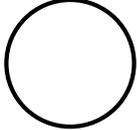
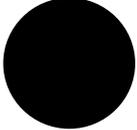
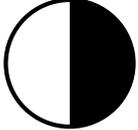


What's Up - March 2026

Moon

 Full Moon 3 March 2026 13:38	 Last Quarter 11 March 2026 11:39	 New Moon 19 March 2026 03:23	 First Quarter 25 March 2026 21:18
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The moon is at perigee (closest to Earth) on 22/03 at 13:40, at a distance of 366 858 km. It is at apogee (furthest from Earth) on 10/03 at 15:43, at a distance of 404 385 km.

Planets



Mercury (in Aquarius)
 ↑ 05:41 ↓ 18:14
 Near the Moon on 17/03



Venus (in Pisces)
 ↑ 08:03 ↓ 19:50
 Near the Moon on 20/03



Mars (in Aquarius)
 ↑ 05:36 ↓ 18:29
 Near the Moon on 17/03



Jupiter (in Gemini)
 ↑ 15:23 ↓ 01:15
 Near the Moon on 26/03



Saturn (in Pisces)
 ↑ 07:27 ↓ 19:33
 Near the Moon on 19/03

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

Antares: red supergiant in Scorpius
 Arcturus: red giant in Boötes
 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 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.

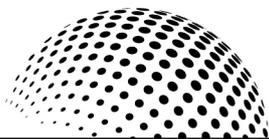
Equinox

The March equinox takes place on 20 March at 16:45:57. This marks the beginning of astronomical spring on the southern hemisphere.

Fun facts

Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto on 18 February 1930 by comparing photographic plates. It had been seen several times before - but nobody had noticed it was not a star. Pluto was regarded as a planet until 2006, when it was reclassified as a dwarf planet by the International Astronomical Union.

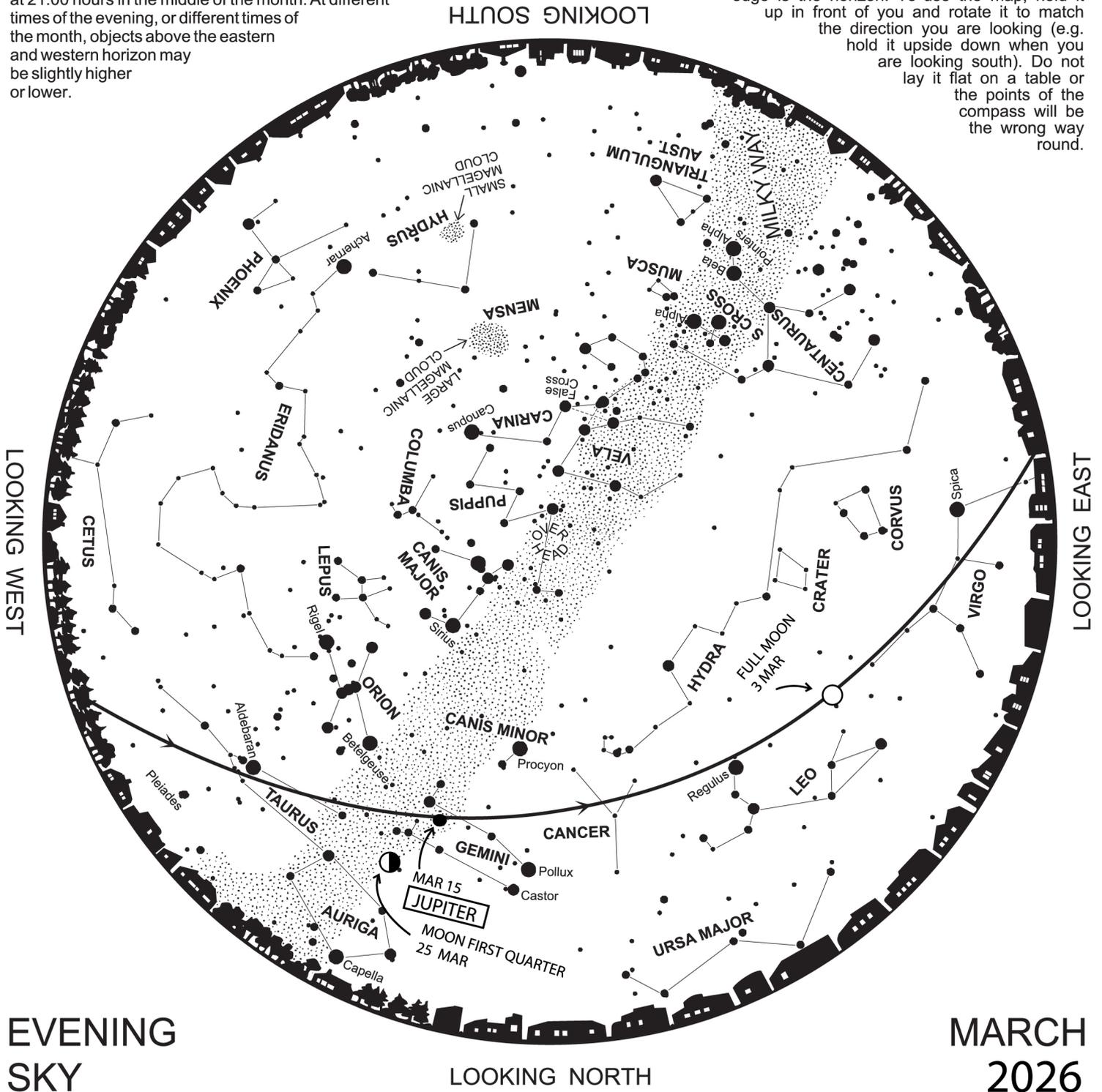
The name "Pluto" for the newly found planet was suggested more than a hundred times. The first of these suggestions to reach Lovell Observatory came from an 11 years old girl, Venetia Burney, from Oxford. She would not remain the only learner to name a heavenly object. The name of the asteroid *Ubuntu* was suggested by Nabeela Kajee, a learner from Pinelands High School, in a naming competition held by the SAAO during the International Year of Astronomy in 2009.



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

MARCH 2026

The start of autumn brings a shift in our evening skies constellations from summer to winter. The Milky Way begins to return to prominence in the late evening and early morning hours, hinting at the rich winter sky to come. In the east, Virgo climbs higher each evening, led by its bright blue-white star Spica. Although it looks like a single star, Spica is made up of two stars orbiting extremely close to each other. They are so close, in fact, that their strong gravity pulls them out of shape, stretching them slightly so they are not perfectly round. Gemini, Cancer, and Leo drift westward as autumn advances. Orion, along with his hunting dogs Canis Major and Canis Minor, sinks toward the western horizon. In early March, the Moon appears close to Regulus in Leo, creating a striking pairing in the evening sky.

To the south, Centaurus climbs higher, with the famous Pointer Stars, Alpha and Beta Centauri. The Full Moon occurs on 3 March, accompanied by a total lunar eclipse. However, this total phase is not visible from South Africa, as it occurs below our horizon. The New Moon falls on 19 March, providing darker skies for deep-sky observing. Jupiter remains bright in the constellation Gemini, shining near the twin stars Castor and Pollux. As the month progresses, Taurus, with its reddish star Aldebaran, moves gradually toward the western sky.