



In this file photo taken on April 4, 2014, Kathy Kriger (left), owner of Rick's Cafe, based on the movie "Casablanca," shows US Secretary of State John Kerry around the cafe in the Moroccan city of the same name. — AFP photos



A man walks in "Rick's Cafe", a bar which recreates that of the iconic film "Casablanca", in the Moroccan city of the same name.



In this file photo Humphrey Bogart's son Stephen Bogart and Ingrid Bergman's daughter Pia Lindstrom attend the press conference for the 60th Anniversary of "Casablanca" gala tribute screening and DVD release event at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center on August 11, 2003 in New York City.

'As Time Goes By': Casablanca cafe celebrates film classic, 80 years on

Tourists are flocking to a bar in Morocco searching for the spirit of Humphrey Bogart's iconic, fictional nightclub, 80 years after the classic wartime film "Casablanca" hit the silver screen. The Moroccan port city entered the cultural imagination of the United States at a key point in World War II, thanks to the moody romance starring Ingrid Bergman as Ilsa Lund and Bogart as Rick Blaine. Just days after its initial screening on November 26, 1942,

American forces snatched Casablanca from Vichy control during Operation Torch, a string of allied landings in North Africa that helped change the course of the war.

But Morocco was still under Vichy rule when the film was made, so director Michael Curtiz shot his entire masterpiece at Warner Brothers' studios in California. Decades later, former US diplomat Kathy Kriger opened a real-life "Rick's Cafe" in Casablanca itself as a

tribute to the film.

Complete with cocktails and piano, the venue is modeled on Blaine's eponymous bar, and became an instant hit with tourists when it opened its doors in 2004. "I absolutely had to come, even though I knew that the film wasn't shot here," said Wendy, a tourist from Vancouver. "The place is a unique experience, nostalgic and romantic. You have to see it once in your life." Fellow tourist Alexandra, from Spain, said she had not seen the film but was "fascinated" by the place. "In my imagination, the city of Casablanca is linked to Rick's Cafe," she said.

'We'll always have Paris'

Stepping into the chic bar next to Casablanca's old city feels like walking back in time. Tables are laid out on two levels, amid sculpted stucco columns in a traditional Moroccan style. "It's not an exact replica of the cafe in the film," said restaurant manager and pianist Issam Chabaa. "The only thing that was perfectly reproduced in the end was its spirit." The interior is littered with reminders of the film that inspired it-wrought iron candle holders, beaded lampshades, a jazz and blues repertoire from the era and posters of the film.

Of course, the restaurant houses a piano, similar to the one on which Dooley Wilson's character Sam played "As Time Goes By"-the theme song of Rick and Ilsa's affair. "All that's missing is a roulette wheel and the smoky, dramatic atmosphere of the time," said Irish diner Tony. He and his companions said they were not cinema buffs, but could nevertheless recite lines from the film. "We'll always have Paris," quoted one,



This file photo shows posters and pictures of US legendary movie "Casablanca" at the Casablanca bar in Camaguey city, 600Km east of Cuba's capital Havana.

referring to Blaine and Lund's romance shortly before Nazi Germany invaded France in 1940.

'Anchored in legend'

Blaine recites the enduring line to Lund as he convinces her to part ways with him, sacrificing their love affair to help her husband, a Czech resistance fighter, escape the Nazis. "Casablanca" gave allied forces a propaganda boost as they gained control of North Africa, which became a springboard from which to liberate western Europe. The film's US release came in January 1943 as president Roosevelt took part in the

Casablanca Conference in preparation for that push.

Historian Meredith Hindley, author of a book on wartime Casablanca, said the film formed "part of the American war experience in a way that was never intended". "It just becomes part of the American cultural fabric," she said. The movie has remained one of Hollywood's most beloved works. American drummer Najib Salim, who has performed at Rick's Cafe for 15 years, described it as "timeless". "It will always be anchored in legend," he said. — AFP



In this file photo taken on July 12, 1999, moviegoers watch the classic film "Casablanca" on a 20-by-40-foot outdoor screen on the Washington Monument grounds in Washington DC.

'Twitter becoming taboo': Celebs look for exit strategies

It has become the common refrain of the moment on Twitter-something along the lines of: "In case this is the end, please find me at..." For some Twitter celebrities, particularly those working in politics and crypto-finance, the potential demise of the platform under Elon Musk's erratic stewardship is a serious problem. "As a back-up plan, follow me on Instagram @AOC - it's really me there," tweeted US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to her 13.4 million followers last week. But for many celebrities, it would not be such a great loss.



In this file photo Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX, speaks during the Satellite 2020 at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC. — AFP

Many have long grown wary of the hate-filled invective that swamps Twitter, with pop idols like Selena Gomez, Charlie XCX and Shawn Mendes among those already on extended hiatus. But Musk's scorched-Earth approach to management and reinstatement of Donald Trump risk making Twitter not just toxic-but also uncool.

Fashionistas like Gigi Hadid and Balenciaga, or rock star Jack White, have been among the first to shutter their accounts since the billionaire took the reins. "We really see Twitter becoming a

taboo for celebrities in the coming month or so-becoming a Truth Social-type environment where it's a controversial stance for celebrities to be on it," said Lauren Beeching, co-founder of Honest London, a PR firm that manages top-level celebrities and brands.

Beeching said her firm tested the waters with the Twitter account of an (unnamed) public figure and got immediate backlash from fans, criticizing them for still being on the platform. "Of course, they were saying this on Twitter so there is some hypocrisy." "But personally I do expect a massive walk-out. Twitter was always known as toxic but now it's controversial as well."

'Audiences can move'

Actors and models can continue to feed their fanbases on Instagram and TikTok, but Twitter currently remains the easiest way to share breaking news, making it hard to replace for political discussions and sectors such as crypto-finance, which is firmly established on the platform. That could quickly change, however. "I'm eagerly trying out Mastodon, Farcaster, Lens and others," tweeted Vitalik Buterin, co-founder of the Ethereum blockchain, to his 4.6 million followers last week, adding: "Let the best socials win!" "Audiences can move," Robin Coulet, director of French digital communication agency Conversationnel, told AFP. "When there were Facebook outages, we realized that internet users immediately went to another network."

For some niche users, however, replacing Twitter may be tricky. French train driver Wilfried Demaret, alias "BB27000", has slowly amassed some 78,000 Twitter followers with his wry tales of life among the "shadow workers", as he calls them. His writing works perfectly on Twitter, and he says he would feel uncomfortable pivoting to video on TikTok or elsewhere. One option would be to go back to an older medium. "If Twitter sinks, I'll save my stories to one day put out a book," he told AFP. "But I realize that's a huge job. When I think about copy-pasting every tweet one-by-one, I realize that I've written a lot!" — AFP

To strengthen ties, ancient Maya gifted neighbors a spider monkey

Seventeen hundred years ago, a female spider monkey was presented as a treasured gift-and later brutally sacrificed-to strengthen ties between two major powers of pre-Hispanic America, according to a new study. The paper, published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), compared the offering by Maya elites to Teotihuacan to China's panda diplomacy that accompanied the normalization of Sino-US relations in the 1970s.

By using multiple techniques-including extraction of ancient DNA, radiocarbon dating and chemical dietary analysis-researchers were able to reconstruct the life and death of the primate, finding she was likely between five and eight years of age when buried alive. "It's such an exciting time to be doing archaeology because the methodology is finally here," lead author Nawa Sugiyama of the University of California, Riverside told AFP. The work began with Sugiyama's surprising discovery in 2018 of the animal's remains in the ruins of Teotihuacan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the arid Mexican Highlands.

Spider monkeys (Ateles geoffroyi) aren't native to the elevated region, leaving Sugiyama with a puzzle to solve: What was the animal doing there, who brought it, and why was it sacrificed? Vital clues came from the remains' location. Teotihuacan (pronounced tay-uh-tee-waa-kaan), which lies 30 miles (48 kilometers) northeast of Mexico City, was an important site of cultural exchange and innovation in Classic Mesoamerica. It's perhaps best known for the pyramids of the Moon, Sun and Feathered Serpent. But there is increasing interest in another monument called Plaza of the Columns, a complex where neighboring Maya maintained a pres-

ence likened to a modern day embassy.

Feasts, treasures and murals

The monkey's skeletal remains were found in the complex alongside a golden eagle-an emblem of Mexico even today-and surrounded by a collection of high-value items, including obsidian projectile points, conch shells, and precious stone artifacts. Over 14,000 ceramic shards from a grand feast were also discovered, as well as a Maya mural depicting the spider monkey. This, said Sugiyama, was further evidence of an exchange that took place at the highest levels, and preceded the Teotihuacan state's later rise and military involvement in Maya cities by the year 378 CE.

Results from chemical analysis involving two canine teeth that erupted at different points in the monkey's life indicate that prior to captivity, she lived

in a humid environment and ate plants and roots. After being captured and brought to Teotihuacan her diet was closer to that of humans, including corn and chili peppers. The spider monkey may have been "an exotic curiosity alien to the high elevations of Teotihuacan," wrote Sugiyama and colleagues, with the fact she was a fellow primate possibly adding to her charisma and appeal.

Ultimately, the animal met a grisly demise: "Hands bound behind its back and tethered feet indicate en vivo burial, common among human and animal sacrifices at Teotihuacan," the authors wrote. Though savage to modern eyes, "we need to understand and contextualize these cultural practices... and what it meant to be able to give up that which is most precious to you," said Sugiyama. — AFP



This handout image shows the complete skeletal remains of a 1,700 year old female spider monkey that was found in Teotihuacan, Mexico. — AFP