is reciprocal in a way that is rather surprising to us. If I am your grandfather, and you are my grandson, we may be each other's mabidi: some Njamaal kinship terms do not distinguish generation, as they do in English, but generation distance – mabidi refers to certain relationships which are two generations removed. Similarly, a man can use a single term, maili, for his father's father (his paternal grandfather) and his daughter's son's wife's sister (his grandson's sister-in-law) – the person in question, again, is two generations removed from himself.

Human societies come in an amazing variety of forms; and so do human languages. Long may it continue.