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A March Through Egypt's Charms

March in Egypt brings more than warm sun and ancient wonders—it offers a celestial showstopper. On March 19, during the spring equinox, the Great Sphinx of Giza steals the spotlight as the sun sets perfectly on its shoulder, creating a moment of alignment that is both awe-inspiring and steeped in ancient precision. This phenomenon occurs only twice a year, in March and September, showcasing the sphinx's extraordinary positioning.

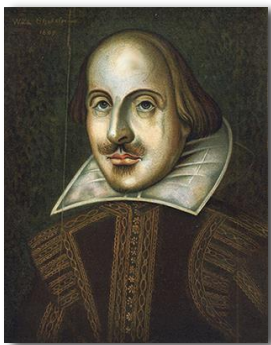
The equinox itself is a time of balance, when Earth's hemispheres receive equal sunlight, making day and night the same length. For the sphinx, carved from limestone bedrock and likely modeled after Pharaoh Khafre, it's an ideal occasion to bask in the sun—a cosmic nod to its enduring role as a guardian of Egypt's ancient secrets and astronomical knowledge.

March often coincides with Ramadan, a deeply spiritual time for Muslims in Egypt and worldwide. While days are quiet as people fast, evenings are vibrant with shared meals, colorful lanterns, and a communal spirit. The festive atmosphere often spills into the streets, where vendors offer traditional treats like *kunafa*, a sweet, nutty pastry, and *qatayef*, a pancake stuffed with nuts that is fried and dunked in syrup. Hospitality shines, and visitors are warmly welcomed to experience the unique blend of reflection and celebration.

For travelers, Egypt in spring offers more than history and spirituality. Strolling through Cairo's bustling markets or gliding down the Nile in a traditional felucca boat feels like stepping into an adventure novel. Whether marveling at pyramids or sipping mint tea in the shade, Egypt charms with its timeless appeal. The season's pleasant weather is perfect for exploring Luxor's temples or wandering through the Valley of the Kings without the intensity of summer's heat. The scent of blooming jasmine and the lively sounds of bustling streets remind you that Egypt's vibrant present is as captivating as its ancient past.

Everyday Shakespeare

In his play *Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare warned, “Beware the Ides of March” (March 15). Lucky for all lovers of the bard that Shakespeare Week falls from March 24 to March 30.



Shakespeare Week was begun in 2014 by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in England. Its goal is to make Shakespeare delightful, not dull. His works are part of the curriculum for half of the world’s schoolchildren. For many, the writings

of Shakespeare are remembered as difficult, mandatory high school reading. But, in Shakespeare’s day, his plays were considered bawdy, coarse, and boisterous, and theaters were often dirty, loud, and very crowded—some holding crowds of up to 3,000 people. A three-hour play was considered a rollicking good time. Shakespeare knew his audience.

Though many now consider Shakespeare’s plays to be examples of great literature, a part of high culture, or difficult to understand, Shakespeare wrote to his audience—many of whom were common folks just like himself. He was sure to include plenty of jokes, fights, love triangles, and off-color remarks.

Shakespeare has seeped into our everyday life. Many common expressions were written by Shakespeare, including:

- “Wild goose chase” (*Romeo and Juliet*)
- “Seen better days” (*As You Like It*)
- “Off with his head.” (*Richard III*)
- “Good riddance.” (*Troilus and Cressida*)
- “Knock, knock! Who’s there?” (*Macbeth*)
- “Break the ice.” (*The Taming of the Shrew*)

Utter one of these phrases between March 24 and March 30, and you might be celebrating Shakespeare Week without even knowing it.

Paws on the Trail

Mushers begin the “Last Great Race” across the Alaskan wilderness on March 1. The word *Iditarod* comes from the native northwestern Alaskan language and means “distant place.” It’s the name of a city, a river, a trail, and the famous roughly 1,100-mile dogsled race.

Not just any dog can compete in the race. Only dog breeds accustomed to the cold, such as Alaskan Malamutes and huskies, are allowed to race. In 1980, musher John Suter entered with a team of European poodles; many of the dogs were dismissed at checkpoints along the way with frozen feet. In 1990, rules for accepted dog breeds were established.

Frigid temperatures aren’t the only threat to a dogsled team. Massive moose have been known to charge at racers. To ensure the health and well-being of the dogs, they are treated like all-star athletes and are accompanied by veterinarians. The last team to cross the finish line receives the Red Lantern Award, named after the lantern that remains lit until the final dog arrives.

A Tale of Two Names



Istanbul or Constantinople? The largest city in Turkey has struggled with its name for centuries. The Greek colonist Byzas founded the city as Byzantium around 700 BC. It was renamed Constantinople in AD 330, when Roman emperor

Constantine made it the capital of the Roman Empire. The name persisted until 1453, when the city was overtaken by the Ottoman Turks and renamed Istanbul. Yet most Turks, even in an official capacity, referred to the city as *Kostantiniyye*—which many still confused with Constantinople. It wasn’t until March 28, 1930, that the Turkish Postal Service decreed it would no longer send mail to any place addressed as Constantinople. It has been Istanbul ever since.

Chasing Cherry Blossoms



It lasts for only two weeks, but what a beautiful two weeks it is. *Hanami* is the Japanese term for enjoying the spring beauty of blossoming flowers. The most spectacular show of all

is the viewing of the cherry blossoms, known as *sakura* by day and *yozaakura* by night. It begins at the end of March.

The practice of hanami began in seventh-century Japan, when wealthy elites and members of the Imperial court would gather to view plum blossoms. Soon, though, cherry blossoms became more highly regarded for their beauty. Before long, members of the “samurai class” joined in the viewing, and finally the practice became widespread among all people—rich or poor. The cherry blossom has even become Japan’s unofficial national flower.

The blossoming of the cherry trees also ushers in an entire season of hanami parties. Many rush to parks and reserve spots, relaxing under the blossoming trees with blankets. The most popular spot in the country for hanami is Tokyo’s Ueno Park, where there are more than 1,000 flowering cherry trees. Japan’s best hanami location may be the mountaintop town of Yoshino, where thousands of cherry trees burst into bloom and a veil of pink flowers resembling clouds slowly floats down the mountainside. The tiny lanes of this sleepy village become packed with visitors.

America’s most famous version of hanami begins every March in Washington, D.C. In 1911, the city of Toyko gifted 2,000 cherry trees to the U.S. Sadly, those trees were infested with insects and had to be destroyed. But Tokyo mayor Yukio Ozaki was undeterred. He sent a new shipment of 3,020 cherry trees, which arrived in Washington on March 26, 1912. Visitors have flocked to D.C.’s Tidal Basin to enjoy the cherry blossoms ever since.

Full-Court Frenzy

The “Road to the Final Four” begins Tuesday, March 18. Sixty-eight of the country’s best men’s college basketball teams will compete in a three-week tournament known as March Madness, or the Big Dance. With so many games to follow, it’s common for fans to watch several games at once across channels.

The tournament is also crucial for college basketball programs aiming to bolster their national reputation. The NBA draft takes place three months after the tournament, and a player’s performance during March Madness can impact their draft prospects. While the focus is on team play, standout individual performances still draw attention. Top contenders like Kansas, Duke, Kentucky, Arizona, and Gonzaga remain perennial favorites. Yet, the magic of March Madness often lies in the unexpected a “Cinderella” team overcoming the odds to deliver a victory.

Barbie Beyond the Box



On March 9, 1959, the Mattel toy company unveiled the first Barbie doll at the American Toy Fair. Ruth Handler, cofounder of Mattel, was inspired to create the doll after observing her daughter prefer paper dolls of adult women over baby dolls. Barbie became the first adult doll for kids—and the star of the first TV ad aimed at children. While Barbie has faced criticism for promoting gender stereotypes and unrealistic body proportions, the toy has generated over \$1.5 billion in sales.

In 2023, Barbie’s cultural impact reached new heights with the release of the *Barbie* movie, directed by Greta Gerwig. The film’s vibrant visuals, sharp humor, and exploration of identity captivated audiences worldwide, cementing Barbie’s status as both a toy and a cultural icon.

Marching to a Healthy Beat



March is Nutrition Month, a month to ditch the junk food, add exercise, and take on healthier habits. An easy place to start is to eat more fruits, whole grains, and vegetables.

Having fresh fruit and vegetables in your home is a simple way to add healthy vitamins and nutrients to your diet. Another excellent step is eating food in reasonable portions, as well as eating a variety of foods.

A daily exercise routine, even something as simple as a daily walk, increases fitness. Studies show that as fitness increases, mood improves, energy increases, stress decreases, we have the strength and endurance to do the things we enjoy, and we look and feel our best. Perhaps it is no coincidence that March is also Quinoa Month (pronounced *KEEN-wah*). This ancient seed, harvested high in the Andes Mountains, is one of nature's most perfect foods. In 1955, researcher Philip White wrote, "While no single food can supply all the essential life sustaining nutrients, quinoa comes as close as any other in the plant or animal kingdom." That's high praise for an often-overlooked food.

Quinoa is called a grain and is cooked like a grain, but it is not a grain at all. From a botanical point of view, quinoa is more closely related to beets and spinach. It is a complete protein, gluten free, and rich in potassium. The ancient Incas called it the "mother of all grains" and considered it sacred. It can be found today in bread, crackers, granola, beverages, pasta, and even shampoo. It's a nutritive powerhouse.



March Birthdays

In astrology, those born between March 1–20 are Pisces, the Fish. Selfless, spiritual, and intuitive, Pisces swim an inner journey. They're emotional, compassionate people, always willing to help others. Those born from March 21–31 are Aries, the Ram. Rams are adventurous go-getters, full of enthusiasm, charm, and energy. They make dynamic pioneers and adventurers, undeterred when the going gets rough.

Charles L. 3/22
 Nancy D. 3/12
 Carmen G. 3/7
 Joan P. 3/29
 Rodney M. 3/8
 Russ M. 3/12



Celebrating the Mario Way

March 10, or rather MAR10, is Mario Day—a holiday for the fictitious Mario Bros. video-game plumbers. It's designated as such because MAR10 looks like MARIO. It also can be a day to celebrate the Marios in your life. Even if you don't know a Mario, you can still celebrate one. Cheer on racing legend Mario Andretti by watching highlights of his iconic career. Read a book by writers Mario Puzo or Mario Vargas Llosa. Grab a slice at Mario's pizzeria.

While the name Mario is most often associated with Italy, it is quite common in Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Greece, Latin America, and America. It comes from the Roman name *Marius*, which derives from *Mars*, the Roman god of war. For those wanting to give the name Mario a more delicate and feminine touch, there is the name Maria, or should we say MAR14?



Saint Patrick's Day

March 17

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BLARNEY
CHARM
CLOVER
DANCE
DUBLIN
EMERALD

GOLD
GREEN
IRELAND
ISLE
LEPRECHAUN
LIMERICK

LUCK
MARCH
PARADE
RAINBOW
SHAMROCK



LUCKY THE LEPRECHAUN



My friend Lucky is _____ and _____ .
(adjective) (adjective)

We met one day at the _____ while I was
(place)

_____ with some other friends. Lucky
(verb -ing)

may be an _____ name, but he says he
(adjective)

likes being different. One day after it rained,

Lucky told me that if I could _____ to the
(verb)

_____ of the rainbow, I'd find where he
(noun)

_____ a _____ of gold. When I
(verb; -ed) (noun)

asked Lucky to _____ me there, he said
(verb)

it's more _____ if you _____ the
(adjective) (verb)

_____ of gold yourself. Maybe one day I'll
(noun)

get _____ and _____ that
(adjective) (verb)

_____ of gold!
(noun)

