

01 Night falls on the Thames and  
such iconic city sights as the London  
Eye and Houses of Parliament





01 A Buddhist monk sweeping the Red Chapel clean at the 16th-century Wat Xieng Thong complex in Luang Prabang

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# Abu Dhabi

// United Arab Emirates

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

VITAL STATISTICS

NAME: Abu Dhabi

DATE OF BIRTH: 1760; named by the first settlers, the Bani Yas Bedouin tribe, meaning 'father of the gazelle'

ADDRESS: United Arab Emirates (map 5, O11)

HEIGHT: 27m

SIZE: 972 sq km

POPULATION: 1.5 million

**ANATOMY**  
The emirate of Abu Dhabi is the largest of the seven emirates comprising the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The city itself occupies a main island linked by major bridges with the mainland. It is also linked by bridge to Yas and Saadiyat Islands, which are quickly transforming into leisure and entertainment zones. The former is home to Yas Marina Circuit, Yas Waterworld and the world's fastest rollercoaster at Ferarri World, while the latter is earmarked to become a highbrow cultural hub. Abu Dhabi's scenic Corniche is bookended by the Mina Port to the east and the Emirates Palace to the west. Private taxis (with air-conditioning) are the best way of getting around – it's almost always too hot to walk.

**PEOPLE**  
Only one quarter of the population of Abu Dhabi is actually made up of UAE nationals; the majority of

inhabitants are expatriates from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and from across the Arab world. Although Arabic is the official language here, English is widely spoken and understood. Islam is the official religion.

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

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

**STRENGTHS**

- Beachside promenade
- F1 racing venue
- Ferrari World
- Major UAE concert venue
- Yas Marina
- Diverse cuisines

- Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque
- Glamorous hotels and resorts
- Atmospheric souqs

**WEAKNESSES**

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

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

**STARRING ROLE IN...**

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

**IMPORT**

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

**EXPORT**

- Oil
- Pearls

**SEE** the gilded Emirates Palace and goggle in wonder at its gold vending machine.

**EAT** a shawarma from one of the many top-notch Lebanese restaurants in town.

**DRINK** a sugary, lurid mocktail on one of the terraces overlooking the Corniche.

**DO** rent a bike and cruise along the seafront Corniche.

**WATCH** any of the world-class musicians appearing at the annual F1 event concerts.

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

**AFTER DARK** dress up and head for one of the top hotels' glitzy bars and clubs.

URBAN TALE

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

- 01 The dramatic Etihad Towers complex
- 02 A woman walks through the forecourt of Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque
- 03 Yachts moored at the marina at the Intercontinental Hotel



BUENA VISTA IMAGES | GETTY IMAGES // CABLE DRINKS | SHOPK // JANE SWENERY | GETTY IMAGES



VITAL STATISTICS

NAME: Bogotá  
DATE OF BIRTH: Pre-Columbian; inhabited by one of the most advanced pre-Columbian Indian groups, the Muisca  
ADDRESS: Colombia (map 3, K10)  
HEIGHT: 2645m  
SIZE: 25 sq km  
POPULATION: 7.6 million

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

# Bogotá

// Colombia

ANATOMY

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

PEOPLE

Just over 70% of the population is composed of around 58% mestizos (of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage) and 14% mulattos (with one black and one white parent). There are also about 3% zambos (of African-Indian blood). Indians represent

just over 1% of the population. Spanish is the official language.

BEST TIME

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

A PERFECT DAY

Strolling around La Candelaria, Bogotá’s charming historic quarter, and stopping off for a *santafereño* (hot chocolate served with cheese and local bread) at Pastelería Florida, then exploring the Museo del Oro

(Gold Museum), before conducting a night crawl around the pubs, clubs and salsatecas of Zona Rosa or Parque 93.

STRENGTHS

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

WEAKNESSES

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

GOLD STAR

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

STARRING ROLE IN...

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

IMPORT

- *Telenovelas* (soap operas)
- African rhythms of the Caribbean
- Roman Catholicism
- Cuban salsa

EXPORT

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

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

EAT the Bogotano speciality *ajiaco* (soup made with chicken and potato) at Restaurante La Pola.

DRINK the excellent Colombian espresso at boutique coffeehouses like Amor Perfecto or Azahar Café.

DO visit the salt cathedral at Zipaquirá, one of only three cathedrals in the world to be carved from salt.

WATCH a play, opera or ballet at the recently renovated Teatro Colón in La Candelaria, the city’s loveliest, and most historic, theatre.

BUY emeralds at one of the many *joyerías* (jewellery shops) in the city centre.

AFTER DARK head to Andrés Carne de Res in Chia, one of the wildest nights out that you will ever have.

URBAN TALE

*The Palacio de Justicia (Palace of Justice) has had a tragic history. The first court building, erected in 1921, was burnt down by a mob during El Bogotazo in 1948. A modern building was then constructed on Plaza de Bolívar, but in 1985 it was taken by M-19 guerrillas and gutted by fire in a fierce 28-hour offensive by the army in an attempt to reclaim it. The ruin stood untouched for four years until authorities decided to construct a new building.*

01 Bogotá stretches out to the Eastern Hills

02 A performer in the opening parade of the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá

03 Cerro de Monserrate, topped by the white church of El Señor Caído

04 A gold mask from the ancient Calima culture on exhibit at the Museo del Oro







# Melbourne

// Australia

*Stylish, creative, coffee obsessed and stark-raving sports mad, Melbourne stands tall as the country's cultural and culinary capital.*

VITAL STATISTICS

NAME: Melbourne

DATE OF BIRTH: 1835; by Tasmanian entrepreneurs keen on a mainland base

ADDRESS: Australia (map 1, NN22)

HEIGHT: 35m

SIZE: 36 sq km (city), 9985 sq km (metro area)

POPULATION: 127,742 (city), 4.7 million (metro area)

**ANATOMY**  
Melbourne lines Port Phillip Bay and stretches into the plains to the west and east and out to the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. The city is divided by the muddy Yarra River, with the central business district on the north bank, set in a neat grid that suits its tram transport perfectly. To the north of the city centre, café-and-boutique filled hip Collingwood and Fitzroy vie for coolest-suburbs honours with St Kilda to the south of the Yarra with its palm-fringed promenade and stretch of sandy beach. Trams and trains are the best way to get around the city.

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

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

**A PERFECT DAY**  
Running a lap of the Botanic Gardens, then catching a tram to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for an AFL (Australian

01 Princes Bridge crosses the Yarra River to Flinders St Station and Federation Sq

02 Cricket under lights at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)

Football League) game, afterwards dining at the hottest new place in town before heading to a pub to watch the latest local band.

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

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

**GOLD STAR**  
For Birrarung Marr: take a tranquil stroll along the banks of the Yarra past sculptures and indigenous flora along this path that is a tribute to the Wurundjeri People.

- STARRING ROLE IN...
- *Malcolm* (1986)
  - *Death in Brunswick* (1991)
  - *The Castle* (1997)
  - *The Wog Boy* (2000)
  - *The Bank* (2001)
  - *Crackerjack* (2002)
  - *Harvie Krumpet* (2003)
  - *Three Dollars* (2005)
  - *Home Song Stories* (2007)
  - *My Year Without Sex* (2009)
  - *Animal Kingdom* (2010)

- IMPORT
- Paul Kelly
  - Great coffee
  - Cathy Freeman
  - Formula One Grand Prix

- EXPORT
- AFL
  - *Neighbours* TV series

- Kylie Minogue
- AC/DC
- Nick Cave
- Melbourne Cup
- The Australian Ballet
- Heidelberg School art movement
- Adam Elliot
- Lonely Planet
- Eric Bana
- Cate Blanchett
- Percy Grainger
- Liam and Chris Hemsworth
- Men at Work

**SEE** the patchwork design of Federation Sq: paved with pink sandstone from the Kimberley region and with buildings clad in a fractal-patterned skin.

**EAT** creative degustation at the hottest new place where you'll

have to queue since it's too popular to take bookings.

**DRINK** coffee – single-origin, pourover, filter, espresso, flat white, you name it.

**DO** a kayak tour along the Yarra past city landmarks.

**WATCH** a local band at the gritty iconic Tote Hotel, Collingwood.

**BUY** the hippest homewares and hottest fashion on Fitzroy's Gertrude St and Smith St, Collingwood.

**AFTER DARK** head down hidden laneways or shoot up to rooftop bars in the CBD (central business district).

URBAN TALE

On 17 December 1967, Australia's then prime minister, Harold Holt, popped out for a swim on Cheviot Beach not far from Melbourne and disappeared without a trace. Speculation was rife about what happened to the head of state, with theories ranging from suicide to defection to China via submarine. Holt's disappearance remains a part of Melbourne culture through the rhyming-slang expression 'to do a Harold Holt' (or bolt) and Glen Iris' ironically named Harold Holt Swimming Centre.





# Oxford

// England

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

### VITAL STATISTICS

NAME: Oxford  
NICKNAME: City of Dreaming Spires  
DATE OF BIRTH: 9th century, founded by Alfred the Great  
ADDRESS: England (map 4, G8)  
HEIGHT: 72m  
SIZE: 45 sq km  
POPULATION: 150,000

### ANATOMY

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

### PEOPLE

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

### BEST TIME

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

### A PERFECT DAY

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

### STRENGTHS

- Medieval architecture
- Libraries
- The Pitt Rivers Museum
- The Covered Market
- G&D's ice cream parlour on Little Clarendon St
- Bookshops
- Pubs
- Port Meadow
- River Cherwell
- Transport links to London by road or rail
- New bicycle-share scheme

### WEAKNESSES

- Accommodation costs
- Shortage of outstanding restaurants
- City centre traffic
- Bicycle theft

### GOLD STAR

For maintaining age-old architecture in a modern city.

### STARRING ROLE IN...

- *Shadowlands* (1993)
- Three *Harry Potter* movies (2001, 2002, 2005)
- *The Golden Compass* (2007)
- *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh
- *Inspector Morse* series by Colin Dexter
- *Zuleika Dobson* by Max Beerbohm
- *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman

### IMPORT

- Students from around the world
- Car manufacturers

### EXPORT

- British, Indian and Australian prime ministers
- American presidents
- Scientists including Tim Berners-Lee
- Authors including Oscar Wilde and Shelley
- Philosophers including Thomas Hobbes
- Artists including William Morris
- Explorers including Sir Walter Raleigh and TE Lawrence
- Rowers including Sir Matthew Pinsent
- 50 Nobel Prize winners
- Guitar bands, including Radiohead, Ride and Foals
- Books
- Minis (the car)

SEE fascinating ethnographic artefacts at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

EAT healthy organic food in the undercroft of St Mary's church on Radcliffe Sq at the Vault & Garden cafe.

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

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

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

BUY Oxford University Press books from Blackwell's bookshop.

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

### URBAN TALE

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

01 The graceful Radcliffe Camera and All Souls College

02 Magdalen College's vaulted ceilings are in the English Gothic style

03 Punts awaiting punters on the River Cherwell







## VITAL STATISTICS

**NAME:** Wellington  
**NICKNAME:** Windy Welly  
**DATE OF BIRTH:** 1840; when European settlers arrived to purchase land from the Māori inhabitants  
**ADDRESS:** New Zealand (map 1, RR22)  
**HEIGHT:** 127m  
**SIZE:** 290 sq km (city), 1388 sq km (metro area)  
**POPULATION:** 204,000 (city), 409,200 (metro area)

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

## ANATOMY

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

## PEOPLE

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

## BEST TIME

The southern hemisphere summer is a great time to visit, with Fringe NZ, the New Zealand International Sevens rugby and warm, stable weather. From June to August it gets cold and windy, but you can stay indoors for the New Zealand International Film Festival. In September book beds early – the World of WearableArt design festival consumes the city.

## A PERFECT DAY

Taking a stroll around the Botanic Gardens before riding the cable car down to town for a freshly brewed coffee, getting behind the scenes at Weta Workshops then chasing the perfect drop at one of the many craft beer bars.

## STRENGTHS

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

- View of the city from Mt Victoria
- Mountain biking at Makara Peak
- More cafes per capita than New York City
- Paddle boarding, sailing, and windsurfing (make the most of that wind)

## WEAKNESSES

- Houses are rarely insulated
- Wellington is on a fault line, no-one knows when it will quake
- Windy weather a blessing and a curse
- It's very hilly if you're not used to climbing

## GOLD STAR

For arts and culture on tap. From craft beer to arts and crafts, Wellington supports a host of independent creatives flying their home-grown flags with pride.

## STARRING ROLE IN...

- *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03)
- *King Kong* (2005)
- *The Hobbit* trilogy (2012-14)
- *Pete's Dragon* (2016)

## IMPORT

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

## EXPORT

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

**SEE** exhibits revealing New Zealand's history and experience an earthquake at the fabulous Te Papa museum.

**EAT** fresh fish and chips from The Chippery in Mt Vic or Thorndon.

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

**DO** take a ride in Wellington's red cable car up to the Botanic Gardens.

**WATCH** live music in Wellington's oldest venue that keeps on delivering the goods: Bodega.

**BUY** Kiwi fashion and cool gifts on Cuba St.

**AFTER DARK** take your pick of the bars and clubs on Courtenay Place and Cuba St.

## URBAN TALE

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

01 Wellington's cable car makes its way to the Botanic Gardens

02 Wellingtonians love their coffee and the cafe lifestyle

03 The City to Sea Bridge and public artwork connects Civic Sq to the waterfront

04 Sculptures outside the excellent Te Papa museum

# Wellington

// New Zealand