Night falls on the Thames and such iconic city sights as the London Eye and Houses of Parliament.
Abu Dhabi // United Arab Emirates

The UAE capital is the most cultural of the emirates. Lots of all-richt Abu Dhabi’s cash has been devoted to all-new galleries, museums, theme parks and cultural centres.

**VITAL STATISTICS**

**NAME:** Abu Dhabi  
**DATE OF BIRTH:** 1766, named by the first settlers, the Bani Yas Bedouin tribe, meaning ‘father of the gazelle’  
**ADDRESS:** United Arab Emirates (map S, O11)  
**HEIGHT:** 27m  
**SIZE:** 972 sq km  
**POPULATION:** 1.5 million

**ANATOMY**

The emirate of Abu Dhabi is the largest of the seven emirates comprising the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The city itself occupies a man island linked by major bridges with the mainland. It is also linked by bridge to Yas and Saadiyat Islands, which are quickly transforming into leisure and entertainment zones. The former is home to Yas Marina Circuit, Yas Waterworld and the world’s fastest rollercoaster at Ferrari World, while the latter is earmarked to become a highbrow cultural hub. Abu Dhabi’s iconic Corniche is bookended by the dramatic Etihad Towers complex and the late architect Zaha Hadid’s Foster+Partners–designed Sheikh Zayed National Museum.

**BEST TIME**

Abu Dhabi really comes into its own during the winter (from November to February). After months of scorching weather, the temperature finally starts to drop below 30°C, making it the perfect time for the city’s residents to throw themselves into events season. High-profile sporting contests and outdoor concerts take place almost every weekend, while the beaches, al fresco restaurants and bars are packed with punters.

**A PERFECT DAY**

Starting with a visit to the spectacular Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi’s crowning glory, taking time to admire the beautiful design of cool white marble intricately faced with flowers and vines, before joining a free guided tour which finishes with a very open question-and-answer session as visitors sit cross-legged on the world’s largest carpet under one of the world’s biggest chandeliers. Later, having a saunter around the extraordinarily lavish Emirates Palace hotel and enjoying a frothy cappuccino topped with real gold flakes.

**STRENGTHS**

- Beachside promenade
- F1 racing venue
- Ferrari World
- Major UAE concert venue
- Yas Marina
- Diverse cuisines
- Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque
- Glamorous hotels and resorts
- Atmospheric souks

**WEAKNESSES**

- Searing heat
- Expensive accommodation and nightlife
- Downtown traffic
- Little potential for interaction with Emiratis

**GOLD STAR**

For utterly unbridled cultural ambition: plans to open an Abu Dhabi Louvre, Guggenheim and Foster+Partners–designed Sheikh Zayed National Museum are underway.

**STARRING ROLE IN…**

- The Kingdom (2007 – filmed but not set here)
- Sex and the City 2 (2010 – set but not filmed here)
- The Bourne Legacy (2012 – filmed but not set here)
- Fast and Furious 7 (2015)
- Body of Lies by David Ignatius

**IMPORT**

- Real estate developers
- South Asian cuisine
- Formula One race cars

**EXPORT**

- Oil
- Pearls

**SEE**

- The gilded Emirates Palace and goggle in wonder at its gold vending machine.

**EAT**

- A shawarma from one of the many top-notch Lebanese restaurants in town.

**DRINK**

- A sugary, luscious mocktail on one of the terraces overlooking the Corniche.

**DO**

- Rent a bike and cruise along the seawall Corniche.

**WATCH**

- Any of the world-class musicians appearing at the annual F1 event concerts.

**BUY**

- Gold at the ever-popular gold souq in the Madinat Zayed Shopping Centre.

**AFTER DARK**

- Dress up and head for one of the top hotels’ glitzy bars and clubs.

**URBAN TALE**

The late architect Zaha Hadid designed the Sheikh Zayed Bridge which connects Abu Dhabi to the UAE’s mainland. The distinctive symmetrical steel arches are said to represent desert dunes, but there’s a persistent rumour that they were really inspired by a woman’s drawn-up legs, ‘giving birth’ to the traffic that runs through.

**DO**

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Bogotá

**VITAL STATISTICS**

**NAME:** Bogotá  
**DATE OF BIRTH:** Pre-Columbian  
**ADDRESS:** Colombia  
**HEIGHT:** 2645m  
**POPULATION:** 7.6 million

Bogotá is a city of futuristic architecture, a vibrant and diverse cultural life, fine colonial churches and great museums. This cosmopolitan metropolis is paved with modern skyscrapers and lined with cobblestones. Its history is the story of an ancient civilization, the Muisca, that pre-dated the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. Today, Bogotá is home to a dynamic blend of pre-Columbian, Spanish, and African cultural influences. The city is a hub of intellectual life, fine colonial architecture, and a vibrant and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

**ANATOMY**

Bogotá is bordered to the east by a mountain range topped by the peaks of Monserrate and Guadalupe. Bogotá’s northern sector consists mainly of upmarket residential districts, while the city’s southern part is a sprawl of undistinguished lower-income suburbs, culminating in the vast shanty towns on the southernmost outskirts. The urban bus service TransMilenio is efficient and fast.

**PEOPLE**

Just over 70% of the population is composed of around 58% mestizos (of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage) and 44% mulattos (with one black and one white parent). There are also about 3% zambos (of African-Indian blood). Indians represent just over 1% of the population. Spanish is the official language.

**BEST TIME**

Bogotá is at its warmest in May, but the slightly cooler months of June and July will leave you reaching for your umbrella a lot less frequently. The city really comes alive in August, when free, open-air festivals such as Salas al Parque and Festival de Verano get Bogotanos’ hips shaking, only to be outdone over the Christmas holidays, when Bogotá is awash in a festival of lights – weather be damned.

**STRENGTHS**

- Framedness of the locals  
- Museums everywhere, led by Museo del Oro and Museo Botero  
- Bohemian hipster enclaves of Chapinero Alto and Macarena  
- Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá – one of the best theatre festivals in Latin America  
- Colonial churches such as the Iglesia Museo de Santa Clara  
- Cerro de Monserrate  
- The food-centric village of Usaquén  
- Amazing variety of fruits, some endemic to the country  
- Futurist architecture  
- Andrés Carne de Res  
- Intellectual life

**WEAKNESSES**

- Crime
- Vast shantytowns
- Traffic
- Graffiti (as opposed to street art)
- Cold and rainy weather

**GOLD STAR**

For the view of the city from the top of Cerro de Monserrate – on a clear day you can even spot Los Nevados, the volcanic range in the Cordillera Central, 135km away, noted for its symmetrical cone of the Nevado del Tolima.

**STARRING ROLE IN...**

- The People at Universal [1991]
- Maria Full of Grace [2004]
- El Rey [The King, 2004]
- One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez
- Narcos (TV series 2015-present)

**IMPORT**

- Telemirelas (soup operas)
- African rhythms of the Caribbean
- Roman Catholicism
- Cuban salsa

**EXPORT**

- Author Gabriel García Márquez (lived here for a while)
- Singer Shakira
- Magic realism (literary genre)
- Writer Álvaro Mutis
- Actress Sofía Vergara

**SEE**

- More than 55,000 gold pieces from all the major pre-Hispanic cultures in Colombia at the most important gold museum in the world, Museo del Oro.

**BUY**

- Emeralds at one of the many jewellery shops in the city centre.

**WATCH**

- The Bogotano speciality ajiaco (soup made with chicken and potato) at Restaurante La Pola.

**DO**

- Visit the salt cathedral at Zipaquira, one of only three cathedrals in the world to be carved from salt.

**A PERFECT DAY**

- Strolling around La Candelaria, Bogotá’s charming historic quarter, and stopping off for a santafereño (hot chocolate bread) at Pastelería Florida, then exploring the Museo del Oro (Gold Museum), before conducting a night crawl around the pubs, clubs and salaterías of Zona Rosa or Parque 93.

**URBAN TALE**

The Palacio de Justicia (Palace of Justice) has had a tragic history. The first court building, erected in 1927, was burnt down by a mob during El Bogotazo in 1948. A modern building was then constructed on Plaza de Bolívar, but in 1985 it was taken by M-19 guerrillas and gutted by fire in a fierce 28-hour offensive by the army in an attempt to reclaim it. The rain stood untouched for four years until authorities decided to construct a new building.

**THE CITIES BOOK**

JESSE KRAFT | ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
GUILLERMO LEGARIA | STRINGER
JORGE RUEDA | GETTY IMAGES
GEORGE HOLTON | GETTY IMAGES

**THE CITIES BOOK**

Bogotá is a city of futuristic architecture, a vibrant and diverse cultural and intellectual life, fine colonial churches and great museums.

**THE CITIES BOOK**

Bogotá stretches out to the Eastern Hills
Melbourne // Australia

Stylish, creative, coffee obsessed and stark-raving sports mad, Melbourne stands tall as the country’s coolest city, with a unique cultural make-up.

VITAL STATISTICS
NAME: Melbourne
DATE OF BIRTH: 1835
PLACE OF BIRTH: Port Phillip Bay
SIZE: 36 sq km (city), 9985 sq km (metro area)
POPULATION: 4.7 million (metro area)

ANATOMY
Melbourne lies Port Phillip Bay and stretches into the plains to the west and east and out to the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. The city is divided by the muddy Yarra River, with the central business district on the north bank, set in a neat grid that suits its tram transport perfectly.

PEOPLE
Melbourne’s population is drawn from around the world, with postwar migrations of Greek and Jewish people giving it a unique cultural make-up. Melbourne, famously, has the highest population of Greeks of any city outside of Greece itself. More recently Vietnamese, Indonesian and Malaysian people have arrived, with Melbourne having a particularly high population of international students (the fourth-largest in the world). Melbourne’s original people, the Wurundjeri, have survived all of these waves of immigration.

BEST TIME
Melbourne is a year-round destination where the culture and sporting calendar carries through all seasons. December to March sees hot days and balmy nights perfect for the Australian Open and Melbourne Cup, while footy finals fever takes hold of the city in September. May to September can be moody, wet and windy but it’s the perfect weather for hiding away in Melbourne’s museums, cafés and cosy pubs.

A PERFECT DAY
Running a lap of the Botanic Gardens, then catching a tram to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for an AFL (Australian Football League) game, afterwards doing a stroll along the banks of the Yarra River or visit one of the city’s top galleries.

STRENGTHS
• Four city themes
• St Kilda beach
• Live music
• Melbourne Zoo
• National Gallery of Victoria
• Gold rush-era architecture
• Expansive parks and gardens
• Full calendar of sporting events
• Network of neighbourhoods with individual personalities
• Multiculturalism
• A UNESCO City of Literature
• Street art everywhere

WEAKNESSES
• Tricky traffic hook turns
• Unpredictable weather
• High cost of living

GOLD STAR
For Birrarung Marr: take a tranquil stroll along the banks of the Yarra River, with the Wurundjeri People. The Wurundjeri People have survived all of these waves of immigration.

FOOTBALL (League) game, afterwards doing a stroll along the banks of the Yarra River or visit one of the city’s top galleries.

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Oxford

Medieval colleges, Gothic libraries, enthralling histories, great pubs and river walks captivate in the world’s most famous university city.

VITAL STATISTICS
NAME: Oxford
NICKNAME: City of Dreaming Spires
DATE OF BIRTH: 9th century, founded by Alfred the Great
ADDRESS: England
(map 4, GB)
HEIGHT: 72m
SIZE: 45 sq km
POPULATION: 150,000

ANATOMY
Britain’s most beautiful city has expanded around 35 colleges over the centuries without losing its sense of space or poise. Its first colleges were established in the 13th century. When its students are not at work in the University’s libraries and laboratories, or musing in college quadrangles, they can row on the two rivers that flow through the city – the Isis (or Thames) and the Cherwell – or walk in its parks and meadows. To the north of the city centre are the affluent neighbourhoods of Jericho and Summertown. To the east lie Cowley and the industrial portion of the city. West leads visitors into the rural Cotswolds.

PEOPLE
The headed rivalry between town and gown – local residents and students – has cooled since the St Scholastica’s Day Riot in 1355 when 62 scholars were killed. Today, the 32,000 students co-exist with a large city population that is twice as ethnically diverse as Britain’s national average.

BEST TIME
Visitors in spring (April and May) and autumn (September and October) avoid the summer onslaught of sightseers and witness more of the daily rhythms of student life. Building or falling leaves add to the romance of the city.

A PERFEKT DAY
Breakfasting at a café in Jericho, then walking down Walton St to spend the morning exploring the art and antiquities in the Ashmolean Museum, the world’s oldest public museum. Then, after lunch, strolling around the Radcliffe Camera, diverting to check out the quads of a couple of colleges close by, such as Exeter or Hertford. If it’s a sunny summer day, heading down to the river to rent a punt for a couple of hours. If not, retiring to one of Oxford’s many excellent pubs, such as the Eagle and Child, where authors JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis once musing in college quadrangles, or Hertford.

GOLD STAR
For maintaining age-old architecture in a modern city.

STARRING ROLE IN...
• Shaken Unquiet (1993)
• The Golden Compass (2007)
• Bridget Jones Revisited by Evelyn Waugh
• Inspector Morse series by Colin Dexter
• Zuleika Dobson by Max Beerbohm
• His Dark Materials trilogy by Philip Pullman

IMPORT
• Students from around the world
• Car manufacturers

EXPORT
• British, Indian and Australian prime ministers
• American presidents
• Scientists including Tim Berners-Lee
• Authors including Oscar Wilde, Philip Pullman
• Philosophers including Thomas Hobbes
• Artists including William Morris
• Explorers including Sir Walter Raleigh and TE Lawrence
• Writers including Sir Matthew Pimlott-Pineau
• 50 Nobel Prize winners
• Guitar bands, including Radiohead, Ride and Foals
• Books
• Beer (the car)

SEE
• Fascinating etchographic artifacts at the Pitt Rivers Museum.
• Healthy organic food in the underscort of St Mary’s church on Radcliffe Sq at the Vaut & Garden cafe.

DRINK
A pint of beer in three north Oxford pubs: the Gardeners Arms, the Rose and Crown and the Old Bookbinders.

DO
Visit the Bodleian Library, one of the oldest, largest and most majestic libraries in Europe.

WATCH
Open-air student theatre in a college garden, weather permitting.

BUY
Oxford University Press books from Blackwell’s bookshop.

AFTER DARK
Take in a classical concert in the Sheldonian Theatre.

URBAN TALE
Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke is fondly remembered for many impressive achievements in his home country – not least founding Medicare, Australia’s public health system – but top of the list is his world record for downing a yard of ale (2.5 pints or 1.4L) in 12 seconds, which he did while a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. The feat took place in the dining room of University College as a penalty for a minor infraction. But the Turf Tavern nearby on Turl St has become the focus of pilgrimages by awe-struck Antipodeans.
Wellington

// New Zealand

VITAL STATISTICS
NAME: Wellington
NICKNAME: Windy Welly
DATE OF BIRTH: 1840, when European settlers arrived to purchase land from the Māori inhabitants
ADDRESS: New Zealand (metrop: 290 sq km (city), 1388 sq km (metro area)
POPULATION: 409,200 (metro area)

With its compact city centre, small bar scene, and distinctive timber architecture, New Zealand’s beautiful and bustling capital has long been one of the country’s best cities to inhabit.

ANATOMY
Wellington’s harbour sits between two peninsulas at the southern tip of New Zealand’s North Island. Ferries regularly cross the Cook Strait from here to South Island. The main business street, Lambton Quay, used to sit on the waterfront but is now separated from the sea by reclaimed land. The city centre is bounded by the train station, at the northern end of Lambton Quay, and Cambridge and Kent Terrace to the southeast. The historic and embassy area of Thornton lies just north of the centre. Wellington has an efficient local-bus system and suburban trains. "That’s quite a climb!"

PEOPLE
New Zealand is a bicultural nation and Māori and English are the official languages. For most of Wellington’s population at least one of these (probably English) is their mother tongue, but the number of inhabitants who have moved here from overseas is on the increase – particularly from Asia and the Pacific Islands.

A PERFECT DAY
Taking a stroll around the Botanic Gardens before riding the cable car down to town for a freshly brewed coffee, getting behind the scenes at Weta Workshops then chasing the perfect drop at one of the many craft beer bars. "It’s very hilly if you’re not used to climbing"

STRENGTHS
• Film making and film touring
• Te Papa (Museum of New Zealand)
• Zealandia project, the world’s first fully-fenced urban eco-sanctuary
• Government Buildings – among the world’s largest all-wooden buildings
• Beehive – the architectural emblem of New Zealand
• Katherine Mansfield’s birthplace
• Botanic Gardens
• Red cable car

WEAKNESSES
• Houses are rarely insulated
• Wellington is on a fault line, no-one knows when it will quake
• Windy weather a blessing and a curse
• Wellington supports a host of independent creatives flying their home-grown flags with pride

BEST TIME
The southern hemisphere summer is a great time to visit, with Fringe Festivals consuming the city. "Bodegas deliver the goods: Bodega"

IMPORT
• Director Peter Jackson
• Architect Ian Athfield
• International movie stars on location
• Rugby fans

EXPORT
• Director Taika Waititi
• Director Jane Campion
• Author Katherine Mansfield
• Director Lee Tamahori
• Author Catherine Chidgey
• Rugby players

SEE
Artwork connects Civic Sq to the waterfront
Wellington supports a host of independent creatives flying their home-grown flags with pride
"It’s very hilly if you’re not used to climbing"

EAT
Fresh fish and chips from The Chippery in Mt Vic or Thorndon.
"Delivering the goods: Bodega"

DRINK
Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc at Toast Martinborough, a food, wine and music bonanza.
"Food, wine and music bonanza"

WATCH
Live music in Wellington’s oldest venue that keeps on delivering the goods: Bodegas
"Bodegas deliver the goods: Bodega"

BUY
Kingfish (2005)
The Hobbit trilogy (2012–14)
Peter’s Dragon (2016)

BUY
Kiss fashion and cool gifts on Cuba St.
"Craft beer to arts and crafts"

AFTER DARK
Take your pick of the bars and clubs on Courtenay Place and Cuba St.
"For arts and culture on tap. From craft beer to arts and crafts"

URBAN TALE
Japanese aircraft carrying submarines travelled through Cook Strait during World War II on reconnaissance missions looking for American warships to sink. When a Japanese airplane was spotted over Wellington in 1942 the locals had visions of being made to pull rickshaws up Mount Victoria by their new colonisers, if the war was lost. "That’s quite a climb!"

01 Wellington’s cable car makes its way to the Botanic Gardens
02 Wellingtonians love their coffee and the cafe lifestyle
03 The City to Sea Bridge and public artwork connects Civic Sq to the waterfront
04 Sculptures outside the excellent Te Papa museum