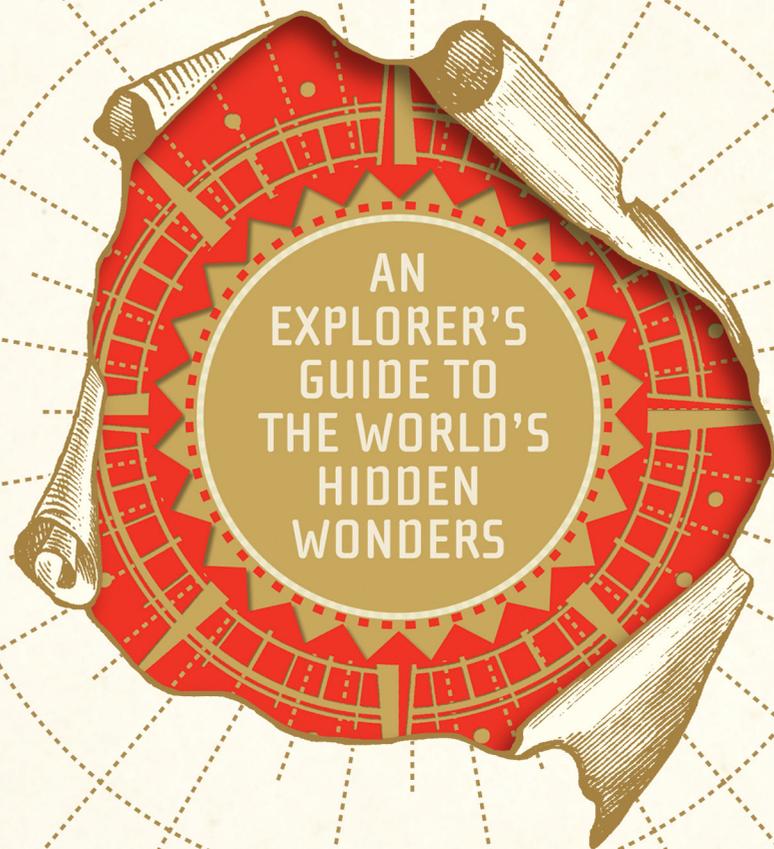


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"I thought I had seen most of the interesting bits of the world.
Atlas Obscura showed me that I was wrong. . . . A joy to read and to reread."

—Neil Gaiman

Atlas Obscura



JOSHUA FOER, DYLAN THURAS & ELLA MORTON

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ARGENTINA

EL ATENEO GRAND SPLENDID

BUENOS AIRES

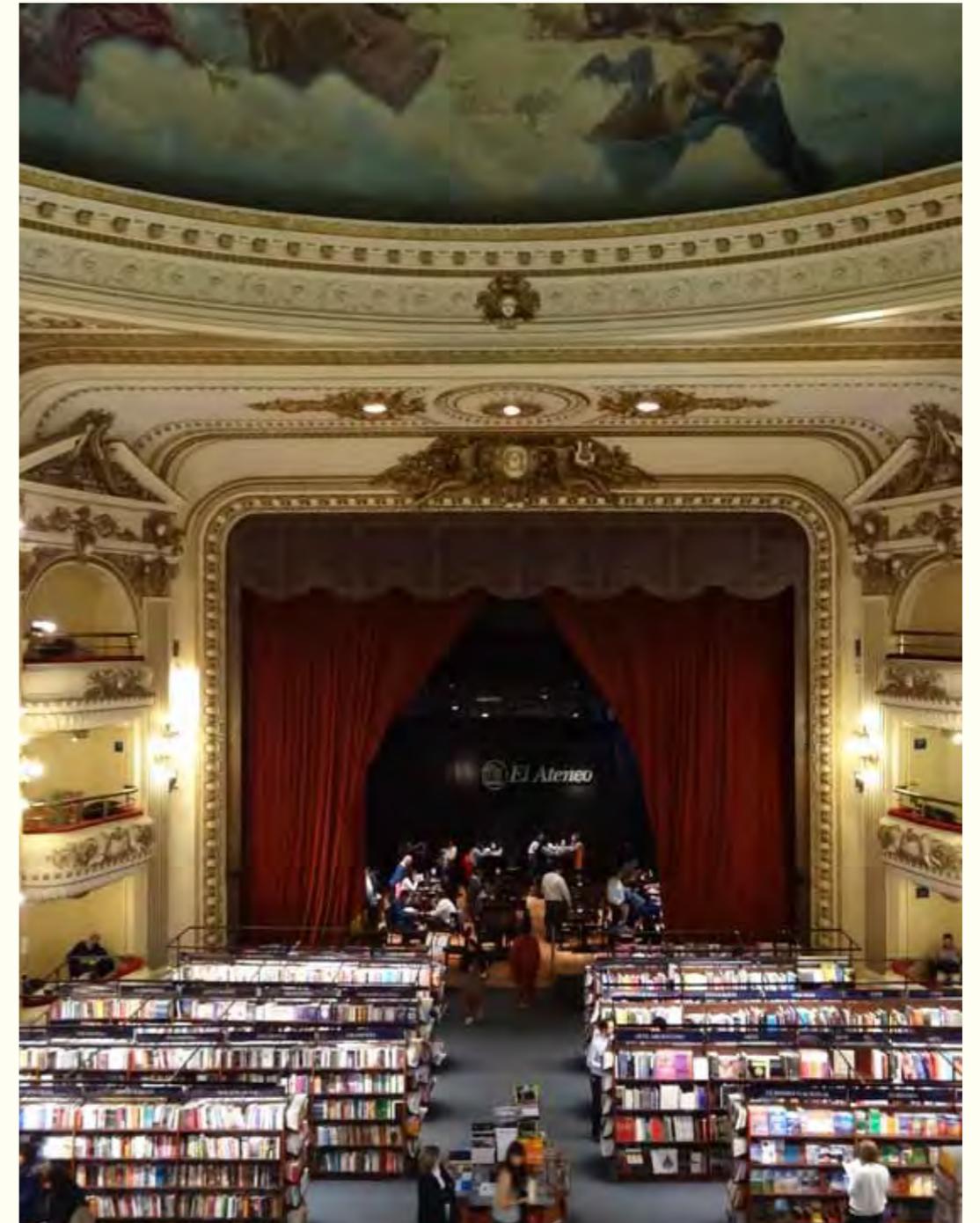
With frescoed ceilings, ornate theater boxes, elegant rounded balconies, detailed trimmings, and plush red stage curtains,

the El Ateneo Grand Splendid is hardly your average bookstore. Built in 1919, the majestic building began as a theater featuring tango legends, then became a cinema—the first in Buenos Aires to show film with sound. While the titles on offer tend to be more expensive than in other

city bookstores, the staggeringly opulent interior is reason enough to pay a visit.

Avenida Santa Fe 1860, Buenos Aires. Ride the train to the Callao stop and walk three blocks north to Avenida Santa Fe. 📍 -0.1491923 📞 -78.4628712

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POVEGLIA ISLAND

VENICE, VENETO

The first challenge to visiting Poveglia is finding someone to take you there. It won't be easy. Poveglia, an island just south of Venice, is strictly off-limits for both locals and tourists. Given the island's history, you'll understand why.

For hundreds of years, Poveglia was a dumping ground for the diseased, the dying, and the mentally ill. In the early 15th century, it functioned as a quarantine island. Those afflicted by one of the many Black Death plagues over the years were taken to the island along with disease-ridden corpses. The living shivered and vomited blood while the hundreds of dead were thrown into plague pits and burned. The remains of an estimated 160,000 people are mixed into the island's soil.

In 1922, a psychiatric hospital opened on the island. Legend holds that one of the doctors, a sadistic man fond of experimenting on



Plague Island and an octagonal fort.

his patients, threw himself off the bell tower after being haunted by the spirits of those who had died on the island. (In some versions of the story, he is thrown off the tower, presumably by a vengeful patient.)

The hospital building, which closed in 1968, is still on Poveglia, covered in scaffolding and colonized by trees. Rusting bed frames, rotting wood beams, and pieces of

the ceiling litter the floors. In the bushes surrounding the hospital are the rectangular metal grates that were once fastened to every window to keep patients trapped in their rooms.

Officially, Poveglia is off-limits to visitors. Unofficially, you'll be more likely to find a Venetian boat operator to take you if you're willing to offer a heap of Euros. 📞 45.38 1879 📍 12.33 1196

WOODEN BOOKS OF PADUA UNIVERSITY

SAN VITO DI CADORE, VENETO



Each book in this 56-volume collection tells the story of a particular tree—not in words or illustrations, but with parts of the tree itself.

The wooden books of Padua University date from the late 1700s and early 1800s. While most books are made from wood—pulped into paper—these are different: The back and front covers are made from the tree's wood, its spine made of the tree's bark.

Inside are samples of the tree's leaves, twigs, flowers, seeds, and roots. Each book is accompanied by a handwritten piece of parchment with a key explaining the contents.

41 Via Ferdinando Ossi, San Vito Di Cadore. 📞 45.25 📍 11.52

ALSO IN NORTHERN ITALY

Zoological Museum

Bologna · Beginning as the 16th-century collection of Ulisse Aldrovandi, who is regarded as the father of natural history, the collection of stuffed and jarred animals is in enjoyably shabby shape.

Campanile di Curon

Bolzano · A lonely bell tower emerges from the middle of this artificial lake—the only visible remains of a submerged small town.

Hidden Bomb Shelters

Milan · A vast network of air-raid tunnels lie beneath Lombardy's capital.

Il Gigante

Monterosso del Mare · The bomb-ravaged remains of a 46-foot statue of Neptune built in 1910 decorates the seaside edge of the elegant Villa Pastine.

Insane Asylum Museum

San Servolo · Known as the “Island of the Mad” for 250 years, the island of San Servolo was the official mental institution of Venice. In 2006, it reopened to the public as a museum.

UNDERGROUND TEMPLES OF DAMANHUR

BALDISSERO CANAVESE, PIEMONTE

From 1978 to 1992, members of the Damanhur commune dug into the mountain where they lived, tapping into what they believed were energy lines connecting the Earth to the cosmos. Their excavations were done in secret: having neglected to secure planning approval, they had to conceal their work from authorities. But the world would eventually find out.

Led by philosopher, writer, and painter Oberto Airaudi, the “eco-society” of Damanhur began in 1975 with about 24 members. Billing itself as a “laboratory for the future of humanity,” Damanhur is based on neopagan and New Age beliefs with emphasis on creative expression, meditation, and spiritual healing. Residents adopt animal and plant names (such as “Sparrow Pinecone”) and live in “nucleo-communities” of 20 people in the foothills of the Alps, 30 miles (50 km) north of Turin.

Some former members have railed against Damanhur's sunny-spirited collective, describing it as a cult. It was an ex-Damanhurian who tipped off police about the unauthorized underground construction. When three officers and a public prosecutor arrived to conduct an early-morning raid, they were astonished. Beneath a humble farmhouse, behind a secret door, was a collection of temples spanning five levels.

Damanhur citizens had spent a decade and a half working around the clock in shifts to excavate 8,500 cubic meters of earth and rock. They decorated each hall and hallway in a different theme, with murals, stained glass windows, mirrors, and mosaics. The New Age, '70s-style artwork depicts everything from the history of the universe to a forest of endangered

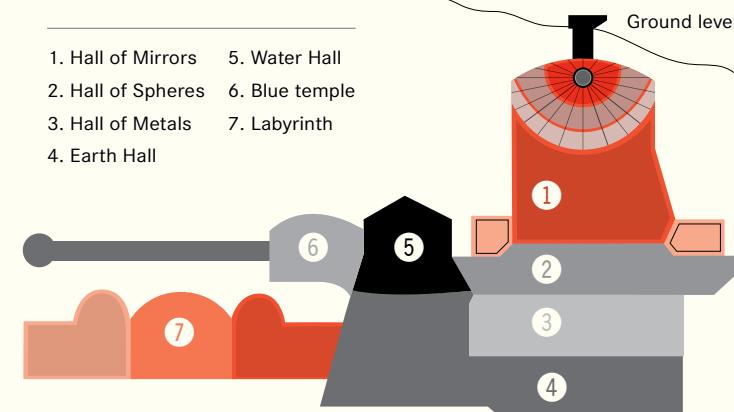


Minimalism is frowned upon among Damanhur's interior decorators. Above, The Hall of Earth

animals to the International Space Station. The perimeter of one of the circular rooms is cluttered with sculptures, due to the directive that each member of the community must carve a statue in their own likeness.

Boggled by the unexpected beauty of the subterranean halls, Italian police granted a retroactive construction permit. The eco-society, which currently numbers around 1,000 members, now welcomes visitors to its temples.

Via Prammarzo, 3 Baldissero Canavese. 📞 45.417763 📍 7.748451



KAZAKHSTAN

BAIKONUR COSMODROME

BAIKONUR

“Dear friends, known and unknown to me, my dear compatriots and all people of the world! Within minutes from now, a mighty Soviet rocket will boost my ship into the vastness of outer space. What I want to tell you is this. My whole life is now before me as a single breathtaking moment. I feel I can muster up my strength for successfully carrying out what is expected of me.”

Those were the words of Yuri Gagarin on April 12, 1961, minutes before the cosmonaut lifted off in the *Vostok 1* spacecraft, becoming the first human to travel into space and enter orbit around the Earth. His journey began at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, the world’s oldest and largest space launch facility, set in the desolate desert steppe of Kazakhstan.

The Soviet Union built the cosmodrome in 1955 as a secret missile testing site and space launch facility. Two years later, *Sputnik 1* launched from Baikonur, becoming the first man-made satellite

in orbit and igniting the Space Race between the Soviets and the U.S.

The cosmodrome is the world’s oldest and most active spaceport, with a long list of historic launches. A month after *Sputnik 1*, a stray female dog named Laika hurtled into space aboard *Sputnik 2*, becoming the first animal to enter orbit and paving the way for human spaceflight. (Unfortunately, the canine pioneer’s one-way suicide mission was even shorter than planned—she died of heat exhaustion hours after launch, a detail that was only revealed in 2002.)

Before each launch, a Russian Orthodox priest clad in golden robes blesses the space-bound rocket, spraying holy water in the air and onto the faces of the assembled media.

The only way to see inside the cosmodrome and its space museum is on a guided tour. Since Baikonur is administered by Russia, tours leave from Moscow via a three-and-a-half-hour chartered flight. For the most spectacular experience, time your visit for a launch—planned dates are available online and reconfirmed about a month ahead. Be prepared for extreme weather—Baikonur can reach -40°F (-40°C) in winter and 113°F (45°C) in summer. 45.9650000

KYRGYZSTAN

NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM

BISHKEK

Kyrgyzstan’s National History Museum is probably the only place in the world where you can find a ceiling mural of a naked Nazi in a horned helmet emerging from a wall of flames astride a demonic horse. It is definitely the only place you’ll see a mural of Ronald Reagan in a skull mask, American flag T-shirt, and khaki cowboy hat riding a Pershing missile in front of a bunch of antinuclear demonstrators.

The museum, established in 1927, contains Kyrgyzstani cultural relics dating back to the Stone Age, such as armor, jewelry, coins, and weapons. The second and third floors became shrines to the legacy of Lenin and



Caption consectetur adipiscin vadipiscing luctus massa.

the Soviet Union. Images of communist heroes Lenin, Marx, and Engels inspiring the masses are gradually being replaced as the nation moves further away from its Soviet past. The outlandish murals, though, seem destined

to stay.

If you’re feeling bold, flag down one of the overcrowded minibuses, locally known as “marshrutkas,” that stop at Ala-Too Square. For a less stressful option, take a taxi. 42.8763889 74.6038889

cut widow

TASH RABAT

AT-BASHI, NARYN

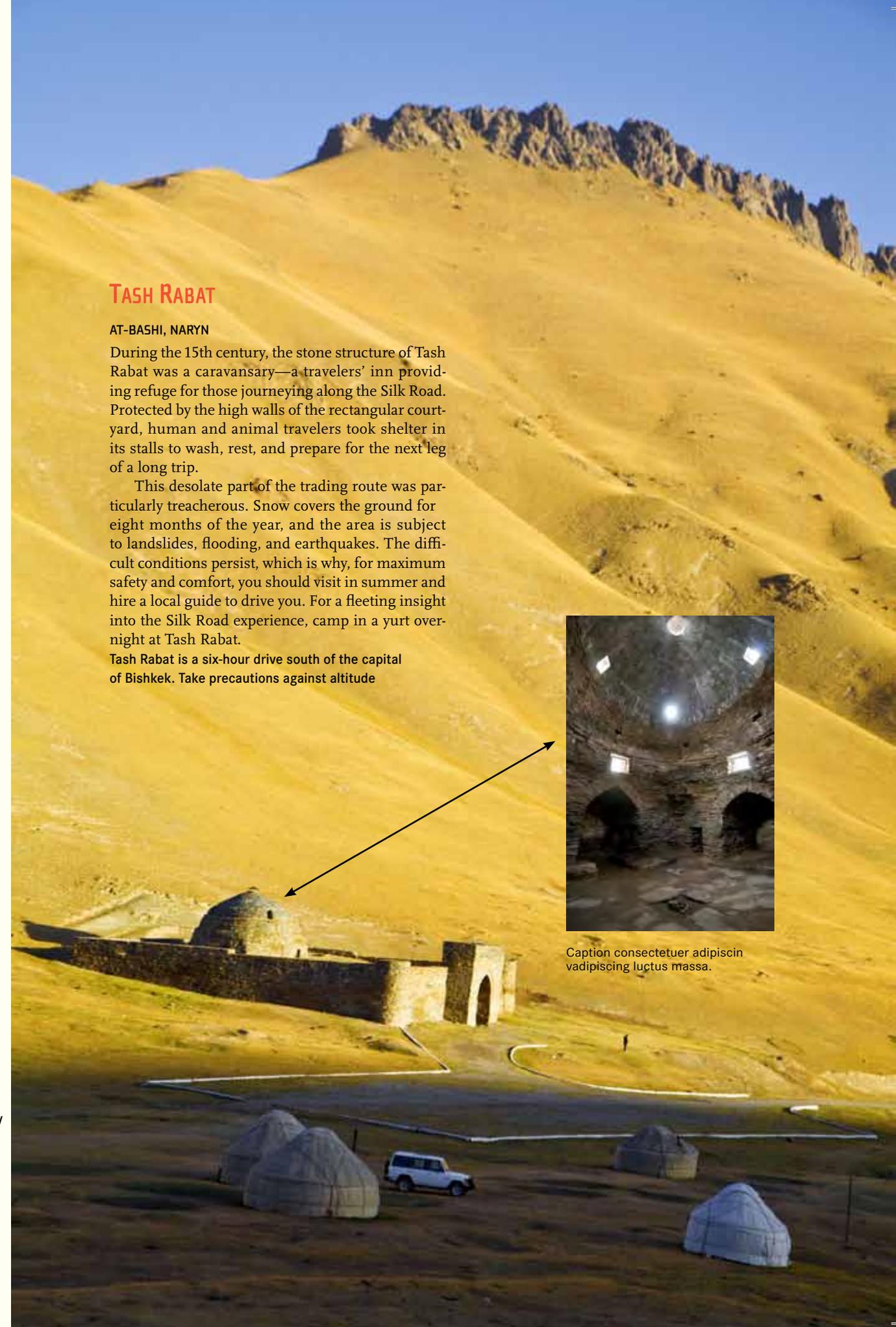
During the 15th century, the stone structure of Tash Rabat was a caravansary—a travelers’ inn providing refuge for those journeying along the Silk Road. Protected by the high walls of the rectangular courtyard, human and animal travelers took shelter in its stalls to wash, rest, and prepare for the next leg of a long trip.

This desolate part of the trading route was particularly treacherous. Snow covers the ground for eight months of the year, and the area is subject to landslides, flooding, and earthquakes. The difficult conditions persist, which is why, for maximum safety and comfort, you should visit in summer and hire a local guide to drive you. For a fleeting insight into the Silk Road experience, camp in a yurt overnight at Tash Rabat.

Tash Rabat is a six-hour drive south of the capital of Bishkek. Take precautions against altitude



Caption consectetur adipiscin vadipiscing luctus massa.



SUAKIN

SUAKIN

Once a prosperous port and gateway to the Middle East, the island city of Suakin is now an abandoned city of collapsing buildings created out of coral rag, a type of limestone made from old coral reefs.

Located on the Red Sea opposite the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah, Suakin provided an ideal site for traders to ply their animal hides, ivory, spices, perfumes, and silks. Until the early 20th century, such commerce took place amid Ottoman-style coral rag buildings.

The construction of Port Sudan in 1905 rendered Suakin less important. Ships that were too big to traverse Suakin's shallow reefs docked at the new port, bringing trade with them. By the 1930s, Suakin was deserted.

Some of the island's fragile coral buildings have been restored, but lack of funds has kept many of them crumbling. Ruined mosques, souks, squares,



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drive south. You can also get a ferry from Jeddah in Saudi Arabia (a 13-hour trip), but note that getting a Saudi visa can be very difficult or even impossible, especially for women, Jews, and those who have traveled to Israel. There is no tourist visa available. 📞 37.333333 📍 19.1

SUDAN

PYRAMIDS OF MEROË

MEROË

There are more pyramids in the northern region of the Sudanese desert than there are in the whole of Egypt. During Egypt's 25th dynasty—760 until 656 BCE—Meroë, now located in Sudan, was the capital

of the Kingdom of Kush, ruled by Nubian kings who had conquered Egypt. The city, nestled against the Nile, contained a necropolis for royal burials.

As in Egypt, Nubian kings and queens were buried with gold, jewelry, pottery, and, occasionally, pets. Some royals were mummified, while others had their remains burned or buried whole. A



TUNISIA

HOTEL SIDI DRISS

MATMATA

The small Berber village of Matmata is dotted with “trog-lodyte homes”: traditional cave houses carved out of rock. Though the homes were created centuries ago, one of them, Sidi Driss, has a much more modern claim to fame: it was used as Luke Skywalker's childhood abode in *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *Attack of the Clones*.

The cave is now a hotel targeted at Star Wars fans. For around \$20 per night, you can experience the lifestyle of a Jedi knight. It's not luxurious—the



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cave rooms are windowless, the beds are cots, and the occasional offensive odor travels on the wind—but it's certainly unique.

Shared taxis and buses leave from Gabès, 25 miles away. 📞 9.968319 📍 33.545687

ALSO IN TUNISIA

Ksar Ouled Soltane

Tataouine North · The blocky contours of this 15th-century granary served as slave quarters in a Star Wars film.

Dougga

Tunisia · Twenty temples, an amphitheater, and a chariot-racing circle are among the highlights at this well-preserved ancient Roman town.

sandstone pyramid, steeper and more narrow than the Egyptian variety, was built over each tomb.

In all, there were about 220 pyramids over three cemeteries at Meroë. They remained relatively intact until the 1830s, when Italian treasure hunter Giuseppe Ferlini smashed the tops off 40 pyramids

while searching for gold and jewels.

Meroë is three hours north of Khartoum. A camel ride will get you to the pyramids. 📞 33.749167 📍 16.938333

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GIANT BUDDHA STATUES OF ASIA

Buddhism is big in South and Southeast Asia—you can tell from the size of the statues. Colossal Buddhas smile serenely across the region, their imposing forms often extending hundreds of feet high. The six statues drawn to scale below, placed next to a suddenly puny-looking Statue of Liberty, are the giantest Buddhas of them all.



SPRING TEMPLE BUDDHA
 LFodushan Scenic Area,
 Henan, China
 BUILT: 2002
 HEIGHT: 420 feet (128 m)

LAYKYUN SETKYAR
 Monywa, Sagaing,
 Myanmar
 BUILT: 2008
 HEIGHT: 381 feet (116 m)

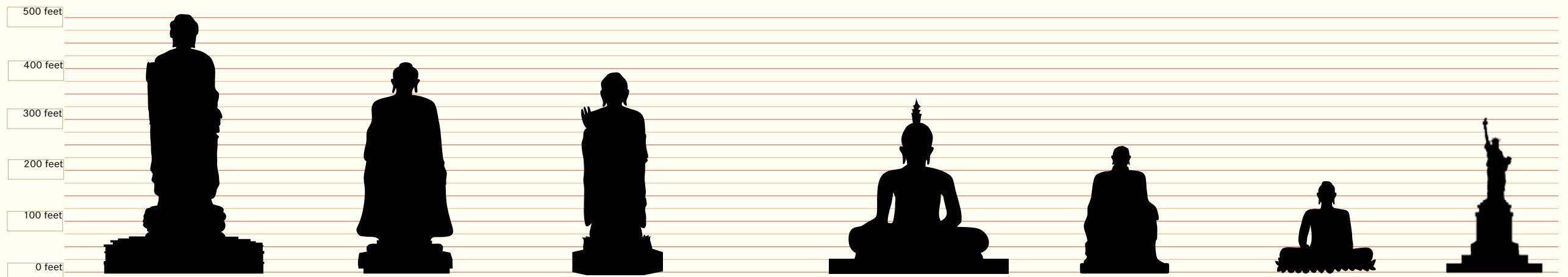
USHIKU DAIBUTSU
 Ushiku, Ibaraki Prefecture,
 Japan
 BUILT: 1993
 HEIGHT: 393 feet (120 m)

THE GREAT BUDDHA OF THAILAND
 Ang Thong, Thailand
 BUILT: 2008
 HEIGHT: 302 feet (92 m)

LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA
 Leshan, Sichuan, China
 BUILT: 803 CE
 HEIGHT: 223 feet (68 m)

BUDDHA IN ALUTHGAMA
 Aluthgama, Western
 Province, Sri Lanka
 BUILT: 2007
 HEIGHT: 160 feet (48 m)

STATUE OF LIBERTY
 New York, USA
 BUILT: 2007
 HEIGHT: 151 feet (xx m)



The Spring Temple includes a 66 foot lotus throne (20 m) placed on a 82 foot (25 m) pedestal/building. Total monument height, 502 feet (153m).

Laykyun stands on a 13.5 m (44 ft) throne. Total monument height, 427 feet (130m).

Ushika includes the 33 foot (10 m) lotus throne and 33 foot (10 m) pedestal/building. Total monument height, 394 feet (120m).

The Great Buddha, the tallest in Thailand, sits on top of a one story museum, and is accessible via a front facing staircase.

Leshan Giant Buddha is carved out of a stone cliff on a tributary of the Yangtze river. It's the tallest pre-modern statue in the world.

The Buddha in Aluthgama sits on top of a salmon colored double lotus. TKTK need help here....

The statue of Liberty is 305 feet tall from base to the top of the flame.

OKLAHOMA

Museum of Osteology

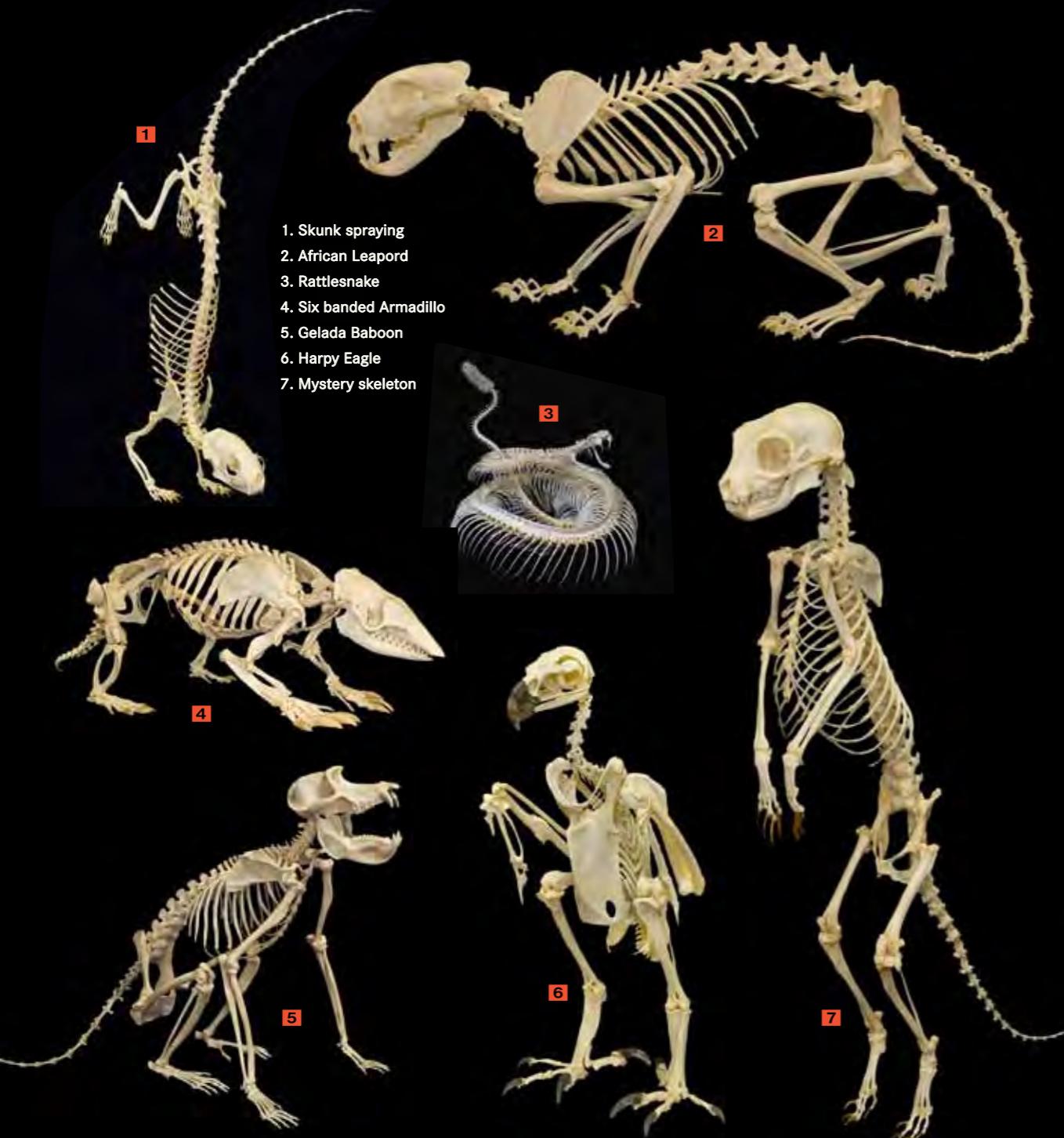
OKLAHOMA CITY

In 1986, skull collector Jay Villemarette turned his hobby into a profession by establishing Skulls Unlimited, a business dedicated to cleaning, mounting, and selling animal skulls. (The cleaning process is fascinating: Flesh-eating

dermestid beetles are let loose on the animal heads to chew away skin, muscle, and fat, leaving a dry and gleaming white skull.)

In order to showcase some of the more striking specimens from Skulls Unlimited, which now cleans skulls submitted from all over the world, Villemarette opened the attached Museum of

Osteology. Here you'll find over 300 carefully articulated specimens, including the skeletons of a Komodo dragon gifted from Indonesia to George W. Bush, a rare Javan rhinoceros found in a shop in Paris, and a two-faced calf. 10301 South Sunnyslane Road, Oklahoma City. **N TK W TK**



- 1. Skunk spraying
- 2. African Leopard
- 3. Rattlesnake
- 4. Six banded Armadillo
- 5. Gelada Baboon
- 6. Harpy Eagle
- 7. Mystery skeleton

Wichita Mountains Buffalo Herd

TK



In 1907, 15 bison rode a train from New York to Oklahoma. Their 650 descendants now roam the plains of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife

Refuge, a 92-square-mile area dedicated to protecting endangered animals.

The story of why six male and nine female buffaloes took a train trip across the country begins in 1905 with the formation of the American Bison Society. At the time, hunting and settlement had reduced the country's bison population to approximately 1,000—down from 60 million in 1830.

Spearheaded by William T. Hornaday and under the auspices of President Theodore Roosevelt, the society aimed to save the buffalo from extinction, increase the population, and provide a safe place for them to roam. Thankfully, the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge had been established four years earlier—and the newly opened Bronx Zoological Park

in New York was willing to spare a herd of bison.

The journey from New York to Oklahoma took six days by train and wagon. When they arrived at the preserve, the bison, who traveled in individual crates, received a rapturous welcome from curious crowds and members of the Native American Comanche tribe. The animals have roamed free in the prairies ever since. The North American bison population is now around half a million, 650 of whom roam the plains of Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

Visitors Center, Cache Meers Road. The refuge is 59,000 acres—your best bets for spotting buffalo are to bring binoculars and have patience. Organized nature tours, held throughout the year, get you closer to the action.

N TK W TK

ALSO IN OKLAHOMA

Center of the Universe, Tulsa · Stand inside this worn concrete circle, speak a few words, and your voice will become distorted and amplified for no discernible reason.

45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City · See the mirror from Hitler's Berlin bunker and a Mickey Mouse gas mask made for kids.

The Grave of Elmer McCurdy

GUTHRIE

It was 1976. Crew members from the TV show *The Six Million Dollar Man* were preparing to shoot on location at the Pike Amusement Park in Long Beach, California. The plan was to capture Steve Austin, the titular pricey fellow, riding in one of the cars along the track of a spooky ride called the "Laff in the Dark." The ride featured a tunnel in which ghouls, demons, and skeletons would pop up and scare you as your car jolted from side to side in the dark.

While sprucing up the set, a *Six Million Dollar* employee spotted a mannequin hanging from a noose in the corner. He reached for the mannequin's arm—and the arm broke off in his hand. Looking at the dismembered limb, the worker was astonished to see what looked like bone beneath desiccated layers of skin. This was no mannequin. This was a man.

The hanging corpse in question was once Elmer McCurdy, an outlaw who died in a gunfight with police 65 years earlier. In 1911, the mischief-making vagabond robbed a train near Okesa, Oklahoma, then took his spoils—\$46 and two jugs of whisky—north, where he holed up in a barnyard on the Kansas border. Police pursued him and

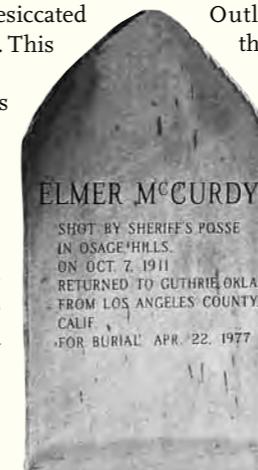
ended up killing him in a shootout among the hay.

McCurdy's body was taken to a funeral home in Pawhuska, but no one claimed it. Seeing a money-making opportunity, the undertaker embalmed him and allowed visitors to view the preserved corpse if they placed a nickel in its mouth.

Five years into this lucrative scheme, a carnival man turned up at the funeral home claiming to be a long-lost relative of McCurdy and requested to take the body so it could be laid to rest properly. He was, of course, lying through his teeth. Within weeks, the McCurdy corpse was the star attraction of a traveling carnival.

For 60 years, McCurdy's mummy made the rounds of carnivals, wax museums, and haunted houses, until it turned up, inexplicably, at the Pike in Long Beach. By this time, the legend of Outlaw McCurdy was long forgotten, and the body assumed to be fake. After the Six Million Dollar discovery, police identified McCurdy and sent the body to Summit View Cemetery in Guthrie, Oklahoma, for long-delayed internment.

McCurdy's grave is marked by a stone that lists his death date as 1911 and burial date as 1977, with no elaboration on the matter. A thick layer of concrete atop the casket ensures the corpse won't go walkabout again.



Summit View Cemetery, a **N TK W TK**

AUSTRALIA

DEVILS MARBLES

WAUCHOPE, NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Devils Marbles, known as Karlu Karlu (big boulders) to local Aboriginal groups, consist of hundreds of rocks scattered across the landscape, varying in

diameter from one and a half feet (.45 meters) to 20 feet (6.1 meters). Some boulders are stacked and appear to be balancing precariously atop one another.

According to Aboriginal mythology, the boulders are the work of Arrange, the Devil Man, who walked through the valley

twisting a hair-string belt. As he twisted, clumps of hair fell to the ground, becoming rocks. On his walk back, Arrange spit on the ground, forming more marbles.

In 1953, a marble was transported to the town of Alice Springs and used in a memorial for John Flynn, the founder of a mobile doctor service for the outback. The move was controversial—the site is sacred to local Aboriginal groups—and after more than 40 years, the rock was returned to its original location. During a ceremony in 2008, the government returned possession of the Devils Marbles Conservation Area to its Aboriginal owners. Today, Aboriginal communities and local government work together to manage the site.

Wauchope, Northern Territory. The Devils Marbles are a long journey on the Stuart Highway from either Alice Springs (242 miles/389.5 kilometers south) or Darwin (679 miles/1,092.7 kilometers north). The nearest small town is Wauchope, a good place to stock up on supplies. Out of respect for indigenous residents, don't climb the boulders. 📍 -20.566667 📞



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THE CAGE OF DEATH AT CROCOSAURUS COVE

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

While you are being lowered into the first of Crocosaurus Cove's saltwater crocodile enclosures, you may notice claw marks on the walls of the acrylic cage in which you're standing. Try not to let that bother you—there are one-and-a-half inches (3.9 centimeters) of protective plastic between you and the 18-foot-long (5.5-meter-long) lethal reptile.

Though this urban wildlife park houses other reptiles and fish, the main attraction is its collection of saltwater crocodiles. Compared to alligators, the saltwater species is larger, faster, and more inclined to attack humans. "Salties," as they're known locally, are abundant in the rivers and estuaries of northern Australia, where swimming is strongly discouraged.

Crocosaurus Cove offers a rare chance to splash alongside a saltie in the "Cage of Death," a transparent cylinder that is lowered into the crocodile enclosures. Though no humans have ever been injured, the same can't be said for the crocodiles. In 2010, a crocodile named Burt—the 80-year-old star of *Crocodile Dundee*—lost a front tooth when he lunged at two football players who were taunting him from the cage.

In 2011, a cable holding the Cage of Death snapped and dropped a pair of tourists into the tank with an eighteen-foot-long (5.5-meter-long) crocodile named Choppa. Luckily for the couple, Choppa ignored them and they were quickly rescued.

58 Mitchell St, Darwin. Thirteen bus routes stop along Mitchell St. Unsurprisingly, you'll need to sign an indemnity release form before stepping into the Cage of Death. 📍 -12.462333 📞 130.839162

134.266667



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BRAZIL

AMAZON STONEHENGE

CALÇOENE, AMAPÁ

In 2006, archaeologists digging on the banks of the Rego Grande river in northern Brazil discovered a strange grouping of 127 giant stones. The megaliths, each standing over 10 feet (3 meters) high, were arranged in circles in an open field. By analyzing ceramic shards found nearby, the archaeologists estimated the arrangement of stones is between 500 and 2,000 years old. The placement of the stones appear to be astronomically based—the shadow of one of the blocks disappears during the winter



The vestiges of an ancient astronomical observatory, according to archaeologists.

solstice—suggesting it might have been built as an observatory.

Anthropologists have long

argued that large complex civilizations could not have existed in the Amazon, as the poor-quality soil could not have supported the agriculture necessary to establish large communities. But the Amazon Stonehenge and other recent findings have cast doubt on this assertion and opened up the possibility that thriving metropolises existed in the jungle thousands of years ago—it's just a matter of finding them.

The stones are in Calçoene, 240 miles (386 kilometers) north of Macapá. 📍 2.497778 📞 -50.948889 ➔

➔ Don't Follow That Man

The origin of the Amazon Stonehenge remains a mystery, but its discovery lends credence to the hypothesis that the South American rain forest may be teeming with the remains of lost cities. Such notions consumed the minds of explorers like Colonel Percy Fawcett, who ventured into the wilderness of Brazil's Mato Grosso region in 1925 in search of the city he dubbed "Z." Fawcett, his son, and his son's best friend all vanished without a trace.

In the decades following Fawcett's disappearance, over a dozen expeditions have been launched in the hope of discovering his fate. None have found conclusive evidence, and it is believed over 100 explorers have perished in the jungle looking for him. Here are a few who tried and failed:

Swiss trapper Stefan Rattin arrived at the British Embassy in São Paulo in 1932, claiming that he had encountered a long-haired, animal-skin-clad Fawcett five months earlier while hunting near the Tapajós River. According to Rattin, "Fawcett" told him he was being held captive, and pleaded for help from the embassy.

With the blessing of Fawcett's wife, Nina, Rattin set off on a rescue



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mission with two men, walking through the jungle for weeks and building canoes out of bark. A subsequent dispatch reported the trio was about to enter hostile Indian territory. No one ever heard from them again.

Shortly afterward, English actor Albert de Winton, bored with the

Hollywood life, decided to become a genuine jungle adventurer. Vowing to find Fawcett, he ventured into the wilderness, his publicist issuing a press release about his heroism. Nine months later, he emerged, thin and dressed in rags, and posed for photographs to send to the *Los Angeles Times*.

After replenishing himself in Cuiabá, de Winton headed back into the jungle. The only subsequent sign of him came a few months later, when an Indian messenger brought a crumpled note out of the forest declaring he had been captured. The unfortunate story of his demise followed years later: Members of the Kamayurá tribe had found him in a canoe, naked and deranged, and clubbed

him to death.

In 1947, missionary Jonathan Wells warned New Zealand schoolteacher Hugh McCarthy against venturing into the Mato Grosso, but McCarthy was determined. The ever-cautious Wells gave him seven carrier pigeons for the journey. Over the next few months, three of the birds brought messages. The first reported a leg injury but remained optimistic. The second said McCarthy had abandoned his rifle and canoe and was living on berries and fruits, having exhausted his food supply. The third and final missive was simple and resolute: "My work is over and I die happily."

NAZI GRAVEYARD

AMAPÁ

On a small island on a tributary of the River Jary stands a nine-foot-high wooden cross with an unusual decoration. Marked on the cross are the words "Joseph Greiner died here on 2.1.1936" and above that, a swastika.

Greiner, a Nazi soldier, arrived in Brazil in 1935, accompanied by fellow scientist and SS officer Otto Schulz-Kampfhenkel. Their mission, known as the "Guayana Project," was to evaluate the area's suitability for colonization by the Third Reich.

Despite Schulz-Kampfhenkel's reports that the area offered "outstanding possibilities for



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exploitation" for "the more advanced white race," the Nazi colonization of Brazil obviously never took place. (Schulz-Kampfhenkel, however, was able to put aside his racial views long enough to father a child with an indigenous woman.) Today, all that remains of this monomaniacal plan is the rotting grave of the Nazi soldier who perished in pursuit of it, and a short film made while on the expedition called

Rätsel der Urwaldhölle, or "Riddles of the Jungle Hell."

Head southwest from Macapá on highway 156 until you hit the Amapá-Para border. The grave site is a little farther north. 📍 -0.6234618 📞 -52.5778198

AMAZON BORE SURFING

SÃO DOMINGOS DO CAPIM, PARÁ



Every year in February and March, during the spring tides of a new or full moon, the world's longest wave comes tumbling down the Amazon River at speeds of up to 20 miles (32.1 kilometers) per hour. Referred to colloquially as *pororoca*, or "great destructive noise" in the Tupi

language, its roar can be heard half an hour before it arrives.

Though the *pororoca* has the power to destroy trees, houses, and livestock, surfers from all over the world converge to compete in the annual Brazilian National Pororoca Surfing Championship. Braving wave heights of up to 12 feet (3.65 meters), winners have experienced the ride of a lifetime, surfing the bore for more than 30 continuous minutes. However,

Amazon bore surfing has its risks, including murky water, floating trees, poisonous snakes, and hungry alligators.

Surfers meet at São Domingos do Capim, a two-hour drive east of Belém. The contest is usually held between February and April, but includes a lot of waiting, as the exact moment of the *pororoca* is always unknown. 📍 -1.675948 📞 -47.7658346

BOCA DO ACRE

BOCA DO ACRE, AMAZONAS



For followers of the Santo Daime religion, the violent expulsion of bodily fluids is both a regular and desirable experience. Founded in the 1930s, Santo Daime mixes Christianity, Shamanism, African Animism, and the ceremonial ingestion of a psychoactive vine known as ayahuasca. Boca do Acre, Brazil, is the religion's psychedelic mecca, with people traveling from around the world to attend the ceremonies held here. Because ayahuasca is used for the purpose of healing, self-enlightenment, and spiritual communion, the Brazilian government has deemed it legal.

During ceremonies, which begin in the evening and last all night, participants are divided by sex, age, and—occasionally—virgin or non-virgin status, and given cups of brewed ayahuasca. As leaders

sing and pray, the drug takes effect, causing out-of-body experiences, visions, loss of motor skills, and, most importantly, the "purge." Violent vomiting, diarrhea, and wailing are all common and looked upon favorably; within Santo Daime, these expulsions signify evil spirits leaving the body.

Ayahuasca tourism brings visitors to Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, where they are guided through a ceremony in groups under the guidance of local shamans. Experiences differ markedly, but many people report revisiting childhood traumas, letting go of their egos, and waking up the next morning with a sense of peace and clarity. Others just report vomiting.

Boca do Acre is a five-to-ten-hour drive from Rio Branco, depending on the state of the poorly maintained dirt roads. There is a local airport, but no commercial flights—you must charter a plane for the 25-minute trip from Rio Branco. 📍 -8.7406895 📞 -67.3840816

cut widow

ARMERO

ARMERO, TOLIMA



Visit the eerily quiet former town of Armero and you'll see only a few buildings surrounded by weeds. Then you will realize that you are looking at the upper levels of those buildings. The ground floors are buried by mud that smothered the town over 25 years ago.

Armero was home to almost 30,000 people on November 13, 1985. That was the day the nearby Nevado del Ruiz volcano erupted, sending—torrents of mud and debris surging down its slopes at 40 miles (64.3 kilometers) per hour. Soon, a 15-foot (4.5-meter) layer of the sludge had covered the town, trapping and killing 23,000 of its inhabitants.

Those who escaped instant death faced an agonizing wait for help. It was 12 hours before relief workers arrived, and the mud, which pulled at their feet like quicksand, made rescue efforts frustratingly slow. People who had been buried up to their necks watched, helpless, as workers tried and failed to dig

them out.

One such victim was 13-year-old Omayra Sánchez. Imprisoned in the mixture of water, mud, and the concrete remains of her own home, she smiled, sang, talked to rescue workers, and was interviewed. Volunteers made multiple attempts to dig Omayra out, but her legs were pinned by concrete. Sixty hours after becoming trapped, Omayra died. A photograph of her staring, helpless, into the camera while immersed in neck-high sludge was published around the world and became the symbol of the disaster.

Covered in mud and with more than two-thirds of its inhabitants wiped out, Armero became a ghost town. Survivors created a kind of cemetery, constructing tombs in place of the old houses and honoring their former residents with epitaphs. The Armando Armero foundation has established a “Memory Interpretation Center” on the site, where visitors can learn about the buried city and the volcano that destroyed it.

The ruins of Armero are located 105 miles (169 kilometers) west of Bogotá, Colombia's capital. **N** 4.966667 **W** -74.9

MANO DEL DESIERTO

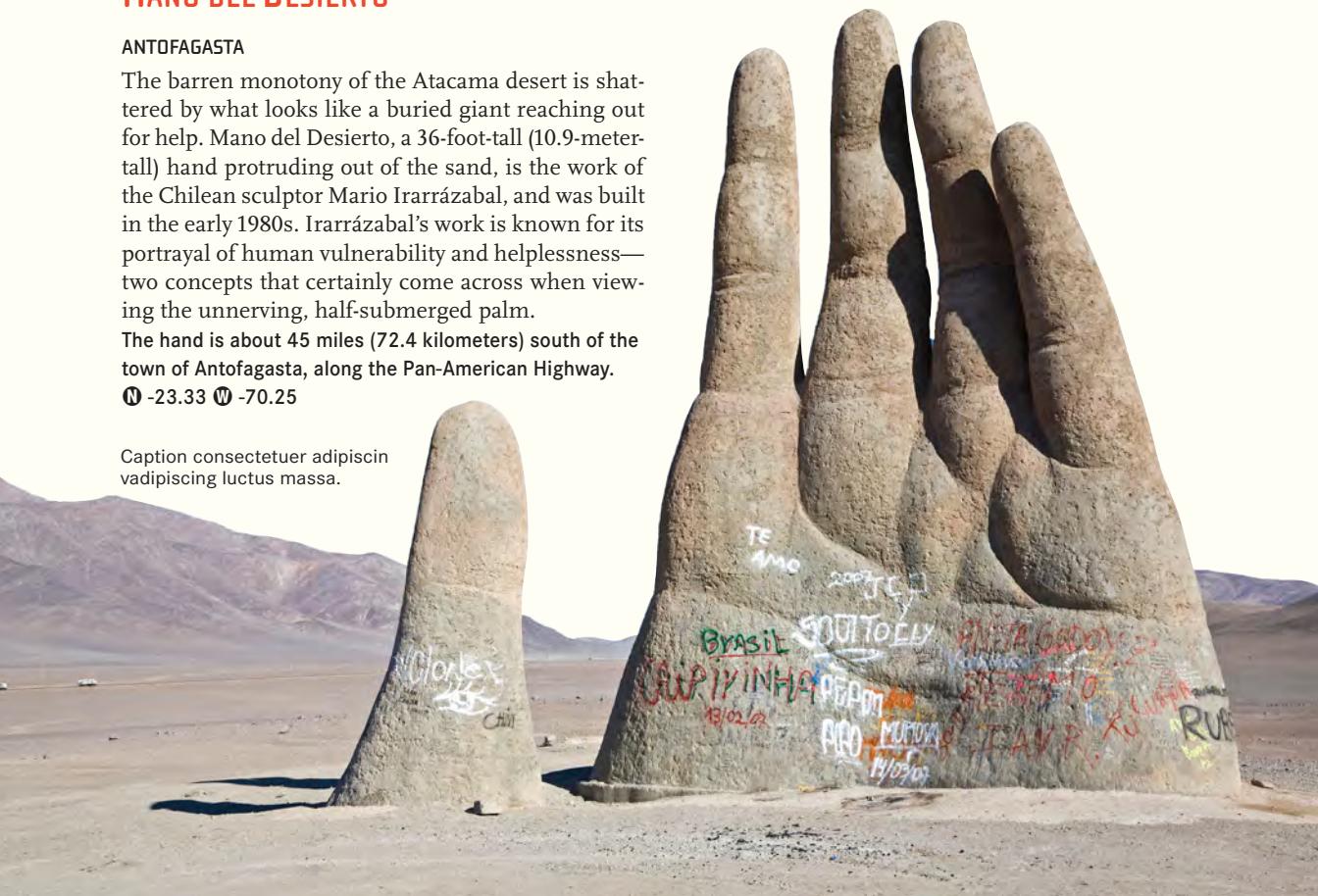
ANTOFAGASTA

The barren monotony of the Atacama desert is shattered by what looks like a buried giant reaching out for help. Mano del Desierto, a 36-foot-tall (10.9-meter-tall) hand protruding out of the sand, is the work of the Chilean sculptor Mario Irarrázabal, and was built in the early 1980s. Irarrázabal's work is known for its portrayal of human vulnerability and helplessness—two concepts that certainly come across when viewing the unnerving, half-submerged palm.

The hand is about 45 miles (72.4 kilometers) south of the town of Antofagasta, along the Pan-American Highway.

N -23.33 **W** -70.25

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NITRATE TOWNS

IQUIQUE, TARAPACÁ

Until 1909, Chile had something very rare and valuable: large deposits of sodium nitrate. Also known as “white gold” or “Chile

saltpeter,” sodium nitrate is used in the production of fertilizer and explosives. So valuable was this “white gold” that Chile went to war with Peru and Bolivia in 1879 over areas containing the chemical compound.

At the turn of the century, Chile's northern Tarapacá region was full of sodium nitrate mining towns. Workers from South America, Europe, and Asia formed communities around the mines. In the words of UNESCO, each town became a “distinct urban community with its own language, organization, customs, and creative expressions.”

But something on the horizon would change all this. In 1909, German scientists Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch figured out how to chemically fix nitrogen—that is, how to make white gold on an industrial level. The discovery was disastrous for the Chilean saltpeter towns. By 1960, all lay abandoned. Today, their remains stand as rusting ruins in the inhospitable Atacama desert. The Humberstone and Santa Laura Saltpeter Works are an hour east of Iquique on Route 16. **N** -20.205805 **W** -69.79405

COLOMBIA

PABLO ESCOBAR'S HIPPOS

PUERTO TRIUNFO, ANTIOQUIA



Notorious Colombian cocaine baron Pablo Escobar once lived on this sprawling estate, spending his days riding his hovercraft over its many lakes, wandering among his collection of vintage cars, and strolling through his zoo filled with hippopotamuses and exotic birds.

Escobar was killed in a hail of gunfire by the Colombian police in 1993, and the hacienda became dilapidated. It has since been revived—this time as a theme park. There have been some problems, however. Locals have been known to sneak in—on one occasion with a backhoe—and dig up the lawn and floors in search of treasure they believe Escobar buried.

Meanwhile, the four hippos Escobar imported from Africa have thrived and, in one case, escaped the confines of the estate. In 2009, a hippo named Pepe was found 62 miles (100 kilometers) away and killed by the Colombian military. The group of wild hippos is now estimated at around 40. They are ruled by an alpha male named Pablo.

The hacienda is 100 miles (161 kilometers) east of



Caption consectetuer adipiscing luctus massa.

Medellin on Route 60. Visitors can feed baby hippos, tour the drug lord's personal effects, and even see the Cessna that carried Escobar's first load of cocaine to the United States. **N** 5.886187 **W** -74.6424866



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ISCHIGUALASTO PROVINCIAL PARK

SAN JUAN

This park, nicknamed the Valley of the Moon on account of its odd geological formations, is home to giant petrified tree trunks and some of the world's oldest dinosaur remains. Among the odd stone formations is one called the "ball court," a field of hundreds of stone spheres formed over millions of years by wind and erosion.

The closest cities to Ischigualasto are San Juan (five hours south) and La Rioja (northwest). Charter vans and buses depart from both locations. 📍 -30.513765952287702 📞 -67.5823974609375

ALSO IN ARGENTINA

Petrified Forest of José de Ormachea

Sarmiento, Chubut · Fossilized remains of trees, branches, and even fruits and seeds make up this forest.

Parque el Desafío

Gaiman, Chubut · A retiree's challenge to build an outdoor wonderland out of trash resulted in this colorful park.

Perito Moreno Glacier

Santa Cruz · This growing glacier causes havoc when it dams Lago Argentino and then bursts—with spectacular results.

Petrified Forest

Santa Cruz · The two largest petrified trees on the planet are in this 38.6-square-mile (10,000-hectare) park

Museo Rocsen

Nono · Photography, insects, medical artifacts, furniture, toys, religious relics, fossils, and a Peruvian mummy are among this 25,000 objects in



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LAGUNA DEL DIAMANTE

SAN RAFAEL, MENDOZA

There are plenty of reasons why life should not exist at Laguna del Diamante. Located within one of the world's largest calderas—the bowl-shaped formations resulting from land collapsing after a volcanic eruption—the lagoon is surrounded by sulfur-spewing vents. The hyper-alkaline lagoon is five times saltier than seawater, and has levels of arsenic that are 20,000 times higher than the amount deemed safe for drinking by the EPA.

Despite these inhospitable conditions, which mimic those of the early Earth, millions of bacteria known as "extremophiles" have managed to flourish. Scientists hope that the mysterious microorganisms can be used to discover new antioxidants or enzymes, and may someday help to explain how life on Earth began.

Three and a half hours south of Mendoza, near the Chilean border. The road to Laguna del Diamante is only passable from December to March. Four-wheel-drive tours depart from nearby San Rafael and Mendoza. Expect a bumpy ride. 📍 -34.15 📞 -69.6833333



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BOLIVIA

LA PAZ'S WITCHES' MARKET

LA PAZ

Dozens of vendors line this street, selling folk remedies, dried reptiles, and llama fetuses that are said to bring prosperity and good luck. "Witches" wander through the market offering fortune-telling services, spiritual advice, and traditional medicine cures. If

you'd like a glimpse into your future, or help with a physical or spiritual ailment, look for the people wearing dark hats.

Calle Linares, a cobblestone street between Sagarnaga and Santa Cruz. Taxis, micros (minivans), and *trufis* (cars with specific routes) are all cheap ways of getting to the Witches' Market. Just confirm the destination and price before getting in. 📍 -16.496624 📞 -68.138655

Gold Pyramid House

WADSWORTH, ILLINOIS

Jim and Linda Onan's passion for ancient Egypt is equaled only by their passion for hyperbole. In 1977, the couple constructed a six-story golden pyramid to serve as their home. They describe it in a self-produced brochure as "one of the most awesome works of art ever created."

The 24-karat gold-plated building is surrounded by a moat and guarded by a 64-foot-tall statue of Ramesses II, who reigned as pharaoh from 1279 to 1213 BCE. The pyramid is furnished to reflect, in the Onans' words, "the elegant ostentatiousness common only to the wealthy Egyptian pharaohs."

Cleopatra costumes and pharaoh headwear are available in the gift shop.

37921 Dilley Road, Wadsworth. The pyramid is open on Sundays for tours and available to rent for private events.

ALSO IN ILLINOIS

Peoria Solar System, Peoria · Go on an interplanetary journey via this 99,000,000:1 scale model of our solar system, starting with a 46-foot-wide sun and ending 62 miles away with an Eris dwarf planet the size of a quarter.

Phone Booth on a Roof, Lincoln · Before the widespread adoption of Doppler weather radars, this phone box, perched on the roof of a fire house, was once used for observing—and sheltering from—major storms. A firefighter would climb up to it, survey the skies, and pick up the receiver to deliver updates to colleagues below.



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ALSO IN CHICAGO

American Science & Surplus · This store may be the only place in the world where you can pick up a Tesla coil, portable two-seat army latrine, 17-inch "starter skeleton," pencil sharpener in the shape

of a human nose, and fallout shelter sign.

Oz Park · This Wizard of Oz-themed urban oasis features statues of the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion, Dorothy, and Toto.

Money Museum · See a money pit and stand in the shadow of a million bucks at this museum dedicated to the almighty dollar.

SS Eastland Memorial · Learn how a ship that

sank in just 20 feet of water, a mere 20 feet from shore, resulted in more than 800 deaths.

Shit Fountain · This oversized bronze coil of feces is both a tribute to doggie defecation and a

reminder to pick it up.

Busy Beaver Button Co. · Ever wanted to visit a museum dedicated solely to pinback buttons? Busy Beaver's got what you need.



International Museum of Surgical Science

CHICAGO

Housed in a four-story 1917 mansion, this museum displays the development of surgical practices and techniques via artwork, medical instruments, and bits of the human body.

Among the more alarming items are a collection of chloroform inhalation masks from the 1890s, piles of gallstones removed during surgery, and bloodletting blades once used on patients stricken with the Bubonic plague.

1524 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago. ☎ 41.910292 📞 -87.62655

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INDIANA

Rotary Jail Museum

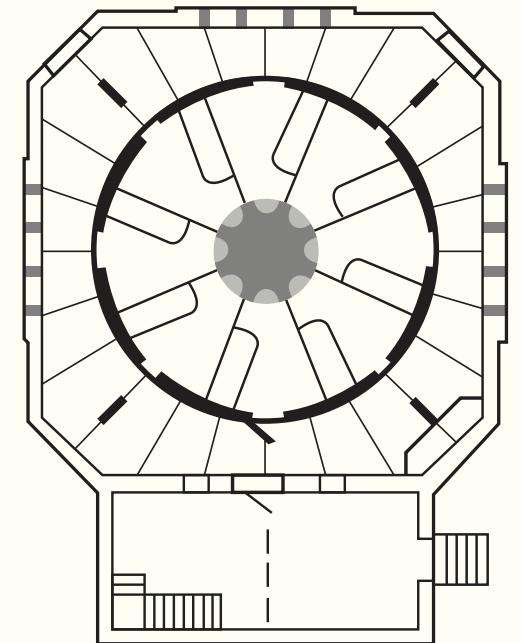
CRAWFORDSVILLE

In the spring of 1881, architect William H. Brown and iron foundry owner Benjamin F. Haugh, both of Indianapolis, filed a patent for a most ingenious innovation: a jail with revolving cells.

The submitted design consisted of a two-tier cylindrical cell block with a central column that served as both support and plumbing for the individual toilets in the cells. Each tier had eight wedge-shaped cells, but the surrounding structure had only one door. When a guard rotated a hand crank, the cell block spun, sending the prisoners on a disorienting carousel ride past the lone access point.

Brown and Haugh's invention quickly became a reality. In 1882, the first spinning jail, a two-tiered, 16-cell institution known as Montgomery County Rotary Jail, opened in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Other states in the midwest soon got in on the idea—the three-tiered, rotating Pottawattamie County Jail, nicknamed the "Squirrel Cage Jail," opened in Iowa in 1885, followed by a single-story spinning jail in Gallatin, Missouri, in 1889. Records vary, but between six and 18 rotary jails were built in the United States, mostly in the midwest.

Unfortunately, Brown and Haugh's novel, almost whimsical design had its flaws. Chief among them was the fact that a prisoner standing at the front of a cell with his hands resting on the bars had a decent chance of getting an arm crushed when the rotary mechanism was engaged. Natural light was scant, ventilation was poor, and mechanical problems could interfere with the operation of a jail. In the case of a fire, all the prisoners whose cells weren't aligned with the access door would likely be doomed.



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In light of these problems, many rotary jails had their turntables immobilized during the 1930s. After operating in a modified state for decades, Montgomery County Jail closed for good in 1973. Pottawattamie County Jail sent its prisoners away in 1969, while the Gallatin jail shut up shop in 1975. All three now operate as museums. Montgomery County is the only one that still spins. 225 North Washington Street, Crawfordsville. ☎ 40.043839 📞 -86.901742

WISCONSIN

House on the Rock

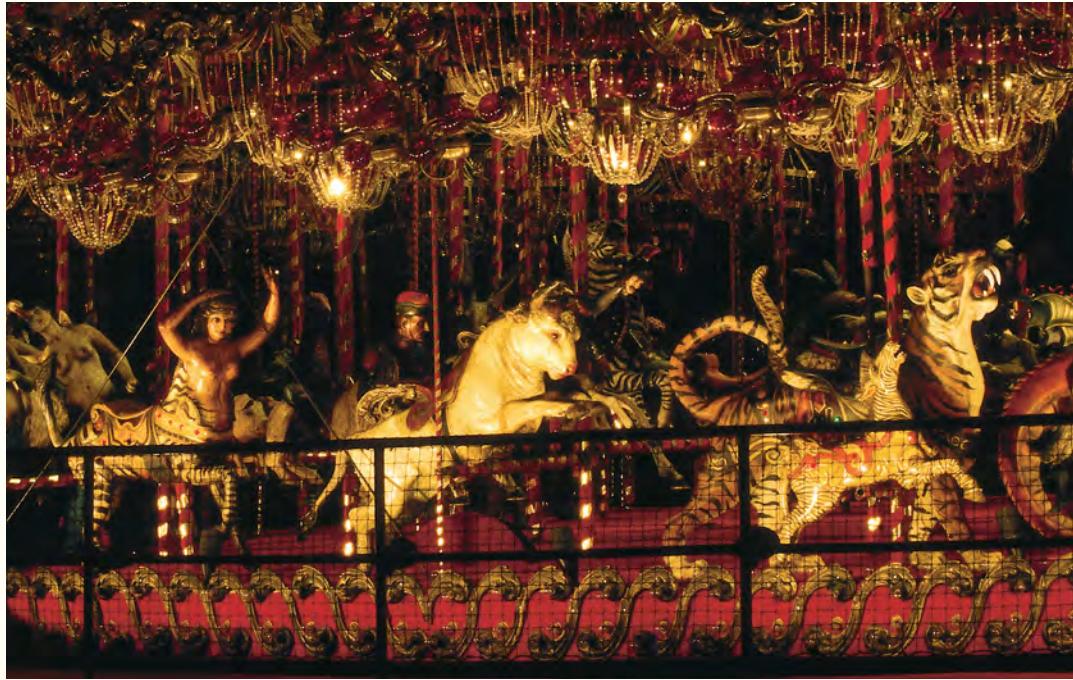
SPRING GREEN

Opened to the public in 1959, this attraction is a window into the warped mind of Alex Jordan, who built the 14-room home as a weekend retreat. A walk through the house raises a lot of questions: Is this real? Why is it so dark in here? Why is that massive sea monster battling a giant squid, and how does it relate to the robot orchestra?

Jordan was a lifelong collector with eclectic tastes. Over the decades, he filled the house with an astounding array of objects: pipe organs, dollhouses,

antique weapons, coin-operated music machines, chandeliers, and miniature circuses, to specify but a few. Jordan died in 1989, but his house of treasures lives on. The collections are still crammed into dark and dusty rooms, which create an overwhelming atmosphere for visitors and induces the occasional desire to escape.

Amid the sensory overload, two parts of the house really stand out: the Carousel Room, and the Infinity Room. The Carousel Room contains the world's largest merry-go-round, featuring 269 animals—none of which are horses—and 20,000 lights. The Infinity Room, built in 1985, is a cantilevered,



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Kovac Planetarium

RHINELANDER



A disappointing Boy Scout trip led Frank Kovac to build this spherical, rotating planetarium. On an October afternoon in 1996, Kovac and his fellow scouts ventured to Mud Creek Observatory and waited for the sun to set so they could gaze at the universe. But when it was finally dark, cloud cover made stargazing impossible.

Annoyed at the clouds for, in his words, “obscuring the universe,” Kovac decided to create his own celestial sphere. He spent a decade building a two-ton, 22-foot-wide globe and painting the interior with every northern hemisphere star visible to the naked eye.

The Kovac Planetarium is one of four mechanical globe planetariums ever built in the world. Kovac treats visitors to a sky show that lives up to the attraction's motto: “Kovac Planetarium, Where the Universe Revolves Around You.”

2392 Mud Creek Road, Rhineland. **N** 45.573826 **W** -89.065458

Dr. Evermor's Forevertron

NORTH FREEDOM

Nestled in the trees on a remote stretch of Highway 12 is the Forevertron, a 19th-century spacecraft built by an eccentric man named Dr. Evermor.

Dr. Evermor didn't exist until 1983. That's when former industrial wrecking and salvage expert Tom Every retired and assumed the alter ego of a Victorian professor and inventor. Having amassed a personal collection of beautiful old machinery components during his wreck-and-salvage days, Every set about sculpting a scrap-metal spacecraft with an 1890s aesthetic.

The Forevertron comes with a story: Its purpose is to launch Dr. Evermor into the heavens on a magnetic lightning beam. The big



glass egg at the top of the sculpture, latticed with copper, is the doctor's personal space capsule. An elevated gazebo beside the main sculpture allows royalty to watch the launch from a decent vantage

point. The Celestial Listening Ears are designed to allow visitors to hear voices from space.

There is no set launch date for the Forevertron. Even if it never blasts into the heavens, it has already earned an impressive distinction: At 50 feet high and 120 feet wide, it's the largest scrap metal sculpture in the world.

US 12, North Freedom. The Forevertron is 5 miles south of Baraboo, behind Delaney's Surplus Sales. **N** 43.375669 **W** -89.768549

ALSO IN WISCONSIN

FAST Fiberglass Mold Graveyard, Sparta · The molds once used to make roadside sculptures, from menacing sharks to goofy giant mice to a towering Santa Claus, have been strewn across this grassy lot, making it look like the ruins of a particularly quirky civilization.

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SOUTH DAKOTA

Thunderhead Falls

RAPID CITY

To see this 30-foot waterfall, you'll need to journey 600 feet into a mountain. Thunderhead Falls is located in the tunnels of a disused gold mine established in the 1870s. To the miners tunneling for treasure, the gushing torrent that spewed forth was an inconvenient surprise amid more general disappointment—the mine never yielded any gold, and was abandoned by the time the 20th century rolled around.

With no gold in them hills, Thunderhead Falls was forgotten until 1949, when Vera Eklund boarded a sightseeing train from Rapid City to Mystic. While aboard, she noticed a stream of water flowing down the side of a mountain. Eklund and her husband, Albert, returned to the site to track down the source of the stream and found the waterfall. The Eklunds acquired the land and opened Thunderhead Falls to the public as a tourist attraction



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the following year. With a tromp through the musty tunnels, you too can experience the highs and lows of the gold-rush days.

10 miles from Rapid City along Highway 44 West. 📞 44.066968 📠 -103.409214

ALSO IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Crazy Horse Memorial, Custer · This sculpture of the Oglala Lakota Chief, carved out of a mountain, is still in

progress, having been begun in 1948. Completion is a long way off, but the ultimate vision is to create the world's largest sculpture at 641 feet wide and 563 feet high. For now, you can see the fully carved head, which is 87 feet tall. (For comparison, the presidential heads at Mount Rushmore are 60 feet tall.)

Petrified Wood Park, Lemmon · A park the size of a city block is filled with 100 conical sculptures, created out of petrified wood in the early 1930s.

WYOMING

PhinDeli

PHINDELI



PhinDeli is the name of a Vietnamese coffee company. It is also—and not by coincidence—the name of America's smallest town.

Until 2013, PhinDeli was known as Buford. The town sign provided a unique photo opportunity: Planted beside the dusty main road, it read BUFORD; POP: 1; ELEV: 8000. That one crucial person was Don Sammons, a Vietnam vet who moved to Buford in 1980.

Founded in 1866 during the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad, Buford reached a peak population of around 2,000 people. As the rail line moved west, however, so did the workers. When the Sammons, his wife, Terry, and son arrived in Buford in 1980 hoping for a quiet life, they got

it—the trio comprised the entire population of Buford. In 1992, the family bought the town—consisting of a gas station, convenience store, modular home, garage, and surrounding land—for \$155,000.

After Sammons's wife died and his son moved to Colorado, it was time for a change. In 2012, Buford went up for auction and was snatched up for \$900,000 by mystery investors from Vietnam. The next year, the plan for the town was revealed: The PhinDeli Corporation, makers of Vietnamese coffee, intended to capture a share of the US market by establishing a branded town in the American heartland.

The town of PhinDeli now sells Vietnamese coffee in its convenience store. Though Sammons has moved to Colorado to be closer to his son, the population is still one: a caretaker who lives in the town's only house.

Interstate 80 between Laramie and Cheyenne.

📞 41.123688 📠 -105.302292



ILLINOIS

Leather Archives & Museum

CHICAGO

The sign above the door of this former church says LA&M in large white letters. A picture of a black boot to the left gives a tiny hint of what's inside, but no passer-by would guess that this is a museum devoted to alternative sexual practices.

The Leather Archives & Museum documents the leather lifestyle, a subculture mostly associated with gay men, fetish, and BDSM—though the museum encompasses all sexualities and genders. The collection includes clothing, books, photos, and provocative paintings like "The Last Supper in a Gay Leather Bar with Judas Giving Christ the Finger." The Dungeon displays fetish and BDSM items such as a stainless-steel male chastity device and a red leather spanking bench. 6418 North Greenview Ave, Chicago. The museum is open from Thursday to Sunday. You must be 18 or older to visit the galleries. 📞 41.998637 📠 -87.668273



Pitch Drop Experiment

BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND

To view the experiment that the University of Queensland School of Mathematics and Physics boasts is “more exciting than watching grass grow,” you’ll need to go to the display cabinet at the school’s foyer. There, beneath a glass dome, you will see a funnel filled with asphalt. It doesn’t seem to be doing anything other than sitting there, but do not be deceived: You are looking at the world’s longest continuously running lab experiment in action.

The Pitch Drop Experiment began in 1927, the brainchild of UQ physics professor Thomas Parnell. His aim: to demonstrate



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that pitch—a term thatfor thick, solid polymers such as asphalt—is not solid, but a highly viscous liquid.

To prove this, Parnell poured a heated sample of pitch into a

closed funnel and let it settle, a process that took three years. In 1930, he cut off the end of the funnel, allowing the pitch to flow freely. Which it did. Very, very slowly. The first drop fell into the beaker in 1938, with the second and third drops following in 1947 and 1954. With the installation of air-conditioning in the building came a reduction in the flow rate—the eighth drop, which hit the beaker in November 2000, took over 12 years to fall.

Just over 13 years later, in April 2014, the ninth drop fell. the pitch-plopping actions should reallyget going again in 2027.

Physics Annexe, University of Queensland, Brisbane. Get a bus from central Brisbane (Adelaide Street) to UQ (Chancellor’s Place).

📞 -27.497854 📞 153.013286

Boab Prison Tree

DERBY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

During the 1890s, police used the bulbous, 15-foot-wide (4.6-meter-wide) hollow trunk of this 1,500-year-old boab tree as a temporary jail for Aboriginal prisoners en route to sentencing in the small town of Derby. Long before its use as a makeshift prison, the tree formed part of an indigenous legend. The story goes that the boab, once tall and prideful, learned humility when the spirits turned it upside down, causing its roots to grow into the sky.

Broome Highway, Derby. Skywest flights from Perth to Derby (a three-hour trip) depart every weekday. A fence around the tree prevents visitors from going inside it, partly out of respect for its connections to Aboriginal Australian beliefs, but also because snakes like to sleep in the trunk. 📞 -17.3507 📞 123.6699

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Umpherston Sinkhole

MOUNT GAMBIER, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In 1864, a creative gentleman named James Umpherston purchased a plot of land containing a large sinkhole. This was no oversight—Mount Gambier is a city built on a porous foundation of eroding limestone caves and craters.

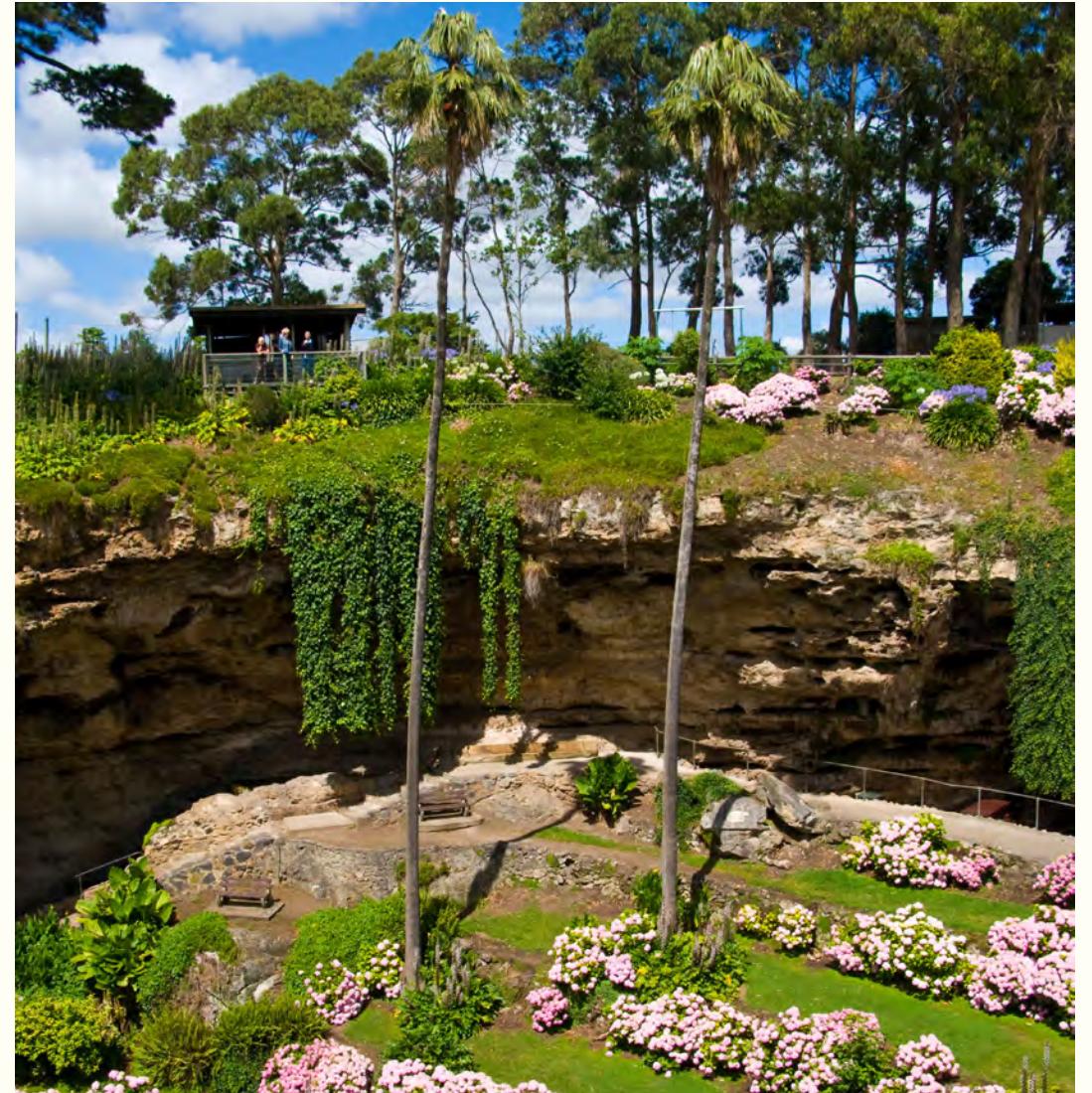
Far from being perturbed by the sinkhole’s presence, Umpherston decided to transform the pit into a sunken recreational garden open to all. By 1886, he had filled the hole with a variety of ferns and flowers. Visitors flocked to the new garden, entering it via a set of wooden stairs.

After Umpherston’s death in 1900, the garden began to deteriorate, into an overgrown garbage

dump. By 1976, however, plans were afoot to restore its former beauty. Department of Woods and Forest staff uncovered Umpherston’s terraces, and planted new flowers and shrubs. Just like its original incarnation, the garden was an instant hit.

Umpherston sinkhole continues to flourish, with its blooming pink and lilac hydrangeas and its edges dripping with hanging ivy that conceals the caverns below. Its popularity has extended to local possums, who scamper among the plants at night in search of food.

Jubilee Highway East, Mount Gambier. Mount Gambier is a six-hour bus ride from Melbourne’s Southern Cross station, or just over six hours from Adelaide’s Central station. 📞 -37.835267 📞 140.802465



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Ned Kelly's Death Mask and Revolver

MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

He went to the gallows in 1880, but the ghost of Ned Kelly maintains a firm hold over the collective psyche of Australia. The most famous of the bushrangers, he is remembered with fondness as an underdog and maverick who fought laws that unfairly targeted the poor, but he is also abhorred for being an unrepentant murderer.

Born to an Irish convict father who was transported to Australia in 1841 after stealing two pigs, Kelly racked up his own criminal record as a teenager. After shooting a police officer who got too friendly with his sister, Kelly and his brother Dan went on the run in 1878. Police gave chase, and the brothers shot back, killing three officers.

Despite being wanted—dead or alive—by the government, the Kellys reemerged a month later and committed two brazen bank robberies, holding police and customers hostage as they emptied the vaults. With the authorities closing in and the situation ever more desperate, the Kelly brothers and other members of their gang created now-iconic suits of armor out of bulletproof metal plates, including cylindrical helmets with



small slots for the eyes. The Kelly Gang wore them at the final showdown in June 1880, where they held 60 people hostage at the Glenrowan Inn and engaged in a half-day shootout with police. Three civilians died, along with all members of the Kelly Gang except Ned, who was captured and sentenced to death for three murders.

The Old Melbourne Gaol, which operated from 1845 to 1924, was the site of Kelly's November 1880 hanging. He remained defiant of authority to the end, responding to the sentencing judge's customary "May the Lord have mercy on your soul" with "I will go a little further than that, and say I will see you there where I go."

Kelly's death mask, made an hour after he was hanged, and his revolver are on display. His skeleton, which was buried in a yard at the jail, was turned over to the Kelly family in 2012 for a proper burial—minus the skull. Stolen in 1929, rediscovered, put on display at the Old Melbourne Gaol, and stolen again in 1978, the whereabouts of the skull remain unknown.

Old Melbourne Gaol, 377 Russell Street, Melbourne. The jail is a five-minute walk north of Melbourne's Central train station. Kelly's famous helmet, complete with bullet dents, is located a block away on Swanston Street at the State Library of Victoria.
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William Ricketts Sanctuary

MOUNT DANDENONG, VICTORIA

The winding mountain paths in the quiet forest of the William Ricketts Sanctuary are lined with 92 ceramic faces that seem to have grown straight out of the rocks and boulders. Each face depicts a real figure in the life of sculptor William Ricketts. Never trained in sculpture, Ricketts grew up surrounded by Aboriginal mythology, in which ancestral beings are believed to have created the land's natural features during what is called "the Dreamtime."

Ricketts began creating sculptures of indigenous elders, adults, and children in the 1930s—a time when Victorian government policy still removed Aboriginal



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children to be removed from their parents to be raised in white homes and institutions. In his depictions of white men, Ricketts often sculpted them wearing crowns made from bullets, with dead animals at their feet.

Ricketts continued sculpting until his death in 1993 at the age of 94. Opened to the public in the 1960s, his sanctuary continues to offer a place for quiet reflection and the appreciation of nature.

1402-1404 Mt Dandenong Tourist Road, Mount Dandenong, Victoria. Get a train from Flinders Street Station in central Melbourne to the Croydon stop. From there, get a bus to the sanctuary. 📍 -37.8327 15 📞 145.3556 45

Balls Pyramid

LORD HOWE ISLAND GROUP

Darkness had fallen. Two Australian scientists were perched 330 feet (100.6 meters) above the sea on a shard of an old volcano shaped like a giant jagged dagger. It was in this precarious position that they laid eyes on the best possible surprise: a nest of 24 giant stick insects, each the size of a human hand.

David Priddel and Nicholas Carlile embarked on their 2001 trip to Balls Pyramid, a 1,844-foot-tall (562-meter-tall) volcanic remnant off the east coast of Australia, motivated by a shaky belief: that the stick insect, long thought to be extinct, was still alive. The insect, also referred to as a "tree lobster" on account of its unusually large size, once roamed the forests of nearby Lord Howe Island. Following the 1918 introduction of black rats to the island—which escaped from a supply ship that ran aground—the insects disappeared, and by 1930 were considered extinct.

Balls Pyramid, located 12 miles (19.31 kilometers) southeast of Lord Howe, is hardly lush with vegetation—it is almost entirely rock, its near-vertical cliff faces inhospitable to fauna and off-limits to mountain climbers without government permission. But beneath a spindly shrub growing from a crack, there they were: two dozen tree lobsters.

No one could figure out how they got there. Were they carried by birds? Did their eggs float across on the sea? At first, the Australian government couldn't decide whether they ought to be moved. But, in 2003, a team from the National Parks and Wildlife Service scaled the pyramid and collected two pairs of



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stick insects for breeding in captivity. One pair died shortly after, but the pair dispatched to Melbourne Zoo—"Adam and Eve"—met with success, producing eggs that became the foundation of the zoo's now-thousands-strong tree lobster population.

373 miles (600.3 kilometers) northeast of Sydney. Flights link Sydney and Lord Howe Island, taking just under two hours. 📍 -31.754 167 📞 159.251 667

Christmas Island Crabs

CHRISTMAS ISLAND



Christmas Island, an Australian territory in the middle of the Indian Ocean, is populated by 1,500 humans and 100 million crabs.

Each year at the start of the rainy season, the ground becomes a moving red carpet as tens of millions of endemic red crabs leave their forest burrows and scuttle to

shore in order to spawn. During their perilous journey, which can take several weeks, the crabs must cross roads, withstand seaside winds, and steer clear of yellow crazy ants.

The ants, who, true to their name, move frantically and erratically when disturbed, were accidentally introduced to Christmas Island in the 1920s. Since then they have formed super-colonies, wreaking havoc on the island's ecosystem. Red crabs, despite their larger size and exoskeletons, are no match for the jets of lethal acid that swarms of ants spray into the crabs' eyes and mouths.

Concerned by the ants' destructive effect on red crabs

and Christmas Island ecology as a whole, the Australian government has established a seven-member Crazy Ant Scientific Advisory Panel. Tactics thus far include a four-year research study into the ants' reliance on honeydew, and the 2009 release of 13 tons (11,793.4 kilograms) of insecticide on super-colony areas. Though this last measure made a significant dent in the crazy ant populace, their numbers are rapidly increasing once again. **Christmas Island is a four-hour flight from Perth. Exact timing of the migration varies according to the weather and the phases of the moon, but tends to happen in November.** 📍 -39.6870 08 📞 143.832 193