

Full of verified facts and debunked myths, this book will be your strongest ally in combatting social awkwardness.

It will arm you with plenty of icebreaking pieces of trivia, suitable for any occasion.



Nayden Kostov is an award-winning author and member of the high IQ society MENSA. Born in Bulgaria, he has lived in places like Germany, Belgium, and Iraq, before settling down with his family in Luxembourg.

463 **HARD TO BELIEVE FACTS**

NAYDEN KOSTOV

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Hard To Believe

FACTS

Better Explained, Counterintuitive and Fun Trivia



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5.

Myth: The remains of a man who perished during a volcanic eruption represent a “man masturbating for one last time”.



Reality: A photograph showing the remains of a man who perished during the volcanic eruption that destroyed the Roman city of Pompeii in 79 CE was repeatedly posted online with the caption “masturbating man”. About 2,000 people were killed instantly when Mount Vesuvius erupted, and the city was buried in a thick carpet of volcanic ash. Due to the exorbitant heat, many of the victims experienced muscle contractions and were left frozen in a boxer-like position. These poses have nothing to do with sexual activity or masturbation.



6.

Myth: Heavy cream is heavier than milk.

Reality: Do not be misled by the name: heavy cream is whipping cream with a milk fat content of between 36 and 40 percent. It is in fact lighter than milk.

7.

Myth: Michael Jackson held the rights of South Carolina’s anthem.

Reality: The state of South Carolina, USA, has two official state songs: “Carolina” and “South Carolina On My Mind”. The latter has a title very similar to the famous James Taylor song “Carolina In My Mind” (recorded and released on the Beatles’ label, Apple Records). Michael Jackson did indeed own the rights to most of the Beatles/Apple catalogue, along with “Carolina In My Mind”, but for sure not to “South Carolina On My Mind”.



8.

Myth: The US state of West Virginia is further west than the state of Virginia.

Reality: It is exactly the opposite, check a map!

9.

Myth: The Ponzi scheme was invented by Charles Ponzi.

Reality: A Ponzi scheme is a fraud that lures investors and pays profits to earlier investors with funds from more recent investors. Among the first scams that meet the definition of a Ponzi scheme were those organised by Adele Spitzeder in Germany from 1869 to 1872, and by Sarah Howe in the USA through the so-called “Ladies’ Deposit”, in the 1880s. The Ponzi scheme was also previously described in novels: Charles Dickens’s 1844 novel, “Martin Chuzzlewit”, and his 1857 novel, “Little Dorrit”, both describe such a scheme. In the 1920s, Charles Ponzi carried out this fraud and became notorious throughout the USA because of the huge amount of money that he collected.



10.

Myth: The Spanish fly is a fly.

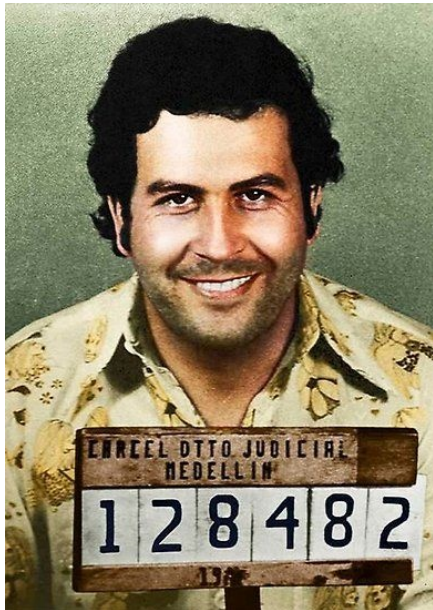


Reality: The Spanish fly was once used as an aphrodisiac. It is however not a fly, but an emerald green beetle of the species *Lytta vesicatoria*.



13.

Myth: The notorious drug lord, Pablo Escobar offered to repay the external debt of Colombia if the government left him alone.



Reality: His son disproved it. The rumour started when a former President of Colombia visited Pablo Escobar and the press speculated about it.



14.

Myth: The story is often told of Napoleon's army freezing in the bitter Russian Winter, their clothes falling apart as tin pest ate the buttons.

Reality: This appears to be an urban legend. Indeed, several French regiments did use tin buttons and the temperature during the Russian winter did drop low enough for a tin pest to start (below -40°C or -40°F). However, any tin that might have been used would have been quite impure, and thus more tolerant of low temperatures. According to laboratory tests, pure tin needs almost two years to develop significant tin pest damage, much longer than the duration of the entire invasion. Additionally, none of the survivors described any problem with buttons and, most probably, the legend is a mix of a real case of Russian tin buttons falling apart in an army warehouse in the 1860s and the deplorable condition of Napoleon's soldiers upon their return.



of couples. The female goes back to the sea to feed after laying one egg, which is then hatched by the male. The male spends the pitch-black, turbulent winter incubating the egg in his brood pouch. By the time the egg hatches (some 2.5 months later), the male will have fasted for around 120 days since arriving at the colony. To survive the fierce winds of up to 200 km/h (120 mph), the males huddle together, taking turns in the middle of the group. In the four months of travel, courtship, and incubation, the male may lose as much as 20 kg (44 lb) from the initial mass of 38 kg (84 lb).



31.

The male White-fronted Parrot (also known as “White-fronted Amazon” or “Spectacled Amazon Parrot”) will vomit in the female’s mouth during their mating ritual. After selecting a satisfactory partner, the two parrots will start “kissing” one another, locking their beaks and playing with each other’s tongues, making these birds one of the few animals to engage in kissing. During the kissing session, the male will vomit into the female’s mouth.





39.

Some species of fruit flies can produce coiled-up sperm more than 5 cm (2 in) long, which is 20 times the length of their own body. That is a thousand times longer in relative terms than human sperm.

40.

The directors of “The Matrix” are Larry and Andy Wachowski, who used to be brothers. Today, Lana Wachowski (born 1965 and formerly known as Larry) and Lilly Wachowski (born 1967 and formerly known as Andy) are both trans women and, technically, sisters.



41.

In 2015, China banned showing LGBT relationships on TV.



42.

According to the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, one in twenty people taking the anti-depressant clomipramine have an orgasm when they yawn.

43.

Once female blue crabs reach sexual maturity, they mate with a male only once. Male crabs will mate with multiple females during their lifespan.





70.

As a weird experiment, in 2009, Professor Stephen Hawking organised a lavish party with lots of expensive champagne and hors d'oeuvres open to everyone, but did not announce it until the day after the party had taken place. As expected, no one attended the party. Professor Hawking was trying to prove and did so successfully that time travel is not possible.



71.

Joseph John Thomson discovered the electron. Thomson's student Ernest Rutherford discovered the proton. Rutherford's student James Chadwick discovered the neutron.



72.

A turbojet train is a train powered by jet airplane engines. Several were built for experimental purposes in the USA and the USSR. In 1966, the USA created the fastest one, reaching 296 km/h (184 mph).



73.

After decades of continuous use, the US Air Force finally retired its floppy disk system for managing nuclear weapons in 2019. The Strategic Automated Command and Control system no longer runs on 8-inch floppy drives from circa 1972.



78.

The term “Asian flush” describes people’s face and neck turning red when they drink alcohol. Sometimes, the red colour comes along with headache and nausea. The culprit is the deficiency of an enzyme called aldehyde dehydrogenase 2 (ALDH2). Almost half of East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans) have this condition.

79.

Long before becoming the closely guarded tourist attraction that it is today, the Hollywood Sign (formerly known as the Hollywoodland Sign) was a slowly deteriorating advertisement for a real estate development that no one had ever cared to take down. The founder of Playboy magazine, Hugh Hefner, saved it twice. By the way, Google deliberately leads you to the wrong place if you enter “Hollywood Sign” for navigation.



80.

You clap your dominant hand towards the other hand.

81.

Up until the 1950s, some cars had trafficators instead of blinkers. Trafficators are semaphore-like signals that stick out from the door pillars to show an intention to turn.





251.

Roberto Martin Antonio Bonilla (born in 1963) is a former baseball player in the US major leagues from 1986 to 2001. From 1992 to 1994, Bonilla was the highest-paid sportsperson in the league, earning more than \$6 million per year. He will also be remembered as the baseball player who received almost \$30 million for not playing. Let me explain: New York Mets released Bonilla before the 2000 season while still owing him \$5.9 million for the final year of his contract. Instead of paying the lump sum, the team agreed to make 25 annual payments of \$1.2 million each in the period 2009-2035.

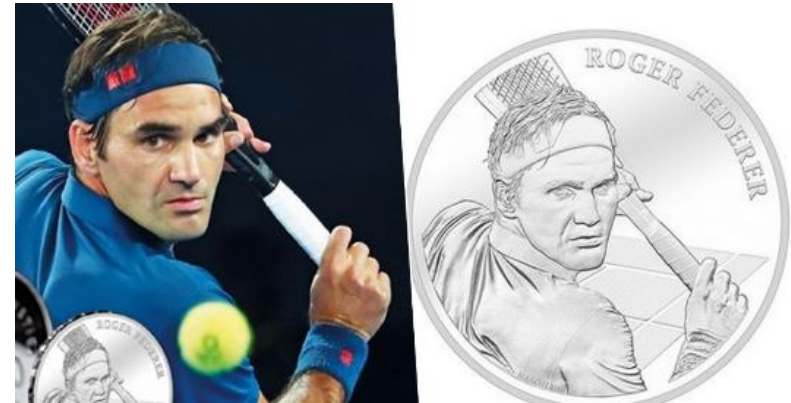


252.

In a 1975 Asia Cup semi-final football game, North Korea and Hong Kong finished 3:3 after extra time. They needed 28 penalties to decide the winner: North Korea.

253.

In late-2019, Swiss tennis legend Roger Federer became the first living person to be featured on a Swiss coin (20-franc silver coin) as “a perfect ambassador” for the country.



254.

Athletes perform better if their main rival participates in the competition.



299.

The orang-utan is the only ape in Asia. The male orang-utan is the largest tree mammal in the world.



300.

In 2011, it was revealed that elephants have six toes (including a pseudo toe) on each foot. We have to note that not every toe has a corresponding toenail.



301.

Elephants can “hear” through their feet. They are capable of the so-called seismic communication. Elephants’ sensitive feet capture the slightest vibration, be it the steps of humans, elephants or other animals, distant elephant alarm cries, mating calls, and navigation instructions to the herd.



302.

Often compared to an air conditioner, elephants’ ears have large blood vessels that are visible from the back of the ear. Blood circulates through those vessels and cools down, then continues cooling down the rest of their bodies.



310.

The grey fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) is widespread throughout North America and Central America. It is unique in that it is a skilled tree climber. Grey foxes can climb trees that are straight up to escape their predators but they also climb to take a nap in a sunny location, and have been known to hide or sleep in hawk and owl nests.



311.

Cartilaginous fish (with skeleton made of cartilage, rather than bone), such as sharks and rays, do not have swim bladders. Some of the species have adapted to control their depth only by swimming (using dynamic lift); others stockpile fats with lesser density than seawater to achieve a neutral buoyancy, which does not change with depth.

312.

The bony-eared assfish (*Acanthonus armatus*) holds the record for the smallest brain-to-body weight ratio of all vertebrates.





346.

Planting trees reduces crime. According to a 2012 study published in the US journal “Landscape and Urban Planning”, it was observed in the neighbourhoods of Baltimore, Maryland, that a 10% increase in tree cover yielded at least a 12% decrease in crime. The researchers controlled for socioeconomic factors, like the fact that wealthier neighbourhoods tend to have leafier lanes. Yet the more-trees/less-crime relation still held.

347.

“Plogging” combines jogging with picking up trash. It started in Sweden in 2015 and rapidly spread to other countries.



348.

Since 2019, commuters who use public transport in Rome, Italy, can exchange their used plastic bottles for metro or bus tickets. People can simply insert plastic bottles in the machine to receive the ticket on their smartphones through an app.

349.

In 2019, several shops in the Czech Republic introduced shampoo and shower gel filling machines. Customers can now re-use their empty bottles and do not have to buy a new plastic bottle every time.





376.

There is no official army in the tiny landlocked country of Andorra (population 85,000), which is protected by France and Spain. However, in case of emergency, all men between the ages of 21 and 60 are required by law to serve and defend. For this reason, by law the male head of each family in Andorra is required to own a gun in case of attack.



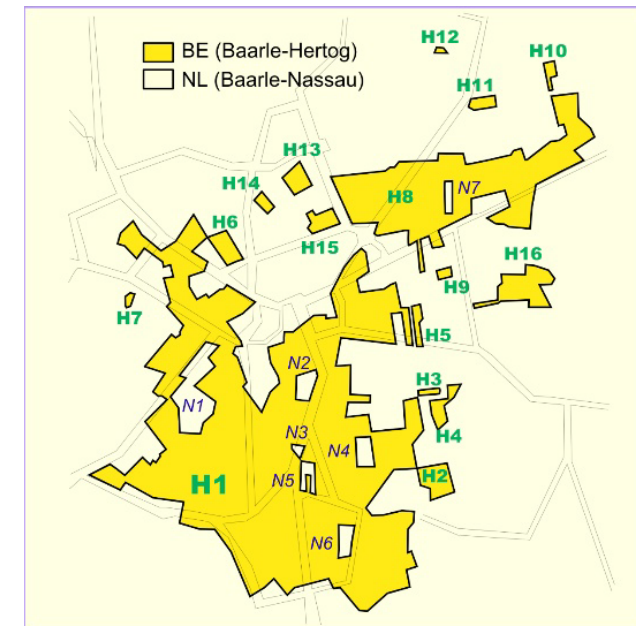
377.

The local government in the South Korean capital, Seoul, aims to tackle loneliness and dementia in the rapidly ageing country by organising daytime discos for 65+-year-old seniors.



378.

One of the most bizarre complexes of enclaves and ex-claves in the world is the Belgian town of Baarle-Hertog. It consists of 24 non-contiguous plots of land, mostly surrounded by the Netherlands. Many houses straddle the border and are simultaneously located in both countries. Each building has to pay taxes in the country where its front door is located. That is why some shops and businesses repeatedly move their front doors some metres if that is profitable for the taxes.





379.

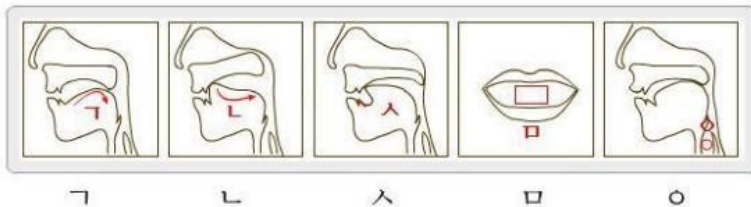
In South Korea, the typical gift for a house-warming party is toilet paper.

380.

Korea invented metal printing type some 200 years before Johannes Gutenberg.

381.

The Korean alphabet, created in 1443, was inspired by the shapes of the vocal organs. Today it consists of 24 letters in South Korea and 40 in North Korea.



382.

Up until 1882, Korea had no national flag.

383.

In Japan, it is considered rude to eat or talk on the phone while walking.



384.

For both religious and practical reasons, the Japanese mostly avoided eating meat for more than twelve centuries. Eating the meat of 4-legged animals was partly or fully prohibited between 675 CE and 1868 CE.

385.

Shitenno-ji is a Buddhist shrine in Osaka, Japan. It is regarded as the first and oldest Buddhist temple in the country.



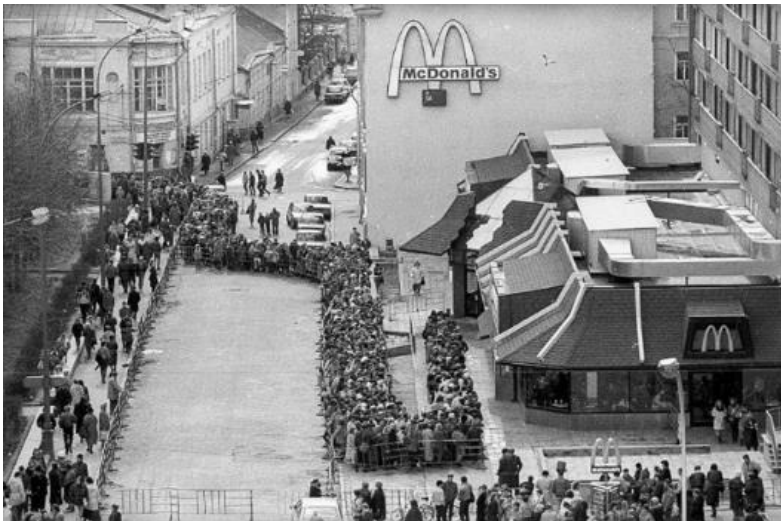
386.

Sussex and the Isle of Wight were the last places in England to convert to Christianity, in 686 CE.



417.

McDonald's opened the doors of its first restaurant in Russia (then USSR) on 31 January 1990. With 900 seats, it was the largest McDonald's in the world at the time. Some 27,000 Russians applied to work at the first McDonald's in Russia, with 630 eventually hired. All this in a country where unemployment did not officially exist.



418.

Worldwide, there are only four national anthems that have no official lyrics: the ones of Spain, San Marino, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.



419.

Vietnam is the world's largest black pepper producer and exporter, accounting for nearly half of the global output.

420.

Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), aka El Libertador ("The Liberator" in Spanish), was a Venezuelan political leader who headed the revolutions against Spanish rule in the Viceroyalty of New Granada. For a few years, he was simultaneously president of Gran Colombia (present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador), Peru, and Bolivia.





461.

In the 2018 presidential elections in Egypt, more than one million Egyptians struck out the names of both contenders and cast their ballot for Mohamed Salah (writing his name on the ballot). Salah is a widely popular Egyptian footballer who played a decisive role in qualifying Egypt for the 2018 World Cup. He did not participate in the elections yet got second place.



462.

According to INRIX 2019 Global Traffic Scorecard, the cities where drivers spent most hours in traffic jams in 2018 were Bogota, Colombia, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: 191 and 190 hours per year, respectively.

463.

In Finland, when one receives a PhD diploma, they are also given a top hat and a sword for the ceremony.



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