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The Republic of Ecuador (*Republic of the Equator*)



Head of State: His Excellency Daniel Roy Gilchrist Noboa Azín, the 48th president of the Republic of Ecuador since 23 Nov. 2023.

Capital City: Quito • **Population:** 17 million • **Currency:** U.S. dollars is the official currency, since 2000 • **National Holiday:** Independence Day is August 10th also recognized as 'Día del Primer Grito de Independencia de Quito.'

What is now Ecuador, in Western South America, bordering the Pacific Ocean at the Equator, between Colombia and Peru, formed part of the northern Inca Empire until the Spanish conquest in 1533. Quito became a seat of Spanish colonial government in 1563 and part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada in 1717. The territories of the Viceroyalty -

New Granada (Colombia), Venezuela, and Quito - gained their independence between 1819 and 1822 and formed a federation known as Gran Colombia. When Quito withdrew in 1830, the traditional name was changed in favor of the "Republic of the Equator." Between 1904 and 1942, Ecuador lost territories in a series of conflicts with its neighbors.

Did you Know?

Ecuador means "equator" in Spanish. The equator runs through the country. The country's official name is 'República del Ecuador' (Republic of the Equator). Ecuador is the only country in the world named after a geographical feature.

It is the country closest to outer space. At over 6,000 meters (19,685 ft.) tall, Mount Chimborazo is one impressive inactive volcano. It is also the highest point on Earth. Mt. Chimborazo tops out due to a strange occurrence at the equator where the world bulges out in the middle, making it an imperfect sphere. This geographic oddity gives Ecuador's volcano an extra boost when measured from the center of the Earth, it would easily loom over all other mountains. Also, the Cotopaxi, a volcano in Andes, is the highest active volcano in world.

Ecuador is home to 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Ecuador boasts a raft of fascinating cultural and environmental sites, five of which have been officially recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. These include three cultural sites, the City of Quito, the Historic Centre of Santa Ana de los Ríos de Cuenca, Qhapaq Ñan and the Andean Road System. In addition, two of the country's treasured natural sites have also been honored by UNESCO, the Galapagos Islands and Sangay National Park.

The Galapagos Islands inspired the Theory of Evolution. The Galapagos Islands are famous thanks to Charles Darwin and his Theory of Evolution. The theory is centered around the finches of the islands. Darwin examined the way that the same species of bird had evolved differently on the 21 different islands of the Galapagos.

Ecuador is known as the orchid capital of the world. It has over 4,000 species of these beautiful plants. With over 25,000 plant species worldwide, the orchid is the most varied of them all. It also boasts some of the greatest levels of diversity within the species ranges. Some of the flowers can even live up to 100 years old. You can find these plants in Cuenca!

Bananas are an undeniable staple of Ecuadorian diets and cuisine. With around 300 different types of bananas growing in the country, supply meets the demand. Here, there truly is a banana for every occasion. For the last 60 years, Ecuador has been one of the world's largest fruit producers, producing 25% of the world's bananas, missing out on the top production spot to India.

Scientists traced the origins of cacao to Ecuador. A ceramic bottle found in Santa Ana-La Florida, Ecuador, the earliest known site of Mayo-Chinchiipe culture, is the main evidence of early use and domestication of cacao in Ecuador. Researchers used three lines of evidence to show that the Mayo-Chinchiipe culture used cacao between 5,500 and 2,100 years ago: (i) presence of starch grains specific to the cacao tree inside ceramic vessels and broken pieces of pottery; (ii) residues of theobromine, a bitter alkaloid found in the cacao tree but not its wild relatives; (iii) fragments of ancient DNA with sequences unique to the cacao tree. The findings suggest that the Mayo-Chinchiipe people domesticated the cacao tree at least 1,500 years before the crop's use in Central America.

The month of April gets its name from the Latin word "aperio", which means "to open (bud)". This is because April is when many plants, like pear trees and azaleas, begin to bloom. April is also the time when garden soil warms up, making it ideal for planting vegetable seeds. April is the fourth month of the year in the Gregorian calendar, but it was previously the fifth month in the Julian calendar.

The Republic of Ecuador is our featured country for this month. We extend our appreciation to the Consulate General of Ecuador in Miami for providing pertinent information about Ecuador.

We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Gabriela Eremia, Consul General, Consulate General of Romania in Miami to South Florida. We congratulate Ms. Cristine Keller on her promotion to Aviation Protocol Specialist, in the Protocol & International Affairs Division, MDAD.

We celebrate the achievements of Arab Americans during the National Arab American Heritage Month (NAAHM) and honor their invaluable contributions to our nation. We salute the nations celebrating their independence.

Finally, Happy New Year to our friends in Thailand. Songkran is the Thai New Year, celebrated in mid-April. It is renowned for its water festival, as a symbol of cleansing and purification. Songkran is a time for paying respects to elders, visiting temples, and participating in traditional ceremonies.

As always, please be safe.

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DIPLOMATIC & CONSULAR RELATIONS

Meet the new Consul General of Romania in Miami, Florida



Ms. Gabriela Eremia was appointed Consul General, Consulate General of Romania in Miami by the Romanian Prime Minister in August 2023 and began her mandate on December 30, 2023. After serving 20 years in the Romanian Central Public Administration, where she held a variety of positions, such as counselor, director, secretary general in four (4) different areas of activities, and the Chief of Office for both the Minister of Economy and the Vice Prime Minister (PM), she was appointed Minister Counselor within the Romanian Consulate General in Cape Town. A position she held from 2017 to 2022.

During her 5-year-long mandate in South Africa, it was her responsibility to promote Romanian economic and commercial interests in South Africa. In this respect, Ms. Eremia promoted the Romanian business environment and investment climate to attract new Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) to Romania and build cooperation to develop and improve bilateral relations.

She is a graduate of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (1994). She has also continued her professional development by attending a multitude of post-graduate courses and programs in fields such as project management, financial audit, etc.

The main objectives of her mandate as the Consul General of Romania in Miami is providing services, assistance and consular protection to all Romanian citizens under the jurisdiction of the Consulate General of Romania in Miami, consolidating and promoting economic and commercial relations between Romania and the U.S., and promoting the Romanian language, culture, traditions to increase the presence of Romania in the cultural environment of the United States.

Meet our new Aviation Protocol Specialist



Ms. Cristine Keller assumed the new position of Aviation Protocol Specialist, Protocol & International Affairs Division, Miami-Dade Aviation Department on April 26, 2024. She will be responsible for coordinating the activities of the staff of Airport Protocol Officers and assisting in the development of procedures for the handling of protocol at Miami International Airport, working in collaboration with key stakeholders and partners at the local, state, federal, and international levels, etc. Prior to her promotion, she served as Airport Protocol Officer.

After more than 20 years in health care, Ms. Keller followed her passion for airplanes and aviation to Miami International Airport. In 2014, she started as a volunteer Airport Ambassador welcoming visitors and providing information and assistance as needed. After a few months, she secured a position with Air Canada as a seasonal passenger service agent. This experience provided her with ample opportunity to speak French and hone her customer services skills.

Prior to joining the Aviation family, she worked as a physical therapist at the Marian Center School & Services from 2007 – 2010. She was also a self-employed massage therapist, providing therapeutic massage to clients, from 2010 – 2014.

In November 2015, Ms. Keller joined the Miami Dade Aviation Department as a Public Service Assistant in the Airport Operations Center (AOC). Working behind the scenes provided excellent opportunities to learn about the airport and its operations. She also had the opportunity to work in Paging and Information, which allowed her to work directly with the traveling public.

In September 2018, she joined the Protocol and International Affairs Division. She was selected by the Rewards & Recognition Committee as Miami-Dade Aviation Department's May 2021 Employee of the Month. Ms. Keller was selected for her outstanding customer care and service.

Ms. Keller earned a bachelor's degree of Arts in Geography/German - double major, (1983), from Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, and a Master of Science in Physical Therapy, University of Miami, Division of Physical Therapy, Coral Gables, Florida (1990).

She also obtained Diplomas in Complex Decongestive Physiotherapy, Sports Massage Training, Therapeutic Massage and Hydrotherapy. She is proficient in German, Spanish, French, and Portuguese (completed Rosetta Stone Portuguese).

Ms. Keller is a graduate of the Protocol School of Washington @ Miami Protocol Training Class of 2021. She is a member of Protocol & Diplomacy International - Protocol Officers Association (PDI-POA). The mission of PDI-POA is to foster a global community of protocol and diplomacy professionals.

CULTURE, ETIQUETTE, AND PROTOCOL

Worst social etiquette mistakes in the office

Workers are back in offices, and so are some of their bad habits. After years of prolonged working from home, some employees at [Epignosis, LLC.](#), a software learning company, were returning to offices but not treating them as shared spaces. As a result, the 235-person company, which is 30% remote and 70% hybrid, created an office etiquette guide and required that all existing and new employees get training on it, says Christina Gialleli, the director of people operations at Epignosis.

It's all in an effort to combat the biggest etiquette faux pas Gialleli says she sees in today's workplace: not being mindful of others in your surroundings. "Offices are busy now," she says. Some recurring issues of today's office include people talking too loudly in areas meant for focused work or taking personal calls in an open space.

Unkempt workspaces are another big problem, Gialleli says. Things you'd think would be "common sense" are turning out to be big problems, she says, but explains that people have trouble "adjusting to not being on your own in your home office." One example she's seen: Leaving your dirty dishes from lunch on your desk to pick up at the end of the day. It's especially bad for teams that use hot-desking rather than keeping assigned spaces for employees, Gialleli says. Suddenly, leaving behind a graveyard of used coffee cups isn't just an eyesore for your desk neighbor, but it can become the problem of the next person to use the space.

In response, Epignosis employees are now trained in an office etiquette guide, which includes reminders about picking up after yourself in the communal kitchen and not adjusting the A/C to freezing.

Mindfulness in the hybrid workplace

Being mindful is especially important in hybrid workplaces where employees aren't always in the room together. Otherwise, Gialleli says, teams can easily fall into issues of proximity bias, where people in the office are favored for certain assignments and in meetings because they're physically present. According to Epignosis data, one of the most in-demand courses it offers is around the proper etiquette to host a hybrid meeting, which Gialleli adds is "the biggest pain point" and area for improvement in today's hybrid workplace.

To that end, good hybrid meeting etiquette includes a few things:

- * Booking the appropriate facilities in the office with the right technology so remote workers can actively participate.
- * Setting an agenda beforehand so everyone has the same info entering the meeting.
- * Sending the meeting request in advance to accommodate those on a more flexible working schedule.
- * Following up on the meeting with a written summary an action items for everyone to work on

Finally, Gialleli suggests, remember to capture anything important said outside of the formal meeting that remote workers should know, and pass that along in a written message.

Source: [CNBC Online](#)

No. 1 etiquette skill people are eager to learn in the workplace

One of the most in-demand skills people want to learn in the workplace is also straightforward: effective communication. Communication and etiquette topics are some of the most common courses being accessed in the [TalentLibrary](#) from [Epignosis, LLC.](#), a software learning company, according to internal data.

Consider today's hybrid workforce that uses multiple email and messaging platforms, where up to five generations make up a workplace, and it's not surprising that people want to brush up on their communication skills, says Christina Gialleli, the director of people operations at Epignosis.

The demand for learning "is about adapting to changes in the workplace," she says. Some of the top soft skills people are learning in the workplace include:

- * Email etiquette.
- * Communicating under stress
- * Effective problem solving
- * The 7 skills of critical thinking
- * Time management

Dealing with email [causes a lot of workplace stress](#): 60% of people say the volume of emails they receive at work adds stress to their day, according to a survey of 2,000 U.S. office workers from [Babbel](#), the language learning platform. Gialleli says her company's "email etiquette" course covers how to communicate effectively by making sure "the email includes very clearly the topic you're trying to cover, action items and next steps."

She suggests using the **GROW** framework, which stands for:

Goal: What am I trying to achieve through this message or response?

Reality: Does this message address the reality of what's happening?

Options: Does this message give the person options to move forward?

What will we do: Does this message specify what we'll take action on next?

Epignosis' course on "communicating under stress" covers how to identify stressful conditions that make it hard to communicate, as well as how to speak and listen effectively under stress. Overall, Gialleli says businesses can help new employees learn the rules of communication and etiquette around the workplace by providing them with mentorship early on. That includes having access to a senior leader and peer employee to show them the ropes.

It can also include fostering a strong connection among "new hire" cohorts, Gialleli says.

"Having that group through onboarding creates this bond and opens communications channels" to learn about working within the organization "with people of different backgrounds and seniority," Gialleli says.

Source: [CNBC Online](#)



An eclipse occurs when a planet or a moon gets in the way of the Sun's light. Here on Earth, we can experience two kinds of eclipses: solar eclipses and lunar eclipses. A **solar eclipse** occurs when the Moon passes between the Sun and Earth, causing the Moon to cast a shadow on Earth. A **lunar eclipse** occurs when Earth is between the Sun and the Moon, causing Earth to cast a shadow on the Moon.

As early as 500 B.C., the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras figured out that eclipses involve shadows. Chinese, Islamic, and Mayan thinkers also began to work out the science of eclipses. But until the 18th century, it became common knowledge that the occurrence an eclipse had was not an omen or a mystifying experience. Traditions from around the world imagined the eclipse as everything from the Sun being eaten by monsters to an intimate meeting with the moon. Here, we explore some eclipse stories and customs from around the world.

The Sun Is Devoured

In Vietnam, legend has it that a giant frog swallows the Sun. Its master, the lord of Hahn, then convinces the frog to spit it out. In Javanese (the largest ethnic group in Indonesia) mythology, the god of darkness, Batara Kala, swallows the Sun. Javanese villagers try to make Batara Kala release the Sun by offering sacrifices and beating drums.

The Pomo people's (descendants from the Hoka-speaking people in the Sonoma County, California) name for a solar eclipse is "Sun got bit by a bear." They tell a story about a bear who goes out for a stroll along the Milky Way. The bear meets up with the Sun, and the two begin to argue about who will move out of the other's path. The argument turns into a fight, which is the eclipse.

In ancient Chinese culture, it was commonly held that a celestial dragon attacked and devoured the Sun. To frighten away the dragon and save the Sun, people would bang drums and make loud noises.

In Norse culture, the evil enchanter Loki is chained by the gods. He gets revenge by creating wolflike giants, one of which swallows the Sun. Another of the giant wolves chases the moon, trying to eat it. The old Norse culture encompasses both the 'Viking' and the medieval cultures of Iceland and Norway, etc.

An Intimate Relationship

In the Euahlayi oral traditions of southeast Australia, the Sun is known as a woman named Yhi and the moon as a man called Bahloo. Yhi falls in love with Bahloo and chases him across the sky. Yhi tells the spirits that hold up the sky that if they let Bahloo escape she will plunge the world into darkness. A medicine man would recite magical chants to combat this evil omen.

In German mythology, the hot female Sun and cold male moon are married. The Sun rules the day, and the sleepy moon rules the night. Seeking companionship, the moon is drawn to his bride, and they come together to create a solar eclipse.

The Inuit (the term *Inuit* refers broadly to the Arctic indigenous population of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland) tell of the Sun goddess Malina, who is chased across the sky by her brother, the moon god Igaluk. Occasionally he catches up with her for a brief reunion and everything goes dark. **The Maya of Mesoamerica** observed and recorded eclipses in accordion shaped bark paper books called codices. The Dresden Codex (named after the city that houses the original document) records eclipse prediction tables for both solar and lunar eclipses. The Maya were able to predict eclipse seasons, although the precise location where the eclipses would be visible was unknown. Today, Maya people bang pots and pans to make the Sun and Moon release their embrace.

Unhappy Gods

Ancient Greeks had a different spin on this celestial event. They believed that eclipses were a sign the gods were angry with humans and that the Sun would abandon Earth, bringing untold misery. The word "eclipse" comes from the Greek word - "abandonment."

The Incas worshiped Inti, the all-powerful Sun god. Inti was generally believed to be benevolent, but solar eclipses were understood to be a sign of his wrath and displeasure.

African Mythology

According to the Batammaliba of northern Togo and Republic du Benin, an eclipse is caused by fighting between the Sun and the moon. When an eclipse occurs, the Batammaliba come together as a community and try to end their own fighting as a way of encouraging the Sun and moon to do the same.

The Yoruba people (Western Nigeria) had their own, ingenious story. The moon and the sun had children: the stars. But the sun turned against his children. Which is why, when the sun comes out, the stars — his kids — go into hiding, only to sneak back when their mother, the moon, takes over at night. Which makes dad angry. "The sun was seen to be chasing the moon across the sky," Swangin said. "When the two met — when the sun caught up with the moon — you had an eclipse."

Shangaana/Tsonga People (are a diverse people in South Africa, Southern Mozambique, and Zimbabwe) name of Solar eclipse is called 'Kubola kadyambi'. This can be translated as the rotting of the sun. This ethnic group associate this event with their beliefs. It is believed that once this event occurs in the specific area which is affected or experiencing the total Solar eclipse there is someone who did wrong acts and therefore the God of their Gods called 'Kokwani' is angry and his anger is upon the specific area affected or experiencing the total Solar eclipse.

Sources: [Exploratorium](#); [African Eclipse](#)

BRIEFS & NOTES



The achievements of Arab Americans are celebrated through the celebration of National Arab American Heritage Month (NAAHM) in April. [Arab America and the Arab America Foundation](#) launched the National Arab American Heritage Month initiative in [2017](#), with just a handful of states recognizing the initiative. In 2021, the President of the United States, Joe Biden, recognized the month of April as National Arab American Heritage Month with a special commemorative letter. In 2022, Congress, the U.S. Department of State, and 45 state governors issued proclamations commemorating the initiative. Additionally, the following states have passed permanent legislation designating the month of April as NAAHM:

[Illinois](#); [Oregon](#); [Virginia](#); [Indiana](#) (Senate), and [California](#).

During this time, we celebrate and recognize Arab Americans past and present invaluable contributions to our country's history. It also serves as a time to combat Anti-Arab bigotry and to challenge stereotypes and prejudices. [Click here to view President Biden's Proclamation on Arab American Heritage Month 2023.](#)



National Poetry Month is a literary observance that is celebrated all over the world by millions of people. The purpose of this holiday is to mark the importance of poetry in our lives and to remember the great poets who have created this art. According to the [Academy of American Poets](#), the National Poetry Month was launched in April 1996. National Poetry Month is a special occasion that celebrates poets' integral role in our culture and that poetry matters. Over the years, it has become the largest literary celebration in the world, with tens of millions of readers, students, K-12 teachers, librarians, booksellers, literary events curators, publishers, families, and—of course—poets, marking poetry's important place in our lives.

The Academy of American Poets—an organization that includes booksellers, librarians, teachers, publishers, poets, and literary associations—met in 1995 to discuss the need for a month-long celebration of poetry. It was determined that it would have value, and the holiday was officially launched in April of 1996, by President William Clinton making the first presidential proclamation of National Poetry Month. Since then, similar proclamations have been made by mayors and other government officials across the United States. There are various poetry-related events that will take place in Miami during April, such as the [O. Miami Poetry Festival](#), and Piano Slam, which is a fusion of poetry and music. Click on [Celebrate Miami's Youth at PIANO SLAM 2024 – A Fusion of Poetry and Music](#), if you are interested.

Interesting Poetry Facts:

- * The most popular poetry form in the world is the Haiku.
- * The longest poem in the world is the Indian epic Mahabharata.
- * The shortest poem is 'The Shortest and Sweetest of Songs' by George MacDonald. It has just two words: "Come Home."
- * The oldest poem is the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.

April 6 is National Teflon / Accidental Discovery Day

On [April 6, 1938 a chemist named Roy J. Plunkett](#) conducted an experiment to find a better refrigerant, but the attempt failed. Instead of a non-flammable gas he discovered a substance we all know as [Teflon](#), quite by accident. Plunkett quickly realized the waxy white powder that formed had remarkable properties. It was corrosion resistant, heat resistant, and had a very low surface friction. He used it to coat laboratory equipment, and soon it would find widespread use in everything from heavy industry to cookware.

Today, due to some [concerns over PTFE](#), the day is also known as "National Discovery Day". After all, Teflon itself was an accidental discovery. Here is a short list of other things discovered by accident:

[Post-It Notes](#): Spencer Silver, a researcher for 3M, was trying to create a stronger adhesive for the aerospace industry. What he created was a weak adhesive, but it was perfect for another application.

[Smoke Detector](#): A Swiss physicist named Walter Jaeger was trying to build a sensor to detect toxic gasses in the 1930s. When his invention did not work, he lit a cigarette in frustration and noticed the meter move.

[Penicillin](#): Perhaps the most famous accidental discovery, On September 3, 1928, Scottish microbiologist Alexander Fleming returned to work from a vacation, only to discover a mold had contaminated a petri dish containing Staphylococcus (a bacteria that cause boils). Instead of throwing it out, he noticed that the mold was inhibiting bacteria growth around it.

[Mauve Dye](#): In March of 1856, chemistry student Willam Henry Perkin failed to oxidize a compound known as aniline to create quinine, a substance the British desperately needed. His experiment left behind a solid black mess in a beaker, and when attempting to clean it out with alcohol noticed that it turned a purplish hue. The world's first synthetic dye was discovered.

So, remember next time you set out to do something and the results are not what you expected, it might not be a failure. It could be the greatest success of your life, if you can find a way to use it in an unexpected way.

BRIEFS & NOTES

How old are taxes? Older than you think

For thousands of years, human civilizations have been collecting taxes, in one form or another. From grain to beards to rubber balls, governments always found new ways to collect their due. Thanks to the detailed records in the *Matricula de Tributos*, historians know exactly how the Aztec paid their taxes in the early 16th century.

Every April in the United States, predictable signs of spring appear budding flowers, chirping birds, and ... taxes. They may be [as certain as death](#), but taxes aren't a recent phenomenon; they date back thousands of years. Over the centuries, different governments all over the world have levied taxes on everything from urine to facial hair—and officials accepted payments of beers, beds, and even broomsticks. These payments went to fund government projects and services—from the pyramids of Giza to the legions of Rome.

First taxes

Taxation has existed for so long; it even predates coin money. Taxes could be applied to almost everything and might be paid with almost anything. In ancient Mesopotamia, this flexibility led to some rather bizarre ways to pay. For instance, the tax on burying a body in a grave was “seven kegs of beer, 420 loaves, two bushels of barley, a wool cloak, a goat, and a bed, presumably for the corpse,” according to Oklahoma State historian [Tonia Sharlach](#). “Circa 2000-1800 B.C., there is a record of a guy who paid with 18,880 brooms and six logs,” Sharlach adds.

Pharaohs' tax preparation

Ancient Egypt was one of the first civilizations to have an organized tax system. It was developed around 3000 B.C., soon after Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt were unified by [Narmer, Egypt's first pharaoh](#). Egypt's early rulers took a very personal interest in taxes. They would travel around the country with an entourage to assess their subjects' possessions—oil, beer, ceramics, cattle, and crops—and then collect the taxes on them. The annual event became known as the *Shemsu Hor*, or Following of Horus. During the Old Kingdom, taxes raised enough revenue to build grand civic projects, like [the pyramids at Giza](#).

Ancient Egypt's taxation system evolved over its 3,000-year history, becoming more sophisticated with time. In the New Kingdom (1539-1075 B.C.), government officials figured out a way to tax people on what they had earned before they'd even earned it, thanks to an invention called the [nilometer](#). This device was used to calculate the water level of the Nile during its annual flood. Taxes would be less if the water level was too low, foretelling a drought and dying crops. Healthy water levels meant a healthy harvest, which meant higher taxes.

Tax amnesty in ancient India

In India's [Mauryan Empire](#) (ca 321-185 B.C.) an annual competition of ideas was held—with the winner receiving tax amnesty. “The government solicited ideas from citizens on how to solve government problems,” Sharlach explains. “If your solution was chosen and implemented, you received a tax exemption for the rest of your life.” The Greek traveler and writer Megasthenes (ca 350-290 B.C.) gave an astonished account of the practice in his book *Indica*. Like most tax reform efforts, the system was far from perfect, Sharlach notes. “The problem is that nobody would have any incentive to ever solve more than one problem.”

Render urine unto Caesar

The Roman emperor Vespasian (r. A.D. 69-79) may not be a household name like Augustus or Marcus Aurelius, but he brought stability to the empire during a turbulent time—partly through an innovative tax on people's pee. Ammonia was a valuable commodity in ancient Rome. It could clean dirt and grease from clothing. Tanners used it to make leather. Farmers used it as fertilizer. And people even used it to whiten their teeth. All this ammonia was derived from human urine, much of it gathered from Rome's public restrooms. And like all valuable products, the government figured out how to tax it. Some wealthy Romans, including Vespasian's own son Titus, objected to the urine tax. [According to historian Suetonius](#) (writing around A.D. 120), Titus told his father he found the tax revolting, to which Vespasian replied, “*Pecunia non olet*,” or “Money does not stink.”

Itemizations for Aztecs

At its height in the 15th and 16th centuries, [the Aztec Empire](#) was wealthy and powerful, thanks to taxation. [Historian Michael E. Smith](#) has studied its tax collection system and found it to be remarkably complex, with different kinds of items collected at different levels of government. All taxes made their way to the Aztec central governing body, the Triple Alliance. There they kept meticulous records of who had sent what. Many of these records survive today. The most famous are found in the *Matricula de Tributos*, a colorful illustrated registry filled with pictographs showing exactly how many jaguar skins, precious stones, corn, cocoa, rubber balls, gold bars, honey, salt, and textiles the government collected each tax season.

Russia's fashion tax

Widespread use of coins and currency had a leveling effect on taxation systems, but rulers were not above applying some taxation muscle to achieve their ends. In 1698, Russian reformer Peter the Great sought to make Russia resemble “modern” nations in western Europe whose clean, close shaves Peter equated with modernization. After he returned to Russia, the tsar instituted a beard tax on his citizens, who favored beards. Any Russian man who wished to grow a beard had to pay a tax—peasants paid a small fee while nobles and merchants could pay as much as a hundred rubles. Men who had paid the tax were also required to carry beard tokens wherever they went to prove that they'd paid their taxes for the privilege. However, [Catherine the Great](#) repealed the beard tax in 1772.

Source: [National Geographic](#)

BRIEFS & NOTES

Origins of April Fool's Day



April Fools' Day—occurring on April 1 each year—has been celebrated for several centuries by different cultures, though its exact origins remain a mystery. April Fools' Day traditions include playing hoaxes or practical jokes on others, often yelling “April Fools!” at the end to clue in the subject of the April Fools' Day prank. While its exact history is shrouded in mystery, the embrace of April Fools' Day jokes by the media and major brands has ensured the unofficial holiday's long life.

Origins of April Fools' Day

Some historians speculate that April Fools' Day dates back to 1582, when France switched from the Julian calendar to the [Gregorian calendar](#), as called for by the Council of Trent in 1563. In the Julian Calendar, as in the Hindu calendar, the new year began with the [spring equinox](#) around April 1.

People who were slow to get the news or failed to recognize that the start of the new year had moved to January 1 and continued to celebrate it during the last week of March through April 1 became the butt of jokes and hoaxes and were called “April fools.” These pranks included having paper fish placed on their backs and being referred to as “poisson d'avril” (April fish), said to symbolize a young, easily caught fish and a gullible person.

Hilaria in Ancient Rome

Historians have also linked April Fools' Day to festivals such as Hilaria (Latin for *joyful*), which was celebrated in [ancient Rome](#) at the end of March by followers of the cult of Cybele. It involved people dressing up in disguises and mocking fellow citizens and even magistrates and was said to be inspired by the Egyptian legend of Isis, Osiris, and Seth. There's also speculation that April Fools' Day was tied to the [vernal equinox](#), or first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, when Mother Nature fooled people with changing, unpredictable weather.

History of April Fools' Day

April Fools' Day spread throughout Britain during the 18th century. In Scotland, the tradition became a two-day event, starting with “hunting the gowk,” in which people were sent on phony errands (gowk is a word for cuckoo bird, a symbol for fool) and followed by Tailie Day, which involved pranks played on people's derrieres, such as pinning fake tails or “kick me” signs on them.

In modern times, people have gone to great lengths to create elaborate [April Fools' Day hoaxes](#). Newspapers, radio and TV stations and websites have participated in the April 1 tradition of reporting outrageous fictional claims that have [fooled their audiences](#).

In 1957, the BBC reported that Swiss farmers were experiencing a record spaghetti crop and showed footage of people harvesting noodles from trees. In 1985, *Sports Illustrated* writer George Plimpton tricked many readers when he ran a made-up article about a rookie pitcher named Sidd Finch who could throw a fastball over 168 miles per hour. In 1992, National Public Radio ran a spot with former President [Richard Nixon](#) saying he was running for president again... only it was an actor, not Nixon, and the segment was all an April Fools' Day prank that caught the country by surprise.

In 1996, Taco Bell, the fast-food restaurant chain, duped people when it announced it had agreed to purchase Philadelphia's [Liberty Bell](#) and intended to rename it the Taco Liberty Bell. In 1998, after Burger King advertised a “Left-Handed Whopper,” scores of clueless customers requested the fake sandwich. Google notoriously hosts an annual April Fools' Day prank that has included everything from “telepathic search” to the ability to play Pac Man on Google Maps.

For the average trickster, there is always the classic April Fools' Day prank of covering the toilet with plastic wrap or swapping the contents of sugar and salt containers.

Source: [History.com](#)

INDEPENDENCE AND NATIONAL DAYS

April 1, 1979 – Iran: The Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed.

April 4, 1960 – Senegal: Senegal gained independence from France. Complete independence was achieved once the federation with Mali was dissolved on August 20, 1960.

April 9, 1991 – Georgia: On May 26, 1918, Georgia achieved independence from Soviet Russia, and on April 9, 1991, it achieved independence from the Soviet Union.

April 17, 1946 – Syria: France administered Syria through a League of Nations mandate until April 17, 1946, when Syria declared full independence, and the last French troops withdrew from its territory.

April 18, 1980 – Zimbabwe: Gained independence from the United Kingdom.

April 26, 1964 –Tanzania: Union Day: On April 26, 1964 Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which was renamed the United Republic of Tanzania on October 29, 1964.

April 27, 1960 – Togo: Gained independence from the French-administered United Nations trusteeship.

April 27, 1961 – Sierra Leone: Gained independence from the United Kingdom.

April 27, 1967 – The Netherlands: King's Day celebrates King Willem-Alexander's birthday.

April 27, 1994 – South Africa: Freedom Day, South Africa's National Day, is an annual celebration of the country's first non-racial democratic elections held in 1994.

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