

THE WORLD THIS WEEK

The world this year 2025

The year 2025 marked the first year of Donald Trump's second term, characterized by significant shifts in domestic and international policy, including America's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord and aggressive trade policies. Despite the "Liberation Day" tariffs causing an initial stock market plunge, the global economy remained resilient, and markets largely recovered. A major focus was the acceleration of artificial intelligence development, with the Stargate project and Intel's partial government ownership, though questions remain about AI's profitability following a Chinese firm's low-cost AI model. Geopolitically, a fragile ceasefire was brokered in Gaza, but violence persisted with Israeli bombings in Iran and an Iranian symbolic retaliation. Domestic issues in America included the murder of Charlie Kirk, heightened border security, and a record-long government shutdown due to a budget dispute.

The weekly cartoon

This section directs readers to dig deeper into the subject of the week's cartoon, which concerns America giving Ukraine hope. It lists related articles about Europe needing to fund Ukraine and Vladimir Putin's lack of a winning plan. The editorial cartoon is a weekly feature in The Economist.

LEADERS

China proved its strengths in 2025?and Donald Trump helped

In 2025, President Xi Jinping of China emerged as a significant beneficiary of President Donald Trump's policies, as China defied tariffs and demonstrated its industrial and technological dominance, particularly in green technology and AI. Trump's approach, including bilateral tariffs and cuts to American science funding and hostility towards foreign scientists, inadvertently played into China's hands by alienating allies and hindering American innovation. While China's short-term advantage is clear, its rigid politics and economic issues like deflation and overcapacity could stifle its dynamism in the long run. The editorial suggests that America's founding values of universalism and diversity are its greatest strength, which Trump's ethno-nationalist rhetoric risks squandering, making the upcoming 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence a crucial moment for national debate and potential renewal.

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Two months in, the Gaza ceasefire is floundering

Two months after its signing, the Gaza ceasefire is failing, with Gazans facing dire conditions due to winter storms and a lack of progress on the agreement's second phase. Hamas refuses to disarm, delaying reconstruction and further Israeli withdrawal, while the international community, including the Trump administration, appears to have lost interest in pushing for peace. America's focus on building "planned communities" in Israeli-controlled Gaza is seen as insufficient and a tacit admission of the peace plan's stall. This lack of progress prolongs suffering, allows Hamas to reassert control, and strains Israel-Egypt relations due to potential refugee flows. The article urges faster action from the Trump administration to appoint a governing board and Palestinian technocrats, and for regional countries to support the peacekeeping mission and reconstruction efforts, emphasizing that the Gaza deal is a critical test of American credibility in brokering international agreements.

The Economist's country of the year for 2025

The Economist's Country of the Year for 2025 is Syria, recognized for significant political improvement following the ousting of Bashar al-Assad in late 2024. Despite initial fears of an Islamist theocracy or chaos under the new ruler, Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria has maintained stability, allowed for greater freedoms, and seen the return of three million refugees, with its economy beginning to recover as Western sanctions ease. This selection highlights Syria's transformation from a brutal dictatorship to a more peaceful state, despite remaining challenges like militia violence and clannish governance. Other strong contenders included Argentina, for its president Javier Milei's painful but impressive free-market reforms that significantly reduced inflation and poverty, and South Korea, for successfully recovering from a martial law attempt and prosecuting its former president.

What Novo Nordisk, OpenAI and Pop Mart have in common

Novo Nordisk, OpenAI, and Pop Mart illustrate the challenges of overnight success, facing pitfalls like scaling to unpredictable demand, the rise of shadow markets, and the "first-mover disadvantage." OpenAI, for instance, committed \$1.4trn to AI infrastructure amid soaring demand, risking collapse if growth falls short. Novo Nordisk's slow production of its weight-loss jab, Wegovy, led to "compounding" pharmacies creating cheaper, less safe copycats, while Pop Mart battled fake dolls. Eli Lilly, learning from Novo's mistakes, surpassed its rival in the obesity drug market, and Chinese firm DeepSeek and Google challenged OpenAI's AI dominance by offering competitive models. The article concludes that lasting success requires a difficult-to-replicate business model that continuously evolves, highlighting quiet achievers like Walmart and CATL as examples of sustained growth through scale and innovation.

Your Well Informed guide to surviving Christmas

This guide offers evidence-based advice for navigating Christmas feasting and drinking. It

suggests strategies like strength training to absorb alcohol better, choosing clear spirits, sipping drinks, and alternating with water or electrolyte-rich beverages. For food, it recommends consuming beneficial plant proteins and viscous fiber (like almonds or apples) to block cholesterol absorption and eating sugar alongside fats, protein, and fiber to prevent glucose spikes. The article also touches on the psychological benefits of moderate alcohol consumption for social connection and relaxation, emphasizing that while heavy drinking is dangerous, light quaffing offers tangible upsides.

How the young can make sense of the news

The Economist Educational Foundation, an independent charity, is teaching young people critical thinking and media literacy skills, crucial in an age of misinformation and AI-driven content. Through topical lessons, the foundation encourages students to engage in civil discourse on complex issues like gun crime and luxury goods, promoting respectful dialogue and evidence-based reasoning. The charity, which reached over 500,000 young people in 2025, aims to expand its reach to one million schoolchildren by the end of 2026, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Programs like "Topical Talk" and the "Leadership for Change" prize help students evaluate information and understand different perspectives, fostering a sense of pride and engagement as seen in the transformative experiences of participants.

LETTERS

Europeans should be worried by America's new national security strategy

Readers express concern over America's new national security strategy under Donald Trump, seeing it as a continuation of long-standing American dissatisfaction with European defense spending and a threat to transatlantic alliances. One letter highlights Trump's strategy of "cultivating resistance" within European borders, creating a pincer movement that jeopardizes European institutions. Another points out the alarming alignment of Trump's foreign policy vision with that of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, drawing parallels to George Orwell's "1984" in its implication of perpetual states of emergency to maintain dictatorial control.

Dealing with Chinese trade

A reader argues against The Economist's recommendation for Europe to avoid raising trade barriers against China, citing Britain's struggling service-based economy as a poor model and highlighting China's successful, albeit distorting, industrial policies. The letter contends that Europe needs industrial policies and sectoral tariffs to protect its manufacturing base and strategic dependencies, especially given its rearmament efforts to support Ukraine and deter Russia. It critiques the idea of adhering to free-trading principles when facing China's mercantilist approach.

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A stonking surprise

A reader praises The Economist's vocabulary, particularly the use of "stonking," and playfully inquires about its grammatical forms and related terms.

Some Christmas shopping

Readers offer humorous comparisons of British political parties to well-known brands, such as the Conservatives being like John Lewis stores (identity crisis), Labour like ASOS (trying to look sensible), and Reform UK like Sports Direct (shouts a lot, simple solutions). Another reader likens both Labour and Conservative parties to British Leyland in the 1970s, plagued by infighting and declining market share.

For the record

A reader challenges the notion that distinguishing true from false information was easy before AI, emphasizing that reputable newspapers have always published corrections, which serve as an anti-misinformation signal.

Turning the page

A reader expresses hope for the resurgence of physical letters and paper books, noting that younger generations, often associated with smartphones, are increasingly adopting them for special occasions and leisure reading.

Driving through the snow

A Canadian reader shares an anecdote about using AI to create personalized letters from Santa for hundreds of children during a postal strike, highlighting both the practical utility and the ethical considerations of AI, such as disciplined parenting and avoiding gaslighting.

The most positive word

A reader suggests reinforcing the optimistic message of Homer's "The Odyssey" by referencing James Joyce's "Ulysses," which deliberately ends with "Yes," symbolizing peaceful triumph and hope despite imperfections. Another reader highlights Penelope as a proto-feminist role model, using her wily nature and needlework skills to maintain control.

Wicked

A reader recounts Salman Rushdie's witty observation about hating Toto in "The Wizard of Oz," adding to the enjoyment of his writing.

UNITED STATES

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Will California try to block Hollywood's next megadeal?

States are increasingly asserting their antitrust enforcement powers, posing a new threat to major mergers, even if federal regulators approve them. California's Attorney-General, Rob Bonta, is a significant wildcard in the ongoing competition between Netflix and Paramount to acquire Warner Bros Discovery. Both bidders are focused on federal approval, but Bonta's office has expressed strong opposition to further consolidation in media, signaling a willingness to litigate independently, much like Washington and Colorado AGs torpedoed the Kroger-Albertsons merger. This trend reflects a broader beefing up of state antitrust laws and enforcement, driven by concerns over federal under-enforcement during the Trump presidency and ambitious AGs seeking to raise their profiles by challenging big firms.

Toll roads are spreading in America

Toll roads are proliferating across America due to the declining revenue from petrol taxes, which traditionally funded highway maintenance. With fuel-efficient cars and political resistance to raising gas taxes, states like Indiana are seeking new ways to cover road costs, with tolling seen as a fair method, especially for out-of-state drivers. Tolls also help manage congestion, with variable-rate "express" lanes expanding. While traditionally bipartisan, populist Republicans, including Donald Trump, have begun to oppose new tolls and even advocate for buying back and freeing existing pay-to-drive roads.

More schools in America are adopting a four-day week

An increasing number of American schools are implementing four-day weeks, a trend that began in rural areas but is now extending to towns and cities. This schedule, often adopted to save money or attract teachers, is popular among teachers, students, and parents, who report better attendance, behavior, and mental health. However, studies show that the impact on educational outcomes is middling, with students potentially falling two to seven weeks behind, and concerns exist for children in single-parent families who lose a day of childcare. Despite these academic concerns and minimal cost savings, the perceived benefits of improved morale and work-life balance continue to drive the adoption of shorter school weeks.

The race for an AI Jesus is on

A new app called "Text with Jesus," powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT, offers personalized spiritual and theological counsel, allowing users to converse with avatars of biblical figures. The app, which has about 150,000 users, particularly in the Americas, has faced criticism for providing "palatable" answers and not unequivocally affirming Jesus's divinity, with its founder even admitting his mother views it as blasphemous. This innovation emerges as trust in traditional clergy hits a record low in America, prompting Pope Leo to caution Catholics against relying on wisdom from aggregated data.

Lexington

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Political courage is rare but valuable, as exemplified by Republican state senators in Indiana who rejected a gerrymandering bill designed to benefit their party, despite intense pressure and threats. John F. Kennedy's "Profiles in Courage" highlights the complex reasons politicians often avoid brave acts, but the Indiana senators' decision, aligned with public opposition, offered a heartening example of principle. In an era of intense polarization and the Trump administration's focus on self-interest and party loyalty, principled dissent is increasingly necessary but often vilified, both on the right and, to a lesser extent, the left. The article suggests that more such dissent may emerge within the Republican party in the coming year, particularly from those not facing immediate primary challenges.

THE AMERICAS

An oil boom where the Amazon meets the Atlantic

Brazil is experiencing an oil boom on its Equatorial Margin, where the Amazon meets the Atlantic, despite President Lula da Silva's green platform. State oil firm Petrobras received a license to explore for oil, driven by the depletion of existing reserves and the success of neighboring Guyana and Suriname in finding massive reserves. This exploration, near one of the world's most biodiverse and least-studied regions, the Amazon river estuary, is expected to generate significant revenue and jobs, leading to increased local support for drilling. However, the environmental risks are substantial, and the influx of people is causing infrastructure strain and corruption, challenging Lula's dual goal of promoting a green agenda while expanding fossil fuel extraction.

Javier Milei loosens his grip on the peso

Argentina's President Javier Milei has cautiously allowed the peso to float more freely, widening its monthly movement band to adjust with inflation, aiming to address the currency's overvaluation and aid foreign-reserve accumulation. This move, welcomed by the IMF and markets, follows pressure on the central bank to defend the peso, which was exacerbated by midterm elections. The US Treasury's extraordinary backing of the peso had temporarily relieved pressure, but this latest adjustment is a step towards a full float, though experts believe the peso will remain overvalued and other monetary policy reforms are still needed.

ASIA

Can Australia defend itself against jihadist murderers?

Australia is grappling with heightened fears of jihadist terrorism after a father and son killed 15 people at a Hanukkah celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach. The attackers, followers of Islamic

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State, had visited the southern Philippines, raising concerns they sought training. The incident revealed that one attacker was previously known to intelligence services. This attack has intensified demands from Jewish leaders for stronger action against antisemitism, which has surged in Australia, and prompted Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to announce toughened hate-speech laws and a review of gun controls. The heroism of an immigrant who disarmed one attacker provided a point of national pride amid the tragedy.

Why has the border between the Koreas fallen silent?

The border between North and South Korea has fallen silent, reflecting South Korean President Lee Jae Myung's conciliatory approach to reduce tensions with the North. Lee, a left-winger, ceased propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts and leafleting, leading North Korea to similarly halt its own auditory provocations. More controversially, South Korea's spy agency also stopped its radio broadcasts into North Korea, significantly reducing external uncensored information reaching the country, especially after Donald Trump dismantled similar American services. While Lee hopes these gestures will bring Kim Jong Un to the negotiating table, the North Korean regime, supported by China and Russia, shows little inclination to negotiate, potentially awaiting further concessions from a possible second Trump-Kim summit.

The botched response to a devastating storm infuriates Indonesians

Indonesia's government has been widely criticized for its botched response to Cyclone Senyar, which ravaged Sumatra, killing over 1,000, displacing a million, and damaging 150,000 homes. President Prabowo Subianto's administration refused to declare it a national disaster, impeding foreign aid, and insisted the country could manage independently, sparking public outrage and accusations of arrogance. Environmentalists argue that widespread deforestation exacerbated the floods, questioning the government's sincerity in prevention efforts given Prabowo's past comments promoting palm oil. The incident highlights Indonesia's extreme vulnerability to natural disasters and its inadequate preparedness for future climate-related events.

CHINA

Jimmy Lai's judgment day

On December 15th, Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai was found guilty of foreign collusion and sedition by national-security judges, a verdict widely anticipated given the high conviction rate in such trials. Lai, a British citizen and long-time supporter of democratic causes, had his Apple Daily newspaper closed after his 2020 arrest and now faces potential life imprisonment, with his family fearing he may die behind bars due to health issues. The judgment, which stated Lai was "obsessed" with "turning China into a lackey of the West" and continued "international lobbying" after the national-security law was enacted, highlights the erosion of civil liberties in Hong Kong and is expected to set significant legal and social precedents. Despite international

condemnation from Britain and the EU, major world leaders like Sir Keir Starmer and Donald Trump plan to visit Beijing, suggesting a reluctance to provoke China by pressing Lai's case, while China warns against interference in its domestic affairs.

The Christmas-industrial complex centres on Yiwu

Yiwu, China, serves as the world's Christmas capital, producing most of its decorations and contributing to China's record trade surplus. However, US imports of these festive goods have declined due to President Donald Trump's tariffs, prompting Yiwu's merchants to shift exports to European markets like Germany and the Netherlands. Traders express frustration with America's unpredictable trade policies, which make planning and pricing difficult, and are also impacted by global events like the war in Ukraine. Despite these challenges, Yiwu's diverse merchants continue to prepare for upcoming global festivals, showcasing their adaptability.

MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

Donald Trump's peace plan is faltering in the chaos of Gaza

Donald Trump's peace plan for Gaza is collapsing amid ongoing chaos and a faltering ceasefire, despite American officials' insistence on a bright future for the region. Rafah, once a major city, lies devastated, and the planned "International Stabilisation Force" (ISF) and technocratic government outlined in the peace plan have not materialized, with Hamas reasserting control. Infractions of the ceasefire are common, leading to significant Palestinian casualties, while Israel shows no sign of withdrawing from occupied areas. Deepening disagreements between Israel and America over implementing the next phase, particularly regarding Israel's control over aid and the inclusion of Turkey in the ISF, further complicate the situation, with Trump losing patience as he presses Netanyahu for concessions.

Just 74 intensive-care beds remain in Gaza

Gaza's health-care system is severely shattered, with many hospitals destroyed or out of commission, leaving only 74 intensive-care beds and 215 emergency-room beds for the entire strip. Supplies of essential medical equipment, drugs, and even clean water are scarce, exacerbated by Israeli restrictions on "dual-use" items like surgical instruments. The conflict has killed at least 1,722 health-care workers, and over 18,500 patients, including 4,000 children, are awaiting evacuation for treatment, with more than 930 having died while waiting. The immense physical and psychological trauma, especially for children, requires years of rebuilding and billions of dollars, but this cannot begin without Hamas disarming and a new governing body, conditions that remain elusive in Trump's faltering peace plan.

Ethiopia wants to build Africa's biggest airport

Ethiopian Airlines plans to build Africa's largest airport near Addis Ababa, aiming to cement Ethiopia's status as the continent's air-travel hub and aid national development. The \$10bn project, intended to handle 110m passengers annually, is backed by ET's strong profitability and interest from the African Development Bank, America, and China. However, its viability is questioned due to ongoing internal conflicts, increasing competition from Gulf and Turkish airlines expanding in Africa, and the Ethiopian government's penchant for mega-projects and growing interference in ET's affairs. The project also faces local resistance due to the displacement of 15,000 people and allegations of harassment against those who complain.

EUROPE

Ukraine scrabbles for handholds against Russia's massive assault

Ukraine achieved a tactical success with a counter-attack in Kupiansk, liberating most of the railway town and encircling Russian forces, defying Vladimir Putin's recent claims. This operation showcased creative thinking in circumventing modern battlefield challenges. However, the overall outlook for Ukraine remains bleak, as Russia continues to press its advantage in men and materiel across Donbas and Zaporizhia, with Ukrainian defenses retreating faster than at any point since the war began. Ukraine struggles with conscription and supplies, while Russia's army grows despite heavy losses and demonstrates increasing competence in drone warfare.

Italy is using the Winter Olympics to appeal to the ultra-wealthy

Italy is leveraging the 2026 Winter Olympics, co-hosted by Milan and the ritzy resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo, to attract ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) to the country. A tax break introduced in 2017, which has drawn thousands of rich individuals, primarily to Milan, is being further sweetened with proposed increases. This influx has transformed Milan, creating new luxury clubs and private schools, but also driving up property prices and causing concern among locals. Despite some real-estate scandals and construction delays, the demand for high-end properties remains strong, indicating Milan's success in becoming a magnet for the wealthy.

Why German cities feel like war zones on New Year's Eve

German cities transform into "war zones" on New Year's Eve due to intense firework battles, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, fires, and overwhelming emergency services. Despite polls showing most Germans support extending the year-round firework ban, politicians resist, viewing it as an inviolable national tradition, and existing laws on illegal explosives are difficult to enforce. Campaigners are pushing for a federal ban, drawing hope from the Netherlands, which outlawed private fireworks earlier this year, but full implementation in Germany remains a future prospect.

Charlemagne

European gastronomy is a potent source of nationalism, as exemplified by Italy's agriculture minister's outrage over incorrectly made carbonara in the European Parliament. Despite decades of EU integration harmonizing laws and borders, culinary habits continue to divide the continent, with national palates unmoved by unity. This "gastronationalism" allows Europeans to denigrate neighbors' cooking without seeming impolite, often drawing a horizontal line between butter-loving, calorie-focused northerners and olive-oil-worshipping southerners who see meals as sacred. While some critics argue against prescribing "correct" ways to prepare dishes, the EU itself has enforced "geographic indication" rules to protect specific foods, with southern countries benefiting most.

BRITAIN

How to heal the trauma from Northern Ireland's killings

The British government under Sir Keir Starmer is pursuing a new policy to address the trauma of Northern Ireland's Troubles, aiming to use commissions for "information recovery" and draw a line under the past killings. This approach replaces the previous Conservative government's de facto amnesty, which sought to trade justice for information but faced criticism for potentially legitimizing past violence and failing to adequately pursue rogue soldiers. The legacy of the Troubles continues to fester, with modern nationalist politicians sometimes glamourising past paramilitary actions, despite historical widespread revulsion for the violence. The new bill, while unlikely to lead to many prosecutions, focuses on providing truth to families, but risks amplifying a sense of hidden truth if information is perceived as sanitizing events.

Britons are becoming obsessed with pet photography

Britons are increasingly obsessed with pet photography, with a 2024 survey finding they post three times as many pet photos on Instagram as those of partners or themselves. This demand for professional pet portraits surges before Christmas, appealing to "pet parents" who are becoming more affluent. The trend is particularly prevalent in posher boroughs of London, where a higher percentage of pet owners create social media profiles for their animals. Pet photography, though sometimes challenging with unruly subjects, offers a unique service that caters to a growing desire for framed memories of beloved animals, with some firms offering extravagant options like London cabs for shoots.

A portrait of Britain's aristocrats

Britain's aristocracy, though numerically small (794 hereditary peerages), still holds significant influence over land ownership and cultural heritage, despite a steady decline in their political

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power and financial status. The House of Lords is set to remove its last hereditary peers in 2026, marking the end of a thousand years of direct aristocratic influence. Modern aristocrats, like the current Earl of Sandwich, often resort to opening their stately homes to the public and engaging in commercial ventures to maintain their properties, leading to a "pretty normal middle-class existence" despite their titles. While critics argue aristocracy perpetuates snobbery and stems from historical "theft and unrepentant greed," Britons continue to be fascinated by this "biscuit-tin Britain" heritage, with charities like the National Trust dedicated to preserving grand homes.

Bagehot

Roger Hallam, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, has influenced a broad "extended universe" of civil disobedience in Britain, advocating for mass arrests as a core strategy to generate martyrs and draw attention to causes. This tactic, once fringe, is now adopted across the political spectrum, with pro-Palestine activists and far-right figures like Tommy Robinson and Lucy Connolly embracing victimhood to rally support. Hallam's movements have demonstrably influenced policy, such as pushing the Conservative government to commit to net-zero targets and influencing North Sea oil and gas licensing. The article suggests that British politics has taken a "millenarian turn," where catastrophism sells, and grannies are willing to risk jail, reflecting a nation where radical ideas become rational in the face of perceived existential threats.

CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

A journey into the world's most mysterious rainforest

The Congo basin rainforest, the world's second-largest and least understood, is a critical terrestrial carbon sink and biodiversity hotspot, currently under severe threat from logging, mining, and population growth. Recent research in areas like Odzala-Kokoua National Park is revealing new insights in climate science, ecology, and archaeology, including the vast peatlands that store massive amounts of carbon and the role of forest elephants as "ecosystem engineers." Scientists are using advanced tools like lidar and flux towers to map and study the forest, uncovering new species and archaeological sites that could illuminate early human migrations. The article stresses the immense global value of the Congo basin, estimated at \$1.15trn annually, and highlights the urgent need for conservation efforts before its secrets are lost due to rampant deforestation and corruption.

What The Economist discovered at dating bootcamp

Dating manuals, a genre offering advice largely to men, highlight a paradox: they promise triumph but often speak to a lack of social capital, selling millions amidst rising singlehood and men's fear of talking to women. Research suggests women are more selective sexually, and men

often need "primitive" advice on grooming, manners, and interaction. A dating "Bootcamp" observed in Miami, run by "Mystery," teaches formulaic, bragging-based pick-up techniques, including "negging," for \$10,000. While these courses improve social skills by forcing interaction, their misogynistic undertones are critiqued. However, the article notes that dating advice is evolving, with a shift towards listening to women's individual desires and developing genuine charm.

How humankind's 10m-year love affair with booze might end

Humankind's long love affair with alcohol, which has shaped human history from ancestral foraging for fermented fruit to the formation of cohesive societies, is showing signs of ending. Our efficient ability to metabolize ethanol, acquired through evolution, allowed early humans to consume energy-rich fermented fruits. Later, alcohol in social rituals fostered group cohesion by triggering endorphins and promoting sociability. However, the modern era faces the severe health consequences of alcohol abuse, with recent advice suggesting no amount is safe. Sales of alcohol are declining in rich countries, particularly among the young, who prefer social media to drinking. The rise of weight-loss drugs like Ozempic, which reduce alcohol's appeal, and the growth of no- or low-alcohol alternatives and "functional drinks" offering similar effects without the downsides, suggest a future of more precise neurological tinkering and potentially a soberer society.

The tariffs that nearly stole Christmas

President Donald Trump's "Liberation Day" tariffs in 2025 severely disrupted the global toy supply chain, threatening Christmas for American toymakers and consumers. Initial 145% tariffs on Chinese imports, where most toys are made, pushed many firms to the brink of bankruptcy, forcing difficult decisions about mortgaging homes or laying off staff. Though a 90-day pause provided a temporary reprieve, the unpredictability of US trade policy led some toymakers to sue the administration. While some, like Build-A-Bear Workshop and Lego, found ways to adapt or onshore production, the general trend was a decline in American toy manufacturing and a shift away from China. The article highlights the challenges for smaller businesses like The Queen's Treasures, facing ongoing struggles and personal sacrifices, with the potential Supreme Court ruling on the legality of IEEPA tariffs offering a glimmer of hope for refunds and curbing presidential power.

From honeycomb curry to blood fry: India's untouchable cooking

Dalit cuisine in India, shaped by cruelty, scarcity, and shame due to the caste system, is a rich and vibrant culinary tradition that remains largely invisible despite its hidden joys. Dalits, historically marginalized and performing degrading jobs, consume pork, beef, and offal foods shunned by upper-caste Hindus and creatively utilize wild greens and overlooked ingredients due to necessity. Their dishes, like blood fry, are often quick, simple, and ferociously flavorful. However, Dalit cooks face obstacles, including violence from "cow vigilantes" who enforce

bans on cow slaughter, even for naturally deceased animals. Despite the widespread consumption of meat in India, a pervasive image of a vegetarian nation endures, leading to discrimination against Dalits and Muslims. Efforts by historians and artists, like Sri Vamsi Matta and Shahu Patole, are slowly bringing Dalit food into the mainstream, challenging notions of "purity" and celebrating a culinary heritage born of resilience.

The battle to stop clever people betting

Sports-betting firms actively try to prevent skilled gamblers, or "sharps," from winning by imposing "stake restrictions" and employing sophisticated "player-profiling" strategies. While most punters are "squares" (losers), sharps, ranging from lone wolves to large syndicates, exploit mispriced odds in less popular leagues or obscure "derivative" markets. Betting firms use detailed data, including a player's device, deposit method, and betting patterns, to identify sharps and limit their wagers, often pampering "whales" (big losers) with VIP treatment, though some whales are sharps in disguise. Once restricted, sharps resort to methods like using "beards" (proxies) for betting, employing operational security, or "priming" accounts with intentional losing bets to raise limits. While some jurisdictions are exploring limits on betting limits, sharps paradoxically appreciate these restrictions as they help weed out competition and maintain their edge.

Adam Smith is misinterpreted and his influence overstated

Adam Smith, often hailed as the "father of economics" and an advocate for self-interest and libertarianism, is frequently misinterpreted, and his influence overstated. His most famous work, "The Wealth of Nations," celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2026, contains fewer novel ideas and more weaknesses than commonly acknowledged. Smith's earlier work, "Theory of Moral Sentiments," emphasized principles of human nature beyond selfishness, introducing the "impartial spectator" as an internal moral compass. He also often favored government intervention, supporting navigation acts and state-provided education, contradicting his popular libertarian image. Furthermore, Smith made economic errors, such as the "labour theory of value" which later influenced Marxism, and many ideas attributed to him, like GDP and free trade, originated with earlier thinkers. While Smith's method of treating the economy as a system was influential, his writing style was diffuse, and he was known for "unacknowledged borrowings" of ideas, making his claim as a sole revolutionary figure debatable.

What street talk reveals about Anglophone civilisation

Jonathon Green, a leading expert on English slang, argues that slang, despite its trivial perception, offers deep insights into Anglophone civilization, reflecting historical taboos, social bonding, and adaptability. His "Green's Dictionary of Slang," continually updated online, traces words like "arse" and "booze" back a millennium, revealing their evolution and social context. Slang has historically served to baffle outsiders, as seen in Cockney rhyming slang, and to cope with hardship, as evidenced by soldiers' vocabulary in World War I. While

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technology like social media accelerates the diffusion and transient nature of new terms, and AI complicates lexicography, slang continues to meet expressive needs beyond standard language, carrying nuanced meanings about identity, emotion, and perception.

America's fight back against China starts in Los Angeles in flip-flops

El Segundo, near LAX and nicknamed "Gundo," is becoming a hub for American startups dedicated to wresting industrial supremacy back from China, fueled by venture capital and a hard-headed patriotic ethos. These firms, founded by SpaceX alumni, focus on hardware innovation in defense, space, and energy technologies, distinguishing themselves from Silicon Valley's software focus. Gundo's history as an aerospace manufacturing center, combined with its countercultural aversion to Hollywood, fosters a unique entrepreneurial cluster where engineers with a "shoot for the moon" mindset quietly work on Plan B for America. Despite California's business challenges, the enthusiasm for President Trump's manufacturing revival and the clear mission to strip Chinese technology from products like lethal drones drive these companies, which, while small, aim to build a scalable industrial base for future geopolitical challenges.

The long, strange journey of a temple from profane to sacred

This article traces the remarkable journey of a wooden Jain temple replica from its origins as a British colonial marketing tool for tea in Calcutta, to a commercial exhibit at the 1904 St Louis World's Fair, then a "Gateway to Luck" at the Castaways casino in Las Vegas, and finally to a sacred space at the Jain Centre of Southern California. Commissioned cynically to attract visitors, the structure's meaning evolved from profane commerce to a revered object for Jain migrants in America. Despite its replica status and practical limitations for worship, the temple has become a powerful symbol of identity, faith, and community for Jains, especially as the community assimilates, reinforcing their heritage and driving fundraising for Jain studies.

What if the best way to learn about history is by playing with it?

Historical video games like Paradox Interactive's Europa Universalis 5 are transforming how people learn history by offering interactive, "learning by doing" experiences beyond traditional passive reading. These high-concept games allow players to control historical states, manage economies, diplomacy, and conflicts across centuries, creating alternate histories that encourage critical thinking about how events unfolded. The games' complex simulations, or "procedural rhetoric," subtly teach players about geographical knowledge, historical possibilities, and international relations concepts like the "security dilemma." While not without flaws (players can reload, computer opponents are imperfect), these engaging simulations make history alluring, driving students' interest and providing a unique, hands-on understanding of the past.

How two explorers, a mother and a baby made America

The Lewis and Clark expedition, ordered by President Thomas Jefferson after the Louisiana

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Purchase, explored and mapped the vast, newly acquired French territory in 1803, significantly accelerating America's westward expansion. The expedition's success, often attributed to the "great man" view of history, also relied crucially on the "small baby" view: the presence of Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman, and her infant son, Pompey, reassured Native American tribes of the group's peaceful intentions. The expedition, meticulously documented in journals, provided invaluable scientific and geographical data, despite initial ignorance and dangerous encounters with tribes. While Jefferson, a "man of facts," was a visionary in orchestrating the purchase and the mission, the story also highlights the tragic fates of some participants and the inevitable, uncontrolled march of American pioneers westward.

The gigantic task of catering on the world's biggest cruise ship

Catering on the world's largest cruise ship, the Star of the Seas, is a monumental and meticulously disciplined operation, overseen by Chef Gary Thomas, serving 100,000 meals daily for up to 7,600 guests and 2,350 crew. Inspired by Auguste Escoffier's 19th-century kitchen reforms emphasizing specialization and hierarchy, the ship's 344 chefs and 1,700 staff prepare all food from scratch, requiring immense planning and storage of ingredients worth \$1.5m weekly. Inventory manager Randy Nicolas uses AI-powered software to predict food needs based on passenger demographics and minimize waste, which is nevertheless inevitable due to buffet style and health regulations. The strenuous conditions for the predominantly international crew, working seven days a week, underscore the immense human effort behind the seamless passenger experience.

How wolves became dogs

The strange symbiosis between humans and dogs, dating back over 14,000 years, is explained through ecological, behavioral, and genetic evidence. Dogs, descendants of grey wolves, are uniquely integrated into human society, serving as skilled companions and workers. The "scavenger hypothesis" suggests wolves were drawn to hunter-gatherer camps for discarded meat, particularly during ice-age winters when humans, unable to subsist on protein alone, generated surplus lean meat. This led to a "survival of the friendliest" evolutionary process, where wolves developed psychological adaptations like "dognition"—an ability to read human minds and seek approval, exemplified by the evolution of the puppy-dog-eye muscle. While deliberate breeding later diversified dog breeds, the initial domestication was a result of a gradual co-evolution, with both species benefiting from the interaction.

A journey along East Asia's hidden artery

The Kuroshio (Black Stream), a powerful ocean current in East Asia, has profoundly shaped the region's life and societies for millennia, serving as a hidden artery for the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Named for its clear, dark waters, the current sustains rich fisheries and influences weather patterns. Historically, it facilitated Spanish trade between the Philippines and Mexico and is strategically important in modern geopolitical conflicts. Research by

scientists and archaeologists highlights its role in ancient human migrations to the Ryukyu islands and the cultural evolution of indigenous groups like Taiwan's Tao people. However, the Kuroshio is now being altered by human activity and climate change, warming significantly and shifting northward, leading to chaotic weather, altered marine ecosystems, and rising concerns among local communities.

How Jane Austen revealed the economic basis of society

Jane Austen's novels, celebrating their 250th anniversary, reveal the economic foundations of society with quantitative precision, often opening with financial setbacks and enumerating characters' fortunes as shorthand for social rank. Austen's personal experience of varying wealth informed her nuanced understanding of money's necessity for happiness, though not its sufficiency. Her characters' incomes, like the Dashwoods living on £500 a year, place even her less fortunate figures higher on the economic ladder of her time. Austen's dealings with publishers provided a harsh education in risk and reward, reflecting the seminal economic thought of her era, including Malthusian theories on population and critiques of profligacy versus miserliness. Her final, unfinished work, "Sanditon," explores the dynamic between cautious financial restraint and the "animal spirits" of a sympathetic capitalist, highlighting the importance of confident spending for a prosperous society.

Was Mr Darcy the richest of all Jane Austen's characters?

While Mr Darcy is famously wealthy with £10,000 a year, comparing characters' fortunes across Jane Austen's novels is complicated by inflation during the Napoleonic Wars. Mr Rushworth in "Mansfield Park" had £12,000 a year, but if his story is set later (1808 or 1812) than "Pride and Prejudice" (1793-94), his purchasing power would have been significantly less due to a 50% rise in the cost of living. Therefore, by adjusting for inflation, Mr Darcy remains a richer catch than Mr Rushworth, challenging initial impressions based on nominal income figures.

The most friendless place on earth

Loneliness is not just a rich-world problem; it is prevalent in poorer countries, with Africa being the loneliest region, contradicting the notion that individualism causes isolation. Loneliness is defined as a painful mismatch between desired and actual social connections, linked to negative health outcomes and misery. Studies, including a WHO analysis and The Economist's own, show a strong correlation between poverty and loneliness, with the poorest in the poorest places experiencing the most isolation. Madagascar, particularly its arid south, is identified as the loneliest place, where poverty forces migration and strains family relationships, making social connections difficult to maintain. Interventions like "community connectors" in places like Frome, England, or "friendship benches" in Zimbabwe, offer models for directly tackling loneliness and improving social well-being.

The Weekly Digest

Two centuries ago, Russian revolutionaries tried to change the world

Two centuries ago, on December 26th, 1825, the Decembrists?aristocratic military officers inspired by Western liberal ideals?staged a revolt in St Petersburg, aiming for emancipation of serfs, representative government, and the rule of law. Their rebellion, at a moment of imperial succession, failed due to disorganization and hesitation, resulting in a bloody crackdown and the execution or exile of its leaders to Siberia. Though a short-term failure, leading to a more draconian regime, the Decembrists became a powerful myth in Russian history, inspiring generations of writers and dissidents, from Alexander Herzen to Alexei Navalny, as champions of freedom against despotism. Their legacy continues to be debated, with modern Russian authorities denouncing them as traitors while others see them as a beacon of individual dignity and a call for a different Russia.

The rise and fall and rebirth of lapsang souchong

Lapsang souchong, the original black tea, originated in China's Wuyi hills over 400 years ago but is now facing declining popularity in the West, replaced by cheaper imitations. The tea, known as zhengshan xiaozhong in China and historically valued by figures like Queen Victoria, was once a sensation abroad, with its smoky flavor arising from a legend of soldiers drying leaves over pine fires. However, Western palates are changing, and brands like Twinings have discontinued it due to slumping demand and negative reviews for substitutes. In contrast, zhengshan xiaozhong thrives in China, where wealthy customers pay exorbitant prices for the authentic, pinewood-smoked tea, which has also given rise to new, unsmoked varieties like Jin Jun Mei. Strict Chinese regulations to protect Wuyi's forests and the tea's geographical indication are contributing to its status as a luxury good, ensuring its "real" version survives as a symbol for the upper classes.

How magicians stay relevant in the age of AI

Magicians today face new challenges in an age of shrinking attention spans, social media's ability to reveal tricks, and technology's desensitization to wonder. Harry Houdini, the 20th-century master, excelled at monetizing mystery and defending his act through publicity stunts and legal battles. Modern magicians like Justin Flom, a controversial figure with huge social media presence, adapt by deliberately "exposing" secrets, arguing that the revelation can be more entertaining than the trick itself, aiming to maximize viewer engagement. While some fear this diminishes magic's thrill, others argue it necessitates staying one step ahead with new illusions or subverting exposure itself, as seen in Asi Wind's "Fool Us" performance. Despite the rise of AI actors and the decline of long, immersive shows, magicians find demand for live magic heightened by its ability to offer an unreplicable, "hiccup in the texture of everyday life" that phones cannot provide, proving that the craving for wonder persists.

INTERNATIONAL

Ditch textbooks and learn how to use a wrench to AI-proof your job?

Generation Z is increasingly questioning the value of a university education, with many opting for skilled manual trades as a path to job security and good pay in the age of artificial intelligence. Mr. Palmer, a 23-year-old electrician, exemplifies this trend, finding high revenue and demand in a field he sees as "AI-proof" compared to vulnerable white-collar jobs. While university graduates still earn more on average, the rising costs of higher education and concerns about teaching relevant skills are driving a shift in sentiment. Vocational training and degree apprenticeships, as seen in Switzerland and programs by BAE Systems and TSMC, offer practical skills, on-the-job training, and reduced debt, addressing a critical shortage of blue-collar workers in industries like advanced manufacturing and defense.

How to survive abandonment by America

East Asian allies, particularly South Korea, are planning for a harsher world without guaranteed American support, as the Trump administration demands greater responsibility for their own security while simultaneously limiting ties with China. American envoys demand significant financial investments and military alignment in potential conflicts, while also restricting deeper economic or security relations with China. South Korea, recovering from a failed coup attempt, is seeking a consensus to hedge against "Trumpian abandonment," balancing pragmatic trade deals with America with cautious avoidance of alienating China, which remains a crucial economic partner despite public negative sentiment. The prospect of "friendly nuclear proliferation" by allies, a significant departure from long-held American policy, is also being considered as a means for self-reliance in a potentially lonelier world.

BUSINESS

The plan to rescue Novo Nordisk

Novo Nordisk, the Danish drugmaker, is undergoing a transformation to regain its lead in the obesity drug market, which it lost to Eli Lilly's Zepbound after vastly underestimating demand for its pioneering drug, Wegovy. CEO Maziar Mike Doustdar plans to push a new generation of obesity treatments, including oral and higher-dose injectables, and is overhauling the company's operations. This includes cutting 9,000 jobs, narrowing its focus to diabetes and obesity, and adopting a "consumer mindset" by expanding direct sales channels and revising pricing strategies. The company is also shifting its pipeline strategy to include acquisitions, but faces formidable competition from Lilly and other developers, alongside upcoming patent expirations in key emerging markets.

Retreating from EVs could be hazardous for Western carmakers

Western carmakers are hitting the brakes on the transition to electric vehicles (EVs) as customer demand stalls and governments ease targets, with the EU dropping its 2035 ban on petrol cars and Ford writing down EV assets. This slowdown is driven by high upfront costs, limited small models, and insufficient charging infrastructure. However, retreating from EVs could be risky, as Chinese brands are rapidly gaining market share in both pure electric and hybrid segments globally. Western carmakers face a delicate balancing act: profiting from petrol cars now while investing enough to remain competitive in the inevitable long-term shift to EVs, lest they concede an unassailable lead to foreign rivals.

Job apocalypse? Not yet. AI is creating brand new occupations

Despite fears of widespread job losses, artificial intelligence is creating new roles that require uniquely human skills, rather than leading to a job apocalypse. These include highly-paid data annotators (experts training AI models), "forward-deployed engineers" (FDEs) who embed AI tools in organizations and combine technical skills with consulting and sales, and "AI risk-and-governance specialists" ensuring bot safety. The rise of these new occupations, overseen by increasingly common Chief AI Officers, highlights a shift towards valuing personality and human-facing skills in the tech workforce, as coding becomes automatable and companies need individuals who can navigate complex human and technological interfaces.

Luxury handbags may be shoddier than you think

Luxury handbags are facing increased scrutiny over quality, as online videos expose loose stitching and melting dyes on extravagantly priced items from brands like Goyard. This issue is particularly concerning for luxury companies because handbags have been central to their success, accounting for a significant portion of market growth. The slump in handbag sales, driven by middle-class financial strain and a shift towards experiential luxury, is compounded by price hikes that invite closer examination of quality. Furthermore, the rise of secondhand marketplaces and high-quality "superfakes" offer consumers alternatives, prompting brands like Chanel and Prada to invest in manufacturing oversight and craftsmanship to rebuild trust.

How to conduct a job interview

Job interviews, despite their stereotypical flaws and often predictable questions, can be the most useful part of the selection process if conducted correctly. Research indicates that "structured" interviews—using standardized, job-related questions with agreed-upon scoring systems—have the highest predictive value for job performance, far surpassing unstructured approaches. While structured interviews may reduce interviewer agency, they are more effective. Even the best interviews, however, only predict 20% of job performance, so layering other assessments like personality tests and work samples is recommended to achieve a modest 30-40% predictive validity. Ultimately, hiring managers should approach interviews with a script, a scoring system, and a dose of realism, acknowledging that no method is foolproof.

SpaceX, OpenAI, Anthropic and their giga-IPO dreams

SpaceX, OpenAI, and Anthropic, once exclusively funded by private capital, are reportedly exploring initial public offerings (IPOs) with valuations potentially reaching trillions. This shift, driven by their escalating capital needs for ambitious projects like Starship and AI infrastructure, comes as private markets plateau. While public markets offer deeper capital pools, they demand greater scrutiny, posing dilemmas for the trio. SpaceX faces governance concerns related to Elon Musk's control, while OpenAI and Anthropic are currently burning billions, far from profitability. The decision to go public would test their lofty valuations against market impatience for profits and could expose them to the slings and arrows of discerning investors, especially as competition intensifies.

FINANCE & ECONOMICS

Where America's most prominent short-sellers are placing their bets

America's prominent short-sellers, Jim Chanos, Carson Block, and Andrew Left, offer mixed views on the current stock market, with Chanos warning of "exuberance similar to 2021" fueled by AI ambitions, while Block is more sanguine given solid earnings growth. All agree that predicting a market downturn is impossible, but anticipate signs like weakening AI profits or a sharp rise in unemployment. They express concerns about the impact of a potential bear market, citing investor overexposure to stocks and the concentration of retail bets on risky assets. Additionally, they worry that the current boom might mask fraud, especially as law enforcement has increasingly targeted short-sellers themselves, potentially leaving fewer "sleuths" to uncover corporate misdeeds.

Meet the American investors rushing into Congo

American investors, including Josh Goldman of KoBold Metals, are increasingly rushing into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to access its vast deposits of critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, and copper, despite the country's ongoing conflicts and corruption. This influx is driven by Donald Trump's "Washington Accords" with Congo and Rwanda, aiming to diversify America's mineral supply away from China. The US government's visible support is making it easier for American firms to navigate Congo's challenging business environment, with a new upfront agreement on tax settling some issues. However, significant challenges remain, including widespread corruption and the de facto control of some key mining areas by M23 rebels, backed by Rwanda, testing the efficacy of Trump's deal diplomacy.

This Christmas, raise a glass to concentrated market returns

Bank of America and Cisco recently reached new all-time share price highs, recovering from their 2006 and 2000 peaks, respectively, after nearly two decades. This highlights a surprising

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trend: despite global share prices rising significantly since 2007, a large proportion of individual companies, around 36% of those existing before November 2007, still trade below their pre-financial-crisis levels. This phenomenon is even more pronounced in markets outside America. The article attributes this to the powerful force of concentrated returns, where a small number of "superstar" stocks, like Apple, Nvidia, and Netflix, account for the bulk of market gains, a pattern observed historically.

Crypto's real threat to banks

The crypto industry is challenging Wall Street's long-held privileged position within the Republican Party, posing a significant long-term threat to traditional banks. Despite both sectors benefiting from the Trump administration's deregulation, crypto's growing political clout, backed by substantial PAC funding, is evident in regulatory decisions like the GENIUS Act. This act, while banning stablecoin yields, has workarounds that allow "rewards," frustrating banks who see it as an unequal playing field. Banks are also alarmed by crypto firms gaining national bank-trust charters, allowing them to provide custody for assets nationally, and find themselves aligning with Democratic senators concerned about stablecoin yields and money-laundering risks.

Free exchange

The article challenges the common narrative of declining birth rates in the West, arguing that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) can be misleading as a measure of overall births, as it captures the timing rather than the total number of children a woman has over her lifetime. Using the Completed Fertility Rate (CFR), which measures average births by the end of child-bearing years, data shows that America's CFR has remained stable over the past two decades, rising slightly from 1.91 to 1.97. This suggests that women are largely deferring childbirth, rather than forgoing it, similar to a fable about lizards whose population temporarily dwindled due to delayed births but eventually recovered. While the CFR is still below replacement level, the article argues that panic about population decline is unwarranted if women are simply delaying, rather than eliminating, births.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A debate is raging over the origins of an elusive cousin to modern humans

A debate is intensifying over the origins of Denisovans, an elusive cousin to modern humans, following the analysis of the Harbin skull, which has been genetically linked to this mysterious group. While nuclear DNA evidence suggests Denisovans and Neanderthals formed a single lineage that split from modern humans 500,000-800,000 years ago, the skull's morphology (physical features) points to a later split, after Neanderthals diverged. This discrepancy

challenges the established "out of Africa" theory for Homo sapiens, suggesting a potential origin for the sapiens lineage outside Africa or complex interbreeding scenarios. Scientists are optimistic that more fossil finds and advanced DNA/protein extraction techniques will eventually clarify the Denisovan story, acknowledging that a single piece of evidence is not enough to represent an entire species.

Saudi Arabia wants to host the world's cheapest data centres

Saudi Arabia aims to host the world's cheapest data centers for artificial intelligence (AI), leveraging its abundant, low-cost solar electricity and ample land. This national priority, part of its "Vision 2030" to diversify away from fossil fuels, is spearheaded by Humain, a new company under MBS's leadership. Humain has secured cutting-edge AI chips from Nvidia, a significant reversal in US policy, and signed deals with data-center builders. The strategy involves offering AI companies greatly reduced costs for "inference" (querying AI models) by selling output tokens at half the market price. The country is also developing its own Arabic-language AI model and plans a "world-first AI operating system for the enterprise," aiming to become a top-five global AI hub.

How dogs make teens feel less anxious

New research suggests that dogs make teenagers feel less anxious by influencing their gut microbiota, a beneficial relationship that goes beyond mere companionship. Kikusui Takefumi's study at Azabu University found that dog owners have significantly different gut microbes, particularly variants of Streptococcus and Prevotella 7 bacteria, compared to non-owners. These microbe variants were linked to reduced aggression, delinquent behavior, and social withdrawal in dog-owning teens. Further experiments with mice, infused with microbe samples from both groups of teens, showed that those with microbes from dog owners displayed more sociality and empathy. This indicates that microbial transfer from dogs may directly influence the brain, suggesting a novel path to mental well-being through pet ownership.

Are some types of sugar healthier than others?

When it comes to sugar, the type consumed makes no significant difference to health; what matters is how it's eaten. Most sugars, whether refined white or "natural" varieties like honey or coconut sugar, are primarily composed of fructose and glucose. Glucose causes blood sugar spikes, while excess fructose is processed into fat in the liver. To mitigate negative effects, it's advised to eat sugar slowly, avoid sugary drinks (like fruit juice, which contains as much sugar as Coca-Cola), and consume it alongside fiber, protein, or fat, which slow absorption and promote fullness. The minor mineral and antioxidant content in "natural" sugars like honey is too negligible to provide substantial health benefits.

CULTURE

What goes into raising the turkey on your holiday table

Raising domesticated turkeys for holiday tables is a labor-intensive process that sustains small farms but involves birds lacking the survival instincts of their wild counterparts. Baffoni's Poultry Farm, a century-old family business, raises broad-breasted whites, known for their quick growth and table presentation, supplying various sizes for Thanksgiving and Christmas. The farm's operations include fortnightly batches of poults, outdoor enclosures to prevent disease, and on-site slaughtering and processing, adhering to federal inspections. Despite the demanding work and competition from large brands, local farms like Baffoni's are experiencing a resurgence in popularity as consumers increasingly seek out locally sourced food, contributing significantly to the farm's annual profitability.

And 2025's winners are?Timothée Chalamet and Sydney Sweeney

Timothée Chalamet and Sydney Sweeney emerged as Hollywood's champions of 2025, embodying the star power needed to draw audiences to cinema. Chalamet's performances in "Marty Supreme" and "A Complete Unknown" solidified his status as a talented actor, while Sweeney's screen charisma, despite varied critical reception for her acting, made her a bona fide movie star, likened to Marilyn Monroe. Both adeptly manage a delicate balance of intimacy and distance to maintain their mystique in today's fractured attention economy, using sly stunts and aloof responses to media frenzies. In an era where streaming dims celebrity aura and action franchises dominate, these "true stars" are crucial for keeping audiences in cinema seats, especially as the industry faces new threats from artificial intelligence actors who, no matter how plausible, can never replicate genuine stardom and public fascination.

The best podcasts of 2025

This section lists the best podcasts of 2025, offering a diverse range of topics from clothes history ("Articles of Interest") and political careers ("Final Thoughts: Jerry Springer") to music biographies ("Fela Kuti: Fear No Man") and human relationships with AI ("Flesh and Code"). Other notable podcasts cover poignant life stories ("Heavyweight"), true crime investigations ("Missing in the Amazon"), lawfare analysis ("Past Present Future: Politics on Trial"), the history of transgender medicine ("The Protocol"), AI's impact on the workforce ("Shell Game"), and geopolitical war simulations ("The Wargame").

ECONOMIC & FINANCIAL INDICATORS

Economic data, commodities and markets

No significant coverage this issue.

OBITUARY

Iain Douglas-Hamilton fought to save the beasts he loved

Iain Douglas-Hamilton, a pioneering zoologist who died aged 83, dedicated his life to studying and saving African elephants, initially through ethological observation and later by pioneering aerial census techniques. His research revealed the devastating impact of ivory poaching, leading him to become a fierce advocate for elephant conservation and instrumental in passing America's African Elephant Conservation Act in 1988. As honorary chief warden in Uganda, he established anti-poaching patrols, helping elephant populations recover significantly. He co-founded Save the Elephants in 1993, which continued his work, demonstrating success in increasing savannah elephant numbers, though forest elephants remain critically endangered. His innovative solutions included "bee fences" to deter elephants from farms, an ironic twist given his near-fatal bee attack in 2023.