

The Economics of Easter: Why One Weekend Moves an Entire Economy



Wishing our readers that celebrate Easter, a very happy Easter and safe travels if you are heading out to further afield

Image supplied

Mark Bishop

For most people, Easter arrives as a welcome pause - a long weekend, a road trip, time with family. But behind the scenes, it is something far more powerful. Easter is one of the few moments in the year where travel, retail, hospitality and leisure all surge at the same time. It is a holiday – but it is also a synchronised economic event.

Globally, the scale is significant. In the United States alone, Easter spending exceeds \$20 billion annually (about R 332 billion), according to the National Retail Federation. That figure includes everything from food and clothing to gifts,

travel and dining out. In the United Kingdom, Easter confectionery sales alone are estimated to exceed £400 million each year (about R 9 billion), highlighting just how commercially powerful even a single category can be.

Yet chocolate is only the visible tip of the iceberg.

One of the biggest drivers of Easter's economic impact is movement. Airlines, hotels and tourism operators see reliable demand spikes around the Easter period every year. The International Air Transport Association has long identified public holiday windows like Easter as predictable peaks in passenger travel.

Closer to home, the same pattern plays

out. Across South Africa, Easter consistently ranks among the busiest travel periods of the year, with national parks, coastal destinations and bushveld regions all seeing a clear influx of visitors.

This year, however, the picture is slightly more complex.

Apart from the Middle East fiasco – which is another story for another time, recent flooding in parts of the Lowveld and within sections of the Kruger National Park has caused infrastructure damage, including roads, low-water crossings and access routes. In practical terms, this means that some areas may operate below full capacity over the Easter period, or not operate

at all, and movement within the park may be more restricted than usual.

That has two important effects. The first is pressure. Where capacity is reduced, demand does not disappear - it concentrates. Visitors who would normally disperse across a wide area begin competing for fewer available beds, routes and experiences. In those conditions, availability tightens quickly.

The second is redistribution. When parts of a system become constrained, activity shifts. Private lodges, towns like Hoedspruit, and surrounding attractions often absorb some of that displaced demand.

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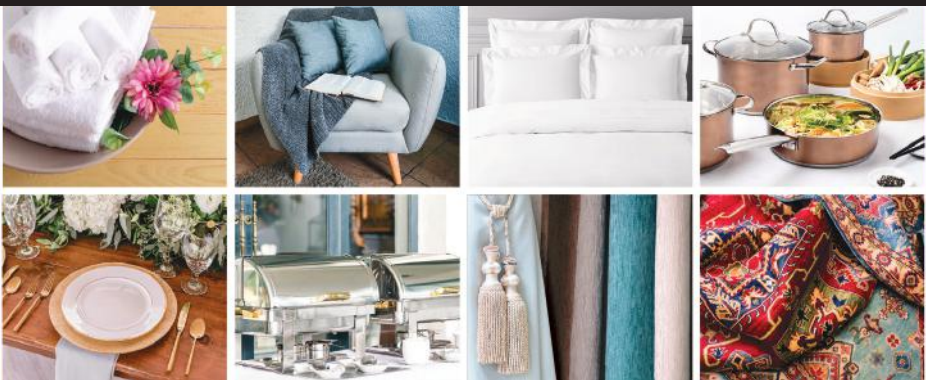
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Why Being Seen Over Easter Isn't Optional - It's Just Good Business Practice

Ad guru's Op-Ed

Every year, Easter arrives and, almost without anyone formally acknowledging it, the region shifts. You see it in small ways at first - a few more cars on the road, a slightly fuller car park, restaurants that feel just a touch busier earlier in the day. Then, by the time the weekend settles in properly, it's obvious. There are people here. Not just passing through, but staying, looking around, spending time. And importantly, spending money.

What makes Easter different from other busy periods is not just the number of visitors, but the way people behave once they arrive. They are not rushing. They are not working around tight schedules. They have time, and when people have time, they start making decisions more freely.

Where to eat becomes a conversation, not a necessity. What to do tomorrow becomes an opportunity, not an afterthought. A stop at a shop, a detour to somewhere new, an unplanned booking - these things happen far more easily over a long weekend than they do during the normal rhythm of the year.

That shift in behaviour matters more than most businesses realise.

Because decisions are not being made weeks in advance. They are being made in real time, often between one activity and the next, and usually based on whatever feels familiar, visible, or easy to access in the moment. And this is where many businesses quietly fall behind.

There is a tendency to assume that being "known" is enough. That reputation carries the day. That if the product is good, people will find it. Sometimes they do. But more often than not, especially over a compressed, high-movement weekend like Easter, people choose what is in front of them.

Not because it is better - but because it is there.

Visibility, in this context, is not about shouting louder than the next business. It is about being present often enough that your name feels familiar when it counts. There is a significant difference between something that a visitor notices once and something they feel they have seen a few times already. The latter carries a quiet weight. It feels safer, easier, and more certain. And in a place where choices are plentiful, ease usually wins.

Easter amplifies this dynamic because everything happens faster. What would normally take a few weeks - awareness, consideration, then action - is compressed into a handful of days. The window to be seen, remembered and chosen is short, and once it closes, it closes completely.

By the time the weekend is over, the opportunity has passed. The visitor has eaten, explored, spent, and left. From a business perspective, that makes Easter less of a "nice to have" moment and more of a strategic one. It is one of the few times in the year when demand is not being chased - it is arriving and in your face. The question is simply whether your business is visible when it does.

Local media plays a very specific role in this. It reaches people who are already here, already moving through the area, already making decisions. It sits in that space between arrival and action, which is where most of the economic activity actually happens. And that is the part worth understanding.

Easter does not create demand out of nowhere. It concentrates it. It brings people, time and spending together into a very short window and lets behaviour take over from there. The businesses that benefit most are not necessarily the biggest or the most sophisticated. They are the ones

that are present, recognisable, and easy to choose when the moment arrives.

Because in the end, over a weekend like Easter, people don't go looking very far. They go where they've already seen.



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The Economics of Easter: Why One Weekend Moves an Entire Economy

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Day visitors may spend more time outside the park. Restaurants, retail outlets and activity providers beyond the core SANParks infrastructure can see increased footfall as a result.

In other words, disruption in one part of the system does not necessarily reduce economic activity - it changes where and how that activity happens.

Across South Africa more broadly, the pattern remains consistent. Key tourism regions regularly report occupancy levels of around 80% over the Easter period, with many establishments reaching full capacity, a clear indication of how concentrated demand becomes over a single weekend. In areas like the Kruger National Park, visitor numbers typically increase to the point where gate quotas are enforced - a practical sign of just how much traffic moves through the region in a matter of days.

The reasons behind this are straightforward, but powerful. Easter lands at a perfect

point in the calendar - the first meaningful break after the opening stretch of the year, often aligned with school holidays, and just as the intense summer heat begins to ease. In regions like Limpopo and the Lowveld, this translates into near-perfect travelling conditions: cooler mornings, clear skies, and landscapes shifting into autumn tones.

That combination changes behaviour. People don't just consider travelling - they commit to it. Trips are well planned and longer, spending is less constrained, and decisions that might normally be delayed are brought forward into a single weekend.

For the hospitality sector, this creates a short, highly concentrated window of opportunity. Lodges and hotels typically see increases in both occupancy and average daily rates, driven by a surge in demand over a limited number of days. Restaurants, activity providers and local businesses benefit from the same influx, creating a ripple effect that extends well beyond accommodation and into fuel stations, retail outlets, guides, transport services and informal

trade.

Retail follows closely behind. While Easter eggs and chocolates dominate the shelves, the broader impact runs deeper - grocery spend, clothing purchases, gifts and entertainment all lift. It is a period of elevated discretionary spending, driven by the simple fact that people have both the time and the reason to spend.

And that is the real engine behind it.

Easter works because of what economists often refer to as the "long weekend effect." When time expands, spending follows. A four-day break lowers decision friction. Travelling further feels justified. Eating out becomes easier. Small indulgences scale quickly across millions of households. In economic terms, this creates a short-term multiplier effect. Money spent on accommodation flows into wages, suppliers, logistics and local services, amplifying the impact beyond the initial transaction.

In other words, people don't just celebrate Easter - they actively and enthusiastically participate in it economically.

For regions like Hoedspruit and the greater Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere area, this matters. Easter is more than a busy weekend; it is a concentrated injection of activity into the local economy - even in a year where parts of the system are under pressure.

Ask any local operator and the pattern is familiar - Easter bookings come in early, the roads fill up, and the region shifts gear for a few days. If anything, this year serves as a reminder of how resilient that system is. Even when conditions are not perfect, the underlying drivers remain the same: people move, they explore, and they spend.

It is easy to think of Easter as tradition. In reality, it is something far more practical. It is a moment when behaviour shifts, movement accelerates, and spending follows. And in a world where economic activity is often fragmented and unpredictable, especially in these turbulent times, that kind of synchronised momentum remains rare - and valuable.

Why You Can Remember Every Word of a Song From 25 Years Ago - but Not Why You Walked Into the Room

Michelle Spear
Professor of Anatomy, University of Bristol

While driving recently, a long-forgotten song came on the radio. I found myself singing along; not only did I know all the lyrics to a song I hadn't heard in 25 years or more, but I also managed to rap along. How is it that I could give this rendition, but often cannot remember what I came into the room for?

It is tempting to treat these moments as evidence of cognitive decline. A quiet, creeping sense that something is slipping. But the contrast between flawlessly (it was) performing a decades-old song and forgetting a just-formed intention is not a sign that memory is failing. It is a demonstration of how memory works.

We tend to talk about "memory" as if it were a single thing. It isn't.

Remembering song lyrics relies on long-term memory - networks distributed across the brain that store information consolidated over years. These include language areas in the temporal lobes, auditory cortex, motor regions involved in speech production, and emotional circuits of the brain that help tag experiences as meaningful.

Music is neurologically extravagant: it recruits multiple systems at once - rhythm, language, movement and emotion. That multiplicity strengthens encoding.

Each time you repeated those lyrics - in your

bedroom, in a car, at a party - you reinforced the synaptic connections involved. Over time, the pathway becomes efficient and stable. Retrieval becomes almost automatic.

By contrast, remembering why you walked into the kitchen relies on working memory - the brain's temporary holding space. Working memory is fragile. It can hold only a small amount of information for a short period, and it is highly sensitive to distraction. A single competing thought is enough to overwrite it.

Psychologists have described what is sometimes called the "doorway effect". When you move from one physical space to another, the brain updates context. It segments experience into discrete episodes.

The intention formed in the previous room - "get my glasses", "find my charger" - was encoded in that earlier context. Crossing a threshold can weaken the retrieval cue. The task disappears.

This isn't inefficiency, it's organisational strategy. Our brains evolved to structure experience into meaningful chunks. That segmentation supports long-term memory formation - even if it occasionally leaves us standing in the hallway, perplexed.

Why music survives

Music benefits from structure. Rhyme and rhythm create predictable patterns. Predictability supports recall because the brain is constantly anticipating what comes next.

Brain imaging studies show that musical memory activates widespread cortical and subcortical regions. Strikingly, even in neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, musical memory can remain relatively preserved long after other forms of recall deteriorate.

The fact that you can still deliver a flawless rap verse decades later tells us something important: memory strength is less about age and more about depth of encoding. A lyric repeated hundreds of times in adolescence may be neurologically "stronger" than a single fleeting intention formed five seconds ago.

Processing speed does tend to slow modestly with age. Working memory becomes more vulnerable to interference. Multitasking grows harder. But long-term knowledge - vocabulary, expertise, well-rehearsed information - is often maintained or even enhanced.

What feels like memory loss is frequently attentional overload. Modern environments are saturated with interruptions: notifications, internal thoughts, competing demands. Working memory was never designed to withstand this level of interference.

How to reduce 'roomnesia'

The issue is not that your brain can no longer store information, it's that it is selective about what it stabilises. Small adjustments can reduce those frustrating "roomnesia" moments.

One of the simplest is to say the task out loud before you move. Verbalising an intention - "I'm going upstairs to get my charger" - strengthens its encoding by engaging additional language networks.

Another approach is brief visualisation. Taking a second to picture the object you are about to retrieve creates a richer mental trace than a vague intention alone.

Even carrying a physical cue can help: picking up an empty mug before heading to the kitchen anchors the purpose of the journey in something tangible. These strategies work because they reinforce the intention before a change in context disrupts it, making the memory less vulnerable to interference.

If you can still perform a 1990s rap in full but occasionally forget why you walked upstairs, your brain is not betraying you. It is prioritising deeply rehearsed, emotionally tagged information over transient intentions. In other words, it is doing exactly what it was built to do.

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Restoring the source: two years of impact in the Upper Letaba Catchment



Before and after images of the upper Groot Letaba catchment area.

Images: Supplied

Johan Coetzer
Project Manager, Kruger to Canyons Biosphere

Between March 2024 and February 2026, the Upper Letaba Catchment Restoration Project transformed the landscape of the Upper Groot Letaba catchment while strengthening partnerships, creating jobs, and securing vital water resources for the region. What began as an invasive alien plant clearing initiative evolved into a landscape-scale restoration effort that is now helping to catalyse long-term stewardship, scientific research, and community collaboration across the Wolkberg escarpment.

Located around the town of Haenertsburg in Limpopo Province, the project operates within a landscape that includes some of South Africa's most important high-altitude grasslands and water source areas. The Upper Groot Letaba Catchment forms the headwaters of the Letaba River system, feeding the Ebenezer and Tzaneen dams and ultimately supporting agriculture, rural settlements, and economic activity across the Lowveld. Water from this catchment is also transferred to Polokwane, the capital of Limpopo, highlighting the national importance of protecting this strategic water source area.

Over the two-year implementation period, the project exceeded its ecological restoration targets. Teams completed 1,646 hectares of initial invasive alien plant clearing and 823 hectares of follow-up clearing. By removing water-intensive invasive species

such as black wattle, pine, blackwood, and bugweed from wetlands, riparian corridors, and grassland remnants, the project has contributed to an estimate of more than 720 million litres of water per year returning to the natural system.

The ecological benefits extend beyond water recovery. Clearing activities helped reconnect fragmented patches of Woodbush Granite Grassland, a critically endangered vegetation type found almost exclusively in this part of Limpopo. Restoring these habitats strengthens ecological corridors between protected areas such as Haenertsburg Nature Reserve, Ebenezer Nature Reserve, River Park Nature Reserve and surrounding landscapes. These corridors improve biodiversity resilience while helping to restore ecological processes across the catchment.

Equally significant has been the project's socio-economic impact. The restoration programme created 40 green job opportunities, exceeding the original target of 30. Of these workers, 18 were women and 20 were youth, demonstrating the project's commitment to inclusive employment and skills development. Workers received accredited training in chainsaw operation, fire awareness, snake safety, and personal finance, building a skilled workforce capable of contributing to future restoration initiatives.

Local contractor Hlole Development Programme, led by Jessica Letsoalo, played a central role in delivering the clearing work. Through the project, the company expanded its operational capacity and secured additional private clearing contracts from landowners in the catchment. This growth not only strengthened the local restoration

economy but also ensured that invasive plant management continues beyond the formal project footprint.

The project has also opened opportunities for research and environmental learning. In partnership with the University of Limpopo and local conservation organisations, researchers established 60 permanent monitoring transects across cleared sites to track grassland recovery. These monitoring plots compare areas under passive recovery, fire management, and livestock grazing to better understand how different management approaches influence long-term ecosystem resilience.

More than 100 students and volunteers have participated in ecological monitoring and pollinator surveys through the project. These activities have turned the Upper Letaba catchment into a living laboratory for understanding how high-altitude grasslands recover following invasive plant clearing.

The project has also strengthened landowner stewardship across the catchment. Landowners who participated in clearing operations are now actively maintaining restored areas through follow-up clearing, rotational grazing, and coordinated fire management. Several have also begun restoring riverine buffers and grasslands beyond the original project sites, demonstrating the growing momentum for conservation-led land management.

Importantly, the success of the Upper Letaba Catchment Restoration Project has laid the foundation for continued restoration and follow-up work across the landscape. Plans are already underway to extend clearing operations, strengthen stewardship

agreements, and expand research activities that support long-term ecological recovery.

The achievements of the past two years would not have been possible without the collaboration of a wide network of partners, landowners, researchers, and community organisations working together across the catchment. A special thank you goes to the project's funders and implementing partners: The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Global Water Challenge (GWC), and Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa (CCBSA), and local NGO Mountain Environmental Watch (MEW) whose support made this work possible.

Together, these partnerships have shown that restoring critical water source landscapes is both achievable and essential. As the Upper Letaba catchment continues its recovery, it stands as a powerful example of how restoration, science, and stewardship can work together to secure South Africa's water and biodiversity for generations to come.



The HDP team

Image: Supplied



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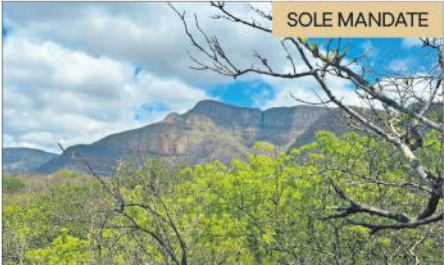
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What the numiknow® App Data Tells Us About Learning Mathematics

Thias Taute

New insights from the numiknow® learning platform show how game data can reveal how players think about numbers, track their progress and potentially guide future mathematics learning in clubs and schools.

“When players play numiknow® games, they are not only practising mathematics - they are also generating data that helps us understand how mathematical proficiency develops.”

The numiknow® application is more than just a collection of mathematics games. Behind the scenes, the platform collects a range of games data that helps us understand how players interact with numbers, how they improve over time and which mathematical concepts they find challenging.

The dashboard of the numiknow® app provides four main sets of information for every player. Together these data points give a powerful picture of mathematical engagement and learning progress.

In a particular example shown in the table below, a player spent a total of 3 hours 11 minutes and 55 seconds on the platform. They were actively engaged in 128 games and answered a total of 1606 questions were answered. This information helps facilitators see whether players are practicing regularly and building familiarity with numbers.

Game	Played	numiknow® at start	numiknow® at end	Improvement
adda	24	20	20	0
bigga	2	3	20	17
biqua	2	1	1	0
challa	8	1	1	0
counta	2	16	20	4
diva	7	1	1	0
dotta	7	4	20	16

The table above tracks progress within individual games. Each game in numiknow® focuses on a specific mathematical concept such as counting, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions or problem solving. The dashboard records the player’s score after each game they have played. The difference between the two scores shows the improvement made in that concept.

This information allows facilitators and teachers to identify where players are making strong progress and where they may need additional support. For example, a player who improves quickly in adda (addition) but struggles in mina (subtraction) may require extra practice with subtraction concepts and strategies.

Each game is specifically designed to fol-

low logical progression from basic numbers to more advanced calculations. By analyzing the results, facilitators can see which concepts a player has already explored, achieved and which ones they should focus on next.

Domino sets were used to play the games. The domino sets naturally increase the difficulty of number combinations. Smaller domino sets (for example from 1 to 6) involve simpler numbers, while larger sets (for example from 1 to 12) introduce bigger numbers and more combinations. Tracking which sets are used allows the system to understand the level of numerical difficulty that a player is comfortable with.

Taken together, these four sets of data provide a clear picture of how players are developing their mathematical skills. They show engagement, concept mastery, learn-

ing progression and difficulty levels - all important factors in building strong numeracy.

Looking ahead, the data collected in the numiknow® app could become even more powerful. By analysing patterns in game performance, the system could eventually identify learning gaps automatically and recommend the next games a player should engage with. In the future, numiknow® could evolve from a mathematics game platform into a data-driven system that helps diagnose and improve mathematical proficiency for players across our region.

For more information, visit <https://numiknow.com>, try the games at <https://play.numiknow.com> or contact Thias Taute at thias@hoedspruithub.com.

2026 Budget Speech: What you should know

Marteen Michau

Minister Godongwana’s tax proposals signal a shift in focus by government. Rather than introducing shocking new tax rates (2025 with three budget proposals was only but last year), the changes refine technical areas of legislation, close planning gaps and aim to encourage regulated savings. Generally personal income brackets were adjusted for inflation.

The implications on specific changes discussed below are both practical and strategic, particularly where cross-border planning, spousal transfers, and investment structuring are involved. The key legislation affected includes both the Income Tax Act and the Tax Administration Act (as amended). Interestingly intra-spousal transactions have enjoyed a bit of a spotlight in this year’s budget speech.

Ceasing tax residency and spousal donations

Currently donations between spouses are exempt from donations tax in terms of section 56 of the Income Tax Act.

Treasury has identified instances where families have structured “staggered residency cessations” to reduce their overall tax exposure, that means where one spouse ceases South African tax residency with the

remaining (resident) spouse donating their assets to the non-resident spouse prior to ceasing tax residency. This “staggered” approach means SARS is out of pocket in two instances, that being donations tax (albeit legally), but then also due to so-called “exit tax” being avoided under section 9H of the Income Tax Act when the second spouse ceases tax residency.

The proposal, immediately effective (from 25th February 2026), curbs the spousal donations exemption where the recipient spouse remains a South African tax resident and intend donating assets to the non-resident spouse, meaning that the resident spouse will either be liable for donations tax or exit tax when ceasing tax residency.

Collective Investment Schemes (“CIS’s”)

Following public consultation, National Treasury has proposed a more certain and favourable tax approach for CIS’s and retail hedge funds. The proposal is that all returns generated by regular CIS’s and retail investment hedge funds be taxed as capital. Since capital gains are typically taxed more favourably than income, this provides certainty and encourages long-term savings through regulated vehicles and subject to diversification requirements.

Qualified investment hedge funds will be excluded from this regime and are expected

to fall under a separate tax framework to be proposed later.

Thresholds reviewed

- Tax-free savings, donations and capital gains tax exemption thresholds were reviewed (amongst other line items) and were adjusted as follows with effect from 1 March 2026:
- Tax-free savings: from R36,000 to R46,000 per annum
 - Individuals - donations exemption: from R100,000 to R150,000 per annum
 - Corporates - donations tax exemption: from R10,000 to R20,000 per annum
 - CGT exclusion at death: from R300,000 to R440,000
 - CGT exclusion on disposal of primary residence: from R2,000,000 to R3,000,000.

Tax administrative fairness:

When a taxpayer disputes an assessment and requests suspension of payment in terms of section 164 of the Tax Administration Act (as amended), the obligation to pay the disputed tax liability is temporarily suspended and their tax status remain as “tax compliant.”

In terms of section 215 of the Tax Administration Act, when requesting remission of penalties, although payment is automatically suspended, the compliance status protection was not explicitly provided for. The proposed amendment aligns this anomaly, ensuring that taxpayers are treated as compliant while awaiting decisions on penalty remission requests. In addition, the grace period after SARS rejects a suspension or remission request will be standardised to ten (10) business days.

For clients involved in tax audits and/or disputes, this change reduces the potential tax risk arising from tax compliance status issues.

In closing

This year’s message is one of an increasing focus to ensure compliance and proper record-keeping to support your tax returns. There is a changing of the guard at SARS and we have to salute the digital infrastructure and capabilities build by the current Commissioner, Mr Edward Kieswetter. Now is a good time to review your current balance sheet and planning.

For any specific queries relating to the above, please contact Marteen Michau (marteen@fidelisvox.co.za) - we are standing by to assist.



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Lady Godiva's April Forecast: Friction Is the Signal

SUDOKU



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April brings resistance - delays, push-back, tension where things *should* be flowing. This is not bad luck. It's feedback. Where things feel difficult, there's usually something misaligned: a decision avoided, a boundary not set, or a direction that no longer fits. The mistake in April is to push harder in the wrong place. Instead, pay attention to where energy is being wasted. Friction highlights inefficiency - in work, relationships, and routines. Adjustments made now prevent bigger breakdowns later. This is a month for refinement, not retreat. Fix what's not working. Don't abandon what is.

Aries (21 March - 19 April)
Resistance forces you to think, not charge. The usual approach won't land this time - adapt it. Precision beats speed. Pick your moment - not every moment.

Taurus (20 April - 20 May)
Comfort zones tighten. Something needs to shift. Holding on too long creates un-

necessary pressure. Adjust early - it's easier. Stubbornness will cost you more than change.

Gemini (21 May - 20 June)
Scattered energy creates its own friction. Focus on one outcome and finish it. Clarity restores momentum. Discipline beats distraction.

Cancer (21 June - 22 July)
Emotional tension reveals what's been ignored. Address it directly instead of absorbing it. Strength comes from response, not retreat. You don't need to carry everything.

Leo (23 July - 22 August)
Not everything needs a reaction. Step back and assess before stepping in. Measured leadership wins respect. Control the impulse to prove a point.

Virgo (23 August - 22 September)
Perfection slows progress. Refine as you

go instead of delaying the start. Movement creates clarity. Progress will teach you more than planning.

Libra (23 September - 22 October)
Avoiding conflict creates more of it. Say what needs to be said - calmly. Balance returns through honesty. Delays only complicate the outcome.

Scorpio (23 October - 21 November)
Pressure sharpens your edge. Use it well. Restraint gives you more control than force. Let timing do the work. Silence is sometimes your strongest move.

Sagittarius (22 November - 21 December)
Restlessness needs direction, not escape. Pick a target and move toward it. Momentum replaces frustration. Commitment unlocks freedom.

Capricorn (22 December - 19 January)
Systems feel strained - that's useful information. Refine what's inef-

ficient instead of pushing harder. Small adjustments, big impact. Structure is your advantage - use it.

Aquarius (20 January - 18 February)
Pushback doesn't mean you're wrong. It means you need to communicate better. Simplify and proceed. Clarity builds support.

Pisces (19 February - 20 March)
Sensitivity highlights weak spots. Strengthen boundaries where energy leaks. Clarity follows protection. Not everything deserves your attention.

- Hot Tips for April**
- Friction is feedback, not failure.
 - Fix the system, not just the symptom.
 - Calm adjustments outperform force.
 - Where it's hard, look closer - not away.

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Where the Panorama Route Drops You Into



Spectacular scenes and views of the Graskop Gorge Lift and world-class experiences

Images supplied

Travel Correspondent

There are viewpoints along the Panorama Route ... and then there's the Graskop Gorge Lift. This is not a "stop, take a photo, and leave" kind of place. It's a bucket-list experience - one that quite literally takes you off the edge of the escarpment and into the heart of a living forest.

Set just outside the town of Graskop on the R533 towards Hazyview, the Graskop Gorge Lift Company has quietly become one of Mpumalanga's standout attractions - and for good reason. This is a world-class experience.

"Most places show you the landscape. This one drops you into it."

The Descent

The headline act is a 51-metre glass viewing lift that drops visitors from the top of the gorge down into the dense Afromontane forest below. It's smooth, quick (about a minute), and surprisingly gentle - but the impact is immediate. One moment you're standing on a cliff edge looking out over the escarpment, the next you're surrounded by cool air, towering trees, and the sound of water and birds deep in the gorge. It is truly a transition that feels almost cinematic.

What You Actually Do There

At the bottom, a raised 600-metre circular elevated walkway and a series of suspension bridges guide you through the forest floor. This is where the experience really lands. The path is designed to slow you down - not rush you through - take your time and experience nature at its best. It winds through thick indigenous vegetation, across gentle spans above the forest floor, and into pockets of quiet where you can stop and actually take it all in. Its mesmerising!

"Go down. Slow down."

It is quite unique in the experience. Expect

towering indigenous trees and lush undergrowth. Feel the cool, shaded air of a true Afromontane forest. Take time to look and listen, taking in the birdlife and the constant, subtle sound of moving water. And the suspension bridges add just enough sense of adventure, with viewing points that reward you for pausing rather than pushing on. The information boards, so well laid out, explain your situational position perfectly - one learns so much.

For most visitors, the forest walk takes around 30 minutes to an hour - one should take longer and suck it all in! That's easy to do, and you should. At the end, visit the Cliff Café and add another 400m to the walk, where you come face up with the rock face on this walk. See the water dripping from fissures in the rock, the ferns that thrive on the environment and hear the roar of the waterfall pounding into the gorge. At the café you can take in a coffee or cooldrink, and sit and admire the pristine paradise that surrounds you.

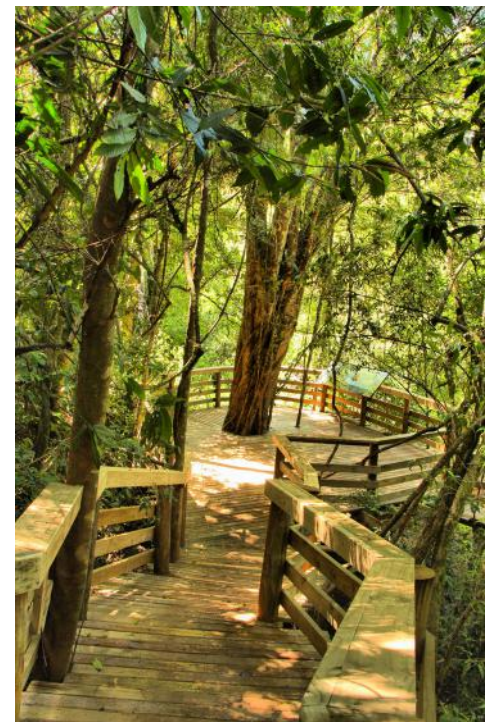
More Than Just a Lift

Where this facility separates itself is in everything built around the core experience. For those wanting more than a walk there's the picturesque suspension bridge, the Big Swing (a controlled drop into the gorge), ziplining across the valley and the breathtaking Cliff Walk along the rock face in the gorge. All these are optional, all professionally run - which means you can keep it calm or push it a bit.

At the top, the lifestyle centre includes restaurants, cafés, viewing decks and a selection of local retail. It's easy to spend a long time here before or after your descent, whether it's a proper meal or just a coffee overlooking the escarpment.

"An absolutely unique and special experience."

Cont. on page 9...



Another World: The Graskop Gorge Lift

Cont. from page 8

How Long Should You Allow?

For a quick stop set yourself 1 - 1.5 hours (lift + walk). For a comfortable visit, that will take 2 - 3 hours (add food, browsing, relaxing, but for the full experience (highly recommended) give yourself half a day (add activities). Many people underestimate this - and end up staying longer.

Family Friendly? Yes - With Perspective

The facility is well designed and accessible, and it works well for families. Kids tend to love the lift and the sense of being “in the forest” rather than just looking at it. The walk is manageable and engaging without being physically demanding.

The only caveat is that it’s a natural environment. Keep an eye on younger children, especially on bridges and walkways. That said, it’s precisely this authenticity that makes it memorable.

Getting There

From Hoedspruit, the drive to Graskop Gorge Lift is straightforward - and worth doing properly. The most direct route takes you through Ohrigstad and up the escarpment via the Strydom Tunnel, one of the most scenic transitions from bushveld to mountain. It’s about 140 km and takes from 1.5 – 2.5 hours (allowing for mountain roads and stops along the way). By the time you arrive, you’ve already had a proper outing.

The lift sits just outside Graskop on the Panorama Route, making it an easy addition to stops like God’s Window and Bourke’s Luck Potholes. There is secure parking on site, and the facility operates daily from around 08:30 to 17:00, 365 days a year!

The Bottom Line

This is one of those rare world-class tourism developments that doesn’t compete with the landscape - it draws you into it. It’s well run. It’s thoughtfully designed. And it offers something genuinely different: the chance to move from viewpoint to immersion in under a minute. If you’re travelling the Panorama Route and skip this, you haven’t just missed a stop. You’ve missed the drop.

“Go over the edge. You’ll understand why it matters when you’re down there.”



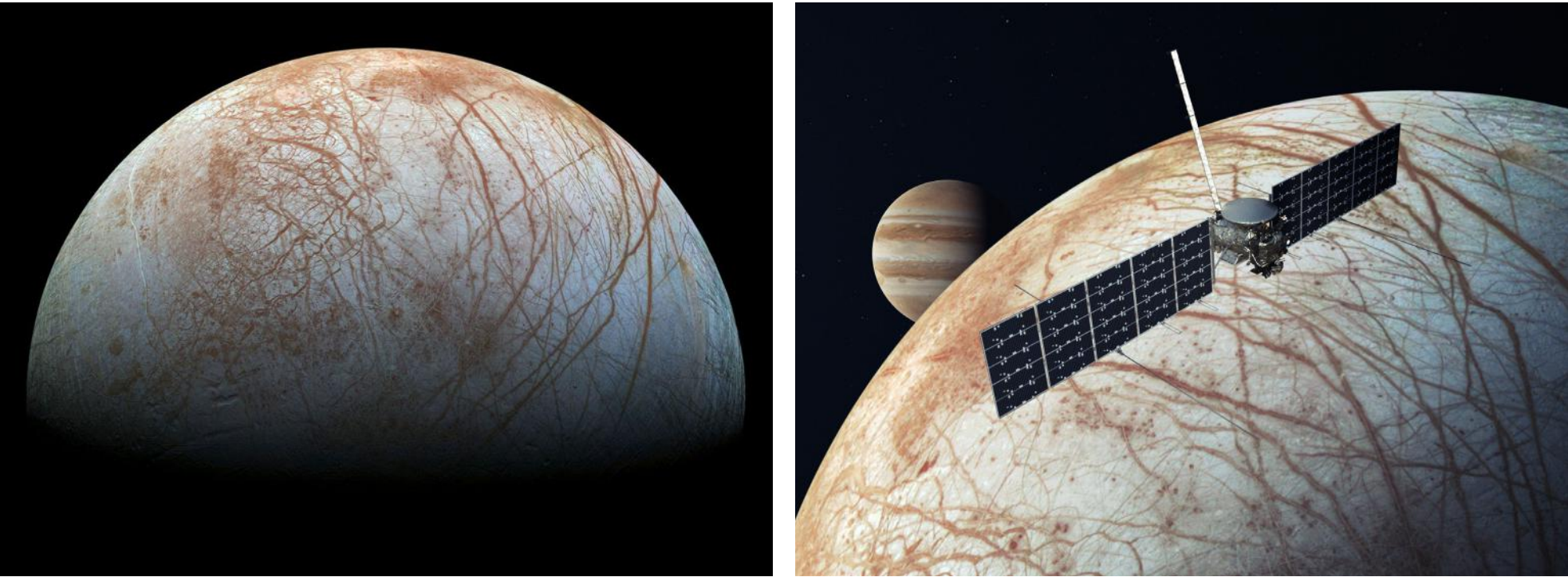
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The Rise of the European Empire?



Europa (above) and Europa Clipper (above right), the Galilean Moons of Jupiter (below) and Europa interior (bottom) Images - NASA

Ben Coley
Celestial Events SA

Jupiter is currently visible in our night sky as a steady, golden point of light that outshines almost every star around it. To the naked eye, it looks calm and unchanging. But aim a simple pair of binoculars at it, and something remarkable happens. Four tiny pinpricks of light appear alongside the planet. These are Jupiter’s four largest moons, Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto. They shift position from night to night, quietly orbiting their giant host in a celestial dance, first noticed by Galileo over 400 years ago.

It is a humbling sight. You are looking across hundreds of millions of kilometres of space, watching another world with your own eyes. And yet, as you watch on, a spacecraft, smaller than a minibus, is racing through the solar system at tens of thousands of kilometres per hour, faster than a speeding bullet, towards it.

Europa Clipper was launched by NASA in 2024 and is due to arrive in 2030. Its purpose: to help answer one of the oldest and most profound questions humanity has ever asked. Are we alone?

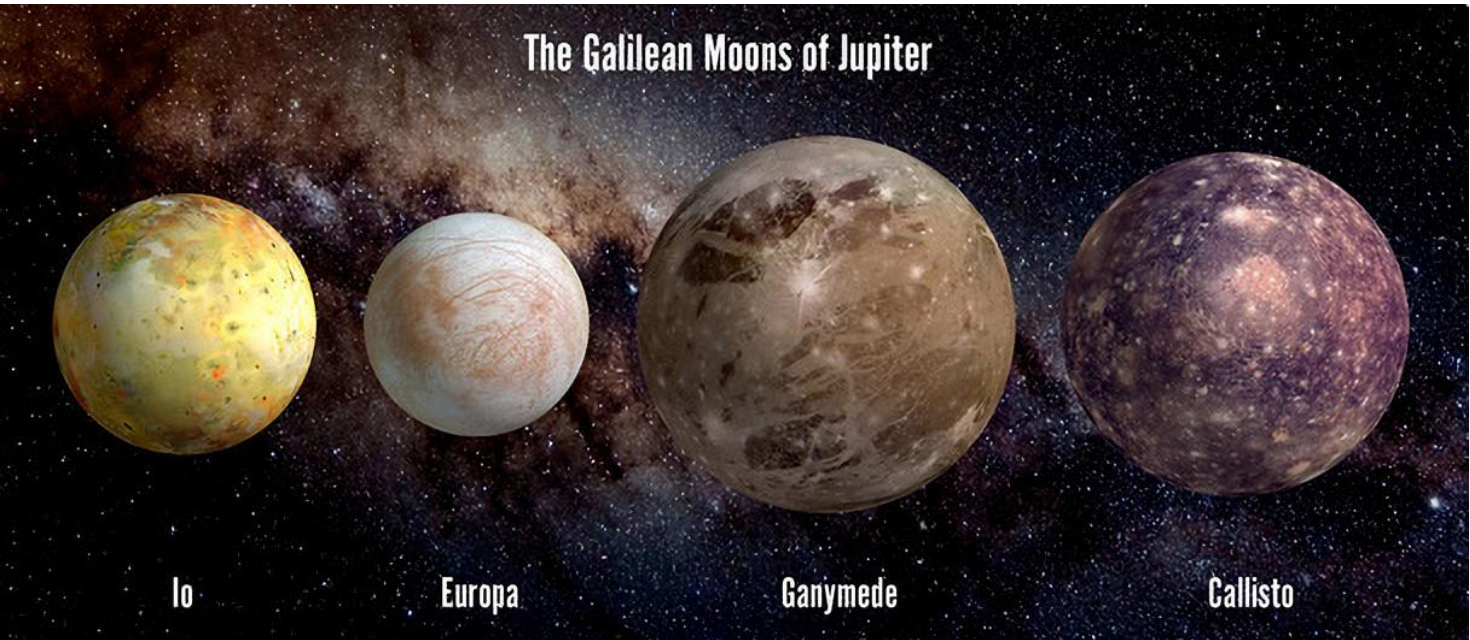
At first glance, Europa seems an unlikely place to search for life. Its surface is a frozen wasteland, with temperatures plunging below -150°C. Sunlight is weak, and Jupiter’s radiation makes the environment harsh and unforgiving. But appearances can be deceiving.

Beneath Europa’s icy shell, scientists believe there is a vast, global ocean of liquid salt water that may contain more water than all of Earth’s oceans combined. And where there is liquid water, there is the possibility of life. Life, as we understand it, depends on three essential ingredients: water, chemistry, and energy. For a long time, scientists assumed that life could only exist on warm, sunlit planets like Earth. But discoveries in the deep oceans of our own world have changed that view completely.

Far below the surface, in total freezing darkness, ecosystems thrive around hydrothermal vents, powered not by sunlight, but by chemical energy rising from the Earth’s interior. Europa may offer something very similar.

As it orbits Jupiter, the moon is constantly stretched and squeezed by the planet’s immense gravity. This “tidal heating” generates internal warmth - enough to keep Europa’s ocean from freezing solid. It also likely drives geo-chemical activity on the ocean floor, potentially creating the same kind of energy-rich environments where life thrives on Earth.

Radiation at Europa’s surface also breaks



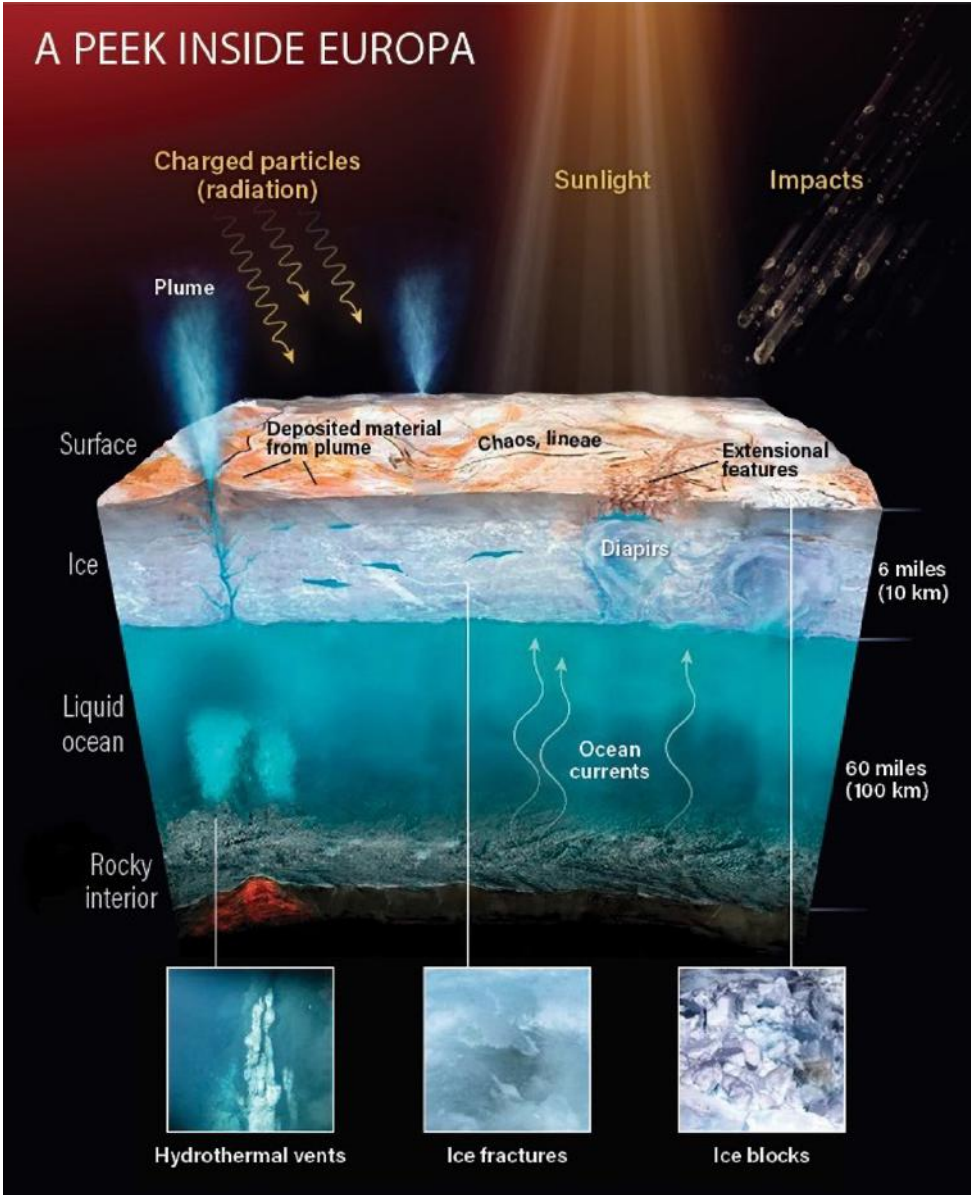
apart molecules, and some scientists believe these chemicals may slowly work their way down into the ocean below, mixing with minerals from the rocky interior. If so, Europa may have all the right chemical ingredients to support life (as we understand it at least!). The three pillars of life: Water. Energy. Chemistry. All hidden beneath a frozen crust, on a world you can glimpse tonight through binoculars, from the comfort of your back garden.

Clipper is not going there to find little green men (or fish), or definitive proof of life. Its mission is simpler, and in many ways more important: to determine whether Europa is truly habitable. It will make repeated passes over the moon, mapping its surface, probing the thickness of its ice, and searching for signs of water plumes erupting into space that can be analysed. Future missions may attempt to land on the surface, or even drill through the ice to reach the ocean below. But if Europa is indeed deemed habitable, the implications are extraordinary.

If life exists, or even *could* exist, on Europa, it would suggest that life is not a rare accident, but a natural outcome when the right conditions are present. It would mean that the universe may be *filled* with living worlds, just waiting to be discovered.

Tonight, as stare up at the African sky and look at Jupiter, see if you can pick out Europa, and the other moons nestled alongside, with your binoculars. And while you do, imagine that a machine built by human hands is speeding toward it, carrying our curiosity across the vastness of space.

One tiny craft. One small moon. One deep ocean. And one question that refuses to go away. Are we alone or simply not looking in the right places?



The Zero-Cost Guide to Falling in Love with Birds



Bearded Scrub Robin - often heard before seen and a Double-banded Sandgrouse - beautiful cryptic camouflage.

Images: J Kinghorn

John Kinghorn
Avitourism Project Manager: BirdLife South Africa

There's a common misconception that birding is a hobby reserved for those with expensive binoculars, comprehensive field guides, endless budgets, and far-flung travel plans. It's an easy myth to believe, after all, what with images of birders often featuring high-end gear, and most times, in hot pursuit of rare sightings or visiting exotic destinations.

But this could not be further removed from the truth, which is far simpler and far more inviting. In fact, you can start birding right now, exactly where you are, without spending a cent. All you really need are your eyes, your ears, and a sense of curiosity.

Start With What You Already Have

Look up from reading this article for a moment. Glance out the window, across your garden, or down your street. The chances are highly likely that you will notice at least one bird, perhaps even more than you might have expected. The key to birding is not finding birds, but *noticing* them.

The art of noticing, however, whilst simple in principle, can be rather challenging for some, especially in an age when we are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature and the environment, with many of us having forgotten *how* to notice.

Begin by slowing down. Look for movement. A flicker in some low-lying scrub, a distinct shape soaring in the sky above, a figure perched on a fence post. You don't need to know its name. Not yet. The first step in birding is simply to *notice*.

Then come three simple questions that you should try to ask yourself. How big is the bird? What shape is it? What is it doing?

These basic observations are the bread and butter of bird identification. The foundation upon which you will begin building your bird identification skills - and they cost nothing.

Think in Patterns, Not Names

One of the biggest hurdles for beginners is the pressure to identify every bird immediately. This can be overwhelming and often discouraging, and rightfully so, given that birders face just over 1,000 species when

opening their field guides to birds of southern Africa! Instead, shift your focus from names to patterns.

Start with size. Is the bird sparrow-sized, pigeon-sized, guineafowl-sized, or larger? Size is one of the quickest ways to narrow things down; ideally, avoid complicating things by using references that others may not be familiar with.

Next, look at the shape. Does it have a long tail? A short, stubby beak? Long legs? It is often easier to recognise a species by its general impression, shape, and size (GISS) before delving into the finer details.

Then, pay attention to behaviour. Some flit nervously through foliage, while others sit boldly in the open, dropping onto unsuspecting prey from above. Behaviour can often be more distinctive than appearance, especially when it comes down to those tricky little brown jobs!

These patterns become clues in your identification mystery; little pieces of a puzzle that slowly come together the more you move them around, and try to piece them together. Over time, you'll start to recognise certain species not because you memorised them by paging through field guides for countless hours, but because they feel familiar to you.

Listen as Much as You Look

Birding isn't just a visual experience - it's also an auditory one. In fact, you'll often hear birds long before you see them. Perhaps sometimes, you may not even see them at all!

At first, bird calls can seem like a confusing chorus of whistles, chirps, and trills. But just like with visual patterns, you don't need to identify everything at once. Start by picking out one or two distinctive sounds. *Notice* their variations in pitch and tone. Try to associate certain sounds with a specific bird, even if you don't know its name yet.

A helpful trick is to describe the sound in your own words. Does it sound like a squeaky bicycle wheel? A bubbling stream? A sharp "chip" or a drawn-out whistle? These personal descriptions make bird calls easier to remember, perhaps not for others in all instances, but for you, which is what is important at this stage of your journey. As your awareness grows, you'll begin to realise that your environment is full of birds, even when you can't see them.

Turn Your Garden (or Street) Into a Classroom

You don't need a nature reserve or a remote wilderness area to start birding. Your garden, balcony, street, or local park is more than enough. In fact, starting close to home is one of the best and easiest ways to learn, and is one of the reasons why birding is growing rapidly across the globe. It is accessible to everybody, everywhere. The same birds will appear day after day, giving you repeated opportunities to observe them. This familiarity and repetition learning is invaluable.

Spend a few minutes each day watching the same area. Notice which species arrive in the morning, which ones appear later in the day, and how their behaviour changes. Over time, you'll build a mental picture of your local birdlife.

Use Free Tools to Support Your Learning

While birding doesn't require equipment, there are free tools that can enhance your experience. Bird identification apps can help you match your observations to real species. Many let you enter simple details - size, colour, location - and suggest possible matches. Some even include sound libraries, so you can compare calls you've heard. Take a look at Merlin Bird ID, and download the "South Africa" pack.

Once you have created a Cornell Lab of Ornithology account (free), you can consider visiting the website "Birds of the World," which has free access for all South African users and has all the revised Robert's 8th edition text incorporated into it, as well as access to species accounts for every other species of bird across the world.

There are also platforms where you can log your sightings. Keeping a list of the birds you've seen adds a sense of progress and achievement. It doesn't need to be formal; a simple note on your phone is enough, but keeping a list helps grow one's cognitive memory.

Local bird checklists are another useful resource. These give you an idea of what species are commonly found in your area, helping you narrow down possibilities and set realistic expectations.

The key is to use these tools as *support*, not as a crutch. Let your own observations come first, and use technology to confirm

or refine what you've noticed.

Embrace Not Knowing

One of the most freeing aspects of birding is accepting that you won't know everything, and this is perfectly okay! Even experienced birders encounter birds they can't immediately identify. The difference is that they're comfortable with the process of figuring it out and learning through the process.

As a beginner, give yourself permission to be curious rather than correct. It's far more rewarding to engage with the process of observation than to rush toward a name. Celebrate the small, personal victories along the way! These moments are what make birding so enjoyable.

Build a Habit, Not a High Species Count

You don't need to dedicate hours to adding new birds to your list to become a better birder. Watch birds while you have your morning coffee. Listen to the dawn chorus before work. Take a few extra minutes on a walk to notice what's around you.

Birding works best when it becomes part of your routine, rather than a separate activity. And over time, these small moments add up. What starts as a casual glance out the window can grow into a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

The Real Reward

At its core, birding isn't about collecting species or owning equipment. It's about connection - learning to see and hear the life that surrounds you every day.

When you start birding without spending a cent, you strip the hobby back to its essentials. You learn to rely on your senses, your patience, and your curiosity. And in doing so, you discover that nature has been there all along, waiting to be *noticed*.


Giving Conservation Wings

Crocodiles Can Have Extra Growth Cycles in a Year - Why This Matters for Estimating the Age of Dinosaurs



Crocodile bones shed light on growth dynamics - Image Canva Pro

Nile crocodile captured in the Kruger National Park - Image Canva Pro- Nico Smit

Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan
Professor, Biological Sciences Department,
University of Cape Town
Maria-Eugenia Pereyra
Postdoctoral fellow, University of Cape Town

In biology and palaeontology (the study of extinct organisms) there are a few ways to estimate the age of an animal's skeleton. One is the extent of fusion of sutures in the skeleton - how much the plates of bone have joined together as the animal matured. Another is the texture of the bone surfaces. Then there are growth marks recorded in the microscopic structure of bone.

Many modern animals grow in periodic spurts (fast at times, slowly at other times). It's generally thought that they grow fast in the good seasons when the environment is better for them in terms of food, temperature and water. They are thought to grow more slowly during unfavourable seasons, when the growth marks form in their bones, rather like the rings formed in trees. By counting the number of growth marks inside the bone tissues, scientists estimate the age of the animal. This method is called skeletochronology.

Over the years there have been a few studies that have determined when the different growth cycles formed, and have proposed the utility of skeletochronology for

age determination.

The application of skeletochronology has been particularly important in working out the age of extinct reptiles like dinosaurs. It's also been used as the basis for constructing graphs showing how the animal grew over time and comparing the rate of growth of different dinosaurs. This is very useful when trying to assess how extinct animals (like dinosaurs) grew up, and in some cases reached gigantic proportions.

Our work in our palaeobiology laboratory at the University of Cape Town has shown that juvenile (wild and captive) caimans, American reptiles related to crocodiles and alligators, under one year of age showed growth marks in their bones. This was unexpected because the animals were too young to show annual periods of quick and slow growth.

This study by our team suggested there was a need for a more cautious approach to estimating the age of skeletons. This caution was reinforced by similar findings in our later work on Nile crocodiles.

More growth marks than expected

Our work on the Nile crocodiles began as an investigation into their growth dynamics. On three occasions we administered antibiotics to two-year-old crocodiles at the Le Bonheur Reptiles and Adventures farm, about 60km from Cape Town in South Africa. These antibiotics became incorporated into the bones

of the growing crocodiles.

Later, when the crocodiles died, we skel-tonised the carcasses and prepared thin sections of their bones which we examined under the microscope. The antibiotic markers allowed us to deduce how much bone growth had occurred in specific time periods.

Much to our surprise, we found that aside from a slowdown in growth during the unfavourable (winter) season, extra growth marks formed during the favourable (summer) season when fast growth was expected. These extra growth marks tell us that the crocodile responded to some environmental factors (perhaps temperature, rainfall, or competition) by slowing down their growth and forming a growth ring.

We found that the two-year-old crocodiles had as many as five or six growth cycles in their bones. We would have expected only one per year. This meant that if we applied skeletochronology, we would have overestimated the age of the crocodiles. Until now, most of the time when skeletochronology was applied, the concern has been about under-estimating the age of the animal (because growth marks are sometimes removed during normal growth processes).

Questions about method of establishing bone age

Our study of these living relatives of dino-

saur raises questions regarding the accuracy of using skeletochronology for estimating the age of dinosaurs. We know the four crocodiles were raised on a crocodile farm, which perhaps does not ideally reflect a natural environment. But we are also aware that on the farm, they would have had optimal conditions for growth - and yet, under these ideal circumstances, they formed extra marks.

Currently investigations into dinosaur skel-eto-chronology are plagued by several issues such as the presence of multiple closely spaced growth marks that are difficult to separate out, as well as some growth marks that cannot be followed around the whole circumference of the cross section of the bone. Added to this, we suggest that since living relatives of dinosaurs (birds and crocodiles) can form extra growth marks, some of the growth marks in dinosaur bones could well be "extra" and therefore unrelated to their age.

More research is clearly needed to investigate this matter. An obvious first step is to undertake a similar study of crocodiles and alligators in the wild - a feat easier said than done.

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HOEDSPRUIT

The Eco-Psyche's Insurance Policy



W R Leigh 1939

Andrew Paterson
Philosafaris.com

On decades of trails through the African wilderness, I've observed systems that have perfected the art of survival through millions of years of trial, error, and adaptation.

Pausing beneath the shade of a *Marula* tree in the heat-ticking cicada serenade, I explore the first—and perhaps most misunderstood - of Brian Walker's attributes of resilient systems: **diversity**.

The word gets tossed around so casually these days that it risks becoming meaningless. But here in the bushveld, diversity isn't just a buzzword - it's the difference between a landscape that absorbs shock and one that collapses.

Stand in any healthy patch of African savannah and you're surrounded by invisible insurance. The grasses beneath your boots - red grass, Buffalo grass, thatching grass, weeping lovegrass, couch grass - might look like variations on a theme to the untrained eye. But they're actually a sophisticated response network, each species calibrated to different disturbances.

Some grasses thrive in drought. Others resurrect after fire. Some tolerate heavy grazing whilst others spring back after trampling. When cattle ranchers count grass species and see "redundancy," ecologists see response diversity: multiple ways of performing the same essential function - holding soil, feeding herbivores, cycling nutrients - but with different responses to different shocks.

Brian Walker spent decades in these systems and discovered something counterintuitive: having ten species of nitrogen-fixing legumes isn't redundancy. When disease strikes one, or drought kills another, or bush encroachment claims a third, the others carry on. The function continues. The system bends instead of breaking.

This is diversity as insurance, not as ornamentation.

The herbivore cascade: Walking on, you'll notice the grazers: zebra taking the coarse stems, wildebeest cropping short grass after, impala browsing selectively, buffalo eating the lot. Each species has a feeding niche, a preferred grass height, a tolerance for different plant chemical defences. They're not competing for the same blade of grass - they're partitioning the available food in ways that allow them all to coexist.

Remove the grazers and watch what happens. Grasses grow tall and moribund. Fire

intensity increases. Woody plants encroach. The system shifts. Reintroduce mega-fauna and diverse herbivores and the landscape opens again, creating a shifting mosaic of short-grazed lawns, medium-height grassland, and tall grass refuges. Predators follow the prey. Insects follow the plants. Birds follow the insects. Diversity at one level cascades through the system.

The Stoics understood something similar about human character. **Epictetus** didn't advise developing a single virtue to perfection. He taught the cultivation of multiple virtues - courage, wisdom, justice, moderation - because life throws different challenges, and rigidity in any direction makes you fragile. The person with only courage but no wisdom charges into battles better avoided. The person with only moderation but no courage never takes necessary risks.

Character, like an ecosystem, needs functional diversity to remain resilient.

When diversity disappears: In communal rangelands across Africa, something insidious happens when diverse wild herbivores are replaced by cattle alone. The cattle graze efficiently, but they graze uniformly. They favour certain grasses, avoid others, and gradually simplify the grassland into a subset of what it was.

For a while, nothing seems wrong. The grass still grows. The cattle still eat. But the system has lost its buffers. When drought comes - and it always comes - the simplified grassland has fewer options. The palatable species crash. Bare ground appears. Erosion accelerates. Woody shrubs invade the gaps.

The crossing of a threshold often looks fine until suddenly it doesn't.

I think of this when I watch people streamline their lives for efficiency: one income source, one skill set, one way of coping with stress, one friend group, one rigid routine. When life is stable, optimisation looks brilliant. When disturbance hits, fragility is exposed.

The functional palette: Diversity isn't just about numbers. It's about function. You could have fifty species of grass that all respond identically to drought, and you'd have no more resilience than one species. But five species that respond differently - one drought-tolerant, one fire-adapted, one quick to recover from grazing, one deep-rooted, one shallow and fast-growing - give you functional diversity.

In a savannah, this manifests as different life strategies. Annual grasses that seed prolifically and die back completely. Perennials that persist through dry years by going dormant. Pioneer species that colonise bare ground. Climax species that dominate in the absence of disturbance. Together, they create a system that can absorb variable rainfall, periodic fire, intense grazing, and still regenerate.

The Stoic tradition recognised this in the practice of **premeditatio malorum** - the premeditation of evils. By rehearsing different kinds of adversity mentally, you develop multiple response strategies. Financial loss, social rejection, physical pain, betrayal, failure - each requires different virtues, different coping mechanisms, different reframes. Practising these responses isn't pessimism. It's cultivating cognitive diversity.

The cognitive and emotional spread: Just as ecological systems rely on diversity to prevent catastrophic collapse - when one species fails, others maintain ecosystem function - small special forces teams operating in volatile environments depend on cognitive heterogeneity and emotional range. An operator who has cultivated diverse mental models, learned from varied experiences, and developed multiple problem-solving approaches possesses greater adaptive capacity when confronted with novel stressors.

This principle extends beyond the individual to team composition. Teams that emphasise ruthless efficiency through standardisation - selecting only operators who think alike or respond identically to stress - create the same brittleness we see in monoculture grasslands. Whilst such homogeneity may optimise performance in predictable scenarios, it erodes the team's capacity to adapt when the unexpected emerges. The individual expertise's of team leader, radio communications, medic/doctor, team support weapon, demolitions and tracker make for an ecosystem whole that is greater than a sum of its parts.

A resilient team deliberately maintains diversity in personality types, cultural backgrounds, and cognitive styles, recognising that different perspectives generate the creative tension necessary for innovative solutions under pressure. The lesson is clear: psychological resilience requires resisting the temptation towards cognitive monoculture, instead nurturing diverse ways of perceiving, interpreting, and responding to operational environments.

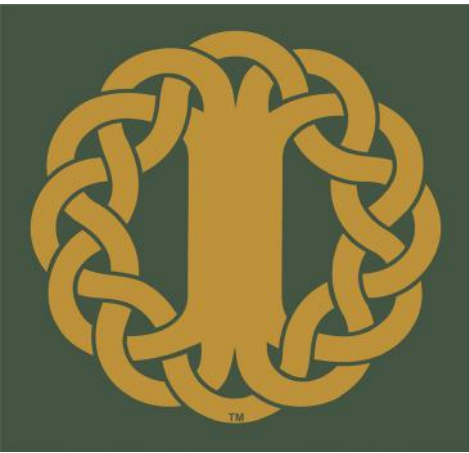
This applies equally to individuals navigating ordinary life. When you cultivate only one way of thinking about problems, one emotional register, one decision-making framework, you're creating the human equivalent of a single species-grazed rangeland - efficient until conditions shift.

The hidden diversity: Beneath the visible drama of herbivores and grasses, the real diversity work happens in the soil. Thousands of bacterial species, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, termites. They decompose organic matter, cycle nutrients, maintain soil structure, and regulate plant health. No one sees them. No one celebrates them. Yet remove them and the system collapses within a single generation.

This mirrors the psychological insight that resilience often rests on invisible supports: sleep, social connection, small daily rituals, quiet time in nature, trusted relationships, private reflection. They don't make for impressive stories but strip them away and your capacity to handle disturbance plummets.

Misreading redundancy: The tragedy of modern resource management is mistaking response diversity for redundancy. Why maintain ten legume species when one fixes nitrogen just fine? Why support multiple local governance structures when one centralised system is more efficient? Why cultivate several coping strategies when your current approach works?

The answer only becomes apparent when conditions change. The drought-resistant legume becomes essential. The local knowledge network saves lives during a crisis. The underused coping strategy becomes your lifeline.



In resilience science, we call this the **efficiency-resilience trade-off**. Systems optimised for maximum efficiency under stable conditions become brittle under changing conditions. Systems that maintain apparent redundancy - what actually IS response diversity - stay flexible.

Marcus Aurelius, administering the vast Roman Empire, understood this intuitively. He didn't centralise everything, didn't eliminate local variations, didn't standardise every response. He recognised that an empire spanning climates, cultures, and crises needed multiple ways of solving problems.

Diversity as options: Perhaps the most elegant way to think about diversity is as a portfolio of options. When you don't know which disturbance is coming - drought or flood, fire or pest, disease or predator - you need multiple responses waiting in the wings.

This is why savannah managers now deliberately maintain *habitat heterogeneity*: patches of short grass and tall grass, open areas and thickets, wet and dry zones. The uncertainty about future conditions makes diversity not a luxury but a necessity.

And it's why cultivating diverse capabilities in yourself - emotional, cognitive, social, physical, practical - isn't dilettantism. It's basic risk management for a life where you cannot predict which challenges will arrive or when.

Walk-on: As we rise from the shade and continue our walk, scan the landscape with different eyes. That "messy" patchwork of grass heights? Strategic diversity. Those "redundant" herbivore species? Response options. That apparently chaotic mixture of trees and grass? A system practising resilience.

Next month, we'll explore the second attribute: **variability**, and why attempts to eliminate fluctuation often undermine the very stability we seek. But today, let diversity settle into your understanding not as a moral position or an aesthetic preference, but as the fundamental insurance policy that allows complex systems - ecosystems, societies, and psyches - to absorb the unknown.

The wilderness has spent millions of years learning this lesson. Perhaps it's time we caught up.

If you want to get hold of Andrew you can email him on ecostoice@philosafaris.com.
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In today’s highly competitive hospitality market, standing out is no longer just about plush bedding or complimentary breakfast. Business and leisure travellers alike are prioritising wellness - and that increasingly includes access to a well-equipped, thoughtfully designed fitness space.

Properties investing in proven, commercial-grade solutions such as Vision Fitness are positioning themselves ahead of this shift, aligning their offering with what modern guests actively seek, not just what they passively appreciate.

Wellness Is No Longer a Luxury

From bush lodges and boutique Bed-and-Breakfasts to established hotel groups, wellness has moved firmly into the mainstream of hospitality strategy. Research by RLA Global indicates that 80% of guests are more likely to return to properties offering personalised wellness services, including fitness and recovery options. This is not a passing trend. The global wellness tourism sector continues to outpace general tourism growth, driven by travellers who are more health-conscious and routine-driven than ever before. For hotels, this presents a clear opportunity: provide an environment where guests

can maintain their lifestyle while travelling. Equipment such as Vision Fitness, known for its durability, ease of use and intuitive design, enables properties to cater to a broad spectrum of users - from casual guests to experienced athletes expecting a professional standard. Fitness spaces are no longer peripheral. They contribute directly to physical wellbeing, mental reset and the overall quality of a guest’s stay - making them a core component of the modern hospitality experience.

Fitness Facilities That Drive Revenue

Wellness is not only experiential - it is commercial. A well-equipped fitness facility can justify higher room rates, attract a more discerning clientele and increase length of stay. Properties that integrate strong wellness offerings consistently report improved occupancy and stronger repeat visitation patterns. From a visibility standpoint, this matters just as much. Travellers actively filter accommodation options by amenities, and access to a credible, on-site gym significantly improves a property’s competitiveness in those searches. Being able to confidently promote a fitness centre equipped with globally recognised solutions such as Vision Fitness cardio

and strength equipment strengthens both perception and positioning - particularly among business travellers, long-stay guests and those for whom fitness is non-negotiable. Beyond functionality, these spaces also become valuable marketing assets, enhancing online listings, social media content and overall brand storytelling.

Building the Right Foundation

For properties entering or upgrading their fitness offering, success lies in smart, deliberate planning - not excess. The objective is a versatile, inclusive space that maximises both usability and footprint. A strong starting point includes:

- High-quality cardio equipment such as treadmills, bikes and ellipticals
- Multi-functional strength machines supporting full-body training
- Free weights and functional accessories for flexibility and progression
- Space-efficient designs tailored to hospitality environments

This is where supplier choice becomes critical. Vision Fitness equipment is specifically engineered for commercial settings, offering reliability under frequent use, intuitive

interfaces for guest accessibility and long-term operational durability. Working with a full-service provider further streamlines the process - from initial concept and layout through to installation and ongoing maintenance - ensuring the facility performs as intended from day one.

Looking Ahead

Hotel gyms are no longer hidden, secondary spaces. They are becoming a visible, valued part of the guest journey. Travellers expect environments that reflect how they live - active, balanced and intentional. Fitness facilities play a central role in meeting that expectation. By investing in high-performance equipment such as Vision Fitness and designing spaces that genuinely support movement and wellbeing, properties do more than meet a trend - they strengthen guest connection, elevate satisfaction and build long-term loyalty. In a competitive market, that edge is not marginal. It is decisive.

Start building your hotel or lodge’s wellness advantage. For more information: Johnson Fitness – Lara Reiser, lara@johnsonfitness.co.za, +27820401137, <https://www.visionfitness.com/eng>, <https://johnsonfitness.co.za/>





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My 5 Sent

Oupa Bobbili

lets wat ek opmerk in vandag se gejaagde lewe is dat mense nie meer baie lag nie. Die lewe is net te ernstig. Alles is negatief en vol drama. Glad nie gesond nie. Dit maak die siel swaer en dan suip ons 'n pilletjie vir depressie. Moet sê en bieg dit is moeilik om positief te bly.

Dit is egter geen verskoning nie. Ons moet onthou 'n groef word 'n graf, en oor meerderheid mense beweeg in 'n groef van negatiewiteit. Ja en nou sit ons weer met die gevolge van ander lande se parkie “fight” en dit plaas meer druk

op die middel klas broodwenner se gemoed en bankrekenings.

Ons kan hieroor lag of huil, dit is elke persoon se eie houding wat hom hierdeur gaan dra. Die natuur beweeg vorentoe sonder dat 'n negatiewe toestand hom onder kry. Ons is deur vloede hier en waar die water skade aangerig het, het die grond, plant en dier weer aangepas en begin lewe daarna. Dit is net die mens gemaakte strukture wat deur mens moet herstel word. Die aarde, die dier en die plant het nie eenkeer 'n vloer polka gegooi met 'n gevloek en skree oor die situasie nie.

Ons Koppel geld eerste aan elke situasie van ons lewens en eintlik is dit die verkeerdste ding om te doen. Maar dit is die mens se eerste reaksie, en die mees natuurlikste reaksie ook. Die eerste wat die media altyd sê as hulle praat oor sulke situasies is “daar is miljoene rande se skade”. Steeds beweeg ons vorentoe en steeds bou ons op en steeds lewe ons, maar ons is besig om ons sin vir humor te verloor.

Kyk verstaan nie verkeerd nie, ons as Suid Afrikaners kan vinnig 'n grap maak van 'n situasie, maar dit is van korte duur. Die goed wat deur kom op media en sosiale media is 90% negatief

en die res positief. Ons hoor tot in die kerke as jy nie reg lewe nie gaan jy hel toe.

Lag is lekker, en 'n glimlag kos niks. Komplimente bou mense op en 'n dankie is meer werd as enige geld. 'n Goeie klop op die skouer vir waardering het nog nooit skade gedoen nie. Wees ernstig, daar is niks fout met dit nie. Dit hou die pot aan die kook en dit bou ook karakter. Lag en wees vrolik ook dit gee jou meer perspektief van hoe om ernstige situasies te hanteer. 'n Goeie sin vir humor bring altyd 'n vars energie tussen mense, en dit skop depressie in die tande. Groete .

Comfort Without Contentment: Why the Best Time to Be Alive Still Feels Unsatisfying

Al perspective 'correspondent'

By almost every measurable standard, there has never been a better time in human history to be alive. A person born today can expect to live more than twice as long as someone born in the early 1800s. According to the World Bank, global life expectancy has risen from around 32 years in 1900 to over 71 years today. Infant mortality has collapsed. Famine has largely retreated from most parts of the world. Even extreme poverty has declined dramatically over the past century.

In material terms, modern life would appear almost miraculous to someone from the past. Electricity at the flick of a switch. Clean water from a tap. Instant communication across continents. Medicine capable of curing diseases that once wiped out entire communities. And yet, despite these extraordinary advances, something curious seems to be happening.

Many people feel increasingly dissatisfied. Across much of the developed world, surveys show rising levels of anxiety, stress and depression. The World Health Organization has reported a steady global increase in anxiety disorders in recent decades. In other words, while our physical conditions have improved dramatically, our psychological sense of wellbeing has not necessarily followed the same trajectory.

This paradox raises an uncomfortable question. If life has become so comfortable, why do so many people feel restless? Part of the answer may lie in a simple fact about human nature: we adapt quickly.

Psychologists call this phenomenon *hedonic adaptation*. When circumstances improve - a better job, a bigger house, a new car - the uplift in happiness is often temporary. Before long, the new reality becomes normal, and the mind resets its expectations upward. What once felt like luxury soon feels ordinary.

In earlier centuries, survival itself demanded focus. Daily life involved physical labour, uncertainty, and tangible challenges. Food had to be grown or hunted. Water had to be carried. Travel took weeks or months. Communities depended heavily on cooperation and practical skills. Those conditions were undeniably hard, but they also imposed a clear structure on life. Purpose was often embedded directly in survival, family, and community.

Modern life has removed many of those pressures. In many societies, survival is no longer the central daily concern. Comfort has replaced hardship. But the human mind may not be entirely designed for a world without struggle.

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, writing after surviving Nazi concentration camps, argued that humans require meaning more than comfort.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl suggested that people are not primarily driven by the pursuit of pleasure, but by the pursuit of purpose. When purpose is absent, even comfortable lives can feel strangely hollow.

There may be another factor as well. Comparison.

For most of human history, people compared themselves to a relatively small circle - their neighbours, their village, their immediate community. Today, social media and global connectivity have expanded that comparison pool to billions. Every day, people are exposed to carefully curated images of success, beauty, wealth and adventure. Even when these portrayals are unrealistic, the psychological effect can be powerful. Someone with a stable job, a safe home and a healthy family can still feel as though they are somehow falling behind. The goalposts keep moving.

Ironically, the same technologies that have made life easier may also be amplifying dissatisfaction. Constant information streams, notifications and digital distractions leave little room for reflection or quiet thinking. Yet psychologists increasingly recognise that boredom, silence and reflection are not useless states. They are often where creativity and insight emerge. Without them, life can begin to feel like a sequence of tasks rather than a meaning-

ful journey.

None of this suggests that the past was better. It clearly was not. Earlier generations faced hardships that modern societies have thankfully reduced or eliminated. But progress may have created a new kind of challenge. When survival becomes easier, the responsibility of creating meaning shifts more heavily onto the individual.

Previous generations inherited clear roles and expectations from their communities. Today, people are often told they must “find their own purpose.” That freedom can be empowering - but also overwhelming. The modern world has given humanity extraordinary comfort. What it has not always provided is a clear answer to the deeper question: what should we do with that comfort?

Perhaps the real paradox of our age is not that life has become easier. It is that in making life easier, we have also made the search for meaning more personal - and more complicated - than ever before.

Which leads to a final question worth considering. If comfort is no longer the main challenge of life, what should be?

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