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Tight housing market boosts New York office conversions

New York, United States
New York real estate firms are increasingly converting office buildings into apartment complexes as an antidote to the city's housing crunch, tapping into tax incentives also designed to increase the supply of affordable homes. Water Street in lower Manhattan has been a popular area for the makeovers, earning it the nickname "Conversion Alley," with buildings offering a mix of luxury and affordably-priced apartments to qualify for municipal abatements.

"My belief is just about any building could be converted as residential," Joey Chilelli, partner at real estate developer Vanbarton Group, told AFP during a tour of an office highrise at



A worker paints at 77 Water Street, a former office building being transformed into luxury rental apartments in the Financial District of New York, on April 10, 2026.

77 Water Street the firm is converting into a residential building. The real estate retooling has reached celebrated structures such as the Flatiron Building near Madison Square Park, which is cur-

rently being converted. Real estate firms view the projects as less risky and quicker to implement than many new builds.

The movement comes as rental costs continue to

drift higher. In April, the median rent of a Manhattan apartment topped \$5,000 for the first time as the vacancy rate slipped to a six-year low of 1.55 percent. By contrast, commercial real estate vacancies stood at 14.6 percent in the first quarter, reflecting a lingering impact from the pandemic period when remote working depleted downtown business districts.

Under the current policy, the city abates 90 percent of property taxes on conversions that set aside at least 25 percent of units as affordable housing. The affordable apartments may rent for around one-quarter of market rates, but otherwise look identical. Such abatement policies have drawn interest from developers, along with a measure that expands the pool of qualifying buildings to those built before 1990 instead of 1961.

- Amenities -

In Manhattan, more than 44 commercial buildings have been converted into residential ones between 2020 and 2024, resulting in nearly 18,000 new apartments.

Real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield expects 31 conversions in 2026 compared with 18 in 2025 and nine in 2024.

In December 2022, former mayor Eric Adams set a target of adding 500,000 new apartments through 2030, while his successor Zohran Mamdani in April unveiled plans for another 200,000 new affordable homes.

Vanbarton began converting buildings in 2013 and currently manages more than 5,000 apartments.

Construction at 77 Water Street is in full swing, with the first residential occupants arriving in October and completion slated for mid-2027.

The 30-floor highrise will contain 650 apartments, some with a view of the Statue of Liberty.

Chilelli said the firm is anticipating hundreds of thousands of applications for suites designated for affordable housing; the win-

ners will be determined by lottery.

At Pearl House, a 1972 building at 160 Water Street, the conversion has resulted in nearly 600 new apartments since December 2023.

"We are very very happy here," said renter Charles Wisell.

Wisell, an attorney, originally rented a one-bedroom apartment but has gone for a bigger space to accommodate his wife and son, who now prefer their new abode to their home outside the city.

Wisell raved about the building's amenities, which include a bowling alley, a sports suite featuring simulated golf, a spa with a jacuzzi, a "paw salon" for pets and a "game den" with backgammon, board games and a pool table.

"The location is terrific, you're right in the middle of everything," Wisell said. "I'm walking distance to my office."

- Some affordable units -

At 77 Water, Vanbarton has implemented suggestions from renters, including a room with light therapy in the spa.

At other converted Manhattan buildings, developers have installed basketball courts, Pilates studios and both indoor and outdoor pools.

Such luxury services may be included in the rent or are available to residents for a monthly fee of \$100-150.

Monthly rents at Pearl House start at \$3,995 for a studio and \$6,475 for a one-bedroom. Rents for the affordable units begin at \$932 for a studio to \$3,286 for a three-bedroom.

In Manhattan, the average price in April for a one-bedroom was \$5,228.

The biggest conversion so far is the SoMA, which was built in 1969 and once occupied by JPMorgan Chase and the New York Daily News. It has 1,320 apartments.

But that will be overtaken in 2027 by the former Pfizer building in midtown, which will have around 1,600 apartments. □

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After three sessions, SpaceX already among world's most valuable companies

San Francisco, United States

SpaceX shares surged again Tuesday, lifting Elon Musk's rocket company into the world's top five in market value for most of the session as a record-breaking IPO gives way to a torrid buying frenzy.

Shares of SpaceX, formally Space Exploration Technologies Corp., finished up nearly five percent at \$201.80, giving it a market value of \$2.64 trillion.

That placed the company a hair below Amazon's \$2.65 trillion at the end of Tuesday's session after leading the online shopping platform most of the day. SpaceX also briefly eclipsed Microsoft, which is fourth on the list.

The latest rise came as SpaceX announced it will acquire artificial intelligence coding startup Cursor for \$60 billion, a deal designed to further cement the Texas-based company near the nexus of the AI boom.

The SpaceX fever partly stems from enthusiasm over its growth potential, including AI. But at least as important are dynamics that have nothing to do with the company's operations or profit outlook.

"There is no valuation support for this market cap as it's all retail excitement meeting a very small float and no institutional sellers," said Eric Clark, a portfolio manager and chief investment officer at Accuvest Global Advisors.

"It's just a momentum trade and retail excitement plus active growth managers wanting exposure," Clark said in an email that described SpaceX's growth potential as a "five-to-10-year game."

Shares of SpaceX have soared more than a third in three sessions since last week's IPO, which raised a record-breaking \$85.7 billion.

"There's a bit of a mania involving AI and anything that could be one of the beneficiaries of the spending on AI," said Steve Sosnick of Interactive Brokers.



SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk speaks via video at the Nasdaq Marketsite in Times Square during the launch of the SpaceX initial public offering (IPO) on the Nasdaq on June 12, 2026, in New York City.

Co-founded by Musk in 2002, the rocket startup has expanded into a major satellite operator and has also folded in Musk's artificial intelligence company xAI, which includes social media platform X.

- Cursor -

SpaceX's acquisition of Cursor marks its latest big AI investment. Founded in 2022, San Francisco-based Cursor specializes in AI for software development, particularly for business uses.

An acquisition had looked possible after the two companies had announced a partnership in April that included a clause for Cursor to be potentially bought by SpaceX for \$60 billion. Cursor's emergence has coincided with the growth of "vibe coding," whereby online users build applications with AI-generated code. At its last funding round in November, Cursor was valued at \$29 billion. Tuesday's deal more than doubles that sum.

In a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, SpaceX said the all-stock deal was expected to close in the third quarter and that Cursor would become a wholly owned subsidiary.

In May, SpaceX announced plans to invest

\$55 billion to build a "Terafab" semiconductor factory in Texas, producing chips for AI and robotics.

Also last month, AI startup Anthropic announced a partnership with SpaceX under which it would pay for use of the compute capacity at SpaceX's Colossus 1 data center in Tennessee.

- Bubble? -

These ventures have cemented investor belief that SpaceX resides at the nexus of key AI developments. Investor consensus also continues to propel Musk, already the world's wealthiest person, whose role as Tesla CEO also brings exposure to new developments in autonomous driving and robotics. □

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Trump ballroom cost soars to \$600 million, half from taxpayers: report

Washington, United States

U.S. President Donald Trump's ballroom project at the White House will cost as much as \$600 million, with more than half coming from taxpayers, The Washington Post reported Tuesday.

Trump had previously estimated the cost at \$400 million and repeatedly insisted that private donors -- including himself -- would foot the bill for the new building, a centerpiece of his drive to put his stamp on the U.S. capital.

The newspaper cited a copy of a detailed cost estimate prepared for the Trump administration by Clark Construction, the contractor hired to build the ballroom.

The project began last year when Trump, with little warning and without consulting Congress, tore down the entire historic East Wing of the White House.

The White House insisted in a statement to AFP Tuesday that Trump and the donors were bearing most of the cost.

"President Trump and generous American patriots are funding the ballroom to the tune of approximately \$400 million, which will be a secure and appropriate venue for Presidents for genera-



A view of the construction site of U.S. President Donald Trump's proposed ballroom as he speaks to the press at the White House in Washington, DC, on May 19, 2026.

tions to come," spokesman Davis Ingle said.

An alleged plot to attack the White House during a cage fight attended by Trump and other top officials at the weekend "proves exactly why the East Wing Modernization Project is severely needed for large scale events," he said.

Ingle added that the ballroom project was "inextricably tied" to presidential security and other security

assets, which Trump says include drone ports on the roof and a hospital in the basement.

In late March, Trump reiterated to reporters that the project would cost up to \$400 million, calling it "taxpayer free."

However, a summary prepared for the White House earlier that month already estimated the total cost at \$600 million, with only \$293 million coming from "private sources," the Post said.

And when Trump made

those comments in March, the administration had already approved more than a dozen payments of public funds to Clark Construction totaling tens of millions of dollars, the Post said, citing a log of the contractor's invoices which it obtained. When Trump first floated the idea of the ballroom he said it would cost \$200 million.

Democratic opponents of the president have pointed to the gilded ballroom and

other costly renovation projects around the U.S. capital as evidence that the billionaire leader is out of touch with everyday Americans.

Republicans fear that continued concerns among voters about the cost of living -- especially soaring fuel costs due to the Iran war -- could spell disaster in the November midterm elections.

"This is a gift to the United States of America," Trump said last month as he took reporters on a tour of the building site, shouting over the noise of hammers and buzzsaws.

"This is all my money and donors' money. This is tax free," Trump said.

The builder was quoted by the Washington Post as saying details of the project are confidential.

The project has prompted a legal battle, with a judge ruling in March that work above ground needed to halt.

The ruling was put on hold as an appeals court considers the case.

Trump's administration has also argued that the need for the ballroom became more urgent after a man with a gun tried to break into a gala press dinner he was attending in April. □

Swamp Thing: Algae mess with Trump's pool project



A hose used to remove algae is seen inside the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool following the completion of recent renovations in Washington, DC, on June 16, 2026.

Washington, United States

One of President Donald Trump's pet beauty projects for Washington was supposed to make the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool look blue, like part of the U.S. flag. Enter Mother Nature. Algae have proliferated in the water, turning it a swampy green.

"Can you see it in my photos? Oh well, I'll just use a filter to hide the algae," said Farrah Lu, a 43-year-old tourist from China. The invasion comes just days after the completion of the pool repainting project, part of Trump's drive to put his stamp on Washington with things like a ballroom at the White House and a huge

arch by the Potomac River. Under Trump's orders the long, rectangular pool, designed to capture reflections of the Washington Monument on the National Mall, was drained and painted in what he calls "American flag blue."

This is hallowed Washington real estate: it was from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famed "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963 to several hundred thousand people gathered below around the pool.

Alas, hot weather this past weekend apparently caused an algae bloom in the pool.

"When I thought reflecting pool, I would see some reflection of the monument on the pool. That's what the name

says, so that didn't meet my expectation," said Ravi Desai, visiting from Australia. "But overall I still find it very beautiful. And we're just tourists here."

The National Park Service said it is using pumps to treat the water with what it called nanobubble ozone technology to kill the algae, along with hydrogen peroxide, which it said is milder than chlorine.

The pool project has faced scrutiny over its multimillion dollar cost and the process by which the contract was awarded -- a no-competition deal favoring a company that had already done work for Trump at one of his golf clubs.

Nicole Leguillow, a 66-year-old resident of neighboring Virginia, said she was not disappointed by the pool,

saying algae will be algae. But she complained the funds spent on this Trump endeavor were "definitely not worth it." "That money could have been spent much more wisely on things people in this country need," Leguillow said. □

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Gaza tailor turns waste fabrics into dresses for girls

Khan Yunis, Palestinian Territories

A young Gazan girl twirls across the floor of a dressmaker's shop, her white dress billowing around her as a shy smile spreads across her face.

Trimmed with delicate tulle and topped with a soft veil, the dress looks fit for a celebration.

Few would guess that parts of it are from discarded fabric or an old gown salvaged from the ruins of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The dress is the work of 24-year-old tailor Amir al-Rantisi, who has made it his mission to provide elegant dresses for special occasions for young girls and women in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis area.

He does this by recycling used fabrics and old dresses.

"When I go to Gaza (City) to get the fabric, I take it from a place that's been destroyed, from old fabric that's available, which was probably damaged by shrapnel or burnt," Amir told AFP.

"I select pieces from it, and I make dresses from those pieces. I also take old dresses and recycle them."

Outside the shop, his colourful creations in satin, organza and tulle hang from



A Palestinian girl tries on a dress to wear at a wedding celebration at a dressmaker's makeshift workshop where dresses, evening and wedding gowns are created despite limited resources, and old dresses are recycled, in the city of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on June 13, 2026.

makeshift mannequins fashioned from iron poles vivid splashes of colour against a backdrop of grey concrete and blackened buildings.

Several elegant long gowns are displayed on cement mannequins outside the shop, while colourful frocks sway gently from a clothesline stretched across the storefront, allowing customers to inspect the garments with ease.

Inside the workshop, neat rows of ready-to-wear dresses line the walls. Nearby, a customer dressed in a

black abaya carefully examines a small dress, considering its intricate details.

- Joy despite hardship -

The workshop itself hums with activity. On a table beside a collapsed wall, piles of old dresses sit waiting to be given new life as festive creations.

His mother, Nisreen al-Rantisi, works alongside him in the workshop, while another assistant tailor attentively takes the measurements of a young girl.

As Nisreen sorts through the colourful fabrics, selecting

the perfect materials for the next creation, the assistant tailor deftly guides his scissors through a length of cloth, skillfully shaping it into what will soon become a beautifully crafted dress.

Keeping the business running, however, requires constant improvisation.

"We suffer greatly from power outages," said mother Nisreen al-Rantisi.

"Sometimes, we have orders or work that we can't complete."

Amir has found a way to tackle that too.

He has rigged an old bicy-

cle pedal to his sewing machine, a makeshift solution to keep working through the frequent power cuts that plague the devastated Gaza Strip.

But it is difficult and inconvenient, said his mother.

"Sewing is done manually; one person has to sew while the other has to do the rest," she said.

Meanwhile, the cost of supplies has soared.

With imports into Gaza severely restricted and shortages widespread, even basic materials have become difficult to obtain.

"This spool of black thread is no longer available, and even if it's available, it used to cost seven shekels (\$2.40), but now it's 50," said Amir.

Israel controls all entry points into the territory, and the number of trucks carrying foreign aid and private sector goods remains far too low to ease war-inflated prices or shortages, according to NGOs on the ground.

Yet, as the little girl spins once more in her white dress, her eyes wide with joy, Amir's work offers a rare reminder of how residents of Gaza are finding ways to create and celebrate despite the hardships of war. □

'Excellent' water at most European beaches, study says

Copenhagen, Denmark

The vast majority of Europe's beaches offer "excellent" water quality for swimming, the EU environment agency said on Tuesday ahead of the summer season, with coastal nations and inland Austria topping the list.

"This summer we can all reap the benefits of solid implementation of EU bathing water rules, which have made a vast majority of our bathing waters clean enough to swim in," the director of the European Environment Agency (EEA) Leena Yla-Mononen said in a report published Tuesday.

More than 85 percent of bathing sites across the

European Union had "excellent" water quality, with Cyprus, Bulgaria, Greece, Austria and Croatia standing out with at least 95 percent of their sites classified as "excellent".

Water quality can be classified as "excellent", "good", "sufficient" or "poor", depending on the level of detected faecal contamination.

Polluted waters can, if ingested, cause illness, including gastrointestinal problems and diarrhoea. Water quality tends to be better in coastal areas rather than inland, thanks to their capacity for self-purification.

The EEA report was based on data from more than

22,000 bathing sites in the 27 EU member states in 2025, as well as non-EU countries Albania and Switzerland.

Only 1.5 percent of bathing sites studied in the report had "poor" water quality.

A total of 89 percent of coastal areas were classified as "excellent", compared to 78 percent of rivers and lakes.

Lakes, rivers and streams are more sensitive to short-term pollution caused by heavy rains and summer droughts.

At the bottom of the table was Albania, where 23.5 percent of its sites were graded as "poor".

If tests show that the water quality at a bathing spot



Beachgoers rest under parasols at a beach with a view of the Mediterranean Sea in the background in Portiragnes-Plage on July 1, 2025, amid a heatwave in western Europe.

is "poor" for five consecutive years, authorities are required to prohibit swimming at the site.

That was the case for 57 sites from 2020 to 2024: 34 in Italy, 16 in France, three

in Spain, two in Sweden and one each in Estonia and Portugal.

Of these, only four had improved to at least "sufficient" quality by 2025. □

Toxic 'time bomb' threatens Mekong river basin

TChiang Saen, Thailand

Thai fisherman Somdet Singthong steered his metal skiff across the brown waters of the Mekong river, resigned to the pollution that has put his health and lifelong source of livelihood at risk.

Doctors have found elevated levels of toxic arsenic in his fingernails and urine, with the heavy metal also detected in the river which millions of people in South-east Asia depend on.

Testing suggests the contamination, which experts and campaigners trace back to illegal mining in Myanmar, is now spreading downstream.

Locals used to buy their fish directly from Somdet on a pier near Chiang Saen in northern Thailand, on the border with Myanmar and Laos.

But since authorities detected arsenic and other heavy metals in several Mekong tributaries last year, his clientele has shrunk, leaving his carp and catfish rotting. "The impact has been huge," the 69-year-old fisherman told AFP.

"I've never been afraid, but other villagers are worried. They don't eat fish; some won't touch it at all." Thailand's pollution control department said in April it had found arsenic concentrations of up to 296 milli-



This photo taken on June 5, 2026 shows Wan Wiriya (L), assistant professor from Chiang Mai University, and his colleague collecting a sediment sample from the Kok River near the northern Thai city of Chiang Rai.

grams per kilogram of sediment near Chiang Saen more than nine times the level considered dangerous for aquatic life.

That was the first time the contamination was detected in the Mekong river itself, and not only its tributaries. "When it's contaminated with heavy metals and other kinds of toxins, they flow all the way to the Mekong delta," threatening an important rice-growing region in Vietnam, said Pianporn Deetes of the Rivers and Rights campaign group.

"The fish are contaminated already," she added.

- 'The water is dead' -

Researchers and environmental activists generally attribute the pollution to illegal mines in neighbouring Myanmar, whose long-running civil war enables unregulated exploitation of natural resources, including rare earth elements used in smartphones, wind turbines, electric vehicles and more.

"Conflict, fragmented governance, and global markets converge to promote and sustain extraction at the expense of environmental integrity and human

security," the Washington-based Stimson Center think tank said in a report in May. Researchers from Thailand's Chiang Mai University found arsenic levels 10 times higher than normal in sediment from the Kok river, a Mekong tributary.

Assistant professor Wan Wiriya described it as a "time bomb", raising long-term risks of cancer and neurological disorders particularly among vulnerable populations.

Buddhist monks in saffron robes led a protest march this month along the contaminated waterway, with

participants holding signs reading "Rivers are the veins of our lives".

"We don't see children playing in the water anymore. We don't see birds. We don't see butterflies," said Sansoen Duangdee, a 69-year-old artist.

"The water is dead. And if the water is dead, what about the people?"

- 'Invisible' danger -

Activist Deetes, one of the organisers of the march, called for "diplomatic dialogue" between Thailand and its neighbours, along with China -- the main importer of rare earth elements from Myanmar and Laos.

She denounced "gangsters" who "do what they want and without responsibility", as well as political apathy in the face of largely "invisible" danger.

The inter-governmental Mekong River Commission says it is strengthening regional monitoring and cooperation in the wake of the latest findings, including on heavy metals -- but neither Myanmar nor China are members.

Despite the concerns, Chiang Saen fish vendor Buakhee Srisawat said some customers "are starting to return".

The merchandise in her plastic coolers was "edible", she said. □

Stolen felines reunited with owners after Vietnam cat-meat bust

Hanoi, Vietnam

More than 40 abducted cats have been reunited with owners after Vietnam police busted a feline theft ring and rescued 400 pets destined to be slaughtered for food, an animal rights group said Tuesday.

Nine people were arrested last week in connection with the "criminal group specializing in stealing and collecting cats", according to the official newspaper of the Ho Chi Minh City police.

Authorities clawed back more than 400 live cats and 80 dead ones preserved on ice, the newspaper said. They seized an-

other 21 cats from a separate facility.

Consumption of dogs and

cats is legal in Vietnam, where many restaurants openly advertise the meat

however vendors are required to obtain certificates showing the origin of the animals.

Police said they swooped on the gang after responding to rampant pet thefts in Ho Chi Minh City, and the suspects confessed to luring and trapping the cats over three years across southern Vietnam.

At least 40 of the pinched pets have been reunited with their owners, Humane World for Animals said in a Tuesday statement, praising police for "decisive action that has saved the lives of so many animals". However, it said around


100 of the rescued cats "later perished due to what they have endured". "While efforts are continuing to reunite stolen cats with their families, our main concern is for the cats who remain at the police station as evidence during the prosecution," Humane World for Animal's Karanvir Kukreja said, according to the statement.

He said the organization had donated food and was arranging the delivery of fans to keep the pets from overheating.

Ho Chi Minh City police did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment. □



This handout picture taken on June 15, 2026 and released on June 16 by Humane World for Animals Vietnam shows a staff member looking at cats seized by police at a facility in Ho Chi Minh City.



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.

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 deep-

er, there is no sand present they were swept away with the current!

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).

How Aruban beaches came to be!

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

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Unique fauna of Aruba



For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

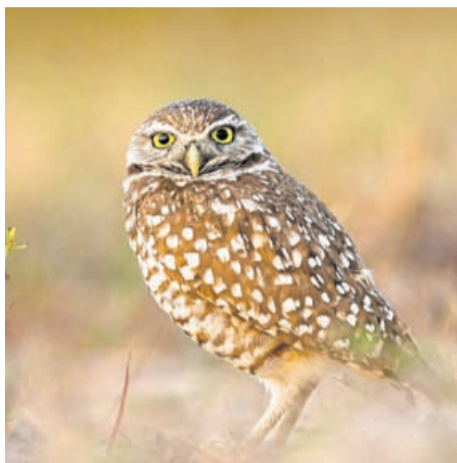
Cascabel (rattlesnake, *Crotalus durissus unicolor*)

According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of



the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, *Athene cunicularia arubensis*)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color.

The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.



Prikichi (parakeet, *Aratinga pertinax*)

The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Coneu (cottontail rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis*)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Coneu, has spread all over the island and has become part of our eco-



system. The very adaptable Coneu can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Coneu has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 liters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Coneu is an endangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Coneu is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Coneu can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits. These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. □

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Food culture in Aruba

(Oranjestad) – Like many other cultures, an important aspect of the Aruban cultural identity is our connection to food and food traditions. The local food traditions consist of a melting pot of different cultural and religious eating habits and dishes.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

The routine of breakfast, lunch and dinner on the island is one that does not completely follow a European or American routine, despite the major influences from these parts of the world on our culture and way of living. When it comes to the three important meals of the day, most of the Aruban population follows a Latin-American influenced routine.

Breakfast

Breakfast in Aruba is quite simple: a cup of coffee or tea, some bread, and sometimes an egg. Sometimes, due to the need of a quick "to-go" breakfast, you may also find many snack trucks and cafes that sell sandwiches, pastechis

(meat pie), arepas and empanadas early in the morning.

Main Meal

The main meal is typically eaten in most households around noon or in the afternoon. This can consist of meat, fish, and chicken stewed or fried with funchi (polenta) or rice with stewed vegetables. Often, fried or boiled plantain or pan bati (Aruban pancake) is included. Stews are a staple in Aruban cuisine and can be largely influenced by Latin-American and Latin/Afro-Caribbean Stews. Some of the more unique stews and soups from the ABC Islands* include sopi bonch'i rabo (red kidney bean soup with pig tail), sopi mondongo (tripe soup), carni stoba (beef stew), comcomber stoba (West Indian gherkin stew) and much more.

Dinner Time

Dinner time can vary significantly from household to household. Unlike the U.S. or in Europe, dinner time typically does not consist



of a whole (warm) meal. Instead, the evening "meal" can typically consist of something lighter, like a sandwich, though it is not uncommon to see leftovers from the main meal reheated and eaten again. Tea and coffee are often also served with the evening snack.

(Religious) Holidays

Christmas is probably the biggest global holiday, and every culture has its own spin on what their Christmas cuisine entails. In Aruba, our Christmas cuisine is again largely based on Latin-American influences, most notably from Venezuela. Ayacas and the famous pan di ham* are two cru-

cial holiday dishes, along with stuffed turkey, roasted glazed ham topped with pineapples, arroz con pollo (rice and chicken) and potato salad, among other items. Traditional drinks include ponche crema (Aruban eggnog), chuculati pinda (hot chocolate with peanut butter), and homemade fruit punch. Desserts include bolo di pistachio (pistachio cake), bolo di cashupete (cashew cake), quesillo (flan), bolo preto (fruit cake), drigidek (gingerbread), pan boyo (bread cake) and more.

Snacks and tasty delights

Besides meals and dishes that are eaten on the dinner table, Aruba also has

a food tradition that includes snacks and other tasty delights that you may easily find around the island. These include, Saco*, baskets, pastechi, kroket, deditos, Johnny cake and more. These snacks are usually sold at local snack trucks and cafes, often located on the side of the road. In the area of Tanki Leendert and Tanki flip, for example, there are many of these trucks parked on the side of the road and often open until late at night offering tasty and filling snacks post night-life fun.

*ABC Islands: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao

*Pan di ham: Derived from the Venezuelan Pan de Jamon (rolled up bread with ham, raisins and olives)

*Saco: Saco literally means "bag". Saco contains fried potatoes, plantains, chicken (and ribs) and a Johnny cake, served in a paper bag. □

Source: Voeding, voedingsgewoonten en gerechten op Aruba (Nutrition, Food Traditions and Dishes on Aruba) by Biblioteca Nacional Aruba

Watch out for Blue Crab Migration near Savaneta

(Oranjestad) — The department of nature & environment in Aruba are urging motorists to watch out for blue crabs crossing the road in Pos Chiquito to make their way to the ocean.

They added a new bright yellow road sign with "Land

Crab Crossing" to remind people to be cautious while driving on the highway on Pos Chiquito with blue crabs.

Blue crabs in Aruba are found plenty near the beach areas, especially in Pos Chiquito, because of the amount of mangroves. They are known to dig

holes deep in the beach sand in seek of humidity. The diet of blue crabs consists of decomposed trees, insects, scorpions and rest of dead animals. Nesting season for blue crabs is between June & July.

Why protect blue crabs?

Because they are of high



value for the ecology of the mangroves. Conserving the blue crabs is crucial for the preservation of

crossing blue crabs on the highway near Pos Chiquito & Santo Largo. □



Article by Etnia Nativa
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Episode CCCLVII-357

The Living Force: Hurricane Season

In this new episode, Etnia Nativa shares fascinating memory, myths about the living force that shapes the Caribbean Sea.

As the 2026 hurricane season unfolds, the familiar conversations return across the Caribbean. In Aruba, there is a sense of relative shelter—our geographic position near the South American continent often spares the island from the full force of major storms. Yet the season remains a reminder of nature's volatility, bringing instead frequent rain showers and thunderstorms that still shape daily life.

Long before meteorological forecasts and satellite tracking, early European sailors entering the Caribbean were unprepared for the region's violent weather systems. Lacking experience and understanding, many fell victim to shipwrecks in those early years of transatlantic exploration. To them, the Caribbean seas were unpredictable and often hostile, their patterns unlike anything they had known in Europe.

But for the Indigenous peoples of the region, these forces were neither new nor mysterious. They were understood as part of a living natural world—one that demanded respect and interpretation. Across Caribbean cultures, a shared word emerged to describe this immense force: huracan. Among the Caquetío ancestors of Aruba, the term horcan persists in Papiamentu today, still meaning hurricane. These communities viewed nature through an animist lens, believing wind, rain, sun, and stars carried spiritual power—forces that could nurture life or destroy it.

Hurricanes, in this worldview, were not random events but powerful beings. Some communities even depicted them as spirals or serpents in motion, capturing both the swirling winds and the calm eye at their center. This imagery reflected an intuitive understanding of the storm's structure: a rotating system that moves with purpose, sometimes slowly advancing, sometimes lingering, but always reshaping everything in its path.

Even today, hurricanes remain a defining force in Caribbean life. Beyond their dramatic winds and rains, they disrupt economies, particularly in communities dependent on tourism and agriculture. Each season brings the same uneasy awareness: this is a recurring phenomenon that cannot be prevented, only prepared for and endured.

Yet within that vulnerability lays a long tradition of resilience. Caribbean societies have always adapted—reading the sky, the behavior of animals, the stillness of the sea before a storm. Where our ancestors once sought meaning in stars and spirits, modern communities now combine science with lived experience, strengthening preparedness and rebuilding after each impact.

The very word hurricane carries this layered history. Its origins are debated—possibly Taíno, Mayan, or Ca-



quetío. In Mayan interpretation, it has been described as a fusion of wind, energy, and central force. For the Taíno and Caquetío peoples, it simply meant "storm." The term entered Spanish during early contact with Indigenous Caribbean populations and later spread into other European languages. By the late 16th century, variations such as "forcane" appeared in English texts, before evolving into the modern "hurricane," famously used by Shakespeare to describe a waterspout.

Over time, the word has also taken on metaphorical meaning. In both Spanish and English, it can describe anything overwhelming or chaotic—even a person whose energy disrupts everything around them.

In the Caribbean, however, a hurricane is never just a metaphor. It is history, memory, science, and survival—an enduring reminder of nature's power and humanity's constant need to understand, adapt, and rebuild.

This weekly cultural column, Island Insight, is presented by Etnia Nativa—a gateway to the living soul of Aruba's ancestral heritage. Constructed entirely from recycled materials and discreetly tucked away just minutes from

the high rise hotels' area, this unique cultural sanctuary offers an authentic encounter with Aruba's history, traditions, and identity.

Far removed from the bustle of conventional tourism, Etnia Nativa invites visitors to step into a world where stories, artifacts, and living traditions reveal the island's deeper cultural roots. In little more than an hour, guests often gain a richer understanding of Aruba than many do after days of sightseeing.

For travelers who value authenticity over spectacle, meaningful experiences over photo opportunities, and cultural connection over crowded attractions, Etnia Nativa offers something increasingly rare: a genuine encounter with the spirit of Aruba. Leave not only with memories and photographs, but with a deeper appreciation of the island, its people, and its enduring heritage.

Don't just visit Aruba—experience its spirit, uncover its stories, and connect with its ancestral roots. □

Reserve your mystical cultural experience by appointment only.

WhatsApp +297 592 2702
 etnianativa03@gmail.com

Know more about the Town Hall Eloy Arends building

The Monuments bureau shares some essential facts about the Town Hall known as the Eloy Arends building. The aim is to educate the community about the mansion's construction, history, and preservation.

The Doctor Eloy Arends building is located at the Wilhelminastraat 8 and was the home of the Arends family. It was the first building that the Monuments bureau, and the Government of Aruba, restored in 1997. Mr. Medardo 'Dada' Picus, was the architect of this Aruban-Caribbean building. The building sits on a 1.545 m² plot of land and is a typical Aruban mansion. It is an open home with false walls that allow the connection of the rooms with each other.

The entrance has large doors and columns supporting the floor of the upper balcony. In between the columns, there are decoration details made out of wood. The elaborately detailed embellishment is



known as gingerbread trim and the triangular decorative wall surface over the columns is called the tympanum.

The top of the doors and windows have stained glass.

The building is not built on

ground level but at approximately 1.5 meters above ground level. This mansion elevation created storage below the wooden floors and allowed proper ventilation.

The building has lots of windows which allow plenty of

light inside, as well as good ventilation.

It has dormer windows and crowns on the outside part of the roof and different decorations on the edges of the walls and facade.

This is a stunning building full

of beautiful details that resemble its beauty and transform into a history of love. Aruban tradition for "well-to-do" families dictates that before a man gets married, he has to present his future wife with a newly built and fully furnished house. It was certainly the case with this building.

Due to the engagement between Eloy Arends and Monica Lacle (daughter of Adriaan Lacle, who is mainly known for the boulevard that bears his name), the construction of the mansion began in 1922 and was completed in 1925 when the couple got married.

The Office of the Civil Registry is located in the adjacent building, whereas the mansion hall is used exclusively for civil wedding ceremonies.

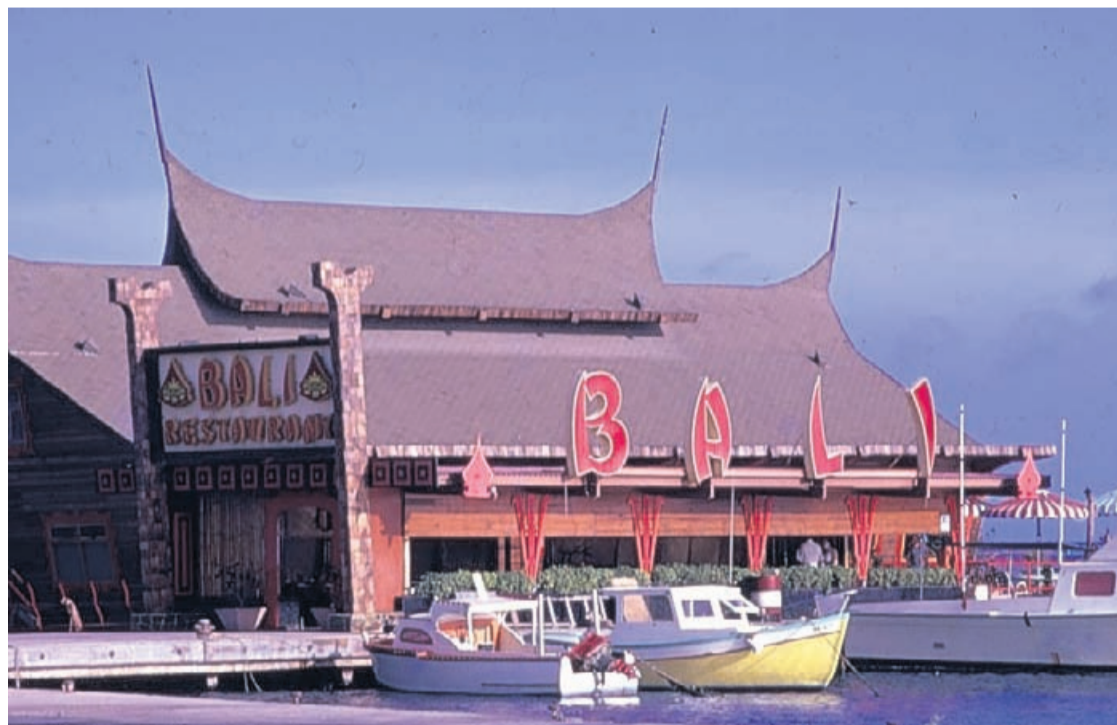
The Monuments bureau will continue to contribute and educate the community about the history of our monuments with significant value for Aruba. □

The Bali Restaurant: a touristic hot spot and lost gem on the island

(Oranjestad)—Once located by the yacht dock in front of the Parliament building, the Bali Restaurant was once both a touristic and local hot spot, and nowadays it's considered a forgotten gem on the island.

Known as "the floating restaurant", Bali first opened in 1955 by Willem "Bill" Strijland, who had experience in Javanese cuisine. At the time, the restaurant was pretty exclusive—with space to host only 25 guests. Yet, 4 years later, it was named the best restaurant in the Caribbean by the Caribbean Tourist Association.

The restaurant was probably most iconic for its Javanese-inspired exterior with its pointy, slanted roofs. However, the first version of Bali did not look like that at all but was still considered as one of the most popular restaurants on the island at the time. The restaurant saw three different owners



during its existence, during which it underwent various renovations and rebranding.

In 1964, the restaurant was taken over by Karel "Carl" Schmand. Over the years, the restaurant needed constant renovation and repair, mainly due to its vul-

nerability to leaks and the unstable pillars underneath the foundation. However, the biggest change made to the restaurant happened in the year 1970—still under the ownership of Schmand, when it got its iconic pointy roofs. The restaurant was also expanded to host a total of 85 guests. This was

"The New Bali", who had its official (re)opening in 1972.

After 1972, when Ronny Schmand took over, the restaurant saw yet another expansion; this time complete with a long bar and dance floor, where guests enjoyed live music from legendary Aruban musician and com-

poser, Toti Arends.

After 1989, the restaurant was again handed over to other owners, and since then suffered from unstable pillars underneath the foundation, resulting in various leaks and overflowing of water into the restaurant. And as most great things come to an end, so did the survival and maintenance of the Bali Restaurant. However, folks today reminisce its legacy, and it's now considered a lost monument.

Be a part of the conversation: if you or any family member of yours have a memory of the Bali restaurant, whether it be a picture or just a story, share it with us! We would love to see this legendary hot spot through the lens of our visitors! □

Source and pictures credit to: "De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba)" by Evert Bongers.

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

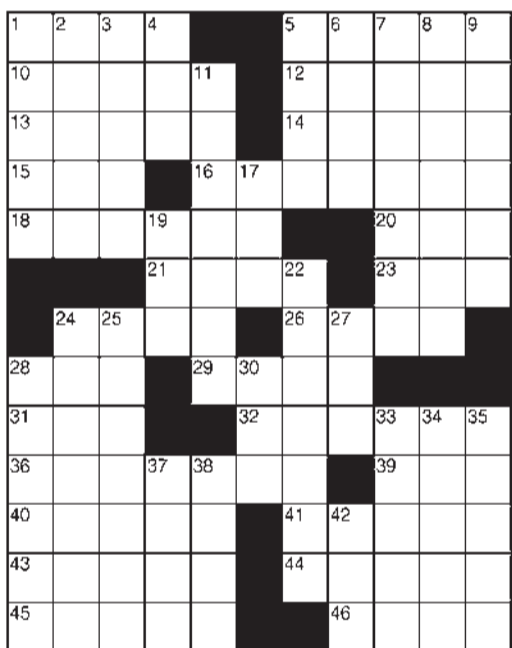


ACROSS

- 45 Throws off
- 1 Places for the pampered
- 5 Fought
- 10 Caruso, for one
- 12 Tehran native
- 13 Job reward
- 14 Nemo's creator
- 15 Be decisive
- 16 House leader
- 18 Less powerful
- 20 Lumber tool
- 21 A party to
- 23 Headed
- 24 Let off steam
- 26 Not new
- 28 The Grinch's dog
- 29 Matching
- 31 Artist Jean
- 32 Lab vessel
- 36 Gym shoe
- 39 Mendes of movies
- 40 Following
- 41 Be patient for
- 43 School paper
- 44 Jousting need

DOWN

- 1 Scarecrow fill
- 2 Treaty goal
- 3 "West Side Story" role
- 4 Urgent call
- 5 Workers' home
- 6 Open space
- 7 Fruity brew
- 8 Added onto
- 9 Like wedding cakes
- 11 Bristles at
- 17 Old hand
- 19 Family
- 22 XXII, e.g.
- 24 Wood coat
- 25 Outlay
- 27 Squid's home
- 28 Rabble
- 30 Penny prez
- 33 Reeves of "John Wick"
- 34 Kick out
- 35 Assesses
- 37 Mil. sch.
- 38 Florida feature
- 42 Simple card game



2-16

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.

2-16

CRYPTOQUOTE

ULXJK DTSZDXDX IRPI ERJKR

KPVVNI OD XPJA PVA NV

ERJKR JI JX JUSNXXJ OCD IN

OD XJCDVI. — YJKINZ RLFN

Cryptoquote: LET THE WAVES CARRY YOU WHERE THE LIGHT CAN NOT. — MOHIT KAUSHIK

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.

Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

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 occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

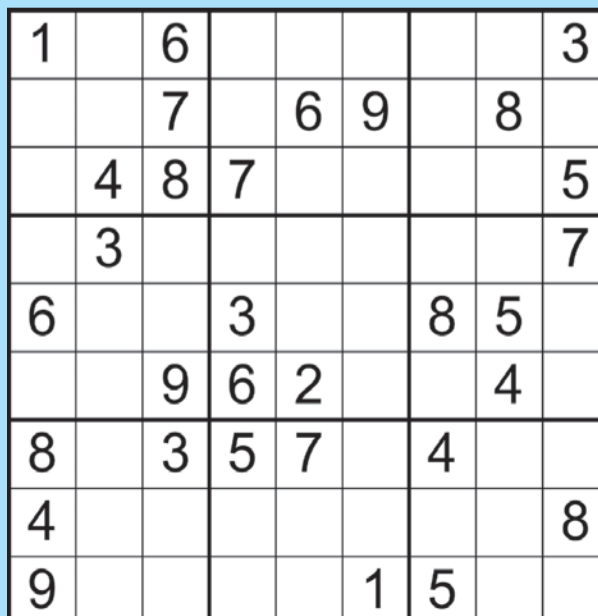
JUNE CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE

02 TUE	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: B
	CARNIVAL MAGIC Arrival: 9:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: C
09 TUE	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B
	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
	CARNIVAL MARDI GRAS Arrival: 13:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I
16 TUE	ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: B
	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
	SEVEN SEAS MARINER Arrival: 10:00 Departure: 21:00 Berth: I
17 WED	CARNIVAL VISTA Arrival: 7:00 Departure: 16:00 Berth: C
	ALLURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I
23 THU	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B
	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
30 TUE	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: B
	CARNIVAL MAGIC Arrival: 9:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: C

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



Difficulty: ★★★

6/17

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★

6/16

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Scientist confronting the rising global threat of mosquitoes

Paris, France

Growing up in Tahiti, Anna-Bella Failloux saw first-hand the threat posed by mosquitoes: nearly a third of adults on the picturesque island once had swollen limbs from elephantiasis caused by their bites. She has since dedicated her life to studying mosquitoes and the diseases they transmit -- a concern that looms ever larger as climate change expands the area where the insects roam.

"You have to accept being bitten by a mosquito from time to time," the 63-year-old entomologist at France's Pasteur Institute told AFP.

"But we have to avoid too many people getting sick and dying from the infections," Failloux said as she observed a mosquito trap being installed in the woods east of French capital Paris. A keen seamstress, Failloux had sown the trap's netting herself. Every few days over summer, these traps will be checked to see if the tiger mosquitoes inside could have spread yellow fever, dengue, chikungunya or Zika.

Once confined to the tropics, these mosquitoes have recently been detected in greater number across France and elsewhere, raising fears of outbreaks. Failloux's life-long interest in mosquitoes goes back to a childhood spent in Papeete, Tahiti, where her shopkeeper parents arrived at the end of the 19th century.

While it seemed a tropical paradise, the island suffered from shockingly high rates of elephantiasis, which swells limbs to immense proportions. The condition is caused by a bacteria called *Wuchereria bancrofti*.

People become infected when mosquitoes inject "a small worm into their lymph nodes, which blocks circulation," Failloux explained. At one point, around "30 percent of French Polynesia's population" was af-



A picture taken on August 23, 2016 in Lille, northern France, shows a mosquito on a person's arm.

ected, she added.

- 'Increasingly vast playing field' -

Failloux would move to mainland France to study the *Wuchereria bancrofti* bacteria at university and dedicate herself to studying mosquito-borne diseases.

"Thirty years ago, climate change wasn't a major topic of discussion neither were mosquitoes," she said.

"Luckily, I persisted, then at some point, I was needed," said Failloux, who now heads the Pasteur Institute's arbovirus and insect

vector unit.

While she had wanted to return to work in French Polynesia, life intervened.

"I met a husband in mainland France... so there you have it," Failloux said.

Rising temperatures caused by human-driven global warming have given mosquitoes and the many pathogens they spread "an increasingly vast playing field," she warned.

According to the World Health Organization, 80 percent of the world's population is now at risk of being exposed to one of more infectious diseases that were long considered

tropical.

These diseases kill more than a million people a year, most of them children, according to the UN agency. □

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San Nicolas: Centro Medico
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Dental Clinic	587 9850
Blood Bank Aruba	587 0002
Urgent Care	586 0448
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Police Oranjestad	527 3140
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A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Microsoft launches AI agent with pay-as-you-go pricing

San Francisco, United States

Microsoft is changing how it charges for its software for the first time in two decades, moving to bill customers with a pay-as-you-go model each time they use its new AI agent.

The change, prompted by the soaring cost of artificial intelligence, came Tuesday as the company launched Copilot Cowork -- an AI "agent" that can independently carry out office tasks like drafting documents, building spreadsheets and sending emails.

The tool still requires a paid Microsoft 365 Copilot subscription, but now every task it runs is billed separately, based on how much computing power it consumes.

Copilot Cowork is Microsoft's take on so-called "agentic" AI, a wave that has gripped Silicon Valley and turned the simple chatbot into an assistant capable of acting on a user's behalf.

Like rival tools on Google's and Amazon's enterprise platforms, it can be handed an assignment and run with it on its own, sometimes for several hours.



A photo taken on May 7, 2026 shows the letters AI for Artificial Intelligence on a laptop screen (top) next to the logo of the Microsoft's Copilot chatbot application on a smartphone screen in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.

Microsoft says one customer used it to compare nearly 4,000 documents in a matter of hours, and that the assistant can prepare complex meetings by synthesizing emails, internal documentation and calendars.

The reason for the new pricing comes down to cost: running these AI systems demands vastly more computing power than a

search engine or a chatbot, and usage can vary widely from one user to the next.

The new plan will be "like you're filling up your gas tank at the pump," Charles Lamanna, Microsoft's executive vice president for Copilot and agents, told AFP.

Under the old system "there's not one overarching user license that makes

sense," he said, given that different users consume widely varying levels of computing power.

The turn is a notable one for Microsoft, whose office software has relied for some two decades on fixed, predictable subscription fees.

"This is a big evolution for us ... which has been a user subscription-based business for so long, for re-

ally like two decades," Lamanna acknowledged, calling the new approach "the only way to make the model work."

To guard against runaway bills, the service is disabled by default, and companies can cap spending per employee, per team or per department.

Microsoft is not alone in taking this route. Its programming subsidiary GitHub moved to usage-based billing in early June, sparking anger among developers, some of whom saw their bills shoot up.

Anthropic, one of the United States' AI flagships, announced in early June that its newest cutting-edge models would soon be billed by usage rather than included in subscriptions, even premium ones.

Another way to ease the bill: users will be able to choose which model is used, more or less powerful and therefore more or less expensive.

At general availability, Copilot Cowork runs on Anthropic models, including Opus 4.8 and Sonnet 4.6, while customers on the "Frontier" tier can use the state-of-the-art GPT 5.5. □

Snap bets on AR glasses in post-smartphone race

San Francisco, United States

Snap, the parent company of social network Snapchat, on Tuesday launched its Specs augmented reality glasses, a major bet by a struggling company to stake out ground in the post-smartphone era. Unveiled at the Augment-

ed World Expo in Long Beach, California, the Specs are the first stand-alone augmented reality glasses aimed at the general public, according to the company.

They will go on sale in the fall in the United States, the United Kingdom and

France, and can be reserved starting Tuesday for \$2,195.

Snap is targeting a middle ground: glasses more sophisticated than the models offered by Meta and soon Google, which CEO Evan Spiegel sees more as a "phone accessory," and less bulky and costly than headsets, which he called "very capable and immersive, but ... cumbersome to wear and shut you out of the world."

"Ultimately we believe that unless we can bring computing into the world where we live ... it's going to be very, very hard to make it feel more human," Spiegel told AFP.

The difference is in how they work: glasses like Meta's Ray-Ban Display or a planned Google device simply project a flat screen in front of the wearer's eye.

"So it feels like you have a tiny little phone screen stuck to your eye everywhere you look," Spiegel said.

Specs, by contrast, map the surrounding world and project three-dimensional digital objects that interact with the real world seen through the lenses.

Snap is touting a price lower than that of mixed-reality headsets such as Apple's Vision Pro, which launched at \$3,499 and whose maker has since halted development for lack of sales.

"By being able to offer Specs at \$2,195, we're able to take this really, really advanced technology and try to put it in as many people's hands as possible," Spiegel said. The market remains embryonic.

Meta dominates with its

Ray-Ban glasses, more than seven million of which have been sold, but its dedicated division is losing billions of dollars.

Google has announced connected glasses for the fall, and Samsung has been selling a headset running Google's Android XR system since October.

Asked by AFP, Spiegel disclosed no profit margins, production volumes or sales target, saying he measures the success of the Specs by developers' creativity rather than by financial indicators.

The launch comes as Snap, which has been in the red since its 2017 stock market debut, cut 16 percent of its workforce in April, or about 1,000 jobs.

The group claimed nearly 956 million monthly users for Snapchat in the first quarter. □



Evan Spiegel, Co-Founder and CEO, Snap Inc. is interviewed about SPECS at AWE 2026 at Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center on June 16, 2026 in Long Beach, California.

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USA's Serena Williams (R) reacts with Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova as they play against New Zealand's Erin Routliffe and Mexico's Giuliana Olmos during the women's doubles round of 16 match at the WTA500 Berlin Tennis Open tournament in Berlin on June 16, 2026.

'Mom, play with Venus': Serena says daughter inspired Wimbledon return

London, United Kingdom Serena Williams said Tuesday a comment from her daughter inspired her decision to return to play doubles at Wimbledon alongside sister Venus later in June.

Speaking in Berlin after she was defeated alongside doubles partner Karolina Muchova in the first round, Williams confirmed she would accept a wildcard to play at Wimbledon for the first time since 2022, alongside long-time doubles partner Venus.

The 44-year-old, who has won 14 doubles Grand Slams alongside Venus including six on the Wimbledon grass, said a conversation with eight-year-old daughter Olympia sparked her decision.

"My daughter Olympia told me I should play with Venus. She's always right, so I was like 'damn'.

"'Mom, maybe you should play with Venus'. But she's very serious, she knows. She's very smart she's very

wise, I think is another word. "So I said 'You know, let's see if we can do it'."

Williams previously said a desire to play in front of her young daughters was a motivating factor in her shock return.

Williams however shot down speculation she may take the last remaining singles wildcard slot.

"You think I'm ready for singles?" Williams asked reporters. "I need to get to work."

The Williams sisters' last Wimbledon title came on their most recent appearance together a decade ago.

A 23-time Grand Slam singles winner, Williams retired in 2022 but re-entered doping protocols in 2025 to keep open the idea of a potential return.

She said Tuesday that her sister's run to the quarter-finals of the women's doubles at the 2025 US Open inspired her to consider coming back.

"I think I was really motivated by what Venus was doing that year in the Open doubles. I thought she played really well.

"And I would say at the time, (people) were always telling me that I should play but I felt a lot of pressure because I wasn't practising at all.

"It wasn't my goal at the time", Williams said of a proper comeback, adding "I had no intention of actually being here today, to be perfectly honest with you."

- Comeback continues -

Williams made a sensational return last week when she won her first-round doubles match at Queen's Club with partner Victoria Mboko, her first competitive appearance in 1,375 days. She was unable to play more than one match after Mboko pulled out with an injury but impressed in what was her first competitive match in almost four years. □



USA's Noah Lyles poses for a photo next to the time board after winning the Men's 150m race with a new world record at the 65th IAAF 2026 Golden Spike Athletics Meeting in Ostrava, Czech Republic on June 16, 2026.

Lyles sets world's best time over 150 meters at Ostrava

Ostrava, Czech Republic

U.S. sprinter Noah Lyles set the world's best ever time over the rarely-run 150 meters on Tuesday, clocking 14.67 seconds at the Golden Spike meet in the eastern Czech city of Ostrava.

The 28-year-old Lyles beat the previous best of 14.72sec set by Kishane Thompson of Jamaica in Florida in April. At Ostrava, Lyles beat Sinesipho Dambile of South Africa with 14.78sec, while Australian teenager Gout Gout finished third in 14.96sec.

"Was there ever any doubt? Was there ever any doubt? We came for a show," an elated Lyles told Czech TV. Dutch star Femke Broeders-Bol had to bow to in-form Swiss Audrey Werro in her outdoor debut in the 800m. The 26-year-old Broeders-Bol has switched from 400m hurdles, in which she had won two world gold medals, and clocked an impressive 1min 57.13sec for second place.

"It was so cool, I love racing in Ostrava. It was tough, but I enjoyed it," she said.

Bol has also claimed multiple medals as the anchor leg in 4x400m relay teams, notably a gold in the mixed event in the Paris Olympics.

She ran her first 800m since 2017 in February, clocking a national record of 1min 59.07sec before withdrawing from the rest of the indoor season to nurse a foot injury. The 22-year-old Werro won in 1min 54.45sec, half a second behind her personal best from March, after shedding Broeders-Bol with 200 meters to run.

"It was a really crazy run but the time is very good so I'm really happy," Werro said.

Having set the eighth best time ever, she stayed over a second behind the oldest world record in athletics of 1:53.28 set in 1983 by Jarmila Kratochvilova of then-Czechoslovakia, who watched the race from the stands. South Africa's 20-year-old Bayanda Walaza won the men's 100m as he equalled his personal best of 9.94sec, beating Emmanuel Eseme of Cameroon with 9.99sec. □

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France's forward #10 Kylian Mbappe shoots to score his team's third goal during the 2026 World Cup Group I football match between France and Senegal at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on June 16, 2026.

Mbappe double fires France to opening win over Senegal

East Rutherford, United States

Kylian Mbappe scored twice as France launched their bid for a third World Cup crown with a 3-1 victory over Senegal in Group I on Tuesday.

Real Madrid star Mbappe took his career World Cup goals tally to 14 just two behind all-time leader Miroslav Klose and Bradley Barcola was also on target as Les Bleus secured all three points for Didier Deschamps' side.

Mbappe darted across the penalty area to convert a brilliant Michael Olise pass on 66 minutes to break the deadlock in a contest in which France struggled badly in the first half, but came to life after the break.

Barcola of Paris Saint-Germain then came off the bench to get the second late on, before his club colleague Ibrahim Mbaye pulled one back in stoppage time for Senegal.

But Mbappe saved the best for last, as he blasted in from long range in the 96th minute to seal the win, and become France's all-time top scorer with 58 goals.

The decision by coach Didier Deschamps to move Olise infield from the right wing was crucial in swinging the game the way of the two-time World Cup winners.

But it is Mbappe who grabbed the spotlight in what turned out to be a memorable 99th appearance for his country. Mbappe renewed his extraordinary love affair with the World Cup, in which he scored in the 2018 final as France won, and netted a stunning hat-trick in their defeat on penalties to Argentina in the 2022 final in Qatar.

The 27-year-old Real Madrid striker's double took him past Pele's 12 and overtook the 13 of Lionel Messi and fellow Frenchman Just Fontaine.

He is now level with Gerd Mueller in the overall list, with only Klose and the Brazilian Ronaldo (15) still ahead of him.

France, one of the pre-tournament favourites, will be expected to build on this to ease into the last 32, with outsiders Iraq up next before a meeting with Erling Haaland's Norway.

Deschamps, in his last tournament before he steps down after 14 years in charge, has been wary of overconfidence in his talented squad.

Opponents Senegal served as a warning from the past France went into the 2002 World Cup as holders and favourites, but lost 1-0 to the Lions of Teranga in their opening game and never recovered, going out in the group stage without scoring a goal.

- Olise outstanding -

Senegal showed how strong they are before a packed house of 80,545 in a game played in bright sunshine with the skyscrapers of Manhattan in the distance.

A team led by veteran forward Sadio Mane, and featuring four starters born in France, were playing their first competitive game since the Africa Cup of Nations final in Morocco in January. □

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