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Ballroom, library, airport: Trump aims to leave his mark

Washington, United States
 While returning to Washington from Florida aboard Air Force One on Sunday, President Donald Trump chatted with journalists for a few minutes about the Iran war. But then he abruptly pulled out large color images of the ballroom he is building on the East Wing of the White House, and talked extensively about the neo-classical building, praising its "hand-carved" Corinthian columns as "the best, most

beautiful by far." The president is at heart a real estate developer, and it shows. "Everything's drone proof and bulletproof," an animated Trump said of the ballroom. "I'm so busy that I don't have time to do this. I'm fighting wars and other things. But this is very important because this is going to be with us for a long time." The ballroom, which involved demolishing the historic East Wing and drew



U.S. President Donald Trump holds a rendering of the White House South Terrace balustrade view as he speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One en route to Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, on March 29, 2026.

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thousands of critical comments from the public, is just one of several Trump projects aimed at leaving his mark on the American landscape.

- Promoting his brand -
 Since becoming president, Trump has essentially replicated the formula that characterized his career as a businessman: promoting his name like a brand, engraved in gold letters on his golf clubs, hotels and merchandise. Barely into the second year of his second term in office, Trump has already added his name to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, thanks to a hand-picked board of directors, and to the Institute of Peace in the nation's capital. He has already hung portraits of himself inside the White House, breaking with the tradition that a president wait until the end of his term to be invited by a successor to unveil a portrait. Last Friday, the US Treasury announced that Trump's signature would appear on future US banknotes, also a first for a sitting president. And this year he will have a commemorative coin bearing his image, minted to mark America's 250th

birthday.

- Sheer scale -
 Trump has also proposed building an enormous, 250-foot tall "Independence Arch" reminiscent of Paris' Arc de Triomphe on the bank of the Potomac River near the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery. Since Herbert Hoover (1929-1933), American presidents have traditionally erected libraries bearing their names where documents and objects related to their terms in office are kept and displayed. But the projects spearheaded by Trump stand out for their sheer scale and self-promotional nature. On Monday, his son Eric Trump posted computer-generated images of a future Trump Library on X showing an imposing skyscraper on the Miami waterfront. Inside, the images showed an auditorium dominated by a gigantic golden statue of Trump. Also on Monday, Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis signed a law renaming Palm Beach International Airport not far from the US leader's Mar-a-Lago estate the President Donald J. Trump International Airport. □

University students recognized for life-saving blood drive efforts

FOTO X STONY BROOK, NY – In an era where headlines are often dominated by division, the students of Stony Brook University are proving that the simplest act of human kindness rolling up a sleeve can spark a movement. This week, the University's student-led donation teams received national recognition for their extraordinary commitment to community health, marking a milestone in a campaign that has saved thousands of lives across the Tri-State area.

The accolade comes at a critical time. For years, blood centers across the United States have struggled with "donor fatigue" and a dwindling youth donor base. However, the Stony Brook Seawolves have bucked that trend, transforming the campus into one of the most prolific blood donation hubs in the country.

A culture of giving

The success of the program isn't just about the number of pints collected; it's about a fundamental shift in campus culture. What began as a series of small, intermittent drives has evolved into a sophisticated, year-round operation.

"We didn't want blood donation to be something students did once a year for a free t-shirt," says Marcus Chen, a senior biology major and one of the lead organizers. "We wanted it to be part of what it means to be a Seawolf. When you see your roommate, your professor, and your coach all heading to the Student Union to donate, it becomes a social norm. It becomes an act of solidarity." The student groups leveraged social media, peer-to-peer outreach, and friendly competitions between dorms and athletic teams to keep momentum high. By "gamifying" the process, they managed to break down the intimidation factor often associated with needles and clinical settings.

The impact on the front lines

While the recognition is a point of pride for the university, the real-world impact is felt miles away in hospital trauma centers and oncology wards. According to the New York Blood Center, a single donation can save up to three lives. At Stony Brook, the sheer volume of participation has provided a vital cushion for local hospitals during seasonal shortages.

Dr. Elena Rodriguez, a hematologist at a nearby regional hospital, emphasized the importance of the student contribution. "In emergency medicine, time is our greatest enemy. Having a stable, reliable supply of blood products especially O-negative is the difference between life and death. These students aren't just hitting a quota; they are literally providing the fuel for our life-saving interventions."

The national award specifically highlighted the students' ability to mobilize during "crisis windows" periods like the winter holidays or spring break when donations typically plummet. The Stony Brook teams organized "Power Drives" during these windows, ensuring that the supply remained steady when patients needed it most.

Empowerment and leadership

Beyond the medical benefits, the program has served as a leadership incubator. Managing a high-volume blood drive requires logistical precision: coordinating with medical professionals, managing thousands of appointments, and ensuring donor safety and comfort.

For many of the student organizers, the experience has been transformative. "I came here wanting to be a doctor to help people in the future," says Sarah Jenkins, a sophomore volunteer. "But through these drives, I realized I don't have to wait for a degree to make a difference. I'm helping people right now.

It has given me a sense of agency that I didn't know I had." □



Vice President for Student Affairs Rick Gatteau (left) and Kate Valerio (right) surprise senior Zachary Don with the news that Stony Brook has been named 2026 School Partner of the Year by the Association for Blood Donor Professionals.



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Meet the four astronauts set to voyage around the Moon

Washington, United States
The four astronauts selected for the Artemis 2 Moon mission will be the first to travel there in more than five decades.

In doing so, they will become the new faces of American space exploration.

Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch will make the voyage with their Canadian colleague Jeremy Hansen, and are now preparing to take off as soon as April 1.

The journey, set to last around 10 days, will take the astronauts on a loop around the Moon, though they will not land on its surface.

The crew comprises the first woman, the first person of color and the first non-American to take part in such a journey.

Those are key differences from the Apollo era, which included the first and to this day the only humans to travel to the Moon.

Here is a closer look at the crew:

- Reid Wiseman -

At 50 years old, Reid Wiseman is the mission's commander.

The native of Baltimore joined NASA in 2009 following a 27-year career in the US Navy.

"I never thought I'd be an astronaut," he said on a NASA podcast. "I mean, come on, it's like an unobtainable dream."

Until it's not: in 2014, Wiseman traveled to space for a 165-day mission aboard the



Canadian Space Agency astronaut Artemis II Mission Specialist Jeremy Hansen, NASA astronaut and Artemis II Mission Specialist Christina Koch, NASA astronaut and Artemis II Commander Reid Wiseman and NASA astronaut and Artemis II pilot Victor Glover look on during a welcome ceremony ahead of the Artemis II April 1 launch at Kennedy Space Center in Florida on March 27, 2026.

International Space Station, and later served as NASA's chief of the astronaut office. After losing his wife to cancer in 2020, he raised his two daughters now teenagers on his own.

In January, he said he aimed for transparency in explaining to them the inherent risks of his career and his coming journey.

"I told them, 'here's where the will is, here's where the trust documents are,'" he said. "And if anything happens to me, here's what's going to happen to you." "And that's just that is a part of this life."

- Victor Glover -

Victor Glover, 49 and also

a Navy veteran, will serve as pilot of the Orion spacecraft.

The native of California and father of four daughters was working as a legislative advisor in the US Senate when NASA selected him in 2013. He has recounted youthful dreaming of becoming a police officer like his father. But watching a Space Shuttle launch on his family's television set changed his perspective: "I thought, 'I really want to drive one of those.'"

"And yes, I said drive, because I didn't know any pilots or engineers."

He will become the first Black man and person of

color, period to travel to the Moon.

In 2020, he became the first African American to take part on a long-duration mission to the ISS.

He emphasized at the time that the historic first was made possible thanks to those who came before him, paying tribute to figures including Guion Bluford, the first African American to travel to space in 1983.

- Christina Koch -

American astronaut Christina Koch, 47, will become the first woman to take part in a lunar mission.

Like Glover, she was also chosen by NASA in 2013. Her background is particu-

larly eclectic: an engineer by training, she is a seasoned explorer who has worked in extreme environments including Antarctica. She long dreamed of becoming an astronaut, she has said, noting the poster of the iconic "Earthrise" image plastered to the wall of her childhood bedroom. That photograph was taken during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968.

"I always say to people, do what scares you," she says of her personal motto. "And that means I have to follow my own advice."

Koch already holds the record for longest spaceflight by a woman 328 days and also participated in the first spacewalk performed entirely by women, alongside her colleague Jessica Meir.

- Jeremy Hansen -

Canadian Jeremy Hansen, 50, rounds out the crew and will be the first non-American to fly around the Moon. Following his career as a fighter pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Canadian Space Agency brought him into its ranks in 2009.

Post-training he served for several years as a liaison between Earth and the ISS, after which he was entrusted with training a new class of astronauts.

He has said that as a child he found a photograph of Neil Armstrong on the Moon, a moment that sparked his passion for space exploration. □

Meta says testing subscription tier for Instagram



This photograph taken on March 7, 2024 in Nantes, shows the logo of US social media platform Instagram (I) and US social media platform Threads, both of US company Meta.

San Francisco, United States

Instagram is testing a pay tier that offers features including letting subscribers discreetly view "Story" posts that normally vanish after 24 hours, Meta told AFP on Monday, confirming a report by news website TechCrunch.

Paying users will also get more control over which accounts are permitted to see photos or videos they share in Story posts on the popular social network.

The new tier is being tested in "a few countries worldwide," a spokesperson said, without providing further details.

According to TechCrunch, they include Japan, Mexico and the Philippines, with

subscription prices hovering around \$2 per month.

Meta launched ad-free, paid versions of Facebook and Instagram in the United Kingdom last year to comply with legislation there.

Social media platforms Snapchat and X have offered paid premium version for several years.

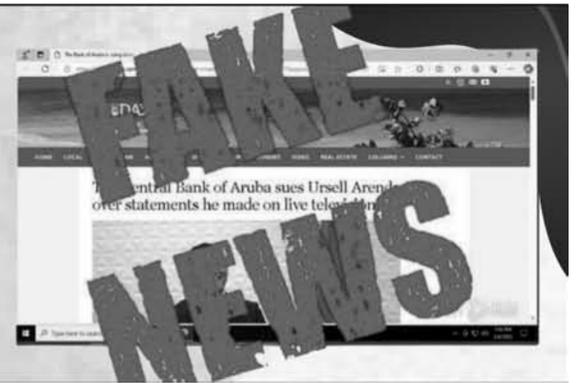
Snapchat's parent company Snap recently reported having more than 25 million subscribers to its premium tier and being on pace for \$1 billion in annual revenue.

Content creators at Instagram already have the ability to charge fans for access to exclusive content. □

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Hindu devotional clubbing sways India's youth

New Delhi, India

In India's capital, Hindu "bhajan clubbing" is electrifying nightlife, with revelers dancing to traditional devotional songs reimagined through guitars and pounding drumbeats, transforming public venues into spiritual hangouts.

ChaiLeela, a cafe in the suburb of Noida, crackled with energy as devotees swayed to rhythmic riffs soaring into crescendos in songs praising the deity Krishna.

"I felt energised and alive," said Himanshu Gupta, a 30-year-old IT professional and regular attendee of the song nights.

Bhajans devotional songs with ancient roots in Hinduism have long been used as a spiritual bridge between the individual and the divine. But "bhajan clubbing" represents a modern twist that is gaining traction in New Delhi, which hosted at least five major devotional concerts in March alone, drawing tens of thousands.

One open-air event this month at the grounds of the 16th-century Purana



Artists dance to Hindu spiritual songs called 'Bhajans' during the Sanatan Journey devotional music festival at the iconic Purana Qila in New Delhi on March 1, 2026.

Qila fort drew about 7,000 devotees, with the atmosphere resembling a rave more than a religious gathering. "It provides an opportunity for our youth to connect with devotion and spirituality," said Aishwarya Gupta, 31, a nuclear physicist attending the concert, her face dotted with both paint and religious marks. "It feels great to be here."

Musicians performed devotional hits backed by guitars and drums as crowds danced in a near-trance. "It is a calming feeling," said Kumar Shubham, a 27-year-old doctor and fitness influencer, who said the events also instilled "pride" in Indians. "When we see today's youth, they seem more interested in things other

than religious matters," said businessman Jay Ahuja, 28. "But this... shows them the right path... it's a good way to connect with God."

- 'Spirituality, not spirits' -

The phenomenon reflects a broader revival of public expressions of Hindu identity in India, alongside the growing political and cultural influence of Hindu

populist narratives.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has backed the trend, noting that bhajan traditions had been the "soul of Indian culture for centuries".

The 75-year-old Hindu nationalist leader has praised how bhajan clubbing "incorporated the spirit of devotion into the youth's experiences and lifestyles", speaking in his weekly radio broadcast in January.

When tens of thousands packed Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium for a devotional show this month with electric guitars and drum beats projected by giant speakers it was introduced by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, a member of Modi's party.

Nikunj Gupta, 26, who organised the devotional music festival at Purana Qila, said that "spirituality is necessary to unite the next generation".

He said such events offered young people a festive atmosphere without the alcohol commonly associated with concerts in Delhi, which some conservative Hindus frown upon. □

Italy fertility rate fell to new low of 1.14 in 2025

Rome, Italy

Italy's fertility rate fell to a new low of 1.14 children per woman in 2025 -- one of the lowest levels in the world, official data released on Tuesday showed.

The figures are the latest sign of Italy's rapidly ageing population.

The report from the Istat agency also showed that Italy has some of the highest life expectancy rates in Europe -- 81.7 years for men and 85.7 years for women. Sociologist Chiara Sarace-

no told AFP women were putting off having children out of financial considerations because of "precarious conditions for young people".

"It is even harder for women because, in Italy, the division of domestic labour remains highly unequal.

"Nobody here says anymore that 'mums shouldn't work', but they are expected to look after the children," she said.

Italy was one of the 10 countries with the lowest fertility rates along with China, Japan and Poland, according to a World Bank ranking using data from 2023.

Fertility rates in the EU as a whole fell from 1.57 children per woman in 2010 to 1.34 in 2024.

In Italy, the region with the lowest fertility rate was Sardinia with an average of 0.85 children per woman. The size of the population in



An Italian family leave the polling station after casting their votes for a fertility referendum 12 June 2005.

2025 compared with 2024 remained broadly stable thanks to immigration. The population of foreign

residents grew by 188,000 while the Italian resident population was down by 189,000. □



A shepherd walks with his flock of sheep in Lagkadas, near Thessaloniki, on February 19, 2026.

Sheep culls put pressure on Greek feta cheese production

Thessaloniki, Greece

Three months after state vets seized and killed hundreds of his sheep to stamp out an ongoing pox pandemic, Kostas Theofilou fights back tears as he gazes at his empty stable. "Three families lived off this place. Look what they've done to me. I'm 55 years old. What job can I do now?" the livestock farmer sobbed.

From August 2024 to early March, more than 480,000 sheep and goats have been slaughtered because of the pandemic, mainly in central and northern Greece.

Producers say the resulting fall in the livestock population and milk production is threatening feta, one of Greece's premier exports. A heavy quiet hangs over Theofilou's farm in the absence of the bleats from the sheep and the tinkle of their bells. The sheepdogs wander about.

"I only know how to be a shepherd. I have no other memory from my life. Only the sheep," he told AFP. In Thessaly, where around 45 percent of the briny white cheese is made from sheep and goat's milk, the impact of the disease is already significant. The central region, one of

the country's key centres of agricultural production, has already sustained major livestock losses over the past three years owing to floods and sheep plague.

According to cheesemakers in the area, milk production this year is down by around 40 percent. Thessaly is the leading region for feta exports, accounting for over 50 percent of Greece's total exports.

Christina Onasoglou is a food technologist specialising in dairy products who runs with her husband a medium-sized dairy that exports 98 percent of the feta it produces.

She told AFP that because of the animal culls, her milk deliveries have fallen by up to 50 percent, resulting in a corresponding reduction in feta production.

- Exports in jeopardy -

Sheep milk prices have also increased by up to 12 percent, she noted, further jeopardising exports.

According to estimates by the organisation representing feta producers, the National Interprofessional Organisation for Feta Cheese (EDOF), the drop in feta production due to the lack of milk is expected to reach 20,000 tonnes in 2026. It is estimated that in 2025

feta production reached 140,000 tonnes.

To limit the spread of the disease, the authorities have banned livestock farmers from allowing their animals to graze freely.

With the exception of farmers who own fenced-off fields, the rest must keep their flocks in their pens.

"We've kept the animals inside since September 9," said Giorgos Xenitidis, a 59-year-old livestock farmer in the outskirts of Thessaloniki.

"We feed them, we water them and they don't go out to pasture. The costs are almost double because the animals are shut in. We live in constant fear that the disease might reach us too," he said.

Almost on a daily basis, police have arrested and put on trial farmers accused of trying to skirt the ban.

Cheesemakers say that by keeping animals confined in barns for a prolonged period that Greece is violating the core requirement of the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) specification for feta.

"The main argument for obtaining PDO status for feta was that the milk comes from animals that graze freely in pastures full of native herbs, which gives the milk unique characteristics," said Onasoglou. □



A group of garca branca pequenas, snowy egret (*Egretta thula*) is pictured at the Pantanal, a key region along birds' migratory routes in the Americas, in the municipality of Miranda in Mato Grosso do Sul state, Brazil on March 20, 2026.

Forty new migratory species win international protection: U.N. body

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) on Sunday approved the listing of 40 new species for international protection, including the snowy owl featured in the Harry Potter saga.

The decision came at the conclusion of the COP15 summit on migratory species in Campo Verde, Brazil, which brought together representatives from 132 countries and the European Union.

It is one of the world's most important global meetings for wildlife conservation.

Also on the new list for protection along with the snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) are the Hudsonian godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) a long-beaked shorebird threatened with extinction and the great hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*).

The new list featured land mammals like the striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*) and other aquatic wildlife such as the giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*).

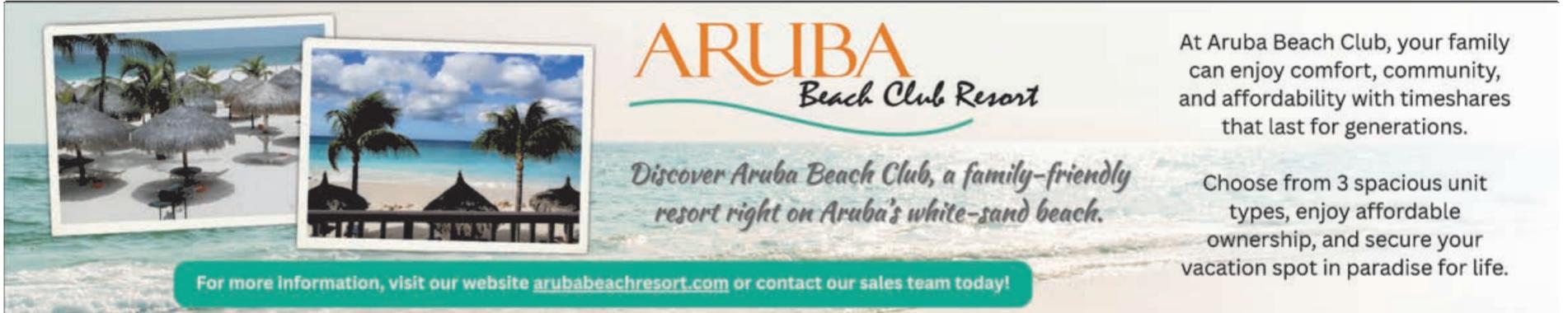
The countries that are party to the CMS are legally obliged to protect species listed as at risk of extinction, conserve and restore their habitats, prevent obstacles to migration and cooperate with other range states. Campo Verde is in Brazil's biodiversity-rich Pantanal wetlands, in the southern Amazon.

According to a report released ahead of the summit, nearly half (49 percent) of all species catalogued by the CMS are showing signs of declining numbers, and nearly one in four are threatened with extinction on a worldwide scale.

Another major UN assessment, published on Tuesday as the summit opened, warned that migratory freshwater fish populations crucial to river health and sustaining the livelihoods of millions of people are in freefall and risk collapse.

Habitat destruction, overfishing and water pollution from the Amazon to the Danube threaten the very survival of hundreds of species whose epic voyages along the world's great rivers go largely unnoticed.

Last November, Brazil hosted the COP30 climate summit in the Amazonian city of Belem. □



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Up for a snorkeling adventure in Aruba? Top 3 shipwrecks to explore

(ORANJESTAD) – Aruba is not only the perfect vacation destination to sit back and relax on the sandy beaches but also has great snorkeling spots for passionate adventurers to explore. On the coast of the island, there are various shipwrecks that have become fan-favorites over the years. Here are the top 3 shipwrecks you should explore.

SS Antilla

Dubbed "The Ghost Ship", SS Antilla is the biggest and most visited shipwreck site off the coast of the island. Located in Malmok, this 400-foot ship's story is one of capture and sabotage during WWII.

After Germany invaded The Netherlands, Dutch authorities ordered the confinement of the ship's German crew, who were ported in Aruba because it needed to find a neutral port. The Dutch ordered the ship to be confiscated, but the German crew had other plans. Taking advantage of a delay caused by an anticipated armed resistance, the Germans started scuttling the ship, opening her sea-cock and setting her ablaze.

Eventually, the crew was arrested, but SS Antilla could not be saved by the Dutch forces. The Dutch fired two rounds of their 35mm gun aboard the 'Aruba' at SS Antilla and left her to sink.

The shipwreck can only be reached by boat. The ship is visible from the surface and during your snorkeling trip you'll be surrounded by hundreds of tropical fishes, but the shipwreck alone is already impressive enough.

SS Pedernales

Like the Antilla, the story of SS Pedernales dates to WWII. Pedernales was used as a lake tanker between Venezuela and Aruba, and sailed under British Flag. At this time, The US and Britain were using Aruba and Curacao as fuel stations for the war ships.

Under operation Neuland (disruption of British and American oil sources), Germany fleets bombed Pedernales. The ship was later cut into three sections, two of which were taken to the US for reconstruction. The remaining part stayed in Aruba and was used as target practice. Eventually, the ship became a snorkeling site that has attracted many visitors throughout the years.

Pedernales lies on the northwest coast of Aruba, and is no more than 10 feet under water, making it an ideal site for snorkelers and divers of all levels.

Jane Sea Wreck

The Jane Sea Wreck lies near Palm Island at 100 feet underwater. Jane's story is heavily speculated, making her origin a tale of legends.

Launched in 1959, the 190-foot ship was initially called "Blackthorn". Her last owner, S&D Shipping Ltd. named her Jane Sea. Jane was a cement freighter between Venezuela and Aruba.

The story goes that the Jane Sea arrived one day at the Barcadera Harbor, where Aruban customs discovered several tons of cocaine. The ship was confiscated and petitioned went out for her owner to claim her. However, several years went by and no one came forward

to claim the ship, so dive operators decided to sink her as an artificial reef. This happened in 1988. Jane Sea earned the nick name Jane C, because of the illicit white powder discovered on board.

Jane is now beautifully overgrown with coral and is home to a diverse set of marine life, like turtles, octopus, crabs and sometimes even nurse sharks.

The stories behind these shipwrecks enriches their exploration and offers snorkelers and divers a glance into the past, as well as the beautiful marine life that have molded these wrecks into their home. So, grab your equip-



ment and discover another side of what Aruba has to offer!

We highly recommend you

embark on your adventure with the guide of a professional and be sure to take of yourself and Aruba's precious nature. □



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CAYA Introduces a Bold New Menu Celebrating Latin Caribbean Flavors



(Oranjestad)—CAYA, one of Aruba's most beloved dining destinations, continues to celebrate the vibrant essence of Latin Caribbean cuisine with an exciting new menu that beautifully balances tradition and innovation.

Nestled in a beautifully restored traditional Aruban Cunucu house, surrounded by lush tropical greenery, CAYA offers guests a dining experience that feels both authentic and contemporary. The restaurant's philosophy is simple yet profound: to create a space where the warmth of island hospitality meets the creativity of modern gastronomy.

The new menu reflects this vision with a series

of inspired dishes that showcase the diversity of Caribbean and Latin American flavors. From Cuba to Colombia, and from Aruba to Mexico, each plate tells a story rooted in heritage and reimagined through CAYA's modern lens.

Among the standout new appetizers are the **Tuna al Tamarindo**, featuring thinly sliced tuna sashimi served with tamarind *leche de tigre*, creamy avocado, marinated onions, radishes, cilantro, and crispy tortillas dusted with *tajín*; and the **Beef Stew Croquettes**, a playful nod to Caribbean comfort food, served with truffle and black garlic mayonnaise. Guests can also savor the **Beef and Pork Brochetas**, made with locally smoked bacon, *Madam Jeannette* peppers, local honey, and tenderloin, grilled to perfec-



tion and served with *chimi-churri espuma*.

The main courses bring equal excitement. Highlights include the **Chilean Sea Bass**, pan fried and served with a smooth carrot and *ají amarillo* sauce, creamy garlic mashed potatoes, grilled paksoi and broccoli, hearts of palm, toasted cashews, and a fragrant lime leaf vinaigrette. Another showstopper is the **Duck and Rice**, a Caribbean interpretation of a Peruvian classic, featuring pan fried duck breast with aromatic green rice infused with local herbs, kombucha, and *ají amarillo*, finished with a pan fried egg and *sarsa criolla*.

Dessert lovers are in for a treat as well. The **Caribbean Black Forest** reimagines the classic with a tropical twist, featuring a rich brownie served with red fruit, coconut mousse, chocolate, and banana rum ice cream. The **Merengon Tropical** delights with sage panna cotta, mango and pineapple compote, mango sorbet, and citrus meringue.

Guests can also enjoy CAYA's new *Sabor Experience*, a limited time three course menu priced at \$79, allowing diners to explore an appetizer, main course, and dessert of their choice.

To complete the experience, CAYA hosts live music every Sunday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., setting the perfect backdrop for an evening of island charm and culinary artistry.

CAYA continues to invite locals and visitors alike to experience the heart of Aruba, where Latin Caribbean heritage comes alive in every dish, every note of music, and every heartfelt welcome. □

“Turning the Tide Project” successful across the Caribbean European Union strengthens conservation and innovation at Arikok National Park

(Oranjestad)—Cooperation with the European Union has contributed significantly to the development of conservation projects in Aruba, with a focus on nature protection and environmental education. This was evident in the experience shared by Tyson

Lopez, Chief Executive Officer of the Aruba Conservation Foundation (ACF).

One of the most recent projects is the “Turning the Tide Project,” implemented between 2023 and 2025 in collaboration with Wagenin-

gen University, the University of Aruba, and the Scubble-Bubbles Foundation. The project focused on coral and mangrove ecosystem restoration.

In the marine component, artificial reefs were developed and coral was planted on special structures, while in mangrove areas, volunteers carried out cleanups and opened channels to improve water circulation. The project concluded with a documentary that recorded the entire process over two years.

According to Lopez, this initiative contributed significantly to awareness and environmental education within the community and is considered one of the most successful projects in the Caribbean region.

As a continuation of these efforts, a new project called “REEFLECT” was recently approved, which will continue focusing on coral restoration, including the installation of more artificial reefs and greater participation from the local community.

Lopez emphasized that the

European Union has played an important role in the development of conservation in Aruba over the years. Among the historic projects is the establishment of Arikok National Park, including the construction of a visitor center and infrastructure to make the park more accessible.

“The European Union means a lot for conservation in Aruba,” Lopez stated, highlighting that international cooperation continues to be essential for the protection of nature and the sustainable development of the island. □



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Infini Launches New Menu 14 Following Its Five-Year Anniversary Celebration

Infini has officially launched Menu 14, a special edition menu unveiled in celebration of the restaurant's five-year anniversary. The new menu revisits guests' favorite dishes from the past five years, blending nostalgia with

fresh interpretations inspired by Infini's signature approach to modern gastronomy.



Infini stands for limitless possibilities, and Menu 14 perfectly embodies that philosophy. Crafted by Chef Urvin Croes, the menu celebrates innovation, creativity, and fearless exploration. Known for pushing boundaries through storytelling, technique, and flavor, Chef Urvin continues to redefine Aruba's fine dining scene. Infini's immersive chef's table concept invites guests to interact directly with the culinary team, transforming each dish into a chapter of an evolving narrative.

Before opening Infini, Chef Urvin honed his craft in Aruba's most prestigious hotel restaurants, rising from apprentice cook to Sous Chef, and gaining international experience at the Michelin-rated Grand Hotel Karel V in Europe. His mission has always been to position Aruba as a leading culinary destination by reimagining local recipes with modern techniques and artistic precision.

Dedicated to supporting local farmers and producers, Chef Urvin incorporates homegrown ingredients that reflect the island's rich food culture. His collaborations with these artisans are essential to Infini's distinctive culinary identity.

With numerous awards to his name—including being crowned the first-ever Iron



Chef Aruba—Chef Urvin remains grounded in his passion, curiosity, and love for sharing Aruba's story through food.

Menu 14 invites diners to taste, explore, and rediscover Infini's journey while looking forward to the limitless possibilities ahead. Reservations are highly recommended to experience this new chapter in Infini's evolving culinary story. □



What Aruba means to Maureen and Anthony!

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of

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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Maureen and Anthony Fiorentino from Rockaway Park, NY. They wrote to us saying: "Aruba to us is Paradise."

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! □





Article by Etnia Nativa

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Episode CCCXLVI - 346

Hidden Cost of Paradise

In this new episode, Etnia Nativa reveals that long before Aruba became synonymous with turquoise waters and luxury resorts, the island told a different story, one marked by resilience. For centuries, the island survival depended on ingenuity, and the careful management of scarce resources.

The Aruba's inhabitants, our fore fathers the Caquetio people, forged a life intimately connected to the land and sea and nature itself. Migrating from the South American mainland, they built economic communities supported by through fishing, hunting and slash and burn agriculture practices. Their way of life reflected a balance with Aruba's arid environment—a balance that would be disrupted by the arrival of European powers in the early 15th century.

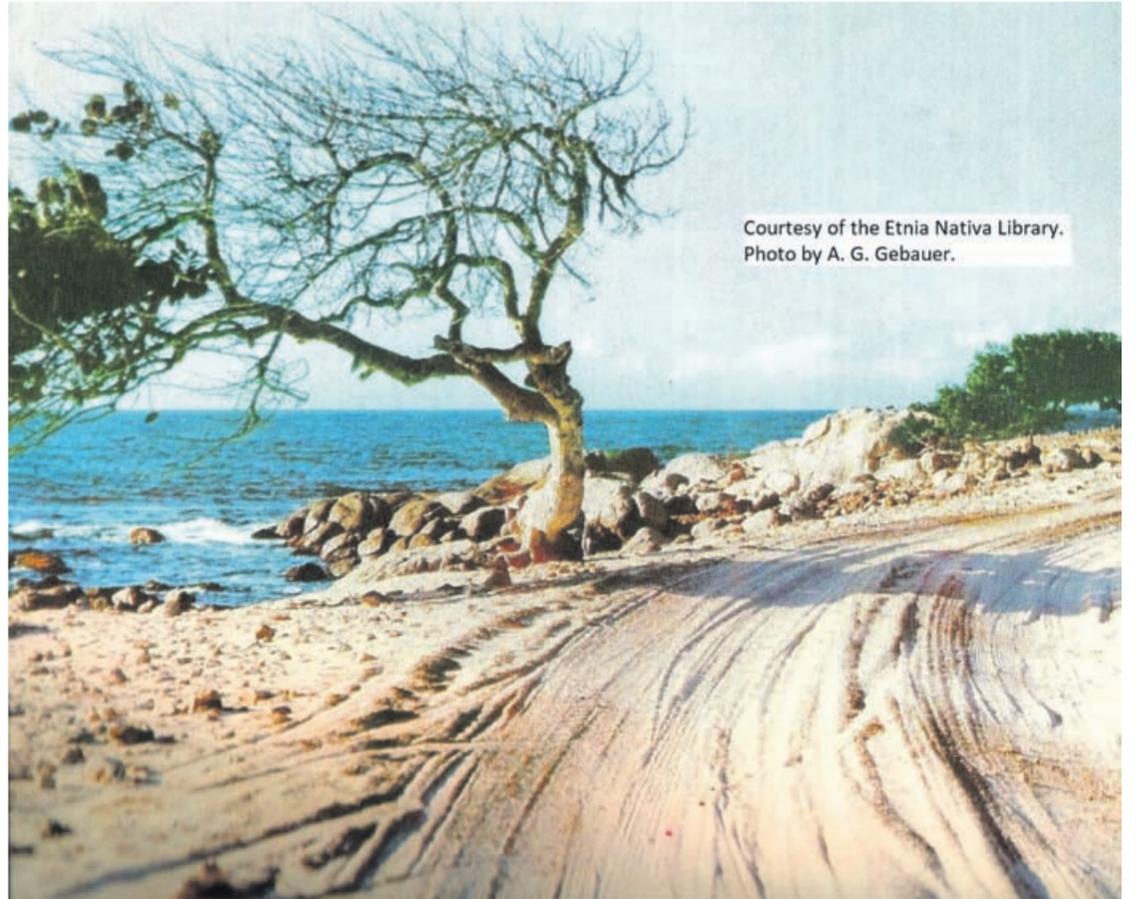
Under Spanish, followed by the Dutch rule Aruba's natural resources were exploited with little regard for sustainability. Among the most notable losses was "Palo di Brazil", Brazil wood tree, which once grew abundantly across the island. Prized in Europe for its intense red dye, the wood was felled to near extinction, and the striping of a great portion of the islands South coast of its mangrove forests, leaving an indelible mark on Aruba's ecological landscape. Meanwhile, the introduction of goats and donkeys further altered the terrain, modifying vegetation patterns and land use.

When the Dutch took control in 1636, Aruba became a supplier of horses, exported from Paardenbaai—"Bay of Horses"—often destined for military or for incursions into the mainland. However, economic life remained fragile. Trade was sporadic and dependent on passing ships who exchanged goods for water, livestock, and provisions. The rest was shipped in by natives trading with their cousins of the main land. Unlike the rest of the Caribbean islands, Aruba did not become a center of the transatlantic plantation slave trade. In later years, people of African descent arrived primarily from neighboring island of Curaçao as house slaves other came as free laborers.

Scarcity marked daily life. Aruba's arid climate and limited natural resources made drought famine a constant threat. Colonial policies often exacerbated these conditions, forcing the export of much of the island's production, even in times of crisis. Yet even amid these hardships, moments of opportunity emerged—none more transformative than the discovery of gold.

In 1824, a young shepherd stumbled upon gold, sparking excitement across the island. Early prospectors relied on simple techniques such as panning in dry riverbeds, but the promise of wealth soon attracted more organized enterprises.

By the mid-19th century, companies were attempting to industrialize extraction, yet most failed due to high costs and logistical barriers. Only in the early 20th century did mining briefly become profitable before global upheavals—particularly World War I—brought operations to a halt. Subsequent attempts at revival



Courtesy of the Etnia Nativa Library.
Photo by A. G. Gebauer.

never restored the industry's former promise. Gold was not the only resource to offer fleeting prosperity.

Other resources offered fleeting prosperity. Phosphate discovered in 1874 at Cerro Colorado led to the Aruba Fosphaat Maatschappij, which exported roughly one million tons of guano between 1881 and 1914. Aloe, introduced in 1861, thrived in Aruba's climate; its potent loin reached 22 percent, among the highest globally. Yet both industries succumbed to fluctuating world markets, and many fields were eventually abandoned as oil offered higher wages.

Aruba's economic life before the arrival of oil was defined by extremes. Periods of near famine alternated with brief periods of prosperity. The island's inhabitants turned to a wide range of trades to survive: rope making, straw hat weaving, peanut farming, shipbuilding, pottery, carpentry, and fishing. Even the pods of the Divi-divi tree were harvested for tannic acid, demonstrating the extent to which every available resource was utilized.

The arrival of the oil industry in the 20th century marked a turning point and transformed Aruba's economy, bringing stability and growth and the top of modernity after centuries of uncertainty. However, even this prosperity was not without challenges. Automation led to job losses, exposing the vul-

nerability of relying on a single industry. Seeking to diversify its economy, Aruba turned to tourism.

A pivotal moment came on February 5, 1955, with the arrival of The Trade Wind, the island's first cruise ship in the modern era. Shortly thereafter, the construction of the Aruba Caribbean Hotel and Casino marked the beginning of a new chapter, attracting the international jet set. Tourism promised not only recovery but reinvention. Aruba's story is one of perseverance against all odds. It is a story defined by environmental limitations and by a people who, generation after generation, adapted, resisted, and survived at the very edge of what seemed possible.

That legacy remains deeply ingrained in the island's identity, now a silent witness to a new era of strain and stress. Tourism, once heralded as a source of renewal, is increasingly associated with environmental decline and intensifying social unrest.

This episode is brought to you by Etnia Nativa—the native inspiration behind turquoises waters. Don't just visit Aruba—understand it.

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Forgotten gems: Open air movie theaters

(Oranjestad)—During the span of over 100 years, Aruba only saw five open air movie theaters. Now practically obsolete on the island, these theaters were once frequently visited by locals and migrants in the 20th century.

The first open air theater was constructed in 1920 and was commissioned by Shon Eduard (Eddy) de Veer. This theater was located at the Hotel Colombia in Oranjestad, which is now where the Aruban census office is located. The theater was simple; it only consisted of a screen, and visitors had to bring their own chairs to enjoy the popular silent movies of the time.

American migrants who



worked in the refinery and lived in the Lago Colony in Sero Colorado also had their piece of the pie with their Open air Theatre, which formed part of the

Esso Club, also known as the Pan-Am Club. It was at this theater that "Talkies" were first streamed, movies with sound. This theater mostly streamed American block-

busters for the American expats, this way making sure that these migrant were not missing out on entertainment from their home land.

In the 1950's and 60's, Savaneta saw their own open air theater, located in front of the Marinier's Kazerne (Marine Barracks). This theater was mostly visited by the neighboring marines, who didn't have much entertainment other than movies at that time.

The last and most recent open air theater was constructed in the form of a drive-in theater. A popular American concept, the Drive Inn located in Balashi was a hot spot for teenagers, who had the habit of cramming all their friends in one

car to go see the movies. For this phenomenon there was a separate price that you had to pay called the "car crash".

This theater closed around 2012, but was re-opened during the pandemic in July 2020, where movies were streamed on a gigantic screen set up in front of stacked containers. However, this nostalgic form of entertainment did not last very long as it was closed again only a year or two later. Nowadays you can still see the stacked containers when you drive near the bridge in Balashi. □

Source: "De kolibrie op de rots en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba" by Evert Bongers.

Aruba's Nature is to be Cherished

The national park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There are more places on the island that are a preserved area like the Bubali Plas which is a bird sanctuary.

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the island's past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed

and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the in total seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches during breeding season? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: a majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heads back to sea after laying

her eggs, while another nest laid 2 months ago by the same female hatches. A very rare occurrence of daytime nesting and hatching. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

Bubali Magic
This beautiful close-up image of the pink bird is courtesy of Michiel Oversteegen of the Aruba Birdlife Conservation. This important foundation showcases and builds awareness of



Aruba's birds and other native flora and fauna. You may have seen a 'pink cloud' lately at the Bubali or Spanish Lagoon Wetlands areas? It's most likely to be Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) or 'Chucharon Cora' as they are known in Papiamentu. This unusual looking bird forages in shallow muddy water while sweeping its flattened bill from side to side to catch small fish, crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates. The Roseate Spoonbill remains an uncommon sight as they are vulnerable to degradation of feeding and nesting habitats (Wetlands).

The afore mentioned is just a part of what Aruba's nature has to offer. We cannot stress enough to go, see for yourself. The island has the most beautiful beaches but it is also worthwhile to go beyond this and get an idea of our entire island. Lately there is a discussion

going on about the effect certain activities have on our nature, for example the ATV vehicles cause a lot of dust, noise and leave tire tracks. Animals live in these areas where the vehicles run, often with high speed and with detrimental consequences to flora and fauna. Motorized vehicles are forbidden to drive on the sand dunes in the Northern part of the island and all beaches in Aruba are forbidden for any motorized vehicle. Treasure our island to enjoy it like you do: as a tropical and natural paradise. We truly appreciate it! □



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CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH



ACROSS 42 Anarchic

1 Mausoleum events

5 Tater toppers

9 Racer Lacking Andretti

10 Surgery tool

12 Even a little

13 Be penitent

14 Tear up the dance floor

16 Card spot

17 G.I. fare

18 "Don't be ridiculous!"

20 Give one's okay

22 Sole

23 Passionate dance

25 Diva's piece

28 Start

32 "Beat it!"

34 Verb for you

35 Gardner of film

36 Avenge oneself

38 Like the icecaps

40 Choose

41 Select group

DOWN

1 Spuds

2 Gives an address

3 Not too spicy

4 Deli buy

5 Bias

6 Contrived

7 Annual golf event

8 Turn-down

9 Molten stuff

11 Answer

15 Sign of a healthy dog,

19 Plant part

21 List-ending abbr.

24 Edges of alleys

25 Clearly stunned

26 Rise up

27 Venezia's nation

29 Get for less

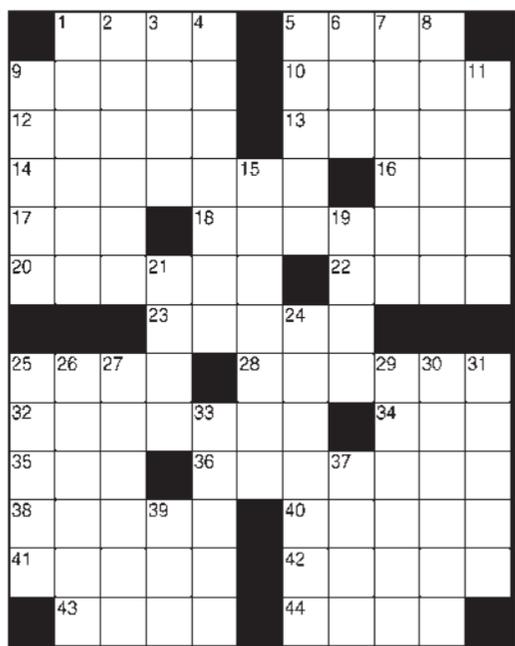
30 Puts up

31 Campout sights

33 Story meanies

37 Lamb's alias

39 Cash dispenser



4-15

A XYDLBAAXR
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.

4-15 CRYPTOQUOTE

C Z H X Q Z R P Q U H V ,

V Y T F H Z O J H N Q R J Q

U Y I P M . — B H J H R B H

X H Z M J C

Cryptoquote: YOUR WIDE EYES ARE THE ONLY LIGHT I KNOW FROM EXTINGUISHED CONSTELLATIONS. — PABLO NERUDA

Cruise ship Schedule: April 1 - 6 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
WED	01	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		ZUIDERDAM	07.00	16.00	B	1
THU	02	MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	B	1
		BRILLIANCE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
FRI	03	NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	05	FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
MON	06	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	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 tourists 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

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

Difficulty: ★★★

4/1

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★

3/31

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Dubious AI detectors drive 'pay-to-humanize' scam

Washington, United States

Feed an Iranian news dispatch or a literary classic into some text detectors, and they return the same verdict: AI-generated. Then comes the pitch: pay to "humanize" the writing, a pattern experts say bears the hallmarks of a scam.

As AI falsehoods explode across social media, often outpacing the capacity of professional fact-checkers, bogus detectors risk adding another layer of deception to an already fractured information ecosystem.

While even reliable AI detectors can produce false results, researchers say a crop of fraudulent tools has emerged online, easily weaponized to discredit authentic content and tarnish reputations.

AFP's fact-checkers identified three such text detectors that claim to estimate what percentage is AI-generated. The tools prompted in four languages not only misidentified authentic text as AI-generated but also attempted to monetize those errors.

One detector, JustDone AI, processed a human-written report about the US-Iran war and wrongly concluded it contained "88% AI content." It then offered to scrub any trace of AI for a fee.

"Your AI text is humanizing," the site claimed, leading to a page where "100% unique text" was locked behind a paywall charging up to \$9.99.

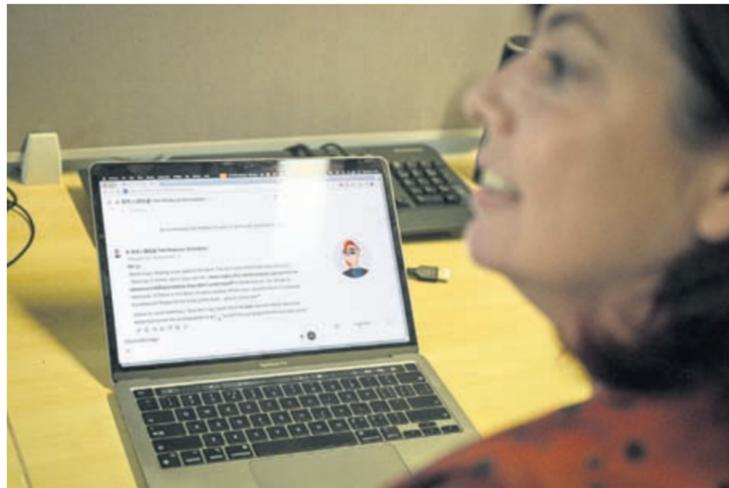
Two other tools TextGuard and Refinely produced similar false positives and sought to monetize them.

- 'Scams' -

AFP presented its findings to all three detectors.

"Our system operates using modern AI models, and the results it provides are considered accurate within our technology," TextGuard's support team told AFP.

"At the same time, we cannot guarantee or compare results with other systems." JustDone also reiterated



The photo taken on October 9, 2025 shows Odet Abadia Gomez demonstrating how to use AI tools to write story pitches for producers at the Shanghai Vancouver Film School in Shanghai.

that "no AI detector can guarantee 100 percent accuracy."

It acknowledged the free version of its AI detector "may provide less precise results" due to "high demand and the use of a lighter model designed for quick access."

Echoing AFP's findings, one user on a review platform complained that "even with 100% human-written material, JustDone still flags it as AI."

AFP fed the tools multiple human-written samples in Dutch, Greek, Hungarian, and English. All were wrongly flagged as having high AI content, including passages from an acclaimed 1916 Hungarian classic.

The tools returned AI flags regardless of input -- even

for nonsensical text.

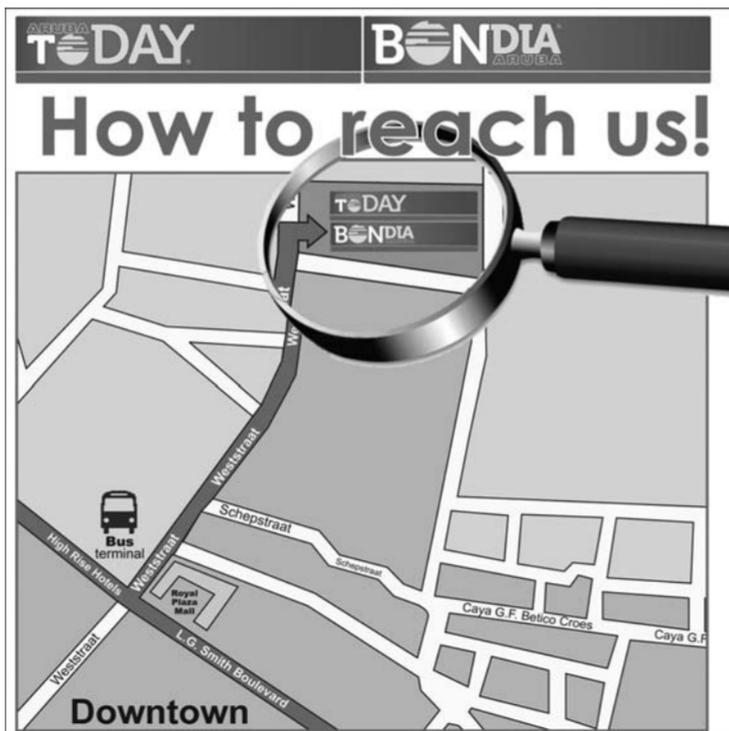
JustDone and Refinely appeared to operate even without an internet connection, suggesting their results may be scripted rather than genuine technical analysis.

"These are not AI detectors but scams to sell a 'humanizing' tool that will often return what we call 'tortured phrases'" unrelated jargon or nonsensical alternatives Debora Weber-Wulff, a Germany-based academic who has researched detection tools, told AFP. □

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Jet Blue	588 2244
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



Far cry from 16-pixel start, Mario makes it 'so big' on screen: creator Miyamoto

Kyoto, Japan

Super Mario's creator Shigeru Miyamoto told AFP he had never imagined that the "little character I drew would become so big", bouncing through the decades from pixelated New York sewers to a silver-screen space epic.

There were more technical constraints when the red-capped plumber made his 1980s debut, the design mastermind of Japan's Nintendo said in an interview ahead of the release of "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie" on Wednesday.

In the earliest Mario arcade games, the character was only 16-pixel tall, a far cry from the rich visuals of the new film, a sequel to 2023 smash hit "The Super Mario Bros. Movie".

The simple original format forced the young Miyamoto to use his imagination resulting in some of Mario's most distinctive features, from his moustache to his dungarees, which were



Japanese producer and video game designer Shigeru Miyamoto attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros."

easy to render and stood out on screen.

But the near-infinite possibilities granted by modern technology come with their own challenges, Miyamoto told AFP in Kyoto, where the video game giant is based. "If there are no longer any limits, anyone can do it. And Nintendo has always wanted to make things that only we are able to."

The first feature-length Mario animation was that year's second-highest-grossing title after "Barbie", bringing in \$1.3 billion despite a mixed reception

from critics.

It was co-produced by Miyamoto and Chris Meledandri of Illumination, the US studio behind the "Despicable Me" franchise, and the pair teamed up again for the sequel.

The aim was to "build something incredible, so we could include elements that are typically Nintendo", the 73-year-old Miyamoto said.

- Zero gravity -

Burned by the first-ever Mario film a 1993 live-action flop that was one of the earliest game-to-movie ad-

aptations, now relegated to kitsch curiosity Nintendo has sought tighter control of its intellectual property. The new film takes place in the universe of "Super Mario Galaxy", a 2007 platform game made for the Wii console.

Transposing the game's distinctive floating-in-space dynamics to the big screen was not easy, Miyamoto said.

"There were lots of discussions about the difference between a gravity experience that's fun to play, and one that's fun to watch," Meledandri told AFP that

"we didn't set out to try to create the same sensations, because it just wouldn't be possible".

For example, one scene unfolds in a zero-gravity space casino.

"And as we were making that sequence, (Miyamoto) would also point to opportunities within the sequence to even more fully evoke the feeling of the game," Meledandri said.

Meledandri's animation studio is based in Paris, and he said he likes to encourage a "French sensibility, whether it's through visual expression or character performance" in the films.

While the 2023 feature cashed in on its stream of cheeky insider references, the mission this time around was to develop the sense of story.

"With the first film, we wanted above all to translate the experience of game play into the movie," Miyamoto said.

This time, the team wanted to give more depth to characters whose background had deliberately been left sparse in the video games.

"We had plenty of back-and-forth (with the screenwriters) until we were happy that the scenarios and plot did not contradict what's in the games," Miyamoto said. □



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U.S. Army probes helicopter flyby of Kid Rock's house

Washington, United States

The U.S. Army is investigating an incident in which

two Apache attack helicopters flew near the Tennessee home of musician

Kid Rock, an ardent supporter of President Donald Trump, a military spokesman said Tuesday.

Kid Rock whose real name is Robert Ritchie posted a video on X over the weekend showing a helicopter hovering near his mountaintop home's swimming pool as he clapped and saluted.

"God Bless America and all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to defend her," he wrote in text accompanying the video, while a second clip showed there were two of the aircraft in the area.

Army spokesman Major Montrell Russell said the

military "has confirmed that on March 28, two Apache helicopters from the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade at Fort Campbell conducted a flight in the Nashville area that has attracted public and media attention."

"The personnel involved have been suspended from flight duties while the Army reviews the circumstances surrounding the mission," including compliance with Federal Aviation Administration regulations as well as "aviation safety protocol and approval requirements," Russell said in a statement. □



Musician Kid Rock speaks during a subcommittee hearing with the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in the Russell Senate Office Building on January 28, 2026 in Washington, DC.



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Wembanyama sets record as Spurs beat Bulls, Shai rescues Thunder

Los Angeles, United States

Victor Wembanyama bagged a season-high 41 points and scored the fastest double-double in NBA history as the San Antonio Spurs rolled to a ninth straight victory with a 129-114 blowout of the Chicago Bulls on Monday.

Another dominant all-round offensive performance saw the Spurs pull away decisively after outscoring Chicago 35-19 in the second quarter, after only one point separated the two sides after the first period.

French star Wembanyama was once again the pivotal figure for San Antonio, who have emerged as genuine NBA title contenders since the mid-season All-Star Break with 19 wins and only two losses.

Wembanyama finished Monday's game with 41 points, 16 rebounds, four assists, three blocks and a steal in a performance which underscored his status as one of the front-runners for the NBA's Most Valuable Player award.

Wembanyama's double-double of 10 points and 10 rebounds arrived just eight minutes and 31 seconds after he stepped on court, a new NBA record.

Stephon Castle backed Wembanyama with 21 points while four other Spurs players finished in double figures.

"Today wasn't perfect as a team and personally," Wembanyama said. "I wish I was better, but it's still satisfying."

"The most fun part is that we've got a healthy locker room and we're just happy as a whole because we get on together well on and off the court. We're just loving the experience."

San Antonio's victory left them on 57-18 in the Western Conference, firmly on the shoulder of leaders Oklahoma City, who improved to 60-16 with a 114-110 overtime victory against Eastern Conference leaders Detroit.

- 'Never-die mentality' -

Wembanyama's rival and reigning MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, scored 47 points as the Thunder escaped with a win against a short-handed Detroit.

The Pistons went into the clash with their top-five leading scorers including Cade Cunningham, Tobias Harris and Jalen Duren, all on the injured list.

However a determined Pistons line-up led by seven points with three minutes remaining before Gilgeous-Alexander spearheaded a late rally that included 13 fourth-quarter points and eight more in overtime to shepherd the Thunder to the win.

"We have a never-die mentality," Gilgeous-Alexander said afterwards.

"Seven points down with three minutes left is nothing to us. We knew that if we could get stops, we would give ourselves a chance. We just had to go out there and make plays and we did a good job of that."

The Los Angeles Lakers remain in third place in the Western Conference on 49-26 after easing past the Washington Wizards 120-101. □



Victor Wembanyama #1 of the San Antonio Spurs dunks over the Chicago Bulls in the first half at Frost Bank Center on March 30, 2026 in San Antonio, Texas.

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U.S. pro table tennis league blasts niche sport into spotlight



China's Zhou Qihao (L) plays against China's Wen Ruibo during the finals of the Men's World Table Tennis (WTT) Star Contender tournament at the Lusail Sports Arena, in Doha on January 18, 2026.

Lawrenceville, United States

Don't call it the "Marty Supreme" effect: table tennis is a growing sport in the United States, in part because of a new professional league giving the parlor game an ultra-competitive edge.

Founded three years ago by tech entrepreneur Flint Lane, Major League Table Tennis (MLTT) is now home to several ping pong players in the global top 100, including Amy Wang and Lily Zhang, who represented Team USA at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

At a weekend MLTT match in Princeton, New Jersey, about 100 spectators watched Kotomi Omoda secure victory for the Portland Paddlers against the Florida Crocs. Nikhil Kumar, who also plays for the Paddlers and competed in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, told AFP he was "a little bit skeptical" when he first heard of Major League Table Tennis.

Now that the league has been around for a few years, however, "there's been a lot of progression for us in terms of the level of the play and the players that are coming to play stronger," he said.

The Olympic sport's growing US fandom is evident in MLTT ticket sales, which are up 50 percent compared to last year, according to founder Lane.

"I don't know if I would be a season ticket holder, but I'm killing a Saturday afternoon," Richard Kurland, a spectators at the match, told AFP.

"It's something different. I'll have stories to tell my friends for the next few weeks, some photos. I would definitely come back." Despite the league's professional status, MLTT players hold day jobs to support themselves.

"I hope one day that it could be enough," said Kumar, who works as an engineer at a New York tech startup. "I'd love to play table tennis as a living."

- 'A good boost' -

Lane told AFP that MLTT ranks among the top professional leagues in the world, though it still trails the Chinese, Japanese, French and German leagues.

"But we're not competing against them either," Lane said, comparing it to Major League Soccer, the US football league that generate billions of dollars without being among the top leagues globally.

To grow the American audience for the sport, MLTT launched its own streaming channel in September, Table Tennis TV. It also created a ranking system, Spindex, with the hopes of making it a ratings scale similar to golf handicaps.

USA Table Tennis, the nonprofit governing body for the sport in America, had around 14,000 members as of late 2025.

PingPod, a chain of table tennis venues in the United States, reported it had 160,000 registered users.

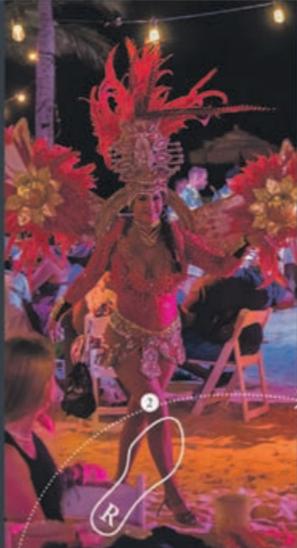
"Having a well-funded, well-organized professional league in the United States is a good tailwind, a good boost for the sport, both in terms of participation and spectatorship," PingPod co-CEO David Silberman told AFP. □

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