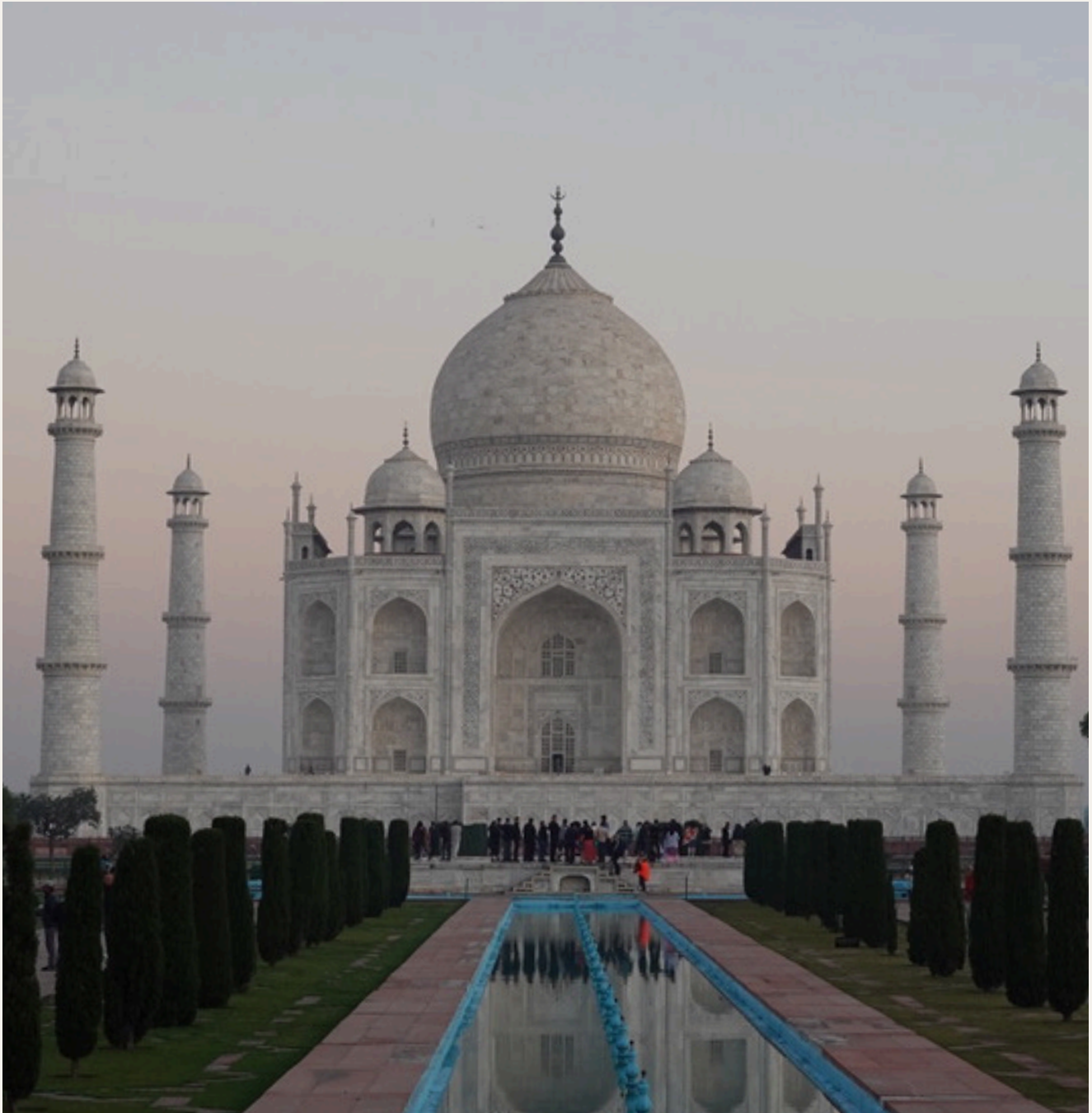


ROAM & TELL

Special Issue:
7 Wonders Edition

Samantha McKibben



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ROAM & TELL

EDITORS NOTES

I started this magazine as a way to slow down and remember what travel feels like beyond the highlight reel. It's a love letter to moments that don't always make the itinerary.

SAM MCKIBBEN

I am a Chicago-based traveler and storyteller who's endlessly curious about the world. So far, I've been lucky enough to visit 58 countries - each one teaching me something new about culture, connection, and myself.

I write, photograph, and design every part of this magazine as a creative outlet to capture those experiences and share them with others.

My goal isn't just to see new places, but to travel with intention: to slow down, listen, and find meaning in the moments between flights.



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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to *Roam & Tell*: a collection of stories, photos, and fleeting moments from around the world. I started this project to capture travel not just as movement, but as meaning: the people you meet, the quiet mornings, and the memories that linger long after the plane lands.

Travel, to me, has always been about connection. It's about noticing the details. From the way light hits a café window in Lisbon, to the laughter shared with strangers in the Sahara desert, to the calm of a sunrise run before a city wakes up. It's the small, unplanned moments that make each trip feel alive.

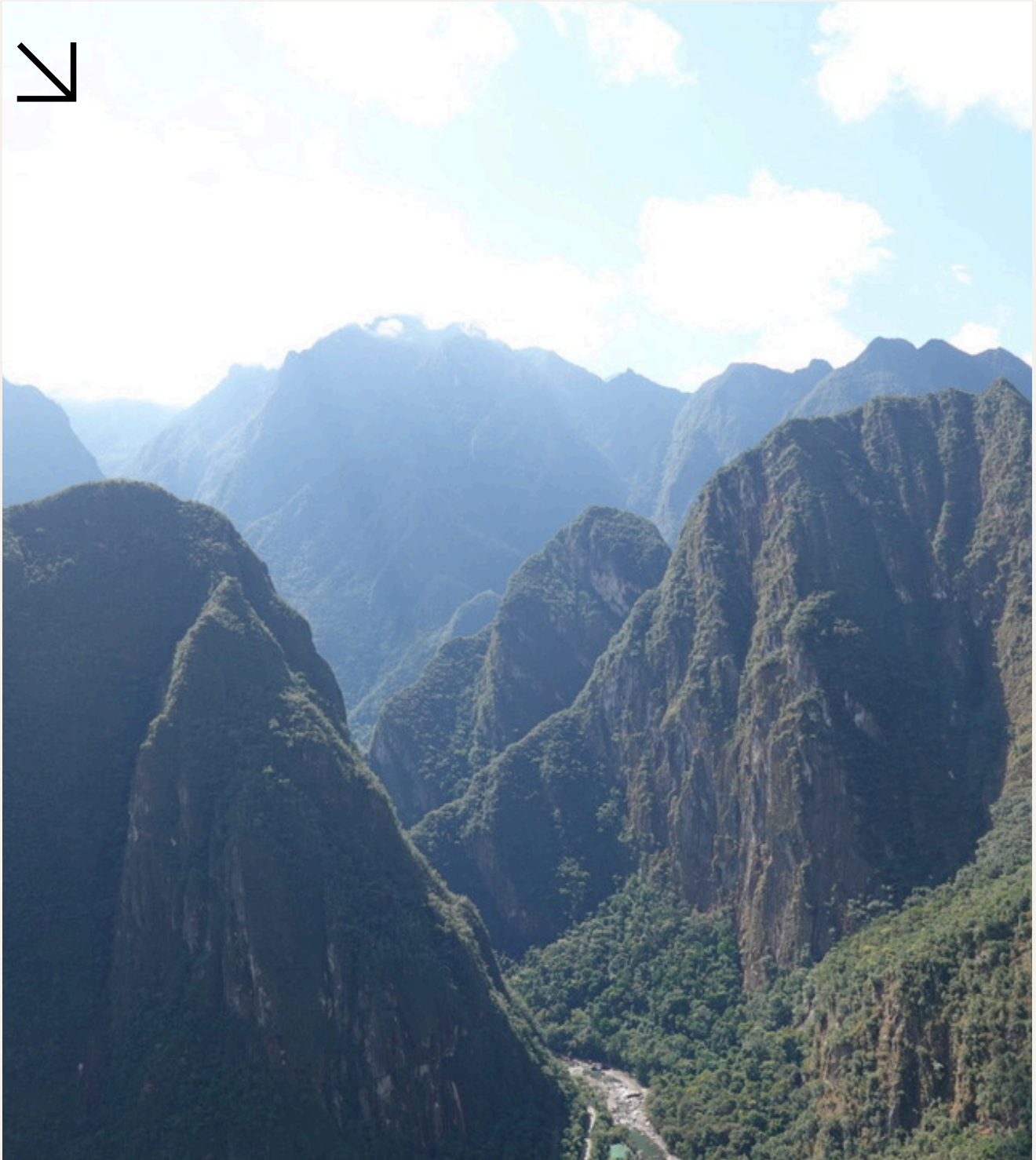
This magazine grew from a desire to slow down and reflect; to document not just where I've been, but how each place has shaped me. Every photo, paragraph, and layout here is created by hand. It's a love letter to exploration, creativity, and the beauty of paying attention.

My hope is that as you flip through these pages, you're inspired to explore more intentionally. To see the world with curiosity, to embrace imperfection, and to find meaning in the in-between... because sometimes the journey itself is the most beautiful part.

SMikibben

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SPECIAL ISSUE: 7 WONDERS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM MCKIBBEN

The New Seven Wonders of the World highlight incredible human achievement: the Great Wall of China, Petra (Jordan), Christ the Redeemer (Brazil), Machu Picchu (Peru), Chichen Itza (Mexico), the Roman Colosseum (Italy), and the Taj Mahal (India).



The New Seven Wonders of the World represent a celebration of human creativity, ingenuity, and cultural heritage across the globe. Unlike the ancient Seven Wonders, which were largely centered around the Mediterranean and mostly no longer exist, this modern list was determined in 2007 through a worldwide poll organized by the New7Wonders Foundation. The goal was to identify monuments that embody the spirit, history, and artistic achievement of humanity.

Each wonder tells its own story: the Great Wall of China stands as a testament to ancient engineering and defense; Petra in Jordan reflects the ingenuity of the Nabateans; Christ the Redeemer in Brazil symbolizes faith and unity; Machu Picchu in Peru preserves the marvels of Incan architecture; Chichen Itza in Mexico showcases Mayan astronomy and cultural sophistication; the Roman Colosseum in Italy highlights architectural mastery and social history; and the Taj Mahal in India endures as an eternal symbol of love and artistic brilliance.

Together, these seven sites connect the past and present, demonstrating how diverse cultures have shaped the world. They are more than monuments: they are landmarks of human achievement, inspiring millions to appreciate history, innovation, and the beauty of global heritage.



THE COLOSSEUM

 ROME, ITALY

Towering in the heart of Rome, Italy, the Colosseum is one of the world's most iconic symbols of history, architecture, and human ambition. Known originally as the Flavian Amphitheatre (or Amphitheatrum Flavium in Latin), it was commissioned in AD 72 by Emperor Vespasian and completed in AD 80 under his son Titus. As the largest amphitheater of the ancient world, it could hold between 50,000 and 80,000 spectators, hosting gladiatorial games, animal hunts, mock naval battles, and public spectacles that reflected both Roman engineering brilliance and cultural life.

Constructed from concrete, tuff, and travertine, the Colosseum showcases advanced Roman engineering. Its complex system of arches, corridors, and trap doors allowed for rapid crowd movement and dramatic stage effects that amazed audiences. Though partially ruined by earthquakes and stone looting over centuries, the Colosseum's grandeur still dominates the Roman skyline.

The Colosseum sits in central Rome, adjacent to the Roman Forum and Palatine Hill, making it easy to combine with a day exploring the heart of ancient Rome. Visitors can enter through the main entrance on Piazza del Colosseo, and tickets are available online or at the site. Guided tours provide insight into the gladiators' lives, the underground chambers, and the arena's history. For a unique experience, book a night tour to see the Colosseum illuminated, evoking the drama of ancient Rome.

Beyond its history, the Colosseum remains a powerful symbol of Rome's enduring legacy. It's not just an architectural marvel - or wonder. It is a window into the social, political, and cultural fabric of one of the greatest civilizations in human history.

THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

BEIJING, CHINA

Stretching across rugged mountains, deserts, and grasslands, the Great Wall of China stands as one of the most extraordinary architectural feats in human history. Winding over 13,000 miles, it embodies centuries of determination, defense, and national pride.

The Wall's origins date back to the 7th century BCE, when early Chinese states built fortifications to protect against invasions. These sections were later unified during the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE) under Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who sought to link and strengthen the empire's defenses. Construction continued through subsequent dynasties, most notably the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), which reinforced the Wall with bricks, stone, and watchtowers that still stand today.

Beyond its defensive purpose, the Great Wall served as a symbol of unity and strength, guarding trade routes such as the Silk Road and controlling immigration and goods flow. It also became a powerful emblem of the Chinese spirit—resilient, innovative, and enduring.

The Wall stretches across northern China, from the Gobi Desert to the Bohai Sea, with the most accessible and well-preserved sections near Beijing. Popular areas include Badaling, ideal for first-time visitors, and Mutianyu, known for its scenic beauty and fewer crowds. Adventurous travelers can explore more rugged sections like Jinshanling or Jiankou, which offer panoramic views and a glimpse of the Wall's wild, untouched charm.

To visit, plan a half- or full-day trip from Beijing, wear comfortable shoes, and bring layers as temperatures can shift quickly with altitude. The Great Wall is more than just an ancient fortification; it's a living monument to the perseverance and ingenuity of the Chinese people. Standing atop its stone battlements, gazing into the distance, one can truly feel the weight of history stretching endlessly toward the horizon.



PETRA

PETRA, JORDAN

Carved into rose-colored cliffs in the heart of the Jordanian desert, Petra is one of the world's most breathtaking archaeological wonders—a city that once thrived at the crossroads of ancient trade and now stands as a silent testament to human artistry and resilience.

Founded around the 6th century BCE by the Nabataeans, a nomadic Arab people, Petra became a wealthy trading hub connecting Arabia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean. The Nabataeans were master builders and engineers, channeling water through intricate systems of dams and tunnels to sustain their desert city. At its height, Petra was home to tens of thousands and flourished as a center of commerce and culture.

The city's most famous structure, Al-Khazneh—or The Treasury—greets visitors at the end of the narrow canyon known as the Siq, its towering façade carved directly into sandstone cliffs. Other highlights include the Monastery (Ad-Deir), the Royal Tombs, and the High Place of Sacrifice, each blending Hellenistic architectural style with Nabataean craftsmanship.

After earthquakes and shifting trade routes led to Petra's decline, the city was largely forgotten by the Western world until its rediscovery in 1812 by Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. Today, it's recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, drawing visitors from around the globe.

Petra lies in southern Jordan, about a three-hour drive from the capital, Amman, or two hours from the Red Sea city of Aqaba. Most visitors stay in the nearby town of Wadi Musa, where hotels and restaurants cater to travelers. A one- or two-day ticket allows you to explore Petra's vast expanse—over 60 square kilometers of temples, tombs, and trails.

To truly experience Petra's magic, arrive early or visit in the late afternoon, when the sunlight turns the sandstone cliffs brilliant shades of red and gold. For an unforgettable evening, attend Petra by Night, when over 1,500 candles light the Siq and Treasury, casting a glow that feels both sacred and surreal.

Petra is more than an ancient city—it's a journey through time, a reminder of human ingenuity carved in stone, and a symbol of Jordan's enduring beauty.







TAJ MAHAL

 AGRA, INDIA

Gracefully rising above the Yamuna River in Agra, India, the Taj Mahal stands as one of the most beloved and recognizable monuments in the world—a gleaming masterpiece of symmetry, artistry, and devotion.

Commissioned in 1632 by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the Taj Mahal was built as a mausoleum for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died during childbirth. Over 20,000 artisans, architects, and laborers from across the Mughal Empire and beyond worked for more than two decades to complete the monument, which blends Persian, Islamic, and Indian architectural styles into one harmonious design.

Constructed entirely of white marble inlaid with precious stones, the Taj Mahal changes color throughout the day—glowing pink at dawn, ivory white in the afternoon, and golden under moonlight. Its central dome rises majestically above symmetrical gardens, reflecting pools, and intricately carved minarets, each detail symbolizing balance and eternity.

More than an architectural wonder, the Taj Mahal is a universal symbol of love and loss, embodying both the grandeur of the Mughal Empire and the depth of human emotion. It has survived wars, colonialism, and time itself, continuing to inspire poets, artists, and travelers for centuries. In 1983, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and in 2007, it was named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.

Located about 125 miles (200 km) south of New Delhi, the Taj Mahal is easily accessible by train or car. The complex opens at sunrise, offering a serene, golden-lit view before crowds arrive—an experience many call unforgettable. Visitors should also explore the Agra Fort and Mehtab Bagh, the garden across the river that offers stunning sunset views of the monument.

For the most magical visit, plan your trip between October and March, when the weather is cooler and the skies are clear. Remember to remove your shoes before entering the mausoleum and take time to wander the gardens, where the reflection of the Taj in the long pools captures its timeless perfection.

The Taj Mahal is more than a monument... it's a love story carved in stone, a masterpiece that transcends culture and time, and a reminder that beauty, when born of devotion, can endure forever.



MACHU PICCHU

 CUSCUO, PERU



High in the misty Andes Mountains of Peru, perched nearly 8,000 feet above sea level, lies Machu Picchu—a breathtaking Incan citadel and one of the most extraordinary archaeological sites in the world. Hidden for centuries, it continues to captivate travelers with its mystery, beauty, and enduring spirit.

Built in the 15th century during the reign of the Inca emperor Pachacuti, Machu Picchu is believed to have served as a royal estate or sacred religious site. The Incas constructed the city with remarkable precision, using a technique called ashlar masonry, where massive stone blocks are cut and fitted together without mortar. Even after centuries of earthquakes and heavy rains, the structures remain astonishingly intact.

The site includes more than 150 buildings, from temples and terraces to residences and agricultural zones, all interconnected by intricate stairways and pathways. Its most iconic features include the Temple of the Sun, the Intihuatana Stone—a ritual sundial believed to have astronomical significance—and the Room of the Three Windows, which frames spectacular views of the mountains beyond.

Though abandoned in the 16th century during the Spanish conquest, Machu Picchu remained hidden from the outside world until 1911, when American explorer Hiram Bingham brought it to international attention. In 1983, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and in 2007, it earned its place as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Today, it stands as a symbol of Incan ingenuity, spirituality, and harmony with nature.

Machu Picchu is located in southern Peru, near the town of Aguas Calientes, about a four-hour train ride from Cusco. Visitors can take the scenic Inca Trail, a multi-day trek that winds through cloud forests and ancient ruins, or opt for the train journey that offers stunning views along the Urubamba River.

To make the most of your visit, arrive early, sunrise over Machu Picchu is a moment of pure magic as golden light spills across the terraces. Tickets must be purchased in advance, as daily visitor numbers are limited to preserve the site. The best time to visit is during the dry season (May to October), when clear skies reveal sweeping mountain vistas. More than a ruin, Machu Picchu is a living link to an ancient world where history still echoes through the stones.

CHRIST THE REDEEMER

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

Perched atop Corcovado Mountain, arms spread wide above the vibrant city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Christ the Redeemer (Cristo Redentor) stands as a global symbol of faith, hope, and unity. Gazing out over the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, the statue is not just a marvel of engineering—it's the spiritual soul of Brazil.

Construction began in the 1920s as a project to commemorate 100 years of Brazil's independence. Designed by Brazilian engineer Heitor da Silva Costa and sculpted by French artist Paul Landowski, the statue was completed in 1931 after nine years of work. Rising 98 feet (30 meters) tall with an arm span of 92 feet (28 meters), it was built from reinforced concrete and covered with over six million soapstone tiles, chosen for their smooth texture and enduring shine.

Christ the Redeemer overlooks Rio from 2,300 feet (700 meters) above sea level, within the lush Tijuca National Park, offering panoramic views of Sugarloaf Mountain, Guanabara Bay, and the sprawling city below. The statue's open arms symbolize peace and embrace—a reflection of Brazil's welcoming spirit and deep-rooted faith.

The monument is located in the Cosme Velho neighborhood, accessible by the Corcovado Train, vans, or hiking trails through the forest. Early mornings or late afternoons offer the best light—and fewer crowds. On clear days, visitors are rewarded with sweeping views of Rio's coastline and mountains, while misty days lend the experience an almost ethereal beauty.

In 2007, Christ the Redeemer was named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, cementing its place among humanity's greatest landmarks. Whether viewed from the city streets or standing at its base, the statue radiates a quiet grandeur—a reminder of both human artistry and divine inspiration.

More than a monument, Christ the Redeemer is a symbol of connection—between earth and sky, faith and culture, people and place.



CHICHÉN ITZÁ

 PISTÉ, MEXICO



Deep in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, surrounded by jungle and mystery, lies Chichén Itzá—one of the most remarkable archaeological sites of the ancient world and a lasting testament to the brilliance of Mayan civilization.

Founded around the 5th century CE, Chichén Itzá thrived as a powerful city and cultural center for centuries, blending Mayan and Toltec influences in its architecture, art, and astronomy. The city's most iconic structure, El Castillo (also known as the Temple of Kukulcán), is a masterpiece of mathematical precision and celestial alignment. Rising nearly 100 feet (30 meters), the pyramid was built to honor the feathered serpent god Kukulcán, and twice a year—during the spring and autumn equinoxes—the setting sun creates the illusion of a serpent slithering down its steps.

Beyond the pyramid, Chichén Itzá features vast plazas, sacred temples, and ball courts where ancient rituals and competitions once unfolded. The Great Ball Court, the largest in Mesoamerica, still echoes with the legends of players who competed not just for victory but for divine favor. Other highlights include the Temple of the Warriors, the Thousand Columns, and the Sacred Cenote, a natural sinkhole once used for ceremonial offerings to the gods.

Chichén Itzá is located about 120 miles (200 km) from Cancún and 75 miles (120 km) from Mérida, making it an easy day trip from either city. Arrive early in the morning to beat the crowds and the heat—especially if visiting during the dry season (November to April). Guided tours bring the ruins to life with stories of astronomy, mythology, and daily Mayan life.

Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988 and named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007, Chichén Itzá continues to awe visitors from around the globe. Standing before El Castillo, watching sunlight dance across its stone steps, it's easy to understand why this ancient city remains one of humanity's greatest cultural treasures.

More than a collection of ruins, Chichén Itzá is a living calendar of the cosmos—a place where science, spirituality, and art converge under the same sun that guided the Maya a thousand years ago.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Kenya is not only a haven for wildlife but also a leader in conservation efforts across Africa. From anti-poaching initiatives to community-led wildlife programs, the country works tirelessly to protect endangered species like elephants, rhinos, and big cats. Visiting these protected areas offers a firsthand look at the dedication and collaboration required to safeguard the savannah's rich biodiversity, reminding travelers that every encounter with wildlife carries both wonder and responsibility.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM MCKIBBEN





THE “8TH WONDER”

The title of the “8th Wonder” has been given to some of the world’s most remarkable sites and achievements. Cambodia’s Angkor Wat captivates with its monumental scale, intricate architecture, and deep cultural significance. China’s Terracotta Army, with its thousands of life-sized clay soldiers guarding the tomb of the first emperor, impresses with both artistry and history. The Banaue Rice Terraces in the Philippines inspire awe for their age, ingenuity, and sheer beauty. Straddling the U.S. and Canada, Niagara Falls is celebrated for its breathtaking power and global fame. New Zealand’s Pink and White Terraces, lost to volcanic activity, were once renowned for their extraordinary natural charm. In Egypt, the Aswan High Dam earns occasional recognition as the “8th Wonder” for its engineering brilliance and role in taming the Nile.

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Thank you for joining on this journey. Stay tuned for the next issue, where more adventures and stories await.

