

Ancient wonders

DISCOVER THE WORLD'S MOST INSPIRING DESTINATIONS IN TRUE MODERN LUXURY

There's something truly ethereal about monuments built in centuries gone by – as tourists, we can be privy to a secret life long before us. However, from the awe-

inspiring Great Pyramid of Giza to the world's most lavish testimony to love, the Taj Mahal, there's no need to rough it when experiencing ancient temples and crumbling ruins. The Earth's most impressive man-made icons all come with nearby super-lush hotels, almost as legendary as the structure itself.

Honeymoon highlight:

The Great Wall of China

First built more than 2000 years ago during the Qin Dynasty, the Great Wall of China spans 6400km. Originally a fortification against potential attack from neighbouring invaders, the masonry and packed-earth wall stretches over northern China's mountainous regions

to the north of Beijing. It is the longest human-made structure in the world and at times climbs extremely steep slopes with thousands of stairs, forts and watchtowers. Some sections have crumbled, while many within the Beijing municipality have been restored.

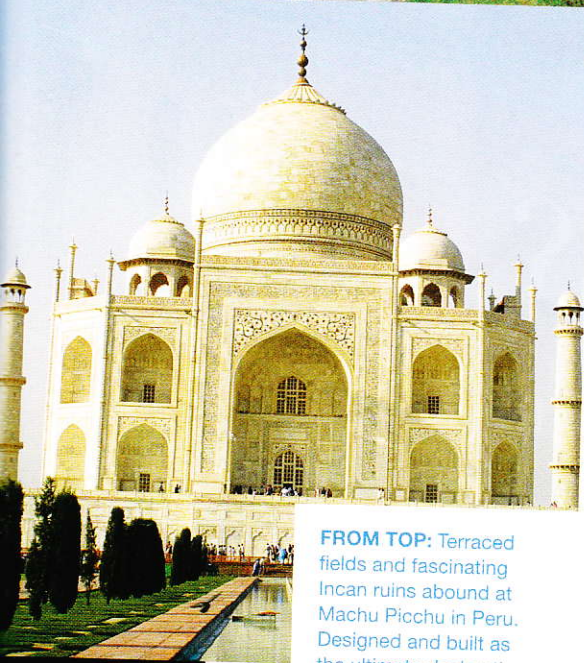
Where to stay:

Commune by the Great Wall

This collection of luxe contemporary dwellings was recently named "A New Architectural Wonder of China" by *Business Week* magazine. The original 11 villas, each unique in design, came with 46 guest rooms and a further 31 villas have since been added with spectacular mountain views. Choose from the 'Suitcase House', the 'Cantilevered House' or the 'Forest House' and marvel at the design. Guests climb through the commune's private path to the Great Wall for a day of exploration, then get pampered at the commune's luxe Anantara Spa. communebythegreatwall.com

The Great Wall of China winds through thousands of kilometres of spectacular scenery.

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FROM TOP: Terraced fields and fascinating Incan ruins abound at Machu Picchu in Peru. Designed and built as the ultimate declaration of love, India's majestic Taj Mahal is surrounded by gardens and viewing platforms. Remote but luxurious, the stunning Orient-Express Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge.



Honeymoon highlight: *Angkor Wat, Cambodia*

The temples of Angkor represent the capital of Cambodia's ancient Khmer empire. Spread over 80 hectares of lush green parklands and jungle, it is dotted with mammoth sculptures carved from stone and ruins that belie this once thriving million-plus city that ruled an empire from Burma to Vietnam. The shrines here date from 802AD and continue to fill travel-hungry sightseers with wonder as the sunlight plays with shadows from dawn till dusk.

It's possible to spend an entire week exploring Angkor Wat on foot, bicycle or in air-conditioned European car comfort. Allow plenty of time to devour the mighty Angkor Wat temple's recessed pools, carved walls and religious effigies. The Bayon Temple boasts over 200 eerie faces and is best seen in the morning light, while the Ta Phrom temple has literally been reclaimed by the jungle, with mammoth tree roots strangling the ancient stone walls. If you're feeling adventurous, go further afield into the jungle north of Siem Reap to discover an incredible carved riverbed known as the 'River of a Thousand Lingas'.

Where to stay:

Hôtel de la Paix, Siem Reap

Part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World group, the Hôtel de la Paix has raised the bar even higher in Southeast Asia, where service and design already leads the hospitality sphere. Nothing is too much trouble for the property's highly attuned staff who are five steps ahead when it comes to

anticipating the needs of their guests. Add mammoth beds so huge you'll never want to get up, bathtubs sized for two, a rooftop pool inspired by Bedouins, hanging breakfast beds suspended from ceilings in a dining courtyard and an affiliation with the region's most innovative artists, who hang their wares in the dreamy foyer, and you have a perfect recipe for pure indulgence.

For toll-free reservations within Australia call 1800 251 958, or see slh.com/delapaix

Honeymoon highlight: *Machu Picchu, Peru*

The 'lost city' of Machu Picchu sits high in the Peruvian mountains and is said to have been built in the mid-15th century. Discovered in 1911, this citadel was used by the Inca ruler, his noblemen, priests, priestesses and chosen women. It was once thought that Machu Picchu was a place of virgin sacrifice or a shrine for a study of the stars. Either way it remains a spiritual centre for those drawn to the wonder of this high-altitude stone city.

A popular trekking destination, it's possible to hire a private guide or join a small group to complete the four to six day walk to the top of the Lost City of the Incas, as it reveals itself in full glory on your final day. Others choose to do it in comfort – and less time – and take the train.

Where to stay:

Orient-Express Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge

There is one way, and one way only, to see the Inca city in style. The Orient-Express Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge is the only



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Enjoy modern luxury in the land of the pharaohs at Sofitel le Sphinx. Exploring the huge temple complex at Cambodia's Angkor takes a week. Oberoi Amarvilás complements the beauty of its neighbouring attraction, India's Taj Mahal. Impeccable service, design and attention to detail are hallmarks of the Hôtel de la Paix, near Ankor.



hotel adjacent to the ancient citadel and has pride of place for sunrise and sunset. With a mere 29 rooms and two suites, it's intimate and remote, the perfect setting for spiritually inspired romance. Two restaurants overlook the ruins, while the hotel also offers private guides for personalised tours.

orient-express.com

Honeymoon highlight:
The Great Pyramid of Giza and the Sphinx, Egypt

These amazing testimonies to ancient man's construction ability are more than 4500 years old. The Great Pyramid is one of three main pyramids in Giza and was built as a tomb for Pharaoh Khufu. Around 100,000 people worked on building this pyramid, utilising more than two million limestone blocks weighing at least two tonnes each to create what was, until relatively recent history, the tallest construction in the world.

The nearby Sphinx has the body of a lion with paws 15 metres in length and the head of a king. To many the Sphinx symbolises ancient Egypt, a world of power and god-like obsession. Both the pyramids and the Sphinx are lasting reminders of a mystical era lost in ancient times, well worth visiting for their historic and romantic potential.

Where to stay:

Sofitel Le Sphinx

This remarkable hotel sits in parkland at the base of the Sphinx and pyramids. A shrine to contemporary design, its rooms are fitted in warm desert and rich regal colours to reflect the surrounding environment.

A mammoth infinity pool provides sparkling refuge from the desert heat, while guests in terrace rooms enjoy views of the pyramids.

sofitel.com

Honeymoon highlight:
The Taj Mahal, India

Perhaps the most romantic of all standing monuments from bygone eras, the Taj Mahal was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite and most loved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Considered a shrine to love by romantics around the globe, the Taj Mahal is an intricate building of intense design.

Completed in 1648, it features a giant dome, plus delicate inlay of translucent white marble transported from Rajasthan, jade and crystal from China, sapphires from Sri Lanka and turquoise from Tibet. Surrounded by stunning gardens and viewing positions, the Taj Mahal is the perfect place for lovers to immerse themselves in splendour.

Where to stay:

The Oberoi Amarvilás

Gaze at the face of the Taj Mahal from a property so richly detailed with tapestry and carvings that you'll swear you've gone back in time. Also part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World portfolio, The Oberoi Amarvilás's rooms all offer views of the extraordinary Taj Mahal. Stroll the lavish, elaborate gardens within the hotel grounds, take time out in the day spa, submerge yourself in the pool or simply meditate in the lobby specifically designed with the Taj Mahal as its focus.

For toll-free reservations within Australia call 1800 251 958, or see slh.com/amarvilas

