



Where business becomes pleasure

Keen to combine work and play during your visit to Britain? **Nick Blackmore** discovers that the nation's rich sporting heritage provides the perfect setting

THE ACTOR AND WRITER Peter Ustinov once mused that "the genius of the British lends itself not so much to the winning of games, as to their invention". With four constituent nations and a multitude of sports, fortune does occasionally favour the bold British sporting tribes. However, there can be no scepticism about that genius for invention – the island boasts a world-renowned sporting culture and, if you are doing business in Britain, you owe it to yourself to use that as the backdrop to your professional pursuits.

There can be few sporting venues that are able to match the rich sense of history and pageantry at Ascot Racecourse – the home of Royal Ascot, held annually in the third week in June. Following a £200m redevelopment in 2006, Ascot is not only a world-class racecourse but also a year-round state-of-the-art events venue with a dedicated team on hand to help create bespoke hospitality.

If Ascot hasn't sated your appetite for the regal lifestyle, Berkshire is also home to Windsor Castle and Eton College, where many of the royals have lived, learned and played sports over the years. In particular, the continuing existence of Eton's obscure Wall Game is a testament to British

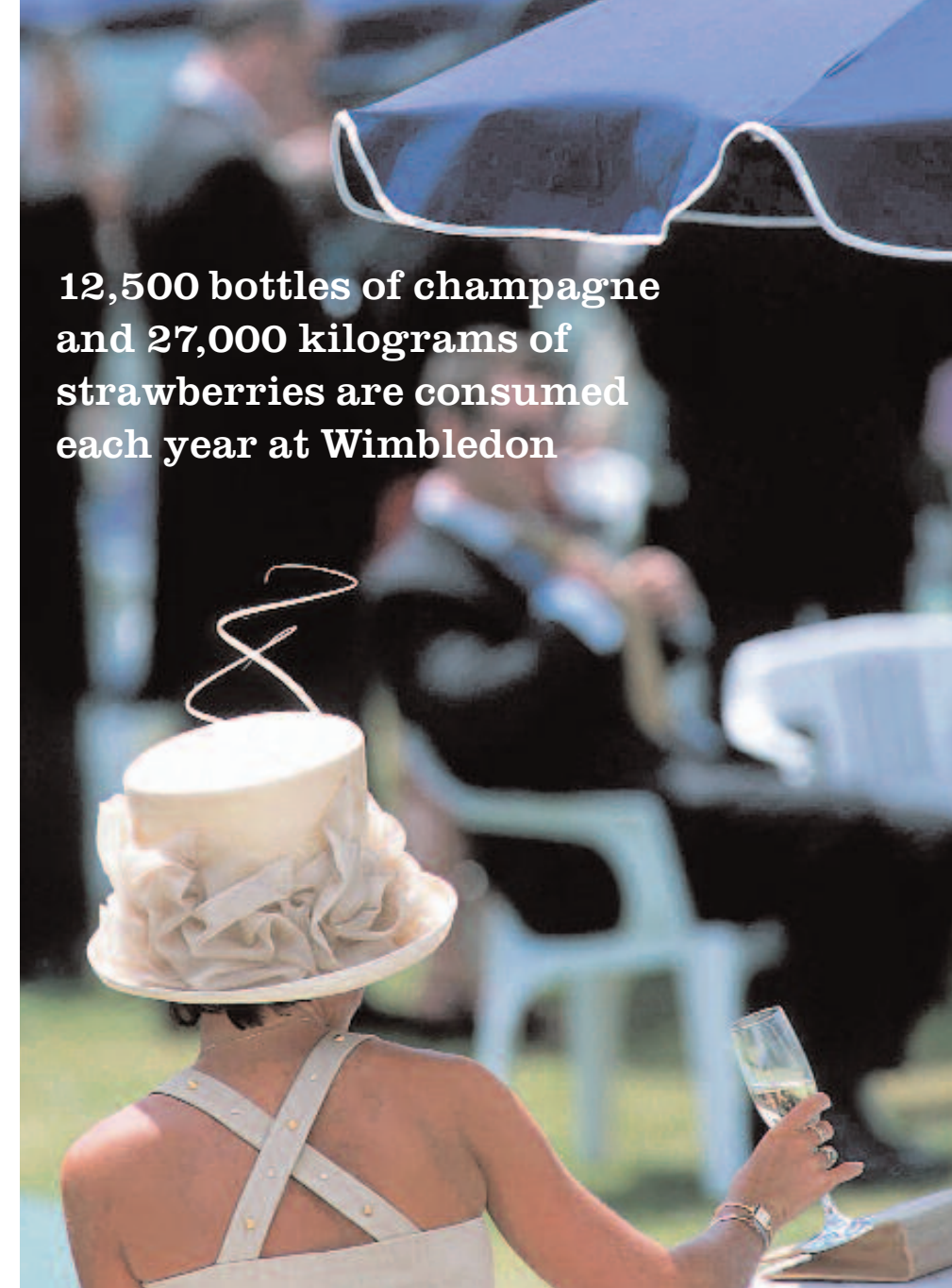
sporting inventiveness and commitment to tradition. The nearby Windsor Great Park is home to Guards Polo Club, long associated with the Royal Family and with sporting eminence. The prestige pick of its annual events is Cartier International Polo, held in July. From a private table at the Smith's Lawn Enclosure you can enjoy the chukkas while sipping specially selected wines and enjoy an Indian head-and-neck massage.

Key players of Britain's royal and blue-chip worlds also converge every July at the waters of Henley-on-Thames, south Oxfordshire, for the Henley Royal Regatta. The sport on show here is rowing, and you can bask in the sun at The Royal Regatta Restaurant or one of the Royal Regatta Private Chalets at Fawley Meadows. Aside from the wide range of dining options, there is an alfresco bar and live music. If you're making a substantial group booking then secure the haven of Temple Island, a luxurious facility on the River Thames, overlooking the starting line and boasting a beautiful ornamental folly.

Direct rail services from Henley-on-Thames to London mean you can also attend that other highlight of the season, Wimbledon. With 12,500 bottles of champagne and 27,000 kilograms of strawberries consumed each year, this is just as much about enjoying the service off the court as on it. From an indulgent choice of hospitality, the Fairway Village is a must. This luxury complex is close to Centre court, and you can be pampered in a relaxed and private environment while keeping abreast of the day's scores.

If you're looking for a London venue even more venerable than the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, head for Lord's Ground in St John's

12,500 bottles of champagne and 27,000 kilograms of strawberries are consumed each year at Wimbledon



Sipping champagne from within a private enclosure, such as the Fairway Village (below left) at Wimbledon, is the best way to enjoy the world's finest lawn tennis



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The Henley Royal Regatta (above) and Royal Ascot (left) are perfect places to combine work-related discussions with sun and socialising



PHOTOS: REX FEATURES/ACTION PLUS

Lord's is the home of cricket (above); the new Wembley Stadium (below) is one of London's most exciting venues

Wood, London. Lord's is the home of cricket: there is scarcely a sport more English. Rich in tradition, cricket is like a gentleman's battle of wits, skills and lightning-fast reactions. Watch a match from the comfort of a private box with a glass of champagne in hand (and the dedicated Lord's hospitality team standing by), and you will easily fall under its spell – a magic that generations of Britons continue to treasure.

However, these days football (or soccer) has supplanted cricket as the nation's most successful sporting export. The Premier League is followed by an estimated half a billion people worldwide, and while you're in London you'll have a golden opportunity to enjoy it in person. There are several top London teams in the Premier League, most famously Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in west London and Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium in north London. Aside from luxury padded seating (for when your eyes are on the game), fine dining and complimentary bar (for when they're not), Chelsea FC's range of packages includes pre-match tours and appearances by ex-players.

Watch a cricket match at Lord's and fall under this British sport's spell

For groups of ten to 12 guests, the Emirates Stadium (opened in 2006) offers some of the finest executive boxes in the world. Champagne on arrival, private dining, LCD screens and first-class service ensure satisfaction, no matter what the score.

Yet even this ultra-modern stadium is eclipsed by the recently rebuilt Wembley Stadium in north-west London, the world's most famous football ground and the cradle of the sport. Securing a hospitality package for a football match here is nigh on impossible, but the venue resonates with visitors even when there is no sport being played. The corporate boxes at Wembley still guarantee great views, and the world-class cuisine and the attentive hospitality team make for an unforgettable day.

All these venues are visually arresting, lavishly equipped and have made the pages of sporting history for the memorable performances and jubilant audiences that they attract.

By mixing business with pleasure during your visit to Britain, you may find that these sporting surroundings provide the perfect venue for some of your greatest personal achievements. ■

Further information

Ascot, tel: +44 (0)870 727 1234; www.ascot.co.uk

Guards Polo Club, tel: +44 (0)1784 434212;

www.guardspoloclub.com

Henley Royal Regatta, tel: +44 (0)845 602 8900;

www.keithprowse.co.uk

Wimbledon, tel: +44 (0)1235 555844;

www.purewimbledon.com

Lord's Ground, tel: +44 (0)20 7616 8500;

www.mcc.org.uk

Emirates Stadium, tel: +44 (0)20 7704 4040;

www.arsenal.co.uk

Stamford Bridge, tel: +44 (0)20 7915 2900;

www.chelseafc.com

Wembley Stadium, tel: +44 (0)844 980 8001;

www.wembleystadium.com

