

# TOURIOSITY®

T R A A G

*Asia*

Touriosity

*7 least visited  
Asian countries*

SIBERIA IN PHOTOS

*The lesser  
known*  
ASIAN REGIONS

Siberia



Yemen



Turkmenistan



Laos



Bahrain



Oman



Timor-Leste



Macau





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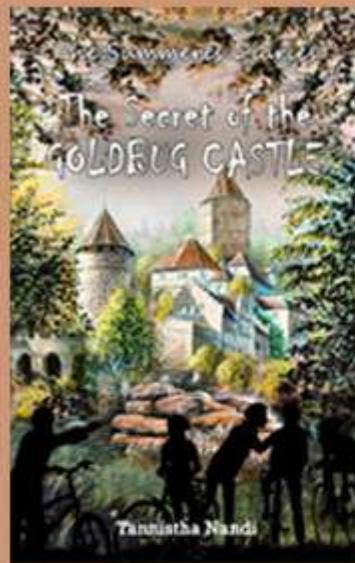


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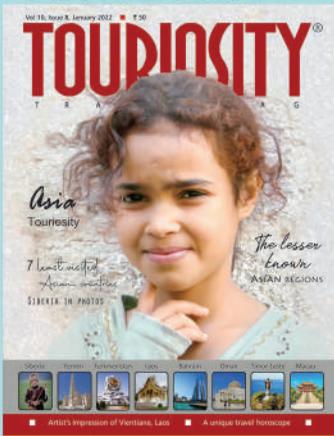
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**Touriosity Travelmag  
January 2022 Issue**

Dear Reader,

If you would like to share your memorable experiences with us, please feel free to contact us with your write ups, articles, anecdotes, photos and others. Good pictures will be acknowledged and published in the Reader's Click section. For the Travel Humour section, you can send us any travel related funny photos or sketches.

For more about us, visit our website: [www.touriositytravel.com](http://www.touriositytravel.com) and [www.thetouriosity.com](http://www.thetouriosity.com)

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A girl in Yemen

**Photo by**

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*The views and opinions expressed in the articles are solely those of the writers and contributors. Touriosity Travelmag is not responsible for any personal views expressed by the authors or contributors.*



*In our series of issues themed on the Asian continent, this is the second and final one, for the time being. This largest continent in the world is known for its sheer beauty and diversity. While the previous issue was focused on this diversity of the continent in terms of its people, culture, religions, geography, architecture, natural beauty, food etc., this issue brings to our readers glimpses from and information about some of the least visited and lesser known countries of the continent. The issue is surely going to be very helpful for our readers in planning their future trips to less crowded destinations in Asia.*

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**AN APPEAL TO TOURISTS**

Asia exhibits large diversity in lifestyles of people, ethnicity, languages, religions, attires, looks and food habits that largely differs from the rest of the world. It is important for visitors not to exhibit any disrespect to the locals on the basis of these. **LET'S BE RESPONSIBLE TOURISTS.**

With one-third of the world's total land area under it, Asia is the world's largest continent and home to 53 countries and other regions. An incredible 60% of the world's population lives here. It is a true melting pot of ethnicities, languages, cultures, traditions, religions and geographical features (including the tallest mountain range, the highest mountain peak, 18 different deserts, huge share of the world's forest cover, the largest, deepest and oldest lake as also some of the deadliest active volcanoes in the world). Asia is also home to the world's tallest buildings, three out of the Seven Wonders of the World, some of the most technologically developed cities, the maximum concentration of centenarians (in Japan) and the first three countries with highest average IQ of people (Japan, Singapore and South Korea). The continent has birthed almost all of the major present day religions and been home to the two oldest civilizations on this planet, the Mesopotamian Civilisation and the Indus Valley Civilisation.

We at Touriosity have always wanted to dedicate a few of our issues to the vast diversity of the continent. In fact, issue dedicated to the theme 'Asia' has been long overdue. But as already mentioned in my last month's Editorial, for Asia the 'To Do' and 'To See' list can run

*into multiple thousand pages, thanks to its diversity. The best we could do was to bring multiple issues to our readers covering as much interesting information about the continent as possible. We are happy to have finally been able to make it. The two back to back issues of December 2021 and January 2022 were carefully prepared so as to reflect the true essence of the vastness, beauty and diversity of Asia. While in the previous issue the focus was more on the general information about all countries, whether recognised or unrecognised, and the autonomous regions that form part of Asia, in this issue we have brought to our readers glimpses and tourism information from 8 of the least visited nations of Asia that have not been previously covered by Touriosity ever.*

*During the last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, travel was either not possible at all or largely restricted with social distancing being the norm of the day. To help our readers relax sitting at home, Touriosity has endeavoured to promote virtual tourism, by bringing out issues on remote and unreachable places of the world, places about which it is more fun to read than visit, rediscovering lesser known areas of our own country, cuisine tours, faraway island tourism and so on. Although many countries of the world are planning to open their doors to tourists soon and domestic tourism in India is especially beginning to bloom, we thought of continuing the trend for a few more issues. This issue on lesser known countries of Asia is our way of urging our readers to avoid crowds, to continue to maintain social distancing and to plan for the future rather than for the present in so far as travel is concerned.*

*In this issue we have featured the countries, including autonomous regions, of Turkmenistan, Bahrain, Laos, Macau, Yemen, Oman, Timor-Leste and Siberia, the Asian part of Russia. The issue is replete with beautiful photos that are bound to be a great visual treat for our readers. We have tried to provide as much information to our readers about these countries as possible. We hope our readers will find the issue interesting and helpful. Send us your feedback at [ttnmag.english@gmail.com](mailto:ttnmag.english@gmail.com).*

*Take care and be safe!*

*Happy reading!*

*Rupanjana De*  
Rupanjana De

# GUIDE TO THE MAG

To make your reading through **TOURIOSITY TRAVELMAG** better, here's presenting a quick glance at the various sections and features in the magazine.



## DESTINATION

It introduces the readers to various destinations in India with an emphasis on at least one destination from each region. It provides an in-depth information on the locations. In addition, there is also handy tourist information to help our readers plan ahead of trips.



## AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

A travelling artist makes it to faraway lands and brings memories in the form of impressive water colour paintings. This section is a visual treat and interesting to read at the same time.



## FEATURE

Here we bring to our readers an article based on the theme of the issue not necessarily focusing on travelling or travel information.



## MEMOIRS OF A BACKPACKER

A new adventure every time in an entirely new place across the globe by a solo female backpacker. We follow the locals she meets, the unusual things she comes across, the surprises she gets and the problems she faces in her journeys with a backpack across the world.



## TRAVELOGUE

In this section we bring travel experiences of one of our readers from popular places around the world.



## GLOBETROTTER'S DIARY

This section explores the world of a globetrotter, whose passion is to travel, travel and travel more. It brings to readers unique facts and information from remote corners of the world.



## COUNTRYSCAPE / CITYSCAPE

Here we introduce a new country / city each time. We bring to our readers facts and photos of people, culture, locales, tourist places, food and traditions of a country / city. Our aim is to take our readers on a magical journey of an unseen land.



## PHOTO TRAVELOGUE

Here we bring to our readers a travelogue in photos.



## PHOTO FEATURE

In photo feature, we cover the theme of a particular issue in photographs from one of our readers.



## SNAPSHOT

This section is an ideal one for quick browsing. It provides interesting information from across the globe with a focus on the theme of the issue.



## AT A GLANCE

A quick look at a destination. Here, we bring to our readers locations from the lesser beaten paths in otherwise popular touristy regions.



## POINT OF VIEW

Here we bring to our readers useful articles with offbeat content. The idea is to give you the stimulus for thinking. It covers important issues that are in some way connected to travel and tourism.



## ADVENTURE

We present here stories of unique adventures undertaken by our readers in some part of the world with a focus on the issue theme.



## MOUNTAINEERING / TREKKING

This section focuses solely on trekking and mountaineering adventures across the world.

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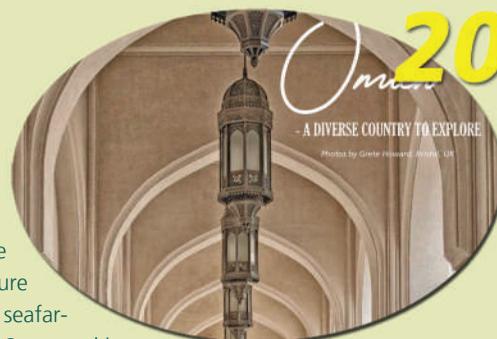


## Turkmenistan

With 90% of its work force employed by the government and only 1% of the population having access to internet, Turkmenistan is an unusual country with very unique rules and restrictions. Yet, there are no dearth of attractions for visitors. From beautiful architecture, history, good food to a hole in the desert that is burning continuously for more than 50 years, the country has a diversity that is difficult to find elsewhere. This article by Grete Howard brings many unknown facts to readers.

## Oman

Unlike other Middle Eastern countries, the cities of Oman are not filled only with skyscrapers. The country has been able to maintain its culture, traditions and heritage and glimpses of the same are visible everywhere one goes. Side by side with old architecture that provide a glimpse of the country's seafaring past, modern-day living co-exists in Oman making it a unique country to visit. Photos by Grete Howard.



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## PHOTO FEATURE of

## Siberia

## Siberia

Siberia is the Asian part of Russian and covers 75% of the total area of this largest country of the world. Siberia shares land borders with Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China and maritime border with Japan in the North Pacific Ocean and the United States along the Bering Strait. In this Photo Feature Zaur Karamyzov brings to our readers glimpses from this rather lesser known region of Asia.

## Yemen

Yemen is the southernmost country of the Arab world and shares maritime borders with Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea and Somaliland in Africa. The country is home to UNESCO World Heritage Sites and provides glimpses of an old world. Scattered all across it are palaces abandoned two centuries back. Photos by Grete Howard bring alive this country that is otherwise a rather unusual choice for visitors.



## Bahrain

The Kingdom of Bahrain, often called the Pearl Capital of the World, is composed of an archipelago of 50 natural islands and 33 artificial islands located on the Persian Gulf. It is a melting pot of the cultures of many ethnically diverse settlements. The country boasts a rather liberal culture as compared to other countries of the Middle East. Photos by Sanghamitra.



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## Macau

Macau is an autonomous region of China and tourism is a major industry here. Popular as a gambling destination, Macau is also known as the 'Monte Carlo of the Orient' and the 'Las Vegas of the East'. Gambling is legal here and casinos located here have the distinction of earning the greatest revenue from gambling anywhere in the world. Photos by Sanghamitra.



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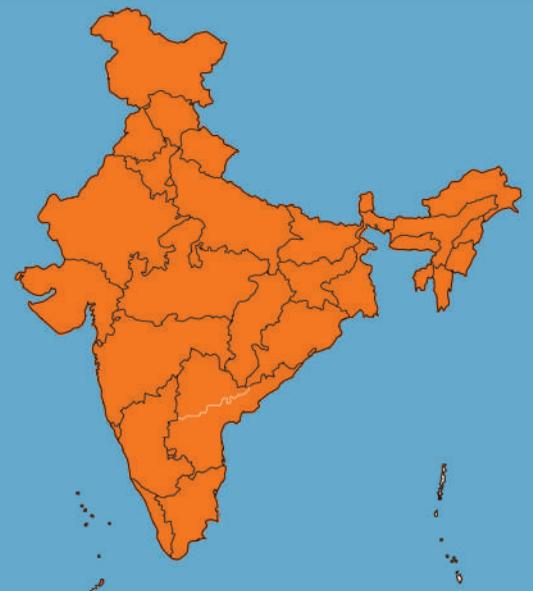
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## DESTINATIONS IN THIS ISSUE





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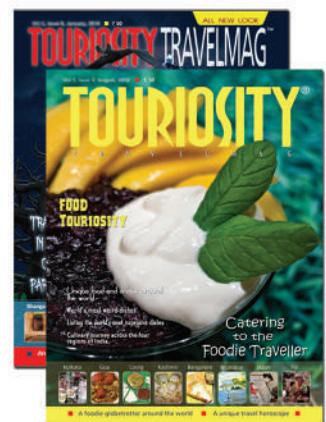
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# Turkmenistan

## - A COUNTRY FORGOTTEN

Article & Photos by  
Grete Howard, Bristol, UK

There were a couple of reasons why of all places I wanted to go to Turkmenistan. The main draw was the 'Gates of Hell', the burning gas crater that I had seen photos of some years ago and wanted to visit it someday. In addition, I was in need of a 'proper adventure', a voyage of discovery rather than a ritual of reassurance.

Turkmenistan is a highly regulated country, akin to North Korea in many ways; independent tourists are not permitted to enter; you have to travel with a tour company. In order to enter the country, you need a letter of invitation, a pre-booked guided tour and a visa.

It wasn't until I started to read up about the places we were going to visit that I realised just how much the country has to offer and how incredibly unique it is.

What I learned about Turkmenistan before I left:

- With only 7,000 visitors a year, it ranks the 7th least visited country in the world.
- It is one of the richest countries in the region with 4th largest natural gas reserve on earth.
- 90% of the workforce is employed by government
- 80% of the country is covered in desert
- Less than 1% have (highly censored) internet access; social media and news channels are banned.

The country's first president, after independence in 1991, Saparmurat Niyazov (also

known as Turkmenbashi), made a number of bizarre rules. He put a ban on opera, ballet and circuses, lip syncing at public concerts, TV presenters wearing make-up, men keeping long hair and beards, playing recorded music at weddings, having gold teeth, having dogs in the capital and any cars that are not white or cars not registered in Ashgabat from entering the city. The megalomaniac President also went on a renaming spree and gave new names to many things including bread (renamed after his mother as Gurbansoltan), names of 12 months (based on his family members with January being named after himself, April after his mother and September after his autobiography) and days of the week (Saturday being named after his book Ruhnuma). He also renamed schools, airports, cities, a breed of horse and even a meteorite after himself.

Niyazov also closed all hospitals outside Ashgabat, and libraries, stating that the people only need two books: the Quran and the book he wrote, the Ruhnama. The latter, a spiritual guide, was made mandatory in schools and for government employees. Interviews were often based on questions from this book. Knowledge of the book was also required in order to get a driving license. He also decreed that all public buildings in the capital should be made of white marble. A self-declared 'President for Life', Niyazov gilded the country with his own image in a cult of personality that makes Kim Jong-Un of North Korea look like an amateur.

Now back to our trip.

Turkmenistan has a very strict policy of drugs; we were sent a complete list of 249 banned drugs with our booking confirmation. Travellers may also be asked to produce original prescription for certain pain killers. I had been warned that I would have to show them all my medicines. Luckily, I was whiskered through without even a cursory glance. The customs officials didn't even mention drugs to us – they barely looked up from their screen. Thereafter, there was a last cursory glance at the passports and luggage tickets, and we were out. Our guide for the trip was waiting for us on the other side of the barriers. After a short ten minute journey we



1. The Independence Square in Ashgabat;
- 2,3. View of white buildings across the capital city of Ashgabat;
4. Wedding Palace on a small hill outside the otherwise very flat capital city;
5. A mosque in Ashgabat;
6. One of the numerous gold-plated statues of the former president Saparmurat Niyazov, the self-declared 'President for Life';
7. Everything in Ashgabat is ornate, include the street lamps.

arrived at the Grand Turkmen Hotel.

### Ashgabat

This is the capital city of Turkmenistan. Every large roundabout in the major cities of Turkmenistan has beautiful white marble and gilded monuments in the centre. That's quite surreal. The former President's affinity for white marble has been carried on as a tradition by his successors. Today Ashgabat holds the Guinness World Record for the most marble buildings in any city, with 80% of public buildings covered, using 5 million cubic metres of marble, mostly imported from Italy. It certainly makes for a

bright and clean look for the city, something that is further enhanced by the total lack of advertising hoardings, graffiti, litter and traffic. Ashgabat has to compete with Pyongyang in North Korea as the capital city with the least amount of cars on the road.

**Independence Monument** - This square in Ashgabat is an extravagant affair, covering an area of 84,500 sq m. The structure is 118m high, with the minaret-like tower standing at 91m. The monument is surrounded by statues of 27 prominent Turkmen heroes. It is also home to a number of spectacular fountains. Our visit time coincided with the Changing of the Guards ceremony

which takes place every two hours.

**Neutrality Monument** – Interestingly, Turkmenistan is the only country officially recognised by the United Nations as neutral. This is a 75m high monument with a 12m high gold statue of Niyazov on top. It was designed to rotate so that Niyazov would always face the sun. Upon his death in 2006, it was agreed that the statue should 'die' with him, and the rotations were turned off.

**Wedding Palace** - On a small hill outside the otherwise very flat capital city, sits the bizarre and eccentric Wedding palace, also known as the Palace of Happiness. Built in



receptions, shops, hair dressers, beauty salons and photography studios, and a small hotel with 22 rooms for newly-weds. Apparently, you can get a divorce here too! That's because divorce can also be a happy occasion for some.

**Ärtogrul Gazy Mosque** - Built in 1993, this was the first mosque constructed after independence as a gift by the Turkish government and became a symbol of freedom and virtue. It was named after the father of Osman I, the founder of the Ottoman Empire. Reminiscent of the Blue Mosque of Istanbul, this mosque, the largest in Ashgabat, can accommodate up to 5,000 worshippers at a time. Inside there

is a large courtyard with a fountain, and its prayer hall abounds with paintings, gilding and stained glasses.

**National Museum** - It is housed in an impressive building, with lot of gold and marble. The museum covers several sections, from pre-historical man to its heydays during trade along the ancient Silk Road. [It may be noted that the Silk Road was not just one single road, but a network of trade routes from 2nd century BC until the middle of the 18th century.]

**Halk Hakydasy Memorial Complex** - This memorial site known as 'People's Memory' is

2011, it was created of a number of star-shaped floors topped with a 'disco ball' featuring a map of Turkmenistan in gold. Apart from six wedding halls, there are banquet halls for parties and



located on a hillside overlooking Ashgabat. The complex consists of three separate memorials as follows:

i. **Ruhy Tagzym**, dedicated to the victims of the 1948 earthquake, is the most remarkable one among the three. It has a bronze sculpture depicting Turkmenistan's first president, Niyazov, on top of a mighty bull, that causes the earthquake by shaking his horns. It's a poignant sculpture, giving a vivid description of the situation. We see bodies coming out of the cracks of earth and a mother's desperate last attempt at saving her son by holding him over the rubble.

ii. **Baky şöhrat**, also known as the Eternal Glory Monument, pays tribute to those who fell in the Great Patriotic Wars fought between 1941 and 1945 along the Eastern Front of World War II, primarily between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

iii. **Milletiň ogullary** is a monument commemorating the heroes who died during the battle near Geok Depe and those who fell in other battles for the Motherland.

### Türkmenbaşy

Turkmenbashi, formerly known as Krasnovodsk, is the second largest city of Turkmenistan after Ashgabat. It is a port town situated on the Gulf of the Caspian Sea. Its population mainly consists of Russians, Armenians and Azeris.

**Ruhy Mosque** - Built by Niyazov, the mosque has courted controversy as a result of the president insisting that the walls be inscribed with scriptures from not only the Quran but also the Ruhnama written by him. Niyazov apparently explained how he had talked to God and could now confirm that anyone who read the Ruhnama three times would be guaranteed a place in heaven. Controversy aside, the mosque is reputed to be the largest in Central Asia, holding a total of 10,000 worshippers, 7,000 men on the ground floor and 3,000 women on the first floor gallery. There is also apparently an underground parking area with a capacity for 400 cars. Running in a circular fashion underneath the mosque is an 'ablution city', complete with marble,

gold and chandeliers.

**Niyazov's family Mausoleum** - Next to the mosque is the final resting place of Niyazov. The mosque and mausoleum were built in Kipchak, the village of Niyazov as well as the epicentre of the massive earthquake of 1948 that killed nearly 90% of the population of Ashgabat including Niyazov's

1. 'People's Memory' monument on a hillside overlooking Ashgabat;
2. Change of Guards ceremony;
3. Statue to the first Turkmen leader Oghuz Khan at Independence Square;
4. Statue of the founder emperor of the Seljuc Empire that reigned in this region prior to Mongolian invasion in 1037 at Independence Square;
5. Ruhy Tagzym;
6. Baky şöhrat;
7. Milletiň ogullari;
8. Niyazov's Family Mausoleum;
9. Ártogrul Gazy Mosque;
10. Türkmenbaşy Ruhy Mosque;
11. Turkmenbashi port;
12. Inside the Türkmenbaşy Ruhy Mosque;
13. The Kopetdag Mountains.



mother and two brothers. This earthquake, measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale, was one of the most catastrophic natural disasters of the 20th century and destroyed nearly all brick buildings in the capital city and surrounding villages. The only reason Niyazov himself survived, was because he happened to be in the wooden outhouse at the time. The mausoleum, a miniature version of the mosque, was finished a couple of years prior to Niyazov's death. He intended the mausoleum to become a pilgrimage site, but in reality it didn't turn out to be one after his death.

**The Port** - Turkmenbashi has an impressive modern port. From here oil and gas is exported, and passenger ferries run across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan.

1. The Lesser Kyz Kala Fortress;
2. The remnants of 15th century silk route;
3. Nisa near Ashgabat;
4. The Greater Kyz Kala Fortress;
5. Gonur Depe horse skeleton;
6. Tombs of the two Askhabs;
7. The Tomb of Hodja Yusuf Hamadani;
8. The Pokrovskaya Russian Orthodox Church;
9. The Mary Library;
10. Gurbanguly Hajji Mosque.

**Japanese Cemetery** - During WWII, some 3,000 Japanese prisoners of war were incarcerated in Turkmenbashi. Even after they were 'liberated', they were never permitted to leave the town, instead employed as forced labourers. There are a number of houses in the town that they built, distinguishable from the Soviet blocks and modern buildings by their architectural style.

### Nisa

It was the 3rd century capital of the Parthian Empire. Old Nisa architecture is unique, and is unprecedented in the entire Central Asia, merging architectural traditions of ancient Greece, Rome and the East. Old Nisa's walls protected the royal palace, Zoroastrian temples and the power and prestige of successive ruling dynasties until its eventual destruction at the hands of the Mongols in the 13th century. Known as Midridatkert in ancient times, the walls of the fortress of Old Nisa were nine metres thick with 43 rectangular towers. Unfortunately only about 30% of the site at Old Nisa has been excavated so far.

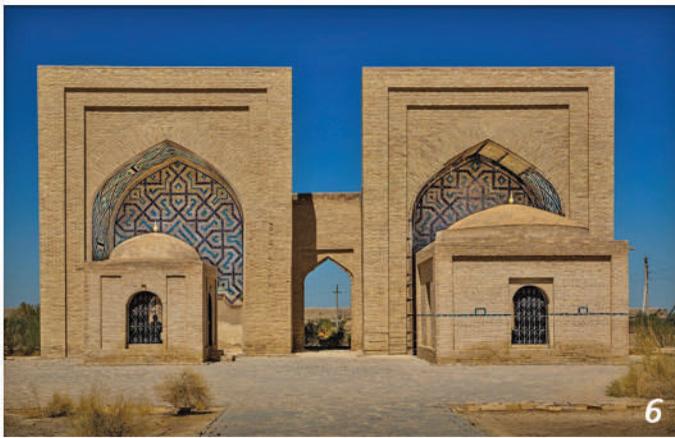
### Mary & Merv

Merv, the present day Mary, was known

as the heart of the Silk Road. Reputed to be founded by Alexander the Great, Merv first became a significant centre under the Achaemenian Empire in the 3rd Millennium BC, and it was subsequently ruled by the Sassanids, Greeks, Arabs, Turks and Persians. At the height of its importance as the eastern capital of the Seljuk Empire in the 11th and 12th centuries, it was a vital centre of learning. Here Omar Khayyam worked on his celebrated astronomical tables. By the 12th century, Merv was the largest city in the world. Archaeologists have found here evidence of a cosmopolitan urban society, boasting communities of Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Manicheans, Christians and Jews.

In 1221, Tolui Khan, the fourth son of conqueror Genghis Khan, entered the city with his Mongol army. Tolui ordered his soldiers to kill every single one of Merv's inhabitants after they refused to pay tribute to the great Mongol warlord. It's said the devastating Mongol destruction of Merv left between 700,000 and 1 million people dead, including several hundred thousand refugees that had been seeking shelter nearby.

**The Greater Kyz Kala Fortress** - This fortress, also known as the 'Girls Palace', was



6



7



8



9



10

built in the 6th century AD, when the Arabs invaded Merv.

**Lesser Kyz Kala** - Known as the 'Boys Palace', legend tells that young men wishing to marry the girl of their dreams should use a slingshot to fire an apple from the southern castle, to land in the northern one for the girl to catch it. Given the distance between the two, it is no wonder the city died out.

**Gäwürgala Town Walls** – These ancient walls bear testimony to the devastation created during the attack by the Mongol army on Merv.

**Mary Museum** – It has many sections dedicated to something different, starting from the President, to the animals of the region, life in Turkmenistan through the ages, items found during excavations of Gonur Depe and so on.

**Mary Library** - The library is a reminder that Merv was famous for the world's largest library that was once the centre of science, education and culture. The roof of the library opens up to reveal tulip-type petals, hiding a powerful telescope. This is a nod to the famous Observatory in ancient Merv, where dozens of scientists, including Omar

Khayyam studied the universe. The library holds three million books and can accommodate 600 readers at any one time.

**Mary Mosque** - The prayer hall can hold 3,000 worshippers, with a further 2,000 women on the second floor. Interestingly, while the writing in other mosques are in Turkmen language, here the scripts are all in Arabic.

**Abdullah Khan Kala** - Not much remains of the fortress erected by Timur's son Shāh Rukh in the 15th century. In its heyday, it was covered with mud bricks on the outside, with 44 watch towers. The fortifications were surrounded by huge moats up to 30m wide, filled with water.

**Tombs of the two Askhabs** - The 7th century tombs belong to al-Hakim ibn Amr al-Gifari and Buraida ibn al-Huseib al-Aslami, the first Arabs to arrive in Merv in 651 AD, to convert the Zoroastrians, Jews and Persians to Islam. At the time, Merv was known as 'The City of Infidels'.

**Pokrovskaya Russian Orthodox Church** - The church was built around 1900 by Russian forces after they seized the city in 1884. Following the Russian Revolution and the establishment of Soviet Union, religious freedom was



curtailed and by the 1930s, the church was closed, the priest executed, the cross torn down and the building repurposed as a club and later a military warehouse. The church returned to its original function in 1947, following the end of World War II, though religious activities remained tightly controlled under Stalin's officially atheist regime. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 atheism no longer encouraged by the state and Islam became the state religion. In Turkmenistan, the Russian Orthodox church is officially recognized as about 3% of the population are Orthodox believers.

**Tomb of Hodja Yusuf Hamadani** - Born in 1048, Hamadani is regarded as one of the founders of Sufism. He died in 1140 and the mosque was built in his honour in the 16th century by the Timurids. It was one of the very few mosques in Turkmenistan that was allowed to operate even during the Soviet period. Today it is one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Turkmenistan.

**Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar** - Hailed by UNESCO as a 'unique artistic and architectural achievement comparable in importance to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Taj Mahal', the mausoleum is also known as Dar-al-Akhyre (The Other World). Sultan Sanjar, who died in 1157, is revered as 'Alexander the Great of his time', and the mausoleum is a place of pilgrimage of thousands of believers and a tourist attraction. The mausoleum was built while he was still alive, and was restored in 2002 by the Turkish government as a gift to Turkmenistan. The monument's foundations and walls were built so strong that Mongol invaders were unable to destroy the tomb even after setting it ablaze. It is said that Sultan Sanjar had the architect killed, to prevent him from designing another building to rival the beauty of this one.

**Türkmenabat**

Türkmenabat would have been the first city merchants reached within the country when travelling along the Silk Road from

Uzbekistan. This city is in the northeast near the Uzbek border.

**Türkmenabat Museum** - The museum building boasts the largest



diamond-shaped roof in the world. The museum focuses heavily on the Silk Road as Türkmenabat, or Amul as it was known then, was an important city on the ancient trade route. The Silk Road totaled some 12,000 km in length, and was a well-developed merchant trade route. Caravanserais were built along the route, featuring rooms for relaxation or overnight stays, and space for horses and camels to be fed, watered and provided with shelter. Many of the caravanserais also doubled as 'shopping centres', where goods from China, like silk, iron, nickel, fur and paper as well as tea, perfume and incense arriving from India were traded with local Central Asian goods like woollen fabrics, carpets, jewels, ceramics and thoroughbred horses.

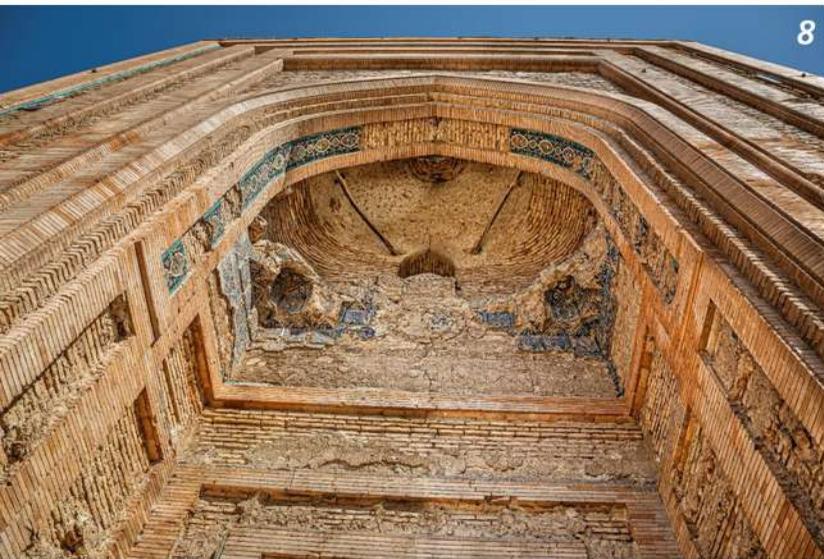
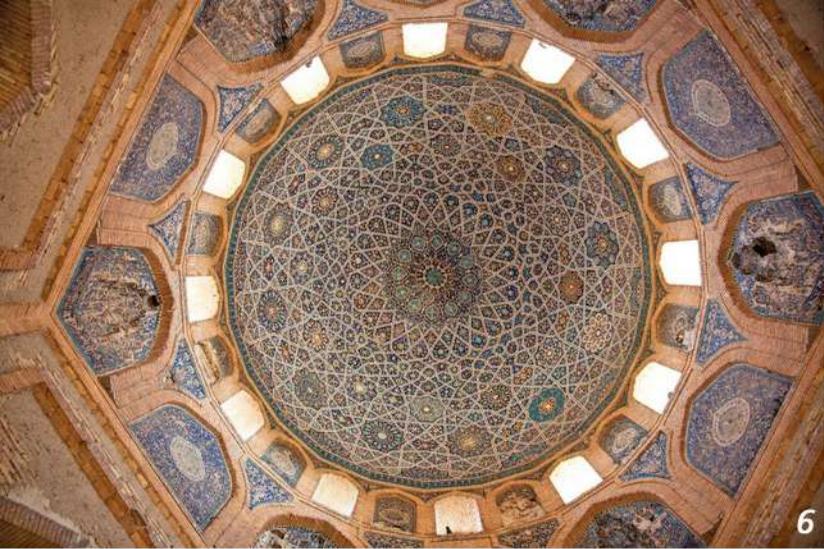
**Bugdayly**

**Akhal Teke Horse Stables** - Akhal-Teke, a distinctively fine-boned and flat-muscl'd horse breed, is one of the oldest existing horse breeds in the world. Its body, with its thin barrel and deep chest, is often compared to that of a greyhound or cheetah. Known as 'the gift from the desert,' this breed was developed for endurance and speed. Considered the art piece of the horse world, elegant and graceful in appearance and stride, Akhal Teke horses are among the rarest, most exotic full-sized breeds, with only around 6,600 in the world, mostly in Turkmenistan and Russia. These horses also have a reputation for intelligence and a distinctive metallic sheen. The shiny coat of palominos and buckskins led to their nickname 'Golden Horses'.

**Gökdepe**

This is a city located 45 km away from Ashgabat. It is built around a





1. Türkmenabat City Hall;
2. Turkmenabat museum;
3. An exhibit inside the Turkmenabat museum showing how the trading took place during the days of the Silk Road;
4. A herd of camels on the road;
5. Sandstorm on the way;
- 6,8. The Türebek Khanum Mausoleum;
7. Konya-Urgench;
9. The Kutlug Timur Minaret.

fortress of the same name.

**Saparmurat Hajji Mosque** - Constructed in 1995, this was the first mosque to be built in the country following independence from the USSR. Built on the site of the former Gök Depe Fortress, the mosque commemorates the 15,000 lives lost when the Russian army launched a bloody attack in 1881. It also honours President Niyazov's pilgrimage to Mecca, and hence the name. With its blue dome and four minarets it is an attractive landmark.

### Köneürgençh

Also spelt as Konya-Urgench (meaning ancient Urgench), this is a UNESCO Heritage Site in northern Turkmenistan. It is the site of the ancient town of Gurgänj, the capital of Khwarazm Empire, parts of which date back to the 5th century BC. The inhabitants of this place deserted it in the 1700s in order to develop a new settlement. The ancient site has remained undisturbed ever since. There are many ruins to explore here.

**Türebek Khanum Mausoleum** - This, the largest and most impressive monument at Konya Urgench, is the final resting place of Türebek Khanum. It is recognized as one of the earliest monuments to make extensive use of multi-coloured ceramic tiles. The inner dome is of particular interest with its 365 stars (one for each day of the year), 24 arches with 12 of them open to the elements, and 12 closed (to represent the 12 hours of day and 12 of night). The 12 larger arches below

denote the months of the year. There are four windows representing the seasons. Interestingly, while the exterior of the mausoleum shows eight side, from the inside you can only see six.

**Kutlug Timur Minaret** - Built in 1011 AD during the rule of the Khwarazm Dynasty, this 62 metres-high minaret is the tallest building in all of Central Asia. Inside the mausoleum there are 144 steps (12x12) in a spiral fashion.

**Fahr-ad-din Razi Mausoleum** - The mausoleum of famed Muslim theologian and philosopher (1149-1209) is one of the earliest surviving structures in Konya-Urgench.

**Najm ad-Din al-Kubra Mausoleum** - The facade of Kubra's mausoleum is leaning toward the Sultan Ali Mausoleum which stands directly opposite it, believed to be a show of respect.

### Nohur Village

It is an isolated village, where the inhabitants are believed to be direct descendants of Alexander the Great. They have their own language, and according to our guide Meylis, "live differently".

**Nohur Cemetery** - The main attraction in this village is its cemetery; a large number of the headstones have goat horns attached to them. Locals believe that goat horns fight off evil spirits and can assist the souls of the deceased during their passage to heaven.



Goats have always been considered sacred in this region, revered for their strength and endurance. Legend also has it that their forefather, Alexander the Great, had horns on his head. Archaeologists have found many ancient coins from around his time in 300 BC depicting Alexander the Great with two horns.

**Balkanabat**

It is the capital city of Balkan Province, the largest in Turkmenistan.

**Köpetdag Mountains** - This is a 600 km-long mountain range stretching along the Turkmenistan-

Iran border. The landscape is distinctly lunar in appearance, living up to its local nickname of 'Moon Mountains'. Once located at the bottom of the sea, the heavily furrowed sedimentary rock slopes look like soft gravel or even slag heaps, but are in fact more akin to solidified mud, and very firm underfoot. There are evidences of crustaceans on the ground, adding to the surreal atmosphere.

**Yangikala Canyon** – It is an eponymous landform in that resulted from erosion, wind, weather and tectonic shifts over the last 5.5 million years. On climbing to the top of the cliffs one can have amazing views of the plateau below. This completely flat area stretches as far as the eye can see. It was once the ocean bed of the pre-historical Parathetys Sea. Today one can see here a series of surreal rock formations rising mysteriously from the planes below. Rose coloured rocks (tainted by the presence of iron) in the company of white limestone folds



stretching some 15 miles across the desert to the Garabogazköl Basin present an extraordinary view.

**Karakum Desert**

When one is travelling in Turkmenistan, the desert appears to go on and on. That's not surprising as the Karakum Desert covers 80% of the land in the country. Here and there one comes across evidence of gas drilling, but no human life for hours, just the odd desert squirrel or lizard, maybe.

**Darwaza**

Colloquially known as 'The Gates of Hell', the Darwaza Gas Crater was created in 1971 when a Russian drilling rig punctured a

- 1. The Moon Mountains;
- 2. The Karakum Desert;
- 3. Darwaza Gas Crater from a distance;
- 4. Close up view of the Darwaza Gas Crater;
- 5. The Yangikala Canyon;
- 6,7. Yurt camp near the crater and close-up of a yurt;
- 8. Inside a traditional yurt;
- 9. View of boys on horses on the way.



gas chamber which collapsed, taking the entire rig with it into the newly created sink hole. Fearing the poisonous gases would create an environmental catastrophe, the Soviets set the hole alight, figuring it would stop burning within a few weeks. That was almost 51 years ago.

Temperature in the centre of the fiery cauldron is said to be between 6,000°C and 7,000°C. Standing close to the edge (where the flames reach around 700°), is OK for short periods, but may get unbearably hot a while later! For accommodation near the crater, there is a yurt village nearby owned by Owdan Tourism. It was set up on a hill, overlooking the crater. There are 3 yurts which were spacious inside, with three beds and a set of

drawers. There is also a toilet block with cold showers and flushing loos. There is a small communal area for dining and socializing.

### Gonur Depe

Covering a huge area, the UNESCO protected archaeological site of Gonur Depe dates from the early Bronze Age (2400-1700 BC). It is believed that this was the home of Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism religion. Excavations have revealed four fire temples, and evidence of a cult based around a drug potion prepared from poppy, hemp and ephedra plants. This potent brew is almost certainly the haoma (soma elixir) used by the magi whom Zoroaster began preaching against in Zoroastrian texts. Some of the buildings have been reconstructed. Each of the citadels had three walls, with the servant living outside, the oligarch in the middle and the royal family in the centre. Much of the site is still unexplored, meaning that much fascinating history yet to be found. The ruins were not discovered until a Russian archaeologist flew over the area in a helicopter in 1972.

Many items of pottery have been unearthed, as well as an entire row of potteries being found on the site, certifying that earthenware was in high demand. The King died in battle, and when the city elders heard, they buried all his possessions in a shallow grave, including his two horses, a camel, dog, his chariot and so on. The remains exhibited today are 4000 years old! It is believed that life ended in Gonur Depe as the Murgab River changed course and deprived the inhabitants of a water source. As they left, they practised the scorched earth policy, setting fire



1. Dograma, a dish consisting of lamb, bread, green onion, fresh tomatoes, water, salt and pepper;
2. Adana Kebab - meat in a wrap with vegetables and a tasty sauce;
3. Manty - the Turkmen-style dumplings;
4. Kakmach (meat in sauce) served with chips;
5. Samsa, somewhat like the Indian samosa;
6. Plov on the road.

to the town before departure.

Turkmenistan was our 141st country and the last of the 15 ex-USSR countries we visited. Everything is grand in Turkmenistan, including the flag pole. The roads, even in the capital, are totally empty, and the numerous street lamps have unusual, and elegant shapes.

The 8-pointed star is found everywhere in Turkmenistan, from railings, lifts, walls, lamp posts, the country's flag, emblems, to even the trash cans. Apparently it signifies the Muslims' belief that there are eight steps to heaven. Interestingly, Turkmenistan is the only country in the world that features carpet designs on its flag. The red stripe on the left with the five patterns, shows the various traditional design of carpet from the five different states in the country. These five motifs, like the eight-point star, features in so many places within the country: boxes of chocolates, hotel door frames, posters, building decorations, the airport etc. The crescent moon, a traditional Islamic symbol, also represents the rising of a new country, and the five stars its separate states.

On our road trips across the country we came across herds of unattended camels, strong wind (more like sand blizzard) carrying the desert sand across the roads thereby blocking view in contrast with total empty streets in the cities. The journey

from Serdar to Balkanabat took us through barren and desolate scenery, with no trees or even falcons, ever-present on our journey. The surroundings, closer to Iran, were eerily devoid of life. As we drove sand from the Karakum Desert (which covers 80% of the country) blew across the road for a few miles.

#### Accommodation

Most of the big cities of Turkmenistan have palatial hotels with grand-looking lobby and interiors. Hence accommodation is not really an issue.

#### Food

On our way to the Karakum Desert, we stopped at the small village of Damla for a pre-arranged lunch. The 100 inhabitants are mostly inhabited by subsistence farmers, with meat featuring heavy on their menu. Rice and vegetables are brought in by truck and bartered for goat and camels. The wells were dug to a depth of six-seven metres below the ground. Lunch was a simple affair, with a goat plov. Surprisingly enough, it was the first plov we had on this trip.

Other popular Turkmen foods include the Manty, delightful little dumplings. They are usually filled with a choice of meat, pumpkin or spinach and served with a small dish of smetana (a type of sour cream). Another popular item is the Dograma, consisting of lamb, bread, green onion, fresh tomatoes, water, salt and pepper. Samsa is also a filling local food.



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# Oman

- A DIVERSE COUNTRY TO EXPLORE

*Photos by Grete Howard, Bristol, UK*



Oman is a country in the Middle East on the coast of the Arabian Peninsula and on the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Officially known as the Sultanate of Oman, the country shares land borders with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen and maritime borders with Pakistan and Iran. Oman is also known for its beautiful emerald blue beaches.

**Muscat**

Muscat, the capital city, is a kaleidoscopic mixture of the old and the new. The city is a great place for adventure lovers and culture fanatics.

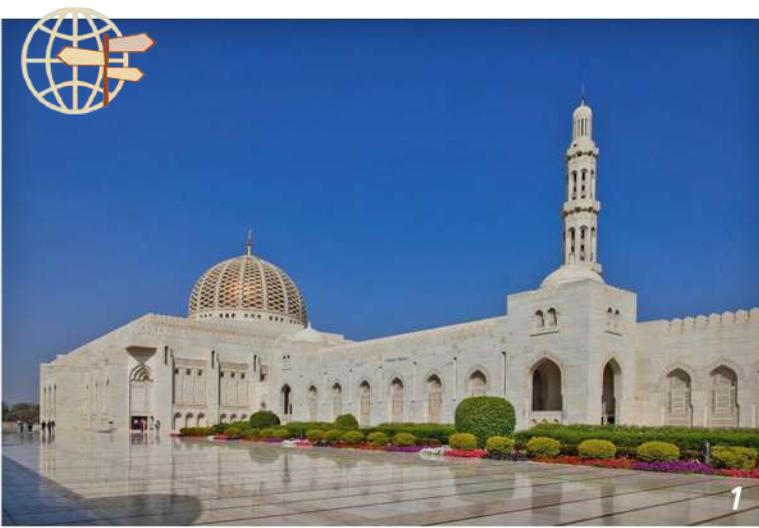
In the new part of Muscat the important

attractions are the Royal Opera House (the first in this part of the world), the Grand Mosque, numerous shopping malls, museums and the Qurum Beach. The Royal Opera and the Grand Mosque are named after Sultan Qubus, the ruler of the country since the 1970s. The Opera House is the ultimate destination in the entire country for art, culture and music. The complex has a manicured garden and houses a theatre, an Art centre, an Auditorium and cultural market.

In the old part of Muscat are the souqs, the Old Town, Bait Al Zubair Museum, Mutrah Fort, Al Mirani Fort and Al Jalali Fort. The Bait Al Zubair is a private museum exhibit-

ing relics from Oman's Military, social and cultural history. It has a huge collection of weapons, jewellery, costumes and household items that provide visitors a glimpse into Omani way of life in the past. The Mutrah Souq is one of the oldest market complexes in the Arab world. The Al Mirani Fort and Al Jalali Fort were built by the Portuguese in the 16th century. They look out

- 
- 1. The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Muscat;
  - 2. Dunes of the desert in Oman;
  - 3. A herd of camels in Salalah;
  - 4. The coastal town of Mirbat;
  - 5. Wadi Bani Khalid near Muscat;
  - 6. Al Jalali Fort in Muscat;
  - 7. The Bait Al Zubair Museum.



to the Gulf of Oman and were intended to guard the Port of Muscat against attack by the Ottoman forces. Both these forts have interesting history and were instrumental in the fall of the Portuguese in Oman. Mutrah Fort was also built by the Portuguese in 1580 on a narrow rocky hill. It overlooks the sea and is located close to the Mutrah Souq. Other attractions in Muscat are the Amouage Perfumery, the Grand Mall and City Centre.

Outside the city of Muscat the Yiti Beach covered in cliffs and rocky edges is popular as a camping spot. Wadi Bani Khalid, located 2.5 km from the city is a desert paradise with emerald lagoons, rocky cliffs and breath-taking view of the Hajar Mountains.

Another popular attraction near Muscat is the Mutrah Corniche, a 3km-long promenade along the waterfront lined with restaurants, cafes and shops. From the corniche one can view the Oman Port, Portuguese Watch Towers and the beautiful formations of the rocky Hajar Mountain. It is a great place to watch the sunset.

### Nizwa

Nizwa, the ancient capital of Oman lies 160 km from Muscat in a mountainous area. It is home to the Fort Nizwa which also houses a museum that educates the visitors about the ancient capital city and the Aflaj, the local irrigation system used traditionally in date plantation. Nearby the fort there are a couple of souqs or traditional Arabian markets. Nizwa was once the centre of trade, art, culture, religion and learning.

### Salalah

Salalah is another beautiful city of Oman that is known for its splendid beaches, lush greenery, rich history and culture. It is also home to the Sultan of Oman. The town is located on the coast of the Arabian Sea and is a great place to savour a variety of seafood. The town has beautiful mosques, museums, fort and souqs. Some of Salalah's main attractions are the 19th century Taqah Castle, Marneef Cave (a large rocky structure facing the mountains and not technically a cave as it does not have an opening), the beautiful Sultan

Qaboos Mosque, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sumhuram Archaeological Park, the lush green valley of Wadi Darbat with a river cutting through it and the picturesque Mughsail Beach with clear blue waters and white sand surrounded by beautiful cliffs. The ancient port of Sumhuram located near Salalah was an important trading port some 2000 years back. Today the archaeological site provides visitors glimpses of the bygone days.

### Mirbat

About 75 km from Salalah is the fishing town of Mirbat that was the site of the Battle of Mirbat in 1972 between communist guerrillas and the Sultan of Oman's army. It is a great place to see mud-brick houses that lie in a dilapidated state now. The main attraction in the coastal town is the Mirbat Castle.

### Al Hamra

Another important place to visit if you are interested in seeing old mud-brick houses is the Al Hamra town. It is a 400 yrs old town in the northeastern part of Oman.



5



6



7

Oman is known for beautiful mosques, wadis, dhows or the traditional sailing ships, Al Buraimi semi-desert plains, its terraced orchards in Jabel Al Akhdar Mountain and the ornate ancient adobe fortresses like Fort Nahl, Nizwa Fort, For Sur and Fort Bahla. The 5000-years-old ancient Aflaj Irrigation System can still be seen in places like Dakhiliyah, Sharqiyah and Batinah. The country is home to Al Said, the world's third-largest yacht, which is owned by the Sultan.

Oman has diverse flora and fauna, pro-

tected by nature reserves and sanctuaries. Majlis Al Jinn is one of the largest cave chambers in the world. The country is also a great destination for snorkelling due to the presence of colourful coral reefs.

In sharp contrast with other Middle Eastern countries, the cities of Oman are not filled with skyscrapers. The country that has been historically into seafaring, trading and exploration has maintained its culture, traditions and heritage and glimpses of the same are visible everywhere you go. The

capital city of Muscat and other desert oasis towns still retain old architecture in most places. The age-old traditions blend seamlessly with modern-day living in Oman, and one is amazed at the beautiful co-existence

1. Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat;
2. Inside the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque;
3. The Mughsail Beach;
4. The Al Hamra village;
5. The beautiful Al Mirani Fort;
6. The Mutrah Corniche after dark;
7. The Nizwa Fort.



*...the cities of Oman are not filled with skyscrapers. The country that has been historically into seafaring, trading and exploration has maintained its culture, traditions and heritage and glimpses of the same are visible everywhere...*

of the old with the new.

### Muscat Festival

Oman is one of the oldest countries in the Middle East and has a strong culture and history. Since 1998 the month-long Muscat Festival has been generally taking place in January and February, but the time changes every year and one needs to look up the exact timing for a year. The venue is generally the heritage village in Al Qurm Natural Park. Annually almost 1,00,000 people visit the festival and it gets quite crowded. The Muscat Festival is a great time to experience Omani culture, music, other entertainment, food and sports and interact with the locals or buy Omani jewelry or other local stuff.

The festival is also famous for fireworks.

### Dolphin watching

Muscat is surrounded by mountains on one side and the Gulf of Oman on the other. Its water is blessed with a plethora of fascinating marine creatures, the dolphin being one of them. Muscat is a great place to go for dolphin watching between October and May.

### What to eat

Muscat is also a great place for foodies and has varieties of options starting from inexpensive street foods to fine dining restaurants. Traditional food items here make use of a wide

range of spices and meaty dishes are served with a variety sauces and salads. However Omani food is less spicy than food in most other Middle Eastern countries. The most popular Omani and other regional foods to try here are the Falafel (a crispy fried snack item), Shawarma (minced pieces of grilled chicken, lamb or beef mixed with salad, mayonnaise and tahini and wrapped in pita bread), Mishkak (grilled pieces of marinated chicken, meat or beef on a stick like kebabs served with tamarind chutney), Kebabs (skewered pieces of chicken or other meat mixed with various spices and then grilled on a stick), Khubz ragag or the Omani bread (with various stuffings or toppings) that is often served with Omani Karak Chai or the local strong tea, Maldouf (date flatbreads), Mushaltat (a soft flatbread stuffed with honey, meat, spinach and cheese), Majboos or Kabsa (Middle Eastern version of



Oman is known for beautiful mosques, wadis, dhows or the traditional sailing ships, the Al Buraimi semi-desert plains, its terraced orchards in Jabel Al Akhdar Mountain as well as the ornate ancient adobe fortresses... The 5000-years-old ancient Aflaj Irrigation System can still be seen in places...

one pot rice dish that is similar to Biryani), Halwa (a sticky dessert made from sugar, honey, eggs, dates and other spices and flavours), Laban (a drink made by blending yoghurt and buttermilk) and so on.

**Travel Tips**

Oman is a rather safe country to travel. Being a Muslim country, dressing, especially for women is conservative. Women should wear loose covered clothing and avoid skin revealing attire at all times. Shorts and sleeveless shirts/tops are banned for both men and women in public places. Further,

if you are visiting during the Ramadan time, eating, drinking, smoking, playing loud music, or dancing in public places before sunset is forbidden and punishable offence.

1. The Taqah Castle in Salalah;
2. Unusul Rock formations;
3. Local pottery for sale outside the Nizwa Fort;
4. The Bahla Fort;
5. Jabreen Castle gate;
6. Sumharam Archaeological Park near Salalah;
7. Old dwelling in Oman;
8. The Nakhal Fort;
9. Labne Plate and Breads;
10. Omani Stuffed Bread.



PHOTO FEATURE



Photos by Zaur Karamyzov

# PHOTO FEATURE *of*

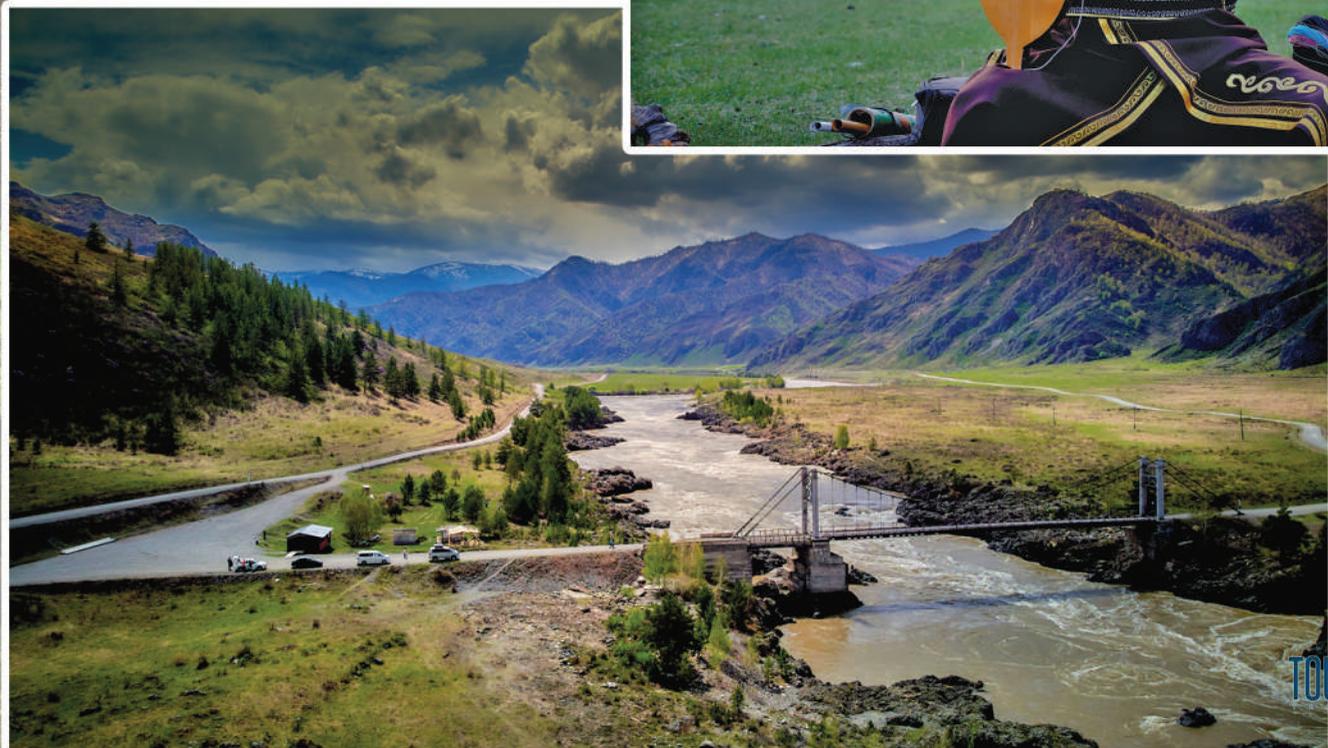






PHOTO FEATURE







# Women Travel Network

ADVERTORIAL

Women have many roles to play in various arenas. Her place in society is punctuated with many tasks. While accomplishing such tasks she compromises with her love to explore the unknown. Kayaking through seas, relishing exquisite delicacies of various countries, experiencing deep water snorkelling or just seeing the world can be any woman's dream waiting to be fulfilled. Making such dreams come true for many women are the new era all-women travel services.

## Why Women Travel Network?

Many a times, when your skin thirsts for a touch of mist or dew drops and your heart yearns for an escape far from the daily life routine or the load of work in your respective jobs, you start seeking for people eager to accompany you. You try convincing your husband or children to take some time out of their busy schedules, but many times in vain. At those difficult times, the Women Travel Network (WTN) gives you the grand idea to set out alone to explore the world. WTN caters to the passion of women who want to travel on their own terms. It is a safe and secure way to travel, especially for those who are new to travel or those who are looking for a getaway, an escapade and your husband's/son's/father's/boyfriend's/friend's dates are bothering.

WTN takes this into account and enables you to indulge in thrilling vacations with a group of spirited women tourists of all ages all geared with the same vigour. Things can be made easy and trouble-free yet well organised by WTN as it reduces the prime inconveniences like buying tickets, booking for lodging and drawing up itinerary.

## What exactly WTN does?

With WTN you have the option of getting the best possible accommodation that would not harm your budget and the discretion of staying alone in rooms or sharing with someone. WTN also ensures that a suitable poise is maintained between seeing around and resting not making someone too fatigued with consistent tours. This network looks after all the formalities giving you a chance to pack your belongings without any hesitation. The organised travel plans will help gather fruitful travelling experiences in the company of like-minded women. WTN gives you the scope of bonding, and at the same time helps you make new friends. So if you are looking for a getaway, an escapade and your husband's/son's/father's/boyfriend's/friend's dates are bothering, Woman Travel





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**Aries**  
(21 March – 19 April)

You will enjoy getting work done, crossing things off of your to-do list, and being efficient and productive. You're more logical and analytical, and you would keep much to yourself. You may need to tame urges to spend too much, however. You'll be putting in the groundwork for future increases in income.

Places to visit: Sydney - Sydney Harbour with its iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House. The city has no shortage of lazy bays and legendary surf beaches.

Tirupati - Tirupati is regarded as the richest Hindu temple in the world and is known for its remarkable Dravidian architecture.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 4, 10, 13, 19, 22

Favorable Colors: Green & Yellow

You want to experience life in new ways, expose yourself to other languages, cultures and beliefs. If in a relationship, you can try to infuse some new life into it by doing something new with your partner. If single, you could meet someone from a different background.

Places to visit: Paris – Paris is the world's most visited tourist destination with places like the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, the Notre-Dame Cathedral, the Louvre Museum, Moulin Rouge, Lido etc.

City Palace on the bank of lake Pichola in Udaipur - It is one of the most visited monuments in India and is known for its opulent Hindu Rajput Architecture. Its balconies provide panoramic view of Jag Niwas and Jag Mandir.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 3, 10, 12, 19, 21

Favorable Colors: White & Red



**Taurus**  
(20 April – 20 May)



**Gemini**  
(21 May – 20 June)

You can create new plans for achieving your goals, and they're practical and realistically achievable. Financial matters, mainly revolving around shared resources or debts, might also heat up in this month. The month is strong for personal triumphs, small yet significant changes, and financial boosts.

Places to visit: Venice - Venice was built upon a series of islands, sand-banks and land reclaimed from the lagoon.

The Khajuraho Group of Temples - The construction of the temples is a remarkable example of the Hindu Nagara style architecture and is also famous for its sculptures depicting various deities, animals, mythical creatures and erotica.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 2, 10, 11, 19, 20

Favorable Colors: White & Purple

You're more defensive of your beliefs, and you may need to analyze what you believe and see if it really fits who you are now. You will enjoy exploring the darker side of life. You crave more intimacy in your life, and can try to grow closer to someone.

Places to visit: Cape Town - The city has several well-known natural features that attract tourists, most notably Table Mountain, which forms a large part of the Table Mountain National Park and is the back end of the City Bowl.

The Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya - It is one of the major pilgrim sites for the Buddhists as it is the place where Lord Buddha received enlightenment.

Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 9, 11, 18, 20, 27

Favorable Colors: Green & Grey



**Cancer**  
(21 June – 22 July)



**Leo**  
(23 July – 22 August)

You have a lot on your mind, come up with lots of new ideas, and go from one idea to the next. You're better at dealing with life in the abstract, but you can come up with innovative and unique solutions to problems.

Places to visit: Rio de Janeiro - It is home to most of Brazil's major tourist attractions including spectacular locations, beaches, views and its world-famous carnival. The city throbs to the infectious beat of Brazilian music and is the main source of Brazil's national culture.

The Charminar, Hyderabad - This iconic structure is known for the signature four minarets, which are built in a marvellous Indo-Islamic style.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 7, 12, 16, 21, 25

Favorable Colors: Yellow & White

New adventures and experiences can suddenly seem desirable. Many recent pressures tend to ease for you this month. Creativity is stimulated, and some of you could be picking up a new hobby or breathing new life into an old one.

Places to visit: Sri Lanka - A small percentage of the islands are inhabited and 87 are exclusively resorts, boasting tropical landscapes hugged by picture-perfect beaches and palm trees.

Ajanta and Ellora Caves in Aurangabad - The Ajanta Caves mainly consist of rock cut monuments dedicated to the ancient Buddhist traditions, while Ellora cave contains Hindu, Buddhist and Jain monuments built during the Rashtrakuta Empire.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 5, 10, 14, 19, 23

Favorable Colors: Blue & Red



**Virgo**  
(23 August – 22 Sept)

**Manish Kumar Arora** is a renowned KP Astrologer, Numerologist, Tarot Reader and Vastu Consultant. He will be with Touriosity Travelmag to bring to our readers monthly predictions based on zodiac signs with special emphasis on travel predictions. Our readers can plan their tours accordingly. He can be reached at [manish@manishastrologer.com](mailto:manish@manishastrologer.com)



Now is time for fun, to be carefree and light-hearted, and to embrace the fun aspects of life. This is a good time to have some important conversations with people to get to the heart of the matter.

Places to visit: Christchurch - It is the gateway to the South Island, which has some of New Zealand's most stunning scenery. The Canterbury region includes a large central portion of the east coast of the South Island, centered around the city of Christchurch.

Old Goa - It refers to the historic town that served as the seat of the Portuguese in India till the 18th century. The city is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its unique Baroque style architecture and various churches.

Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 9, 11, 18, 20, 27

Favorable Colors: White & Red

You may come across as more rebellious, original, and intelligent. The more success you have, the more confident you would feel. You may be on the go, always doing something, and share everything you learn with people.

Places to visit: Hawaii - The natural beauty of the islands continues to be one of Hawaii's greatest assets and is the location of some of the finest beaches in the United States, each unique in its dimensions, shapes.

Varanasi - The city is also known for its Ghats located on the banks of the Ganges River and were mostly built during the 18th century.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 4, 10, 13, 19, 22

Favorable Colors: Yellow & Green



This is a good time to do research, to review financial arrangements, to take back an old financial partner, or to transform yourself in a way that you tried before. Your intensity heightens, and you can't accept anything at face value.

Places to visit: Singapore - Singapore is a land of stark contrast, from one of the sleekest cleanest cities in the world you can also find authentic asian foods and goods for a very reasonable price.

Hampi - Hampi is a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its stone carved structures, built in marvellous Dravidian style architecture, temples and monuments.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 8, 12, 17, 21, 26

Favorable Colors: Red & White

Your personality shines. People will see your value. This is a winning time for attracting others to you through your unique self-expression and vision, as well as for putting past grudges behind you. You can come across as more secretive, intense, and dark.

Places to visit: Dubai - The area of Dubai consists of flat desert surrounds; a great expanse of sand dunes stretches away to the S, and the rugged Hajar Mountains rise to the E.

Jaisalmer Fort - Located amidst the golden sands of the Thar Desert, it remained an important trade center during the medieval era and now is known for its exquisite Rajput Architecture and scenic beauty.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 3, 10, 12, 19, 21

Favorable Colors: Blue & Yellow



You just need to watch for taking on too much and running yourself down..You may be tempted to turn up the charm, but aim instead for sincerity, as it will be appreciated most. Love can be magical, and your powers of attraction run high.

Places to visit: Cairns is located in the NE of Australia, is a holiday maker's paradise, bursting at the seams as an attractive 'hub' destination for nearby attractions.

Taj Mahal - It translates to the 'Crown Palace' and is one of the most famous and marvellous buildings in India. The building is known for its extensive use of white marble and was completed in the mid-17th century.

Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 5, 11, 14, 20, 23

Favorable Colors: Yellow & Red

You can have unexpected expenses arise, or miss something in your budget that you have to make up for. This is a good time to redo your budget. Some of you could be reconnecting with old friends or lovers now.

Places to visit: Barbados - Barbados suits anyone seeking a relaxed and mellow holiday. Main clientele are fairly comfortably off couples, with more mature guests favouring the peak winter season.

Rishikesh - Also known as the 'Yoganagari' or the 'Yoga Capital of the Country' and the 'Gateway to the Garhwal Himalayas', this quaint city is known for its bountiful beauty, sanctity, adventure options and the magnificent places to visit in Rishikesh.

Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 9, 11, 18, 20, 27

Favorable Colors: Yellow & White



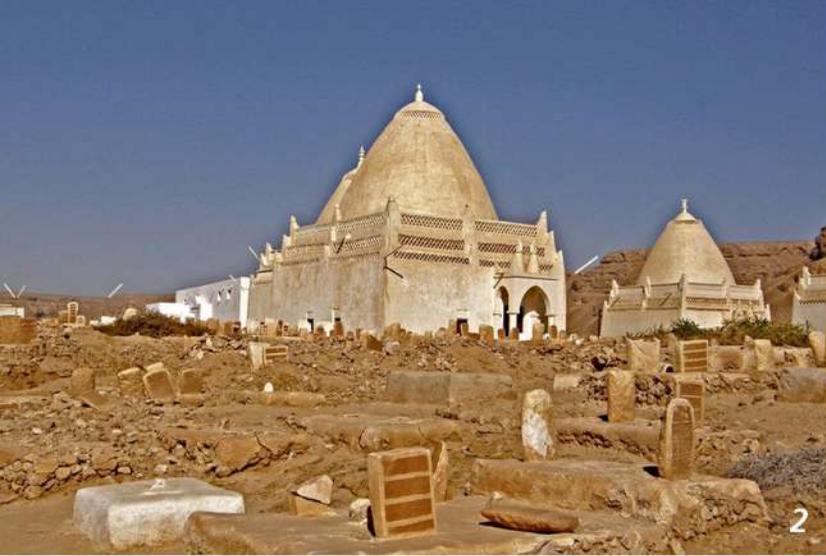


# Jemen

- OFF THE BEATEN PATH

*Photos by Grete Howard, Bristol, UK*





Yemen lies at the southernmost tip of Arabia and has historically been known as South Arabia (not to be confused with Saudi Arabia; the latter is named after the 'Saud' family that ruled over it). Yemen is bordered by Saudi Arabia on the north and by Oman on the northeast. It shares maritime borders with African nations of Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea and Somaliland.

### Sana'a

The capital of Yemen and its largest city is Sana'a. Located near the Sarawat Mountains, it is one of the highest capital cities in the world. The Old city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Great Mosque of Sana'a is one of the oldest in the Muslim world and was built during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammad. The Tower Houses of Sana'a are also big attractions.

Dar Alhajar, a fortress built on stone, located in Wadi Dhar, 15 km from Sana'a, is a popular attraction. It is a former royal palace that was built in the 1920s as a summer retreat for Yahya Muhammad Hamid ed-Din who ruled over Yemen from 1904 to 1948.

### Tarim

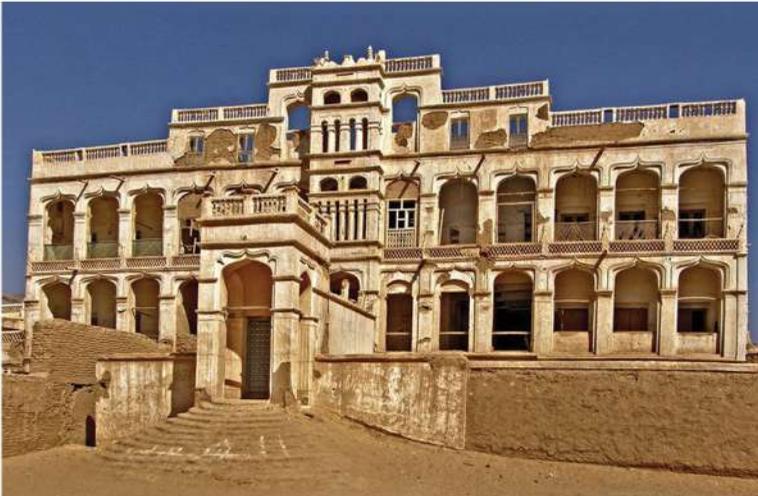
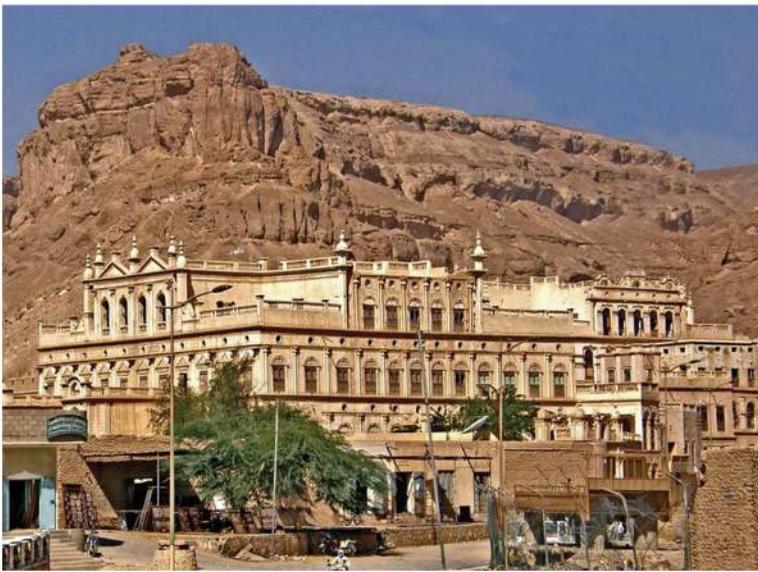
Tarim, a historic town in Wadi Hadhramaut,

is flanked by vast rock cliffs on one side and surrounded by palm groves on the other. It is best known for its 365 mosques, one for each day of the year. Tarim's skyline is dotted with minarets. The most famous among the mosques is the al-Muhdar Mosque, named after the religious leader Omar al-Muhdar who lived in the town in the 15th century. The minaret, the most prominent feature of Tarim, has been repeatedly renewed since the period of the Islamic middle ages. The current minaret, 50 metres tall and built of mud and brick, was added in the beginning of the 20th century.

Tarim has a library that houses 14,000 books and 3,000 ancient manuscripts. Many of the books are adorned with beautiful gold and colours in their pages. Taim has historically been a very important scientific centre in the Islamic world, and the Shafa'i school of Sunni Islamic teaching. Al-Ahqaf Library was founded in 1972 to preserve the spiritual



1. Al Mihdar Mosque in Tarim;
2. Aynat village in Hadramawt;
3. Tomb of Ahmad Ibn Isa al-Muhajir in Hadramawt;
- 4,5. Examples of old mud brick buildings still in existence all over Yemen;
6. Whole goat and rice;
7. A typical market scene.



heritage of the region's Islamic teachers, and the books were gathered from all over Hadramawt.

### Aden

It is a seaport city and since 2015 it is the temporary capital of Yemen. It was an important point in the ancient Spice Route. This city has Biblical significance and the old centre of the city is located inside the crater of an extinct volcano.

Walled city of Sa'dah, Ta'izz, UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shibam (Hadramawt), garden city of Rawdha and Socotra archipelago are some other places to visit.

There are many 19th century palaces built by Javanese immigrants (some built by Sir Sayyid Bu Bakr Ibn Shaikh al-Kaf, who used some of the fortune his family had amassed in Singapore to build

roads, palaces and mosques in Tarim). Some palaces have interesting museums inside and are open to visitors. The rooms have decorated walls, ceilings and ornamented carved doors; they display artifacts that provide a glimpse of life in this part of the world in those times.

Scattered all across Yemen are palaces abandoned two centuries back. These go to show that the country was the abode of affluent people a couple of centuries back. Not anymore. Camels are a common sight throughout Yemen and the animals are used for transport as well as food.

A road trip across Yemen presents one with absolutely breathtaking scenery. A wadi, which is a seasonal riverbed, is huge, with a flat fertile area surrounded by towering cliffs reminiscent of the Grand Canyon. Wadi Hadramawt is the largest wadi in the Arabian Peninsula and runs for 160kms west to east. Over 200,000 people eke a living from this fertile land, whose wheat is said to be the best!

Even today, the vast majority of the buildings in the wadi are made from mud bricks in a style unchanged for centuries. The tower houses are the invention of the Hadramis, and all over the area one finds similar constructions. To make the mud bricks wet mud is mixed with straw for added strength and then spread out on the ground to dry in the sun. Bricks

of different thickness are used for different storeys of buildings – thicker ones on the ground floor and thinner ones near the top.

In Yemen one can also have an experience of staying in a mud-brick hotel. Al Hawta Palace Hotel is the only first class hotel in the world to be built entirely of mud and clay, and its origins date back 150 years. As Yemen's only Heritage Hotel, it is the best in the area, but is very expensive. The ground of the hotel is like a little oasis in the desert, with a swimming pool and lawns, trees, palms and beautiful flowering bougainvillea, something that is so hard to come by in the rest of the country.

Readers should note that due to the ongoing civil wars and political instability, Yemen is not safe to travel now.

*Photos: Abandoned palatial houses across Yemen and their beautiful interior decor.*

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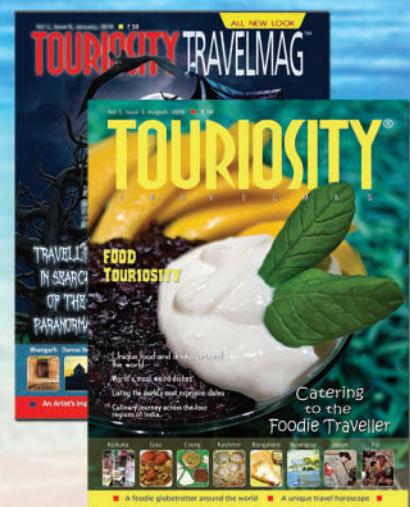
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# Bahrain

## - PEARL CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

*Photos by Sanghamitra*

The Kingdom of Bahrain is composed of an archipelago of 50 natural islands and 33 artificial islands located on the Persian Gulf. The Bahrain Island, the biggest of them all, is the central island and it constitutes more than 80% of the country's total landmass. Manama is the capital city of Bahrain. The country boasts a rather liberal culture as compared to other countries of the Middle East.

Bahrain has attractions for different types of tourists. There are historical ruins, burial mounds and temples, trail of ancient civilisations, nature reserves and wildlife sanctuaries, deserts, theme parks, museums, good food, great cultural experience, excursions, adventure activities and so on. The

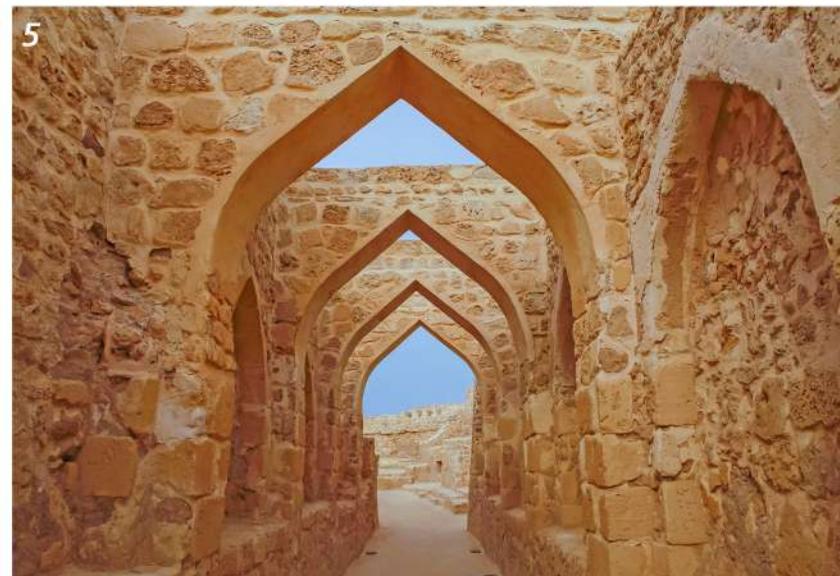
Bahrain National Museum is a great place to know about Bahrain's rich history.

Bahrain is also known

as the Pearl Capital of the World. Historically, pearl diving has been in the main activity around which life in Bahrain revolved. Before the discovery of oil in the region back in the 1930s, pearl diving was the major source of livelihood here. For more than 2000 years Bahraini pearls have been internationally recognized as one of the best natural pearl varieties in the world. Back then pearl divers would be gone to the seas for months in search of the best pearls. Today, there are a number of museums dedicated to pearl diving in Bahrain and needless to mention this is an important thing to experience while visiting this country.

Visitors here can have the unique opportunity of diving for pearls, something that is a little different from scuba diving and snorkeling, but an experience of a lifetime nonetheless. The beach resort of Al Dar Island is one of the destinations to visit if you are looking for pearl diving adventure. During the dive apart from pearls, one can also be lucky to see 30 types of corals and 200 species of fish. One can also see here dolphins during sunrise or sunset.

Bahrain is a melting pot of the cultures of many ethnically diverse settlements.



Scattered across the country are numerous archaeological sites, some of which have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Qal'at Al-Bahrain or the Bahrain Fort is a formidable 16th century Portuguese fort with only a quarter of it excavated so far. The fort, located atop a 15-metres-tall artificial hill (that has been built over 4300 years of continuous occupation) was once the capital of the Dilmun Civilisation. The excavated remains point towards the significant advancement the country had achieved even thousands of years back. The site contains residential, commercial as well as public, religious and military structures. There is an onsite museum with audio guides that displays about 500 artifacts in an area surrounding a huge Tell Wall that recreates the different archaeological layers uncovered at the site.

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site is the Muharraq Island trail that has historically been the location for pearl diving. The place shaped the trading history of the country. The restored houses of the island

depict the traditional Bahraini style of homes. Remnants of old structures including the Qal'at Bu Mahir Fortress in the island are worth seeing. One can also learn about the history of pearl diving at the pearl museum here.

Also inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list are the Dilmun Burial Mounds that date back 4000 years. Other important examples of ancient architecture are the Riffa Fort (Sheikh Salman bin Ahmed fort in Riffa built under the Persian Safavid Empire in 1812) and the Arad Fort (an Islamic building dating from the 15th century in Arad).

For wildlife enthusiasts visiting the country, there is the Al Areen Wildlife Park & Reserve that abodes animals and birds including endangered ones like the Arabian Leopard, the Arabian Gazelle, the Oryx, flamingos, ostriches and more. One can also be amazed at the site of the Shajarat-al-Hayat, or the Tree of Life, which has miraculously survived for centuries squeezing moisture from the sands in the desert.

Also the Hawar Islands is a great destination. It is known for a wildlife preserve and also has a beautiful beach from where one can view dolphins and rare migratory birds. Those interested in sports may visit the race course at Sakhir or go for motor sports at the Bahrain International Circuit.

In Bahrain one can also go for a dhow trip to the pearl reefs in order to have a more authentic experience of this traditional livelihood of the people here. On board the traditional boat trip, the pearl divers recount stories of their adventure on the high-seas. It is possible to have lip-smacking Arabian food on board. One can also enjoy water sports at the Lost Paradise of Dilmun Water Park which has the distinction of being the largest and most advanced water park in the Middle East.

1. The Al Fateh Grand Mosque;
2. Manama, the capital city;
3. The Bahrain Fort in Bahrain Island;
4. The Pearl Monument in Manama, Bahrain;
5. The Qal'at al-Bahrain or Bahrain Fort.



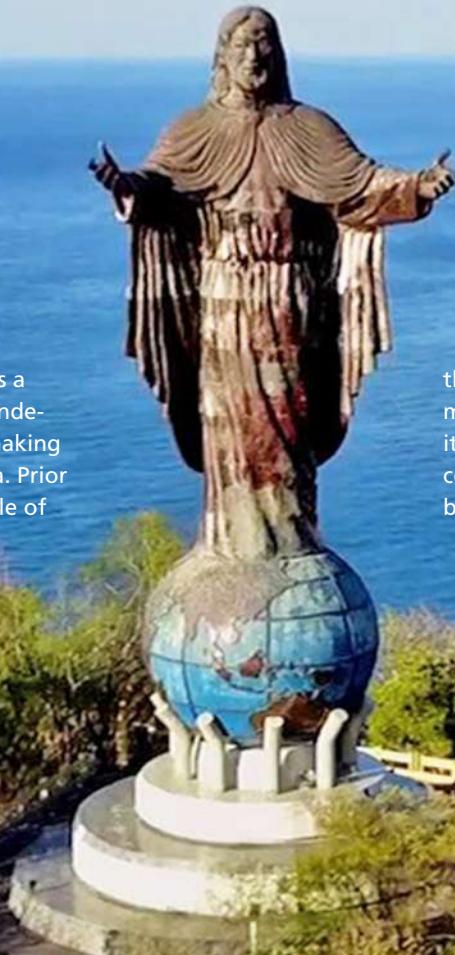
# Timor-Leste

## - ASIA'S NEWEST COUNTRY

*Photos by Sanghamitra*

Also called East Timor, Timor-Leste is a Southeast Asian country. It gained independence from Indonesia in 2002 making it the newest sovereign state in Asia. Prior to that East Timor was under the rule of

the Portuguese till 1975. The country still maintains very close relation with both its colonists, Portugal and Indonesia. The country is known for its rich culture and beautiful virgin beaches. Timor-Leste





2



3



4

is a true tropical paradise.

Timor-Leste, apart from being the youngest country in Asia, is one of the least visited countries in the world. Interestingly it is also the country with the shortest people in the world. At the same time Timor-Leste is one of the poorest countries. It is definitely one of the best tropical destinations in the world. So there are actually a wide range of superlatives that one can use for this country.

Dili is the capital and the largest city of East Timor. It has interesting colonial architecture and is blessed with beautiful beaches where one can enjoy freshly cooked seafood, drink tender coconut water and watch whales swim along the coastline during the migration season. The city has a wide range of restaurants and shops selling local textile products and handicrafts. Dili is also home to a variety of corals, blue moray eels, trevally and scorpion fish reef sharks. However, the most iconic image for travellers willing to visit this country is the Cristo Rei de Dili statue that is built on a hilltop and looks over the surrounding bay. At 88.6 feet (excluding the globe beneath), i.e. 27 metres, it is one of the tallest statues of Jesus Christ in the world. It was a gift from the government of Indonesia to the people of Timor-Leste. Interestingly, unlike most tall statues of the Christ, this statue is made of bronze and not stone. It takes a lot of effort to walk up to Cristo Rei statue but all that is worth the pain because one is

gifted with a panoramic view of the city and the sea from the foot of the statue.

Baucau is the second largest city and also boasts beautiful colonial architecture. For a perfect cultural mix of its past colonists one may visit this city. The Old Town of this city is replete with Portuguese colonial architecture and the New Town is full of buildings built in the Indonesian style.

An important island to visit in Timor-Leste is Atauro. Located 30 kilometers from the beaches of Dili, Atauro Island is accessible only via boat ride. It is a great destination for world-class diving, trekking and dolphin watching. The island acted as the local jail during the reigns of both the Portuguese and the Indonesian colonists. Today, it is equally a wonderful destination for pristine beaches, adventure activities like snorkeling and diving, trekking in the rainforests and so on. One may also visit the villages here that are known for their crafts, especially the wooden sculptures.

Suai town, located about 140 km from Dili, is the perfect destination for those who want to explore the fishing activity of the locals. The livelihood of the local populace here revolves around fishing. Visitors can also try their hand at traditional fishing using handmade goggles and spear guns. Also one can enjoy walking along the sandstone beach in Suai and see or take part in traditional local dance of Timor-Leste. The Our Lady of Fatima Church in Suai is home to a memorial devoted to those who died during the infamous church massacre in 1999 in which more than 100 people lost their lives in a pro-Indonesia military attack.

Other interesting places to visit are the picturesque beach town of Com and the Jaco Island.

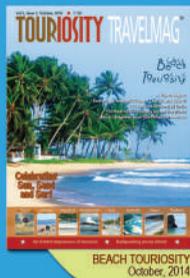
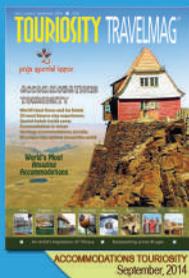
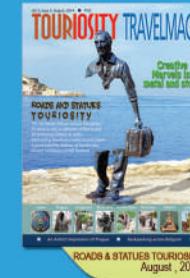
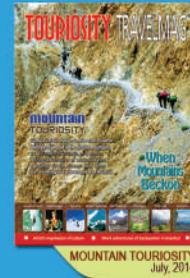
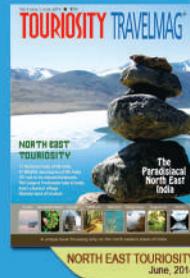
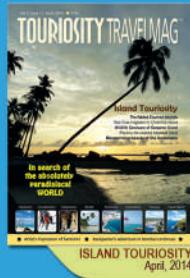
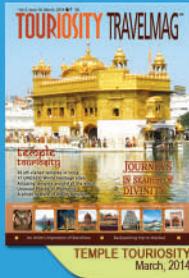
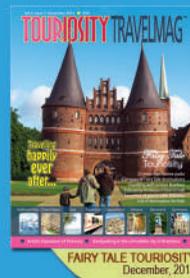
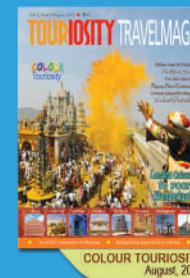
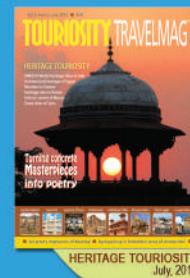
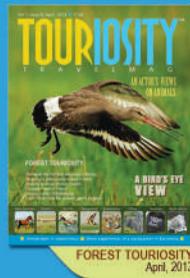
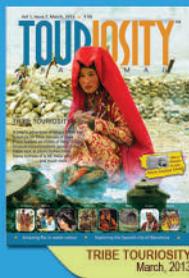
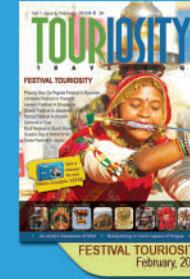
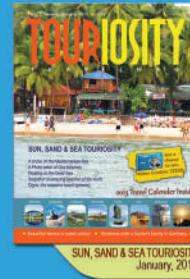
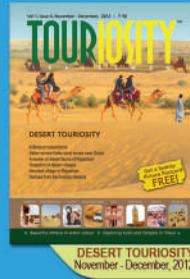
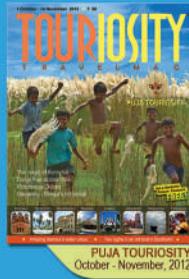
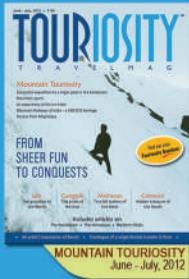
The country of Timor-Leste is known for pristine beaches, lush greenery and wide variety of adventure activities including whale watching, diving, and other water sports. It is a true paradise for divers and nature lovers. Scuba diving in Dili is available all year.

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1. The magnificent statue of Cristo Rei de Dili overlooking the sea;
  2. Ai Pelo prison, a Portuguese colonial prison in Lauhata in east Timor;
  3. A beach in East Timor;
  4. Scuba diving in East Timor.



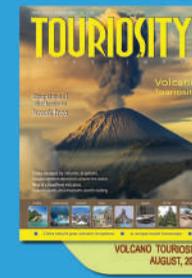
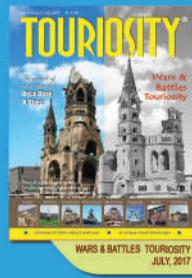
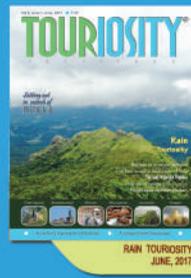
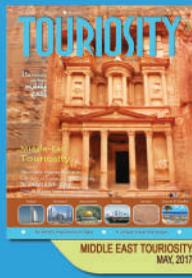
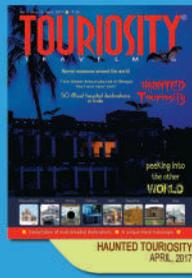
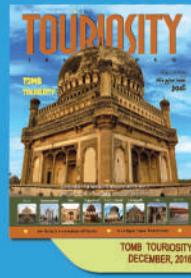
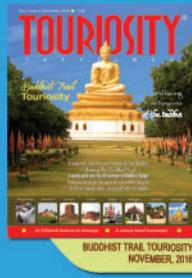
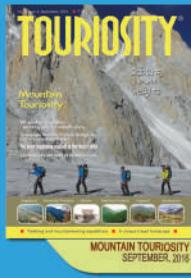
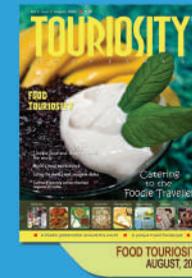
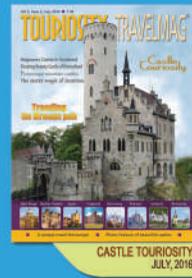
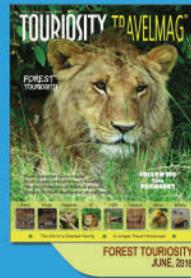
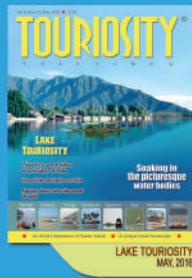
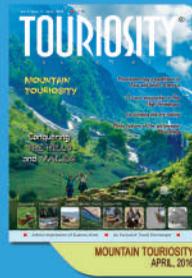
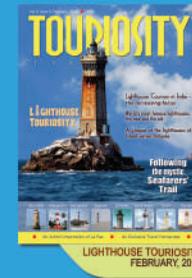
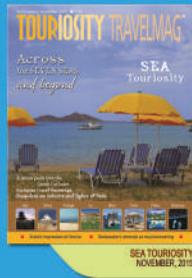
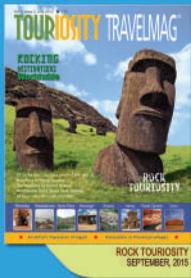
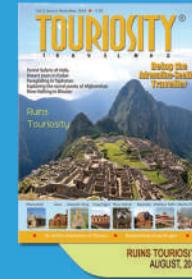
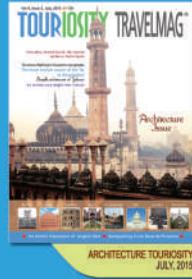
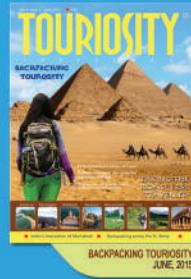
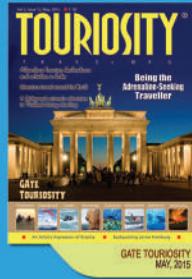
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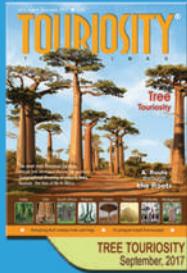


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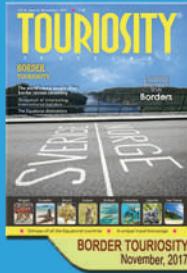
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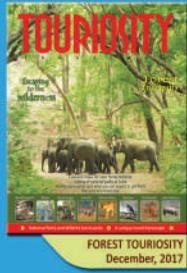
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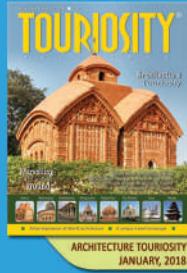
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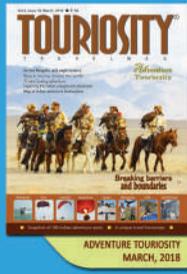
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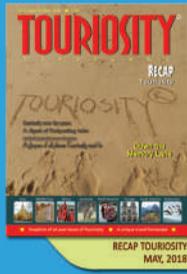
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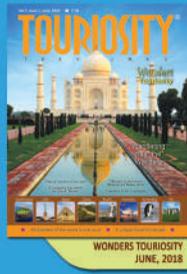
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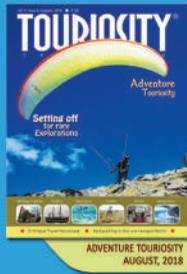
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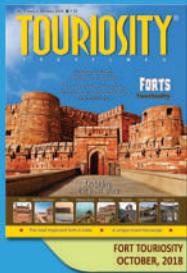
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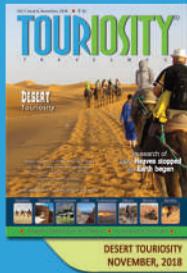
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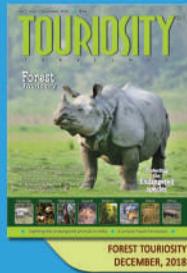
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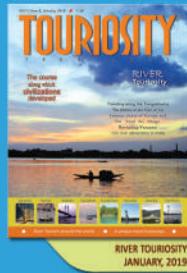
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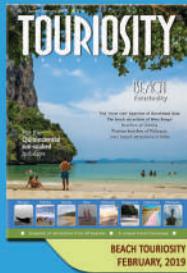
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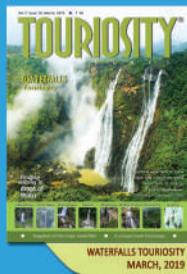
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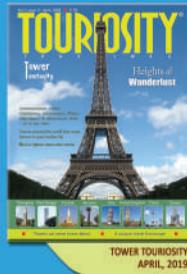
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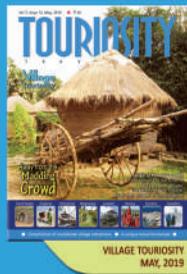
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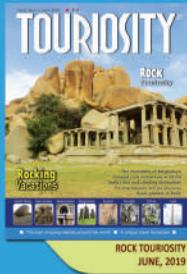
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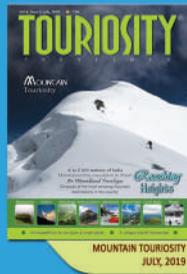
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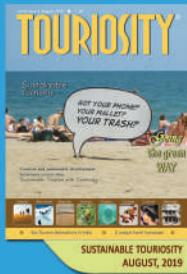
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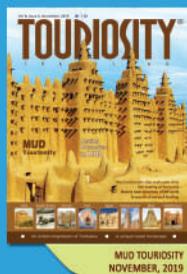
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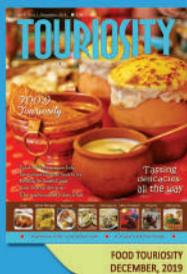
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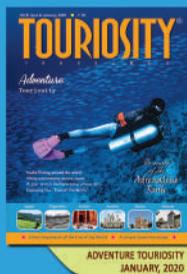
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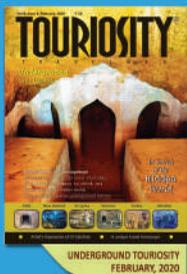
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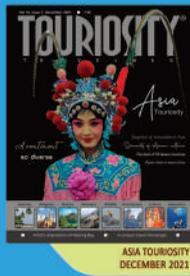
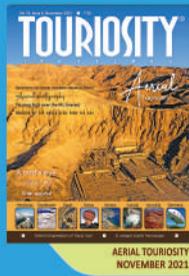
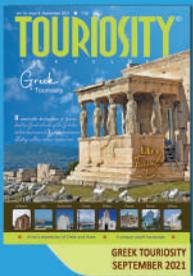
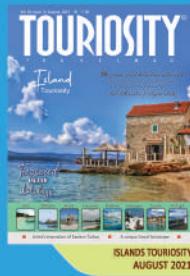
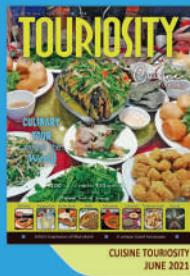
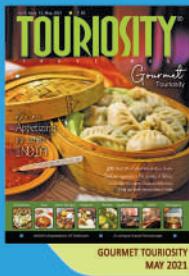
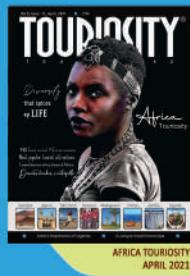
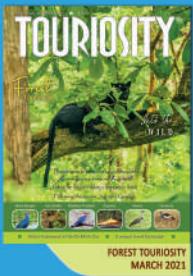
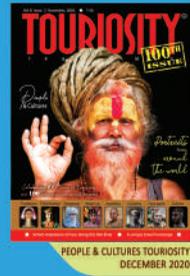
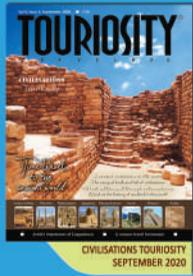
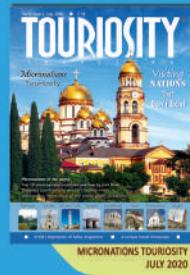
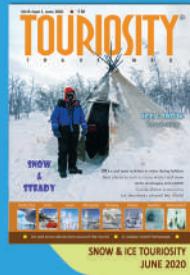
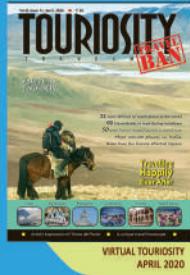
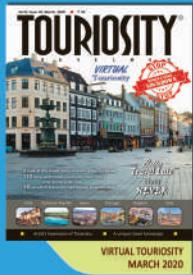


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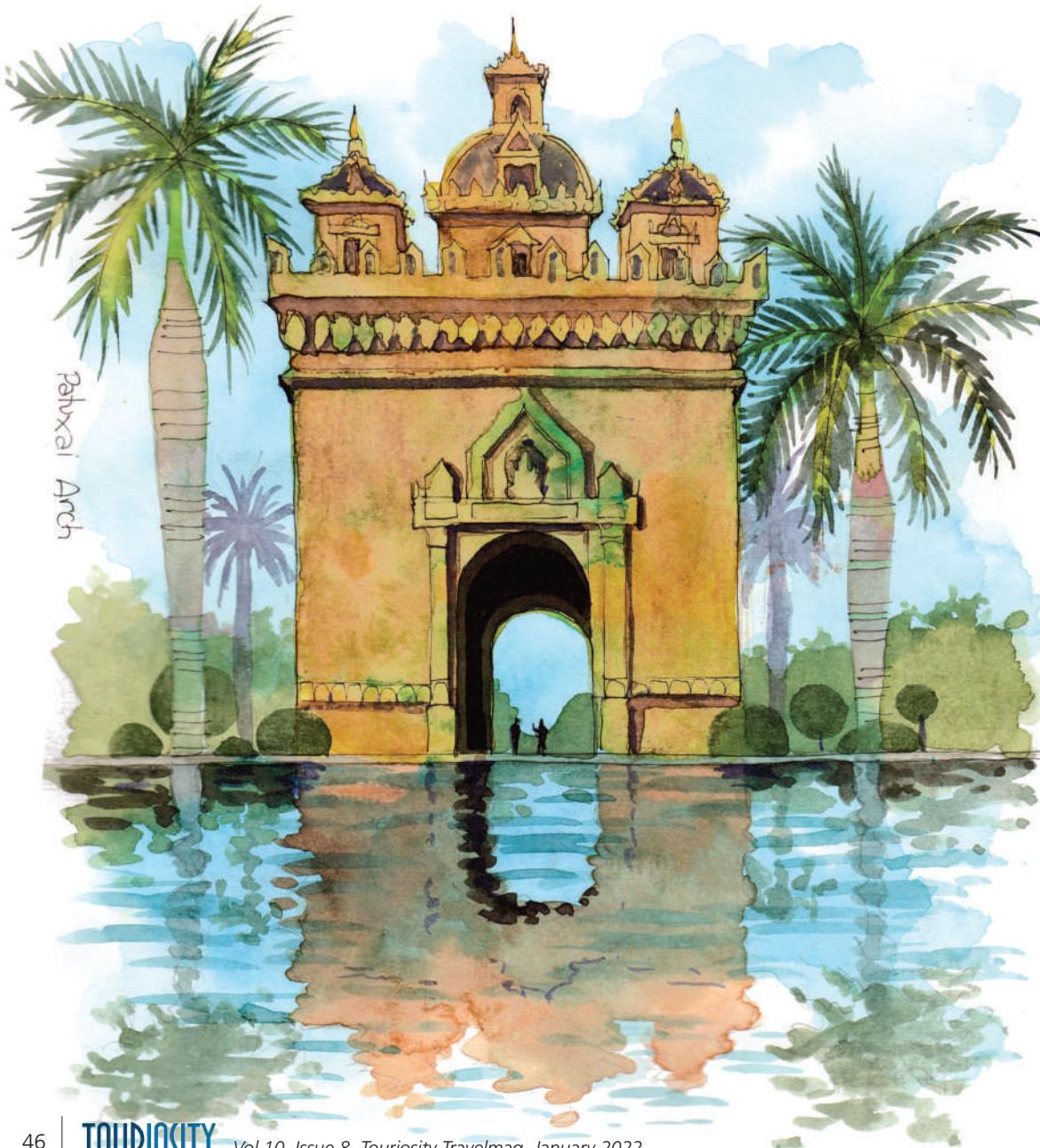
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# VIENTIANE



**TRAVEL JOURNAL**  
This is the journal of the trip I did to Vientiane (Laos) It doesn't intend to be a complete guide of the place, but an extract of my personal impressions in this unique destination.

Text & illustrations: Joaquín Dorao

Although it is the capital of Laos, Vientiane has the appearance of a rather quiet city. Its wide avenues, abundant vegetation and its innumerable temples make the city a relaxed and affordable place, far away from bustling Southeast Asian capitals like Bangkok or Saigon.

I came here by a flight from Hanoi, during a month-long trip across Southeast Asia. When I got off the plane, I instantly had the feeling of having reached a remote place. It seemed there is still very little tourism in Vientiane; there was not even Coca-Cola in the



bars or restaurants here.

A tuktuk took me to the hotel where I was staying. I kept my backpack and decided to start exploring the place. Although there are no large skyscrapers and the general appearance is that of a small city, in Vientiane the streets are wide and the distances long. Being on the banks of the Mekong River, the weather is humid and you sweat a lot from the very first hour. So, after a failed attempt to walk up to the triumphal arch called Patuxai, I took a motorcycle taxi that took me to the place in about 10 minutes. This triumphal arch was built in the 20th century to commemorate the independence of France, of which Laos was a colony until recently. So except for the temples in this capital, everything is quite new. The Patuxai is a national symbol and one of the iconic monuments of the capital. There were many local tourists and some Chinese. The monument is in a wide square surrounded by official buildings. You can stroll through the gardens and the pond in front.

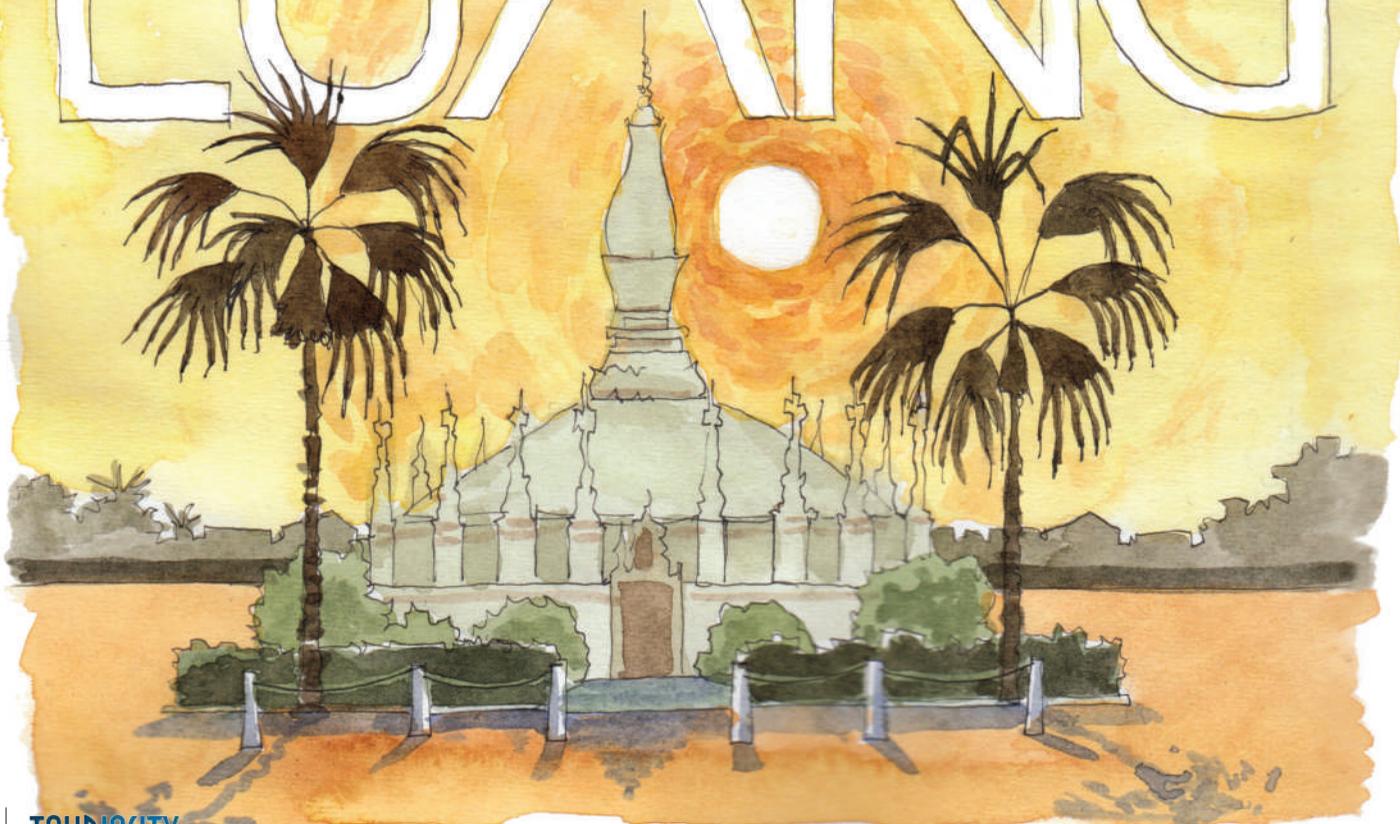
I also went up to the upper part, from whose terrace you have a good panoramic view of the city.

As it was already mid-afternoon, the heat was no longer scorching; so I decided to walk to the next monument, calmly enjoying nature that is so abundant in the streets of Vientiane. I sat for a while on a terrace to have a coconut drink. A measure of how touristy a country is, in my opinion, is usually the presence of plastic chairs (almost always sponsored by commercial drinks) in bars and terraces. The deck chairs where I sat were all bamboo ones and although the waiter spoke some English, it seemed rather authentic.



Patuxai Arch

# PHATHAT LUANG





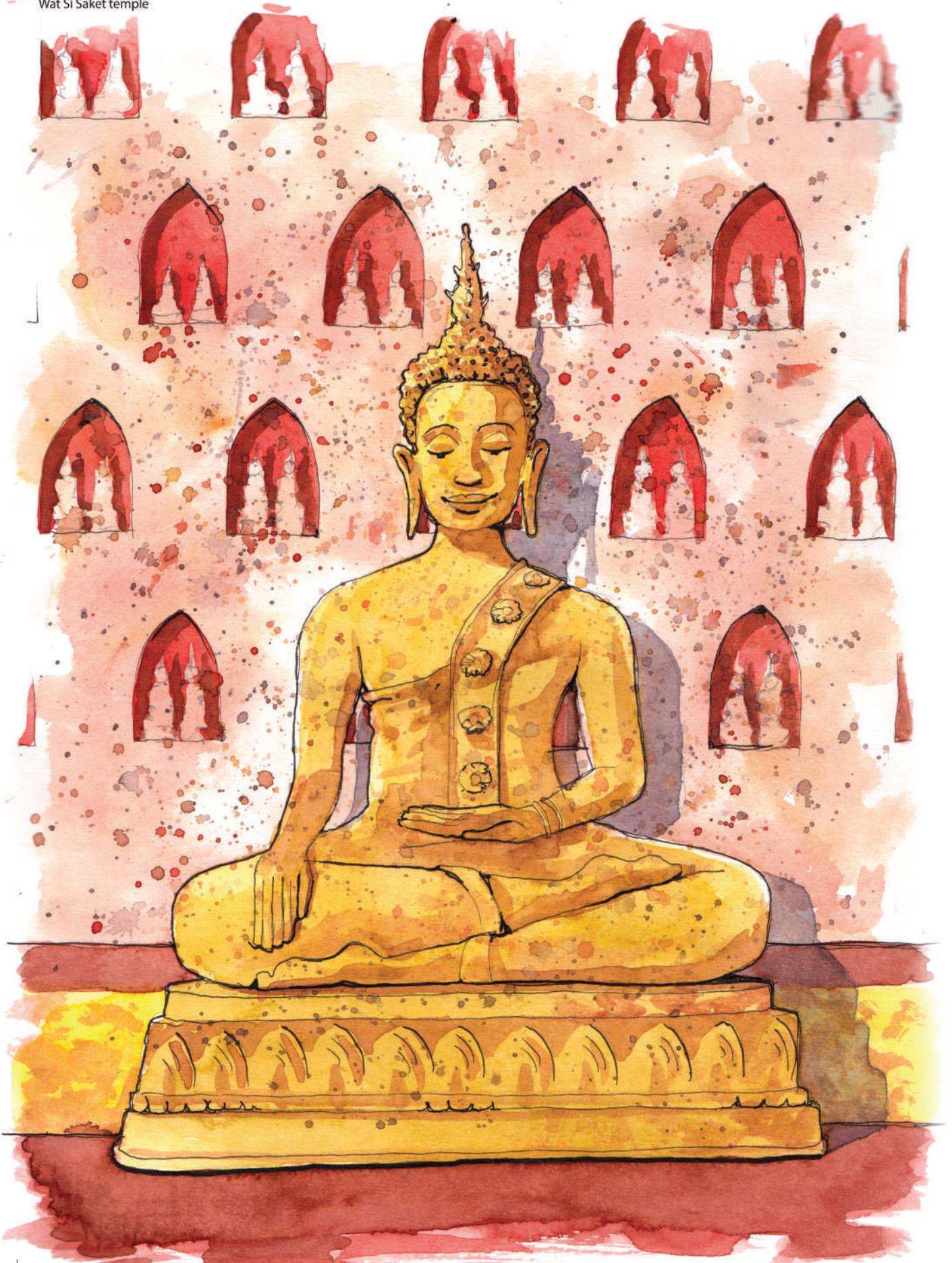
In half an hour I arrived at Pha That Luang, an immense stupa that is located in the middle of a large Buddhist complex. The stupa is very old, from the 3rd century. The surrounding temple began as a Hindu place of worship but with the incorporation of Buddhist relics it eventually became a Buddhist temple. The original stupa was destroyed numerous times over the centuries and the current one is a reconstruction from the second half of the 20th century. It was rebuilt after the country's independence. Now it is one of the most iconic monuments in Laos and appears on banknotes, stamps etc.

The entrance to the stupa complex



AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

Wat Si Saket temple





In the Buddhist complex there was also a huge reclining Buddha, more than 30 meters in length, all covered in gold leaf.

From there I went back to the hotel, which was near the river, in a tuktuk.

The next day I visited the famous temple of Wat Si Saket. From the outside it looked like a simple temple, with the typical overlapping roofs so common throughout Southeast Asia, and without much decoration. Once inside the enclosure, I could admire an incredible collection of Buddhas of all styles and sizes, which were lined up in endless galleries.

From there I went to eat at one of the terraces on the bank of the Mekong River. And with a delicious meal and an incomparable landscape around, I bid goodbye to the capital. I was to leave that night by bus to Luang Prabang, the best known and most touristy city in this country that is so full of surprises.



Wat Si Saket temple

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# Macau

- CASINO CAPITAL OF ASIA

*Photos by Sanghamitra*





Macau is an autonomous region of China and tourism is a major industry here. Popular as a gambling destination, Macau is also known as the 'Monte Carlo of the Orient' and the 'Las Vegas of the East'. Gambling is legal here and casinos located here have the distinction of earning the greatest revenue from gambling anywhere in the world. Macau is a popular destination for tourists especially from India, however, as a worldwide tourism destination, it is yet to make its mark among the global tourists.

Gambling aside, there are many other activities that tourists can engage in while at Macau. It has many historical landmarks, museums, libraries, theatres and cultural centres. Historical sites worth visiting in Macau include temples, churches, old mansions, fortresses and squares. Some of the most popular beaches are the Hac Sa Beach and the Cheoc Van Beach.

The ruins of the St. Paul's Cathedral in Santo Antonio in Central Macau Peninsula belong to an early-17th-century Jesuit church that was designed by an Italian Jesuit and completed in 1602 by early Japanese Christian and Chinese craftspeople. It provides a glimpse of the life of the local Chinese people during the period of Portuguese occupation of the place. The architectural style of this cathedral represents a mix of renaissance style with oriental designs. Another old church worth checking out in Macau is the St. Lawrence Church dating from 1560. It has a blend of neo-classical and Baroque architectural styles.

An important attraction of Macau is the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre. It offers visitors a view of the stunning skyline view of Macau from a height of 338 metres. It also has the highest revolving restaurant in the world.

The A-Ma Temple in Macau Peninsula dates back to 1488 AD, much before the Portuguese arrived here in the 16th century. It is one of the oldest buildings in all of Macau. Apart from the Macau Peninsula, there are also many attractions in Taipa and Coloane Islands which form part of Macau. The Coloane Island is home to several historical sites, making it another important destination for visitors. Another important attraction is the Macao Museum which displays a wide range of artefacts from



the history of the region and the culture and history of the people who have inhabited the region so far.

The most iconic landmark of Macau is probably the Venetian Macao. It is a 5-star palatial resort-cum-casino and a world class shopping mall. It is the second largest casino in the world and is owned by a Las Vegas company and is modelled after the Venetian Las Vegas. It is also the largest hotel in all of Asia and the seventh largest building in the world by floor area.

The culture of Macau is a blend of Portuguese and Chinese cultures. The cuisine of Macau also has a great variety and includes Portuguese and Chinese cuisines as well as Macanese cuisine which is a blend of the former two.

Other important attractions in Macau are the Grand Prix Museum, the Fishermen's Wharf, the 20-metres-tall Kun lam Statue, the Nam Van Lake with its fountain, the Warner Brothers Fun Zone, the City of Dreams and the Chimelong Ocean Kingdom Park. Macau is also home to the highest Commercial Bungy Jump in the world [233m or 764 ft]. One also finds here the Giant Panda Pavilion.

- 
1. The majestic Venetian Macao at night;
  2. The ruins of the St. Paul's Cathedral;
  3. A Chinese temple in Macau;
  4. Nam Van Lake and the Hotel Grand Lisboa in the background.

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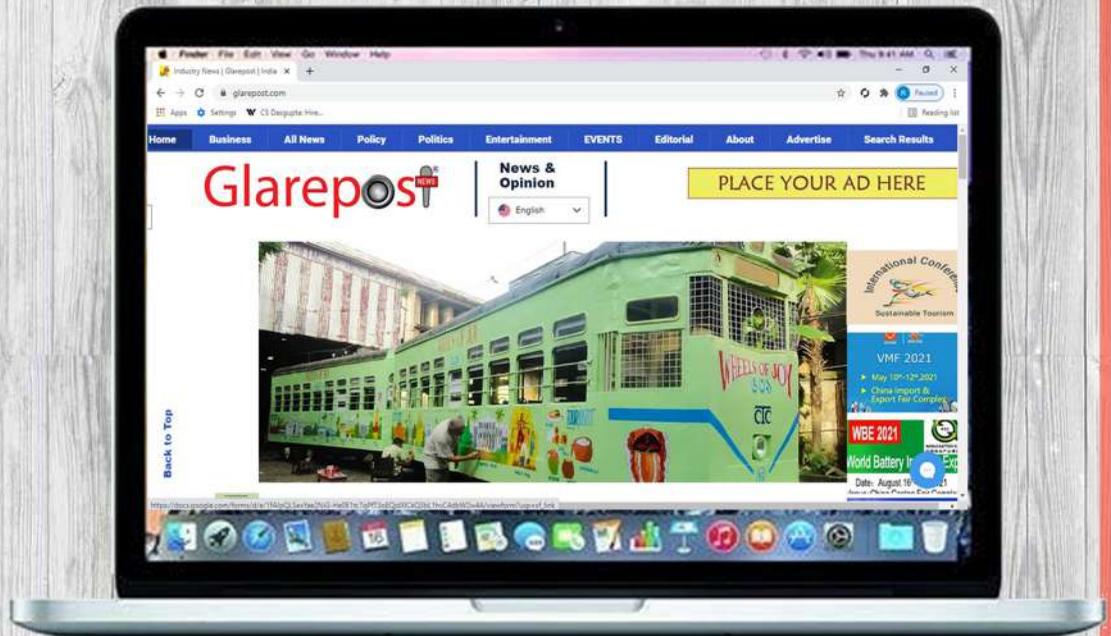
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