SOUTH AFRICAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY

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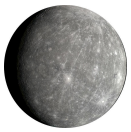
What's Up - April 2026

Moon

Full Moon	Last Quarter	New Moon	First Quarter
2 April 2026 04:12	10 April 2026 06:52	17 April 2026 13:52	24 April 2026 04:32

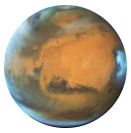
The moon is at perigee (closest to Earth) on 19/04 at 08:57, at a distance of 361 631 km.
It is at apogee (furthest from Earth) on 07/04 at 10:32, at a distance of 404 974 km.

Planets



Mercury (in Pisces)
↑ 05:08 ↓ 17:26
Near the Moon on 15/04

Venus (in Aries)
↑ 09:06 ↓ 19:32
Near the Moon on 19/04



Mars (in Pisces)
↑ 05:29 ↓ 17:30
Near the Moon on 16/04

Jupiter (in Gemini)
↑ 13:28 ↓ 23:22
Near the Moon on 23/04

Saturn (in Cetus)
↑ 05:43 ↓ 17:42
Near the Moon on 16/04

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 April Lyrids are active from 14/04 until 30/04, peaking on 22/04 with 18 meteors per hour. They are best viewed between 02:00 and 05:00. The pi-Puppids are active from 15/04 until 28/04, peaking on 24/04 with <5 meteors per hour. They are best viewed between 19:00 and 23:00. The eta-Aquariids are active from 19/04 until 28/05, peaking on 06/05 with 50 meteors per hour. They are best viewed between 03:30 and 05:30.

Fun facts

The theory of mechanics which allows the Artemis II mission to bring four astronauts to the Moon and back was found by Isaac Newton in the 17th century. It can be used to explain all the motions in the solar system - with one exception. Mercury moves slightly differently from what Newton would have predicted. This discrepancy could be resolved by Einstein's theory of General Relativity.

General Relativity, which views gravity as a curvature of space and time, was heavily inspired by an observation made by Galileo Galilei back in the 17th century: If air resistance can be ignored, all objects fall with the same acceleration, no matter what mass they have or what they are made of. This was nicely illustrated by David Scott during the Apollo 15 mission. At the end of the last Moon walk, he let a falcon feather and a geological hammer drop at the same time. Sure enough, they hit the ground simultaneously. You can watch the experiment on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYEgdZ3iEKA.

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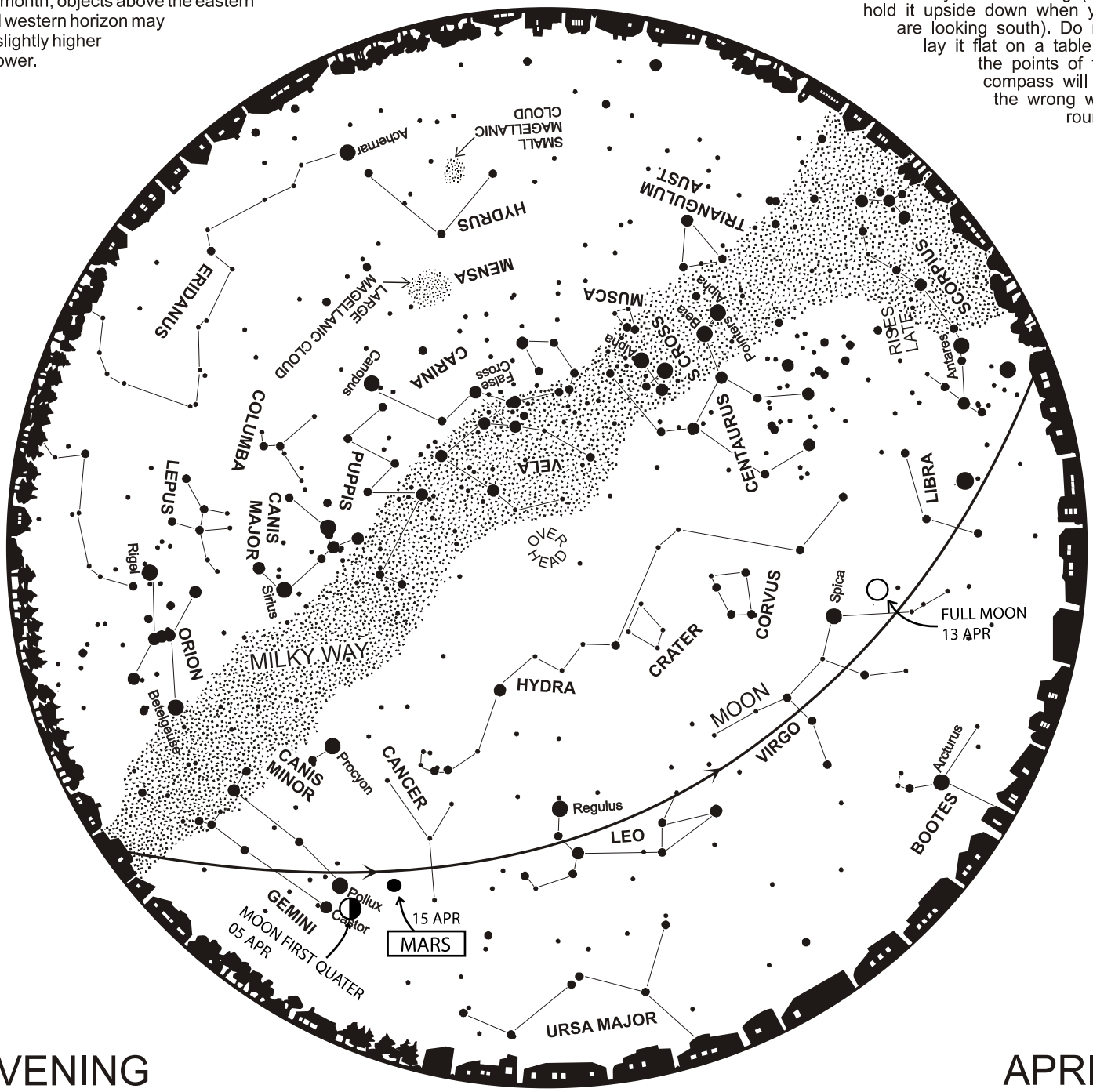
DIGITAL DOME

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

APRIL 2026

As the month progresses, the constellations Leo, Cancer, and Gemini drift gradually toward the western sky. Taurus slips below the horizon, followed by Orion, marking the end of the summer constellations. Meanwhile, Virgo becomes more prominent in the night sky, led by its bright star Spica. In Zulu tradition, Spica is known as iNqonqoli or iNonqoyi, meaning “the wildebeest star.” From the eastern horizon, the faint constellation Libra begins to rise. Although it does not contain any particularly bright stars.

The constellation Scorpius begins to rise in the southeastern sky. One of its most striking features is the bright red star Antares, often called the “heart of the scorpion.”. Its reddish colour makes it easy to distinguish from other stars.

High in the southern sky, the Southern Cross (Crux) is easier to spot by its cross shape and by the nearby Pointer Stars, Alpha Centauri and Beta Centauri, which help guide observers toward it.

Around 21–22 April, the Lyrid meteor shower reaches its peak. These meteors originate from debris left behind by Comet C/1861 G1 (Thatcher). From the Southern Hemisphere, the radiant in Lyra remains low in the northern sky, meaning fewer meteors are visible, but some may still be seen in the early morning hours.

The Full Moon occurs on 2 April, while the New Moon falls on 17 April, providing darker skies for stargazing in the middle of the month.

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