SOUTH AFRICAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY

P O BOX 9
OBSERVATORY
SOUTH AFRICA
7935

TEL: (021) 447-0025
FAX: (021) 447-3639
INT. CODE: +27 21

INTERNET:
https://www.saao.ac.za

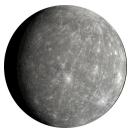
What's Up - February 2026

Moon

Full Moon	Last Quarter	New Moon	First Quarter
2 February 2026 00:09	9 February 2026 14:43	17 February 2026 14:01	24 February 2026 14:28

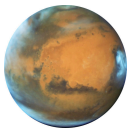
The moon is at perigee (closest to Earth) on 25/02 at 01:18, at a distance of 370 132 km.
It is at apogee (furthest from Earth) on 10/02 at 18:52, at a distance of 404 577 km.

Planets



Mercury (in Aquarius)
↑ 07:45 ↓ 20:24
Near the Moon on 19/02

Venus (in Aquarius)
↑ 07:07 ↓ 20:10
Near the Moon on 18/02



Mars (in Capricornus)
↑ 05:39 ↓ 19:16
Near the Moon on 16/02

Jupiter (in Gemini)
↑ 17:16 ↓ 03:09
Near the Moon on 27/02

Saturn (in Pisces)
↑ 09:01 ↓ 21:15
Near the Moon on 19/02

All the details (apart from the proximity to the Moon) are for mid-month in Cape Town.

More information

Scan the QR code for more information about the South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) and for details about visiting the SAAO in Cape Town or Sutherland.

Some bright stars in the evening sky

Betelgeuse: red supergiant in Orion
Canopus: yellowish-white star in Carina
Procyon: yellowish-white star in Canis Minor
Regulus: blue-white star in Leo
Rigel: blue supergiant in Orion
Sirius: brightest star in the night sky, in Canis Major
Spica: bluish-white star in Virgo
The Pointers: Alpha and Beta Centauri

Meteor showers

The alpha-Centaurids are active from 31/01 until 20/02, peaking on 08/02 with 6 meteors per hour. They are best viewed between 00:00 and 04:30. The gamma-Normids are active from 25/02 until 28/03, peaking on 14/03 with 5 meteors per hour. They are best viewed between 00:00 and 04:30.

Fun facts

Always close to the Sun, Venus is only seen near sunset or sunrise. Thus it came to be known as "evening star" and "morning star". But don't let these names deceive you: Venus is a planet, not a star. Stars are extremely hot gas balls, mostly made of hydrogen and helium. They use fusion as their energy source.

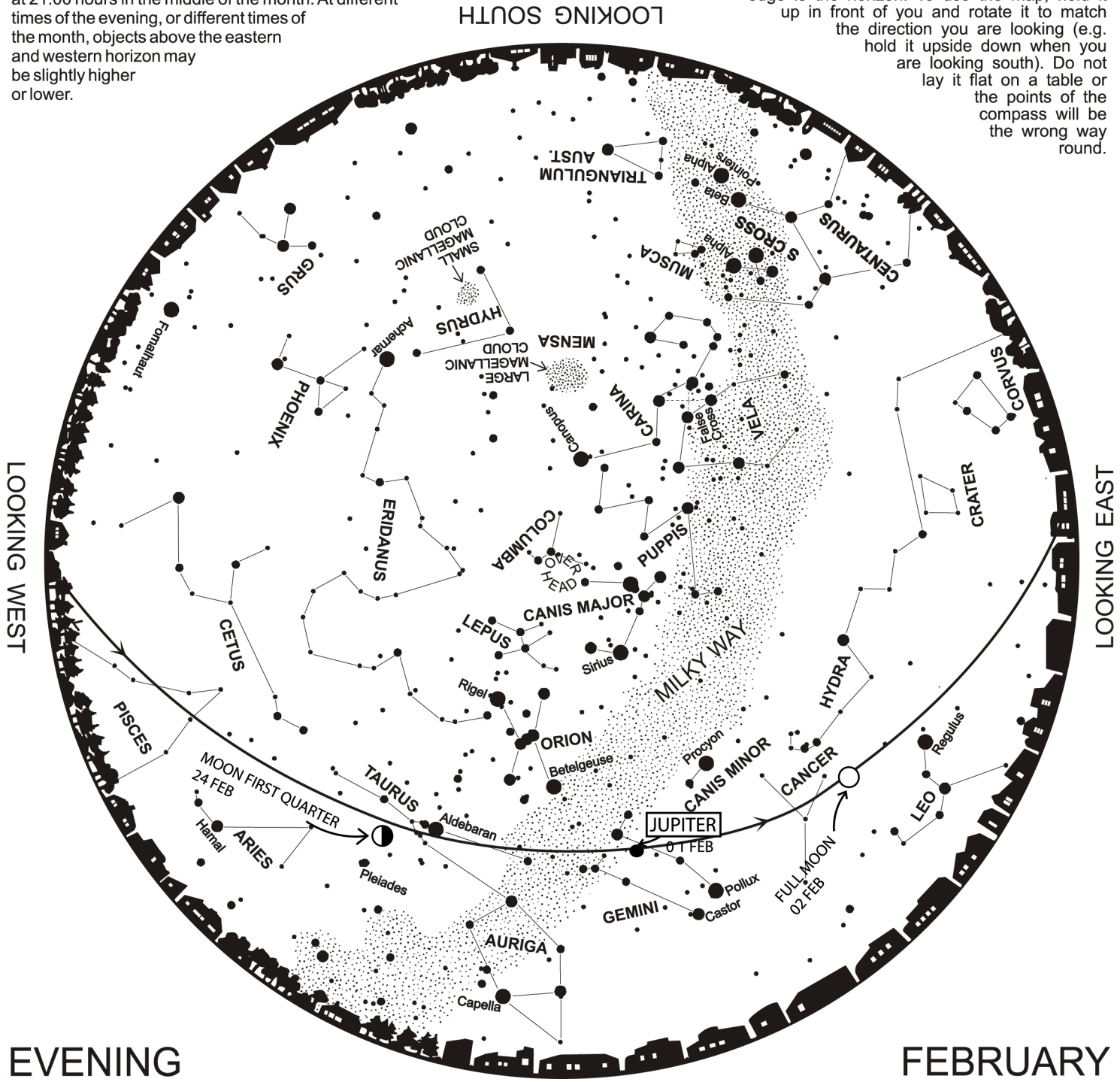
Venus is named after the Roman goddess of love. This is a bit of a misnomer, given that its environment is sheer hell: As most of Venus' atmosphere is made of carbon dioxide, there is a massive greenhouse effect, leading to a surface temperature of about 460 °C. It also means the atmospheric pressure is almost 100 times that on Earth!

For the Tsonga, Venus (as the "morning star") was responsible for leading initiates into their new life. Therefore initiation schools were only held in years when Venus was visible in the morning during the winter months.

IZIKO PLANETARIUM AND
DIGITAL DOME

The map shows the night sky visible above the Cape at 21:00 hours in the middle of the month. At different times of the evening, or different times of the month, objects above the eastern and western horizon may be slightly higher or lower.

The centre of the map is the overhead point, the edge is the horizon. To use the map, hold it up in front of you and rotate it to match the direction you are looking (e.g. hold it upside down when you are looking south). Do not lay it flat on a table or the points of the compass will be the wrong way round.



EVENING SKY

FEBRUARY 2026

During February evenings, the night sky features a blend of late-summer and early-autumn constellations. Prominent in the southern sky are Carina (the Keel), Vela (the Sails), and Puppis (the Stern). Together, these constellations once formed the ancient constellation Argo Navis. Within Carina and Vela, a group of stars forms what is often called the “False Cross”, which resembles the Southern Cross but is larger and dimmer, making it easy to distinguish from the true Cross. Later in the month, multiple planets appear spread along the ecliptic, the plane of the Solar System. Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn are visible in the early evening sky, creating the impression of an apparent planetary alignment. Uranus and Neptune are also present along the same line but require binoculars or a telescope to observe.

Saturn sits low on the western horizon and gradually sets earlier each night. Nearby, Fomalhaut also descends. Known in Shona tradition as Ndemara, the “sweetheart star,” Fomalhaut was said to guide lovers to secret meetings. Its position in a star-poor region of the sky makes it especially easy to identify. As these descend we can welcome the constellations Crater and Corvus
The Full Moon occurs on 2 February, with the New Moon following on 17 February. Close to the New Moon, a partial solar eclipse will take place; however, only a very small portion of the Sun will be obscured. Anyone wishing to observe the eclipse must use proper solar viewing protection at all times.

25 Queen Victoria Street, Cape Town
Postal: PO Box 61, CAPE TOWN, 8000
Tel: 021 481 3900, Fax: 021 481 3900

www.iziko.org.za

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