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LONGITUDE

-180°/-120°

IN WHICH WE ENCOUNTER DISAPPEARING
ISLANDS, BOATS HEWN FROM PUMPKINS
AND A ONE-EYED TROLL LURKING
BENEATH A BRIDGE

LONGITUDE

-120°/-60°

IN WHICH WE ENCOUNTER MYSTERIOUS
MOVING ROCKS, A CAVE OF GIANT
CRYSTALS AND A MUSEUM AT THE
BOTTOM OF SEA

LONGITUDE

-60°/0°

IN WHICH WE ENCOUNTER AN ISLAND
TEEMING WITH SNAKES, A SHIMMERING
PINK LAKE AND THE WORLD'S BIGGEST
MUD-BRICK STRUCTURE

LONGITUDE

0°/60°

IN WHICH WE ENCOUNTER A GROVE OF
SINGING TREES, A TOWN BEING SUBSUMED
BY THE DESERT, AND A HILL OF
100,000 CROSSES

LONGITUDE

60°/120°

IN WHICH WE ENCOUNTER RATS
WORSHIPPED AS GODS, A GOLF COURSE
LAID ON AN AIRPORT RUNWAY AND A
SECRET GNOME HIDEOUT

LONGITUDE

120°/180°

IN WHICH WE ENCOUNTER COFFINS
CLINGING TO A CLIFFSIDE, A COW UP
A TREE, AND A CAVE ILLUMINATED BY
GLOWWORMS

OF RE THE KN



*Move over, Grand Canyon.
Au revoir, Eiffel Tower.
See you, Sydney Opera House.
Angkor what?*



If you think you know about the world's most amazing sights, it's time to look again. This book celebrates under-the-radar places, from the mysterious and the mesmerising to the downright bizarre. In these pages are rainbow eucalyptus trees, a stomach-churning cocktail, ghost towns, a bridge made of trees, an underwater museum, a town called Hell and a band of Caribbean swimming pigs.

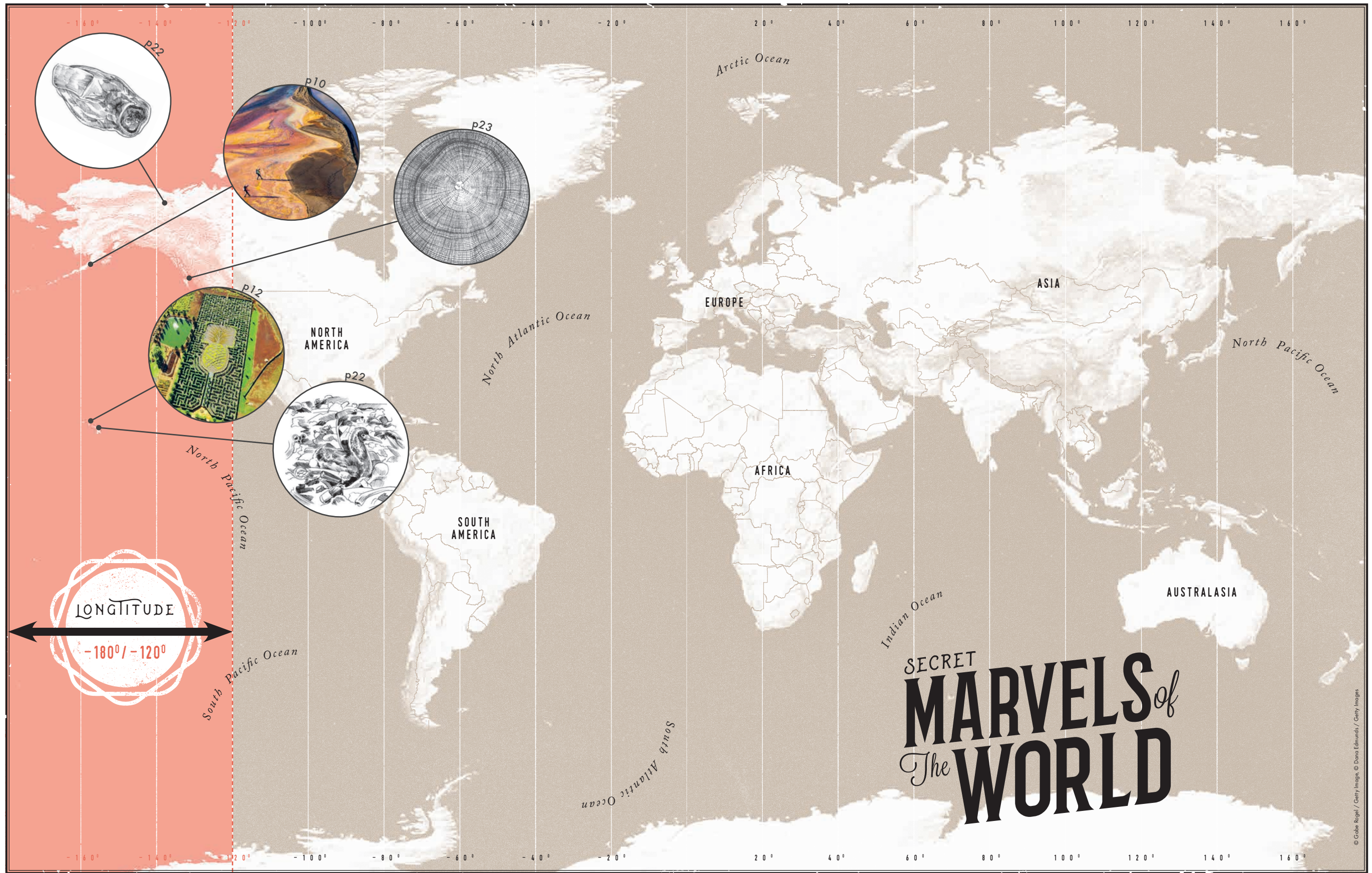
Some of these marvels are entirely man-made – Nebraska's eye-popping replica of Stonehenge made entirely from vintage cars (page 47), for example, or Indonesia's so-called 'Chicken Church' (page 249) – while others are a curious accident of human endeavour, such as Ohio's eerie abandoned ghost ship (page 55). Some needed no intervention from us whatsoever – take the Mexican cave filled with gargantuan, glistening crystals (page 49) or the disappearing island of Fonuafo'ou (page 9), which prove that this planet produces astounding phenomena without a hint of fanfare, while most of us are busy elsewhere, snapping selfies in front of their better-known cousins.

Because these marvels don't pay much attention to country borders, nor have we: the places in this book are arranged not by continent or country, but loosely by their line of longitude. It's a hat-tip to the way our planet resists attempts to impose order upon it, with the most surprising and wonderful of results.

In a time when technology has given us a better understanding than ever before of the hows and whys of life, these places show us we don't know the half of it. As the human race strives above all towards profitability and efficiency, there is a delight to be found in those marvels made by human hands not to chase success or increase the bottom line, but for the simple joy of it. It's a life lesson we could all learn from: taking time out from hectic schedules to appreciate the mysteries and wonders our planet has to offer.

But first, of course, we need to know where to look for them. Fortunately, wherever you are in the world, there will be a sight to enthrall you nearby. These pages are filled with a few hundred ideas of where to start. Happy marvelling!





'Along gravelled walkways, irregular steps and cinder-strewn paths, this stumble in the dark enlightens you to famous and infamous interments'



NEW YORK, USA. 41.0970 / -73.8616

Sleepy Hollow Cemetery

The rolling hills between the Hudson and Pocantico Rivers hum with history and hobgoblins. Lantern in hand, heart in mouth, you may confront these spirits of New York and New Amsterdam past on a walking tour of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, terminating on the site where fictional Ichabod Crane met his demise at the hands of the legendary Headless Horseman.

Along gravelled walkways, irregular stone steps and cinder-strewn paths, this stumble in the dark (the 10pm to midnight Lantern Walk) enlightens you to some famous and infamous interments: the Rockefeller family's two-storey, Vermont-granite, Greek-themed mausoleum stands in stark contrast to Scottish steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's austere Celtic cross. Carnegie's philanthropic legacy is repaid with flowers, coins and notes left on his headstone; the Rockefellers' site remains bare.

Rockefeller's Standard Oil rival-cum-partner John Dustin

Archbold's resting place is neo-modern – he covered all bets with a dash of Celtic, Russian, Greek and even Persian (peacock) iconography which vie for the attention of varied gods, ensuring a measure of sanctity, somewhere. Just up the road, the 'queen of mean', hotelier Leona Helmsley, interred with husband Harry, snarls behind stained glass – but without the dog to whom she bequeathed \$12 million.

Pop icons of the past perambulate – the Ramones were briefly buried on a rolling hilltop here while recording a video for the film adaptation of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (the band are truly dead today); vampire Barnabas Collins of television's *Dark Shadows* conspired in a crypt which in real life served as a holding vault for stiff when New York winters froze the ground solid (Mrs William Rockefeller waited two years here while the family's condo-crypt was being built.)

Wild creatures stalk the 90 acres of nooks and crannies:

coyotes and foxes scamper in the shadows of this hardly disturbed wilderness, and screech owls linger in overhanging Linden branches. Twisted elms and tulip trees reach out for the unsuspecting hiker.

The tour concludes where the new Sleepy Hollow Cemetery – founded by Washington Irving himself – is separated from the old Dutch Burying Ground by a ribbon of horse-carriage path. Irving, a veteran of the War of 1812, gets a place of honour adorned with an American flag. Don't tarry in Tarrytown, however, because just beyond a copse of pines, in the graveyard of the Dutch Reformed Church, lies a certain decapitated Hessian mercenary, still prepared to ride out into the moonlit night.

By Brian Kluepfel

👉 The Cemetery is 2.5km north of Metro North's Tarrytown Station on the Hudson Line. The walk from there takes 30 minutes. Tours take place in November (www.sleepyhollowcemetery.org).

© Dennis K. Johnson / Getty Images



'From the air, the sweeping landscape gives the appearance of rolling bed sheets pitching across the world's most picturesque bed'



● MARANHÃO, BRAZIL. -2.4859 / -43.1284

Parque Nacional dos Lençóis Maranhenses

At first glance, it seems a mirage. A translucent, postcard-perfect lagoon – blue as blueberries, clear as crystal – surrounded by towering sand dunes as far as the eye can see. But then the splashdown reveals this otherworldly landscape is far from fantasy. As I dip below the surface of what some might say is the most refreshing pool of water imaginable, the cool and calming sensation is a travel moment – those minutes of elusive

wonderment we all seek as we traverse the globe – and it feels like everything but an optical illusion. It's a glorious baptism.

Brazil's Parque Nacional dos Lençóis Maranhenses, a 1500 sq km expanse of cinematic sandscapes, is a natural treasure. Located in the far northeastern state of Maranhão, it is the kind of place travel dreams are made of, a transcendental protected park of blanketing white sand dunes only broken up

by the inviting cerulean lagoons that pepper the sandy hills between March and September (there is almost no vegetation whatsoever). From the air, the sweeping landscape gives the appearance of rolling bed sheets (*lençóis* in Portuguese), pitching across the world's most picturesque bed. From the ground, a no-filters-required desertcape unravels into the horizon in every direction.

Lençóis Maranhenses is

reached from the nearby town of Barreirinhas, a five-hour drive from the Unesco World Heritage-listed city of São Luís, from where open-sided 4WD bus tours routinely hit some of the park's biggest lagoons, Lagoa Azul (Blue Lagoon) and Lagoa Bonita (Beautiful Lagoon). Needless to say, this is *not* the best way to experience the park. I have opted instead for a private tour with Buna, a gentle beast of a character who owns and

operates Rancho da Buna in the charming sand village of Atins, a 90-minute boat ride along the Rio Preguiças from Barreirinhas, the park's most picturesque village to bed down in.

Everywhere you look, the landscape is alarmingly similar, yet Buna knows the park backwards and forwards (a trusted guide is a must for navigating within the park). Thus it is Buna who has carted me off to a series of secluded lagoons,

far, far away from the tour buses and tourists on day trips from Barreirinhas, and afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself in this aquatic Eden once mistaken for a mirage. When I re-surface, I'm lost, surrounded by nothing and no one. Paradise found. *By Kevin Raub*

🚗 **Cisne Branco runs buses from São Luís to Barreirinhas, the gateway to the park (www.cisnebrancoturismo.com.br).**

SENEGAL & GAMBIA, 13.6917 / -14.8731

SENEGAMBIAN STONE CIRCLES

Death is confusing and mysterious, and so are these stone circles and burial mounds found across Senegal and The Gambia. Eerie and beautiful, sitting quietly and unobtrusively amid the region's grasslands, the monuments consist of monolithic, laterite pillars arranged in a circle around a burial plot, with one or more frontal stones to the east. Although there are a lot of them – about 17,000 spread across 33,000 sq km – and although they were made continuously for about 2,000 years, surprisingly little is known about the circles' origins.

Archaeologists aren't sure when the first circles were made or who made them. They don't know what the arrangements mean, how the burial practices functioned in the culture, or how they fit in with Islam, which arrived in the region during the height of stone circle production. The burial style is

a total conundrum: bones and skulls were arranged within the circles in elaborate patterns – a quasi-fence of bones set vertically in the earth, leg bones laid out in a design, a layer of jawbones covered with upside-down pots – and no one has any idea why. Oh, and locals say that stones occasionally light up at night. No big deal.

Maybe because of these mysteries (or maybe because it's a burial ground, where larger mysteries prevail), the fields of stones feel magical, as if they're a liminal place between worlds. And the sites are still living monuments: Gambians don't practice what we would call funerary or religious rituals there, but they visit – on their way to work, the market, home – to place a small stone or vegetable atop a monolith, take a moment to reflect, and make a wish.

👉 The Gambia's Wassu Stone Circles are the easiest to visit and have a museum on-site. Take a day trip from Janjanbureh, about 25km away; hotels can arrange tours.



© David Elze / Getty Images



SINTRA, PORTUGAL, 38.7961 / -9.3960

QUINTA DA REGALEIRA WELLS

The spiral staircases of these towers aren't just forbidding, they represent a journey from death to rebirth. Hints at dark alchemy are scattered around the Unesco-protected estate of Quinta da Regaleira – a flamboyant blend of Gothic, Moorish and Renaissance architectural styles – especially around its showy gardens. Beneath this lavish residence, commissioned by coffee tycoon António

Carvalho Monteiro, burrow two wells. But there's no water: these hidden tunnels were once used in secretive Masonic initiation rites. One has nine moss-rimmed levels, hinting at Dante's nine circles of Hell and Heaven, across its 27m height. The other has straight staircases, with steps numbered according to Masonic principles, descending to a huge Knights Templar cross.

👉 Quinta da Regaleira is open daily; it's located 700m west of central Sintra.

'As a great cloud of sulphurous steam drifts across us my eyes start to sting. The island belches and burps, hisses and spits, grumbles and roars'



NEW ZEALAND. -37.5226 / 177.1797

White Island

On the boat on the way to White Island we are issued with hard hats and gas masks.

'This is an active volcano and eruptions can occur at any time with little or no warning,' we're told. 'Stick to the paths. In some places the crust is very thin and you don't want to fall into scalding mud and boiling water.'

The biggest surprise is that we step from the boat directly into the volcanic crater, the sharp rock walls rising above us to the crater's rim: we're actually inside the volcano. We're surrounded by a desolate, otherworldly landscape of bald grey rock, with blooming vivid patches of yellow sulphur crystals but not a speck of vegetation. The crater lake – its water more corrosive than battery acid – is milky jade, the hot surface glimpsed through billows of steam. I follow the

guide step-for-step as we edge past piles of ash and cinder, stepping gingerly over acid-steeped streams and peering into pools of furiously boiling viscous grey mud. Sherbet-yellow fumaroles, like melted candles dripping down the neck of a wine bottle, spurt steaming gas. As a great cloud of sulphurous steam drifts across us, my eyes start to sting, and at the back of my tongue I taste the bitter tang of a struck match. The island belches and burps, hisses and spits, grumbles and roars. There's a sense of barely-contained menace; it's disquieting to be close enough to see, hear and smell the Earth's potential for destruction.

Moving away from the lake, we come to face to face with grim evidence of what happens when that pent-up energy blasts

out. Destroyed buildings, rusted machinery, corroded cogs and wheels are all that's left of a once busy sulphur mine. In 1914 a terrific explosion occurred, killing all ten miners. It's thought that the force of the eruption blasted the miners and their quarters over the 50-metre high crater into the sea. Only the camp cat, Peter the Great, survived.

Later, we hear grim tales of life as a sulphur miner on White Island, including that the miners had to clean their teeth three times a day to stop them going black. Back on the boat I surreptitiously check my teeth – all good – but my silver necklace is sooty black. *By Tracy Whitmey*

👉 White Island (Whakaari) is 50km offshore from Whakatane, and can only be visited with a registered tour operator.



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