

**Top 20 buildings around the world**

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# Dorling Kindersley's choice omits some notable landmarks, not least the Alhambra and Petra

## **Taj Mahal, Agra, India**

An irresistible combination of breathtaking architecture, exquisite adornment and a legendary love story, the Taj Mahal's reputation for romance is fully deserved. The flawless marble tomb and beautiful, tranquil gardens stand as testament to one man's love for his wife, and to the dedication of the 20,000 workers who built it. It took 22 years to complete, so visit it at leisure and savour the experience.

## **Haghia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey**

Imbued with over 1400 years of history and intended as an earthly reflection of the glory of the heavens, the Haghia Sophia is remarkable for its majestic architecture, tangible sense of ancient calm and vivid Byzantine mystery. In a world often considered devoid of spirituality, this is a place that offers visitors a definite feeling of a celestial 'something'.

## **Flatiron Building, New York, USA**

Amongst the first skyscrapers in a city seduced by the notion of reaching for the stars, the Flatiron pulls off the tricky combination of being both legendary and cool. It was feared that its iconic and daring triangular shape would be unable to stand the winds it generated, but 100 years on it still defines the innovative spirit that makes New York great.

## **The Radcliffe Camera, Bodleian Library, Oxford, England**

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In a city crammed with astonishing architecture, much of it literally hidden behind closed doors, the Bodleian Library sits uninhibited and unflustered in its own patch, surrounded by other buildings, but holding them at arm's length with its scholarly doughtiness. It is enigmatically circular amongst the corners and right angles of Oxford.

## **The Houses of Parliament, London, England**

With indomitable English spirit, the Houses of Parliament as we know them today rose, phoenix-like, from the ashes of a catastrophic fire and have since survived both German air-raids and pollution-inflicted dilapidation. Astonishingly ornate Gothic decoration on an almost inconceivable scale and an iconic riverside location make this a building to appreciate up-close and from afar.

## **Transamerica Building, San Francisco, USA**

In a city that gives off a pretty laid-back vibe, the Transamerica Building is a great big, pointy, shiny, enormous reminder that you're in America. But it isn't grotesque or a crude show-off, it has a surprising monolithic dignity and grace and it makes you wonder how the interior designers have coped with all those funny corners.

### **Sydney Opera House, Sydney, Australia**

Deservedly Sydney's number one tourist attraction, and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Opera House is without question one of a kind. It's as though the architects decided to ignore everything that had gone before and conceive of a whole new type of building. Iconic, without question, but also a truly fantastic photo opportunity when framed by the 'Coathanger' of the Harbour Bridge.

### **Basilica San Marco, Venice, Italy**

Never afraid of displaying their wealth and artistry, the Venetians outdid themselves with Basilica San Marco. Essentially Byzantine in design, what you see now is 600 years' worth of embellishment, sparkling with gold. Both the interior and exterior are guaranteed to take the breath away.

### **Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain**

Gaudi's unfinished masterpiece is without doubt Europe's most unconventional church and possibly the world's most impressive building site. Dripping in Catholic symbolism and inspired by nature's curves and undulations, Gaudi lived like a hermit on the site for the last 14 years of his life. He is buried in the crypt, and work is due to continue around him for many years to come.

### **Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao, Spain**

Clustered around a light-flooded, 60-metre atrium, Frank Gehry's sandstone, glass and titanium Bilbao Guggenheim has been popularly acclaimed as a masterpiece of 20th-century architecture. With its shimmering fish-scale curves - crafted from 60 tons of metal - the building is every bit as much a work of art as the modern and contemporary pieces it houses.

### **Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur, India**

Teetering atop 125 metres of sheer rock above the blue city of Jodhpur, Mehrangarh has the last word in grandeur, majesty and sheer invincible scale. With austere ramparts – in parts hewn from the red sandstone and in places over 20 metres thick – contrasting with the opulence and decorative detail of the interior palaces, the vision and determination of the 17 generations of rulers who built the fort is plain to see.

### **Catedral Metropolitana, Mexico City, Mexico**

The Catedral Metropolitana is unsurprisingly a unique synthesis of architectural and design styles – from Baroque, through Churrigueresque to Neoclassical. With vast, 240-metre tall towers, 5 alters and 16 side chapels it's Latin America's largest church. This scale was almost its downfall, however, as it has subsided over the years into the clay on which it

is built. An enormous project to stop further subsidence was completed in 2000, but the building has been left with some unusual slopes and angles.

### **Pompidou Centre, Paris, France**

Literally turning architecture inside-out, the Pompidou unabashedly wears all its inner workings – from air ducts and water pipes to escalators and elevators – on the outside, leaving more, uncluttered space inside. Set in a vibrant plaza, thronged by people-watching locals and tourists, it's now Europe's most visited building and a huge success story for urban regeneration.

### **Parthenon, Athens, Greece**

Built to house a vast 12-metre high statue of Athena, to whom it is dedicated, the Parthenon is widely considered to be the world's finest example of a Doric temple. Although much of the structure was demolished by a devastating explosion in 1687, the skeletal remains of the building endure as a reminder of the extraordinary skill of its Greek architects. Mathematically precise measurements make the Parthenon completely symmetrical, while the laws of perspective are manipulated by sculptural trickery. Not bad for a building more than 2000 years old.

### **Umeda Sky Building, Osaka, Japan**

In terms of high-thrill buildings, you don't get much more of an adrenaline rush than the Umeda Sky Building. Two gleaming, high-tech, 40-storey towers stand side by side, reflecting the sky, joined only at their top two storeys. The enormous void between the towers is crossed by bridges and escalators, and a rooftop observatory, open to the elements, offers unparalleled panoramic views of the city to those staunch enough to brave the vertigo.

### **Colosseum, Rome, Italy**

Once home to unprecedented slaughter of both men and wild animals in the name of entertainment, there is an undeniable gruesome fascination associated with the Colosseum. Accommodating 50,000 spectators and featuring elements from the Doric, Ionian and Corinthian traditions, the building's influence has reverberated down the centuries, through the Renaissance and into the modern day.

### **Angkor Wat, Cambodia**

Dedicated to Vishnu and representing the sacred design of the Hindu cosmos, Angkor Wat is the world's biggest complex of religious buildings. From the five-towered, lotus-inspired central sanctuary, through the outer walls – bedecked with ornate carvings of enigmatic and almost sensuous celestial dancing girls – to the 4-mile-long moat, there really is nothing else on earth which compares.

### **Burj Al Arab, Dubai**

Remarkable for its status as the world's tallest hotel, but possibly more so for its iconic symbolism of the luxury and opulence of modern Dubai, the Burj Al Arab soars 321 m out

of its own artificial island. Inspired by the billowing sail of the traditional Arabian dhow, the hotel's exterior is illuminated by night in a spectacular rainbow of light. Believed to be one of the most expensive buildings ever, the final cost has never been revealed.

### **Mosque of Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco**

In a city as legendary as Casablanca and in a country where ornate decoration is commonplace, it can be hard to stand out. Covering 9 hectares, with a prayer hall to accommodate 25,000 and a minaret 200 m high, the Mosque of Hassan II makes its mark with both sheer scale as well as minutely crafted details. Stunning because of its relative newness (it was completed in 1993) as well as the extraordinary craftsmanship of the carvings, paintings and tilework, the mosque is a fascinating marriage between the ancient and modern.

### **Krak des Chevaliers, Homs, Syria**

Built in the 1100s on a scale that defies comprehension, in a merciless climate by crusading monk soldiers - this is a singularly awe-inspiring building. It has walls up to 100 feet thick and has stood for a thousand years as a constant and unapologetic reminder of the complexity of Syria's history and testament to what can be achieved by the fervent and determined.

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