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LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK

PROFESSIONAL COMPLIMENTARY PICTURES ON TUESDAY AND FRIDAY

SUNDAY: MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	MONDAY: ANDERSON BAHAMON SINGER 6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	TUESDAY: JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	WEDNESDAY: MAILLEYN ALVARADO VIOLINIST 6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	THURSDAY: MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	FRIDAY: MAILLEYN ALVARADO VIOLINIST 7:00 TO 9:00 P.M.	SATURDAY: RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.
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U.S. President Donald Trump's Iran conundrum

Washington, United States

U.S. President Donald Trump has secured a welcome Middle East diplomatic breakthrough with an agreement for Hamas militants to disarm, but remains mired in the conflict with Iran, searching for an exit strategy that continues to elude him.

After five months of war, Trump's room for maneuver seems extremely limited, and he gives the impression of increasingly making up his plans as he goes along. "We're going to be hitting them very hard because it's our turn to hit them," Trump said Wednesday of upcoming strikes against Tehran in retaliation for its attacks against bases hosting U.S. forces in Jordan.

The Republican leader has clearly demonstrated the limits of his so-far unsuccessful efforts to attempt to force Iranian capitulation through air strikes.

As the conflict in the Middle East spreads from Iraq to Saudi Arabia to even Egypt, the U.S. president finds himself at an impasse. He convened members of his cabinet at the Camp David presidential retreat on Friday but gave no indication of a possible shift in



U.S. President Donald Trump and US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth listen to questions from the press during a Cabinet meeting at Camp David in Maryland, on July 31, 2026.

strategy.

Citing unnamed U.S. officials, NBC News reported earlier this week that Trump erupted in anger during a recent White House meeting and was "exasperated" by his limited available options to end the war.

The situation effectively largely depends on Tehran. After the U.S. launched strikes in concert with Israel against Iran on February 28 killing numerous officials, including Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei things

have not gone according to plan for Trump.

- 'No quick solutions' -

The U.S. president spoke earlier in the conflict of a four- to six-week timeline for the offensive, which he says is aimed at preventing Tehran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

While US officials maintain that they have achieved key military objectives, destroying Iran's navy and degrading its ballistic missile capabilities, the conflict is

now centered on control of the Strait of Hormuz, where Tehran has disrupted key maritime traffic with attacks on shipping vessels. That seems to have caught Washington off guard, and a June 17 agreement to halt the fighting has already broken down.

The U.S. military has since carried out repeated strikes on Iranian military targets, while Tehran's Revolutionary Guards have retaliated by striking US bases and allies in the region.

"It is hard to see why this approach would work now when it hasn't worked over the past five months," Richard Haass, the former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in a Friday newsletter.

Karen Young, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, said the "conflict is still in early stages... We should be prepared for prolonged disruption."

"This is a conflict that has no quick solutions really, even with a regime transition that could lead to more instability in the region rather than less," she told journalists this week.

That is especially true now that attacks on Saudi Arabia and other wealthy, oil-producing Gulf states have left them weakened.

- Unpopular war -

In the United States, the war is largely unpopular, especially due to higher gas prices that have angered consumers.

An average of polls compiled by political expert Nate Silver and updated Thursday shows that 58.3 percent of Americans oppose the war a figure that has been steadily rising since March while 37.4 percent say they support it. □

U.S. announces steep water cuts for three states amid Colorado River crisis

Washington, United States

The U.S. federal government on Friday unveiled its plan for future management of the beleaguered Colorado River, with sig-

nificant water reductions ahead for several western states in response to record-breaking droughts worsened by climate change.



A view of the Colorado River on July 31, 2026 in Marble Canyon, Arizona. In July, the combined water of Lake Mead and Lake Powell, the country's two biggest reservoirs, fell to their lowest levels since 1957.

Under the roadmap, the lower basin states of Arizona, California, and Nevada could face collective cuts of up to 3 million acre-feet (130 billion cubic feet or 3.7 billion cubic meters) of water annually, through 2036.

That is roughly equivalent to the amount of water consumed by nine million households in a year.

The actual extent of reductions will depend on the river's reserve levels and hydrological conditions.

The plan is set to take effect in October for two years before being reassessed.

"The Department has a responsibility to ensure the Colorado River system re-

mains reliable and resilient for the millions of Americans, communities and industries that depend on it," said Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum.

The drastic measures are aimed at easing a bitter water dispute that has divided the region for years and worsened this year amid an exceptional drought.

In mid-July, the combined water levels of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, the two largest reservoirs in the United States and both fed by the Colorado River, reached their lowest levels in over 60 years.

The Colorado River provides drinking water for

more than 40 million people and fuels hydropower across seven states.

The upper basin states of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and New Mexico, which also rely on the river for their water supply, will not face the same cuts as the lower basin states -- a disparity likely to fuel disagreements.

Overexploited for decades, the Colorado River is also suffering from the "unprecedented multi-decade drought" that has plagued the region for 25 years, the interior department said.

Washington was forced to step in after the affected states again failed to agree on reducing their water consumption. □



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin speaks during a roundtable with U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on efforts to combat per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at EPA headquarters on May 18, 2026 in Washington, DC.

Forever chemicals and pesticides under Trump: what to know

Washington, United States

Since returning to power, President Donald Trump's administration has approved five new pesticides considered by many to be PFAS "forever chemicals," a class of toxic substances facing increasing restrictions around the world.

But Trump's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an alternative definition of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances that excludes the pesticides, and says they pose no threat to human health.

The last three approvals were made without press statements, surfacing only when nonprofits publicized them this month.

Critics say the chemicals may pose hidden risks, and many of them break down into trifluoroacetic acid (TFA), now abundant in global drinking water and potentially linked to serious harms, including fetal and reproductive damage.

"If we want to do something about this class of chemicals, then you need to draw boundaries," Cindy Hu, an environmental scientist at George Washington University told AFP.

- Damning history -

PFAS are defined by the carbon-fluorine bond, the most stable in organic chemistry, whose strength and liquid

repelling properties made the chemicals prized fire-fighting foam, nonstick pans, raincoats and more. But evidence linking them to cancers, immune conditions and reproductive harms has triggered billion-dollar settlements, new laws and corporate phase-outs.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted a broad definition in 2021 encompassing any molecule with a single fully-fluorinated carbon atom. Roughly half of US states, Congress and the Pentagon have upheld it, as did 150 scientists in a 2024 consensus statement.

In 2023, the EPA under then-president Joe Biden went its own way, narrowing the definition to only include chemicals with two or more adjacent fully-fluorinated carbon atoms, which it deemed less likely to persist. One such pesticide was greenlit under Biden. Trump's second term has added five more.

Trump's EPA says pesticides are essential for food abundance, that all are reviewed, and that single-fluorinated ones can be less toxic than alternatives. It notes they are also registered or proposed in the European Union, Canada and Australia.

- 'Getting worse' -

That is not good enough for many scientists and activists, who fear a growing threat to the food supply and to farm workers.

Trifludimoxazin, one of the new herbicides, has "suggestive evidence of carcinogenic potential," the EPA's own review found.

And the new approvals are just the tip of the iceberg: a 2024 retrospective analysis revisited hundreds of pesticide ingredients approved in the past and found 66 would have met the OECD definition of PFAS.

"It's an issue that most administrations have kind of conveniently swept under the rug," Nathan Donley of the Center for Biological Diversity, who led the study, told AFP. "But it's definitely getting worse."

"If you were to buy 10 peaches or plums at random in the US, chances are nine of them are going to have at least residues of highly toxic PFAS pesticides," Varun Subramaniam, an Environmental Working Group scientist who conducted an analysis of produce samples, told AFP.

Many such pesticides break down into TFA, which is now found extensively in water, and the EU's food safety agency last week sharply cut the acceptable daily intake. □



This photo illustration shows set up screens displaying the logo and home page of US based prediction market platform Kalshi, in Saint-Mande, east of Paris, on April 29, 2026.

New York sues online prediction markets giant Kalshi

New York, United States

New York's attorney general sued betting platform Kalshi on Friday, accusing it of running an illegal gambling operation in a case that could shed a spotlight on the lightly regulated and controversial world of prediction markets.

The suit alleges that Kalshi, one of the biggest such markets, exposes New Yorkers to "serious personal and financial risk."

The lawsuit asked the court to order Kalshi to halt its operation, make restitution to customers, forfeit all illegal gains and pay fines equal to triple those gains.

Online prediction markets have rapidly broken into the mainstream in the United States, positioning themselves as an alternative to both traditional polling and licensed sports betting.

But concern is spreading over allegations of corruption and insider trading based on everything from the top-secret operation to capture Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in January to lucrative bets on the timing of US attacks and ceasefires with Iran. President Donald Trump's longtime teleprompter operator, who had access to speeches ahead of time, is reportedly under investigation for using his knowledge to place bets on Kalshi.

Trump's son Don Jr is an adviser and investor at Kalshi's big rival Polymarket and his investment company bought a stake in the firm. Such platforms remain illegal or unregulated in

most countries outside the United States.

- 'Harming New Yorkers' -

New York-based Kalshi calls itself a federally regulated "event contracts" exchange rather than a traditional sportsbook, a distinction that has fuelled legal battles with state regulators.

Attorney General Letitia James said New York's gambling laws protect children from underage betting and help fight gambling addiction.

"No matter what they call themselves, prediction markets like Kalshi are gambling platforms, plain and simple," James said in a news release.

"By ignoring our laws, Kalshi is running an illegal operation and harming New Yorkers in the process."

New York Governor Kathy Hochul said Kalshi has "chosen to ignore New York's gaming laws... This choice has consequences."

Kalshi representative Elisabeth Diana said on Friday that the lawsuit would hurt New Yorkers, who would be "driven offshore."

"It's sad to see this type of political theater from the leadership in our own state. States can't just shut down a federally licensed exchange," she said in a statement.

Kalshi faces similar legal challenges in multiple US states where gaming regulators have issued cease-and-desist orders or filed suit accusing the platform of operating an unlicensed gambling business. □

Nolan's 'Odyssey' boosts sales of mythology tales in U.K.

London, United Kingdom

Christopher Nolan's adaptation of "The Odyssey" has not only lured legions of fans to cinemas, but sparked huge interest in the U.K. in Homer's epic poem and other Greek and Roman mythology works. Some involved in Classics academia hope the blockbuster's box office success and wider cultural impact will also prompt more young people to study the subject.

The movie's mid-month release has helped hike UK print edition sales of "The Odyssey" by 1,400 percent in the four weeks to July 25 compared to the same period last year, according to market researchers NielsenIQ.

A 2017 translation by British-American classicist Emily Wilson of the millennia-old mythological tale has been flying off the shelves at a similarly increased rate.

Britain's biggest bookstore chain Waterstones saw sales of Wilson's work rise



U.S. actor Matt Damon (L), British-U.S. director Christopher Nolan (C) and U.S. actress Anne Hathaway (R) attend "The Odyssey" premiere at the AMC Lincoln Square in New York on July 14, 2026.

over 1,000 percent compared to 2025 and were "increasing every week" alongside purchases of "all other available translations," a spokeswoman said.

Meanwhile NielsenIQ noted many related works including "The Iliad", Mad-

eline Miller's "Circe" and Margaret Atwood's "The Penelopiad" had also seen "significant" sales uplifts.

Actor and writer Stephen Fry's "The Odyssey" currently tops the history bestsellers on Amazon's UK website. Two of his other Classics

books "Mythos" and "Troy" occupy the second and fifth spots respectively on the online giant's list.

Audiobooks are also sharing in the boom, with Spotify reporting that searches for "The Odyssey" translations have skyrocketed by

310 percent.

- 'Buzz' -

"People are drawn to these stories," University of Exeter Classics lecturer Richard Kendall told AFP, hailing the sales spike as "fantastic".

"And that's not just writers who continually return to the Greeks and Romans the history, the myths, the characters, the events that's also readers. These are ripping good yarns."

Kendall, the first expert-in-residence earlier this year at Britain's The Classical Association, cautioned against viewing the renewed literary interest just in cinema-related isolation.

"If this is a gimmick, it's been a gimmick that's been lasting for over 2,000 years at this point," he said.

"It's wonderful that this has created so much popularity. People are reading more, but this is just this iteration ... People will always return to these stories."

Nonetheless, at Univer-

sity College London (UCL) where British-American director Nolan reportedly studied Homer as an English undergraduate there are hopes for an increase in enrolments.

"The buzz around the film has been tremendous, and we're hoping to see a bounce in student numbers in the next few years," Phiroze Vasunia, head of its Greek and Latin Department, told AFP.

He noted there had been "an exceptional level of interest in Classics and in ancient studies" in recent years, coinciding with the growing fanfare around Nolan's movie.

- Critics -

Based on Homer's poem written originally in Greek around the 7th or 8th century BC, the film tracks hero Odysseus as he faces obstacle after obstacle on his trek home from the Trojan War.

It stars Matt Damon and Anne Hathaway as Odysseus and his wife Penelope, with Tom Holland portraying their son Telemachus.□

Pope Leo says he loves U.S. but he is pope first, American second: NBC

Rome, Italy

Pope Leo XIV has "great love" for the United States and what it stands for but just "happens to be American", the Chicago-born pope told NBC in an interview.

Leo, the first pope from the United States, spoke Wednesday night to the U.S. broadcaster on the sidelines of a prayer event

with music at Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer residence.

"I think of myself more as the pope who happens to be American. Not to belittle what it means to be an American," said the pope, when asked how important it was to him being American.

"I have great love for

America but I understand my mission as having a very important dimension, which is precisely being pastor of a universal church and having a voice and an opportunity to speak to people throughout the world," added Leo, who spent nearly two decades as a missionary in Peru.

Asked what the 70-year-old head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics loved about America, he responded, "so many things".

"In a sense, speaking about principles, what America stands for, the sense of freedom, the sense of opportunity, the sense of having invited, for generations, people from around the world to be part of America," said Leo, adding that his grandparents were immigrants.

On his mother's side, Leo added, "we have people who were both slaves and

slave owners."

Leo, like his predecessor Francis, has repeatedly spoken up for migrants during his nascent papacy, calling the Trump administration's clampdown on immigrants in the United States "inhuman".

A rift earlier this year between U.S. President Donald Trump and the pope sparked global headlines and risked alienating Catholic U.S. voters.

On July 4th, Independence Day in the United States, he visited Italy's island of Lampedusa a major entry point to Europe for those crossing the dangerous Mediterranean from Africa urging tolerance and protection for the vulnerable migrants, many of whom die during the journey.

Leo told NBC that no trip had yet been planned for the United States, but he hoped to visit "soon".□



Pope Leo XIV smiles next to Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli after a concert in Borgo Laudato Si, a 55-hectare educational and environmental center, at Castel Gandolfo on July 29, 2026.

EU grapples with migrant crisis in Spain's N. Africa enclave

Ceuta, Spain

The European Union on Friday scrambled to contain one of the largest migrant crises in recent years after some 60,000 people crossed into Spain's enclave in north Africa, as Italy temporarily suspended an EU-wide free movement agreement with Madrid. The migrants have entered Ceuta from Morocco, the local regional president Juan Jesus Vivas told reporters, but by Friday evening officials said more than 48,000 had returned. To cross into Ceuta, many had swam around a small border barrier that juts out into the Mediterranean but at least 34 died in the attempt.

The sudden, massive influx sparked an international crisis.

France tightened checks on its border with Spain and reinforced police and gendarmes there.

Italy announced it had suspended its Schengen agreement, the zone allowing free movement between the borders of EU member states, with Spain. Several European countries had already said Spain's membership in the Schengen free movement zone should be suspended.

And across the Atlantic, U.S. President Donald Trump led far-right efforts to seize on the crossing to advance hardline immigration policies.



Migrants gather along the fence close to the site of clashes near Fnideq, on the Morocco-Spain border, on July 31, 2026.

- 'Trafficking mafias' -

Madrid rushed troops, more police, drones, divers and boats to the outpost that it has run for centuries as Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his interior minister visited Friday.

On Friday, hundreds of migrants, mostly young men, were hanging around on the Morocco side of the border. But others were seen turning back, saying "there are too many people here".

Inside Ceuta, shops were closed and annual fiestas were cancelled.

"It's catastrophic," said Mohammed, a local taxi driver and Ceuta resident.

"Sure, we sympathize with them they're having a terrible time in their own country, and all that but this isn't the way to enter a place, nor is it a way to live."

Some previous surges have occurred during tensions between Spain and Morocco.

Sanchez visited Algiers on July 20 the first such visit by a Spanish head of government in four years marking a thaw in relations with Morocco's rival Algeria.

But it was not clear if there was any connection between that visit and this latest influx.

Sanchez, in Ceuta, blamed the sudden inflow on people-traffickers spreading rumors about a Spanish Supreme Court ruling this month that irregular migrants arriving by sea could not be immediately returned.

"What has emerged from our talks with Moroccan authorities is that trafficking mafias took a self-serving interpretation of a Supreme Court ruling," he said.

That interpretation "spread like wildfire in recent hours".

- Diplomatic fallout -

Fears of the crowds entering an EU member state, which normally does not enforce border controls between members, sparked diplomatic fallout.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on social media, called the scenes at Ceuta "unacceptable".

"We cannot allow anyone to come to our (European) Union without abiding by our rules," she added.

Finland and Denmark on Friday backed Italy's line, while German Chancellor Friedrich Merz demanded Morocco "take back illegal migrants immediately".

France and Britain said they stood ready to help Spain with the sudden surge, even as Paris tightened border checks with Spain.

Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro said he was considering reinforcing border checks but saw no need to suspend Spain from the Schengen zone.

US President Donald Trump warned: "It looks like an invasion of a country by hundreds of thousands of people, and that same thing's going to happen to us if the Republicans don't get elected, except worse, much bigger."

Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares tried to douse those fears, saying: "It is not possible to travel from Ceuta and Melilla to the Peninsula without identifying oneself at a police checkpoint," referring to Spain's two north African enclaves.

"Enough of this deliberate confusion". □

U.S. admits error after flawed Africa map shown at AIDS conference

Washington, United States

The U.S. State Department acknowledged "an unfortunate error" on Thursday after an inaccurate map of Africa was displayed at an AIDS conference in Brazil earlier this week.

"We take full responsibility for the confusion and misrepresentation it caused for attendees, including our African partners," a State Department spokesperson said.

A slideshow presented by the U.S. delegation at a major international conference on AIDS earlier this week had six African countries incorrectly located.

Nigeria, for example, was shown as a landlocked country in the center of the continent, while Mozambique was placed

in the Horn of Africa and Cote d'Ivoire in southern Africa.

Conference participants revealed the error, first reported by Reuters, in social media posts.

The State Department said a member of the team on the ground had hastily modified the slideshow just before the presentation on U.S. global health assistance. Despite the error, the United States hailed "substantive and constructive" discussions at the conference.

The 26th International AIDS Conference opened Monday in Rio de Janeiro after the United States drastically reduced its international aid budget following Donald Trump's return to the White House last year. □



People protest during the opening ceremony of the 26th International AIDS Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on July 27, 2026.

French, Italian winegrowers face earliest ever harvest

Oliva Gessi, Italy

Scorching summer temperatures have disrupted life for millions of Europeans but for winegrowers in Italy and France, who are harvesting their grapes unusually early, the hot weather offers pros as well as cons. In Oltrepo Pavese, a winegrowing region in northern Italy, the harvest was in full swing in the final days of July, a first.

The same phenomenon is also affecting winegrowing areas of southern France. "This year is historic because the grapes have never been harvested in July before," said Matteo Castellani, head of the Coldiretti farming union for Casteggio, south of Pavia.

"We started the harvest at the beginning of the week, on July 27 and 28, and that's a record."

"In Oltrepo Pavese, like elsewhere in general, the harvest usually begins between August 10 and 15," Castellani told AFP.

Under a blazing sun, farm workers delicately detach bunches of Pinot Noir from rows of vines at the Defilippi - i Gessi estate.

"Recent months have seen abnormal heat a symptom of climate change which, sadly, farmers and the entire sector must now take into account," said Castellani.

Coldiretti forecasts the har-



Workers harvest Pinot Noir grapes in the vineyards The Defilippi - i Gessi winery in the small village of Oliva Gessi, located on the green hills of Oltrepò Pavese, between Casteggio and Montalto Pavese, northern Italy, on July 30, 2026.

vest for Sangiovese grapes, Italy's most common variety, could begin as early as mid-August in Tuscany.

The grapes are usually picked between September and November.

For Italy's top agricultural union, predicting the quality of a harvest that will be spread over almost five months is a real oenological challenge for wineries not least owing to the concentration of sugars which record temperatures and drought induce in the grapes.

For now, "maturation ... is perfect" and "the alcohol content optimal", said

winemaker and estate owner Federico De Filippi, three days into harvesting. But he warned that if the high temperatures continued they could increase the grapes' alcohol content, thereby forcing harvesting to be accelerated.

- Acutely arid conditions -

In southern France, months of soaring temperatures have also presaged an early harvest.

"A July 30 (start) is exceptional to say the least," said Alain Gleyzes, a winegrower in La Palme in the southern region of Aude.

He began harvesting a

Muscat grape at night on Thursday, destined for the production of a sparkling white.

"I've been in the wine business 43 years and it's the first time in my life I've been harvesting in July," he noted.

As head of the Fitou appellation, he has been battling drought for years and had to uproot around one third of his more than 60 hectares in 2025 after two years of acutely arid conditions close to the Mediterranean coastline.

The drought, he said, wilted about 30 percent of his vines.

His is not an isolated case. Just to the north, around Narbonne, twin sisters and 10th-generation viticulteurs Camille and Audrey Lalaurie had never, until this year, begun harvesting before August 12.

"Twenty years ago it was around August 25," said Camille.

This year, they will start this weekend just hours into the new month.

- 'Water farmers' -

Further south, in the Pyrenees-Orientales bordering Spain, the Lafage domain began harvesting last week.

"Compared to normal, we are about 10 days ahead," Jean-Marc Lafage told AFP as he picked grapes for a light alcohol wine requiring less mature fruit.

"With part of our team on holiday, we've had to make do. We managed to motivate the staff from marketing, accounting and IT" to help out.

"On average, we'll end up a good week ahead compared to last year," he added.

"The vines grew very early -- in March. Then growth was good in the spring" helped by high temperatures, said Camille Lalaurie.

"Since February, I don't know if there has been a month when we haven't broken the heat record," she said.□

Mammoth bones found on parched bed of Danube in Bulgaria



This handout photograph taken by Teodor Mechev and released on July 30, 2026, shows remains of an ancient mammoth, as historically low water levels on the Danube River exposed parts of the riverbed near the village of Ryahovo, north east of Rouse.

Sofia, Bulgaria

Sinking water levels in the Danube river have unveiled bones of a mammoth in Bulgaria and could lead to further discoveries, a local museum director told AFP on Thursday.

The bone fragments found near the north-eastern city of Ruse "very likely" belonged to a woolly mammoth that lived during the Ice Age, said Nikolay Nenov, director of the Regional Historical Museum.

Specialists have so far identified a jaw bone, fragments of tusks, part of a shoulder blade and a femur with its articular head among the stash, Nenov said.

The animal is thought to have been young and the dark colour of the bones may indicate that it spent a lot of time in a marshy environment, he added.

The bones are an important discovery because they are well preserved and "unlike many previous discoveries... were con-

centrated in the same place", indicating that they all belonged to the same animal, Nenov said.

Woolly mammoths co-existed with early humans who hunted the cold-resistant herbivores for food and used their tusks and bones as tools.

The animals died out about 4,000 years ago. For decades, scientists have been recovering bits and pieces of mammoth tusks, bones, teeth and hair.

The remains in Bulgaria were spotted by chance on Wednesday by a resident of the village of Ryahovo in the Ruse region, before being collected on Thursday by experts from the museum.

The Danube which runs from the Black Forest mountains of western Germany through 10 countries to the Black Sea -- has dropped to record low levels in parts due to prolonged rain shortages and successive heatwaves since May.□

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 deeper, 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).

Conchi: Aruba's hidden natural pool



(Oranjestad)—Amongst the countless beaches surrounding the island that are well-known and frequently visited, there is an additional "hidden" natural pools that is situated in the northern coast of the island, two ideal stops in your tour itinerary. This is Conchi.

Conchi (Natural Pool)

For many years, Conchi was the only natural pool that we had on the island. Located in the Arikok National Park, near Boca Keto and the Daimari Ranch, Conchi—also known "Cura di Turtuga (Turtle's Cove) or just Natural Pool—is reachable with any 4x4 vehicle or by foot if you're up for a long hike. However, since it is part of the National Park, you must first get permission from park management to enter. You would have to purchase a day pass, and receive a wristband as proof of payment. Once you've completed that, you

are set!

If you decide to hike from the entrance of the Arikok National Park, this is also possible: do bring plenty of protective clothing and enough water and food—it could take you up to three hours to hike there!

However, when you eventually do get there, you will be greeted with crystal blue water surrounded by a natural rock formation that protects you from the wild waves on the other side. Though the pool is located on the northern side of the island (where the sea is largely rough and largely no suitable for swimming), the pool itself is very calm. It's also relatively deep, and you can climb up the rocks and jump in!

Fun fact: "Conchi" means small bowl in Papiamentu. Once you get there, you may see why we call it that. □

Fun facts about the "transhi" hedges!

(Oranjestad)—When off-roading, you may encounter some houses that have rock hedges, aligned perfectly and held together by cement—or sometimes nothing at all.

These hedges are called "transhi," and have a historical and cultural meaning on the island. Used by cunukeros* around the island back when agriculture played a more dominant role in day-to-day life and survival, these stone hedges represent the resilience of our great-grand parents, who had to make do with what nature gave them. These stone structures are traditionally placed carefully on top of each other. No cement or other binding mixture was used to hold the structure together. Though not commonly used for modern homes, the few structures that remain around the island stood the test of time, some completely intact even after decades of rain, wind and urbanization.

These stone hedges are a representation of the Aruba's unique farming culture—which valued durability, sustainability and resilience.

*cunukero: Aruban farmers.

Pictures extracted from the 'Plantage Zorg en Hoop' collection on Coleccion.aw □



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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 ecosystem. 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 litters 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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Explore Aruba!

(ORANJESTAD)—Aruba Today collected some things to do **BEYOND** the beach. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Arikok National Park

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. If you are

not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In total, the park consists of 34 square kilometers of protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.acf.aw

Natural Bridge

One of Aruba's favorite tourist attractions is the Natural Bridge. For thousands of years, pounding waves and strong winds have slowly chiseled away the limestone cliffs along Aruba's north coast to create several



natural bridges. The largest of these bridges used to be the famous Natural Bridge. The bridge was a formation of coral limestone cut out by years of pounding surf, and was one of the largest of these types of spans in the world. It stood some 23 feet (7 meters) above sea level and spans more than 100 feet (30 meters). Unfortunately the bridge collapsed on September 2, 2005. Despite this, it is still the most photographed natural bridge and it remains a popular tourist attraction in

Aruba, with the adjacent and intact Baby Bridge also meriting a visit. The Natural Bridge is the perfect stop while touring Aruba. There is no admission fee or set hours for visiting. Quench your thirst with refreshing beverages & refuel your tank with local snacks.

The Lourdes Grotto

Named in commemoration of the famous French religious landmark, was created under the guidance of a priest named "Erkamp" and parishioners in the year 1958. The

grotto, a shrine built into the rocks is located in Seroe Preto, just off the main road to San Nicolas. A statue of the Virgin Mary, weighing 700 kilos, was hoisted into place in the grotto. Every year, on February 11 (feast of Lady of Lourdes), a procession leaves from the St. Theresita church in San Nicolas to the grotto, where a mass is performed. The grotto is located roadside and can be visited daily. Just make sure you park safely in the event you wish to stop for pictures at this location. □

The Bateson family celebrates a big birthday!

(Oranjestad)—The Aruba Today would like to congratulate the Bateson family for a big birthday celebration! We recently received a message from Karl Bateson, who told us his wife is celebrating her 50th birthday on the island. Happy Birthday!

Karl and his wife are visiting Aruba again with their five-year-old son to celebrate the big milestone. They are no strangers to the island, especially Karl. He told us he's been visiting since 1986 and has been here almost 50 times! What started as a vacation with his parents became a beloved tradition within the family. "Loving Aruba is a family tradition!" His son, despite being only five, has been to Aruba four times already. Karl tells us he actually walked for the first time in the children's pool at the hotel they were staying at during that time.

Thank you Karl for sharing your family's story. We at Aruba Today hope to see you guys again soon! □



The Aruban way of life: Creating community with Cas di Torto

(Oranjestad)—The Aruban people understand that a happy life is spent in great ambience with your loved ones. Passed down from one generation to the other, building community has been a key aspect in forging our traditions and customs. The Cas di Torto (mud house) played a big role in cultivating community, bridging families together and forming close bonds with your neighbors—something we highly value today.



Cas di Torto: History and construction

The origin of the Cas di Torto is said to date back to the early 19th century in the Paraguana Peninsula in Venezuela. Refugees who sought sanctuary on Aruba introduced this building method to the island.

The uprights of the walls were made with sturdy and straight wayaca or kwihi wood, or from thin mangrove struts. Then, the wattle walls were weaved in using branches and twigs from the warero and sisal plant, daubed with a mixture of grass and mud. Finally, the walls got a coat

of white plaster to seal everything in.

For roofing, corn stalks, palm fronds and straws were used, allowing air to flow freely through the house. This method of roofing was known throughout the ABC islands (Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire), but the use of cornstalks in Aruba eventually got replaced with use of mud and white plaster for the roofs. The white plaster all around made the houses look like cake, hence the name "Torto" (Spanish for "cake").

Building community

Building Torto houses was often a community effort. Young couples who were about to get married had to have their house built be-



fore they could tie the knot and start their own family. This is where the help of the community comes into play.

Neighbors, extended family and friends would all help in the construction of a Torto House. And everyone had a role: The men oversaw the building of the house, and the women were tasked with collecting wood and straws, cooking and taking care of the little ones.

The couple's family were primarily responsible for feeding everyone who helped build the house. Before construction, someone usually had the task to prepare the meal; going fishing or slaughter farm animals like goats, chicken or sheep. Even the older kids had their tasks; the older

children of the family usually helped with collecting water and mixing the mud.

The average duration of constructing a Cas di Torto was 4 months.

At the end of a long day of work, everyone would gather around and enjoy a feast of hearty food. This type of help from friends and family became a tradition and was called "paga lomba": You help me today; I'll help you tomorrow.

Nowadays, traditional Cas di Torto are rare, especially those that are still inhabited. Houses that do exist probably date back more than a century. □

Picture credits: Aruba National Library (BNA) and the Monumentbureau archive on Coleccion.aw



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 blockbusters for the Ameri-

can 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.



The district of Savaneta: A quick history guide to the island's first capital

(Oranjestad)—Before Oranjestad became the island nation's capital, Aruba's first capital was the district of Savaneta. Here is where the cultural identity of Aruba was born, and from where the rest of the island developed into what it is today.

Savaneta is said to have been the first place where the Caquetio inhabitants first stepped foot on the island. Though there isn't hard evidence to back this up, but considering the legend of the Cacique Arua, it is believed that there were already movements on Aruba—and Savaneta—around 88 AD.

The Caquetios probably made their way to the island either from Venezuela, Colombia or other Caribbean islands in the region, but with good weather it was relatively easy for them to travel back and forth in their canoes. So, since the Caquetios discovered the island, Aruba found her first form of civilization.

It wasn't until 1499 when Aruba met another group of people who set foot on the island: the Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda. De Ojeda first took notice of Aruba off the coast of Venezuela, during his exploration of the Latin American country. This was on August 9th, 1499. However, de Ojeda didn't actually sail to the island till 4 days later, on August 23rd, 1499. This was the beginning of the Spanish era on Aruba (1499-1636).



Alonso usually didn't stop at every island or land he saw, especially not in the Caribbean. He would often take notice of land from afar and continue sailing. However, Aruba was an exception. He had heard that there were "quebracho" (Kibrahacha) trees on the island, which were commonly used to produce dye or paint. But since these trees could not be found in Savaneta, he continued to search in the area of what is now known as Santa Cruz. The best way to transport the tree barks was via a route passing through Savaneta, and so the first road between Savaneta and Santa Cruz was made.

The Dutch colonial era (1636-1805)

During the 80-year war between The Netherlands and Spain, Dutch explorers and merchants began to travel to the ABC islands. Once they landed in Aruba, they deported the

small Arawakan and Spanish community that was living on the island. This was the beginning of colonization of the ABC islands by the Dutch empire. Around the same, the West Indian Company (WIC) was born. Bonaire and Curacao were mostly used for plantations, where the Dutch had transported slaves from Africa. Aruba, on the other hand, was mostly used to raise cattle and to house the haring factory. The Dutch had often forced the indigenous community to work for them.

In 1636, when the Netherlands won the war against Spain, the country surren-

dered the islands to the Dutch.

The Dutch administration appointed the island's first commander, an Irish man named N. Williams. Because the Dutch were interested in other Caribbean islands and countries in South America, they imported Dutch merchants and business men, all of whom resided in Savaneta. This way, Savaneta officially became the island's first capital.

However, at the end of the 18th century, the commander at the time, J.R. Lauffer, moved his office to what is now "Horse Bay" in

Oranjestad. Because the highest office on the island moved away from Savaneta, the capital lost its title to what was called then Playa.

How Savaneta got its name

The name Savaneta probably has a Spanish origin. It was said that when the Spanish climbed a hill called Yara, they saw that the area was mostly open and had no big trees. In Spanish, such a land area is called a "sabana".

Because of its land surface, Savaneta was a great place to construct cattle farms. From here, the farmer culture on Aruba was born. Before the Aruban Gold Rush and the construction of the Refinery in San Nicolas, most residents were farmers, and Savaneta had many inhabitants that farmed fruits and vegetables. They also continued the tradition of raising cattle, like goat, sheep, pigs and horses. Savaneta was one of the first places on the island to have a general farming culture. From this culture, many other traditions were born, like the Dera Gay Holiday that we celebrate every year on June 24th. □

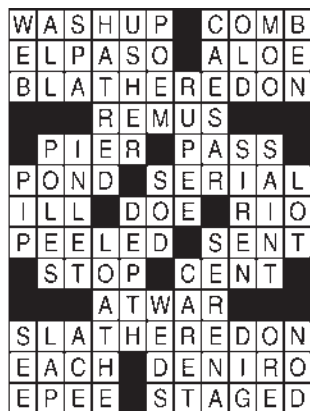
Source: Historia di Savaneta (History of Savaneta) by Adolf "Dufi" Kock.



CROSSWORD

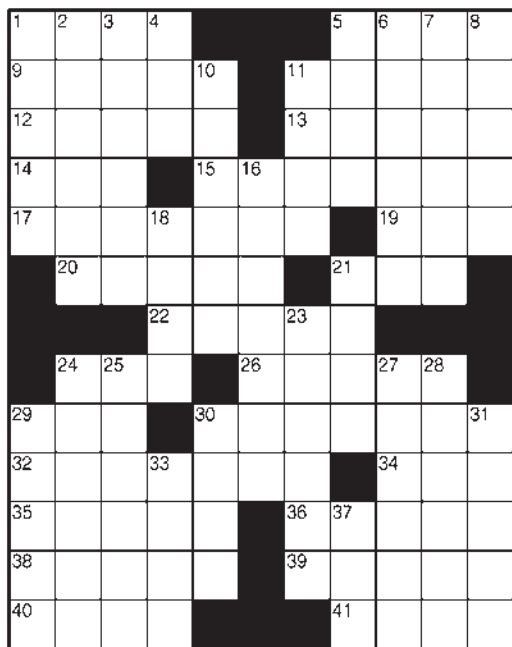
By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 36 Wipe away
- 1 Mass unit
- 5 NYC cultural attraction
- 9 Dance party attendee
- 11 Lock setting
- 12 "Skyfall" singer
- 13 Houston player
- 14 Polite address
- 15 Fire
- 17 Quarter-backs, at times
- 19 Homer's bartending pal
- 20 Inclines
- 21 Kingsley or Affleck
- 22 Canyon of comics
- 24 Sit-up targets
- 26 Comfy spots
- 29 Hotel amenity
- 30 City north of Newark
- 32 Whole heaps
- 34 Sea, to Simone
- 35 Massage targets



DOWN

- 1 Under-stand
- 2 Tire type
- 3 Reluctant
- 4 Singer Tillis
- 5 Church event
- 6 Punctual
- 7 Strand
- 8 Without aid
- 10 Advice to sinners
- 11 One of the Mamas and the Papas
- 16 Weapons store
- 18 Pert talk
- 21 Harry's wife
- 23 Boat
- 24 Cochise's people
- 25 Big parties
- 27 Tex-Mex treat
- 28 Midday break
- 29 Twitch or gnat
- 31 Wave's top
- 33 Takes in
- 37 Crater part



4-5

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

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

4-5 CRYPTOQUOTE

C BGIJ UWPPGIJV KJLWYPJ TGV

QJ CN CP W LVZ WHWCXPN

CXRCTTJVJXLJ, W LVZ TGV

IGOUWPPCGX. — JBCJ ECJPJB

Cryptoquote: WHAT YOU SEE BEFORE YOU, MY FRIEND, IS THE RESULT OF A LIFETIME OF CHOCOLATE. — KATHARINE HEPBURN

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.

CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE	
02 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
04 TUE	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
05 WED	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E
09 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
11 TUE	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: B ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C CARNIVAL VISTA Arrival: 13:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I
12 WED	ALLURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E
16 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E

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

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

Difficulty: ★★★★★

8/1

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★★★★

7/31

Meet the astronomer digging into the Milky Way's 'fossils'

Groningen, Netherlands

Amina Helmi's passion for the Milky Way is clear as soon as one steps into her small office at the University of Groningen, in the north of the Netherlands. Alongside family photos and piled-up dissertations with impenetrable titles sits a bowl stacked with the chocolates named after the star system she has spent her career studying. Digging into the Milky Way's violent past has earned this 55-year-old astronomer, originally from Argentina, the Kavli Prize, widely seen as the Nobel Prize of astrophysics. Helmi is a world expert in a field known as galactic archaeology, which aims to decipher what has happened to our galaxy in the past and get a glimpse of its future by using stars as "cosmic fossils". "We can measure, for example, the amount of chemicals in the stars," Helmi told AFP in an interview.

"This works as a kind of DNA of a star in the sense that they preserve information of where they were born and in which environment." Forget the typical image of an astronomer with eyes glued to a telescope scanning the celestial sphere. Helmi fixes her eyes on vast catalogues of data sometimes with two billion lines of information containing precious information about the stars. The European Space Agency's Gaia mission, which aimed to form a three-dimensional map of the Milky Way, was a key turning point for Helmi's research. "That measured the motions of about one and a half billion stars over a much larger volume than before," said Helmi, who



A picture of Amina Helmi. Photo by Bram Saeys (NWO)

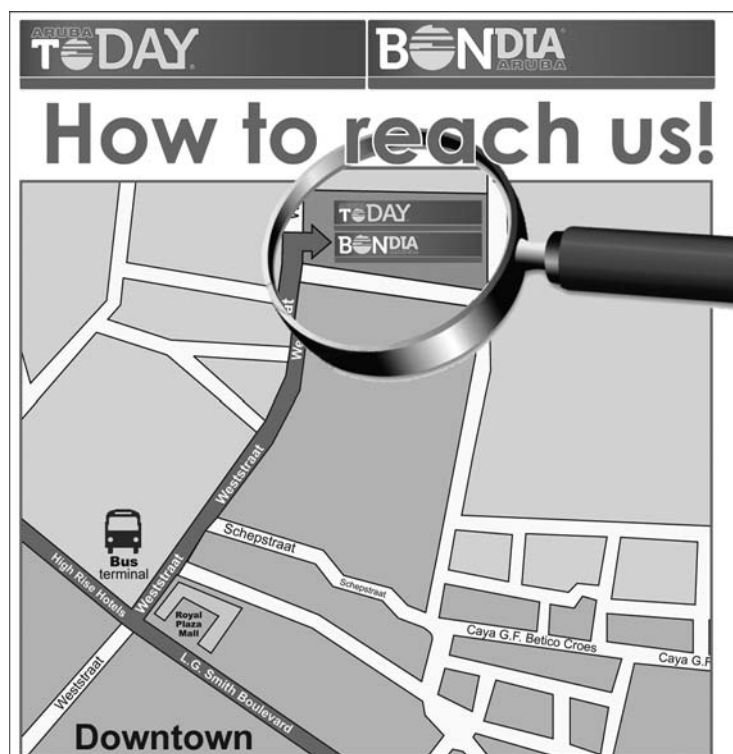
contributed to the mission herself. "It wasn't just the huge number of objects, but also how accurately we could measure the motions, how precisely."

- 'Speechless' -

The data from the Gaia mission allowed Helmi and her team to piece together the events that changed our home galaxy forever. Around 10 billion years ago, well before our Sun and the stars we can see today were born, a dwarf galaxy, Gaia-Enceladus, collided with what was the Milky Way at the time. The two galaxies fused and the stars now present are part of a halo that surrounds our home galaxy.

New stars were also created as a consequence of the cosmic collision, creating a "puffed up" disk that is a feature of the Milky Way, she said. The discovery proved that the Milky Way was formed from a series of crashes with other galaxies, not via a smooth and steady growth as previously thought. The work earned Helmi a share of the Kavli Prize, along with Vasily Belokurov (University of Cambridge) and Rodrigo Ibata (University of Strasbourg). Helmi also won a share of the \$1 million prize fund, a medal, and a citation, due to be presented in September at a ceremony organised by the Norwegian

Academy of Science and Letters in Oslo. The trio of scientists were praised for "uncovering the fossil evidence of past mergers proving that the Milky Way galaxy was built through hierarchical accretion". □



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Oranjestad: del Pueblo
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San Nicolas: Seroe Preto
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OTHER

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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic 588 0539

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Police 100
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Police Noord 527 3200
Police Sta. Cruz 527 2900
Police San Nicolas 584 5000
Police Tipline 11141
Ambulance 911
Fire Dept. 115
Red Cross 582 2219

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Prof. Taxi 588 0035
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A1 Taxi Serv. 280 2828

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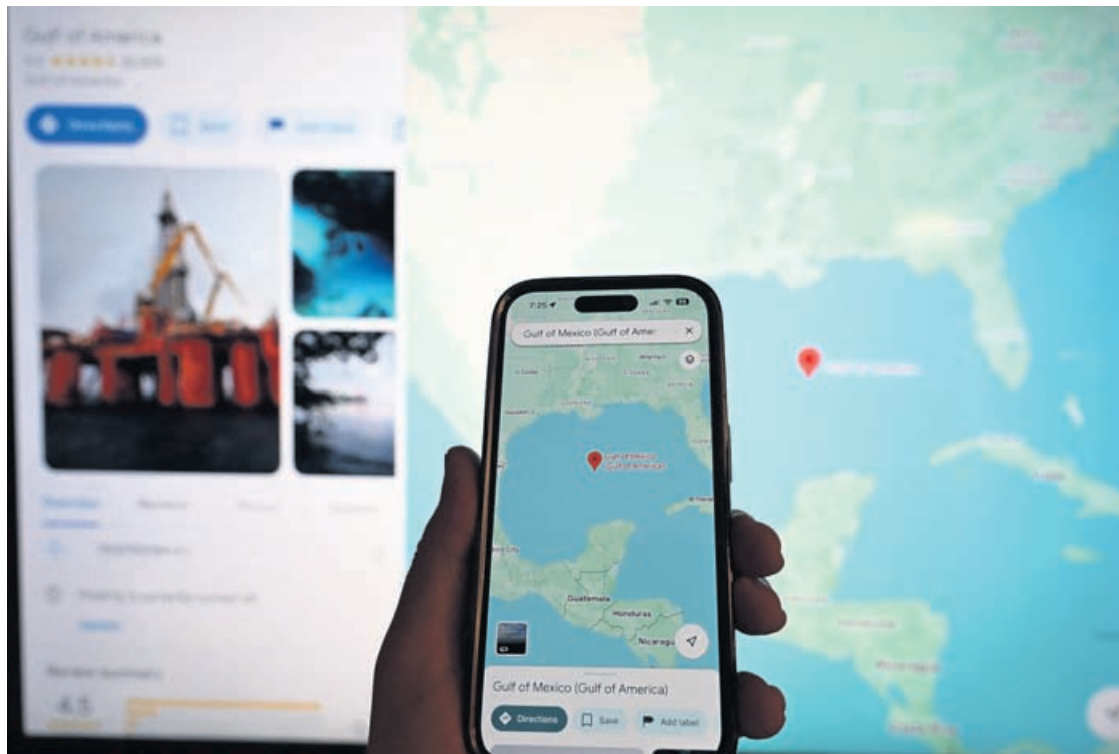
Google launches new satellite image AI tool, alarming researchers

Washington, United States

Google announced a new feature allowing Google Earth users to generate AI visualizations on top of the service's satellite imagery, sparking concerns from researchers and open-source intelligence experts about the potential for disinformation.

The "create image" tool, rolled out Thursday, integrates Google's Nano Banana 2 image-generation technology to let users zoom into locations and build images in seconds based on Google Earth satellite, aerial and 3D-mapping data.

The company unveiled the feature as a way to "visualize history, create real estate plans and more." But disinformation researchers are warning it could enable bad actors to misuse Google Earth a key resource for fact-checking and verification to create realistic geospatial fakes. "Google spent 20 years building the reference the world checks against," digital investigations expert Henk Van Ess wrote on Sub-



A smartphone displays Google Maps that shows Gulf of America, in Mountain View, California, United States on February 12, 2025.

stack. "Today it added a button that makes things up."

"The forgery does not have to look convincing on its own," Van Ess added. "It inherits the credibility of the map it was born on."

Brady Africk, a research analyst at the American Enter-

prise Institute specializing in satellite imagery analysis, told AFP the Google Earth update "makes it easier to generate convincing fake satellite imagery that can spread quickly online and mislead the public."

"These AI-generated fakes, growing more common, may also erode public trust

in satellite imagery, and make the jobs of journalists and researchers more difficult."

In a response to AFP on X, Google said images created with the feature include SynthID digital watermarks, invisible markers embedded in media generated using the company's artifi-

cial intelligence tools. Users can ask Google's Gemini chatbot if a SynthID is present.

"We take misinformation seriously," the company wrote.

Google's statement said the company prevents "image creation on harmful topics" and its AI policy instructs users against "misinformation, misrepresentation or misleading activities."

Yet AFP's tests of the feature Friday were able to fabricate satellite images that could have serious global consequences: an explosion in Paris, a nuclear site in Iran, a bomb crater in Russia and an Islamic State group training ground in Syria.

The tool also fulfilled prompts to visualize other fake scenes, including floods across Bangladesh, a migrant caravan camped at the U.S.-Mexico border and a suspicious warehouse housing vans in Georgia one of several states U.S. President Donald Trump has falsely accused of widespread election fraud.

Similar fakes have had real-world impacts. In 2023, an AI image depicting an explosion at the Pentagon briefly rattled the markets. Early in the U.S. war with Iran, an AI-altered satellite image depicting a destroyed US military base garnered millions of views across platforms.

"I cannot stress how irresponsible this is," Ross Burley, executive director of the London-based Centre for Information Resilience, told AFP. "Trust in satellite imagery has taken decades to build and could be irrevocably damaged overnight."

The group is calling on Google to reverse the decision, Burley said.

GeoConfirmed, a volunteer-driven open-source intelligence project that verifies visuals from conflicts around the globe, also urged Google to reconsider. □

OpenAI says has more than 1 billion active users

Washington, United States

OpenAI announced on Friday that it had surpassed the symbolic milestone of 1 billion active users, less than four years after the launch of its popular chatbot ChatGPT.

"Our models now reach more than one billion active users and more than two million businesses. As

people gain confidence in the technology, they use it more deeply," the company said in a blog post. According to several U.S. media outlets, the San Francisco-based startup had initially expected to reach the milestone earlier this year, after hitting 900 million weekly active users in late February, but

faced increased competition from its rivals. OpenAI was founded in 2015, but did not launch its first consumer product, ChatGPT, until November 2022.

By comparison, it took Facebook six years after launching its social network to reach one billion users.

The figure cited by OpenAI on Friday covers all of its artificial intelligence (AI) interfaces, primarily ChatGPT but also Codex, its model dedicated to AI-assisted programming, as well as ChatGPT Work, a platform that allows users to access other external applications.

Its business customer segment, which generates higher revenue and margins per user, became a priority for the company in late 2025. Since then, it has closed some of the

gap with its major rival Anthropic, which focuses on this class of clients.

The emergence of AI agents which perform tasks on demand, evaluate their results, and make improvements autonomously has sent demand for computing power skyrocketing and caused costs to soar for businesses and developers.

Eager to keep those costs down, many are now turning to models that are less sophisticated than the cutting-edge AI systems from OpenAI and Anthropic, including open-source models, particularly those from China.

In early July, OpenAI released three versions of its new model, GPT-5.6, including a "low-cost" version, Luna, which costs one-fifth as much as the highest-performing model, Sol. □



The OpenAI logo appears on a mobile phone in front of a screen showing part of the company website in this photo taken on Nov. 21, 2023 in New York.

FIFA plan hit by senior advisor resigning, AFC opposition

Paris, France

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) joined UEFA and CONCACAF in condemning world football's governing body FIFA's proposed private investment plan, saying on Friday they were alarmed it had reached the point a "World Cup boycott has entered public discourse".

A damaging blow to FIFA president Gianni Infantino came with the later resignation of a senior advisor Carlos Cordeiro, who issued an excoriating statement.

"As a senior advisor to the FIFA president, a former banker, and a lifelong football fan, I cannot stand by while FIFA considers selling a stake in the World Cup," wrote Cordeiro, a former head of the US Soccer Federation.

"Let me be clear: I had no involvement in this proposal, and I oppose it unequivocally.

"It is a bad deal for FIFA's member associations, a bad deal for football, and a bad deal for the long-term future of the game." His resignation and the AFC statement came hours after FIFA vowed to press ahead with an "open and democratic" consultation on the plan.

The statement followed a pledge by Europe's governing body UEFA to boycott the World Cup if FIFA went ahead with its plan which set alarm bells ringing within the AFC.



Senior Advisor to the FIFA President Carlos Cordeiro looks on as he attends a meeting of the White House Task Force on the FIFA World Cup 2026, in the East Room of the White house in Washington, DC, on May 6, 2025.

"The AFC stands in solidarity with UEFA and CONCACAF in expressing serious concerns over FIFA's proposal," the Kuala Lumpur-based body said in a statement.

"The fact that the situation has reached the point where the real possibility of a FIFA World Cup boycott has entered public discourse should concern everyone who cares about the future of our game," said the AFC, which represents 47 member nations, including Australia, China, Japan and Saudi Arabia. FIFA said in a statement all of its member associations should have a chance to consider the plan.

"Nobody is selling football,"

it said.

"This is not something FIFA would ever entertain."

It also said it had heard feedback from UEFA and CONCACAF, the governing body for football in North and Central America, which said all 41 of its member associations had rejected FIFA's proposal to sell a stake in the business operations of the World Cup.

The world body also said its planned consultation process had been "disrupted by incorrect media reports".

"We respect the feedback and concern aired in public and reaffirm our com-

mitment to an open and democratic consultation," FIFA's statement said.

"We will proceed with this consultation process to ensure that each (member association) has the ability to express its vote based on facts," it said.

FIFA has said the plan it announced on Tuesday could raise up to \$4.2 billion based on a valuation of \$20 billion for the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), the commercial subsidiary it proposed to run events such as the World Cup and Club World Cup.

If approved, the project could provide each of FIFA's 211 member asso-

ciations with a one-off payment of \$20 million in early 2027 and increase their funding allocation for the 2027-2030 cycle from \$8.0 million to \$20 million.

Private investors would be allowed under the proposal to acquire stakes in the company but would remain minority shareholders. U.K. Prime Minister Andy Burnham said that Infantino "is the wrong man to lead" FIFA, calling the plan an "outrageous suggestion".

- 'Time for a hydration break' -

UEFA said in an earlier statement none of its national teams would participate in any FIFA competition "for so long as these proposals remain alive".

"The World Cup cannot be treated as an investment product... No part of it should ever be surrendered to private investors. The World Cup is not for sale," it said.

Infantino had described the initiative on Wednesday as a "golden opportunity to turbocharge the development of the game globally".

However, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, who boycotted the World Cup final to show unhappiness with FIFA, said there was no place in world football for such a model.

"Football's future cannot be dictated by the expectations of those whose first duty is to maximise financial return," he said. □

Ryu leads in bid for third straight major at women's British Open

Lytham St Annes, United Kingdom

Ryu Hae-ran is on course to become just the fifth woman to win three consecutive majors after taking the lead of the British Open at the halfway stage on Friday.

The South Korean was three over par through the opening five holes of her second round at Royal Lytham and St Annes. But the winner of the PGA Championship and Evian Championship in the past two months bounced back with five birdies to card a two-under-par 69 to move to seven under for the tournament.

"I'm just trying to have fun on the course because this course provides a lot of stress through the bunkers and the greens are tough," said Ryu.

Japan's Shiho Kuwaki is one shot back in second after overnight leader Jeeno Thitikul dropped back.

Thitikul, the world number two, was two over for the day to slip into a share of third on five under par.

World number one Nelly Korda kept alive her quest for a third major of the year after a disappointing Thursday with a 68 to move to one under for the tournament.

"You never know what's going to happen. It's links golf," said the American.

"I'm just going to try to have the same attitude I had today going into the weekend."

The 2026 season is the first in golf history in which two players, male or female, have won multiple majors. □



South Korea's Haeran Ryu watches a drive from the 18th tee on the second day of the 2026 Women's British Open Golf Championships at Royal Lytham & St. Annes Golf Club, north-west England, on July 31, 2026.

Nakashima ousts top seed de Minaur and Osaka advances at Washington

Washington, United States

Defending champion Alex de Minaur was eliminated by Brandon Nakashima on Friday while women's top seed Jessica Pegula and Naomi Osaka advanced to the semi-finals of the ATP and WTA Washington Open.

De Minaur, the world number six from Australia, fell to American Nakashima 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 in a rematch of last year's Washington quarter-final.

"He came out with some great serving, a lot of first serves," the top-seeded Aussie said. "I played at a high level. I just threw in two pretty awful games on my serve.

"It's a little bit frustrating, but you live and you learn."

World number 33 Nakashima booked a Saturday semi-final against the winner of a later all-American match between 10th-ranked Taylor Fritz and world number 40 Alex Michelsen.

World number three Pegula, an American who won her first career WTA title at Washington in 2019, eliminated 20th-ranked Anna Kalinskaya 6-3, 7-5, to reach her sixth WTA semi-final of the year.

"Since the beginning of the year I'm finding more



Brandon Nakashima of the United States prepares to serve during a men's singles match against Alex de Minaur of Australia on day five of the Mubadala D.C. Open 2026 at William H.G. Fitzgerald Tennis Center on July 31, 2026 in Washington, D.C.

confidence in matches hitting different spots," Pegula said. "I was focusing on that a lot today."

Pegula will face the winner of a later match between Russians Diana Shnaider and Liudmila Samsonova on Saturday for a berth in Sunday's final.

Japan's third-seeded Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam winner, rallied to eliminate

Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 after two hours and 11 minutes. World number 13 Osaka reached a semi-final against the winner of a later match between Ukraine's second-seeded Elina Svitolina and Alexandra Eala of the Philippines.

"In the first set, I had low energy and I kept trying to pump myself up but something was a little flat,"

Osaka said. "In the second, I just wanted to give it my best shot even though I wasn't playing too good." Nakashima, whose only ATP title came at San Diego in 2022, never trailed de Minaur in the tie-break and fired his eighth of 10 aces to take the first set. Nakashima broke in the ninth game of the second set then held on a service winner to end matters after

one hour and 54 minutes.

- 'That's the match' -

"I was probably playing better, having better stats on top in the first set, and it just slipped away," de Minaur said. "In the second set I've got my chances. Break points, just can't convert. All of a sudden I throw in a bad game, and that's the match."

Nakashima saved six of seven break points he faced in improving to 3-1 in their personal rivalry, including a Queen's quarter-final triumph in June.

Pegula seeks her 12th career WTA crown and third of the year after triumphs in Dubai and Charleston.

She broke in the fourth game and held from there to take the first set in 37 minutes then broke in the 11th game of the second set and held at love to advance.

Osaka was undone by 18 unforced errors, three times as many as her rival, in dropping the first set after 41 minutes.

She reached a third set when Cocciaretto double-faulted away a break in the 10th game of set two.

Osaka hit a backhand winner to break in the second game of the final set and held from there. □

Ohtani out of Dodgers lineup with nagging knee trouble

Los Angeles, United States

Japanese superstar Shohei Ohtani was held out of the

Los Angeles Dodgers' lineup on Thursday because of lingering discomfort in his



Shohei Ohtani #17 of the Los Angeles Dodgers sits in the dugout prior to the game against the Seattle Mariners at Dodger Stadium on July 29, 2026 in Los Angeles, California.

left knee, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

The two-way star has been battling inflammation and soreness in the knee for weeks and skipped the Major League Baseball All-Star Game to receive treatment and rest.

He had remained in the Dodgers' batting lineup, however, with the team saying the knee was only a problem when he pitches. Ohtani hasn't pitched in a game since July 3, and this week he postponed a planned bullpen throwing session over what Roberts called "regression" of the

knee injury.

Roberts insisted before Thursday's game against the Seattle Mariners that he didn't think the problem would keep Ohtani from his hitting duties long-term. "I expected him to play," Roberts said, adding that he was "very confident" that Ohtani would be back in the lineup on Friday. Roberts, who added that Ohtani had been on base seven times over the previous two nights could have possibly contributed to the soreness, said it seemed too soon to consider putting Ohtani on the injured list and sidelining him for

more than a week.

"That's a hard question and I understand the thought behind it. But it's gotten better over the last few weeks, markedly," Roberts said. "He's been a very productive player... You trust him. He feels like he can go.

"He's not 100 percent. Very few players are 100 percent. Then what is it? Is it 70 percent, is it 80 percent, is it 90 percent? For me, there's still that conversation, where he understands the most important part of the season is to come, and he understands his value with our team." □