



## Rustam Rajabboyevich Kobilov

Deputy Governor of Samarkand Region, Uzbekistan

Samarkand, the second-largest city in Uzbekistan, boasts a rich cultural and historical heritage. In the year 2000, the historic town of Samarkand was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The entire city comprises various areas reflecting different periods of construction, preserving numerous religious, cultural, and traditional low-rise residential buildings from the Timurid era. Over the past few years, significant efforts have been made to develop and improve the city's infrastructure, especially its tourism facilities, providing a more comfortable environment for visitors from around the world. With the rapid advancement of digital technology today, our next step is to leverage its power to showcase the historical landmarks, thus to offer tourists an even better viewing experience.

Over the past three decades, through joint efforts

between China and Uzbekistan, bilateral relations have flourished, reaching the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership, setting an example for neighboring countries in friendly cooperation and mutual assistance. Presently, Samarkand has established a Confucius Square and a Confucius Institute, opened many Chinese restaurants, and attracted a group of locals who are passionate about learning and speaking Chinese. As a result, Chinese visitors will feel right at home when they come to Samarkand.

The World Tourism Cities Federation plays a crucial role, particularly at this stage, by uniting important tourism cities worldwide, facilitating discussions, mutual assistance, problem-solving, and overcoming challenges, thus playing an increasingly significant role.



## Tracing the Turquoise and Gold Legends of the Timurid Empire

✦ AUTHOR / CAMILLE PHOTOGRAPHS / PANORAMA MEDIA LNC., LV XING

Samarkand has been the focal point of Central Asian trade for centuries, where the splendors of both the East and the West converge. Its strategic location has led to numerous rulers, including Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan, leaving their marks here.



In 1370, the mighty conqueror Timur the Great made Samarkand his capital, gathering skilled artisans from all over the world to undertake ambitious construction projects. With the spoils of conquest from various lands, he built a magnificent and awe-inspiring imperial city. Even today, most of Samarkand's ancient architecture can be traced back to the Timurid era.

In the year 2000, the historic town of Samarkand was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The evaluation highlighted three major

values of the historic town: "The architecture and townscape of Samarkand, situated at the crossroads of ancient cultures, are masterpieces of Islamic cultural creativity. Ensembles in Samarkand such as the Bibi-Khanyim Mosque and Registan Square played a seminal role in the development of Islamic architecture over the entire region, from the Mediterranean to the Indian subcontinent. The historic town of Samarkand illustrates in its art, architecture, and urban structure the most important stages of Central Asian cultural and political history from the

13th century to the present day." The remnants of Samarkand's glorious past still evoke the enchanting legend of turquoise and gold which shines brightly in the history of human civilization.

To embark on a journey to explore this city rich in Western Region characteristics, the first stop can be Gur-e Amir Mausoleum—the final resting place of Timur and the tombs of his descendants. Samarkand's city development was achieved by shifting its center, not through extensive remodeling or reconstruction of existing buildings

and streets. Thus, the renowned landmarks are interconnected by ancient city pathways. Starting from Gur-e Amir Mausoleum, you can admire the city's stunning beauty as you walk through its ancient alleys and under its majestic domes. As the second-largest city in Uzbekistan and a highly popular tourist destination, the locals in Samarkand are known for their warmth and friendliness, making your travel experience here delightful.

Gur-e Amir Mausoleum is an impressive

architectural wonder that stands out in the entire city. You can spot its vibrant, colorful dome from a distance while in a taxi. Upon reaching the site and passing through a distinctive Persian-style arched gate and a courtyard often referred to as the Garden of Heaven, you enter the mausoleum's main hall. Inside, you'll be mesmerized by the opulence, intricate patterns on the dome, and the grandeur of the interior, which exudes an air of mystery and splendor under the dimly lit ambiance. The hall houses nine stone tombs and nine dark green jade tombstones, giving a glimpse of the glory and prosperity of the Timurid dynasty.

The next must-visit destination is Registan Square. As the city center of Samarkand, it is the oldest square and serves as an emblem of the city's identity. Three majestic madrasas flank the square, exuding grandeur and magnificence. Among them, the Ulugh Beg Madrasa, named after the scholar, astronomer, poet, and philosopher Ulugh Beg, is the oldest and widely acclaimed as the "most beautiful viewpoint" by travelers. Climbing to the top of Ulugh Beg Madrasa's minaret offers a panoramic view of Registan Square and the entire old city, immersing you in the splendor and extravagance of the Timurid Empire. In the evening, a dazzling light show takes place on the square, a spectacle worth revisiting. The outside platform of the square becomes bustling with people, and the illuminated blue and gold exquisite buildings resemble shimmering turquoise jewels.

Beyond Registan Square, a pedestrian street leads to the traditional Siyob Bazaar. This street was the main artery of the ancient city during the Timurid




era. Today, it is lined with low-rise traditional buildings housing several restaurants with charming courtyards. In the pedestrian street and the bazaar, you can savor Samarkand's characteristic delicacies, such as hand-pulled rice, baked buns, and lamb soup. If you visit during the fruit season, you can also buy cherries, strawberries, and other fruits at exceptionally reasonable prices.

Adjacent to the Siyob Bazaar is the Bibi-Khanym Mosque. Some believe it was built by Timur in honor of his beloved wife, while others say it was a surprise gift from his wife during his conquest of India. Regardless of the reason for its construction, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque was undoubtedly a masterpiece of architecture in its time. The height of its main entrance reaches 35 meters. The exquisite craftsmanship, simple and sleek structure, and elegant and delicate decorations, make it a highlight of medieval Central Asian Islamic architecture. However, the

mosque suffered severe damage in history, and though it has undergone several damage and reconstructions, a significant part of it remains in ruins. Yet, after the earlier encounters with the artistic ensembles, the "unfinished" status of this mosque only deepens the sense of Samarkand's ancient and ever-changing history.

Continuing forward, more of Samarkand's historical and cultural wonders unfold before your



eyes. The Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis, adorned with colorful ceramics, stretches along a 500-meter-long avenue, showcasing unique characteristics. The Afrasiab Museum exhibits exquisite murals narrating the ancient connections between Samarkand and the Tang Dynasty of China. The Ulugh Beg Observatory displays enormous sextants, quadrants, and horizontal circles used for measuring the length of a year during the Middle Ages. The delicate architectural styles, Samarkand blue, and intricate botanical and geometric patterns seem to be the city's most unforgettable features, leaving endless reminiscences whenever you think back to this extraordinary place. 





**Tumurtumuu**

Vice Mayor of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, is also a unique tourist city that combines nomadic culture with modern urban development.

Green ecotourism is an important sector of Mongolia's tourism and a key attraction for visitors to Ulaanbaatar. The government attaches great importance to ecological and environmental management and has introduced many policies and regulations in this regard. The tourism sector, based on its own characteristics, has also designed a number of eco-themed tourism products that are highly popular among tourists.

Since the beginning of this year, there has been a rapid recovery in tourism. Within the framework of strengthening economic recovery, the local government has declared 2023-2025 as the "Years to Visit Mongolia", with a special emphasis on accelerating the development of the tourism industry in Mongolia. In practical terms, the government has collaborated with

the public and private sectors, taking various measures to support the development of tourism in Ulaanbaatar. For example, starting from this year, preparations are underway to expand the self-driving tourism market, and it is expected that Chinese tourists will be able to embark on self-driving trips in Mongolia in the second half of the year. To facilitate entry for visitors, visa-free policies have been implemented for 32 countries. At the same time, we are strengthening deep exchanges with world tourism cities. We have established friendly city relations with Beijing, Chongqing and other cities in China, and in the future, we will continue along this path to establish connections with more cities.

In 2022, Ulaanbaatar joined the World Tourism Cities Federation as a new member. Through this platform, we can not only discuss the future vision of the tourism industry but also discuss challenges we are facing, future trends, cooperation opportunities and share best practices.

## Exploring the Dual Life of Ulaanbaatar

► AUTHOR / WANG XINBING PHOTOGRAPHS / PANORAMA MEDIA LNC., VCG, LV XING

Ulaanbaatar experienced several days of rain in early July, washing away the previous summer heat and infusing the air with a refreshing scent of damp earth. Summer is the most beautiful season in Ulaanbaatar, with endless grasslands stretching beneath the vast blue sky, gentle breezes, and lush greenery—an idyllic natural retreat from the heat. During the months of July and August, Ulaanbaatar residents take one or two months off, embarking on family vacations. As a result, the pace of summer life in Ulaanbaatar becomes slower and more relaxed.



Ulaanbaatar is a city built on the grasslands, where traditional and modern elements collide and merge, creating a striking contrast that piques the curiosity of us.

Ulaanbaatar is not just a city; it also represents the urbanization history of the Mongolian people. In 1639, the capital of modern-day Mongolia was established in this enchanting location and gradually developed and relocated to its present site.

Originally named Urguu, Ulaanbaatar underwent several name changes during its development, including Nomyn Khuree, Ikh Khuree, and Niislel Khuree, before officially becoming Ulaanbaatar in 1924, which means "A City of Red Hero."

During the period of Ikh Khuree, the city experienced development in a real sense. Mongolian artisans began blending folk architectural traditions and construction methods, the styles



culture and life of citizens, and serving as a focal point for visitors.

For most people, Ulaanbaatar is a sunny, youthful, and open-minded city. Mongolia has a population of over 3 million, of which 1.5 million live in Ulaanbaatar. The city has earned the nickname "the world's youngest city" due to the high concentration of people under 30 years old (accounting for 70% of the city's population). Ulaanbaatar and its surrounding areas boast numerous tourist attractions and regularly host a variety of festivals and entertainment activities, making them particularly popular among young people. During the summer, residents eagerly participate in outdoor activities and events, transforming the once bustling city center into an almost empty space. The streets become quieter, offering a respite from the usual hustle and bustle, while the suburbs come alive with festive celebrations.

In the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, traditional gers dot the landscape, where people still maintain their old ways of life and customs. Gers serve as

of gers (yurts), and Chinese architectural styles, resulting in temples and monasteries of mixed architectural styles. Notable examples include the renowned Dambadarjeeling Temple, the Gandantegchinlen Monastery, and the East Khuree Dashchoilin Monastery, all built during this era and showcasing distinct architectural features.

With rapid social and economic development, this traditional capital gradually transformed into Mongolia's religious, political, cultural, and commercial hub. As neon lights begin to twinkle and car horns echo, this city on the grasslands adorns itself with a modern touch, unveiling a

completely new face.

As Ulaanbaatar is a relatively young city, its temples are among the most prominent attractions. The most popular ones include the Choijin Lama Temple, the Manjusri Monastery, and the Gandantegchinlen Monastery. To explore Mongolia's history and culture, the National Museum of Mongolia, the Natural History Museum, the Mongolian Theatre Museum, and the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts are must-visit destinations. Additionally, Sukhbaatar Square, the Zaisan Memorial and the Genghis Khan Equestrian Statue are also classic landmarks of Ulaanbaatar, providing insights into its history and





homes and gathering places for families. Contrary to popular belief, Mongolians also enjoy Western cuisine. Slightly different from Westerners, however, Mongolians like to use knives because it is convenient to slice beef and lamb, which is more practical for their meat-based diet. The usage of knives and forks, especially among the younger generation, is quite common, with only a few elderly Mongolians still using chopsticks. Bread is a common staple on Mongolian dining tables, and meat, especially beef and lamb, dominates the cuisine. Radish and potato are common vegetables, while leafy greens are relatively scarce. Beverages typically include cow and goat's milk, or salty milk tea, complemented

by dairy products such as dried curds and cheese. Mongolian cuisine is characterized by its simple cooking methods, as the meat from the grasslands is naturally delicious and doesn't require excessive seasoning or cooking techniques. If you happen to see a whole stewed leg of lamb or a large portion of lamb chops on the breakfast table, don't be surprised, as it is a typical breakfast for locals. It was only after spending three days here that I gradually began to adapt.

Ulaanbaatar possesses a duality of modernity and tradition, and its uniqueness and charm lie precisely in this duality. On the one hand, the city center boasts towering skyscrapers, representing

modern urban living. On the other hand, the outskirts are dotted with thousands of traditional gers, evoking a sense of connection with nature. Within the city, you can experience the excitement and liveliness of urban life, with bustling streets and neon lights. Beyond the city limits, you can gallop through the boundless grasslands, leaving behind the worries and fatigue of work, and embrace the pristine beauty of nature—a perfect recipe for relaxation.

Undoubtedly, this journey to Mongolia has been fulfilling. I had the opportunity to experience the fast and slow aspects of city life in Ulaanbaatar, explore museums and the training ground of

Genghis Khan in Khentii Aimag where Genghis Khan was born, see precious cultural relics up close in the Dornod Aimag Museum, and witness the development of the local cultural tourism industry. What was especially memorable was driving along winding paths through the vast grasslands, with rare animals like herds of Mongolian gazelle, and wild rabbits, as well as grey cranes and falcons passing by. The dense growth of precious wild foods and medicinal herbs, such as white mushrooms and Chinese thorowax, all around was like a harmonious ecological masterpiece, showcasing the beauty of the untouched wilderness, leaving an indelible impression on my heart. [🌐](#)



## Elvis Lexin La Torre Uñaccori

Mayor of Machu Picchu, Peru

Peru, the source of the Amazon River, "the heart of South America", conceals the secrets of a lost empire, boasting the remnants of ancient civilizations explored by European colonizers and bearing witness to the twists and turns of history. Among Peru's most iconic tourist cities, Machu Picchu has long been committed to the development of tourism since its designation as a World Cultural Heritage Site. It has evolved into a city reliant on tourism for growth and progress.

Machu Picchu has been steadfast in its efforts to protect and develop tourism. The government has introduced seven conservation measures for safeguarding Machu Picchu's cultural heritage. In promoting the integration of culture and tourism, some Peruvian cities allow tourists to live with locals, providing visitors not only with a taste of the local culture during their stay but also the opportunity to carry it back home with them. In the post-pandemic era, our primary

focus lies in catering to the diverse interests of local tourism. We aim to balance cultural and natural attractions, offering visitors varied and unforgettable experiences.

Machu Picchu gained worldwide fame for its Inca archaeological ruins, with its ancient temple being recognized as a World Heritage Site as early as 1983. It holds the distinction of being a dual World Heritage Site, recognized for both its natural and cultural significance, and was declared one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007. The future development of Machu Picchu undoubtedly lies in the integration of natural and cultural landscapes, where historical and cultural preservation is prioritized alongside environmental conservation. Embracing the ever-evolving digital technologies, we envision creating a smart city that incorporates new digital information technologies into city management, ultimately providing our tourists with a superior and seamless experience.



## The Sky City Hidden in the Andes

◆ AUTHOR / REN ZIYU PHOTOGRAPHS / REN ZIYU, VCG, PANORAMA MEDIA LNC., LV XING

Recently, the release of "*Transformers: Rise of the Beasts*" has left many viewers in awe of its stunning scenes. Among the grand settings used in the movie are the Peruvian cities of Cusco (Machu Picchu) and San Martin (Tarapoto). Lorenzo di Bonaventura, the film's producer, confessed, "I've always wanted to go to Machu picchu. It was one of the biggest desires in life and the great thing about Transformers is that it enables you to go to these wonderful places. The Peruvian culture and the jungle are incredible."

Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, and an iconic representation of ancient Inca civilization, enthralls travelers with its terraced mountaintops, Sun Temple, fascinating history, and rich culture, making it a must-visit destination for travelers worldwide.

The name Machu Picchu means "Old Mountain" in Quechua, and it is also referred to as the "Lost City in the Inca". This well-preserved Inca archaeological site dates back to the 15th century but was abandoned during the decline of the Inca Empire in the 16th century, remaining forgotten for four centuries. It wasn't until 1911, when explorer Hiram Bingham rediscovered it that Machu Picchu was introduced to the world.

Another moniker for this ancient wonder, "The Sky City," evokes a sense of wonder and mystery. Nestled in the Andes Mountains, surrounded by tropical jungles, and with the Urubamba River flowing through the valley at its foothills, Machu Picchu hides the ruins of the ancient city, astonishingly neat terraces, and remnants of Inca culture on a ridge more than 2,400 meters above sea level.

For those embarking on a journey to Machu Picchu, the road is not easy. The common route involves taking a small plane from Peru's capital Lima to Cusco, followed by a three-and-a-half-hour scenic train ride to Aguas Calientes at the base of Machu Picchu.

Cusco, a small yet charming city, houses the famous Temple of the Sun. Street vendors sell scarves, trinkets, and sheepskin paintings adorned with the symbol of the Sun God. A delightful sight is the presence of baby llamas, wearing hand-knitted, colorful woolen hats and led by elderly women,



strolling the streets.

Tourists from all over the world gather here, most with their sights set on Machu Picchu. Cusco offers an excellent opportunity for relaxation and replenishment, with its diverse restaurants serving international cuisine and offering simple food and souvenirs for purchase.

Aguas Calientes is an essential stop on the way to the Machu Picchu ruins. Aside from local residents, the town is mainly a commercial hub providing accommodation and food for travelers. Buses departing from here transport visitors up the winding mountain roads, reaching their destination in about half an hour.

At an altitude of approximately 2,400 meters, one is met with tiered terraces and stone ruins arranged with precision and grandeur beyond modern imagination. Machu Picchu comprises





140 structures, including temples, shelters, parks, and residences. The Incas skillfully utilized the terrain and meticulously crafted the city, including the Temple of the Sun, altars, noble estates, residences, workshops, squares, baths, and fortresses, relying solely on stone-cutting techniques, and built a matching water diversion system with the use of terraced fields.

The reasons behind its construction and the process remain shrouded in mystery, but the Incas' stone-cutting abilities at that time were truly remarkable. Every structure within the city is built from stone blocks of different shapes, cleverly assembled together.

Ascending the stone steps, visitors can stop at three or four platforms to enjoy the magnificent views from above. Following the path along the ridge, which is one-way, tourists eventually return to the entrance after a full circuit of the ruins. On the day of my visit, a gentle rain was falling, causing intermittent white mist to rise from the valley below. Wild llamas roamed freely, grazing on the grass. Walking among the stone houses at close range, I felt like a protagonist in an adventure movie, as if time had rewind.

It is worth visiting several temple ruins throughout the tour.

In Inca culture, the Temple of the Sun held great significance and sacredness. This particular temple at Machu Picchu is not only one of the iconic structures of the site but also one of the most renowned Sun Temples among surviving Inca remains. It is located at the heart of Machu Picchu, and was built on top of a cave, demonstrating the ancient Inca's advanced knowledge of astronomy and architecture. During the Southern Hemisphere's winter solstice, sunlight passes through a small window and shines directly onto the center of the temple, revealing their understanding of the sun's movement.

The area that includes the Main Temple, the Temple of the Three Windows, and the Intihuatana Stone is known as the Sacred Plaza. The Temple of the Three Windows derives its



name from three massive stones arranged as a set of large windows on a stone wall, offering panoramic views of the central square and distant mountains. It is one of the most important sacred sites of Machu Picchu and a must-see spot for visitors to stop and admire.

The sacred and mysterious Intihuatana Stone is believed to be a sundial or a tool used for astronomical observations by archaeoastronomers. The Incas used the changing shadows of the Intihuatana Stone to determine seasons and create their calendars. Due to the Inca culture's reverence for the Sun God, people would kneel before the Intihuatana Stone, praying for eternal sunshine to light up the world.

Lastly, I must mention Huayna Picchu. For countless travelers, it has become an iconic background in photos and classic postcards—a towering mountain surrounded by terraces and

structures. In the Quechua language, Machu Picchu means "Old Mountain" and Huayna Picchu is its counterpart, meaning "Young Mountain." Climbing up this peak offers a panoramic view of the entire ruins.

China's Taiwanese writer San Mao once set foot in Machu Picchu, and she recorded her feelings with the following words: "I had seen the stone walls and ruins in books and paintings hundreds of times, but when I stood before them in person, I was inexplicably moved. In that rain, Machu Picchu seemed distant from me; its beauty unfolded fully before my eyes." When I visited, the drizzle created a similar atmosphere, and I caught a glimpse of the beauty San Mao had described. Machu Picchu feels like a utopia—a place where the ancient soul of the Inca civilization resides, embodying the ceaseless flow of time and the splendor and decline of the Inca Empire. [C](#)



## Sunita Dangol

Deputy Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Nepal

Often referred to as a "living" museum, Kathmandu is a culturally rich and historically significant city. To provide tourists with a better travel experience, the Kathmandu government has implemented a series of policies and initiatives. These include promoting locally distinctive self-built houses to offer visitors an authentically local experience, supporting the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and emphasizing education to help children understand Kathmandu, its culture and tourism industries.

Currently, the tourism environment faces significant challenges, such as the negative impact of climate change on Kathmandu and the gradual loss of authentic local street scenes due to modernization.

Therefore, in the future, Kathmandu will place greater emphasis on addressing climate change and enhancing the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritages.

Despite being a relatively small city, Kathmandu boasts numerous temples, the locals maintain various traditional cultures and beliefs, and hundreds of delicacies to savour. Nowadays, Kathmandu offers the convenience of E-visa applications for countries all over the world, ensuring a delightful experience for travellers and visitors. Furthermore, there have already been a considerable number of Chinese individuals settled in Kathmandu, with Chinese-owned companies and offices operating here, making Chinese visitors feel right at home in the city.



## Falling in Love with Kathmandu, Embracing the Art of Slow Living

◆ AUTHOR / REN HONGYU PHOTOGRAPHS / REN HONGYU, PANORAMA MEDIA LNC., CHEN CHEN, LV XING

Sometimes, destiny surprises us with unexpected encounters.

An invitation to Good Karma Trekking came out of the blue, igniting the dormant wanderlust within our group of friends after three years of waiting. Thousands of Chinese hiking enthusiasts embarked on a joyous journey to the majestic Himalayan Mountains.

As we landed in Kathmandu amidst a gentle drizzle, my first impression of this largest city in Nepal that captivates visitors from around the world was one of tranquility and serenity.





## The Abode of Deities

Kathmandu City, originally known as Kantipur, was established in 732 AD, meaning the City of Light. Later, kings in the Licchavi Dynasty of Nepal constructed the first pagoda temple out of a single wood, around which the city gradually developed. In 1593, Kantipur was officially renamed Kathmandu, meaning Wooden Temple.

Situated in the Kathmandu Valley, with the Himalayas at its back and facing the Indian Ocean, Kathmandu enjoys a moist and warm climate throughout the year, making it an ideal place to reside. Various dynasties have chosen this city as their capital. Religion thrives in Nepal, as the saying goes, "As many houses, as many temples; as many people, as many deities." Religion truly permeates the lives of the Nepalese people.

Kathmandu has long been renowned as the City of Temples with over 2,700 temples across the city. There are more than 250 Buddhist stupas and temples in the city center, which covers an area of less than 7 square kilometers. Not to

mention the countless Buddha statues found everywhere on the streets and alleys.

When visiting Kathmandu, you must not miss the three major Durbar Squares: Kathmandu Durbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, and Bhaktapur Durbar Square. Each Durbar Square is a grand architectural complex centered around a palace, narrating the rise and fall of different dynasties and chronicling the transformation of Nepal's religious culture.

In the southern part of Kathmandu Durbar Square stands a three-story red-brick building, the most mysterious Kumari Ghar, also known as the House of the Living Goddess. The girl who becomes the Kumari and is worshipped as the goddess, underwent strict selection at the age of three or four. She resides in the temple for education and learning, and briefly appears in the temple for worship each day. During the Indra Jatra festival, the Kumari Goddess rides a chariot, parading through the city, praying for favorable weather. The girl returns to an ordinary life outside the temple once she reaches adolescence.

The Monkey Temple, a group of ancient religious buildings, also known as the Swayambhunath Stupa, is the oldest relic in the Kathmandu Valley and one of Nepal's World Heritage Sites. Climbing to the top of Swayambhunath hill provides a panoramic view of Kathmandu. The hill is populated by numerous wild monkeys freely roaming and climbing in the temple complex, earning it the nickname Monkey Temple.

## Open-Air Architectural Museum

Nepal is a multiethnic country. The Sherpas, indispensable guides for mountaineers scaling Mount Everest, are its most well-known ethnic group for their exceptional lung capacity and unwavering courage. Another prominent group is the Newars, residing in the Kathmandu Valley, renowned for their craftsmanship. The magnificent architectural complexes of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur are masterpieces crafted by the Newar artisans.





Exquisite architectural art as well as wood and stone carvings symbolize the ancient culture of Nepal. Throughout the centuries, Nepalese dynasties have always constructed religious temples near the royal palaces. As dynasties changed, numerous palaces, temples, pagodas, halls, and monasteries of unique styles gradually formed around the royal palaces.

In Bhaktapur's Durbar Square, one can easily spot the Fifty-Five Window Palace. It was the old royal palace and a hallmark of the Malla Dynasty. The palace gets its name from the 55 intricately carved windows made of black lacquered sandalwood. The carvings and gemstones inlaid on each window are exceptionally exquisite, earning it the title of "the essence and treasure of medieval Nepalese art".

According to records, the three Durbar Squares (royal palaces) encompass nearly 130 temples, bathhouses, gardens, stupas, and more, fully embodying the religious and cultural aspects of

Hinduism and Buddhism. However, it is unfortunate that during the devastating 8.1-magnitude earthquake in 2015, many of these exquisite ancient structures suffered varying degrees of damage. In particular, the Maju Ganesh Temple complex, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, completely collapsed during the earthquake and is yet to be fully restored.

## Embracing the Serene City's Slow Living

After a four-day trek in the Himalayas, our group returned to the long-awaited Kathmandu from Pokhara. Our guide, Ravi (meaning "sun" in Nepali), welcomed us with immense pride for his hometown and people. Through conversations with Ravi, we learned that despite the continuous development of Kathmandu, the lives of its religiously inclined residents still hold onto tradition—living in extended families, with most siblings staying together with their parents even after marriage, in their own three or four-story buildings.

Unlike the hustle and bustle of other international metropolises, Kathmandu embodies a true slow-living lifestyle. Instead of rushing to work early in the morning, Kathmandu residents begin their day by paying homage to the deities near their homes, praying, and receiving blessings. Only after that do they calmly and unhurriedly embark on their daily work and activities. On the streets, the most common greeting among acquaintances is, "Take it slow, what's the rush?" This starkly contrasts with the fast-paced life of international metropolises. Although its economy is not developed, Nepalese people never disrupt their own pace. They live slowly, build slowly, and steadfastly uphold their spiritual sanctuary, resulting in a high level of happiness.

In Nepal, you can sense the genuine simplicity, friendliness, ease, and composure that emanate from people's hearts. Unbeknownst to us, we were deeply influenced and fell in love with this beautiful country and its way of life. 🌍





## Lydia Beryl Charlie

Acting Mayor of Victoria, Seychelles

Seychelles is an archipelagic nation adorned with numerous beautiful islands, making it an ideal destination for island hopping. Victoria, the capital city, holds immense significance as a major tourist hub in Seychelles, boasting both beauty and distinctive charm. It is a paradise for scuba divers and snorkelers, a haven for hikers, and a prime choice for honeymooning couples. The city provides comprehensive tourist services with hotels of various sizes and standards and a wide array of exciting tourism experiences, catering to both long-term vacations and short-term getaways, ensuring everyone can find joyous experiences here.

Victoria is rich in diverse flora and fauna, with the prized treasure being the coco de mer, which is prohibited from being exported. To truly experience its uniqueness, one must visit Seychelles in person and savor its wonders. The city enjoys refreshing

air and a pleasant environment, attracting a large number of tourists every year. Our commitment to sustainability in tourism stems from our reliance on and appreciation of such natural ecosystems; hence, protecting our natural resources remains a vital national strategy.

The World Tourism Cities Federation, an international organization of paramount importance, holds great significance as it brings together cities and regions with tourism resources, regardless of their size, to share experiences and collaborate in promoting tourism development. As a member city of the World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF), Victoria has actively participated in quite some important events organized by the WTCF, allowing us to engage in exchanges and discussions with various cities, which fills us with great delight.

# A Wonderland for Scenery Lovers to Grow Old

► AUTHOR / HUANG JIALING    PHOTOGRAPHS / PANORAMA MEDIA LNC., LV XING

After a ten-hour long-haul flight, the plane gradually descended at an airport surrounded by coconut-scented breezes and sea waters. Stepping off the plane, you are greeted by the gentle moist sea breeze and the distinct aroma of the island, giving a surreal feeling of dreams coming to life. Upon entering the borders of Seychelles, airport personnel promptly stamp your passport with an entry stamp in the shape of a sea coconut, the sincerest blessing Seychelles offers to incoming tourists.





Located in the Western Pacific region, Seychelles consists of 116 islands, scattered like emeralds in the Indian Ocean, with most of them untouched by human presence, earning the reputation as "Earth's Last Eden". Seychelles is a beautiful country with abundant tourism resources, with the main islands being Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue. Its capital, Victoria, sits on the northeastern tip of Mahé. Upon arriving

at our hotel in Victoria, we immediately rented a boat to explore the islands, enjoying the breathtaking island scenery and experiencing the joy of deep-sea diving.

## Small Capital, Vast Ocean

Among all country capitals in Africa, Victoria is the smallest, serving as an important port, relay station, and fishing harbor for Indian Ocean shipping. The deep-water area of 25 square kilometers accommodates large vessels, exporting goods such as copra, cinnamon bark, cinnamon oil, vanilla, and salted fish on a daily basis. As a result, there are numerous processing factories around the port producing coconut oil, spices, tea, and milled rice.

How "compact" is Victoria? Let's do a rough



count. The entire city has only two traffic lights, one wet market, one post office, and one library. Despite its small size, the streets are clean and the buildings elegant, giving a sense of exquisite charm. The city boasts two landmark structures. One is a clocktower built in 1903 on Independence Avenue, locally known as the "Little Ben". The other is a large sculpture composed of three seagulls in white, yellow, and black, symbolizing the history of the Creole people who migrated here over 200 years ago from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Influenced by modern culture and the fusion of world cultures, Victoria has developed into a multicultural city where people of African, Malagasy, European, Chinese, Malay, and Indian descendants intermarry and coexist.

Here, you can experience leisure activities such as cycling around the islands, hiking in the mountains, and snorkeling, immersing yourself in the beautiful scenery gifted by nature. Especially when the sea breeze blows, the suppressed emotions you felt in the urban "concrete jungle" seem to dissipate into thin air.

## Pure Ecology, Pure Life

Known as the world's top-notch islands, the backyard of the British royal family, Prince William's honeymoon destination, David Beckham's vacation spot, and Ferrari-tier islands..., Seychelles boasts numerous eye-catching "labels" due to its pristine azure waters and extraordinary natural ecology. However, after

delving deep into these islands and spending some time here, we prefer to strip away these labels and realize that the most captivating aspect of these islands is their pure and authentic nature.

We discovered that Seychellois people have a strong environmental awareness, which is reflected in every aspect of their lives. For example, obtaining approval from the environmental department is required before cutting down a tree, fishing is strictly prohibited in marine parks, and locals spontaneously discourage tourists from collecting seashells. For the locals, protecting their homeland is a responsibility they hold dear.

A plethora of bicycles can be seen in Victoria, which serve as one of the main means of transportation for the locals. To enjoy the coastal scenery, we rented bicycles at the pier. Along the coastal path lined with coconut trees, accompanied by the rhythm of the waves, we hopped on our bikes and joined the flow of

people for a leisurely island cycling tour. Along the way, we encountered many French-style guesthouses that complemented the islands' natural beauty. When we grew tired of cycling, we parked our bikes by the roadside, took off our shoes, and stepped onto the soft sand, letting the jelly-like colored seawater gently lap at our feet. We saw a giant tortoise passing by us with surprising agility.

In that moment, time seemed to stand still, serene, and seemingly endless.

## Tranquil Environment, Blissful Home

On weekends, the beach gathers many residents who come here for vacation. Whenever we arrive at the beach, they warmly greet us with a cheerful "ni hao" in Chinese. Sometimes, we are invited to join beach football matches organized by local youngsters, engaging in friendly competition and pleasant conversations in simple English.

On weekdays, people stroll leisurely on the streets, their faces radiating contentment. They move calmly and unhurriedly, displaying a sense of ease. Whether acquainted or not, they will return each other's smiles and nod greetings, as if they have known each other for a long time. Every weekend, churches across the islands are filled with people of all ages participating in activities. When the melodious singing emanates from the churches, passersby slow their pace and silently immerse themselves in the tranquility and serenity.

Behind this peaceful and harmonious life lies the joint efforts of the people and government departments. Seychelles allocates 40% of its annual budget to sectors such as education, healthcare, and elderly care, providing free education, healthcare coverage, and affordable housing for the population. To address the issue of high living costs, subsidies are provided for essential commodities such as apples, oranges, rice, flour and cooking oil

in state-owned supermarkets, significantly alleviating the burden on people's livelihoods.

The ancestors of Seychellois migrated from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Generations of procreation have formed today's social structure. The blending of multiple races and ethnicities has fostered a spirit of tolerance. People respect and live harmoniously with one another on this small archipelago. Seychelles ranks high in various indices, such as the Human Development Index and the Gini coefficient, reflecting a high level of happiness among its citizens.

If Seychelles is like scattered pearls in the Indian Ocean, then Victoria undoubtedly represents the largest one. If you are burdened with work pressure or feeling unhappy in life, you must give yourself a vacation in Victoria to experience the unparalleled natural beauty, and embrace the purity and goodness brought by the sun, the sea, the coconut groves, and the beaches. Perhaps with a turnaround, you will encounter a better version of yourself. 🌍

