

Great Wall of China



Location: Huairou, China. It runs across the historical borders of previous empires in Northern China.

When was it built? Many of the fortifications in the wall date from the third century B.C.E. The best-known and most-preserved section of the Great Wall- Badaling, located 43 miles (70 km) northwest of Beijing- was built in the 14th through 17th centuries C.E., during the Ming dynasty. Badaling was rebuilt in the late 1950s, and attracts thousands of national and foreign tourists every day.

Why was it built? The Great Wall of China is an ancient series of walls and fortifications, totaling more than 13,000 miles in length. Perhaps the most recognizable symbol of China and its long and vivid history, the Great Wall was originally conceived by Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China under the Qin Dynasty. Made mostly of earth and stone, the wall stretched from the China Sea port of Shanhaiguan over 3,000 miles west into the Gansu province. In some strategic areas, sections of the wall overlapped for maximum security. From a base of 15 to 50 feet, the Great Wall rose some 30 feet high and was topped by ramparts 12 feet or higher; guard towers were distributed at intervals along it. Though the Great Wall never effectively prevented invaders from entering China, it came to function as a powerful symbol of Chinese civilization's enduring strength. Today, the Great Wall is generally recognized as one of the most impressive architectural feats in human history. In 1987, UNESCO designated the Great Wall a World Heritage site, and a popular claim that emerged in the 20th century holds that it is the only manmade structure that is visible from space.

Bayon Temple



Location: Angkor Thom, Cambodia

When was it built? The Bayon is a well-known and richly decorated Khmer temple that was built in the late 12th or early 13th century C.E. The 12th century is generally regarded as a period of European decline; however, in Southeast Asia, the Khmer Empire was enjoying its Golden Age. Their empire extended its borders over much of mainland; in addition, the prosperity and wealth of the empire allowed Khmer kings to build numerous temples throughout their lands as a sign of their piety.

Why was it built? The Bayon Temple served as the state temple of King Jayavarman VII's new capital, Angkor Thom. Unlike the other temples built by the Khmer, Bayon Temple is unique in that it was the only state temple built primarily as a Mahayana Buddhist shrine dedicated to the Buddha. After the Jayavarman's death, the features of the Bayon Temple were altered according to the religious belief of his successors, thus containing Hindu and Theravada Buddhist elements that were not part of the temple's original plan. Over 216 gigantic stone faces in sets of four, each identical, point to a cardinal direction. The location of the faces symbolizes the omnipresence of the person whose face is being depicted. According to some scholars, the statues depict the face of the Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion.

Taj Mahal



Location: Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India

When was it built? Construction, led by main architect Ustad-Ahmad Lahori, began in 1632 C.E. and was completed in 1648 C.E. The mosque, the guest house and the main gateway on the south, the outer courtyard and its cloisters were added later and completed in 1653 AD. For its construction, masons, stone-cutters, inlayers, carvers, painters, calligraphers, dome builders and other artisans were brought in from the whole Mughal Empire as well as from Central Asia and Iran.

Why was it built? It was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The Taj Mahal is considered to be the greatest architectural achievement of Indo-Islamic architecture. It is a perfect symmetrical planned building; the large double storied domed chamber, which houses the cenotaphs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, is a perfect octagon. Four free-standing minarets at the corners of the platform added a hitherto unknown dimension to the Mughal architecture. The four minarets, main gate in the center of the southern wall, double arcade galleries, gardens, and enclosure walls exhibit unique aesthetic qualities in balance, symmetry and harmonious blending of various design elements.

Potala Palace



Location: Lhasa, Tibet

When was it built? The Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, a complex of buildings that includes the Red Palace, White Palace, Jokhang Temple Monastery and Namgyel Dratshang, was built in the 7th century C.E.

Why was it built? As the winter palace of the Dalai Lama, the complex symbolizes Tibetan Buddhism and its central role in the traditional administration of Tibet. The White Palace contains the main ceremonial hall with the throne of the Dalai Lama, and his private rooms and audience hall are on the uppermost level. Higher up the mountain, the Red Palace contains the gilded burial stupas of past Dalai Lamas. The Namgyel Dratshang is the private monastery of the current Dalai Lama. The Jokhang Temple Monastery was founded to promote the Buddhist religion. The buildings are constructed of wood and stone and are outstanding examples of the Tibetan Buddhist style, with influences from China, India, and Nepal. They house over 3,000 images of Buddha and other deities and historical figures along with many other treasures and manuscripts. Murals depicting religious and historical scenes cover the walls. The beauty and originality of the architecture, their rich ornamentation and harmonious integration in a striking landscape, contribute to their outstanding universal value.

Mount Everest



Location: Solukhumbu District, Province No. 1, Nepal

How old is it? Mount Everest, Earth's highest mountain above sea level, one of the Himalayas mountain range, was created about 60 to 70 million years ago.

How was it made? Millions of years ago, India, Africa, Australia, and South America were all one continent called Pangea. Over the next several million years, this giant supercontinent broke apart, forming the continents we know today. Pangea essentially turned inside out, the edges of the old continent becoming the collision zones of new continents. The movement of the Indo-Australian plate, which India sits on, moved rapidly northward toward the continent of Eurasian plate. India charged across the equator at rates of up to 15 cm per year. India collided with South Asia, including China's Tibet, for at least 80 million years. The collision of the convergent plate boundaries resulted in the creation of one of Earth's big mountain ranges-the Himalayas.

Three Gorges Dam



Location: Yichang, Hubei Province, China

When was it built? The Three Gorges Dam is the world's largest power producing facility, and the world's largest hydroelectric dam. When construction of the dam officially began in 1994, it was the largest engineering project in China. At the time of its completion in 2006, it was the largest dam structure in the world.

Why was it built? The Three gorges dam was built across the Yangtze River to control the amount of water allowed through. This created a massive artificial lake which has become an international tourist attraction. One of the main reasons that the Three Gorges dam was built was to prevent flooding further downstream. The need for a dam was highlighted in 1954 when people were killed in the Yangtze River floods. By building a dam across the Yangtze River, it is possible to control the flow of water. The Three Gorges Dam was also built to generate hydroelectric power which is then sold to provinces around China, including Shanghai. The ability to generate and sell power in this way will mean that the dam will eventually pay for itself and start making profits. The electricity is generated without the need for fossil fuels. This means that it is green, renewable energy which does not pollute the environment and it has helped China reduce its carbon dioxide emissions.

Indian Railway



Location: Headquarters in New Delhi, India

When was it built? Indian Railways (IR) is the state-owned railway company of India. It is one of the largest and busiest rail networks in the world, transporting just over six billion passengers and almost 750 million tons of freight annually. Railways were first introduced to India in 1853. By 1947, the year of India's independence, there were forty-two rail systems. In 1951, the systems were nationalized as one unit, becoming one of the largest networks in the world. Indian Railways operates both long distance and suburban rail systems.

Why was it built? On April 16, 1853, India's first passenger train traveled between Bombay and Thane. It consisted of 14 cars being hauled by three steam locomotives, and carried 400 passengers. The railroad was built through an alliance between the Great Indian Peninsular Railway and the East India Company, which at that point ruled large swathes in India. From 1869-1881, the British Raj took control of railway construction and increased expansion to help areas struck by famine. The length of the network reached 9,000 miles by 1880, with lines snaking inward from the three major port cities of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Today, the railways traverse through the length and width of the country; the routes cover a total length of 39,230 miles. As of 2005, Indian Railway owns a total of 216,717 wagons, 39,936 coaches and 7,339 locomotives and runs a total of 14,244 trains daily, including about 8,002 passenger trains.