

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

**1000**  
**ULTIMATE**  
**SIGHTS**

FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING TRAVEL AUTHORITY

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# FOREWORD

I want to see that.

There are so many places in the world where I've ended up as a result of one tantalising glimpse in a movie, one photographic poster taster, one intriguing museum display, one seductive line in a novel. That one tiny temptation is all it took; actually getting there has, on occasion, taken decades, but eventually I'm standing there thinking: 'well there it is, I'm finally seeing it'.

Of course, some sights are so well known, so overexposed in so many movies, that the reality can never match up to the expectation. We've 'seen' it so many times before we actually see it for real that the world's Eiffel Towers, Sydney Opera Houses, Grand Canyons or Taj Mahals all inevitably disappoint. Although my wife and I did, quite accidentally, contrive to arrive for the first time at the Taj on our first wedding anniversary, a perfect intersection of romantic location and romantic date.

The big sights are always worth a big effort, but it's the small ones, the unusual ones which often live in the memory. Encountering a sight without preconceptions and anticipation can make all the difference. It was a pleasant surprise encountering the bust of Frank Zappa in Lithuania, and Graceland is so overwhelmingly the rock-excess focus of Memphis that it was a thrill to discover some down-to-earth rock history at Sun Studios. Sometimes actually getting there brings home

just how interesting or important the sight is: it wasn't until I stood at Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall and gazed across to darkest Scotland that it came home to me that this was the ultimate frontier for the Roman Empire. This was where civilisation ended – one more step and you were in among the wild men.

Wildlife sightings are always a special thrill because they simply are not a sure thing – they might turn up or you might just be unlucky. But when it works ... well, seeing an Alaskan brown bear snatch a salmon out of a raging stream and guzzle it down in a couple of teeth-gnashing gulps is a sight you never forget.

Big egos are just as intriguing as big bears. Hearst Castle is a reminder of the US media magnate William Randolph Hearst (said to have inspired the movie *Citizen Kane*), but it's hard to imagine a bigger ego than North Korean despot Kim Il Sung, immortalised by his gigantic Mansudae Monument statue in Pyongyang. Other sights need no reminders to stay with you; the story of sheer injustice brought home by the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam brings a lump to my throat every time I encounter another connection to that young Nazi victim.

I may have already seen a wide selection of these 1000 sights, but there are plenty more I'm determined to get to one day. The Nazca Lines in Peru, Skellig Michael in Ireland, the market at Kashgar in China, even Chornobyl in the Ukraine. They're all on my list.

**Tony Wheeler**  
**Lonely Planet founder**



The amazing eroded 'fairy chimneys' of Cappadocia, Turkey, seen from the air (see p217)

# ULTIMATE ITINERARIES

## **BEST OF BRITISH**

‘Stately home’ is an understatement for the expansive Castle Howard, which leaves visitors agog at its theatrical grandeur. **p83**



Beautiful Oxford is a haven for literature enthusiasts, not least as it’s the home of the original Alice in Wonderland. **p134**

Fairy folklore abounds at the enchanted Llyn y Fan Fach in the enchanting Black Mountains of Wales. **p276**

The fascinating Bletchley Park Museum houses the Enigma machines and other technology that helped Britain win the war. **p166**

Sporting enthusiasts come to worship at the birthplace of golf amongst ruins and great views at St Andrews, Scotland. **p294**

## **ONLY IN AMERICA**

If you suspect the Truth is Out There, then Roswell will confirm it for you with extraterrestrials making their presence felt all over town. **p68**

Mix with Frank Sinatra and the Mob at the memorabilia-crammed Mulberry Street Bar in New York. **p348**

Book well in advance if you want to get a seat at the pinnacle of American sport, the Super Bowl. **p294**

The rainbow hues of the Grand Prismatic Spring in Yellowstone National Park make it one of the world’s most stunning geothermal springs. **p181**



The Washington National Cathedral is a tribute to America’s inclusiveness, open to all faiths and incorporating local motifs in its European design. **p87**

## WACKY EUROPE

Pack your raygun: riding on Prague's metro trains into Flora Station feels like a bizarre trip into 1970s Soviet sci-fi. **p162**

In Brussels' annual Waiters' Race contestants must carry a bottle and three glasses 2.5km without spilling a drop. **p249**

A series of 16th-century decorative fountains, Bern's Kindlifresserbrunnen depict folkloric and historical characters, including a baby-eating ogre! **p89**



The Jomsvikings, the world's largest viking re-enactment society, makes rampaging warriors out of humble citizens across Europe. **p311**

In typical Dalí style, the Teatre-Museu Dalí, in the artist's home town of Figueres, Spain, is a museum that's full of surreal surprises. **p60**

## WONDERS OF ASIA

The glittering gold- and gemstone-swathed stupa of Shwedagon Paya, in Burma, houses eight of the Buddha's hairs. **p201**



Divers flock to investigate the mystery of the 'Japanese Atlantis' in Yonaguni-jima: ancient underwater ruins or just nature waxing geometric? **p67**

As well as its fearsome reptilian namesake, the Komodo National Park in Indonesia boasts an extraordinary network of iridescent coral reefs. **p159**

The classic Chinese landscaping of the gardens at Beijing's Summer Palace offer a tranquil retreat from the modern metropolis. **p250**

It may not be the prettiest or the sweetest smelling, but the Rafflesia plant of Indonesia and Malaysia is the world's biggest flower. **p125**

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY

Montana was a great stomping ground for dinosaurs, and young enthusiasts now follow in their footsteps with the Montana Dinosaur Trail. **p196**

Harry was not the only beloved Potter: familiar, storybook-perfect details still abound in Beatrix Potter's Lake District. **p134**

The monsters come out for New York's Halloween Parade, the biggest game of dress-ups you've ever seen. **p142**

Everyone loves a fireworks display, and on Bonfire Night (Guy Fawkes Night) they happen all over England. **p263**



An ice-cream from the Gelateria di Piazza in the picturesque Tuscan village of San Gimignano is a memorable treat for kids and adults alike. **p175**

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURES

The Romans left their enduring mark at Libya's Leptis Magna, where well-preserved temples, forums and baths evoke ancient times. **p23**

From its origins around 100BC, through a thriving Mayan civilisation and its collapse, Palanque, Mexico, has many stories to tell. **p57**



Hidden in a forest in India are the 12,000-year-old Bhimbetka cave paintings, depicting an array of animals and humans engaged in diverse activities. **p178**

Unlikely as it seems, there are thousands of marine creatures in Canada's Rocky Mountains – or at least there were 515 million years ago, at Burgess Shale. **p195**

A once-lost monument to greatness, Egypt's Abu Simbel temple ensures Ramses II will always loom large in history. **p74**

## STUNNING NATURE

Set among forests and caves, Croatia's Plitvice Lakes – a network of 16 lakes linked by waterfalls – are as stunning as they sound. **p277**



The reward at the end of Iceland's greatest hike is the Landmannalaugar pools: a warm bath for tired feet in spectacular surrounds. **p183**

Bird-watchers flock to South Africa's Kruger National Park for the thrill of spotting the large and impressive Big Six bird species. **p115**

The Great Blue Hole in Belize is an ocean sinkhole 145m deep; its star attractions are huge marine stalactites. **p145**

Standing next to the venerable General Sherman sequoia in California's Sequoia National Park – the world's largest living thing – is an awesome and humbling experience. **p193**

## DARK TOURISM

Eeriness is a once-thriving town that is now completely abandoned: Prypyat in Ukraine is in Chornobyl's 'Alienation Zone'. **p278**

The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg is a place of sober reflection on 52 years of government-sanctioned racial oppression. **p232**

Visitors walk among ancient ghosts in Rome's seemingly endless underground catacombs, which originally held the remains of early Christians. **p307**

One of history's most famous natural disasters – the eruption of Mt Vesuvius that buried Pompeii – left shockingly precise traces of the lives it extinguished. **p151**



Shameful memories linger in Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, where captured people waited to be shipped to the New World as slaves. **p37**

## ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES

In the Château de Versailles, a palace that drips extravagance from every gold-leaf-coated surface, one can see why the revolutionaries revolted. **p74**

In perfect harmony with the harbour it sits on, the Sydney Opera House is as iconic as they come. **p171**



The world's greatest monument to love, India's Taj Mahal is also one of its most graceful buildings. **p307**

The Chrysler Building is not only the literal pinnacle of the art deco aesthetic, it's also classic New York. **p313**

Barcelona wouldn't quite be Barcelona without Antoni Gaudí and his fabulous, inspired, still-unfinished Sagrada Família church. **p335**

## REMOTE SITUATIONS

The spectacular, wind-buffed cliffs of Vestmanna, in the Faroe Islands, are home to a surprising array of bird species. **p255**



Lonely, isolated and nearly devoid of human life, the former asbestos-mining town of Wittenoom in Western Australia is an almost-forgotten outpost. **p59**

Paradise Harbour on the Antarctic Peninsula doesn't have much going on, unless you count waddling penguins, huffing whales and icebergs calving from glaciers. **p136**

Secreted away in remote Kamchatka, the Valley of Geysers – the second biggest geyser field in the world – vents the earth's ire in near-obscurity. **p148**

A treasure such as Caroline Atoll, an extraordinary lagoon reef in the Republic of Kiribati, is lucky to be so remote – it remains largely unspoiled. **p158**

# BEST UNDERGROUND SIGHTS

*Delve below the surface to see the awesome art, communist caves and top-notch train lines that lie beneath...*

## 101 PATHET LAO CAVES, LAOS

Caves make brilliant wartime hideouts. In 1964, the communist movement Pathet Lao moved its headquarters to a series of caves near Vieng Xai; secreted away along a narrow and precipitous valley, it was virtually unassailable. Six of these caves can now be visited: inside are former meeting rooms, government offices, markets, temples, printing presses, hospitals, army barracks and more. Wooden walls, as well as natural formations, divide the caverns into various rooms, still decorated with images of Lenin and Che Guevara, and incongruous facades and gardens are built onto the front of the caves.

Pick-up trucks run from Sam Neua, the main town of Houaphanh Province, to Vieng Xai; journey time is about 50 minutes.

## 46 102 PARIS CATACOMBS, FRANCE

In 1785, to solve the problem of Paris' overflowing cemeteries, bones of the buried were exhumed and relocated to the tunnels of disused

## 103 CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK, NEW MEXICO, USA

From above, it's a land of cacti and shrub. But beneath lies a geological Swiss cheese. There are more than 117 caves lurking under the badlands of New Mexico, and they put on quite a subterranean show: sulphuric acid has gnawed the limestone into theatrical auditoria, shimmering stalactites, delicate draperies and soda straws. There are cave sights for all: big ones for claustrophobes, tunnel crawls for the brave. Slaughter Canyon Cave has the most festive feel – a desert hike from the main labyrinth, it's home to the 'Christmas Tree Room', where the rock is bedecked in crystals that look like a glitter of fairylights.

Greyhound buses serve the caverns. Self-guided and ranger-guided tours are available; the latter must be booked ahead. See [www.nps.gov/cave](http://www.nps.gov/cave).

quarries, 20m beneath the city streets. This continued for around 100 years, and 300km of tunnels are lined with skulls, tibias and femurs, almost artistically arranged. In the 2km open to the curious (or the ghoulish), it's estimated that six million individuals are represented. During WWII the tunnels were used as a headquarters by the French

Resistance. Today they make a macabre attraction; urban spelunkers are often caught illegally roaming the unstable closed-off section.

The catacombs are accessed from avenue Colonel Henri Rol-Tanguy, near Denfert-Rochereau station; only 200 people are allowed in at one time. See [www.catacombes-de-paris.fr](http://www.catacombes-de-paris.fr).

# BEST SIGHTS FROM ABOVE

*Get up high for an angel's-eye view of these breathtakers.*

## 601 THE WORLD ARCHIPELAGO, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Only in Dubai. This vast engineering project sought to replicate the globe as a series of artificial islands. The thinking was that the islands would be bought for use as resorts and playgrounds for the rich. The lowering clouds of the global financial crisis put the brakes on construction, and the project has lost momentum, although reports that the islands were sinking back into the sea are apparently unfounded. From the air it's an impressive sight, albeit a wacky one. It's as if a Bond villain has turned his megalomania to more benign schemes.

The World ('A Vision Made Real') has a glossy website ([www.theworld.ae](http://www.theworld.ae)) where you can check out pictures and learn more about the scheme.

## 602 FORBIDDEN CITY, BEIJING, CHINA

Beijing's Forbidden City was home to the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties, and closed to the outside world for 500 years. The emperors rarely left the confines of

their pleasure dome – everything they desired was there within its walls. The scale is quite something to get your head around. There are over 800 buildings and close to 1000 rooms. The courtyard overlooked by the Gate of Supreme Harmony is so massive that it could hold an imperial audience of up to 100,000 people. It takes at least a day to see the complex, but to get a sense of the extent of it, it's best seen from above.

Nearby Jingshan Park has a series of five hills topped with pavilions. From the highest you can get a good view of the Forbidden City.

## 603 DEAN'S BLUE HOLE, BAHAMAS

Blue holes seem made to be viewed from the air. They're sinkholes formed by erosion, and their depth gives them a darkness that stands out in the paler blue of the surrounding water. From above they look like a brilliant eye open in the sea. Dean's Blue Hole is the world's deepest sea-filled sinkhole, a vast vertical cave plunging 203m deep. As well as being spectacular from above, Dean's is a stunner from within. It has one of the world's

largest underwater cave rooms, and with unusually clear and calm seas the visibility is great.

Dean's Blue Hole is on Long Island, about 5km west of Clarence Town.

## 604 PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK, AUSTRALIA

Until the release of aerial photos in the early 1980s, this remote wilderness in Western Australia was all but unknown to the outside world. Traditionally used by the Kija Aborigines during the wet season, the rugged web of gullies, cliffs, gorges, domes and ridges holds many Aboriginal art and burial sites within its extraordinary landforms. Over a period of 20 million years, the sandstone mounds of the park's Bungle Bungle Range were eroded into beehive shapes. Today, these surreal cones with eye-catching orange and grey stripes speckle this immense natural labyrinth in the Australian outback.

June to August is cool but busy; May is less crowded but hot (30°C-plus days). The visitor centre is open from 8am to noon and 1pm to 4pm.

# STRANGEST OPTICAL ILLUSIONS & MIRAGES

*Can you believe your eyes? When it comes to these head-twisters, chances are you can't.*

## 511 FATA MORGANA, ANTARCTICA

Way up north (or way down south) the clear and pure air brings distant objects into sharp focus. Depth perception becomes impossible and the world takes on a strangely two-dimensional aspect. On maps and charts the early explorers meticulously laid down islands, headlands and mountain ranges that were never seen again. An amusing example of the phenomenon involves a Swedish explorer who was completing a description in his notebook of a craggy headland with two unusual symmetrical valley glaciers; he was actually looking at a walrus! Fata Morganas are caused by reflections off water, ice and snow, and when combined with temperature inversions, create the illusion of solid, well-defined features where there are none.

.....  
Touring the Antarctic? Look for a company that's a member of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators ([www.iaato.org](http://www.iaato.org)); it means they're into responsible tourism.  
.....

## 512 ST ELMO'S FIRE, EDINBURGH CASTLE, SCOTLAND

Herman Melville called it 'God's burning finger'. Caesar saw it on the javelins of his troops the night before battle. This spectacular effect (caused by the discharge of electricity from storm clouds to the earth) has always conjured thoughts of omens and divine intervention. It's often seen

on the masts of ships during a storm; sailors would welcome the sight, as it usually comes at the point where a storm is quietening down. St Elmo was a protector of sailors, and it was seen as his calling card. The effect is frequently seen on the heights of Edinburgh's Castle Rock.

.....  
You can't miss the Castle, loiring over the town from its volcanic perch. The Royal Mile will take you there.  
.....

## 513 POLAR LIGHTS, ALTA, NORWAY

A space spectacular, the polar lights are a dazzling Arctic and Antarctic display, their colourful sheets of light transforming the endless winter nights into natural lava-lamps. The polar lights – aka aurora borealis and aurora australis – form when solar particles, thrown out by explosions on the sun, are drawn by the earth's magnetic field towards the north and south poles, colliding with atmospheric gases to emit photons, or light particles. What results are brilliant sheets of green, red, white, purple or blue light.

.....  
With a latitude of N 69°, the Norwegian town of Alta is renowned as an excellent base to see the lights.  
.....

PER-ANDRÉ HOFFMANN / PHOTO LIBRARY



The polar lights – words simply fail to do them justice