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Punxsutawney Phil is said to have seen his shadow, forecasting 6 more weeks of wintry weather

By MARK SCOLFORO, TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and KATHY McCORMACK
Associated Press

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. (AP)

— Punxsutawney Phil predicted six more weeks of wintry weather Monday, a forecast sure to disappoint many after what's already been a long, cold season across large parts of the United States.

His annual prediction and announcement that he had seen his shadow was translated by his top hat-wearing handlers in the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club at Gobbler's Knob in western Pennsylvania.

The news was greeted with a mix of cheers and boos from the tens of thousands who braved temperatures in the single-digits Fahrenheit to await the annual prognostication. The extreme cold kept the crowd bundled up and helped keep people on the main stage dancing.

Usually guests can come up on stage and take pictures of Phil after his prediction, but this year the announcer said it was too cold for that and his handlers were afraid to keep him out too long. Instead, the audience was asked to come to the stage, turn around and "do a selfie."

In New York, the ceremony for Staten Island Chuck was streamed live but closed



Groundhog Club handler A.J. Dereume holds Punxsutawney Phil, the weather prognosticating groundhog, during the 140th celebration of Groundhog Day on Gobbler's Knob in Punxsutawney, Pa., Monday, Feb. 2, 2026. Phil's handlers said that the groundhog has forecast six more weeks of winter.

Associated Press

to the public because of the cold. Chuck was said to have also predicted six more weeks of winter.

The Punxsutawney club says that when Phil is deemed to have not seen his shadow, that means there will be an early spring. When he does see it, it's six more weeks of winter. Phil tends to predict a longer winter far more often than an early spring.

The annual ritual goes back more than a century, with ties to ancient farming traditions in Europe. Punxsutawney's festivities have grown considerably since

the 1993 movie "Groundhog Day," starring Bill Murray.

Other Groundhog Day predictions roll in

Phil isn't the only animal being consulted for long-term weather forecasts Monday. There are formal and informal Groundhog Day events in many places in the U.S., Canada and beyond.

Michael Venos, who tracks Groundhog Day predictions at countdownto-groundhogday.com, said the early results Monday

indicated a split verdict 25 for winter and 22 for spring. That's just the start Venos expects to tally about 100 events.

Agreeing with Punxsutawney Phil that more winter weather is on the way this year have been Buffalo Bert, a New York groundhog, and groundhog mascot Dover Doug in Pennsylvania. Also in the "more winter" camp were That Dog Named Gidget, a Havanese in New York, and possum Birmingham Jill in Alabama.

In Georgia, General Beau-

regard Lee waddled outside and tried to get into the hollow part of a log before an announcer proclaimed that he had seen his shadow, prompting groans from the crowd at the Dauset Trails Nature Center south-east of Atlanta.

Those predicting an early spring include groundhogs Buckeye Chuck in Ohio, Fig Newton in North Carolina and Shubenacadie Sam in Nova Scotia, along with Benny the Bass, a fish in Ohio, and Pennsylvania ferret Jessup Giuseppe.

A crowd cheered in Albertville, Alabama, when Sam Mountain Sam, a possum, was said to have predicted an early spring. Sam arrived for his annual forecast carried in a whiskey barrel pulled by a convoy of wagons and horses.

Thousands brave cold weather to see Punxsutawney Phil

Lisa Gibson of Pittsburgh was at her 10th Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, wearing a lighted hat that resembled the tree stump from which Phil emerged shortly after daybreak.

"Oh man, it just breaks up the doldrums of winter," said Gibson, accompanied by her husband dressed up as Elvis Presley and teenage daughter. "It's like Halloween and New Year's Eve all wrapped up into one holiday." □

Actor McConaughey seeks to patent image to protect from AI



U.S. actor Matthew McConaughey poses in the press room after presenting the Oscar for Best Actor in a Leading Role to Irish actor Cillian Murphy for his role in "Oppenheimer" during the 96th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California on March 10, 2024.

New York, United States

Actor Matthew McConaughey has filed recordings of his image and voice with US patent authorities to protect them from unauthorized usage by artificial intelligence platforms, a representative said Wednesday.

Several video clips and audio recordings were registered by the commercial arm of the just keep livin Foundation, a non-profit created by the Oscar-winning actor and his wife Camila, according to the United States Patent and Trademark Office database. Many artists are increasingly concerned about the uncontrolled use of their image via generative AI since the rollout of ChatGPT and other AI-powered tools.

Several US states have adopted legislation that serves as consumer protection against certain AI systems and deepfakes, but much of this applies mainly to malicious use or commercial purposes.

Only a few, notably Tennessee's ELVIS Act passed in 2024, offer more targeted protections for artists against AI-generated cloning or impersonation.

A few actors have taken legal action to assert their rights. Among the most notable is Scarlett Johansson, who sued the image-generating app Lisa AI in 2023 for creating an AI-generated avatar in her likeness for an advertisement without her consent.

McConaughey's approach is novel in that he is taking the lead in protecting his image and voice. □

Some companies tie AI to layoffs, but the reality is more complicated

By **MATT O'BRIEN**
AP Technology Writer

The one thing N. Lee Plumb knows for sure about being laid off from Amazon last week is that it wasn't a failure to get on board with the company's artificial intelligence plans.

Plumb, his team's head of "AI enablement," says he was so prolific in his use of Amazon's new AI coding tool that the company flagged him as one of its top users.

Many assumed Amazon's 16,000 corporate layoffs announced last week reflected CEO Andy Jassy's push to "reduce our total corporate workforce as we get efficiency gains from using AI extensively across the company."

But like other companies that have tied workforce changes to AI including Expedia, Pinterest and Dow last week it can be hard for economists, or individual employees like Plumb, to know if AI is the real reason behind the layoffs or if it's the message a company wants to tell Wall Street.

"AI has to drive a return on investment," said Plumb, who worked at Amazon for eight years. "When you reduce head count, you've demonstrated efficiency, you attract more capital, the share price goes up."

"So you could potentially have just been bloated in the first place, reduce head count, attribute it to AI, and now you've got a value story," he said.

Amazon said in an emailed statement that AI was "not the reason behind the vast majority of these reductions." "These changes are about continuing to strengthen our culture and teams by reducing layers, increasing ownership, and helping reduce bureaucracy to drive speed and ownership," it said.

Plumb is atypical for an Amazon worker in that he's also running what he describes as a "long shot" bid for Congress in Texas, on a platform focused on stopping the



This undated combination of photos shows clockwise from top left the company logos for Amazon, Target, Lufthansa Group, UPS, ConocoPhillips, Intel, Microsoft, Procter & Gamble and Nestle.
Associated Press

tech industry's reliance on work visas to "replace American workers with cheaper foreign labor."

But whatever it was that cost Plumb his job, his skepticism about AI-driven job replacement is one shared by many economists.

"We just don't know," said Karan Girotra, a professor of management at Cornell University's business school. "Not because AI isn't great, but because it requires a lot of adjustment and most of the gains accrue to individual employees rather than to the organization. People save time and they get their work done earlier."

If an employer works faster because of AI, Girotra said it takes time to adjust a company's management structure in a way that would enable a smaller workforce. He's not convinced that's happening at Amazon, which he said is still scaling back from a glut of hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic. A report by Goldman Sachs said AI's overall impact on the labor market remains limited, though some effects might be felt in "specific occupations like marketing, graphic design, customer service, and especially tech." Those are fields involving tasks that

correlate with the strengths of the current crop of generative AI chatbots that can write emails and marketing pitches, produce synthetic images, answer questions and help write code.

But the bank's economic research division said in its most recent monthly AI adoption tracker that, since December, "very few employees were affected by corporate layoffs attributed to AI," though the report was published Jan. 16, before Amazon, Dow and Pinterest announced their layoffs. San Francisco-based Pinterest was the most explicit in asserting that AI drove it to cut up to 15% of its workforce. The social media company said it was "making organizational changes to further deliver on our AI-forward strategy, which includes hiring AI-proficient talent. As a result, we've made the difficult decision to say goodbye to some of our team members."

Pinterest echoed that message in a regulatory disclosure that said the company was "reallocating resources to AI-focused roles and teams that drive AI adoption and execution." Expedia has voiced a similar message but the 162 tech

workers the travel website cut from its Seattle headquarters last week included several AI-specific roles, such as machine-learning scientists.

Dow's regulatory disclosures tied its 4,500 layoffs to a new plan "utilizing AI and automation" to increase productivity and improve shareholder returns.

Amazon's 16,000 corporate job cuts were part of a broader reduction of employees at the ecommerce giant. At the same time as those cuts, all believed to be office jobs, Amazon said it would cut about 5,000 retail workers, according to notices it sent to state workforce agencies in California, Maryland and Washington, resulting from its decision to close almost all of its Amazon Go and Amazon Fresh stores. That's on top of a round of 14,000 job cuts in October, bringing the total to well over 30,000 since Jassy first signaled a push for AI-driven organizational changes.

Like many companies, in technology and otherwise, but particularly those that make and sell AI tools and services, Amazon has been pushing its workforce to find more efficiencies with AI. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg

said last week that 2026 will be when "AI starts to dramatically change the way that we work."

"We're investing in AI-native tooling so individuals at Meta can get more done, we're elevating individual contributors, and flattening teams," he said on an earnings call. "We're starting to see projects that used to require big teams now be accomplished by a single very talented person."

So far, Meta's layoffs this year have focused on cutting jobs from its virtual reality and metaverse divisions. Also driving job impacts is the industry shifting resources to AI development, which requires huge spending on computer chips, energy-hungry data centers and talent.

Jassy told Amazon employees last June to be "curious about AI, educate yourself, attend workshops and take trainings, use and experiment with AI whenever you can, participate in your team's brainstorming to figure out how to invent for our customers more quickly and expansively, and how to get more done with scrappier teams." Plumb was fully on board with that and said he demonstrated his proficiency in using Amazon's AI coding tool, Kiro, to "solve massive problems" in the company's compensation system.

"If you weren't using them, your manager would get a report and they would talk to you about using it," he said. "There were only five people in the entire company that were a higher user of Kiro than I was, or had achieved more milestones." Now he's shifting gears to his candidacy among a field of Republicans in the Houston area looking to unseat U.S. Rep. Dan Crenshaw in the March primary. Cornell's Girotra said it's possible that increasing AI productivity is leading companies to cut middle management, but he said the reality is that those making layoff decisions "just need to cut costs and make it happen."

Pet sounds: Why some dog owners share music with their 4-legged friends

By **CHEYANNE MUMPHREY**
Associated Press

People use music to set moods, create a desired atmosphere and evoke memories of family and friends. The right song at the right time can have similar effects for some dogs.

Pet owners, trainers and animal shelter workers sometimes use music as a training tool, a distraction from triggers and to create a relaxing environment for dogs kept in kennels or left alone at home. But researchers say music is context-dependent, meaning the effects vary based on dogs' temperament, the setting, the type of tune and the volume at which it's played.

Social media videos of dogs howling to music, relaxing to the sounds of specialty playlists or TV channels while their owners are at work, appearing to clam down while boarded, and getting exposed to the same song to assist with crate training show some of the ways music is integrated into pets' lives.

While some trainers consider music to be a helpful, many animal behaviorists, who study animal psychology and understand complex behaviors, suggest additional research is needed to prove how much of an effect music has on dogs and in what situations. Here is how experts suggest making music a potentially paw-sitive experience:



A little Jack Russell Terrier sleeps with a plush toy during the world dog show in Salzburg, Austria, on Friday, May 18, 2012. More than 30,000 dogs are expected to take part at the exhibition in Salzburg.

Music as a support strategy

Many factors cause dogs to experience stress and anxiety, and there are as many behavioral responses. Dog behavior specialists and veterinarians say separation anxiety, noise phobias and other fears are common sources of stress and can exacerbate negative behaviors like aggression, submissive peeing or barking, or medical conditions that may a professional diagnosis or medication.

"Music may promote more relaxation for dogs, but it would not be the first thing I turn to if I want to reduce stress in dogs," said Seana

Dowling-Guyer, a lecturer at Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine and associate director of a research program aimed at improving the lives of dogs in shelters or at risk of being given up by their owners.

Prior to her work at Tufts, Dowling-Guyer worked with shelter animals. The goal was to find them homes, but she noticed that dogs barking, jumping or getting excited in their enclosures sometimes "put off potential adopters." The shelter staff tried to create a calmer environment playing music. Worker debates over the type of music to play

is what led Dowling-Guyer to further research on the subject.

"I was interested in the practical application, not just for owners, but for veterinary offices, groomers or other situations where dogs were sometimes stressed or mildly uncomfortable," she said, adding that music is not meant to be or should be considered a cure for anxious behaviors or conditions or be considered a replacement for more formalized training.

Not all dogs like all music

High Country Humane, an animal shelter in Flagstaff, Arizona, plays classical and

instrumental music on the kennel floors.

"It's really stressful here, and the classical music seems to help calm the dogs down," shelter manager Megan Boyer said. "Everybody is a little bit less amped up. It's a stress reliever for the dogs." Dog music compilations typically include elements of the music that's designed to help humans relax or sleep but takes into account biological differences in how dogs hear and process sound.

"Dog-calming music is simplified classical music. It's slow, repetitive, has a predictable structure and gentle notes. In an unpredictable environment, any kind of predictability using sounds could be soothing to an animal," said Anirudh Patel, a Tufts University psychology professor who studies music cognition in humans and other species. But not all dogs like classical music or exhibit the same behaviors when exposed to similar genres, experts say. Lori Kogan, a Colorado State University professor who studies human-animal interactions, says "dogs tend to habituate to what they are used to" as opposed to innately preferring some types of music over others.

Citing similar human curiosity about the musical preferences of cows, Kogan said, "I don't think cows are born liking country music." □

Audrey Niffenegger to release long-awaited sequel to 'The Time Traveler's Wife'



This image released by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers shows author and Alumni Achievement Award recipient Audrey Niffenegger at the 2025 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards National Ceremony in New York on June 11, 2025.

Associated Press

By **HILLEL ITALIE**
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — More than 20 years after the release of the multimillion-selling "The Time Traveler's Wife," author Audrey Niffenegger has completed her long-awaited sequel.

Hanover Square Press announced Friday that "Life Out of Order" will come out Oct. 27. The protagonist this time is violinist Alba DeTamble, the daughter of time traveler Henry DeTamble. She shares his Chrono-Displacement Disorder, which involuntarily propels her out of the present.

"Alba's story has been a long time coming; when I began, in 2012, her dystopian

world seemed far from mine," Niffenegger said in a statement. "As I wrote through the pandemic and through societal upheaval, our worlds merged. 'Life Out of Order' has been an all-consuming book for me; I will miss living in it, but I am happy to offer it to readers, at last."

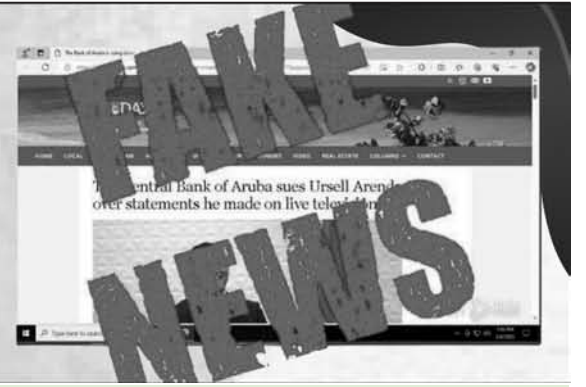
"The Time Traveler's Wife," published in 2003, was Niffenegger's first novel. It sold millions of copies and was adapted into a film starring Rachel McAdams and Eric Bana and an HBO series starring Rose Leslie and Theo James.

Niffenegger's other novels include "Her Fearful Symmetry" and "Raven Girl." □

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Tourists pay a fee to access the Trevi Fountain, in Rome, Monday, Feb. 2, 2026.

Associated Press

Trevi Fountain fee goes into effect as Rome seeks to manage tourist flow at celebrated water feature

By **PAOLO SANTALUCIA**
and **NICOLE WINFIELD**

Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Tourists hoping to get close to the Trevi Fountain had to pay 2 euros (\$2.35) starting Monday as the city of Rome inaugurated a new fee structure to help raise money and control crowds at the one of the world's most celebrated waterworks.

The first tourists to pass through the new ticket check seemed nonplussed by the tariff, noting it was a small price to pay for quality access to a fountain made famous by Federico Fellini's movie "La Dolce Vita." "Before, there were problems accessing the fountain. There were a lot of people. Now, it's very easy," said Ilhan Musbah, a tourist from Morocco. "You can take photos, you feel good, you're comfortable, and on top of that 2 euros is not much."

The tourist fee was rolled

out in conjunction with a new 5-euro (nearly \$6) tourist ticket fee for some city museums. In both cases, Rome residents are exempt from the fees and the extra revenue will actually expand the number of city-run museums that are free for registered Roman residents.

It's all part of the Eternal City's efforts to manage tourist flows in a particularly congested part of town, improve the experience and offset the maintenance costs of preserving all of Rome's cultural heritage. Officials estimate it could net the city 6.5 million euros (\$7.6 million) extra a year.

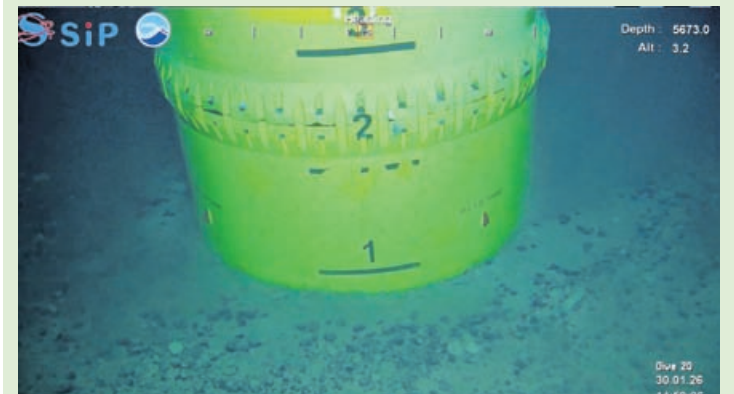
The city decided to impose the Trevi Fountain fee after seeing positive results already from a yearlong experiment to stagger and limit the number of visitors who can reach the front edge of the basin by im-

posing lines and pathways for entrance and exit.

"I think tourists were shocked by the fact that the city of Rome is only asking for 2 euros for a site of this level," Alessandro Onorato, Rome's assessor of tourism, said Monday. "I believe that if the Trevi Fountain were in New York, they would have charged at least \$100."

The fee follows a similar ticketing system at Rome's Pantheon monument and the more complicated tourist day-tripper tax that the lagoon city of Venice imposed last year in a bid to ease overtourism and make the city more livable for residents. The Italian fees still pale in comparison to the 45% price hike that French authorities announced for the Louvre Museum for most non-European visitors, where tickets can now run to 32 euros (\$37) from 22 euros. □

Japan retrieves rare earth-rich mud from seabed to lower reliance on China



This photo provided by SIP/Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, shows rare earth-rich mud recovered aboard a vessel and placed into bottles off Minamitorishima, south of Tokyo, on Feb. 1, 2026.

Associated Press

By **MARI YAMAGUCHI**

Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan said Monday it has successfully drilled and retrieved deep-sea sediment containing rare earth minerals from the seabed near a remote island, as the country seeks to reduce its reliance on China.

The deep-sea drilling vessel Chikyu successfully gathered the sediment at a depth of nearly 6,000 meters (19,700 feet) near the island of Minamitorishima, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in a statement on X.

The test retrieval of the rare earths from that depth is a world first, she added.

"It is a first step toward industrialization of domestically produced rare earth in Japan," Takaichi said. "We will make effort toward achieving resilient supply chains for rare earths and other critical minerals to avoid overdependence on a particular country."

China controls most of the global production of heavy rare earths, which are used for making powerful, heat-resistant magnets in industries such as defense and electric vehicles.

Japan has faced growing tensions with China since Takaichi's comment in November about a possible Japanese involvement in case of Chinese military action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own.

China recently suspended exports to Japan of dual-use goods with potential military use, raising concern in Japan that rare earths may be included.

While 17 elements are classified as rare earth, the U.S. government has identified 50 minerals overall that are labeled critical minerals, which also include a number of other minerals that are seen as essential to the economic and military strength of the nation.

Japanese researchers discovered deposits rich with critical minerals including rare earths around Minamitorishima in the 2010s. □

'Empowering': Ireland's first female sumo wrestler blazes a trail

Belfast, U.K.

Sweat darkened the white "dohyo" ring mat as Ireland's first female sumo wrestler shoved and strained, learning a freshly-discovered sport.

Having tried the centuries-old Japanese discipline out of curiosity, Toraigh (pronounced Tori) Mallon, from Lisburn in Northern Ireland, now trains alongside bulky and beefy men, relying on balance and grit rather than sheer size.

During a coaching session ahead of the British Isles Sumo Championships in Belfast on Saturday, she paused between bouts to catch her breath.

"It's hard work, like moving wardrobes full of cement, but I try my best," the 32-year-old mental health nurse told AFP.

Mark Christie, 39, one of six male wrestlers at the session, welcomed her involvement.

"Women had less access to lots of sports in the past, it's good that sport's more open now," he said.

Mallon first turned up on a whim last February after seeing an Instagram advert for a new sumo club in Belfast, stepping into an unfamiliar world of ritual, grappling and close-contact combat.

"It was me versus all the men, which was pretty in-



This photo taken on January 16, 2026 shows wrestlers Tori Moffett (centre R) and Toraigh Mallon (centre L) facing off in the ring during a sumo wrestling training session at a club in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

timidating yet empowering at the same time: you wouldn't normally fight somebody who was male, but it's good to be an underdog and beat them," she said.

Knowing nothing about sumo or Japanese culture, she was immediately smitten by its speed and simplicity: force the opponent to touch the ground inside the dohyo ring, or out of it altogether.

'Wedding dress'

Having the thick white cotton "mawashi" sumo belt put on her for the first time

"felt like a wedding dress fitting", Mallon recalled.

"Sumo's fun, even if it is against mostly men, sort of like messing about with your siblings in the living room when you were a kid," she added.

In recent weeks, a few other women have turned up to try their hand on the mat.

"Until then I think I was the only female sumo wrestler on the island of Ireland, Irish champion by default!" Mallon joked.

But with more women joining "now I'm going to have work a bit harder for that

title".

Thanks to club founder and coach Johnny Templeton, Mallon says she has learned a lot about the sport's roots in Shinto, the indigenous nature-oriented belief system of Japan.

Its origins can be traced back some 2,000 years and rituals like purification, bowing and ring-entering ceremonies are woven into competition.

Sumo's links to Ireland started about 20 years ago with a wrestler called John Gunning who moved to Japan and turned profes-

sional, before becoming a famous English-language sumo pundit there, according to Templeton.

In late 2024 the longtime combat sports fan, who took up sumo during a Covid lockdown, set up the club in a Belfast jiu-jitsu hall, adapting the space for the ancient sport and forming an Irish federation.

Like the governing bodies of rugby, cricket, boxing and other sports, sumo in Ireland is organised on an all-island basis to include British territory Northern Ireland.

'Travel and fun'

Now roots are spreading with clubs sprouting in Dublin, Cork, and rural Northern Ireland as interest grows.

But almost all the wrestlers are men, so far, according to 37-year-old Templeton, who represented Great Britain at a sumo world championships in Poland in 2024.

"Women like Toraigh getting involved is amazing because it's something that isn't even very common in Japan" where females are barred from competing professionally, he told AFP.

"Especially in Ireland, we find that the girls aren't as interested as the boys, maybe shying away from it because of an idea that a sumo wrestler is not very ladylike," he said. □

Snapchat blocks 415,000 underage accounts in Australia

Sydney, Australia Snapchat has blocked 415,000 accounts under Australia's social media

ban for under-16s, the company said Monday, but warned some youngsters may be bypassing

age verification technology.

The platform urged the Australian authorities to oblige app stores to check users' ages as an "additional safeguard" for the world-first crackdown.

Platforms including Snapchat, Meta, TikTok and YouTube must stop underage users from holding accounts under the legislation, which came into effect on December 10.

Companies face fines of Aus\$49.5 million (US\$34 million) if they fail to take "reasonable steps" to comply.

Australia's eSafety online regulator reported last

month that tech giants had already blocked 4.7 million accounts, delivering "significant outcomes". As of the end of January, Snapchat said it had blocked or disabled 415,000 Snapchat accounts in Australia belonging to under-16s.

"We continue to lock more accounts daily," it said in an online statement.

But the law leaves "significant gaps", Snapchat said, arguing that age estimation technology was only accurate to within two to three years.

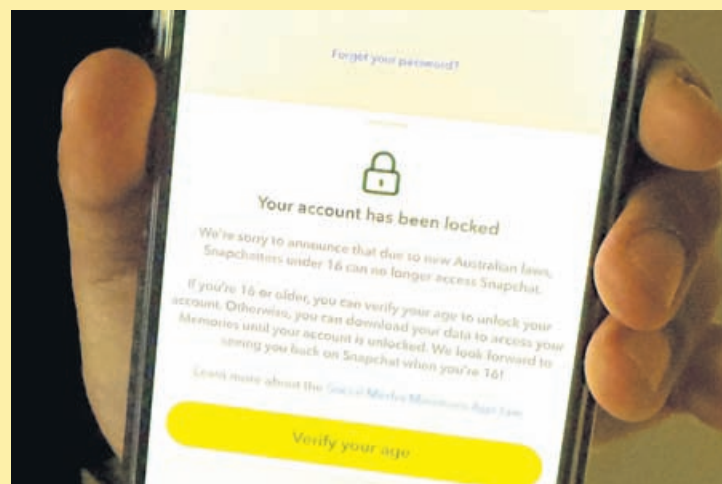
"In practice, this means some young people under 16 may be able to

bypass protections, potentially leaving them with reduced safeguards, while others over 16 may incorrectly lose access."

Snapchat joined billionaire Mark Zuckerberg's Meta in calling on Australia to require app stores to check users' ages before allowing downloads.

"Creating a centralized verification system at the app-store level would allow for more consistent protection and higher barriers to circumventing the law," Snapchat said.

The platform said it did not believe an outright ban was the right approach. □



This photograph displays a message on a mobile phone from social media platform Snapchat after an account was locked for age verification in Sydney on December 9, 2025.

Aruba: The island of Aloes

ORANJESTAD – Aloe Vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe Vera contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Traditionally, Arubans use this gel to treat minor burns and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a

gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the industry of aloe in Aruba.

Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant after it had been introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to cultivate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported abroad to the United States and Europe. The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the best in the world



and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the oil industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventually, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of

the total global production!

The impact and relevance of aloe is visible all around Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decoration, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island. □

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.



A quick snack for the road Learn how to make the Aruban Pastechi!

(Oranjestad)—If you ever been to Aruba before, you probably heard of (and even tried) the Aruban Pastechi. Beloved by young and old, this tasty treat is a staple for party snacks, a quick lunch or even breakfast!

Here's how to make the Pastechi dough.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups of wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder (if using self-rising flour, omit baking powder)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 0.5 cup of melted butter
- 1 cup water
- 1 egg

Directions:

Sift your flour into a bowl and add all the dry ingredients before giving it a quick mix. Next add the butter, water and egg and mix until thoroughly combined. At this point, your dough will start to get sticky; time for an arm workout. Knead your dough into the bowl you are

using or on a clean surface with some flour lightly dusted until its surface is smooth. You'll know your dough is ready when it doesn't stick to your hands or the surface on which you're kneading it. Let your dough rest covered for 15-20 minutes.

After resting, divide your dough into approximately 100 gram balls and roll it flat with a rolling pin. The thickness of the pastechi depends on your taste, but the average thickness would be around ¼ inch or so.

Filling for the pastechis varies according to your taste. The easiest and most common filling you'll find in Aruba is a simple cheese filling. For this, we usually use shredded Gouda, but feel free to use any cheese that melts well when frying the pastry.

Place the filling on your rolled out piece of dough, fold it in half and pinch the sides shut with a fork. If you have a folding tool, feel free to use it for this process. Your pastechi is ready for the fryer!



If you want to store some pastechis for later use, you can freeze them. A good tip is to place a piece of wax paper in between each pastechi if you are to store them on top of one another. This way the pastechis don't stick to each other when defrosting.

Here in Aruba we enjoy pastechi at any time of the day, but it has become almost tradition to eat pastechis for breakfast on the way to work. Many roadside snack trucks sell pastechi from early morning to noon, and offer a variety of fillings like cheese; ham and cheese; ground beef and pulled chicken to name a few. □



Casago Aruba: Redefining Island Stays with Full-Service Property Management



Casago Aruba was born from a shared passion for elevating the island's tourism experience. Built on a strong foundation of service, hospitality, and a keen eye for quality, the Casago team—backed by over 16 years of experience in the vacation rental and hospitality industry—is on a mission to redefine what luxury and convenience look like for travelers visiting Aruba.

But Casago is more than just a vacation rental platform. It is a **full-service property management company**, offering seamless experiences for both guests and homeowners alike. While travelers benefit from handpicked accommodations and personalized service, homeowners gain a reliable partner dedicated to the care and performance of their property.

A Stay Tailored to You

Casago Aruba offers more than just stylish villas. Their curated portfolio includes a **wide variety of condos, homes, and villas** in different sizes to

suit all types of travelers—from solo adventurers and couples to large families and groups. Every stay is backed by local expertise, with concierge support, 24/7 guest assistance, and an attention to detail that consistently exceeds expectations.

Whether you're here to relax on world-famous beaches, explore Aruba's cultural gems, or discover hidden corners of the island, Casago Aruba ensures your getaway is as smooth as it is memorable.

A Partner for Homeowners

Behind the scenes, Casago offers a robust suite of property management services designed to help homeowners **maximize rental income** while

minimizing stress. Services include:

- **Promotion** through Casago's professional booking platform and expert local marketing strategies
- **Complete management** of check-ins, guest communication, cleanings, landscaping, pool maintenance, and repairs
- **Transparent maintenance** reporting, real-time reservation tracking, and on-site security monitoring
- **Full handling** of tax filings for both local and state requirements
- **Monthly property inspections** and full utility bill management
- **Strategic planning** to help homeowners increase profitability and keep their properties in top condition

that every home is maintained to the highest standard while giving property owners full peace of mind.

Rooted in Community and Sustainability

What truly sets Casago Aruba apart is their commitment to the local community and to sustainable practices. The team works closely with local businesses and artisans, promotes eco-conscious travel, and supports initiatives that contribute positively to the island's environment and economy.

As one of the fastest-growing vacation rental and property management companies on the island, Casago Aruba continues to expand its footprint—welcoming more travelers, partnering with more homeowners, and raising the standard of hospitality in Aruba. □

This full-service model ensures



Ever heard of the cah'i orgel? A key instrument in Aruban folklore music

(Oranjestad)—The cah'i orgel music box is an important and unique instrument that is used on the ABC islands in the Dutch Caribbean. This instrument is a staple in our folklore music, and its significance in the traditions of Aruba has and continues to bring together the old and young.

The origin of the cah'i orgel is said to have come from Europe around 150 years ago. A cross breed between the barrel piano and the organ, the most popular stories said that the instrument came from either England or Germany, but made its way to Italy down

to Venezuela, where in 1881, Mr. Horatio Sprock (1866-1949) from Curacao was first introduced to it. After that, Sprock made his own cah'i orgel "Josefina", and successfully debuted it on the streets of Barquisimeto. Back in Curacao, he started his own cah'i orgel business along with his brother Luis. In Aruba, it is said that the cah'i orgel was introduced by Rufo Wever, who later in his career became one of the composers for the Aruban national anthem.

Rufo Wever was a young musician in 1937 when he established his own cah'i orgel business on the is-

land. Before that he experimented with his uncle's cah'i orgel, and he over the years he learned to build and repair the instrument. In fact, he was incredibly skilled in this, and he was one of the few to have recognized from the start that the cah'i orgel is an instrument that needs preserving.

As mentioned, the cah'i orgel is a music box. Made from mahogany wood, it contains a cylinder with a maximum of eight music pieces. By rotating the lever on the front side of the box, the cah'i orgel produces music similar to that of a piano, and is accompanied often by

someone else playing the "wiri", a percussion instrument made out of steel and reminiscent to the Spanish guiro. Back then, you would often also find someone playing the triangle alongside the cah'i orgel and wiri. In Aruba, the cah'i orgel and wiri is used for traditional music genres, such as the Aruban waltz, tumba, mazurka and more.

Fun fact: another name for the cah'i orgel is the "tingilingi box." Source: "E Cilinder Magico entre Aruba y Curaçao" by Marilyn Alcalá-Wallé, Herta Parabirsing-Balentina and Nidia Rosaria-Wallé. □

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Celebrate an Unforgettable Valentine's at Elements Restaurant, Ranked Among the World's Most Romantic Date Night Spots

Romantic Valentine's Day Dinner on February 14 and "Day After Valentine's" Brunch on February 15, Reservations Recommended

EAGLE BEACH — On the most romantic day of the year, couples are invited to celebrate love in one of the Caribbean's most iconic settings: Elements Restaurant, the award-winning, adults-only dining destination at Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, overlooking Eagle Beach. In 2025, Tripadvisor ranked Elements as the #1 Fine Dining Restaurant in the Caribbean and the #7 Best Spot for Date Night in the World and named it, placing it among the most celebrated restaurants worldwide.

To mark the occasion, Elements will host a romantic Valentine's Day Dinner on Saturday, February 14, 2026, followed by an extended celebration with a special "Day After Valentine's" Brunch on Sunday, February 15. Both experiences feature the same curated Couples' Valentine's menu, offering guests the opportunity to celebrate either under the



evening sky or in the warm glow of a relaxed seaside brunch.

A Prime Eagle Beach Location with Panoramic Views

Elements is perched above Eagle Beach — Tripadvisor's #3 Best Beach in the World and #1 Best Beach in the Caribbean — and offers a dining experience defined as much by its setting as by its cuisine. From its elevated position, the restaurant commands panoramic views across the white sands and turquoise sea, creating a cinematic atmosphere that

feels effortlessly romantic from the very first course to the last.

Guests may choose to dine on the shaded Elements Deck, where ocean breezes and sweeping views set the tone for an open-air celebration, or inside in the elegant, air-conditioned indoor dining space, where expansive panoramic windows keep Eagle Beach fully in view while offering cool comfort and refined intimacy. Whether couples choose the deck or the indoor setting, the ambience remains the same: elevated,

serene, and designed for connection.

A Special Couples' Valentine's Menu Served for Both Dinner and Brunch

The Couples' Valentine's menu, served on both February 14 and February 15, begins with a celebratory welcome toast and unfolds through a series of thoughtfully crafted courses designed for sharing. The experience includes refined soups and elegant starters such as locally produced burrata paired with roasted grapes, as well as sesame-seared tuna with tropical ponzu. Guests are then invited to choose from a selection of mains, including filet mignon, seared chicken, or fresh mahi mahi, complemented by warm seasonal accompaniments and rich finishing touches. The menu concludes with a refreshing rosé sorbet and a decadent dessert-sharing platter, offering a sweet finale to an

evening—or afternoon—of romance. For couples looking to elevate the celebration even further, optional premium Champagne upgrades are available.

Reserve Early, Seating Is Limited

With its award-winning culinary reputation, adults-only atmosphere, and extraordinary location overlooking one of the world's most celebrated beaches, Valentine's weekend seating at Elements is already filling up quickly. Guests are encouraged to reserve early to secure their preferred dining time. □

Valentine's Day Dinner:
Saturday, February 14, 2026
Day After Valentine's Brunch:
Sunday, February 15, 2026
Elements Restaurant, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort — Eagle Beach, Aruba
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More information: www.elementsaruba.com/events

Aruba to me

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How Aruban beaches came to be!



(Oranjestad)—We've talked about the best beaches to visit on the island before, but have you ever wondered how Aruba got its white, sandy beaches, and why there's a clear difference between the northern and southern shores? Here are some fun facts about the development of Aruban beaches. How did Aruba get its white, sandy

beaches?

Aruba's beaches have developed over the span of thousands of years. Waves crashing on the rocky formations along our coast line (which consists mainly of coral reefs) have started to wear and tear the reefs over time, resulting in its gradual breakdown. Fish that feed off corals also

contribute to this—one small bite at a time. Over the course of thousands of years, as waves continue to crash and fish continue to eat off the corals, sand starts to accumulate around the area. However, whether the sand stays there is another question to be answered, and this is where we highlight the biggest difference between



the northern and southern coast of the island.

were swept away with the current!

The sand that accumulates around a torn coral reef is swept away along with the debris by the ocean stream. However, in areas where it's shallow and the stream is weaker, the sand tends to stick to the bottom faster. This is why the beaches in the south—the areas with weaker stream and shallower ocean floors—has sand that stretches for miles. In contrast, the northern area, where the stream is much stronger and the ocean floor is much deeper, there is no sand present—they

Why is the north deep, but the south shallow?

Aruba is a continental island. The island actually forms part of South America, and the space between Aruba and the South American continent is simply referred to as land that runs under the ocean. This is why it gets gradually deeper in the south, whereas the ocean floor in the north runs steeply to the bottom. □

Source: archival document provided by the National Archive of Aruba (ANA).

Fun facts about the 'Lisinbein'



The 'Lisinbein' (*Scolopendra gigantea*), also known as the Giant Centipede, is one of the largest centipedes in the world and is found in Aruba. Its size and hunting prowess make it a fascinating, if often misunderstood, creature.

Despite its fearsome reputation, it plays a crucial ecological role that often goes unnoticed.

As an apex invertebrate predator, *Scolopendra gigantea* helps maintain balance in the ecosystem. Moreover, they themselves are a food source for birds such as the Crested Caracara (Warawara) and the Aruba burrowing owl (Shoco).

It controls populations of smaller invertebrates and even small vertebrates, ensuring that no species overpopulates, which could disrupt local biodiversity.

Its presence can indicate a healthy, functioning ecosystem. Its sensitivity to environmental changes makes it a bioindicator of ecological balance.

It can reach an impressive length of up to 30 centimeters (approx. 12 inches) and live for around 5 to 10 years in the wild. Its size and longevity makes it a significant and long-term part of the ecosystem.

A mother's love

In *Scolopendra* species, the 'mother' typically exhibits maternal care by curling around her eggs and newly hatched young. She stays coiled around the clutch, protecting it from predators and fungi, which are serious risks in the moist environments these centipedes often inhabit. The mother maintains a clean environment for the eggs by carefully grooming them, which helps prevent fungal growth that could endanger the brood. This behavior may continue until the young centipedes have undergone their first molt, making them more capable of independent survival.

This form of parental care is beneficial in increasing the survival rates of offspring, as the mother's protection provides a safe 'environment' during their vulnerable developmental stages. It's a fascinating adaptation because it shows a form of care that resembles more complex behaviors observed in vertebrates.

No bark, but all bite!

The lisinbein is known locally for having a really painful sting. While venomous, the Lisinbein is generally not aggressive toward humans unless provoked. Its role as a guardian of balance in the ecosystem helps protect the natural beauty of Aruba by keeping the ecosystem in harmony.

Editor's note: Information and pictures provided by Ms. Natasha Silva from the Aruba Conservation Foundation. □

Basic driving rules on Aruba: Roundabouts

(Oranjestad)—Have you ever felt confused when you're driving on the highways or backstreets of Aruba? Then we present a simple guide to some of the basic rules of Aruban traffic, along with some tips for things to look out for.

Speed limit

Legally, the speed limit on the four-lane highways is 80 km/h. This speed limit also counts for the main roads that are connected to the highways. The minimum speed is 50 km/h. Most people drive around 60 km/h on the main roads and about 70 km/h on the highways. There are also areas that indicate a speed limit on a sign; these are usually around populated and school areas.

The four-lane highways contain the left-lane, also known as the "fast" lane for each direction. Here is where vehicles can drive up to the maximum speed. However, legally it is not permitted to drive for long periods of time on the left lane. This lane is primarily designed for drivers to switch lanes before a roundabout, for example, if your exit on the roundabout is on your far left. The general lane to drive in—both at maximum and minimum speed—is on the right lane.

Roundabouts

Speaking of roundabouts, it is important to know where you have to enter and drive on the roundabout to make your exit. A good rule of thumb is to count the exits starting from your right side. So, exit 1 would be on your right; exit 2 would be straight ahead; exit 3 would be on your far left and exit 4 would lead to the road paralleled to the one you're on, heading in the other direction.

Most roundabouts have these 4 exits, so they are relatively simple. When you're driving on the four-lane highway, it is important to know when to switch to the left lane to make your exit: if your exit is on your far left (exit 3), then you need



to switch to the left lane on the high way before nearing the roundabout so you can take the path that leads you directly to your exit. If your exit is on your right or if you're going straight ahead, you can keep driving in the right lane of the highway.

It's also important to know that vehicles about to enter the roundabout must yield to those already on it. A good rule of thumb is to look out if someone is coming from your left side.

However, other roundabouts can be quite tricky to navigate...

Watty Vos Boulevard (the "paperclip" roundabout)

Probably the biggest roundabout on the island, the "paperclip" roundabout on the Watty Vos Boulevard is one of the trickier roundabouts that could—and has—caused confused among both tourists and locals. However, once you take a good look at it, it's fairly simple. The basis is just the same as a regular roundabout (left exit? left lane! etc.), but instead of having four different exits like on a regular roundabout, now you have two extra; one on the right and the other on the left side of the roundabout. The rules don't change at

all, you just have to keep an extra eye open.

Airport roundabout

Ah, yes. The infamous airport roundabout. The favorite roundabout amongst local, because of its easy (hard) lanes that never (always) cause confusion among drivers. Sarcasm aside, this roundabout can be tricky to enter, especially when you're driving from the direction of the airport heading. When you're driving away from the airport reaching the roundabout, you'll be faced with three lanes. The far right lane is to take the exit 1 out heading east (right lane of highway). The middle exit is

used for exit 1 (left lane of highway), 2 and 3. The far left exit is used to only exit on exit 3 (left lane of highway) and 4.

"Las Americas" roundabout

The Las Americas roundabout is located farther west from the airport roundabout. This roundabout may look like a regular roundabout—and for the most part, it is. However, when you are driving from the east going in the direction of town, please take note that there are two exits on your right.

When you're driving towards this roundabout, you'll notice that the road becomes wider, splitting into two lanes. The right lane is used to take the first and second exit on the right. If you want to exit straight ahead, you must drive on the left lane!

It's always scary to drive in new places where the traffic may look and work differently, but once you get it right once, you'll get the hang of it in no time. Additionally, all roundabouts and roads on Aruba have signs and arrows painted on the road to help guide you. So take your time, keep your eyes open and don't forget to wear a seat belt! □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

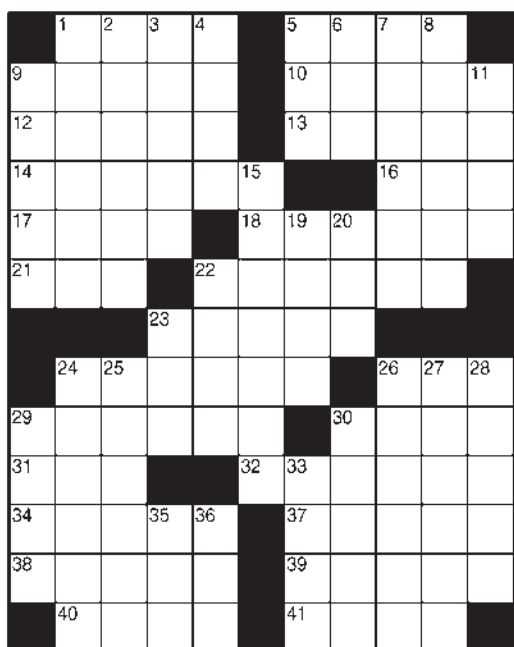
- 1 Members of the force
5 Archaeologist's find
9 Bean-bearing tree
10 Find darling
12 Houston player
13 Praline nut
14 Fetters
16 Child
17 Egg layers
18 Spends time at the mirror
21 Ram's mate
22 Is fearful of
23 Intended
24 Peaceful
26 Poker prize
29 Apply hastily
30 Dressed in
31 Cereal grain
32 Laundry problems
34 Im-passioned
37 Detail map
38 "Tomorrow" musical

- 39 Suspicious
40 Halt
41 Whirl of water

DOWN

- 1 Kidney-shaped nut
2 Gas pump number
3 Louvre location
4 Before long
5 Keg need
6 Keats work
7 Rid-iculed
8 Intelli-gence
9 Secret store
11 Finishes
15 Sports injuries
19 Tear
20 Have lunch
22 Retro style
23 Atlas page
24 Bison's home
25 Hidden
26 Self-assured
27 Stubborn
28 Irritable
29 Couch
30 Diminished
33 Floor piece
35 2016 Olympics host
36 Slangy agreement

BART NICE
EMIRS ARENA
SINNEW MENDS
EGG AVE SOP
TOUCHE BOWS
SPLINTERS
ALTAR
SPRINTERS
BEAK OTTAWA
ANN OREGEL
RODIN RETRO
GRACE STOVE
EASES APES



2-13

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-13

CRYPTOQUOTE

OR KRDV NME UV KRDVE BG

OR AVVK OCV GLM AXRP UROC

GBEVG. — ENDBE DBGJROO

Cryptoquote: DON'T THREATEN ME WITH LOVE, BABY. LET'S JUST GO WALKING IN THE RAIN. — BILLIE HOLIDAY

Cruise ship Schedule: Feb. 2 - 8 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	02	OCEANIA NAUTICA FREEWINDS - Dept.	07.00 ****	19.00 22.30	C E	1 -
TUE	03	CARNIVAL HORIZON SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00 08.00	22.00 23.00	B C	1 1
WED	04	ROTTERDAM BRILLIANCE OF THE SEAS FREEWINDS	08.00 08.00 06.00	17.00 23.00 ****	B C E	1 1 1
THU	05	SILVER SHADOW BRILLIANT LADY NORWEGIAN SKY	13.00 10.00 13.30	**** 22.00 22.30	B C I	1 1 1
FRI	06	SILVER SHADOW - Dept. MARELLA DISCOVERY NORWEGIAN STAR	**** 08.00 11.00	18.00 20.00 20.00	B C I	- 1 1
SAT	07	CARNIVAL LEGEND	09.00	22.00	C	1
SUN	08	CARNIVAL MIRACLE CELEBRITY ASCENT FREEWINDS - Dept.	09.00 09.00 ****	22.00 23.00 22.30	B C E	1 1 -

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

				7	6			5
6		5	2		8		7	
				5			6	
				4	1			6
	3	2	8			5		
1	9		5			7	4	
7			6		5	9	8	
	5	8		2	3	6	1	7
3	6		7	8				

Difficulty: ★★

2/3

Answer to previous puzzle

6	2	4	5	8	1	7	3	9
9	5	8	3	2	7	4	6	1
3	7	1	9	4	6	2	5	8
8	4	9	7	6	2	3	1	5
1	6	2	8	5	3	9	7	4
5	3	7	4	1	9	6	8	2
7	1	6	2	9	8	5	4	3
2	8	5	6	3	4	1	9	7
4	9	3	1	7	5	8	2	6

Difficulty: ★

2/2

2-month-olds see the world in a more complex way than scientists thought, study suggests



In this undated photo, Baby Blaise attends her 9-month Foundcog scan with her mother Mary at Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience in Dublin, Ireland.

Associated Press

By **LAURA UNGAR**
AP Medical Writer

A new study suggests that babies are able to distinguish between the different objects they see around them at 2 months old, which is earlier than scientists previously thought. The findings, published Monday in Nature Neuroscience, may help doctors and researchers better understand cognitive development in infancy.

"It really tells us that infants are interacting with the world in a lot more complex of a way than we might imagine," said lead author Cliona O'Doherty. "Looking at a 2-month-old, we maybe wouldn't think that they're understanding the world to that level." The study looked at data

from 130 2-month-olds who underwent brain scans while awake. The babies viewed images from a dozen categories commonly seen in the first year of life, such as trees and animals. When babies looked at an image like a cat, their brains might "fire" a certain way that researchers could record, O'Doherty said. If they looked at an inanimate object, their brains would fire differently.

The technique known as functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI allowed scientists to examine visual function more precisely than in the past. Many previous studies relied on how long an infant looked at an object, which can be difficult to assess at younger ages. Some of

those past studies suggested that infants as young as 3 to 4 months could distinguish between categories such as animals and furniture.

"What we're showing is that they really already have this ability to group together categories at two months," O'Doherty said. "So it's something much more complex than we would've thought before." In the new study, many of the babies returned at 9 months, and researchers successfully collected data from 66 of them. In the 9-month-olds, the brain was able to distinguish living things from inanimate objects much more strongly than in the 2-month-olds, O'Doherty said.

Someday, researchers said, scientists may be able to connect such brain imaging to cognitive outcomes later in life. Liuba Papeo, a neuroscientist at the National Center for Scientific Research in France, said the number of babies in the study is one thing that makes the work "impressive and unique."

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What is Slippery Fish? A secret project to win Olympic speedskating medals with help from an app

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
AP National Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — All it took was the mere mention of the words "Slippery Fish" for U.S. Speedskating national team coach Ryan Shimabukuro to purse his lips and shake his head.

There wasn't even a full question asked about the secret project using computer technology aimed at shaving fractions of a second off speedskating times to help the Americans bring home gold medals from the Milan Cortina Olympics. Just those four syllables were enough to catch Shimabukuro off-guard a little more than a month ahead of the Feb. 6-22 Winter Games.

"No comment. I don't know how you even know about that," said the genial Shimabukuro, who otherwise was forthcoming about all manner of topics during an interview with The Associated Press about his team and his sport while sitting in the

stands at Milwaukee's Pettit National Ice Center, site of the Olympic trials for long track in January.

"No comment. Nope. Nope," Shimabukuro said. "Respectfully, no comment."

So what, exactly, is Slippery Fish? And why would Shimabukuro and some other folks connected to the American team be so tight-lipped about it?

Using an app to make U.S. speedskaters faster

According to Shane Domer, U.S. Speedskating's chief of sport performance, the idea behind the program was to increase athletes' aerodynamic efficiency by reducing the amount of drag they create pushing against the air during a race.

For years, speedskaters, like cyclists, trained in wind tunnels to study that phenomenon.

Now, Domer explained, it happens virtually: An app lets skaters scan their bodies, creating a "digital twin." The software simulates wind passing over the avatar, computational fluid dynamics calculate how much resistance there is and how tweaking a skater's form alters that.

"We can basically say, 'How much faster will the avatar be in this position vs. that position at a certain speed?' You're trying to make someone a little bit slippery through the air," Domer said about the work that began in 2023 at a cost approaching \$100,000. "Significant performance benefits from small changes: changing the head position slightly, changing the way your shoulders are positioned, elbow positions," he said. "You're talking about tenths of a second per lap in a sport where we look at hundredths or thousandths." U.S. long distance coach Gabe Girard said they've seen improvements from raising both arms in corners instead of only in straightaways.

"We're always hoping to bring something a bit out of left field to catch people off-guard," Girard said. "There's also 'mental warfare' about

it and makes people guess if they should (do) it."

Speedskating secrets at the Olympics

As with other sports, successful speedskating innovations get copied.

At Beijing in 2022, the U.S. men won their first Olympic speedskating medal since 2010, a bronze in team pursuit. That was thanks to a revolutionary change developed by the not-so-creatively-named Project Push: The team's three racers remained in the same order and pushed the leader of the trio, instead of rotating who led.

But the Americans debuted that two years earlier, and other countries soon adopted the same strategy. "We unveiled it too early," Domer lamented.

holds the world record and Casey Dawson, Ethan Cepuran and Emery Lehman are favored for gold on Feb. 17. Lehman said the 3-D modeling fostered better understanding of the ideal spacing between the three racers. "We're thinking about things analytically," Lehman said. "We definitely have some niche things that we do that we try not to share with other people."

Does Jordan Stolz use Slippery Fish?

Slippery Fish mostly is being used for team pursuit and long-distance events like the 5,000 or 10,000 meters.

"We were going to work on a program for more of the sprint side, but I had a little too much on my plate to kind of spearhead that project," said Erin Jackson, who defends her Olympic 500 gold Feb. 15. "Hopefully that's something we can get more into" before the 2030 Games.

Domer said "a lot" of U.S. skaters and coaches have been shown what Slippery Fish can do. "Some have made changes," he said. "Some have not."

The world's best speedskater at the moment, Jordan Stolz, who excels at shorter distances, hasn't taken advantage.

"It's not something that I really got into changing your technique to be more 'aero,'" Stolz said. "Everybody skates so differently. If somebody is more 'aero' ... I don't know if I would be changing my technique to try and match them."

Tech will fuel future speedskating changes

U.S. Speedskating has redesigned helmets including one revealed at the 2022 Games and employs technology to improve performance in other ways.

Cutting Edge is for skate blades. Iron Fist focuses on weighted gloves. New uniforms will arrive, eventually. "It's really hard to change someone who has been training a certain way their entire life, and then you ask them to do something that makes skating feel different.

That's a tough sell," Domer said. "But I do think we'll see crazy new things at the next Olympic Games." □



From front to back, United States' Casey Dawson, Emery Lehman and Ethan Cepuran skate to a new world record during the men's team pursuit at a World Cup speedskating event, Nov. 16, 2025, in Salt Lake City.

Associated Press



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10 years of NFL Next Gen Stats has changed how the game is watched and played

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) —

Anyone watching Caleb Williams' desperation fourth-down touchdown pass in the divisional round knew how improbable a play it was.

Quantifying that was a different story. That's when the NFL's Next Gen Stats stepped in.

Within minutes after the 14-yard touchdown landed in Cole Kmet's hands, the answer was all over social media. The pass traveled 51.2 air yards for the longest throw in the red zone on record.

Williams retreated so far back that he launched the pass from 26.5 yards behind the line of scrimmage, 4 yards further back than any other pass on record. The completion probability was a mere 17.8% from the time Williams threw the pass. A sport whose statistics used to be mostly simple ones like yards gained, passes attempted, passes completed and touchdowns now has numbers based on all sorts of advanced statistics thanks to radio-frequency identification chips the NFL has placed in



Seattle Seahawks running back Kenneth Walker III (9) scores a touchdown past Los Angeles Rams linebacker Byron Young (0) during the first half of the NFC Championship NFL football game Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026, in Seattle.

the ball and shoulder pads of players and the power of the AWS computers to sift through and analyze them.

The NFL just completed the 10th season of the Next Gen Stats era that has transformed the way fans consume the game, how teams make decisions and how the league makes its rules. "Next Gen Stats is the hub of a bicycle wheel that

powers all of these new spokes," said Mike Band, the NFL's senior manager of Next Gen Stats research and analytics. "So the more spokes and the longer that these spokes can be created, the bigger our wheel gets and the more we power. I think as we go on, player health and safety, schedule creation, rule changes, team decision-making, coaching, scout-

ing, strength and conditioning, maximizing player output, those are all just the objectives of the NFL front office. This is a tool to help them do that."

Josh Helmrich, the NFL's senior director of media strategy, business development and Next Gen Stats, said more data gets collected in one game with the tracking chips than in the history

of football before the chips were used.

The data the NFL collects through the chips provides simple answers like how fast players run and how far a pass is thrown to more complex ones thanks to the machine learning technology and artificial intelligence through AWS that has helped the NFL's research team create models for things like completion probability, yards gained over expected on runs or catches and deciphering defensive coverages.

Teams use the technology to monitor the speed and freshness of their players, impacting when to have strenuous practices and when to back off and helping reduce injuries by being able to better monitor a player's condition throughout the week.

"Some use it more than others," Helmrich said. "But that's sort of their secret sauce."

They don't share a ton of the nitty gritty with us. We know all those people, they ask us questions, ask us to make improvements on the data set, add this field, add that field. □

Associated Press

Eugenio Suárez and the Reds agree to a \$15 million, 1-year contract, AP sources say

By JOE REEDY
AP Sports Writer

Eugenio Suárez and the Cincinnati Reds have agreed on a \$15 million, one-year contract, two people familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Sunday night. The people spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the deal was pending a physical and had not been announced.

Suárez was the top slugger left on the free agent market and the two-time All-Star returns to Cincinnati, where he played seven seasons. He hit 189 home runs for the Reds from 2015 through 2021, including 49 in 2019.

The move gives the Reds the proven power hitter they had been seeking throughout the offseason. A third baseman for most of his 12-year major league career, the 34-year-old Suárez is expected to be Cincinnati's primary designated hitter and perhaps play some games at third base or first.

The team has Gold Glove winner Ke'Bryan Hayes at third, and touted prospect Sal Stewart is likely to play first.

The Reds were one of many teams interested in Suárez at the trade deadline last year, but they didn't want to part with key prospects. He was traded from Ari-

zona to Seattle on July 31 and finished fifth in the majors with 49 home runs and fourth with 118 RBIs. He batted .228 overall with an .824 OPS. The Mariners fell one win shy of reaching their first World Series, losing to Toronto in the American League Championship Series. Suárez had two home runs in Game 5, including a grand slam in the eighth inning.

Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati has averaged 2.67 home runs per game since it opened in 2003. That is the second-highest homer rate in the majors among ballparks to host at least 1,200 games.

Suárez was traded by the Reds to Seattle during

spring training in 2022. He spent two seasons with the Mariners before getting traded to the Diamondbacks.

Suárez broke into the majors with Detroit in 2014. He is a .246 career hitter with 325 homers, 949 RBIs and a .792 OPS. □





Seattle Mariners third baseman Eugenio Suarez looks on during a baseball game against the San Diego Padres, Aug. 27, 2025, in Seattle.

Associated Press




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The St. Regis Aruba Resort Marks Its First Year of Operations with Focus on Community, Hosts, and Sustainable Growth



ORANJESTAD – The St. Regis Aruba Resort recently celebrated its first year of operations, reflecting on a milestone distinguished by strong growth, meaningful community engagement, and an unwavering commitment to service excellence.

To commemorate this remarkable achievement, the day began with a celebratory breakfast for all Hosts—its employees—a moment of appreciation during which members of the Executive Team shared their gratitude and recognition for the dedication demonstrated throughout the year. The celebration continued with a special reception honoring the resort's opening team, followed by an evening gathering at the resort signature restaurant, Eskama Cucina Italiana.

During the reception, the resort's General Manager, Mr. Oliver Reschreiter, expressed sincere appreciation to key stakeholders and industry partners,



including government entities, tourism partners, suppliers, and service providers, whose collaboration and trust have been instrumental throughout the resort's first year. Mr. Reschreiter also highlighted the contributions of local Aruban businesses, whose dedication and partnership continue to elevate the guest experience. Equally important was the resort's ongoing connection to the Aruban community. Since opening, The St. Regis Aruba Resort has positioned itself not only as a luxury destination, but as an engaged and responsible community partner. Through local sourcing, partnerships, cultural integration, and employment opportunities, the resort remains committed to growing alongside Aruba.

A key moment was the recognition of the resort's Hosts, who were acknowledged as the heart of the House of Astor. Over the past year, the resort has expanded from 223 to 428 Hosts, representing 14 different

nationalities. In 2025, the property recorded 57 internal transfers and promotions, reflecting its focus on professional development and long-term career growth.

Throughout the year the Hosts wellbeing and engagement were further reinforced through several initiatives, including a dedicated wellbeing week focused on physical, mental, and financial health. Activities included yoga sessions, budgeting workshops, team-building events, and friendly competitions. During this period, the resort also introduced the Legacy Cup, a collaborative initiative between the two Marriott International luxury properties on the island. Additional Host-focused initiatives included participation in local running events and the resort's first Associate Appreciation Week, featuring activities dedicated to recognizing and thanking team members for their dedication and contributions.



During the hotel's first 365 days, the community outreach remained a cornerstone of the resort's efforts through its Serve 360 initiatives. Over the past year, Hosts partnered with local organizations such as the Animal Shelter, Club Kibrahacha, Fundacion pa Nos Comunidad, and several other foundations across the island. These efforts included assembling more than 75 school bags for children at the start of the school year, supporting food basket distributions during the Christmas season, and participating in multiple beach clean-up projects, both independently and in collaboration with local groups.

As The St. Regis Aruba Resort looks ahead, it reaffirms its commitment to excellence in service, integrity, Host development, and community impact—laying the foundation for a strong, sustainable, and mutually beneficial future for the St. Regis brand in Aruba. □

LeBron's All-Star streak at 22 years. Duren, Powell, Johnson, Murray, Holmgren, Avdija 1st-timers



Denver Nuggets guard Jamal Murray reacts after dunking the ball for a basket and drawing a foul in the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Brooklyn Nets Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026, in Denver.

Associated Press

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

LeBron James is an All-Star again, extending his record

streak of selections.

James was a pick for the 22nd consecutive year, one of 14 players who were announced Sunday as reserves for the Feb. 15 midseason showcase that'll take place at the Los Angeles Clippers' arena in Inglewood, California.

James is the All-Star record holder in a number of categories. He also has the most All-Star game appearances (20) and the most points (434) in those contests.

"I didn't make it my rookie year. Twenty-two straight.

Nah, it ain't bad," James said in a video posted by the NBA before he and the Los Angeles Lakers took on the New York Knicks on Sunday night, shortly after the word of his selection was revealed. "Blessed. Honored. Truly." The Los Angeles Lakers star was not chosen as a starter this season in the process that includes voting from fans, media and other players. NBA coaches choose the reserves and, if necessary, Commissioner Adam Silver will select any additional players necessary for the All-Star rosters should some-

one need to be replaced because of injury. James did not play in last season's All-Star event because of injury.

"You think about a star player, their prime is their All-NBA, All-Star years," Lakers coach JJ Redick said. "And you know, he's basically had a 20-plus-year prime. It's kind of unheard of. It is unheard of, uncharted, whatever you want to call it. I mean, it's incredible. It's a testament to the work that he puts in." The reserves from the Eastern Conference: Cleveland's

Donovan Mitchell, New York's Karl-Anthony Towns, Indiana's Pascal Siakam, Toronto's Scottie Barnes, Detroit's Jalen Duren, Miami's Norman Powell and Atlanta's Jalen Johnson.

"I believe that he deserves it and I think probably one of the best compliments you can give him is the fact that he starred in all of his roles that he's had in his career, and he just continues to get better," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said of Powell. "He's having his best years now after the age of 30." □