

L O N E L Y P L A N E T ' S

1000

ULTIMATE
EXPERIENCES

FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING TRAVEL AUTHORITY

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FOREWORD

I've always had travel lists going: things I really must get around to doing, experiences I just might get around to and places that I simply cannot understand why I haven't yet put a tick beside. Like the Trans-Siberian Express – I've been back and forth between Asia and Europe plenty of times over the years, so why have I never ridden the big red train? I'm glad to see it's on our *1000 Ultimate Experiences* list, a gentle reminder that I really should get around to riding the Russian rails.

My own travel lists are a combination of 'wow, I'd like to do that' and 'why on earth haven't I done that? Yet.' *1000 Ultimate Experiences* simply takes the sort of lists that I draw up and extends them in every direction.

If I was going to pull out five interesting 'must-do' projects from this long list – after the Trans Sib of course! – I'd probably start with a couple that have already found their way onto my own lists. I've always wanted to ride a cargo ship out to the Marquesas Islands of French Polynesia, following the trail of Paul Gauguin. Riding a bus over the Karakoram Highway from Pakistan into China has survived unticked on my wish-list for far too long. I've tried nine of the 10 'Best Food & Place Combinations', so it's definitely time I headed for New Orleans to try gumbo. I'm a keen cyclist and I've spent far too many hours watching the Tour de France on television – it's time to see it for real. And I've had great times

exploring the beautiful islands dotted down the coast of Croatia, so sign me up for an Adriatic sailing trip.

And five memorable experiences that I'm very happy to be reminded of? Well, there's walking the circuit of Mount Kailash, a high-altitude stroll where your fellow walkers remind you that no smile is bigger than a Tibetan one. Or driving down the west coast of Africa in the Ultimate Banger Challenge. This was a hoot, all the way from the London departure through to giving the car away at the end (as contestants are required to do) in Banjul, Gambia. I bought a very good, trouble-free banger as well. North Korea is definitely on my ultimate list, unquestionably the weirdest country I have ever been to. I'd agree with Greek Island-hopping as an ultimate boat trip as well. On my last visit we followed the simple (and very successful) plan of heading down to the harbour when we were ready to move on to a new island and simply grabbing the first boat that came by, no matter which island it went to. Although I only pedalled one two-week stage of the whole four-month Cairo-to-Cape Town Tour d'Afrique bike ride, I'd have to agree that travelling the whole length of the continent has to be an ultimate African experience.

Of course there are some ultimate experiences I'm very glad to have already put a tick beside, because that means I never need to spend another night in a Japanese capsule hotel.

Tony Wheeler
Lonely Planet Founder



Gaze out to sea over the bell towers of medieval Rab, in Croatia.

ULTIMATE ITINERARIES

THE BEST OF AFRICAN WILDLIFE

Leopards are Madagascar's biggest draw, but don't miss out on other colourful creatures, from birds to chameleons. **p37**

Test your bravery and get up close and personal with the big cats on a walking safari through the Serengeti National Park. **p162**



Of the seven walking trails in Kruger National Park, the Napi Trail is the best for spotting rhinos, buffalo, elephants, leopards and lions. **p25**

Spy massive herds of migrating wildebeest and zebras from above in a hot-air-balloon ride over Serengeti National Park. **p227**

Shark Alley, south of Cape Town, is a stretch of water teeming with real-life Jaws. This is the ultimate diving experience. **p160**

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN OUTDOORS

Tasmania's Overland Track snakes between Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair, Australia's deepest natural freshwater lake. **p68**

A classic East Coast road trip will highlight Queensland's tropical scenery, the laid-back beaches of New South Wales and an out-of-the-way corner of Victoria. **p46**

Admire ancient Aboriginal rock art against a brilliant red sunset backdrop at Ubirr. **p234**



The great *Ghan* chugs through Australia's remote Red Centre. **p87**

The empty Australian outback stretches between the mainland's southern tip and Darwin at the Top End. **p55**

ACTIVE NORTH AMERICA

It's no surprise that parasailing was invented in Acapulco; it's the perfect location to float in the air, looking over the city, the hills and the islands beyond the bay. **p15**

A Cabot Trail road trip offers national parks, whale-watching, long-haul and short-and-sweet walks, and relaxing village life. **p46**

Temperatures can plummet to -50°C and storms are the norm in the Alaska Range. In this extreme environment, there are glaciers to marvel at and SPAM to eat when the weather turns bad... **p55**

'There she blows' is not something you want to hear near the Yellowstone supervolcano when you're taking in the sights at the world's oldest national park. **p65**



Kayakers in Alaska's Glacier Bay can paddle to their heart's content beneath 10 glaciers and among countless icebergs, big and small. **p25**

FIVE ASIAN ADVENTURES

The 3000-odd tiny islands of Halong Bay are dotted with sublime beaches and grottoes – move through the emerald waters on the boat trip of a lifetime. **p345**

Unforgettable Bhutan is the world's last Buddhist kingdom, and 70% of this treasure (which measures its success in terms of Gross National Happiness) remains covered in forest. **p202**



Remote Ladakh, on India's highest plateau, is sprinkled with Buddhist monasteries and surrounded by giant canyons and snow-capped peaks. **p53**

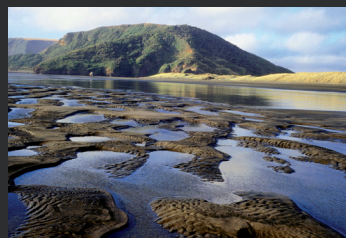
Need a bicycle? A horse? At China's Kashgar market people sell all sorts of things, from the practical to the ridiculous. **p49**

Place your bets and sit back in the stadium for a round of Thai boxing (*muay thai*). Alternatively, sign up for a local class and get in the ring yourself. **p336**

BEAUTIFUL NEW ZEALAND

Here's something you've likely never dreamed of doing: crooning an Elvis tune to attract a dolphin. The word on the street (waves) is that they're fans of the King. **p17**

Black-sand beaches and rainforest walks make Waitakere your perfect excuse to escape the city for a day, or two, or three. **p209**



According to legend, the sheer valleys around the Unesco World Heritage-listed Milford Sound were cut by the magical adze of Tute Rakiwhanoa, giving them an other-worldly beauty. **p195**

Postbombing, the Greenpeace boat *Rainbow Warrior* sits in Matakauri Bay, a peaceful home to coral, fish, eels and colourful algae. **p57**

The four-day Milford Track is the trek (or tramp) of a lifetime, leading through rainforest and along a wilderness river to the edge of the spectacular Milford Sound. **p159**

FIVE ULTIMATE EUROPEAN JOURNEYS

Scotland's west coast is made of lochs, valleys, mountains, castles and pretty villages where a whisky awaits the chilly traveller. **p44**

All aboard the Trans-Siberian and choose your own adventure on a journey that takes you across a third of the globe, from Moscow to Vladivostok. **p88**



The 15-day GR20 trek through Corsica traverses a variety of landscapes, from dense forest to bleak moonscapes. Watch out for the rickety bridges and treacherous rock faces. **p68**

Journey the 140km between the ski resorts of Chamonix and Zermatt on foot or on ski, depending on the season. **p24**

Stow away on a barge and drift down the Canal de Bourgogne, wine glass in hand. **p159**

THE BEST ISLAND PARADISES

Cruising the Galápagos Islands is not just about lazing around on a yacht – this is one of the most special and preserved natural environments in the world. **p347**

Koh Pha-ngan sure knows how to throw a party but when the hangover sets in, there are plenty of deserted beaches and coconut trees to cure what ails you. **p13**



The shallow waters of Papua New Guinea's Samarai Island are a diver's dream, for experts and novices alike. **p56**

Steady winds combined with tame currents and protected bays mean one thing: a sailing trip in the balmy British Virgin Islands. **p228**

The beauties of the Cape Verde archipelago have been discovered: it combines West African and Portuguese colonial cultures and

EXPERIENCE THE WATERS OF EUROPE

Cruise between the bobbing icebergs in Greenland's Disko Bay. **p345**

For three months each year, herring-seeking orcas flow into Norway's Tysfjord. Human travellers can kayak among the cetaceans or, if braver, jump overboard and snorkel among them. **p26**

Sail Croatia's coastline, exploring the crystalline Adriatic and its 1185 islands, stopping in at the hoity-toity island of Hvar or hidden coves and rustic fishing villages. **p229**

Don your bowler hat and blazer for a punt down the River Cam. Make sure to master your punting technique though, or you'll be chasing your tail all day. **p307**



Personalise your Greek Islands experience and discover the most hidden of coves by swimming the flat azure waters from shore to shore. **p309**

THE FINEST FESTIVALS

Jazz Fest is the essence of New Orleans. See the best in gospel, funk, zydeco, rock, Caribbean and jazz in the ultimate setting. **p243**

Celebrate Christmas in the sun in Puerto Rico with a month-long excess of roast pig and salsa. **p201**

The most magical time to visit Stonehenge has to be during the summer solstice, when druids and drum circles descend on the mysterious ancient formation. **p141**



Dress up in New York City for the Village Halloween Parade, which attracts a 2-million strong audience and 50,000 fancy-dressed paraders. **p154**

During Japan's Hadaka Matsuri (Naked Man Festival) thousands of men strip off, douse themselves in freezing water and dash around bringing new year luck to those who touch them. **p240**

FIVE UNMISSABLE EATING EXPERIENCES

For the best in British cuisine, we defy anyone to go past Richmond eel pie and a side of mash. If that doesn't app-eel, there's always jellied eels... **p291**



Matzo-ball soup, pastrami on rye, pickles – these dishes might have originated in Eastern Europe but they are now unmistakably the tastes of New York City. **p266**

There are mouth-watering versions to be had in almost any city's Chinatown but Shanghai's dumplings beat the lot. **p138**

Hungry for a street snack in Tel Aviv? An Iraqi *sabich* is just the thing: pita bread crammed with an unbelievable combination of salads, vegetables and sauces. **p223**

It might taste bitter but a fresh-brewed cup of coca tea (combined with the view of Machu Picchu) will cure all your ills on the Inca Trail. **p94**

BIGGEST ADRENALIN RUSH

TAKE A DEEP BREATH, GET STRAPPED IN & FEEL
THE BUZZ. WE BRING YOU THE THRILL-SEEKERS' BUCKET LIST.

11 BIG SHOT RIDE, USA

This ride, atop the 280m, 110-storey Stratosphere observation tower in Las Vegas, has incredible views – but you'll be too busy vomiting up your intestines to notice. The Big Shot runs on compressed air, which, with incredible force, rockets you in your harness from the ride's base to the top of the Big Shot's 49m tower in just over two seconds. As you shake about in your seat like a rag doll, at a combined total of over 300m above ground, you'll be thanking your lucky stars you didn't wear white underwear.

.....
It's on the boulevard, on top of the Stratosphere Hotel; you can ride it 10am–1am Sunday to Thursday, open until 2am on Friday and Saturday.
.....

14 12 MOTORCYCLE-TAXI RIDE, THAILAND

This is one of the most dangerous rides of them all: three people die every hour in Bangkok traffic. Motorcycle-taxi riders bob in and out of endless lines of cars at

13 ROCK CLIMBING, USA

They say Yosemite Valley is climbing mecca, with climbs coveted by 'rock heads' far and wide, and a degree of difficulty that has necessitated many technical innovations. Even today, as the most demanding ascents have crumbled, aficionados still point to El Capitan, Yosemite's 915m granite wall, as the planet's greatest rock climb. Just because it's been mastered doesn't mean it's now a pushover – recently, several experienced climbers died when the weather turned unexpectedly foul. If you make it, you deserve to puff up your chest, because you're simply the best! Better than all the rest!

.....
Be prepared to self-rescue; it is illegal to camp at the base of any wall; read the climbers' guide at www.nps.gov/yose.
.....

alarming speeds, often mounting pavements, and wipe-outs occur with shocking regularity. Often the injured rider or passenger is carted off to hospital in a passing tuk tuk (not the most comforting way to get treatment). Just hang on tight, squeeze your legs in even tighter to avoid getting kneecapped by a

passing car, say your Hail Marys and hope for the best.

.....
Look for the orange vests worn by licensed taxi riders, who are legally required to carry a spare helmet; motorcycle taxis are usually down the sois just off the main roads.
.....

WORLD'S HAPPIEST PLACES

SMILE & THE WORLD SMILES WITH YOU. THAT'S THE THEORY: TEST IT OUT IN THESE MIRTH-MAXED DESTINATIONS.

51 VANUATU

Many a human's idea of blissful living involves swinging in a palm-strung hammock while the ocean swooshes gently onto a white-sand beach nearby – so it's no surprise that the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu was voted top dog in the New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index. The water's ridiculously blue and teeming with life; the interior's lush and volcanically rumbling, great for exploring amid the breadfruit trees. But it's the sense of community that makes this a truly happy place. Extended families congregate regularly for age-old celebrations – in Vanuatu, there's always a knees-up somewhere.

Visit from April/May to October, when temperatures range from 18°C to 28°C. The terrifying Land Diving festival (the original bungee) runs in April/May.

52 MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC, CANADA

Clean, welcoming and refreshingly multicultural, Montréal is happy enough year-round. Come July, though, it's downright hilarious. Just For Laughs takes over the city in summer, packing venues with the best in both Anglo, and Francophone comedy. It's one of the biggest comedy gatherings in the world, hosting many a top-drawer wisecracker. Shows sell out fast, as even the less known acts are virtually guaranteed to be a riot. But even if you can't get a ticket you can giggle along – every night the city's Latin Quarter is abuzz with street performers, parading puppets and a fantasia of fireworks.

For special offers and advance info, sign up to the festival newsletter at www.hahaha.com.

53 HAPPY, TEXAS, USA

Welcome to the self-proclaimed 'town without a frown'. The tiny Lone Star State settlement of Happy (setting for the 1999 movie *Happy, Texas* in name only) is a frankly disappointing collection of silos and gridded streets. But look outside the 'city' limits and the best of Texas is on the doorstep, guaranteed to raise a smile. Hike or ride amid the red-rock hoodoos of the Palo Duro Canyon, the USA's second biggest; spy bison and stunning sunsets in lesser-known Caprock Canyon; or spend your Wild West dollars at the Amarillo Livestock Auction, a slice of pure Americana (comedy Stetson practically mandatory).

The auction takes place every Tuesday; canyons are best visited in autumn and winter – summers are extremely hot.

ULTIMATE DRIVING HOLIDAYS

HIT THE HIGHWAY, WITH AWE-INSPIRING SCENERY YOUR ONLY COMPANION.

101 CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, TO CAIRO, EGYPT

Allow at least 10 weeks for this African odyssey. Starting in cosmopolitan Cape Town, the journey heads through 11 countries and includes some stunning road stops. As if Victoria Falls, Mt Kilimanjaro and the Nubian Desert with the world's biggest sand dunes weren't enough, this mammoth stretch is also home to every species of African wildlife. Road conditions are dire, and an independent overland road trip bursts off the 'difficult' radar.

Overland Adventure Travel (www.oasisoverland.co.uk) runs 16 week all-inclusive tours; cost is around £2500 all up.

102 COASTAL HIGHLANDS, SCOTLAND

44 Single-track roads hem Scotland's astonishingly beautiful west coast. From the long sea lochs and glacier-gouged valleys in the south, through the central coastal plain shouldered by mountains, to the serried edges of

the wild north, traversing the Scottish coast is a bonny journey. Castles are part of the scenery, and plenty of pretty villages make perfect pit stops. This is whisky country, too – making a most rewarding swill at the end of a day's driving.

Use the interactive map at the National Trust of Scotland website (www.nts.org.uk) to find places of interest at which to stop.

103 AMSTERDAM TO ISTANBUL

As the crow flies it's around 2200km, but 'as the car drives' the kilometres are innumerable. It depends how many of the counties on either side of the route you visit. You'll almost certainly pass through Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. That's a lot of different road rules, road conditions and 'I Spy' games.

When you finally arrive at Istanbul reward yourself with a stay at the Arena Hotel (www.arenahotel.com), in the historic port area of Sultanahmet; the building is a 19th-century Ottoman classic.

104 DELHI TO AGRA, INDIA

If you're willing to tackle India's manic roads, this is the trip for you. (You could also hire a driver, sit back and enjoy the ride.) The trip leaves from the capital, a confusing tangle of 12.8 million people and the gateway to the rest of the country. Head southeast for 240km and you'll be rewarded by reaching Agra – synonymous with the stunning Taj Mahal.

If you want company, check www.delhitoagra.com, which offers tours and tips for planning your sojourn to India's Golden Triangle.

GRANT DIXON / LPI

