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THE CITIES BOOK

A Journey Through the Best Cities in the World

MELBOURNE | OAKLAND | LONDON



Best Cities 01-10

The heart of this book was set beating by our travellers who provided us with the list of 200 cities for inclusion in the book, via a survey we ran on www.lonelyplanet.com asking travellers (and our staff) to nominate their favourite cities.

The top five held no major surprises – Paris, New York, Sydney, Barcelona and London – although a quick glance at the top 25 cities certainly speaks to the adventurous spirit of our travellers. In the top 10 we have Cape Town and Bangkok, and the top 25 features Kathmandu, Buenos Aires and Jerusalem. In the 200 cities selected, we were able to display the great diversity of city life as it is experienced all over the globe: in the classic Western European cities such as Paris; ancient South American cities such as La Paz and Quito; island cities such as Apia in Samoa; trading centres such as Nairobi, hi-tech/futuristic cities such as Hong Kong and Tokyo; and those iconic cities like London, Florence or Rome, where time appears to stand still and accelerate in the same moment. The incredible diversity of day-to-day life explored through these pages challenges our very notion of a consistent ‘city lifestyle’, and yet something about the energy, pace and commonality of experiences connects these cities.

We don’t set too much store by the ‘rating’ of these cities, but it was interesting to see just how the city standard is set by Paris. There are several other cities in this book that claim the reputation by association: Budapest, as the Paris of Eastern Europe; Beirut, as the Paris of the Middle East; Buenos Aires, as the Paris of the South; and Melbourne, as the Paris of the southern hemisphere!

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Cities: Past, Present + Future

When you look at a city, it's like reading the hopes, aspirations and pride of everyone who built it. – HUGH NEWELL JACOBSEN

The Cities Book is a celebration. Of the physical form, in stone, glass, metal and wood, that is taken by these remarkable spiritual, cultural, political and technological bastions. Of the people whose energy spills out into the city, transforming itself into music, art and culture. Of the myriad sights, smells, sounds and other temptations awaiting travellers at the end of a plane, train or boat journey. By celebrating the majesty of cities on every continent we are pausing to marvel at the contribution they have made to the collective richness of humankind over more than six millennia.

Hence it made sense to us to begin this book with a look at the evolution of the city – the roots of cities in the first civilisations, the characteristics that we associate with the great cities of today, and the possible directions that they will take in the future.

Like so many other things, cities come to us as a gift from the ancients. Although capable of great foresight,

our urban ancestors could not possibly have predicted the way in which cities were to change the world we live in. According to the UN, the urban populace is increasing by 60 million people per year, about three times the increase in the rural population. To get a sense of the impact that cities have made, try picturing the world without them. Imagine fashion without Milan, theatre without London's West End, hip-hop without New York, classical music without Vienna, or technology without Tokyo.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan summed it up when he said: 'We have entered the urban millennium. At their best, cities are engines of growth and incubators of civilization. They are crossroads of ideas, places of great intellectual ferment and innovation...cities can also be places of exploitation, disease, violent crime, unemployment, and extreme poverty...we must do more to make our cities safe and livable places for all.'

Past

The story of how cities evolved is the story of civilisation. The link is encoded in the words themselves: 'civilisation' comes from the Latin *civitas*, meaning 'city'. We can catch a glimpse of the past in the preserved walls of castles, palaces and places of worship that have survived, albeit haphazardly, for centuries, and which influence the colour and flavour of our present-day cities. Cuzco in Peru is the perfect example. The city's strongest walls remain those constructed by the Inca who, unfathomably, erected enormous stone monoliths carved by hand and laid the blocks so precisely, without mortar, that it is impossible to slide paper between them. Following the Spanish conquest, the ancient Inca stones were used to build palaces and cathedrals, but the stones were so mighty that many could not be brought down and so continue to make up the streets and foundations of newer buildings to this day.

Paradoxically, with the advent of the first sedentary settlements, where people flocked together to settle in large groups instead of roaming the countryside as small bands of hunter-gatherers, came the advent of inter-city travel. Initially people travelled (as they still do) for trade and business, war, or religious pilgrimages, but eventually cities gave birth to the leisured classes who could travel for curiosity and pleasure. Even in ancient times there were hoteliers who ran a roaring trade for prototypal backpackers and travel writers and historians who made their livings from the fantastical tales of their wanderings.

Sumerian Cities

Divine Nature gave the fields, human art built the cities.

– MARCUS TERENCE VARRO

Current archaeological records indicate that the oldest cities are those found scattered along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia, modern Iraq.

Five thousand years ago merchants travelling upriver from Egypt would have entered the great Sumerian capital of Uruk by boat, sailing swiftly past the fertile shores lined with irrigation ditches that had been dug centuries before. These ditches, filled with water from the Euphrates River, had allowed the Sumerians to begin farming the land, producing surpluses of food that were used to feed an army of construction workers, possibly slaves, to raise the first cities the world had ever seen. The most ancient of these was Uruk and with its construction the door was firmly closed on the prehistoric epoch.

The city of Uruk was famous for its giant defensive walls, luscious gardens and the sophistication of its ruling elite, chief among them the god-king Gilgamesh, who became the subject for the world's oldest epic, the *Song of Gilgamesh*, which is still in print today. Excavation of the vast site where the city once stood, an area covering 450 hectares, has yielded astonishing finds. In the 1900s a cuneiform tablet found at Uruk happened to contain what is regarded as the best and most accurate description of the legendary Tower of Babel, an architectural feat referred to in the Bible.

But the real fascination is with the form of the city itself. In 2003 Jorg Fassbinder, part of a German-led archaeological team conducting excavations at the site, said that in its heyday Uruk must have been 'like Venice in the desert'. The dig covered more than 100 hectares, uncovering extensive gardens as well as an extremely sophisticated network of canals by which the Sumerians swanned around their idyllic city in absolute luxury.

RIGHT INCA CITY WALLS IN CUZCO.

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RICHARD JANSON / GETTY IMAGES

It is incredible to think that after more than 5000 years the legacy of Sumerian culture could still remain potent. Not only did they invent the wheel and come up with the world's first written language (Sumerian cuneiform script, which emerged around 3500 BC), but they also dreamt up the sexagesimal number system, which we still use to measure time. Every time you count down the minutes to an event, you have the Sumerians to thank.

What we know of ancient Sumer has been deduced through careful analysis and interpretation of the discoveries made by archaeologists. These include stone tablets inscribed with ancient stories (the first ever recorded); gold necklaces inlaid with lapis lazuli that were once worn by Sumer's elite; weathered fragments of beautiful vases depicting the conquest and subjugation of rival cities; and the broken outlines of once-feared cities that stretched for kilometres. Interpreting these finds with a little imagination only whets our appetite and makes us want to learn more about these strange worlds that have been lost in time.

Rome – Antiquity's Great Melting Pot

A great city, whose image dwells in the memory of man, is the type of some great idea. Rome represents conquest; Faith hovers over the towers of Jerusalem; and Athens embodies the pre-eminent quality of the antique world. Art.
– BENJAMIN DISRAELI

Sicilian writer Vincenzo Salerno said that despite everything that came after it, the blueprint for Western civilisation was the society of ancient Rome. The Romans gave us our alphabet (minus *u* and *w*), and many of the words we still use are derived from ancient Latin. They gave us the 12-month lunar calendar; the rudiments of classical architecture; the pope; straight

roads; a system of government; literature; public-ablution facilities; and endless subject matter for Shakespearian plays and even movies, such as *Gladiator* and *I, Claudius*. The Romans came, saw and conquered, and left enough behind that they would never be forgotten. And at the heart of the mighty empire was the imperial capital, a monolith of power carved in brilliant marble, home of the Senate and generations of megalomaniac emperors. Ancient Rome's former pagan glory is still visible if you take a stroll around the modern city, notably the remains of the Roman Forum, the Pantheon and the Colosseum.

Quite clearly, the Romans were a pretty remarkable bunch. But they were not the first people to become civilised, and nor did they develop in a vacuum. They were great assimilators, subsuming the skills, knowledge, literary conventions and even deities from neighbouring or past civilisations – a process hastened through conquest. From afar Rome admired in particular the Greek and Egyptian civilisations, centred on the capitals of Athens and Alexandria, which were already melting pots of ideas, racial groups and culture.

Alexandria the Great

It was in Alexandria, during the six hundred years beginning around 300 BC, that human beings, in an important sense, began the intellectual adventure. – CARL SAGAN

In 332 BC Alexander the Great thrashed the Persians and then conquered Egypt for the Greeks. The following year, after being crowned pharaoh, he ordered the construction of a fortified port which he named, in a moment of egotism, Alexandria. The city was to replace Memphis as the capital of ancient Egypt and, had Alexander not died of fever during the conquest of Babylon, would have become the capital of his enormous empire. As it happened, the empire

was carved up by Alexander's generals following his death and Ptolemy Soter took over as pharaoh and king of Alexandria.

During antiquity the Egyptian capital was famous for its wonderful papyrus and had a reputation for producing great medicines, perfume, jewellery and gold work. But most of all, the city was, and still is, legendary for the Pharos Lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and for its library, established under Ptolemy III. It is alleged that he composed a letter 'to all sovereigns on earth, requesting them to send him works by every kind of author, including poets and prose-writers, rhetoricians and sophists, doctors and soothsayers, historians and all the others too'. Such was his zealotry in collecting knowledge that he gave orders for any books on board ships calling at Alexandria to be copied, and only the copies were returned to the owners. As a secure port city, an industrial and manufacturing base, and a hub of knowledge, Alexandria had a celebrated liberal system of governance that championed diversity.

Less than 500 years after Ptolemy Soter had ascended the throne, Alexandria was reduced to smouldering rubble, destroyed through a combination of Caesar's aggression, petty-minded Christian rebels, earthquake and flood. The coastal Egyptian city we know today as Alexandria bears almost no trace of its amazing history. But through the advanced system of trade and communications that existed throughout antiquity, at least some of the knowledge contained in the library (such as details of the Archimedes screw, a pump that Archimedes invented while staying at the Mouseion, the city university), was not completely lost. Then as now, the great powers adopted and adapted the successful tricks and strategies of their contemporaries and in so doing ensured that the legacies of civilisations dating back countless millennia would be recorded.

Lost Cities – Atlantis to Great Zimbabwe

Towered cities please us then,

And the busy hum of men. – JOHN MILTON

For thousands of years fabled lost cities have had a vicelike grip on our imagination. Even such a wise philosopher as Plato would get excited thinking about how these advanced civilisations could just be mysteriously wiped out. His fascination with lost cities has trickled down hundreds of generations and given us the most tantalising and well-known mysterious lost city of all, Atlantis.

The legend of the lost city of Atlantis has captivated scholarly and public imagination since it was first recorded over two millennia ago. The source of the great legend stems from an account written by Plato (427–347 BC) in *Critias* and *Timaeus*. Plato's account was originally derived from Solon (640–560 BC), the great lawmaker of Athens. It is alleged that Solon was told of the disappearance of a vast and worldly island civilisation by Egyptian priests while he was visiting the Nile delta. This story was told to Plato by Critias (a poet, philosopher and controversial political figure), via his great-grandfather, who had learned the story with Solon. In *Timaeus*, Plato quotes Critias' account of the legend:

Now in this island of Atlantis there was a great and wonderful empire which had ruled over the whole island and several others, and over parts of the continent... But, there occurred violent earthquakes and floods, and in a single day and night of misfortune...the island of Atlantis...disappeared in the depths of the sea.

Right now there are still people out there trying to find the site of this ancient Utopia. Based on the scant detail in Plato's account, it is highly unlikely we could identify Atlantis even if it were to be discovered. But there has

been no shortage of possible candidates. Over the past few years a spate of potential Atlantises have been found in waters off India, Cuba and Japan.

In May 2001 underwater archaeologists at India's National Institute of Ocean Technology detected signs of an ancient submerged settlement in the Gulf of Cambay, off Gujarat. Acoustic-imaging analysis identified a 9km-long stretch of what had once been a river now lying 40m beneath the waves. Evidence retrieved from the site, including pottery, beads, broken sculpture, wood and human teeth, has been carbon dated, and a conservative estimate of the age of the site puts it at around 7500 BC. It is not clear whether the Cambay site represents a city or a smaller type of settlement. If it is a city, then the belief that the Sumerians built the first city would be proved wrong, and the whole theory of the origin and spread of ancient civilisations would need to be revised.

But wait, it gets better. In December 2001 another lost city was discovered, this time off the west coast of Cuba in the Yucatán Channel by scientists innocently engaged in sonar imaging for a Canadian company that was hoping to discover sunken ships laden with Spanish treasure. The fact that some of the buildings alleged to be part of the city appear to be shaped like pyramids got dozens of internet Atlantean hopefuls extremely fired up.

Although the jury is still out on whether this Cuban discovery is a lost city or just an anomaly that showed up on the radar, there is no doubt that a strange megalithic structure discovered in Japanese waters off the island of Yonaguni is genuinely man-made. The huge stone structure, which is over 100m long, was discovered by a diver in 1985. By itself the megalith isn't enough to signify the existence of a whole civilisation or even a city, but the estimated age of the structure, put minimally at 6000 years, represents another spanner in the works for those attempting to piece together the chronology of ancient human civilisation.

Each new archaeological find is a puzzle, and as much likely to inspire fear and prejudice as it is joy. Nowhere is this tenet illustrated more plainly than at the site of one of Africa's great lost cities, Great Zimbabwe. The first rumours of a magnificent lost city began circulating around the Portuguese colony of Mozambique during the 16th century. However, the spectacular ruins, with their massive curved walls, were not discovered by Europeans until nearly the end of the 19th century, when a young German explorer named Carl Mauch was directed to the site by a German trader who told him of some large ruins 'that could never have been built by blacks'.

It was almost another 20 years before a full exploration of the site was conducted by J Theodore Bent, an amateur archaeologist at best, bankrolled by British imperialist Cecil Rhodes. Despite unearthing masses of evidence that pointed to the indigenous origins of Great Zimbabwe, Bent concluded that the impressive curved-walled enclosures, which stretched over 40.5 hectares and were over 9.1m high, were the work either of Phoenicians or Egyptians who had travelled down from North Africa.

The inability of conquering civilisations to appreciate the achievements of those whom they have conquered has added significantly to the numbers of lost cities and ruined sites on all continents save Antarctica. The ruins of the World Heritage-listed site at Machu Picchu, picturesquely perched among the clouds high in the mountains of Peru, were once the spiritual capital of the Incan population that was decimated by the Spanish conquistadors, and are now an enigma. With the Inca gone and their knowledge lost, the ruins they left behind can never be interpreted with any certainty. But perhaps that only adds to the allure of the lost city. And the dim, irrational thought that perhaps, upon spending time wandering the ruins with the ghosts of our spiritual ancestors, it is possible to catch a glimmer of understanding in these sacred places.

Present

In the days of the European Grand Tour of the 19th century, it was fashionable for young aristocrats to complete their education by travelling to the great cities of the Continent to study their history and art. These 'tourists' are

the origin of our modern word. But travel was still time-consuming, difficult and expensive and therefore only really available to the privileged classes. Today, modern transport means that we can travel between cities in hours, not days. The world is becoming smaller while correspondingly people's interests are becoming broader, thanks to our greater access to the world through the media. Recent travel trends show that short-break city trips are one of the most popular kinds of travel, and that the main motivators are education and exploring other cultures, escaping the stresses of everyday life for a while, and a sense of adventure. Travellers claim that travel has had a considerable impact on their lives, helping define a social conscience and positively impacting personal goals and values. Today, the most difficult part of city travel is deciding which city to visit next.

Plan for Living

The chief function of the city is to convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into social creativity.

– LEWIS MUMFORD

The quality of life survey of the world's leading cities has become a regular feature of magazines such as *The Economist* and *Monocle*. For their mobile, business-savvy readers, a city's 'livability' is not just a matter of tax rates but embraces more subjective metrics: the amount of green space, the quality of schools, trains, bike paths and restaurants. Looking at a decade of such surveys and it's obvious that the top 10 is dominated by Northern European cities such as Copenhagen and New World centres in Australia and Canada. In particular, over more than three decades, the idyllic Canadian city of Vancouver has earned accolades through the introduction of a simple yet revolutionary approach to city planning and design.

In 1972 Vancouver's planning office took a bold step often feared by public servants scared of opening a

Pandora's box. They decided to look beyond the computer models, livability indicators and programme plans they had created and ask the public what they thought would make the city most livable. The more they tried to answer the question 'what is livability?', the more they realised they didn't have the answer. So they decided to phone a friend – millions of friends.

The city's public discourse about livability eventually led to a plan that recognised the city as an organic entity in itself. A discussion paper on Vancouver prepared by the Vancouver-based International Centre for Sustainable Cities stated:

The brain and nervous system of a livable city refers to participatory processes by which a city develops visions and plans, monitors the implementation of its plans and adjusts to changing circumstances. The heart is the common values and public space of a city that define its essential identity. The neighborhoods, industrial clusters, downtown, parks and other hubs form the organs of a city. Similar to the circulatory system and neural networks that weave connections

MICHAEL WHEATLEY / GETTY IMAGES



RIGHT CANOEING IN ENGLISH BAY, VANCOUVER.



SHALINEGAN / GETTY IMAGES

within a living organism, transportation routes, infrastructure, waste disposal, communication lines, water flows, and green space connect these nodes.

The essence of livability was found to be about quality of life, which is tied to the ability of citizens to access food; clean air; affordable housing; infra-structure (transport, communication, water and sanitation); meaningful employment; and green parks and spaces, and is also determined by the access that its residents have to participate in decision-making to meet their needs. These are criteria that favour mid-sized cities in countries with low population densities.

The *Economist* survey, published annually, ranks living conditions in 149 cities around the world by looking at stability, health care, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. The most recent survey placed Melbourne in the top spot, followed by Vienna and Vancouver. A further two Canadian cities (Montréal and Toronto) rank highly. Alongside Canada, Australia has some of the most livable places in the world, with Perth, Adelaide and Sydney doing well.

Elsewhere in the Asian region, cities in Japan, New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan all offer a good standard of living, and it is only a humid climate that brings scores down slightly.

Higher crime rates and a greater threat of terror put US cities below those of Canada, the most livable coming in around 25th place. Africa and the Middle East fare the worst of any region. Instability, the threat of terror and many cultural restrictions bring the ratings down, although strong anticrime measures in many Arab states are a stabilising factor, and in Israel the negatives are offset by a generally high level of development that makes Tel Aviv generally the best destination surveyed in the region.

LEFT CHIC CYCLISTS IN COPENHAGEN.

Rapt in Wander

We all become great explorers during our first few days in a new city, or a new love affair. – MIGNON MCCLAUGHLIN

Cities are places to wander, without a map, relishing the freedom that comes of being lost in a strange new world. Whether you're taking a leisurely stroll along the wide, cobblestone pathways of Antigua or letting a doe-eyed dog lead you aimlessly round the busy streets of Bangkok, exploring on foot or bicycle can easily be the highlight of any trip around a city.

The best thing about walking is that you have control. Whenever you come across something interesting you can stop and check it out, take your time and really savour the experience. Often the most ancient cities are the most rewarding ones to walk through. Perhaps it's because they were built for walking, in a time before cars were invented and carriages and horses were reserved for a small elite. Small cities also lend themselves to walking, as it is easy to learn your way around and to get a feel for their human scale. The slow pace of walking allows us to meditate and absorb the ambiance of a place, particularly in holy cities.

Passing along the decorated walls of the streets of Varanasi in India, winding through the hustle and bustle, can be a dreamlike experience. The myriad temples and sumptuous buildings of the place nicknamed 'the eternal city' may help you to understand the Hindu belief that anyone who dies and is cremated in the city automatically ends the cycle of death and reincarnation and ascends immediately to nirvana. Lost in thought, wandering slowly, meandering like the Ganges as it flows through the centre of the city, you might feel as if your sins have been washed away and your mind made clear. In Mecca, a city where you are required to walk, the sense of renewal and rejuvenation comes from the river

of humanity you will find yourself caught up in in the haj pilgrimage. Every year well over two million Muslims perform the sacred pilgrimage, forming a human mass that has to be seen to be comprehended. The focal point of Mecca is the Kaaba, the ‘House of God’, believed by Muslims to have been built by Abraham (peace be upon him) and his son Ishmael (peace be upon him), and which is covered in a large black- and gold-embroidered cloth. The pilgrims who have made the journey to Islam’s holiest city wait patiently to circle the Kaaba seven times before they try to touch or kiss its cornerstone, the Black Stone, which is believed to be a meteorite. The process can take several hours simply due to the unbelievable numbers of pilgrims. This is one walk you won’t forget in a hurry.

Tasty Travel

To be tempted and indulged by the city’s most brilliant chefs. It’s the dream of every one of us in love with food.

– GAEL GREENE

Food is the foundation of city and human life and a trip to any city would be much the worse for not savouring the flavours favoured by the locals. The quality of a city’s restaurants can reveal much about its inhabitants – the importance of their traditions and their openness to new ideas.

Cities around the world, and many in this book, would all claim to be top or near the top of the epicure food chain. New York, Paris, London, Toronto, Melbourne, Montréal would certainly stake a fierce claim, as would San Francisco. Some cities have nice weather; others have nice beaches, but San Francisco has both (most of the time) and great food to boot. Whether you’re sampling the city’s best seafood with the leather-clad crowd in the Castro, chewing on dim sum (yum cha) in

one of the world’s biggest Chinatowns, going Mexican in the Mission District or dining sophisto in California’s oldest restaurant, Tadih Grill, this is one city that demands you eat, and eat well.

But of course sampling a city’s cuisine isn’t always about eating the very best. The locals in any city have their own peculiar favourites, often in marked contrast to all the grand fare served up by gastronomic wizards in the finest restaurants at the fashionable end of town. In Chongqing, a searingly spicy hot pot of meaty slivers and noodles has a cult following among the locals, while the *porteños* of Buenos Aires prefer snacking on *empanadas* (turnovers) and *lomitos* (steak sandwiches). Sometimes it’s all about discovering the local secrets, trying something a little different that you wouldn’t find at home.

When you’re in Minsk and need something to help keep your strength up against the Belarusian wind, make sure you gobble down a couple of fish in jelly. They’re a lot tastier than you might think.

In Lahore it pays to explore the full range of Pakistani delicacies and there is no better place to achieve this goal than at the conveniently dubbed ‘Gawalmandi food street’. The whole street is cordoned off to traffic, and from where you sit you can order whatever appeals from any of the stalls. Balti and tandoori dishes are most popular, but the more adventurous can tuck into *karai kaleji* (chicken livers), *gurda* (kidneys), *kapureh* (testicles) and *magaz* or *bheja* (brains).

In Celebration of Diversity

This is the most happening place in the city, and it happens to be gay. I don’t think it’s a coincidence. – PAUL COLOMBO

There’s something about Sydney’s Mardi Gras and Rio’s Carnaval that makes it hard to picture them taking place

in a tiny, sleepy country village with a population of 50 where everyone knows your name and if you go back far enough the inhabitants are all blood related. One of the great opportunities cities offer new residents is the chance for people to be themselves. Sharing a living space with millions of others is often regarded as a profoundly liberating experience. Anonymity allows for freedom and the chance to become the person you want to be.

Cities have a long history of attracting people who are seeking a fresh start or need to outrun the demons of prejudice and intolerance more common in villages and rural areas. During medieval times throughout Europe, peasants, not to mention thieves and vagabonds, would escape the attentions of despotic landlords by fleeing to the cities, hence the old expression ‘city air is free air’. In 19th-century England, following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, slave ships bound for the Caribbean continued to dock in port cities such as Liverpool. Occasionally slaves would be helped to escape and would hide among the throng of the busy city before eventually being integrated into society. Cities are also centres of migration, from rural areas and from abroad. The relative peace and stability that is enjoyed by people of different races, sexual orientation, cultural backgrounds and political views, who live together side by side in thousands of cities worldwide, is a wonderful advertisement for urbanisation.

The residents of Tbilisi in Georgia take pride in their city’s reputation for multiculturalism. It is home to more than 100 ethnic groups, including Georgians, Russians, Armenians, Azeris, Ossetians, Abkhazians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Jews, Estonians, Germans and Kurds. On the other side of the world in Puerto Vallarta (Mexico), locals celebrate the city’s rich cultural diversity by eating out at the famous mix of restaurants. Meanwhile, in the ‘gayborhoods’ of San Francisco,

Sydney, Paris, New York and London, predominantly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender trendsetters continue to make a vital contribution to their city’s economy by attracting curious tourists keen to hang out in a cool part of town. The Chueca barrio in Madrid is one of the city’s best-known gay areas, with a totally chilled atmosphere where gay and straight people intermingle, and same-sex kissing and hand-holding is commonplace.

Endless Nights

Cities, like cats, will reveal themselves at night.

– RUPERT BROOKE

No matter how many natural, cultural or culinary charms a city may have, it is often judged by the quality of its nightlife. And having explored the delights of your chosen city by day, it’s only natural that you should want to check out what happens between dusk and dawn, just to make sure you haven’t missed anything.

Often the best nights out are those that are unplanned. Similarly, some of the best nightlife can be found in the cities where you’d least expect to find it.

Take Belgrade for example. Along the Danube you will find dozens of *splavovi* (floating raft clubs) blaring out funky, folksy Balkan beats as they slide out of view. In contrast, you expect New York to deliver – and it does. Whenever, wherever, whatever, however you want it, the world’s most extravagant city has it all, 24/7. To maintain its pole position, the city has even spawned the New York Nightlife Association (NYNA), an orderly gang of owners, managers and staff from many of the city’s top establishments, who in their own words believe New York City is the nightlife capital of the world and want to keep it that way.

Future

Having lured us out of the wild and into homes that for many are packed with creature comforts, fridges, hot water, electricity, heating, ADSL connections, telephones and the rest, what more does the city have up its sleeve? One thing is certain and that is that there will be change.

The challenges for the future faced by cities mainly revolve around sustainability and managing growing populations. Among the UN's Millennium Development Goals is a target to 'significantly improve' the lives of at least 100 million people living in urban slums by the year 2020. At the same time, cities must also plan to be less environmentally damaging. Economic factors and the desire for unparalleled luxury are also motivators for city planners of the future. Technology moves ahead in leaps and bounds, and ultimately the only thing that can limit a city is the imaginations of the people who are building it. And today, perhaps more than at any time in history, ordinary people are nearer to turning their own city daydreams into something real.

New Real Estate

In a real estate man's eye, the most expensive part of the city is where he has a house to sell. – WILL ROGERS

In an essay entitled 'The Rise of the Ephemeral City' published in Metropolis Magazine, Joel Kotkin has suggested that we are witnessing the emergence of a new urban environment populated by 'non-families' and the nomadic rich whose needs are attended to by a subservient service class. He calls it the ephemeral city and suggests that it prospers merely through its ability to provide an 'alternative' – and one suspects extravagantly decadent – lifestyle for the wealthy few who can afford it. Even though Kotkin wasn't referring to the city of Dubai, he might well have been describing the playground for the nouveau riche.

Often the difference between the possible and the impossible is someone brave enough to have a vision. In the coastal city of Dubai, part of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum is such a man. Following Dubai's decision to diversify its oil-based economy, the sheikh ordered the construction of a number of unprecedented projects to help transform the city. The Burj Khalifa topped out as the world's

tallest tower (829m) in 2010, and is the centrepiece of a mixed-use complex known as Downtown Dubai. Other mammoth landmarks here include the Dubai Mall (the world's largest, including an aquarium and ice-skating rink) and the Dubai Fountain (also the world's largest). In total, the complex covers two square kilometres and is expected to cost around US\$20 billion.

Not all of Dubai's real-estate projects have been so successful, however. Although construction began on three spectacular palm-shaped islands off the Dubai coast in the mid-2000s, the economic recession of 2008 brought development to a halt, with no date set to resume construction.

Less glamorous is the new district of Pudong, now part of Shanghai. Once a flat expanse of boggy farmland located across the river from the city, it was only in the 1990s that construction began here. One-and-a-half times larger than central Shanghai, in the space of just two decades Pudong's skyscrapers have become China's signature skyline. The speed at which Shanghai achieved its grandiose vision of the future – a car-based megacity of glass-and-steel office blocks and sprawling identikit residential towers – is very impressive, though its lack of a human scale poses questions about its sustainability.

RIGHT DUBAI'S MANMADE ISLANDS HAVE BEEN BESET BY PROBLEMS.

GUIDO MENKELBACH / AMSTERDAM / GETTY IMAGES



Raising the Dream

The city is a fact in nature, like a cave, a run of mackerel or an ant-heap. But it is also a conscious work of art, and it holds within its communal framework many simpler and more personal forms of art. Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind. – LEWIS MUMFORD

Some city planners have a more environmentally sustainable vision than the property developers. In the Arizona desert, north of Phoenix, a revolutionary city has been under construction since 1970. Its founder, Italian architect Paolo Soleri, hopes Arcosanti will inspire a change in the prevailing culture. Arcosanti is said to resemble the modernist urban Utopian designs of Le Corbusier and Sant'Elia. However, the principles of design are based on Soleri's concept of 'arcology' (a fusion of architecture and ecology). His vision is for an organic sustainable city that fits into the ecological system rather than imposing itself upon it: greenhouses beneath residential buildings generate solar energy for heating, as well as producing food. Soleri insists that when people come to Arcosanti they will be inspired and that when they leave they will begin to insist that genuinely sustainable principles start being applied to the development of their own cities.

Arcosanti is on too small a scale to provide the technical solutions for the challenges that face the world's major urban centres. However, Soleri fulfils the role of a visionary in that he believes that cities must become confluent with the example set by nature if they are not to be destroyed by the same forces that give them life. He writes:

In nature, as an organism evolves it increases in complexity... Similarly a city should function as a living system... The city is the necessary instrument for the evolution of humankind.

Citizen City

I have an affection for a great city. I feel safe in the neighbourhood of man, and enjoy the sweet security of the streets. – HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

While old-school realists take a deep breath and get on with it, dreamers continue to dream. Anyone who has played Sim City knows the allure of being able to construct your own metropolis. Deciding whether the citizens have a greater need for a new university or a high-security prison can be fun, but for an increasing number of ordinary folk the fun is turning into reality.

Constructing cities started off as the sole preserve of warrior god-kings, then it passed into the hands of elected politicians, and now it seems anyone with enough passion and perseverance can give it a go, though finding financial backing has proven difficult.

For Florida-based Freedom Ship International (FSI), getting its city off the ground and into the ocean has been far from smooth sailing. FSI has plans to construct a 1371m-long, 228m-wide, 106m-tall, ocean-going vessel known as the *Freedom Ship*. The structure is billed as 'an international, cosmopolitan, full-spectrum, residential, commercial, and resort city that circles the globe once every three years'. If the project ever finds serious investors, the mobile modern city with its 518,160-sq-metre floor-space will have 18,000 living units; 3000 commercial units; 10,000 hotel units; a casino; world-class medical facilities; schools; an international trade centre; and more than 40 hectares of outdoor park, recreation and community space for residents to enjoy when they are not flying to the mainland in the ship's aircraft.

So far Norman Nixon, FSI's CEO, has reported the project has been inundated with offers of finance from bogus investors. But he hasn't given up hope of finding

someone real who can turn the dream into reality. If only he could team up with Dubai's Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, perhaps it would be full steam ahead for the world's first mobile floating city.

Clearly if you're looking to set up your own city it would be helpful to have loads of money. Then you could just buy a ready-made city like the one in Wiltshire sold off by Britain's Ministry of Defence. With an asking price of only UK£5 million, 'Burlington', with its 97 hectares, 100 miles of roads, private railway station and even its own pub, the Rose and Crown, seemed like a bargain. The catch is that the Cold War relic, built during the 1950s to house the government, British Royal family and 4000 civil servants in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack, is located underground on the site of a disused and rather dangerous stone mine. However, as an added incentive to prospective buyers, the city came fully furnished with government-issue ashtrays, lavatory brushes, tea sets and office chairs unpacked from 1959.

Paying Your Part

Man's course begins in a garden, but it ends in a city.

– ALEXANDER MACLAREN

As the evidence about the impact of climate change mounts there is a growing awareness among city-dwellers that something needs to be done.

The British Council estimates that over 75% of energy consumption is directly related to cities and that in many cases cities are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. At the same time, it says that cities have a great potential to 'instigate innovative solutions to the impacts of climate change'.

Feeling guilty? Try this then. The UK's ClimateCare Trust offers organisations and individuals a way to live

guilt-free in the city by simultaneously selling carbon offsets while funding and managing projects that help to reduce further emissions elsewhere. How does it work? Simple. Using the trust's Car & Home Calculator, you can work out the amount of carbon dioxide emissions (which cause the negative effects referred to as climate change) for which you are responsible by entering how much electricity, petrol, gas and oil you use per annum. The calculator then works out how much carbon dioxide was ejected into the atmosphere as a result of the energy consumption you've admitted to, revealing a total in pounds that the environmentally conscious are then morally obliged to pay in the form of carbon offsets.

According to the Car & Home Calculator, an average one-car household uses about 9.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide, which would cost around £60 to offset. That £60 would in turn go towards funding worthy conservation projects such as disseminating efficient cooking stoves in Honduras or providing finance for renewable-energy cooking stoves in schools in India.

But the Climate Care Trust doesn't just work out your household and car emissions. To ensure guilt-free travel between cities, they have developed the Air Travel calculator that tells you how much carbon dioxide you are responsible for if you take a flight from, say, Boston to Delhi. Such a journey would emit 1.72 tonnes of carbon dioxide and would cost you £13 to offset. It may sound like a scam and critics ask why the organisation isn't run as a charity. The trust responds with this message: 'We do not believe that it should be left to the charitable sector to clear up pollution.' Whether or not you advocate the approach taken by the trust, the message that we have a responsibility to behave in a sustainable fashion to preserve the built heritage for future generations is one that is worth taking seriously.

Some examples of cities successfully finding ways to reduce emissions include: Berlin, where nearly all new buildings must include solar panels in their design; Toronto, where cold water pumped from the depths of Lake Ontario is circulated around the city as part of the Deep Lake Water Cooling Project to keep buildings cool, rather than using conventional air conditioners; and Chicago, where the government is trying to find new ways to encourage the use of rooftop gardens in order to keep buildings cool.

Fly Me to the Moon

In Rome you long for the country; in the country – oh inconstant! – you praise the distant city to the stars. – HORACE

Sometimes the only way is up. And when it comes to building the cities of the future, Professor Ouyang Ziyuan, author and member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, couldn't agree more. He reckons that within our lifetime work will already be seriously underway to construct a lunar city, and it won't be made out of cheese.

Ouyang outlined his vision for a moon city in *Academicians Envisioning the 21st Century*, a book published in 2000 to encourage children to get interested in science. He predicted that by 2005 astronauts would have begun turning the moon into a 'natural space station' that would have pressurised modules, energy-generating facilities and groovy roving vehicles. By 2010 the completed and fully equipped station would allow human explorers to stay up there for weeks and in 2015, a small-scale but permanent moon base would appear. Humans living in the base would then start to build experimental factories and farms, gradually developing a fully fledged moon city before realising the dream of a self-sufficient 'earth village' by 2020.

Ouyang's predictions may have been a bit premature, as, in spite of claims by conspiracy theorists that NASA has already established colonies on the moon and Mars, there doesn't appear to have been much work in establishing a lunar base as yet. But those who can predict the future often seem to have a problem with dates – Nostradamus springs to mind – so perhaps we should wait a bit longer before giving the Chinese scholar's ideas the brush-off. After all, with China now investing billions on its space programme, maybe it won't be too long before Ouyang is proved correct. And we should hope so, because he also predicts that the moon city will feature a network of mining operations using solar power that will be able to generate enough surplus energy for it to be transmitted back to earth as a long-term, stable energy supply. Now that's got to be better than burning all that coal.

No two cities are the same. Some have great food, others great nightlife, some stunning architecture, some are rich with history and others have an eye on the future. Cities are individuals. Like a human being, a city is a mass of genes, chosen at random by forces beyond our control, fused together in a secret furnace, acted on by nature, reared through infinite probabilities of nurture before finally growing up and trying to make its own way in the world. Only by taking an interest in someone, spending time with them, observing their mannerisms, conversing with them, engaging with their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, learning their idiosyncrasies and funny habits, listening to them sing in the shower and snore at night, only by walking the path with them and imagining what it would be like if you were wearing their shoes, can you begin to realise how special someone is. And the city is the same, except maybe a little bit bigger.

The Cities