

IMAGES, INSIGHTS AND STORIES

In the great library of forgotten ideas lived three beings who rarely appeared apart from each other: Images, Insights and Stories.

Images was the fastest. He darted around the world collecting moments – a smile, a sunset over the sea, the pattern of frost on a window pane. He carried a sack full of raw data, fleeting and beautiful, but without context. 'Look!' he would often exclaim, throwing a handful of glittering images into the air and disappearing again before anyone could ask, 'Why?'

Insights was the silence. She sat in a darkened room and looked at the images that Images brought her. She was slow, thoughtful, and looked for connections. She saw the smile and the sunset and recognised the longing behind them. She saw the frost and understood the physics of cold. Insights was the 'aha!' moment, the spark that connected two separate images into one idea. She took the cold data from Images and gave it warmth. But both felt incomplete. The images were beautiful but silent. The insights were brilliant but abstract. Then came Stories.

Stories was the weaver. He took the vivid images and the deep insights and wove them into a tapestry. He took the image of the smile, the insight of longing, and wove the story of a sailor returning home. He took the image of the frost, the insight into physics, and told the story of a child discovering winter for the first time. One day, all three met in a clearing. Images threw an image of a broken bird's egg on the ground. Insights looked at it and said, 'This is not just destruction. It is also the beginning of something new, a sacrifice for survival.' Both looked at Stories. Stories smiled. He took the image of the broken egg and the insight of a new beginning and began to speak: 'Once upon a time, there was a phoenix who knew that his time had come...'. Images provided the colour, Insights gave the meaning, but it was Stories who turned it into something that could be felt, shared and remembered. And so they realised that, although they were different, only together could they truly change the world.

IMAGES, INSIGHTS and STORIES

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It's the story that completes the picture!



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FROM SIGHT TO INSIGHT

„IF YOU ONLY SEE WHAT IS OBVIOUS, YOU WILL SEE NOTHING.“

Ruth Bernhard (1905 – 2006), German-born American photographer



This photo book is more than just a collection of images; it is an invitation to see the world through different eyes. Through a combination of striking photographs, personal insights and captivating stories, we want to encourage you to take a closer look. Each image tells a broader story that can be perceived in different contexts.

Immerse yourself in these visual narratives. Discover the beauty and diversity of our world in all its facets and let yourself be fascinated by the details that are often overlooked.

I hope you enjoy many interesting insights and have fun looking at and reading the book.

Reiner Sutter

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PETER AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Freshwater Bay was not only a picturesque place during the Second World War, but also an important military zone. Its proximity to the French coast made the Isle of Wight a frontline area, and Freshwater Bay witnessed dramatic events. A boy named Peter, who lived with his grandparents, spent his days scanning the sky for aeroplanes. In 1941, on the day of the Battle of Britain, he and his friend saw a large number of German bombers on the horizon. A deep roar filled the air and the boys knew they were in danger. They ran for cover, but soon the familiar sound of British Spitfires and Hurricanes could be heard. The British pilots surrounded the enemy aircraft and eventually drove them away over the English Channel. Peter later described the sight as extraordinary and unforgettable. The area around Freshwater was frequently the scene of dogfights. Many aircraft crashed, some of them in the fields near Farringford Farm and on the Tennyson Downs. To prevent enemy aircraft from landing, soldiers had dug long trenches in the Downs. Peter also saw pilots who were able to parachute out of their crashing planes. Sometimes British airmen were shot at by the Germans as they floated to the ground. Freshwater Bay also witnessed tragedy at sea. In April 1943, two Royal Navy landing craft sank here during a severe storm. Many sailors and Royal Marines drowned in the rough seas. The history of Freshwater Bay during the Second World War is not only about military decisions, but also about the experiences of ordinary people who lived through the horrors of war.

MOSQUE HASSAN-II - SECOND LARGEST MOSQUE IN THE WORLD

In the beginning, it was just a vision: a monumental building that would reflect the soul of Morocco. King Hassan II wanted to give Casablanca such a spiritual and cultural landmark, and in 1980 he declared that he wanted to build a mosque that stood 'on the water' because 'God's throne was above the water'. This marked the beginning of an unprecedented mobilisation of the Moroccan people. Millions of Moroccans – farmers, merchants and ordinary citizens – donated to finance the ambitious project. With these public donations and under the direction of French architect Michel Pinseau, construction of the mosque began in 1986. The construction site, built on a specially designed site on the Atlantic coast, was a masterpiece of engineering and craftsmanship. More than 10,000 craftsmen from all over the country worked tirelessly. They carved cedar wood, moulded stucco and assembled millions of mosaic tiles into intricate patterns that showcased Moroccan craftsmanship. Traditional techniques were combined with state-of-the-art technology: The mosque was built to be earthquake-proof and was given a retractable roof that allows prayers to be performed in the open air. In 1993, after seven years of construction, the mosque was inaugurated. It stood majestically above the sea, its 210-metre-high minaret, once the tallest in the world, towering into the sky. At night, a laser beam shone from its top towards Mecca. For many Moroccans, the building became a powerful symbol of their faith, their craftsmanship and their national pride. It was not only the work of a king, but a true monument to the people.





THE ARCHITECTURAL GENIUS ANTONI GAUDÍ

The air was warm and thick with the scents of the Mediterranean as the young Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926) wandered through the Catalan countryside as a child. His bones often ached with rheumatism, preventing him from playing with the other children. Instead, he immersed himself in nature, his eternal teacher. He studied how the wind bent the branches of the pine trees, how the sun danced through the foliage, and how the water in the streams splashed over pebbles. He understood that there were no straight lines in nature, only elegant curves and perfect geometries that were in harmony. Later, as an architect in Barcelona, he remembered these lessons. While his contemporaries adhered to rigid, linear building plans, Gaudí shaped his buildings like living organisms. He used the spiral shape of snail shells, the structure of honeycombs and the arches of tree trunks to create his bold designs. His houses breathed, his chimneys resembled sentinels, his facades shimmered like the scales of a dragon. But while the world admired his masterpieces, Gaudí himself became increasingly modest and reclusive. He devoted his life to building the Sagrada Família basilica, a monumental work reflecting his deep religious faith. One afternoon, lost in thought on his way to church, he overlooked a tram. In his simple, worn clothes, he was mistaken for a beggar and did not immediately receive the necessary help. Three days later, after his death, thousands of people flocked to his funeral to pay their last respects to a genius. But Gaudí's spirit lived on in his unfinished cathedral. His unshakeable conviction that 'originality is a return to the source' continues to inspire architects and artists worldwide, reminding them to seek the truest and most beautiful forms in nature.

THE KILLING FIELDS

Vanna still remembered the laughter in Phnom Penh. It was April 1975, the Cambodian New Year, but the celebrations were overshadowed by fear. Then they came. Men and women, almost still children, dressed in identical black pyjamas and red krama scarves. The Khmer Rouge. They didn't look like liberators. They looked like the end. 'The Americans are going to bomb!' they shouted. 'Everyone must leave the city! Immediately! Just for three days.' Vanna's family joined the endless stream of people pouring out of the capital. It was the beginning of 'Year Zero'. The leader they never saw, but whose name was whispered like a curse – Pol Pot – had decided that society must return to its roots. No cities, no books, no glasses, no family. Only 'Angkar,' the faceless organisation, and the rice fields. Vanna's father had been a teacher. That made him an enemy. When they saw him drawing the alphabet in the dust for his daughter, they dragged him away. Vanna never saw him again. They were forced into a collective. Seventeen hours a day, they worked barefoot in the mud, hunger a constant, gnawing pain. There was only watery rice soup. The 'old people,' the farmers, were allowed to monitor and punish the 'new people,' the city dwellers. Paranoia was like the air they breathed. A child could denounce his parents for stealing a mango. One wrong word, one memory of the 'old life,' meant death. At night, people were taken away. They were told they were being 're-educated' or taken to a new job. They never came back. One evening, as the sun set blood red, Vanna had to dig pits with others. She didn't know what for. Until the truck came. The Khmer Rouge soldiers herded dozens of emaciated figures to the pits. They were the intellectuals, the monks, the bespectacled. To drown out the screams, the guards blasted loud revolutionary music from loudspeakers. Vanna hid in the tall grass, trembling, while the dull sound of shovels hitting skulls echoed around her. They were saving ammunition. This was not a field for rice. It was a field of death. When the soldiers were gone, under cover of darkness, Vanna crawled away. She didn't know where to go, just away from the smell of blood and earth. Years later, long after Pol Pot's fall, Vanna stood in that field again. The pits had been opened, the skulls piled up into macabre memorials. The world called them 'The Killing Fields'. For Vanna, it was the place where the music stopped and the silence began.





MONKS ON THEIR WAY TO WAT PHRA KAEO

The scent of jasmine and fried chicken hung heavy in the humid morning air of Bangkok. Despite the early hour, the city was already pulsating. Scooters buzzed like bees, and vendors shouted out their wares. Luang Por Sombat, an old monk with a gentle smile that carved deep wrinkles into his face, adjusted his pace to match that of his novice, young Niran. Their saffron-yellow robes glowed in the early light, a warm contrast to the grey asphalt. They had finished their alms rounds and their bowls were filled with rice, bananas and curry. Their destination that day was Wat Phra Kaeo, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the spiritual heart of Thailand. 'Niran,' said Luang Por Sombat, his voice as gentle as the fluttering of a flag, 'remember why we are walking this path. We are not walking to see the gold, or the jewels, or the tourists. We are walking to renew our reverence for the Phra Kaeo Morakot.' Niran nodded, concentration in his eyes. He was excited. He had only seen the great temple on postcards. As they approached the Grand Palace, the atmosphere changed. The streets grew wider, the sounds more subdued. Above the tall white walls, the spires of the temples rose into the deep blue sky – golden, mosaic-covered towers that exploded like fireworks in the sunlight. At the gate, the guards bowed and let them pass. The interior of the grounds was breathtakingly quiet. Only the soft murmur of visitors from all over the world could be heard. Finally, they stood in front of the Ubosot, the chapel. Shoes were removed, and they stepped into the cool room. There, high on a throne, he sat enthroned: the Emerald Buddha. He was much smaller than Niran had expected, but his presence was immense. Carved from a single block of jasper (mistakenly called emerald), the small, meditative figure radiated a profound calm. Luang Por Sombat and Niran sank into the kneeling posture of worship. They closed their eyes and chanted their suttas, the sound of their voices mingling with those of the praying pilgrims. At that moment, surrounded by architectural splendour and historical significance, Niran was no longer just a young novice on an excursion. He was part of an ancient chain connecting this sacred place to the deepest Buddhist tradition. As they left the temple and the noise of the city tugged at their ears again, Niran carried not only the filled alms bowl, but also the image of the small, powerful statue in his heart – a reminder of the silence at the centre of the world.

CASSAVA

In the small village of Ban Klang, nestled between green rice fields and the rolling hills of southern Laos, lived Grandmother Mae Boun. Her face was weathered by the sun and bore the marks of eighty monsoon seasons. Mae Boun's extended family lived mainly on rice, the heart of Laotian cuisine. But in some years, when the clouds failed or the floods were too severe, there was only cassava. The cassava plant (or manioc) was not just food to them; it was a promise. It grew where the delicate rice withered. Its gnarled, brown roots dug deep into the poor soil and were not deterred by drought or poverty. When Mae Boun's grandson, young Kham, was impatient one day after a particularly hard harvest season, he complained, "Grandmother, rice tastes better. Cassava is so tough and tastes bitter if you don't prepare it properly." Mae Boun smiled, her smile betraying no fatigue. She rubbed one of the large, starchy roots. 'Kham,' she said, her voice as gentle as the murmur of a nearby river, 'rice is our feast. But cassava is our survival.' She explained to him the true significance of the plant in Laos: Cassava is reliable. When all else fails – war, drought, poverty – farmers in Laos can count on this root. It grows quickly and is resistant. To remove the cyanide from raw cassava, you have to laboriously peel, grate, soak and cook it. 'This work,' she said, 'teaches us patience and respect for food. It teaches us that life takes effort.' They showed him how to process it into starch (tapioca), how to make sweet cakes out of it (Khao Niao Ma Muang with cassava flour) and how to cook the leaves as a vegetable. Cassava is the all-purpose weapon of Laotian cuisine and agriculture, even if it is sometimes 'just' animal feed. Later that evening, they sat around the fire. Mae Boun baked cassava fritters in coconut milk, her favourite dish. 'Always remember, Kham,' she whispered as she handed him the warm fritters. 'Cassava is like the family and the land itself. It's not always fancy or sweet, but it's strong, it keeps us alive, and it's always there for us.' Kham took a bite of the pancake. It was sweet and unexpectedly filling. He understood. The unassuming, resilient root was a quiet symbol of Laotian endurance and self-sufficiency.





LOTHAR MEMORIAL

The Lothar Monument commemorates a dramatic natural event that occurred on Boxing Day 1999: Hurricane Lothar. The Christmas holidays in 1999 were marked by festive tranquillity in the Black Forest and large parts of southern Germany. But on 26 December, Hurricane Lothar swept across Central Europe with wind speeds never before measured. Speeds of up to 151 km/h were measured in the lowlands, and up to 200 km/h in higher elevations. Within a few hours, the storm left a trail of destruction in its wake. It was a disaster for the forestry industry: in Baden-Württemberg alone, the hurricane knocked down more than 30 million trees and turned huge areas of forest (around 40,000 hectares) into wasteland. Entire swathes of the forests were torn apart; the trees snapped like matchsticks. Tragically, 13 people lost their lives in Baden-Württemberg in the two hours during which the storm raged. The Lothar Memorial was later erected in memory of this violent natural disaster and as a sign of hope and reconstruction. A well-known Lothar Memorial, created by the artist Norbert Feger, is located on the Siedigkopf near the Moosturm, on the boundary between Gengenbach and Nordrach. It was erected on Boxing Day 2005, six years after the hurricane. The artwork serves as a reminder of the destruction of 1999. At the same time, it stands in an area that was changed by the hurricane but now also shows new and interesting aspects of the Black Forest landscape. It is a place of remembrance of the power of nature and human resilience in the face of destruction.

THE OLD TREE WON'T GIVE UP

At Gengenbach, near the town of Eisingen, an old tree continues to fight for its survival. Wild thorn bushes, rose hips and other parasitic climbing plants entwine an almost crushed, dead tree. A branch stretches upwards like an arm, as if the tree is saying, "You haven't defeated me yet." Despite its overgrowth and apparent decline, the old tree shows signs of life. Small green shoots sprout from its bark, a silent testimony to its perseverance and strength. The villagers, who have known the tree for generations, regard it with reverence and a touch of mysticism. They tell stories of its past, how it once provided shelter from storms and served as a meeting place for couples in love. One day, a young artist from the town decides to immortalise the tree in a painting. He sits down next to the tree with his easel and begins to transfer its shapes and colours onto the canvas. As he paints, he feels a deep connection to the tree, as if it were whispering its life story to him. The painting is finished, and it shows not only the raw beauty of the tree, but also its unwavering willpower. People come from far and wide to see the work of art and hear the legend of the old tree. And so the tree lives on, not only in the physical world, but also in the hearts and memories of the people who honour its memory.





DURDLE DOOR ARCH

The old lady, who called herself simply 'Limestone', had seen it all. She wasn't made of stone, she was the stone. She was the Dorset coast. For thousands of years, she had watched the waters of the English Channel work against her. And in her flank, where the chalk layer was softer and the Portland stone layer was more brittle, lay her greatest jewel: Durdle Door. The locals, the fishermen and shepherds, never called it by its modern name. To them, it was simply The Door. A gigantic, perfectly formed arch that the sea itself had carved into the rock, a stone opening between sky and water. Over ten thousand years ago, when the last ice age ended and sea levels rose, the coastline struggled. The sea ate into the soft layers behind a hard limestone ridge, creating the bay and the small, sheltered cove. Where the limestone ridge finally gave way, the roof of a small cave collapsed, and Durdle Door was born. One sunny afternoon in midsummer, a young painter named Finn sat on the cliff above the arch. He had been trying all day to capture the colour of the water – from deep blue to turquoise, depending on how the light fell through the arch. He sighed. 'You are beautiful, but you don't move,' he thought. Suddenly, he heard a soft, crackling voice speaking to him in the wind. 'Move? Oh, my boy, I move all the time. But on a timescale that your short years cannot comprehend.' Finn looked around. Only the seagulls and the rock. 'Every year,' whispered the voice, the limestone, 'the sea takes a small grain of sand from me. Every storm gnaws at the base. I am getting wider and higher. I am the guardian of the land, but also the prisoner of time.' 'You mean you'll collapse someday?' Finn asked quietly, almost reverently. 'All doors close eventually,' replied the limestone with a melancholic rumble. 'But that's not the end. When I fall, the end of this arch will become a new rock needle – an isolated, watchful pillar looking out over what was once my gate.' Finn understood. Durdle Door was not just an arch that was. It was an arch that will be. It was a fleeting moment in geological eternity. The painter put away his brushes and began not to paint the scene, but to paint its story. He painted the light shining through the arch not as an end, but as a transition – as a constantly open gateway leading from the past to the future. He knew that as long as the arch stood, it was the purest form of maritime wonder – a monument created by the silent, unstoppable hands of the ocean.

PICTURESQUE BRUGES

Once upon a time, in the late Middle Ages, the canals of Bruges glistened in the golden light of the setting sun. The large market square, in the shadow of the majestic belfry, was teeming with life. Merchants from all over Europe were doing business with Flemish traders, buying precious cloth and spices that were transported by ship via the Zwin Canal to the North Sea. A young weaver named Willem looked down from the window of his workshop onto the bustling streets. He was a master of his craft, but the guild imposed strict limits on the price of his fabrics. One evening, he was sitting with his beloved Elodie on the bank of a canal when they suddenly sensed the city's demise. The Zwin Canal, which had made Bruges so rich, was rapidly silting up. It became increasingly difficult for large merchant ships to reach the harbour. Over the years, Bruges transformed from a glamorous metropolis into a sleepy town. Willem, now an old man, saw the old canals become quiet and empty. The merchants moved away and the traders closed their shops. Bruges became a 'dead city', as it was later described in a famous novel. But the silence preserved what the hustle and bustle had almost destroyed: the beauty of the medieval facades and the romance of the canals. When the first tourists visited the city in the late 19th century, they recognised its preserved beauty. Bruges was awakened from its slumber and shone in new splendour – no longer as a powerful trading city, but as an enchanting open-air museum whose history echoes in the canals and on the cobblestones. Willem would certainly have been pleased.





GILDED TEMPLE FIGURES IN THE BUDDHIST TEMPLE PREY NOB

Even during Buddha's lifetime, the first images and statues depicted his life. For example, following the earnest request of a Sinhalese princess, Buddha sent her his own image painted on cloth. When Buddha travelled to the distant Trayatrimsha Heaven of the 33 Gods to give liberating teachings to his mother who had been reborn there, King Udayana of the then kingdom of Kaushambi made a replica of Buddha out of sandalwood to pay his respects. After the Buddha returned to the monastery, he said to the statue that had approached him to greet him, "Return to your seat. After I have entered Parinirvana, you will serve as a pattern for the four classes of my disciples." Thereupon the statue returned to its seat. This was the first of all Buddha images to be copied in the time that followed. According to this story, Buddha only did not allow the statue to be worshipped during his lifetime at that time, but already gave instructions that it should serve as a pattern for all further Buddha images after his death. On another occasion, Buddha allowed King Bimbisara to have an image made of him. This image was inserted into the so-called Wheel of Life, which expresses the central teachings of Buddha, and given as an extraordinary gift to a neighbouring king. Buddha explicitly confirmed the very beneficial effect of this image.

GIGANTIC SCULPTURES

The Caucasus Mountains, a wall of stone and legends, were home to Merab Piranishvili, a man with a soul of rock and hands that shaped history. In his native village of Sno, at the foot of majestic peaks, he saw more than just stones scattered across the landscape. He saw the faces of those who had made Georgia what it is today. Since 1984, the year of victory over the communist regime, he began to erect one stone head sculpture after another, hand in hand with the country he loved. His art was more than just shaping stone; it was an act of remembrance. He carved the faces of poets such as Shota Rustaveli and Ilia Chavchavadze, of thinkers and leaders who lived in the hearts of Georgians. Each of these heads was a mosaic piece of history, a stone witness to the past, but also a reminder for the future. Merab had a dream of creating an open-air museum with 500 such heads to transform the Caucasus into an open-air gallery. He needed helpers to transport the heavy stones from the Dariali Gorge, but he was the leader of this movement. He found new ways to shape the stone and new ideas to honour the past. He hoped that the sculptures would attract tourists to Sno and show the world a different side of Georgia. In the end, as the wind blew over the stone heads, Merab said that he was not just making art, but carving a message into the stone. And so, in the heart of the Caucasus, an open-air museum was created, a place of remembrance, a place of hope.





FLOATING ORANGE TREE

A hint of sea salt and history wafted through the narrow, cobbled streets of Jaffa when Ran Morin had a vision in 1993. He saw not only the ancient walls, but also the loss that the modern world had brought with it: the loss of nature, of origins, of connection to the earth. There, in a small courtyard, he decided to create something that would challenge the laws of gravity and modern alienation. He found an orange tree, an offshoot of the famous Jaffa orange that once symbolised the region's wealth before the era of high-tech agriculture began and the groves disappeared. With the help of ropes and the expertise of the Volcani Institute for Agriculture, Morin managed to suspend a mature tree in a massive, egg-shaped terracotta pot one metre above the ground. Instead of rooting in the earth, the tree was nourished by a hidden drip irrigation system, an ironic tribute to the Israeli invention that once made the land so fertile. The tree sprouted from a crack in the urn, as if to free itself from its roots, but at the same time to show that it could continue to live and bear fruit despite all adversities. The sculpture immediately became a talking point and a symbol open to many interpretations. The sculpture has become an integral part of Jaffa's rich history. The floating orange is not only a work of art, but also a place for reflection on the past, present and future. Its simple but powerful statement reminds us that even in limbo, new life can emerge.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGE IN ENGLAND

The fishing village of Mousehole (pronounced Mau-zl) clung to the granite coast of Cornwall, its houses looking as if they had been carved directly out of the rock. It was late December, and an icy wind whipped the spray over the high harbour wall. In Morwenna's small parlour, the fire flickered wearily. Outside, the sea was wild, and the harbour was empty. The fishermen had not been out to sea for over a week, and food was running low. Morwenna looked at her two grandchildren, who were staring hungrily at the wooden floor. She thought of the legend of the Christmas star and how little light had come to the village this year. The most fearless fisherman in Mousehole was Tom Bawcock. He was a man with a beard as salty as the sea and eyes that could foresee the tides. He knew that the villagers could not wait much longer. On 23 December, when the storm subsided slightly, Tom made a lonely decision. He hugged his wife and said, 'I have to go out. The sea won't kill us, but hunger will.' He steered his small boat out into the raging waves. The whole village stood on the harbour wall and watched as his yellow sail disappeared into the grey sea. It was a desperate, reckless undertaking. Seven anxious hours passed. The sun began to set, and hope faded. Morwenna lit her last oil lantern and placed it in her window, a tiny spot of warmth against the looming darkness. Suddenly, in the twilight, a loud cry rang out from the sea. Tom Bawcock was back. And his boat was not empty. It was filled to the brim with fish, mainly sole and herring. He had found a shoal in the deep waters where the storm had not swept it away. The joy was immeasurable. That night, the villagers celebrated with a spontaneous feast. They baked all the fish together with potatoes and eggs under a pastry crust in a single giant pie – the Stargazy Pie. The fish heads protruded from the pastry as if they were looking up at the sky. It was a dish that symbolised salvation from adversity. Every year since then, on 23 December, Mousehole has celebrated Tom Bawcock's Eve. They bake the Stargazy Pie to honour his boldness. And every year, during Advent, when the village puts up its famous Christmas lights depicting fish, whales and boats, Morwenna remembers. She smiles because she knows that the true beauty of Mousehole lies not in its streets or houses, but in the spirit of its inhabitants – and in Tom Bawcock's tiny but life-saving lantern, which brought courage and sustenance out of the darkest storm.





BUDDHA ON THE WAY TO NIRVANA

Prince Siddhartha Gautama had left his golden cage. He had left behind the palace, the jewels and his family to answer the big question that tormented him: Why is there suffering? He spent years as an ascetic. He fasted until his ribs protruded like a cage and meditated with unbearable rigour. But enlightenment did not come. He realised that neither absolute luxury nor absolute deprivation led to the truth. The path lay in the middle. Exhausted and disillusioned, Siddhartha accepted a bowl of rice porridge from a peasant girl named Sujata. The refreshment helped him gather the courage to begin his final meditation. He sought out a quiet place on the banks of the Niranjana River. There, under a large, spreading bodhi tree (tree of enlightenment), he sat down. He vowed not to get up until he had realised the deepest truth of life. As dusk fell, he felt resistance. The mythical figure Mara, the lord of illusion and desire, appeared to lead him astray. Mara began with temptation. He sent his beautiful daughters to beguile Siddhartha. Siddhartha remained unmoved. Mara tried fear. He summoned armies of demons who threw spears and fire at him. But the spears turned into petals before they reached him. Mara's last attempt was doubt. 'Who are you that you deserve to sit under this tree? Who is your witness?' Siddhartha opened his eyes. He raised his right hand and touched the earth. This was the Bhūmisparśa Mudra – the gesture that called the earth as witness. He said with firm, inner calm: "This earth is my witness. My deeds are my witness. I strive for the deepest truth for the benefit of all living beings." With this final rejection of illusion, Mara's power was broken. Siddhartha sank deeper into meditation. He saw the causes of suffering and realised the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the cause of suffering (desire), the end of suffering, and the path to the end (the Eightfold Path). As the morning star rose in the sky, Siddhartha broke through the veils of ignorance. He attained nirvana – a state beyond death and rebirth, free from greed, hatred and delusion. Siddhartha was no longer just a man. He was the Buddha – the Awakened One. He rose, not to disappear, but to teach for 45 years the truth he had found in that single night under the Bodhi tree.

THE CHARLES BRIDGE

In 1357, when Prague was the centre of the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor Charles IV laid the foundation stone for something that would make his city immortal: the Charles Bridge (Karlův most). But the emperor was not only a visionary, he was also a little superstitious. According to legend, he carefully chose the time for laying the foundation stone based on numerical symmetry: 5:31 a.m. on 9 July 1357. This sequence of numbers – 1-3-5-7-9-7-5-3-1 – was supposed to give the bridge eternal strength. To make it even stronger, it is said that the builders mixed eggs and milk into the mortar to solidify it. Legend has it that people from all over the kingdom brought eggs, but the inhabitants of one village accidentally sent boiled eggs – a mistake that did not detract from the bridge's strength. Centuries passed. The bridge, 516 metres long and supported by 16 massive arches, was populated not only by horse-drawn carriages but also by stories. In the 17th century, it became an open-air gallery. Thirty majestic Baroque statues lined its path, transforming the crossing over the Vltava River into a solemn procession of saints. The most famous of these statues is that of Saint John of Nepomuk. He was the queen's priest and, according to legend, was thrown from the bridge into the Vltava by King Wenceslas IV because he refused to break the seal of confession. Beneath his statue, a small, shiny brass cross is embedded in the railing. Legend has it that anyone who touches this cross and the five stars on it will return to Prague and have their wishes come true. Thousands of tourists did this every day, their hands polishing the metal to a mirror finish over the years. On a foggy winter morning, the violinist Eliška stood on the bridge. She was not a tourist, but a Prague native who earned her living here every day. There was no one around her yet, only the crackling of the fog and the soft murmur of the Vltava River. She began to play. Her music, pure and melancholic, seemed to rise from the stones and the history itself. She knew that the bridge was more than just a structure. It was a bridge between time – a line connecting the past (the kings and saints) with the present (the artists and lovers). As the first rays of sunlight pierced the fog and illuminated the brass cross of Nepomuk, Eliška took a deep breath. Charles Bridge was not just a connection between the Old Town and the Lesser Town. It was the soul of Prague, built on superstition, strengthened by eggs and cemented for eternity by music and legends.





THE COLOSSEUM IN THE HEART OF ROME

Flavius felt the breeze blowing through the broken arches. He was not Emperor Vespasian, who had the Colosseum built in 72 AD, nor was he Titus, who inaugurated it eight years later. Flavius was just a simple bricklayer in modern Rome, but he knew the stones better than any historian. For him, the Colosseum – the Amphitheatrum Flavium – was more than a ruin. It was the heartbeat of Rome, a stone witness to human extremes. He closed his eyes. He did not hear the noise of modern Vespas and tourists, but the echo of 50,000 throats roaring with excitement. He did not smell the soot, but the scent of sweat, sand and blood. He saw the velarium, the huge sail roof that was stretched over the upper tiers to protect the spectators from the scorching Roman sun. He saw the imperial box, from which emperors decided life and death with a single gesture. But the true heart of the arena lay beneath his feet: the hypogeum. This labyrinthine system of underground passages, cages and lifts was the stage for magic. From here, wild animals – lions from Africa, bears from Germania – were catapulted onto the sandy arena seemingly out of nowhere. Here gladiators waited, their helmets reflecting the light, their muscles tense. Flavius imagined a young man named Marcus, searching for support on the hilt of his sword. Marcus was no hero, but a slave who could win glory in the fight for his life – or fall into the sand. The Colosseum was the place where the distinction between man and beast blurred, where life was spectacle and death was entertainment. The games lasted for hundreds of years. Then, with the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity, the roar ceased. The stones were plundered, the Colosseum became a quarry, a dwelling, a workshop, even a fortress. When Flavius opened his eyes, he took a deep breath. Today, the building was just a skeleton, a half-ruined crown. But history was burned into every joint. He ran his hand over a block of sandstone crowned by a medieval cross. The Colosseum was not only the largest arena ever built. It was the ultimate memorial: a reminder of the unbridled power of the Roman Empire, its cruelty, and the ultimate transience of even the hardest, most ambitious structures in the heart of Rome.

POMEGRANATE IS SAID TO BE A SUPER FRUIT

On the eastern edge of a sun-drenched garden, where the air was thick with the scent of figs, grew a pomegranate tree. It looked unremarkable until its fruits burst open to reveal their insides: hundreds of tiny, ruby-red jewels – the arils. The old gardener Amira knew that this tree was no ordinary tree. She called it her 'king' because each fruit had a small, perfect crown at its tip. One day, her grandson Tariq returned from the city with a bowl full of artificial sweets. 'Grandmother,' he asked, 'why do you always eat this sour fruit? The city has much better things to offer.' Amira laughed and picked a pomegranate from the branch. She carefully cut it open, and the bright red juice almost spilled out. 'My little Tariq,' she said, 'this fruit is what modern doctors call a "superfruit", but we have always known that. It is not only sweet; it is medicine and history.' She explained to him the secrets enclosed in the seeds: Antioxidants: 'Every little pearl is a soldier, my child. These soldiers fight against the "bad things" in the body – free radicals. Their power is three times stronger than that of green tea.' She called it the 'inner shield'. Heart and blood: 'The Persians called the juice "blood of the heart". It helps keep the blood fluid and the arteries clean. It is the fruit that keeps your heart strong.' History and myth: She told him that the pomegranate was a symbol in many cultures: of fertility (because of its many seeds), of life and rebirth (because of its long shelf life) and of royal power (because of its crown). She handed him a handful of arils. "Eat them. They are sour, sweet and a little tart – like life itself. But they give you the strength to endure anything." Tariq nibbled on the crunchy seeds. He felt the taste invigorate his tongue. He understood that the true power of the pomegranate lay not in its sweetness, but in its incredible concentration of nutrients. It was not just a fruit; it was nature's complete nutrient package. From that day on, Tariq saw the tree differently. He saw not just a sour fruit, but a small, crowned pharmacy from his grandmother's garden – the true 'superfruit' that combined the wisdom of ancient times with the insights of modern science.





THE FELDBERG IN WINTER

The Feldberg, a harmless green giant in summer, transformed into an icy ruler during the cold season. Storms whipped across its summit, driving the fine snow before them and leaving the trees standing on the slope like frozen sentinels. The valley was often shrouded in thick fog, enveloping the world in a mysterious grey. A little squirrel named Fips, who had been preparing all winter, ventured out of his burrow. He had hidden a nut that he had forgotten and was now desperately searching for. As he jumped excitedly through the crunchy snow, the world around him sparkled in the sunlight that broke through the blanket of fog above the summit. From up here, high above the clouds, the sun seemed bright and warm. Suddenly, Fips saw a group of people trudging through the forest on wide snowshoes. They laughed and pointed to the tracks they left in the snow. Fips was fascinated and followed them from a distance. They passed a frozen lake and marched past a small, snow-covered hut with a cosy light burning inside. When the hikers stopped to take a break, Fips spotted an apple that one of them had lost. He rushed over, grabbed it and hurried back to his winter pantry. The nut was lost, but the apple was a much better find. Happy and full, Fips crawled into his warm burrow and dreamed of the snowy winter wonderland that Feldberg had become.

CLIFFS OF MOHER

The Cliffs of Moher are one of Ireland's most famous sights. The Cliffs, not far from Knockevin in County Clare, are completely vertical and the cliff edge is abrupt. On a clear day the view is stunning, with the Aran Islands engraved in the waters of Galway Bay. From the cliff edge you can hear the roar far below as the waves crash and gnaw at the soft shale and sandstone. Legend has it that the cliffs are home to otherworldly beings and mystical creatures. A witch named Mal is said to have fallen in love with Cú Chulainn, the brave warrior of the Knights of the Red Branch. Cú Chulainn, however, did not return her feelings. Undeterred, Mal pursued him relentlessly throughout Ireland. Eventually, the chase led them to the southern region of the Cliffs of Moher, near the mouth of the Shannon River, where Cú Chulainn jumped onto an island known as Diarmuid and Grainne's Rock. In another legend of the Mermaid of Moher, a local fisherman came across the presence of a mermaid while casting his line near the Cliffs of Moher. Intrigued, he struck up a conversation with the mystical creature. While they were talking, the fisherman noticed a magical cloak resting near a rock. This cloak was essential for the mermaid's return to the sea, as she had to wear it. However, his desire for her magic cloak quickly consumed him. The man seized the opportunity, snatched the cloak and fled hastily to his house, carefully hiding the precious object. - The cliffs are full of stories about ancient warriors, witches and giants.





MAHACHAI MARKET BY THE RAILWAY

Mae Noi had spent her life on the edge of the tracks. More precisely: on the tracks. Her stall at the Maeklong Railway Market in Thailand was her kingdom, her realm of fish, prawns and fragrant herbs. Tourists called it the 'Talat Rom Hup' – the umbrella-pulling market – because of the ritual that took place here several times a day. On this particularly hot morning, while customers haggled and the scent of chilli and salt hung in the air, Mae Noi sat relaxed on her stool. Her wares – baskets of seafood, fresh mangoes and curry pastes – were so close to the steel of the tracks that you would have thought they would slip away at any moment. No one paid any attention to the warnings crackling over the market's loudspeaker system. Everyone knew the routine. It was the heartbeat of the market. Suddenly, a vendor shouted, 'Ma Kom!' – She's coming! Mae Noi looked at her watch. Right on time. As if on cue, the market sprang to life. There was no chaos, no panic, just a lightning-fast, perfectly choreographed movement. The vendors, including Mae Noi, reached with practised hands for the awnings that protected their goods from the sun and pulled them back with a loud bang. The baskets and buckets lying on the floor were not picked up, but simply pushed into the middle of the stall or under the tables. Everything higher than the tracks had to disappear. A long, deep horn sounded, triggering not fear but anticipation. Then it came, the iron snake. The locomotive of the Maeklong train pushed its way slowly, almost reverently, through the narrow alley. The train did not run next to the stalls, but right through the market. The steel wheels rolled just centimetres from Mae Noi's toes and only millimetres above the baskets she hadn't even pushed away. The fabric of her awning almost brushed against the carriages. The faces of the tourists in the train windows were a mixture of amazement and fear, while the local customers stepped aside laughing to let the train pass in peace. Mae Noi waved briefly to the train driver, smiled and watched as the last carriages slowly trundled past. No sooner had the train passed than there was a loud clackety-clack – and the stalls sprang back to life. The awnings were pushed out, the baskets put back on the tracks. The whole spectacle took less than two minutes. The Maeklong Market was not just a place of commerce, Mae Noi thought as she handed a handful of dried squid to a customer. It was a daily lesson in organisation, serenity and the deep Laotian ability to find life where others would see only an insurmountable obstacle. The market was a living, breathing partnership between the railways and the people.

CAP FORMENTOR

A light breeze blew across the narrow winding roads of the Formentor peninsula, but it failed to dispel the thick, stagnant air that hung between the bumpers of the countless hire cars. Leo stared intently at the red dot on the horizon – the lighthouse at Cap Formentor. In his romanticised image of Mallorca, he would now be standing on the cliffs with his girlfriend, a painter named Clara, watching the sun sink below the horizon. Instead, they had been stuck in a traffic jam for over an hour, with no one moving forwards or backwards. Clara, whose sketchpad was now covered with doodles, sighed. 'It's like an allegory for our relationship, Leo,' she said with a sarcastic smile. 'Once in motion, we don't know how to stop. Once forced to a standstill, we can't move.' Leo rolled his eyes but got out of the car to stretch his legs. He spotted a group of cyclists who had leaned their bikes against a rock ledge in frustration and were sharing bread and cheese. He felt a sudden wave of insight. They were stuck here in the beautiful countryside, but they had a choice: either they could be annoyed about the missed view, or they could enjoy the moment that was available to them. He returned to the car. 'Come on, let's have a party,' he said. Clara looked at him confused. He turned the music down low, took the blanket out of the boot and spread it out on the warm asphalt. They ate chocolate and crisps and watched as the sun slowly bathed the rocks and the sea in shades of gold and pink. The lighthouse, their actual destination, was still visible in the distance. As darkness fell, they saw the glow of the lighthouse and the twinkling lights of the other cars, which were gradually starting to move. They almost forgot that it was their turn to leave. The traffic jam at Cap Formentor had shown them that sometimes the journey is more important than the destination.





HAMPI BAZAAR

At the bazaar in Hampi, Karnataka, once the beating heart of the Vijayanagara Empire, time seemed to stand still. The old pavilions, now only partially preserved, cast long shadows on the stone road leading to the majestic Virupaksha Temple. An old merchant named Raju sat in his place at the edge of the bazaar, deep in thought. He was the grandson of a wealthy spice merchant and knew the legends of the bazaar. Once, it was said, the streets were filled with precious stones, the finest silk fabrics and rare spices. Foreign merchants from distant lands such as Persia and Portugal came here to offer their wares. But today, Raju thought, it had become quieter, almost peaceful. The few remaining merchants sold simple souvenirs and local handicrafts. Suddenly, a small, emaciated monkey appeared. He was not like the other monkeys, who were used to being fed by tourists. This one had a sad, painful aura about him. Raju knew the stories from the Ramayana that said Hampi had once been the kingdom of monkeys, Kishkinda. He knew that this monkey was something special. The monkey seemed to be looking for something specific. It jumped from one ruin to another, searching through the stones and sniffing the ground. Finally, it paused, looked Raju straight in the eye and pointed with its hand to a gap in the pavement. Raju was amazed. He crawled on the ground and put his hand in the gap. He felt a cloth bag. When Raju opened the bag, he revealed a handful of old, sparkling sapphires. They were so beautiful that Raju was almost speechless. The monkey seemed to have accomplished its mission. It nodded to him and disappeared into the surrounding rocks. Raju realised that the monkey must have been the spirit of a past monkey king who had given him part of his legendary treasure. From then on, Raju sold not only souvenirs, but also the story of his miraculous find. And even though the Hampi bazaar would never return to its former glory, its splendour lived on in the story that Raju told to anyone who would listen.

ADVENTURE PARK

The rope park is located on Mount Pilatus, which has been shrouded in legends and myths for centuries. Our story begins high up near the Fräkmüntegg mountain station. Pilu, a little dragon and descendant of the ancient mountain dragons, wanted to learn to fly. However, he was still a little fearful and shy. His friends – Felix the swift ibex, Flora the clever crow and Finn the brave falcon – had already taught him a lot. But the big leap from the rocks to one of the treetops, as the dragons used to do to ascend, was still too big for him. One day, new visitors arrived on Mount Pilatus. They had ropes tied around their waists and were climbing from tree to tree. They were humans, and they looked like they were having a lot of fun. Pilu watched them curiously from his hiding place. They balanced across narrow wooden bridges, overcame wobbly obstacles and finally abseiled from one tree platform to the next with loud cheers. It looked so easy and yet so exciting. Pilu plucked up his courage. He swung himself onto a branch that pointed towards a rope slide. 'Pilu, what are you doing?' cried Flora. 'That's dangerous!' But Pilu didn't hear her. He had made up his mind to do the same as the humans and fly along the ropes. He slid off, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The wind tore at him and he felt the adrenaline rush through his little body. He laughed and roared with joy. The humans below saw him and shouted with surprise and excitement. Pilu, the flight-shy dragon, went from being the rope park dragon to a brave adventurer. He landed gently on the last platform, proud and happy. From that day on, the rope park was not only a place for humans, but also a secret training ground for dragons learning to fly. And if you look closely when you visit the Pilatus rope park, you can sometimes hear the distant roar of a dragon swinging from tree to tree with joy.





GADI SAGAR TEMPLE

At Gadi Sagar, Rajasthan, the artificial lake on the edge of the golden city of Jaisalmer, sat the old boatman Kishor. He had witnessed countless sunrises that bathed the water in shimmering gold and knew every little island with its ornate temples. At the entrance to the lake stood the majestic Tiloki Pol Gate, which carried a story of love, defiance and jealousy. Legend has it that the king, Maharawal Garsi Singh, ordered the construction of the lake in the 14th century to supply the city with water. But he fell madly in love with a dancer, Tiloka, and built the magnificent gate in her honour. The queen, jealous and angry at her husband's love for Tiloka, wanted to have the gate demolished. But Tiloka was clever. She secretly had a Krishna temple built on the top floor of the gate to protect it. Now the queen could no longer destroy it, as this would have been considered sacrilege. The gate remained standing, a silent witness to a forbidden love. Generations later, Kishor sat there and told this story to the tourists who rented his colourful boats. When a young girl asked him if he believed the story, he just smiled. 'Belief is like the lake,' he said. 'It catches the rain that the clouds bring. What you see are only the waves. But what lies beneath is true life. Sometimes you just have to look a little deeper.' The girl thought about this. At that moment, the golden walls of Jaisalmer Fort were reflected in the still waters of the lake. The sun was setting, bathing everything in a soft orange glow. Kishor saw the reflection of the temples and gates in the lake, a golden image of the city that held the love and stories of its people. And he knew that the truth of the story lived in that reflection.

HOVERCRAFT SR.N1

The barn door creaked as Sir Christopher Cockerell pushed it open in Norfolk in 1955. He wasn't working with precious metals, but with a vacuum cleaner, a coffee cup and a cat food tin. His neighbours thought he was eccentric, but he knew that the strange contraption floating in front of him contained a revolutionary principle. It took four years for the idea to become reality. On 25 July 1959, the 50th anniversary of the first aerial crossing of the English Channel, the SR.N1, the first practical hovercraft, floated across the waterway from Calais to Dover. It was a technical marvel that looked like a flying saucer. Cockerell, the inventor, was on board as 'mobile ballast' to ensure stability. The glorious era of the hovercraft had begun. In the 1960s, these futuristic vehicles regularly carried passengers and cars across the English Channel and the Solent. It was the fastest way to cross the strait. But in the 2000s, after the opening of the Eurotunnel, they lost the battle against the competition. Today, only a small ferry service between Southsea and the Isle of Wight remains as a reminder of this glorious time. But for those who witnessed the golden age of the hovercraft, the memory of the era of seemingly effortless gliding over the water and of an eccentric inventor with a cat food tin remains.





SODOM APPLE IN BRY'S FORT

On the golden walls of Jaisalmer, where the sun makes the desert sand glow, a unique plant once grew: the Sodom apple. Although it possessed an enticing beauty with its bright purple flowers and radiant, apple-like fruits, it was surrounded by a bitter curse. The legend of Bry's Fort tells of a jealous maharaja, whose fate was closely linked to the transformation of the city, who had a young bride. She was exceptionally beautiful, but her heart belonged to another. The Maharaja, filled with anger and jealousy, could not win her love. One day, in an attempt to bind her to him forever, he conjured up a mysterious plant: the Sodom apple. He cast a spell that anyone who ate its fruit would be bound to the city of Jaisalmer for as long as their love lasted. But knowing that love cannot be forced, he added to the spell that the fruit would crumble to dust and ashes when eaten, as a sign of his broken love. The bride, recognising the bitter deception, was brave. She ate one of the apples to show the Maharaja clear proof of her true love. The apple crumbled to ashes in her hand, an unmistakable sign that she was not his. Even the enchanted apple could not change her love for her beloved. Disappointed and defeated, the Maharaja suffered a heavy loss and the city fell into decline. The Maharaja, who was almost destroyed by the tragic events, ordered all Sodom apple trees to be banished from Bry's Fort and Jaisalmer to prevent the tragic story from repeating itself. Only a few of the plants can still be found in the remotest corners of the desert, but their magic has faded. Today, they are only a rare testimony to the legends of Bry's Fort. The story of the pomegranate reminds people that true love cannot be forced and that one should never be seduced by outer beauty that hides a bitter interior.



WEeping WINDOW

When the Weeping Window, made of ceramic poppies, was installed at the Maritime Museum in Hull in 2017, it brought not only a work of art to the city, but also a flood of memories and stories. One of these belonged to Doris, an elderly lady who sat on a bench opposite the museum every day. For Doris, the poppies were not merely a spectacle of art. They were a deep, painful reminder of her grandfather, a fisherman from Hull. His fishing fleet was recruited for war service during the First World War. He never returned. His story was just one of many in a seafaring town whose victims disappeared into the sea without a grave to mourn. On the first day of the exhibition, as the red flowers seemed to flow like drops of blood from the window of the former dock office, Doris noticed a young girl gazing reverently at the poppies. She saw the girl's gaze and realised that she was not just admiring the beauty of the installation. The girl, named Chloe, was holding an old, faded photograph. It showed her great-grandfather, a merchant navy sailor who had been killed in the war. The two struck up a conversation, and Doris told her about her grandfather, who went into battle with his comrades from the trawler fleets. Chloe explained how her great-grandfather's story was hardly ever mentioned in her family. She felt that these poppies were a bridge to the past. From that day on, Doris and Chloe met again and again at the Weeping Window. The installation became a meeting place for generations who shared the stories of Hull's fallen sailors, fishermen and trawler crews. The curtain of poppies was not just an exhibition, but an emotional place of remembrance. When the Weeping Window left Hull to travel on, it left behind a deep trail of memories and a new friendship. Doris and Chloe stayed in touch and continued to tell the stories of their grandfathers so that the memory of Hull's seafaring victims would never fade.

HADRIAN'S WALL

Sheltered from the wind that swept relentlessly across the barren hills of northern England, the young soldier Marcus crouched by the parapet of Hadrian's Wall. The evening twilight bathed the endless stone wall in a soft, grey light. For weeks, he had seen nothing but this wall, the vast horizon and the rough, unyielding tribes that the Romans called 'barbarians'. Marcus had actually come from a sunny village in Gaul. Here, on the northernmost border of the Roman Empire, everything was different. The cold crept into his bones, and the silence of the landscape was broken only by the wind and the occasional howling of wolves. He missed the warmth of his homeland, the wine and the laughter of the people. One day, he spotted a young boy from the northern tribes, his face painted blue, crouching at the foot of the wall, carefully holding a small sheep by the hand. He must have lost it. The boy saw Marcus and looked at him with fear and suspicion. Marcus, surprised by the encounter, raised his hands to show he was not a threat. The boy ran away, but the little sheep remained behind. Marcus decided to take care of the matter. The next day, as he continued his patrol, he found the sheep near a gap in the wall that had been created by a storm. The boy was sitting there with his mother, and they looked hungry. Marcus thought of his own family. He took a piece of bread, some cheese and a small bottle of wine from his provisions. He gave it to the boy and gestured with his hand that they could take the sheep back with them. The boy looked at him with wide eyes, took the food and gave him a small, finely carved wooden figure, a replica of a sheep, as a thank you. It was not a gesture of trade, but a gesture of humanity. Marcus, the soldier on the enemy border, had found a connection to someone on the other side. As he returned to his post, the cold wind no longer felt quite so unbearable. He now knew that although the wall separated people, humanity could bring them together again.





SMEATON'S TOWER

On the treacherous Eddystone Rocks, 14 miles off the coast of Plymouth, stood the lighthouse designed by the brilliant engineer John Smeaton. Its construction, reminiscent of an oak tree trunk, was a marvel of engineering that guided ships for decades from 1759 onwards. But even the strongest structure cannot withstand the constant pounding of the sea forever. In 1877, lighthouse keeper Alistair noticed that the entire tower vibrated noticeably when the waves were particularly strong. After 118 years of service, the relentless surf had eroded and hollowed out the rock beneath the foundations. It was clear that the tower, which had saved the lives of so many sailors, was itself in danger. Alistair thought back to the many nights he had spent in the glow of candles, and later oil lamps, above the dark sea. He thought of the stories he had told with the other keepers in the small, barren lantern room. The tower was more than just his home; it was a companion that offered him comfort and security. The decision was made: Smeaton's Tower had to be dismantled. But the people of Plymouth could not simply give up the old lighthouse. So the upper part was dismantled stone by stone and rebuilt on the cliff at Plymouth Hoe, overlooking the sea. It was like giving an old friend a new, peaceful home. Alistair, now retired, was among the first to visit the relocated tower. He climbed the 93 steps he knew so well to the lantern room. From up here, he looked out to sea, where in the distance he could see the stump of the old lighthouse and its newly erected successor. He saw the light of Smeaton's Tower, whose history was now carried from the sea to the city and would live on forever as a monument to John Smeaton.



THE BELL TOWER

The bell tower, which rises into the sky like a crooked house of cards in the narrow, cobbled streets of Tbilisi's old town, was only built in 2010 by the famous puppeteer Rezo Gabriadze. It is a whimsical and charming reinterpretation of history, reminding residents and visitors alike that the magic of imagination is alive in the soul of the city. In its short lifetime, the tower has accumulated a history that has become an urban legend. The story is about an old puppeteer who had thought about the history of Tbilisi for so long that he felt the walls themselves were whispering the stories to him. He heard the songs of the princesses in the fortress walls of Narikala, the cries of the fishermen on the Kura River and the clattering of carts in Moti Chowk. But what he felt most strongly was the gap in time left by the many wars and conquests in the city. To fill it, he built the crazy, leaning tower, stone by stone, from all the old, forgotten stones of the city. He decorated it with puppets and turned it into a place of magic and wonder. Every hour, when the clocks of other towers move in perfect synchrony, a small carved doll emerges from the tower and rings the bell with a small hammer. But that is only the beginning of the magic. Twice a day, at noon and at 7 p.m., a window in the tower opens and a puppet theatre begins its performance. It is an allegorical story, the 'cycle of life', which tells the story of Tbilisi and the universal story of love and hope. The story goes that if you watch with a pure heart, the puppets seem to be made not only of wood, but of the soul of the city. And when the performance is over, you can hear not only the laughter and applause of the audience, but also the soft whispering of the stories that the puppeteer has placed in the tower. And everyone who hears these stories becomes a part of the magical soul of Tbilisi forever.

BUDDHA'S FOOTPRINT

On the rocks above the ancient Khmer temple Vat Phou, where jungle vegetation grows wildly, lies a strange formation carved into the stone. It is the footprint of Buddha, and it is associated with a story that has been passed down from generation to generation over centuries. Once upon a time, according to the old monks, there lived a young man named Somchai in the Champasak area. He was a simple farmer, but his heart was pure and his faith in the teachings of Buddha unshakeable. He wished for nothing more than to feel the presence of Buddha and receive his blessings. One day, after meditating for days on end, he hiked up the steep mountain where the temple now stands. He climbed over moss-covered stones and past ancient trees until he reached the highest point. He prayed, his eyes closed, for peace and enlightenment. When he opened them again, he saw a glowing footprint in the rock, surrounded by a soft, golden glow. Somchai was overwhelmed. He immediately recognised that it must be the footprint of the Buddha. When he placed his own rough feet next to it, they were tiny in comparison to the divine imprint. He knew that the Buddha had chosen the mountain as his last stop before entering nirvana to spread wisdom and virtue. From that day on, Somchai returned to the mountain every morning to meditate and clean the footprint. He told the people in the surrounding villages about his discovery. At first they did not believe him, but over time they too saw the gentle glow surrounding the footprint and began to believe his story. Many years later, the Vat Phou temple was built on this site to honour the divine footprint. And even today, it is said that those who climb the mountain with a pure heart can see the soft glow and feel the wisdom of Buddha permeating the rock and spreading across the entire landscape.





PALACE HILL KHAO WANG

High above the city of Phetchaburi, on Khao Wang Mountain, King Mongkut (Rama IV) had a summer palace built in the mid-19th century. However, the story tells of more than just the royal chambers and Western-inspired buildings. It is the story of a king with a passion for the stars. During his 27 years as a monk, King Mongkut had travelled the world and developed a deep fascination with astronomy. He was the first Thai king to bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and Western science. On the highest of the three peaks on which his palace was enthroned, he ordered the construction of an observatory. Here, under the vast canopy of Thailand's sky, King Mongkut spent his nights. He observed the stars and the movement of the planets with a passion that his subjects found difficult to understand. The guards who watched over the palace in the darkness often saw the light of the observatory shining and wondered about their king's mysterious activities. One evening, when the sky was particularly clear, a young maid named Chaba climbed the hill. She had lost her way after fleeing from one of the aggressive macaques that inhabited the mountain. Shivering with fear and cold, she came across the illuminated observatory. The king looked down at her from above. He was not angry, but surprised. He invited her to look through his giant telescope. Chaba, who had never seen anything like it before, looked through it and saw the stars in all their glory. She felt as if she could touch the infinite vastness of the sky. From that day on, Chaba often returned to the observatory. She and the king talked about the stars and the mysteries of the universe. Through their conversations, King Mongkut realised that his passion should be accessible not only to himself, but to all people. He decided to share his knowledge with the people and founded schools to promote the education of Thai youth. The summer palace on Khao Wang remained more than just a royal retreat. It became a symbol of the bridge between tradition and progress, of the openness of a king who saw the future in the stars. The story of Chaba and King Mongkut, who shared their dreams under the bright starry sky above Phetchaburi, is still told today.

THE HOUSE OF FREE PRESS

Just outside Bucharest once stood the Casa Scînteii, the 'House of the Spark', a colossal Stalinist building designed to embody the power and splendour of the Romanian Communist Party. It was the culmination of the regime's demonstration of power, a monumental printing press that silenced the voices of the opposition and carried party propaganda to every corner of the country. In the shadow of the building, in the winter of 1989, lived a young printer named Mihai. For years, he had been printing newspapers glorifying the regime in the basement of Casa Scînteii. He knew the damp, musty walls and the faint smells of printer's ink like the back of his hand. On that December evening, however, when the air was charged with cold and tension, he experienced something new. It was the sound. A soft rattling coming from a corner of his printing room. Curious, he investigated and found a hidden window leading to a small, secret shaft. He climbed through it and found himself in an inconspicuous, invisible passageway leading to the top floors of the building. There, in a secluded room he had never seen before, he found a small group of people. They were young reporters who were secretly printing leaflets. They told of the protests in the neighbouring city of Timisoara and the calls for freedom. They were the secret messengers of the revolution. Mihai, who had been oppressed his entire life, felt a new spark ignite within him. He helped them print their message with the old printing presses, hoping that their voices would finally reach the people. In the days that followed, Mihai saw with his own eyes as the revolution swept across the country. The house of propaganda, the Casa Scînteii, became the house of free press overnight. The red stars and communist symbols that once adorned the building were removed when Mihai and his comrades took over the building. The old printing house, once a symbol of oppression, became a symbol of a new beginning. Mihai remained as a printer and helped to print the newspapers and books that spread the truth of the new free press. He saw the past and the future merge as the old walls of the former propaganda building became the home of the new free press. And he knew that the power of the word had the power to bring down even the strongest walls.





MURAL AT MOTI CHOWK

The walls of Moti Chowk, the central square in Jaisalmer, had always been witnesses to the bustling life of the city. But the mural that adorns the square today had a very special story. It was the story of an artist named Vikram and a little girl named Priya. Vikram was born in Jaisalmer, but he had spent many years in the big city pursuing his artistic dreams. When he returned, he found the city quiet and colourless. The glorious past of the princes and merchants who had once enlivened the square seemed to have faded away. One day, he met Priya, a girl with the brightest eyes he had ever seen. Priya was used to playing in the silence of the old walls and imagining stories about the kings and warriors who once lived there. One day, she asked Vikram why the walls were so grey and sad. Why, she asked, were the old stories no longer being told? Vikram took Priya's words to heart. He began to paint the old legends on the walls. He painted horses going to war, princesses waiting at the window for their lovers, and merchants passing by with camels laden with spices and fabrics. He painted the people who had made Moti Chowk what it was. Priya was his biggest critic. Every day she came to him and showed him where a horse should look braver, where a warrior's eyes should sparkle more intensely. Vikram, who had lost touch with his roots in the big city, found them again through the eyes of the little girl. When the mural was finished, the walls of Moti Chowk glowed in bright colours. The residents of Jaisalmer gathered to rediscover the old stories in the vivid images. The square was once again full of life and colour. Vikram never left Jaisalmer again. He had found his true home in Priya's eyes. And on the walls of Moti Chowk, the past lived on in the stories he had painted.

GRAFFITI WALL

A few decades ago, street art was frowned upon in Bangkok. In the early 2000s, graffiti was considered vandalism and was rejected by the majority of the population. But the underground scene continued to flourish, and a small, dedicated group of local artists tried to gain recognition for the art form. A turning point came with the Bukruk Urban Arts Festival. Inspired by European collaborative projects, the first festival in 2013 brought together Thai and international artists. In once-neglected neighbourhoods such as Charoen Krung and Ratchathewi, they created huge murals that transformed the city into an open-air gallery. The success was overwhelming. What began as an 'invasion' ('Bukruk' means invasion) captured the hearts of residents and visitors alike. The festival laid the foundation for today's thriving street art scene. A second edition took place in 2016, further cementing the movement and expanding it to include workshops and music events. Famous local artists such as Alex Face with his three-eyed child and Rukkit played a key role in changing the face of the city and making their work an integral part of Bangkok's cultural identity. Today, remnants and new works from the festival can be found throughout the city. What was once considered an eyesore is now appreciated and celebrated, and tourists flock to the neighbourhoods to marvel at Bangkok's colourful and ever-growing graffiti art.





WHITE TEMPLE

The dazzling white sparkle of Wat Rong Khun, also known as the White Temple, in Chiang Rai is not a work of the past, but the legacy of a modern dreamer. Its story is that of Chalermchai Kositpipat, an artist who combined the world of pop culture with the profound teachings of Buddhism to create a unique work of art. Once, it is said, Chalermchai was frustrated. The ancient temples of his homeland were in poor condition, and he felt that their spiritual significance was being lost in the modern world. In a vision, he saw himself creating a temple so pure and radiant that it would illuminate the world. Inspired by this vision, he bought the old, dilapidated Wat Rong Khun in 1997 and began transforming it into his work of art. The story is a symbolic journey to enlightenment. It begins with the 'Bridge of the Cycle of Rebirth', lined with hundreds of upward-reaching hands representing greed and human desire. Those who cross this bridge leave worldly temptations behind. The bridge leads to the main temple, whose white colour symbolises the purity of Buddha and whose countless glass shards symbolise his wisdom. Inside the temple, the story continues, but in a surprisingly modern form. The murals feature not only traditional Buddhist motifs, but also images of pop culture icons such as Superman and Neo from The Matrix, as well as depictions of global issues to show that Buddha's teachings are still relevant today. It is an invitation to visitors to pause and reflect on their own life's journey. However, Chalermchai's dream did not end with the construction of the temple. He saw it as an ongoing project that would continue to grow and evolve even after his death. It is a story that never really ends, but is constantly rewritten over time, just as Buddha's wisdom constantly reinterprets the course of the world.

HOME MADE ENGLISH BREAKFAST

Every Saturday morning at 8 o'clock sharp, the alarm clock rang in Tom and Sarah's attic flat. Since their mother-in-law had been visiting for a few weeks, this rule was set in stone. Tom, who burrowed back into his pillows, knew exactly what to expect: the famous homemade English breakfast prepared by his mother-in-law, Martha. Martha, a resolute lady from the Isle of Wight, had made the traditional English breakfast her life's work. She insisted on preparing all the ingredients herself: from the sausages, which she seasoned according to an ancient family recipe, to the beans, which she made from dried beans rather than from a tin, a process that took hours. Her attention to detail was impressive – and a challenge for the young couple, who were used to quick muesli and coffee. This Saturday morning, the pressure was particularly high. Last time, Tom had dared to eat his beans with ketchup, which Martha had acknowledged with a stern look. This time, he wanted to do everything right. The kitchen smelled of fried bacon, onions and the herbs in the sausages. Martha stood at the stove, armed with a spatula and a look that brooked no mistakes. She handed Tom a plate so generously laden that it seemed to spin in circles. On the plate were bacon, sausages, scrambled eggs, fried tomatoes, mushrooms and, of course, the beans, arranged in a careful circle. Tom began to eat cautiously, each bite like a ritual. He praised the sausages, the mushrooms and the egg, all under Martha's watchful eye. When he got to the beans, he took a deep breath and popped the first three into his mouth. They were creamy, mildly seasoned and tasted like hours of preparation. It was delicious, but he missed the familiar sweet taste of tomato ketchup. As he had the last bean on his fork, he noticed Martha looking at him expectantly. He knew this was the moment of truth. He slowly pushed the fork to his mouth, smiled and said, 'Martha, this is the best breakfast I've ever had.' Martha smiled for the first time that morning. 'I know that,' she said. 'But I just needed to hear it from you.' Tom looked at his wife and winked at her. He had passed the test – at least for this week. He knew it had been worth the effort to keep the peace in his mother-in-law's house and to honour her unique way of showing love.





HIKERS IN THE BLACK FOREST

The leaves crunched under Elias's hiking boots, a sound that calmed him. Deep in the Black Forest, far away from the hustle and bustle of the city, he felt at one with nature. He was on his way to Schliffkopf to watch the sunset from up there. But the deeper he ventured into the forest, the darker it became. The tall fir trees filtered the sparse light, and soon an almost eerie silence lay over the paths. Elias passed a small, moss-covered hut that seemed almost completely swallowed up by trees. He had heard of the legends and myths of the Black Forest, of forest spirits and witches, but he had always considered them to be old wives' tales. But in this silence, the fantasy suddenly seemed more real. Suddenly, he saw a woman. She was standing in front of the hut, dressed in traditional costume, which he had seen in old paintings. Her gaze was fixed on the depths of the forest. Elias, hesitant at first, spoke to her. The woman turned around and smiled gently. She introduced herself as Lotte, a hiker who had lost her way. She offered to show Elias the path she claimed to have found. Elias, relieved, followed her. However, Lotte did not lead him onto the familiar path, but onto a narrow, eerie path that led deeper and deeper into the forest. She spoke of the 'mystical paths' of the Black Forest and the magic that dwells in the trees. Elias felt the cold increasing and realised that he had strayed from his path. Just as he was about to turn back, he saw a beam of light in the distance. He heard the voices of other hikers and the sound of their walking sticks. The group of hikers had been waiting for him at the Schliffkopf observation tower and were calling his name. He tore himself away from Lotte, who let him go with a sad look. When he turned around again, she had disappeared as if she had never been there. Elias ran to his friends and told them about the encounter. They laughed and joked about forest spirits. But Elias knew better. He had discovered the magic of the Black Forest, which was hidden not only in the beauty of nature, but also in the stories. He had found not only the way, but also a secret of the forest.

HURRICANE LOTHAR

The millennium was drawing to a close, but the final act of the 20th century was to have a tremendous impact. On Boxing Day 1999, old forester Karl was still in bed when an unusual wind rattled the windows of his forest lodge in the Black Forest. It was no ordinary wind, but a deep rumbling coming from the woods. Karl knew that this wind did not bode well. He remembered the stories his ancestors had told him about the destructive power of nature. But what he witnessed that morning surpassed anything he could ever have imagined. The hurricane, later named 'Lothar', reached unexpected strength. In the Black Forest, trees snapped like matchsticks. The forest that had been Karl's home all his life was razed to the ground in just a few hours. Karl stood at the window in shock and watched as an old fir tree, which he had hugged as a child, fell with a painful crack. The noise was deafening. He saw thick branches break off and the roots of trees, which had once seemed so firmly anchored in the forest floor, being torn from the ground. The gentle rumbling of the wind had given way to an angry roar. When the storm finally subsided, Karl stepped out into the silence after the inferno. He saw a landscape he no longer recognised. Where once there had been a dense forest, countless trees now lay criss-crossed on top of each other. The swath of destruction was so deep that it could be seen from the air. The disaster raised many questions, and Karl knew that the forest would regenerate. He saw how people stuck together and joined forces to begin the clean-up work. He saw how nature, scarred by destruction, slowly began to come back to life. And he knew that Lothar was not just a storm, but an event that had taught people how fast and unpredictable nature can be. The story of Lothar became a reminder of the power of nature, but also of humanity's ability to recover from it and start afresh.





WINEGROWING IN DURBACH

On the steep slopes of the Durbach Valley, where the sun kisses the vines and the Black Forest protects the vineyards, there once lived a young winemaker named Jakob. The history of winegrowing in Durbach dates back to the 13th century, and Jakob was proud to be part of this tradition. He worked in the vineyards of Staufenberg Castle, whose majestic walls towered over the vines. Generations of his family had tended the vines here. Jakob knew that his work was more than just harvesting grapes. It was the continuation of an ancient history that had been buried in the fertile soils of the valley for centuries. One day, during the harvest, Jakob came across an old stone hidden in the steep slopes. It was a boundary stone marking the Klingelberger vineyards. When Jakob placed his hand on the stone, it seemed to him as if he could hear the stories of the many winegrowers who had worked here before him. He heard the songs they sang during the harvest, smelled the scent of the grapes and tasted the wine that had been produced in this valley for centuries. Inspired by the experience, Jakob began to produce a new type of wine, a wine that would carry the essence of the old stories within it. He called it the 'winemaker's wine' and it soon became a symbol of the hard work and passion of the people of Durbach. The grapes came from the steep slopes they cultivated, and the wine was treated with the same respect and love that Jakob had learned from the generations before him. The Winemaker's Wine became famous, but Jakob remained humble. He knew that wine was more than just a drink. It was a tribute to the past, a toast to the future and a tribute to all the people who had worked in the steep vineyards of Durbach. It was a wine that tasted not only of grapes, but of history, tradition and a love of winegrowing. Thus, Jakob became not only a winemaker, but also a guardian of tradition. He knew that winegrowing in Durbach was not just a job, but an art form, a tribute to nature and the people who love it. And in every bottle of wine that left the vineyards of Durbach, the history of the valley lived on.

WINTER IN THE MARKGRÄFLERLAND REGION OF BADEN

In the Markgräflerland region, where winter rarely brings deep snow but rather a mild, grey veil, the cherry trees in the Eggenertal valley had a special role to play. Unlike their sisters in other regions, which were covered in thick blankets of snow, the trees here carried a quiet, almost mysterious dignity. The story tells of an old man named Friedrich who spent his entire life among these trees. He knew every scar in their bark and every detail of their bare, gnarled branches, which became almost invisible under the blossoms in spring. While the young people waited impatiently for the blossoms to appear so they could take photos and celebrate the natural spectacle, Friedrich knew that the true story of the cherry trees lay in the winter season. On a particularly cold day, when the air above the fields was frozen, Friedrich went for a walk with his granddaughter Lena. Lena, who was influenced by the hustle and bustle of modern city life, saw only bare, lifeless shapes in the trees. She asked her grandfather why the cherry trees in the city were shielded during the winter, while here they were exposed to the cold. Friedrich smiled and said, 'They're not naked, Lena. They're just resting before putting all their energy back into the blossoms. They remember the power of the sun and the sweetness of the fruit they will bear.' He took one of their bare branches in his hand and stroked it as if he were petting a beloved animal. Then he saw something special. A tiny, old piece of cherry still hung from the branch, shrunk by the cold into a small, black pebble. 'This is the winter cherry,' said Friedrich. 'It is not sweet and it is not juicy, but it reminds us that life also exists in rest.' Lena, who had never seen a 'winter cherry' before, touched it. It was cold and hard, but there was a kind of beauty in its simplicity. It was not a radiant beauty like the blossoms, but a quiet, deep beauty that existed in the stillness of winter. Lena began to see the cherry trees not just as bare branches, but as a period of rest for nature, waiting for the return of life. When they returned to the warm parlour, Lena's view of the world had changed. She no longer saw only the hustle and bustle of the city, but also the quiet power of nature, which rests in winter and returns in spring. She had learned that beauty lies not only in spectacle, but also in simplicity.





OLIVE PLANTATION

High above the picturesque village of Bunyola, on the rugged slopes of the Serra de Tramuntana, lie centuries-old olive groves. For old farmer Miguel, every gnarled, twisted olive tree was not just a plant, but a part of his family history, carved into the stone terraces over generations. Every morning, before the sun reached the highest peaks of the mountains, Miguel would go to his grove. The old trees, their massive trunks marked by wind and weather, had the ability to survive even in the most barren soils. Miguel knew each and every one of them, with their own unique characteristics. One day, his grandson Toni, a young man with a head full of modern ideas, brought back a new, smooth olive tree from a breeding programme that promised rapid growth. Miguel looked sceptical. 'A tree needs time to write its story,' he said to Toni. "It has to feel the sun and the wind, the rain and the drought. It must learn to fight against adverse conditions.' But Toni was impatient. 'The old trees are beautiful, Grandfather, but they don't yield enough,' he said. 'We have to modernise." Miguel just nodded, but he knew that Toni didn't understand that the value of an olive tree lay not only in its yield, but in the history it carried within it. This year, the harvest was particularly dry. The new tree, spoiled by rapid breeding, struggled with the drought and bore little fruit. But the old trees, whose roots reached deep into the stone walls of the terraces, defied the drought. They did not yield many olives, but the few they did produce were of exceptional quality. When Toni tasted the fruit of the old trees, he understood his grandfather's words. The olive oil from the old trees tasted of centuries of history, of the patience and love that went into every drop. He understood that the olive trees of Bunyola were more than just a plantation. They were a living monument that carried the history of Mallorca within them. Since then, Miguel and Toni have been working together. Toni brings in modern techniques, and Miguel preserves tradition. And in every drop of oil they press, you can taste the history of the ancient olive groves of Bunyola, which form the heart of the Serra de Tramuntana.

THE BERLIN TV TOWER

The grey sphere of the television tower in East Berlin was intended to be an unmistakable symbol of the strength and modernity of the socialist state. The population saw it as a symbol of the technological superiority of the GDR. But sometimes stories take a very unexpected turn. The construction of the tower was a masterpiece of engineering, but the engineers had overlooked one detail. When the steel colossus was inaugurated in 1969, it quickly became apparent that the sun caused a unique phenomenon on the sphere. When exposed to direct sunlight, the stainless steel shell of the tower sphere reflected the light in the form of a large, glowing cross. This was highly embarrassing for the atheist leadership of the GDR. For Berliners, however, the phenomenon quickly became a topic of conversation and was popularly referred to as 'the Pope's revenge' or 'Dibelius' revenge'. The population was highly critical, as the cross appeared on the very structure that was intended to demonstrate the superiority of socialism. Many years later, after the fall of the Wall and German reunification, the tower still stood. The cross still appeared when the sun shone. But this time it was not a symbol of irony or political struggle, but a silent sign of change. People no longer saw it as revenge, but as a symbol of hope hovering over reunified Berlin. For an old man named Klaus, who had worked on the construction of the tower as a young engineer, the cross had a very personal story. He had witnessed the embarrassing jokes of the GDR era and survived the fall of the regime. He saw the cross as a sign that even in the grandest of human plans, nature or a higher destiny can prevail. And he saw that the tower had not only survived the political ideology of its time, but also the times themselves, to become a symbol for the entire city.





ELIZABETHAN II'S JUBILEE

The sky above the Isle of Wight was bright blue on this June day in 2022, with only a few fleecy clouds scattered across it. But the real show was not happening on the ground. Hundreds of residents had gathered along the picturesque coastline to witness an event that linked the history of the Queen and the island: the Royal Air Force flypast to mark the Platinum Jubilee. Among them was retired sailor David. He was born on the island and had spent most of his 90 years here. He knew the history of the island, which was closely linked to the history of the royal family. He still remembered the Queen's visits as a young girl and the stories his grandparents told about nearby Osborne House, Queen Victoria's former retreat. David sat on the beach with his granddaughter Emily. She, a young girl from the city, had little connection to the tradition of the monarchy. But she loved her grandfather and knew how much this event meant to him. Suddenly, in the distance, they heard a deep rumbling that grew louder and louder. It was the sound of aeroplanes taking off from military bases on the mainland and heading for London. David, who had lived on the coast since his youth, knew the sound well. But this time it was different. It was louder, more solemn and filled with a sense of history. The aircraft flew in impressive formation over the island and the coastal landscape. It was a spectacle of incredible precision and beauty. The modern Eurofighter Typhoons, the historic Spitfires and Lancaster bombers – all seemed to span the arc from World War II to the modern era. Spectators on the beach cheered, waved and shouted as the planes flew overhead. Emily, who saw the spectacle through her grandfather's eyes, began to understand what it meant. It was not just a flypast, but living history. The aircraft were not just machines, but symbols of the enduring monarchy, the resilience of the British people and the changing times. As the last jet disappeared and the smoke of the Red Arrows in the colours of the British flag could be seen in the distance, Emily looked at her grandfather. David, who had been silent the whole time, had tears in his eyes. He saw the history of the Queen and the island in the planes and knew that the traditions he cherished so much would live on. The planes flying over the Isle of Wight were more than just an air show. They were an echo of the past carrying into the future.

SPRING WHITE ORCHIDS WITH PURPLE HEART

Once upon a time, in a hidden valley far away from the hustle and bustle of the world, a very special orchid bloomed. Its petals were as pure and immaculate as the first snow, but at its heart it bore a bright purple colour. In this valley lived a young orphan named Elara, who lovingly cared for the orchid with its unusual flowers. The valley was filled with ancient legends, and one of them told of a brave warrior who gave his life to save his village. His love for his homeland was so deep that his heart, pure and innocent as it was, fell to the ground and became an orchid with a violet heart. The flower was to preserve the memory of his purity and courage. Elara knew the story. When spring came, the orchids began to bloom. The play of light on the petals sparkled so beautifully that it attracted people from the surrounding villages. They came to admire the flowers, but Elara knew that they saw not only the beauty of the flowers, but also the story of the brave warrior. They saw the pure heart that the orchid carried and understood that true strength lies not in power, but in the purity of the heart. One day, when a storm swept through the valley, the delicate orchid blossoms were carried away by the wind. Elara was inconsolable. But when the storm subsided, she found that the blossoms had not been destroyed, but had been carried away by the wind to bloom in the most remote places in the world. From that day on, people knew that the orchid with the purple heart carried not only the memory of the warrior, but also the hope for a better world. Elara, the young orphan who cared for the orchid, had not only preserved the history of the orchid, but also passed it on. She had realised that the beauty of the orchid lay not in its flowers, but in the story it carried in its purple heart. And so, every year, the orchids with purple hearts bloomed to remind the world that true beauty and strength come from within.





THE HAMMOCK BEAR

Mani, an Asian black bear, was used to roaming the jungles of Laos. But one day, near a river, he discovered a strange structure that was unlike anything he had ever seen before. A sturdy wooden frame standing between the trees supported a colourful hammock. It was not like the vines he used for climbing, but a soft, swaying net of fabric. At first, Mani was sceptical. The hammock swayed and the frame creaked when he leaned on it cautiously. But his curiosity was stronger. After a few failed attempts to lie down on the wobbly fabric, he finally managed to distribute his weight so that he lay gently in the hammock. The feeling was incredible. He was in the air, free from the solid earth, floating gently between the treetops. The hammock swayed back and forth in time with the wind, and Mani, who was otherwise a vigilant bear, closed his eyes and relaxed. He dreamed of flying honeycombs and sweet mangoes that he could pick from above. The hammock became Mani's secret retreat. The hikers who discovered the wooden frame with the torn hammock wondered who might be seeking peace and quiet there. But no one suspected that it was a bear who had found his new passion here. Sometimes, when people were nearby, Mani would hide in the undergrowth. He watched them and saw how they looked at the wooden frame, and he had to smile. He knew that the hammock was not meant for humans, but for him, the floating bear of Laos. And if you listened closely, you could hear his soft, contented snoring echoing through the Laotian jungle.

KUHRIOSUM

On Kronenplatz square in Bietigheim-Bissingen, where the hustle and bustle of the town pulsates, there is a fountain that is so unusual that it is affectionately known as Kuhriosum. Created in 1987 by artist Jürgen Goertz, it tells a little story about the magic of imagination. Once upon a time, there was a little cow named Charlotte who lived in a pasture on the outskirts of Bietigheim-Bissingen. Unlike the other cows, who only had the lush grass on their minds, Charlotte dreamed of higher things. She dreamed of flying carpets, singing flowers and magical fountains. Her sisters made fun of her and called her 'dreamy Charlotte'. One day, when an artist named Jürgen Goertz was walking through the town, he heard about dreamy Charlotte. He was fascinated by her story and decided to create a monument to her. He created a sculpture that was not just a cow, but a creature that embodied the dreams of the little cow. The Kuhriosum was not only a sculpture, but also a fountain. Not only did water drip from the cow's eyes, but also a glittering, golden stream that carried the story of the dreaming Charlotte within it. And when the children played around the fountain and the water fountains sprayed high, it seemed as if the cow was spraying the magic of her dreams into the town. Since then, the people of Bietigheim-Bissingen say, the Kuhriosum has not only brought good luck to the town, but also a dose of imagination. Sometimes, if you listen carefully, you can hear a soft laugh and a quiet 'Moo' in the splashing of the fountain – the dreamy Charlotte, who still dreams of her magical adventures today.





PUMPKIN EXHIBITION

The Blühende Barock in Ludwigsburg, the huge garden show at the residential palace, is famous for its pumpkin exhibition. According to legend, however, it is more than just a simple show – it is an annual meeting between a princess and a pumpkin spirit. Once upon a time, when the park was still unknown to pumpkins, a princess named Amalia lived in the palace. She was touched by the melancholic beauty of autumn, but the empty garden pained her. Her gardeners simply could not find flowers strong enough to survive the golden autumn. One evening, during one of her walks, she came across a small, lost pumpkin. It was a pumpkin of an amazing orange colour, and it glowed in the moonlight. As she approached the pumpkin, a small, glittering figure appeared. It was a little pumpkin spirit. He told the princess the many stories that pumpkins carried within them, of the sun of summer and the cold of winter. He said that his kind had the power to beautify autumn and give people hope. The princess, touched by the story, decided to gather the pumpkins in the park. She and the little pumpkin spirit summoned all the pumpkins from the land, from the small decorative pumpkins to the giant edible ones. They arranged the pumpkins into impressive figures that told the fairy tales and stories of the land. When autumn came and people visited the Baroque garden, they were overwhelmed by the beauty of the pumpkin exhibition. They saw not only pumpkins in the figures, but also the stories they carried within them. From that day on, the pumpkin spirit returned to the Baroque garden every year to create the pumpkin exhibition. Princess Amalia grew old, but the story lived on in the hearts of the people. And today, when the pumpkin exhibition takes place at the Blühendes Barock in Ludwigsburg, it is believed that the stories of the princess and the pumpkin spirit can be found in the artfully arranged pumpkin figures.

MAE NAM KHONG

Deep in the enchanted forests of Laos, where the Mekong River winds its emerald waters through narrow gorges, there was an ancient legend. It told of the Naga, a serpent-like deity who lived at the bottom of the river and watched over it. But the Naga was not always a deity. Once upon a time, it was a simple water snake that lived in a small stream. It admired the great mother of water – Mae Nam Khong, the Mekong, which gave it life and nourished it. One day, when the stream had almost dried up, the snake had a dream. She dreamed of how she could change the world. In her dream, she plunged into the deepest depths of the Mekong, where she met the ancient gods. She begged the gods to give her the power to help the Mekong. 'Please, let me be the mother of the waters,' she prayed. The gods, touched by the purity of her heart, gave her a task. She was to live in the world of humans to learn how to bring nature into harmony with humanity. She was reborn as a little girl named Sila, who lived in a small village on the banks of the Mekong. Sila grew up near the river and learned to understand its language. In the rainy season, when the river overflowed its banks, she helped the people save their homes. In the dry season, when the river receded, she showed them where to find the best fish. She was wise and kind, and the people called her the 'daughter of the Mekong'. One day, when Sila was grown up, she returned to the river and prayed. She had learned the lesson that the Mekong is not just a river, but a part of life that must not only be given, but also received. She felt her true nature returning to her and transformed into the great Naga who would protect the mother of water. The Naga still lives in the Mekong today. It is said that if you look closely at the water, you can sometimes see a movement that does not come from a fish, or hear the sound of a deep rumbling that does not come from a motorboat. It is the Naga watching over the river and reminding people that the Mother of Water is always with them.





CORVIN - THE CARRION CROW

High above Matthias Church, where the colourful Zsolnay tiles reflected the sun, lived a very special raven. Unlike the crows in the city that rummaged through the rubbish, this raven named Corvin was a direct descendant of the raven that once returned King Matthias Corvinus' ring. Corvin did not carry a shiny jewel in his beak, but he carried the memory of it in his heart. One day, when the hustle and bustle of tourists enjoying the view of the Danube from the castle district had subsided, Corvin landed on a windowsill. He saw a young girl named Eszter looking at an old, faded photograph. Eszter, who had grown up in the city, had lost touch with the old stories. She knew nothing of the legend of the raven who once returned the king's ring. She saw the crow as just an ordinary, annoying bird. But Corvin felt a connection to the girl. He sensed her sadness and her longing for something greater than the hustle and bustle of the city. He tapped the window with his beak to get her attention. When Eszter looked up, she saw the depth in his intelligent, alert eyes. Corvin, using his magic, snatched up a shiny souvenir that had fallen to the floor, a small golden ring, and left it on the windowsill. Eszter, surprised and fascinated, picked up the small ring. She felt a strange warmth emanating from it. When she looked up, Corvin had disappeared. But in the distance, on top of the parliament building, she saw a tiny black dot rising high into the sky. Eszter understood. She had rediscovered the connection to the ancient stories that lived in the soul of the city. The raven had not only brought her a ring, but also the memory of the magic buried in the history of Budapest. From that day on, Eszter no longer saw the crows on the roofs of Budapest as ordinary birds, but as the guardians of the ancient stories that made the city so special.

KINGSTON-UPON-HULL

As the first tender, sun-warmed rays of spring broke through the grey blanket over Kingston-Upon-Hull, the city awoke to new life. The cold, biting wind that so often swept in from the North Sea and across the Humber estuary gave way to a milder, gentler breeze. The port city, once famous for its whaling and fishing, had been through a lot over the centuries. But in spring, it seemed to regain its strength and spirit. The old quays, once bustling with activity, were populated by young families enjoying the warm days by the water. Old fisherman Arthur lived by the River Hull, near the old town. He was one of the few who still had a connection to the city's glorious maritime past. While his fellow citizens celebrated the modern changes, he sometimes looked wistfully at the river that held so many stories. But this spring, he noticed something that filled his heart with joy. A young girl named Lily, the granddaughter of an old friend, came to the river every day. She had a small easel and painted the old red-brown brick houses, the old ships and the fishermen who still found their way up the river. She didn't paint the city as it was, but as it should be – full of colour and hope. One day, when Arthur passed by, he asked Lily what she was painting. 'I'm painting the city,' she said. 'The city in spring.' Arthur, who had only ever seen the city in grey fog, didn't understand what she meant. Lily smiled and said, 'In spring, everything comes back to life, the old houses, the trees, the people. And you just have to look closely to see the colours.' Arthur, touched by her words, looked at the city with new eyes. He saw the delicate green of the trees in the parks, the colourful flowers on the balconies of the old houses, and the bright blue of the sky reflected in the water of the river. He saw how the people in the city, like nature, were awakening from their winter slumber and celebrating the hope of a new beginning. From that day on, Arthur no longer saw the city as a place of the past, but as a place of the future. And the story of spring in Kingston-Upon-Hull was no longer told only by nature, but also by the people who had rediscovered the magic of spring in the streets of the city.





SUN UMBRELLAS

Amie, a small umbrella maker in Amiens, loved springtime when the sun bathed her city in golden light. But business was slow. People no longer seemed to appreciate simple, traditional craftsmanship, and her workshop, located in the narrow streets of the Quartier Saint-Leu, was in danger of closing. One day, as she passed by the blooming Hortillonnages, the floating gardens, she had an idea. She decided to bring colour back to the city, not with flowers, but with the fabrics of her parasols. She spoke to the mayor, but he was sceptical. He only saw the risk, not the opportunity. But Amie was a woman with a big heart. With the help of the other merchants in the neighbourhood, she began to stretch parasols in a wide variety of colours across the streets. She used parasols made of silk and cotton in all the colours of the rainbow. At first there were only a few, then more and more, until the entire neighbourhood was covered by a canopy of floating colours. The tourists who came to the city were thrilled. They had never seen anything like it before. The city, otherwise known for its Gothic cathedral, suddenly became famous for its floating parasols. People came from all over the world to see this extraordinary spectacle. The merchants, who had been sceptical at first, saw their businesses begin to flourish again. Amie's workshop, which had been on the verge of closing, became a busy place once more. Not only had she saved her livelihood, she had also restored colour to the city. The parasols floating in the streets were not just a work of art, but a symbol of hope. They reminded people that the traditions of the past still had a place in the modern world, and that a love of craftsmanship and imagination could enliven the soul of a city. Since then, the people of Amiens say, the hanging parasols are not just a decoration, but a symbol of hope that fills the city with colour, joy and the magic of imagination. And Amie, the umbrella maker, became the guardian of this tradition and the protector of the soul of her city.

GRASS PASTURE IN THE KAKHETI PRAIRIE

On the edge of the vast, sun-drenched steppes of Kakheti, where the earth is barren but the grass seems endless, the shepherd Luka wandered with his flock. For generations, transhumant shepherds had been moving with the rhythm of the seasons, taking their thousands of sheep from the high mountains of Tusheti to the winter pastures in the semi-deserts of the south. Luka knew the way, knew the wind and the smell of the grass. In the flock there was a small, curious lamb named Beka. While the other lambs stayed close to the flock, Beka was always off in search of the rarest, juiciest blade of grass. Luka, who often had to bring him back, affectionately called him the 'little explorer'. One day, when the sun was at its zenith, Beka discovered a small, golden blade of grass growing in the middle of a cliff, protected by other plants. Beka, who had never seen a blade of grass of such beauty before, began to climb the steep cliff. Luka, who was watching the lamb, became uneasy. He knew how dangerous it was to climb the cliffs. Just as Beka was almost at his goal, the cliff began to slide. The lamb cried out in fear, and Luka, without hesitation, rushed down the slope to save it. He knew that the life of a lamb was not worth much, but Beka was more than just a lamb. It was part of the flock that was his family. He managed to reach the lamb just as it was about to fall. He carried it on his shoulders, the lamb trembling with fear, and carried it back to the herd. He was angry, but also relieved. When they arrived at the herd, Beka, without hesitation, held out a small, golden blade of grass to him. Luka, touched by the sign of gratitude, ate the blade of grass. It tasted sweet and of adventure. From that day on, Luka had a new perspective on the steppes of Kakheti. He saw not only the grass and the flock, but also the little adventures and stories hidden in the barren landscape. And the story of the shepherd who saved the lost lamb became a legend among the shepherds of the Kakheti steppes, passed down through generations.





VOLUBILIS

High above the fertile valley of Volubilis, where the ancient Roman ruins lie, there once lived a Berber boy named Tāhar. He was nicknamed Qualili because, like the oleander in the dry riverbeds, he lived on the barren slopes and grew up in the stories of the shepherds who were his family. Tāhar had a special connection to the ruins, which the Berbers called Walila. While others saw only a collection of stones in the remains, he saw the stories of the people who lived and died here, the conquerors who came and went, and the nature that survived it all. He was particularly fascinated by the majestic victory monument, the triumphal arch, which once honoured the Roman emperor Caracalla. One day, while grazing his flock near the triumphal arch, he found a stone. It was no ordinary stone, but a stone with a pattern he knew from Roman mosaics, but also from the intricate patterns of the Berbers. It was a piece of history. Tāhar was fascinated. He began to work on the stone and discovered that it was not just a stone, but part of a larger whole. He began to work on the stone. He sanded and polished it until the pattern was recognisable again. He carved the history of the ruins onto the stone, the history of the people who lived and died here, the conquerors who came and went, and the nature that survived it all. When he returned to the village, he showed the stone to his grandfather. The old man was moved. 'You have not only found a stone, my son,' he said, 'you have found the soul of Walila.' From that day on, as the story goes in the villages at the foot of the ruins, Tāhar Qualili became known not only as a shepherd but also as a storyteller. He had understood that the stories lived not only in the ruins but in the stones themselves, telling people how the past influences the present.

STEPANTSMINDA AND THE HOLY MOUNTAIN KASBEK

The legends of Kasbek, the glacier-covered sacred mountain, are as alive in Stepantsminda as the prayer flags fluttering in the wind. In the stories of the elders, who gathered around the fire at the foot of the majestic peak, lived the mythical hero Amirani. It is said that the Caucasian Prometheus was chained to Mount Kazbek for his disobedience, where the gods punished him for his sins. But the story that remained in the hearts of the inhabitants of Stepantsminda was different. Once, people said, there was a young man named Davit whose father had disappeared in the crevasses of Kazbek while attempting to climb the peak. Davit, a shepherd like his father, vowed to conquer the mountain, not out of boastfulness, but to uncover his father's secret. He knew the paths, the animals and the dangers of the mountain, but he also knew that the mountain had a soul. One day, as he set out for the summit, his father's spirit appeared to him. 'Davit, you don't need to climb the summit,' he said. 'The mountain has already given you everything you need: strength, patience, calm. And you will not find the secrets of the mountain at the summit, but in your heart.' Davit understood. He turned back and devoted his life to the village and the stories of the holy mountain. From that day on, he told people about the wisdom of the mountain, which is not to be found in the heights, but in the depths of the heart. Davit's story became a legend passed down from generation to generation by the shepherds of Stepantsminda. People came from all over the world to see the holy mountain Kazbek, hear the ancient legends and feel the silence of the Caucasus. And if you listen carefully today, you can hear in the wind blowing over the peaks the echo of Davit, the shepherd who found the true wisdom of the holy mountain without ever climbing it.





THE MERMAID OF SITGES

On the edge of the picturesque beach of Sant Bartomeu, beneath the protective walls of the church, a rather inconspicuous bronze figure has stood since 1965. It is the Mermaid of Sitges, a statue by Catalan artist Pere Jou, who turns towards the sea with a welcoming gesture. But it is not only the artwork itself, but also a special tradition that makes it a local legend. The story tells of two inseparable friends, the fisherman Mateo and the seamstress Sofia. Mateo, a man with a weather-beaten face and strong hands, spent his life at sea. Sofia, with her nimble fingers, created elaborate dresses for the villagers. They met every evening on the steps in front of the church to watch the sun set and talk about their dreams. Mateo dreamed of a big catch that would make him rich, and Sofia dreamed of a dress so beautiful that the queen would wear it. One day, after the statue of the mermaid had been erected, Mateo noticed something strange. When he touched the mermaid's open palm before setting sail, he had good luck at sea. When he told Sofia about it, she was sceptical. But when she saw the first riches he brought back from the sea, she too began to believe in the magic. Sofia began to touch the mermaid before setting sail and ask for inspiration. And indeed, the ideas for her dresses seemed to spring to mind when she touched the mermaid's hand. The two friends, now both successful in their craft, came to the mermaid every evening to thank her and tell her about their adventures. Word of the story spread, and soon many people were touching the mermaid's hand to find luck and inspiration. But over time, people forgot that the mermaid was more than just a lucky charm. They began to take her for granted, as a simple statue in the square. One evening, when the moon was high in the sky, Mateo and Sofia noticed that the mermaid looked sad. They had forgotten the stories they carried in their hearts. They decided not only to ask for good luck, but also to give thanks and tell the stories of the magic they owed to the mermaid. Since then, according to the stories told in Sitges, the mermaid has not only been a lucky charm, but also a guardian of memories.

PARAGLIDING

On the slopes below the Teufelsmühle, near Loffenau in the northern Black Forest, the wind had a special power. It was there, where two enthusiastic hang-gliders discovered an ideal launch site on the clear-cut area in the summer of 1977, that the legend of the 'Devil's Flyers' was born. The story is about Johannes, a young man from Loffenau and a descendant of millers who once worked at the Teufelsmühle. Johannes had a passion for flying that was unusual for the people in his village. He did not dream of conquering the wind, but of understanding it. On the slopes, where cold air rose from the valley and the wind played around the tall fir trees, he sought the perfect moment for his take-off. The devil, who could no longer take possession of the old mill, watched Johannes with a suspicious eye. He saw the passion and unshakeable confidence that Johannes placed in the wind. The devil, who believed himself to be the ruler of wind and weather, wanted to tempt Johannes into overestimating his powers. One day, when the sky was particularly clear, the devil appeared in the form of an old man. He said to Johannes: 'Young man, if you really want to fly, you must fly into the storm. Only there will you find the true strength of the wind.' Johannes, who knew the stories of the ancients, knew that this was a trap. He saw in the old man's eyes not the wisdom of the wind, but the lust for power. He turned around and said, 'True strength lies not in defeating the storm, but in understanding it.' He waited for the perfect moment and then took off in a gentle updraft that carried him far above the valley. The devil, frustrated by the boy's wisdom, disappeared in a cloud of smoke. And from that day on, according to the story told in Loffenau, the hang gliders named their club 'Teufelsflieger' (Devil's Flyers), not because they were possessed by the devil, but because they had managed to defeat the devilish forces and make the wind their friend.





LANDS END

The stormy wind whipped the waves against the steep cliffs of Land's End. It is the westernmost point of England and a place where the rugged character of Cornwall is most evident. Here, where the land ends abruptly, ancient stories and legends begin. One of them tells of a young fisherman named Liam, whose family had lived by the sea for generations. Liam was a fearless man who braved even the wildest storms. But his greatest treasure was his daughter Elara, whose laughter was as bright as the sun rising over the sea. Elara had a secret passion: she loved the ancient stories about the sunken kingdom of Lyonesse, which was said to lie off the coast of Land's End. One evening, when the wind was blowing particularly strongly, Liam cast his net. He dreamed of a big catch, but the sea gave him only a small, glittering piece of driftwood. It was no ordinary piece of wood, but an intricately carved replica of a sword. Liam thought of his daughter and took the wood home with him. When Elara saw it, she said, 'Papa, this is the sword of Lyonesse. It was found to tell us that the sea not only takes, but also gives.' Liam laughed and said it was just a piece of wood. But that night, as the wind battered against the windows, he dreamed of a sunken kingdom and a fearless king who lost his home. When he got up the next morning, he saw that the weather had calmed down. The sun was shining and the sea was calm. He went to the beach and saw that the tide had washed a shiny piece of jewellery onto the shore. It was a small, golden fish figurine. He took it home and showed it to Elara. Elara was overjoyed. She knew that the sea had given them not only a treasure, but also a story. From that day on, Liam and Elara no longer saw the sea as a mere expanse of water, but as a living soul that tells stories and gives treasures if you are willing to listen and find them. And so the story of the family who listened to the treasures of the sea from Land's End became a legend in Cornwall, passed down from generation to generation.

ALLERHEILIGENBERG

On Allerheiligenberg, Solothurn, where a sanatorium once stood, the wind blows across the Jura heights. A striking monument, consisting of a column and a figure, towers into the sky. It commemorates the former institution and the spirit of the place, which is still alive today. Once upon a time, there was a young nurse named Heidi who worked at this sanatorium at the beginning of the 20th century. The air up here, so pure and clear, was supposed to heal the patients' lungs. But Heidi knew that it took more than just clean air. She saw the fears and worries in the eyes of the sick and wished she could give them something more than just medical help. Heidi had a special talent. She sang. Her voice was like the wind blowing over the hills, gentle and full of hope. In the evenings, when the sun disappeared behind the Jura mountains and the patients were lying in their beds, she would sneak up the hill to where the monument stands today. There she sang old folk songs and told stories of the hope that spring brought with it. The patients who listened from their rooms felt comforted. One of her patients, a young painter named Artur, was too weak from his illness to hear her melodies. But he felt the magic. He asked Heidi what she did on the hill every evening. Heidi told him about her songs and her stories. Artur, inspired, decided to paint a memorial for Heidi that would capture the spirit of the place: the hope that the singing brought to people's hearts. But Artur was unable to complete his painting. He passed away before he could finish his work. Heidi, deeply affected by his death, decided to carry on his legacy. With the help of the other patients, she collected stones and erected the monument that stands today on All Saints' Hill. The monument is not a simple sculpture, but a tribute to the hope and comfort that Heidi and Artur gave to the patients. It is said that on particularly windless days, you can hear the melody of Heidi's songs blowing over the hill. And in the shape of the column and the figure, you can see the hope that remains alive even in the most difficult times.





MENORAH

In front of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament in Jerusalem, stands the large bronze menorah, a powerful testament to Israel's history. Each of the 29 relief panels on its branches tells of a decisive moment in the life of the Jewish people, from biblical times to the founding of the modern state. An old man named Dov, his face lined with countless stories, often stood in front of the monument. He himself was a witness to history and saw the menorah not just as a statue, but as a living book made of bronze. One day, as he was looking at the reliefs, a young soldier named Sarah approached him. She asked him what it all meant. Dov smiled. He showed her a relief depicting the story of Abraham, who left his country to follow God's call. 'This is the beginning,' he said. 'The history of our people began with a promise.' He led her on to the reliefs of the kings and prophets who shaped the faith of the people. He showed her the relief depicting the Babylonian exile, when the people lost their homeland. 'Each branch tells a different story,' said Dov. 'But all the stories are connected.' He showed her the reliefs depicting the Diaspora and persecution, and finally the relief depicting the Holocaust. Sarah, her eyes filling with tears, asked, 'How could our people survive all this?' Dov, himself a Holocaust survivor, placed his hand on the relief depicting the return to the land of Israel and the founding of the state. 'The Menorah is more than just a sculpture,' said Dov. 'It is a reminder that our faith, our hope and our will to survive are stronger than any destruction.' Deeply moved, Sarah no longer saw the Menorah as a mere work of art, but as a symbol of the eternal struggle and unshakeable hope of the Jewish people. From that day on, Sarah often visited the menorah. She now knew that the history of her people lived not only in books, but also in the reliefs of the menorah that stood in front of the Knesset, burning as an eternal light for the people of Israel.

RED COTTON TREE

In the bustling heart of Tel Aviv, not far from Rothschild Boulevard, stood an old, gnarled red silk tree, also known as *Bombax Ceiba*. Its branches were like gnarled arms whispering stories. In spring, when the city awoke in the warm sun, the tree blossomed in a sea of bright red flowers, as if it had brought its own fiery spring with it. The tree witnessed countless declarations of love, secret rendezvous and fleeting glances exchanged in its vicinity. Its story began many decades ago when a young man named Amir chose the tree as a meeting place for his secret romance with a young woman named Naomi. Amir was a gardener who took care of the trees in the city. Naomi was a talented artist who expressed her feelings and inspiration in her paintings. They met every day under the tree when it was in full bloom. The bright petals that turned the ground into a red carpet were their symbol of love. But one day, Naomi had to leave the city. Her father had taken a job in another city, and the family had to move. Amir was heartbroken. But Naomi promised him that she would return when the tree's flowers bloomed again. Time passed, and Amir, who did not know if he would ever see her again, tended the tree with even greater devotion. He decided to record the stories of the people he observed under the tree. He painted the young lovers, the laughing children and the old people resting on the benches in the shade of the tree. When spring came and the tree was in full bloom again, Amir stood under the tree and waited. The petals that fell on him were like a kiss of hope. Suddenly, he saw a woman walking down the street with a little boy. It was Naomi. She had come back to fulfil her promise. Naomi hugged Amir and then looked at the paintings he had hung on one of the tree's branches. She saw their story in the paintings and understood how much Amir had loved her. She decided to stay in Tel Aviv forever and use her art to serve the city. Since then, the people of Tel Aviv say, the red silk tree has stood as a symbol of love and hope. Every year in spring, when the petals fall to the ground, they remind people of the story of Amir and Naomi and that love, like the blossoms of the tree, awakens again and again.





HONEY BEES - PART OF A MIRACLE

Spring in the Markgräflerland region, where the cherry trees were in full bloom, was the most beautiful time of year for Maya the honeybee. During these weeks, flowers bloomed in abundance and the air was filled with the sweet scent of nectar. For Maya and her sisters, this was the time of hardest work. To collect 500 grams of honey, they had to make an incredible 40,000 flights, covering up to 120,000 kilometres – a distance that would take them to the other end of the world. On this special morning, the air was warm and clear, and the cherry blossoms glowed in the sun. Maya, one of the most experienced collectors of her people, set off. She flew over the rolling hills of the Markgräflerland, past the vineyards and flowering meadows. She visited one cherry blossom after another to collect the precious nectar that was the gold of the bee colony. The work was hard, but it also filled her with a deep sense of satisfaction. Maya knew that every blossom she visited was a small contribution to the greater whole. She was part of a larger plan, a cycle that connected nature and the bees. But one day, when Maya was at the end of her strength, she crashed. She landed on a cherry blossom that floated gently above the ground. She was so exhausted that she almost gave up. But then she thought of the queen, her sisters and the importance of her task. She thought of the honey she collected and the hope it carried. She pulled herself together and continued her flight. When she arrived at the hive, she was happy. She had done her part and was part of something bigger. And at night, as she lay down to rest, she dreamed of the thousands of kilometres she had travelled and the honey she had collected with her sisters. And she knew that she was not just an insect, but part of a miracle.

THE COPPER ROSE BEETLE

In a garden on the edge of the Black Forest, where the compost heap worked away warm and fragrant, lived a little hero who loved to get dirty: Cupri, the copper rose beetle. Cupri was not as striking as his famous cousin, the magnificent green golden rose beetle. But his beauty lay in his depth. His shell not only shimmered green, but had a deep, bronze to reddish sheen – as if an alchemist had dipped him in a bath of molten copper. Cupri, like all rose beetles, was a creature of transformation. As a larva (grub), he lived deep in the compost for months. He was not a pest that ate roots, but a diligent recycler who converted dead, rotten wood and decaying leaves into nutritious soil. He was the unseen gardener of the depths. One sunny June morning, Cupri was ready. He had wrapped himself in a protective cocoon made of his own excrement and soil and completed his metamorphosis. Now he emerged from his dark hiding place. His first act on the surface was to pounce on one of his favourite flowers: the bright red rose. Unlike many other insects that destroy petals, Cupri did not. He was a gentle eater who fed only on nectar and pollen. He loved the sweetness of life without destroying it. As Cupri crawled over a red petal, he felt a brief shadow. 'What are you?' asked a boastful wasp who was just attacking a careless beetle. 'You're all rusty and dirty. And you're taking up so much space in my rose!' Cupri unfolded his wings. Unlike many beetles, which have to lift their wing covers (elytra) first, the rose beetle could fold his wings out through a side recess under the covers. 'I am the gardener who lays the foundation,' Cupri replied calmly. He rose into the air, his bronze armour glinting. 'I may not wear the brightest gold, but I carry the strength of the earth in my colour. And I am the sign that the soil is healthy.' He circled the garden. The sun caught his subtle copper sheen. The copper rose beetle was the silent confirmation that true beauty and strength often lie hidden in work – in the alchemy of the earth, which transforms decay into new life. And sometimes, when the sun was just right, he wore a colour as rich as any gold.





THE EXOTIC BLOSSOMS OF THE CANNONBALL TREE

Old Achan Sumedh, a Buddhist monk, took care of the small grove behind his wat in Thailand. In the middle of this grove stood a tree that was unlike any other: the cannonball tree (Sala tree in Thai). This tree was a study in extremes. Its fruits were large, woody balls that looked like cannonballs and fell to the ground with a loud plop. But its flowers... its flowers were otherworldly in their beauty. The flowers hung on long stems that grew directly from the trunk. Each flower was a whirlwind of colours: pink, deep red and bright yellow. But the most fascinating thing was their structure. They had six outer petals and in the centre an arrangement of stamens that looked like a tiny snake with a crown. One hot afternoon, Nong, a young visitor from the city, came to the garden. He was impressed by the exotic shape. 'Achan,' Nong asked, 'are these flowers real? And do they smell so wonderful? It's a fragrance that is sweet and spicy at the same time, as if you were looking into a hidden room of paradise.' Achan Sumedh smiled and nodded. 'They are real, my son. And their fragrance is so intense that it stuns the bees and attracts moths. Nature is not subtle when it wants to represent the divine.' He explained the spiritual significance of the tree to Nong: In India, the structure of the flower is often associated with the shape of the Naga (the serpent beings) and the crown of the god Shiva, which is why it is often planted near Shiva temples. In Thailand and Sri Lanka, it is often considered to be the sacred Sala tree under which the Buddha was born and which plays an important role in legends. 'You see the loud cannonballs on the ground,' said the monk, 'which symbolise transience and the end. But you also smell the flower growing on its trunk, which proclaims imperishable beauty and new life.' Achan Sumedh gently picked a flower that was just blooming. 'The cannonball tree teaches us that even in the face of destruction (the ball), the greatest splendour (the flower) can spring directly from the foundation of life. It is a constant reminder that the miraculous exists alongside the ordinary.' Nong bowed. He smelled the flower, and the intense, exotic scent carried him away for a moment. He understood that this tree, in its dramatic contrast – deadly bullet and heavenly scent – reflected the essence of the spiritual journey.

THAR DESERT

The twilight painted the Sam Sand Dunes in an unreal, coppery gold as the old man Bhoora Ram set his sandal in the soft, untouched sand. For decades, he had been the guardian of this silent, undulating sea that stretched east of the village of Kanoi. Kanoi was just a speck of green hope in the vastness of the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, and Bhoora Ram's family had lived there for generations, trading camels. But for him, the magic lay here, in the dunes. Today, Bhoora Ram had brought his young granddaughter, Lajja, with him. It was her first time alone with her grandfather in the highest dunes. 'Grandfather,' whispered Lajja as she watched the fluid movement of the sand ridges, 'why do we live in Kanoi when the most beautiful place is here?' Bhoora Ram smiled, his teeth flashing in his tanned face. 'Kanoi is the root, my child. These dunes, the Sam Sand Dunes, are the breath. We need both. The village holds us steady, the sand teaches us freedom.' He pointed to the horizon, where the last ray of sunlight set the surface of the sand ablaze. 'Look closely. When the sun disappears, the sand begins to dance.' Indeed. As the temperature suddenly dropped and the wind picked up, the extremely fine sand began to 'sing' – a deep, resonant hum that echoed through the desert. It was the whisper of the Thar. The finest particles slid down from the ridges, constantly painting new, perfect patterns. Bhoora Ram pulled out a small, dented brass container and lit a small oil-fuelled lantern. 'This lantern comes from Kanoi,' he explained. 'It is our promise that no matter how far we travel in the desert, the light of our home will always burn for us.' He told Lajja stories of travelling merchants, mysterious Rajput warriors, and the gods of the desert who shaped the golden dunes. The collective knowledge of his family, gathered over generations in Kanoi, was their compass. As the stars, countless diamonds on dark velvet, exploded above them, Lajja understood. The Sam Sand Dunes were not just a picturesque place in Rajasthan. They were the canvas of eternity, the centre of a culture that knew how to find beauty in barrenness. She was rooted in Kanoi, but her heart would always beat with her grandfather in the golden, singing dunes. The lantern in the sand glowed small but invincible, connecting her home to the infinite expanse of the desert.





BARREL ORGAN PLAYER

Jan Kataryniarz (Kataryniarz is the Polish word for barrel organ player) was an integral part of Warsaw's Old Town, as indispensable as the cobble streets themselves. Every day, whether the spring sun warmed the colourful town houses on Rynek Starego Miasta (Old Town Square) or the cold Vistula wind blew, Jan pushed his old wooden cart to its place beneath Sigismund's Column. On this cart sat his beloved barrel organ, a creaky but magnificently painted machine whose mechanics were the centrepiece of his life. Jan himself was a small man with a thick moustache, a flat cap and eyes that reflected the melancholy and resistance of the city. He was a witness. He had seen Warsaw rise from the rubble of war, a miracle of reconstruction that brought back its proud past brick by brick. His music was the perfect complement. He didn't play modern pop songs, but waltzes, polkas and old Polish folk songs that grandmothers sang to the little children of Warsaw. Every time he turned the crank, he seemed to turn back time itself. On a cold autumn afternoon, Jan sat in his usual spot. The tourists had thinned out, and only a few elderly ladies were warming their hands on cups of hot tea. He was playing a particularly melancholy tune when a young man in a fashionable coat stopped. The young man, Marek, was a successful software developer who saw the old town only as a backdrop for his expensive lunches. 'Good afternoon, Mr Kataryniarz,' Marek said somewhat condescendingly, tossing a coin into Jan's open hat. 'Why do you always play the same old songs? People want to hear something new. Something that fits the modern pace of Warsaw.' Jan stopped turning the crank. The melody broke off in mid-bar. 'Marek,' Jan replied quietly, 'you live in the skyscrapers of the city, in a world where everything is new. But this old town is not new. It is a memory. We did not rebuild these walls to be modern, but to remember who we were.' He tapped on the wood of his barrel organ. 'My music is like this building. It is the sound of memory. When I play these old melodies, I remind people that the city has a soul that is older and tougher than concrete and glass. It is the indestructible melody of Warsaw.' Jan smiled, picked up the crank again and finished the wistful waltz. Marek stood still. He was no longer listening to just a barrel organ, but to the echo of generations. He understood that Jan Kataryniarz was not just a street musician. He was Warsaw's musical archivist, keeping the city's history alive – one melody at a time.

THE NEEDLES

The old fisherwoman Elara sat on the windswept cliffs at the westernmost tip of the Isle of Wight and gazed out at the raging sea. Below her, they towered: The Needles. These three striking, sharp-edged chalk cliffs were more than just a sight to behold for Elara; they were the last teeth of an ancient dragon. Elara knew the true story of the Needles, which was not written in books but told in the tales of sailors. Long ago, the island was not so isolated. The Needles and the cliffs of Old Harry Rocks on the opposite coast of Dorset were once part of a single chalk formation, a solid bridge. But the sea, the tireless blacksmith, had struck again and again. The tides and storms gnawed incessantly at the soft chalk rock. Over thousands of years, the coast gave way, and what remained was this lonely resistance: the Needles. Once, the rock at the end had been much thicker. There was actually a fourth 'needle' – a slender, needle-shaped column called Lot's Wife. But in 1764, it too succumbed to the sea and crashed into the depths with a loud bang. Elara looked at the red and white lighthouse clinging to the outermost rock. It was a modern guardian, but the Needles themselves were the original guardians. That afternoon, she watched a young couple who had travelled from a nearby coastal town. They laughed, took photos and saw the rocks as a beautiful, static monument. 'They don't know how alive this place is,' Elara murmured into the wind. 'They see the end points. I see the struggle.' She remembered a severe winter storm in her childhood that turned the sea into a raging, foam-crested bull. The roar of the sea as it crashed against the chalk cliffs had been terrifying. The next morning, the land looked different – a new crack, a new crevice, another piece of land sacrificed to the ocean. The Needles taught the fishermen humility. They were a promise that even the seemingly hardest things must ultimately yield to the unstoppable force of time and water. As the sun sank lower and the chalk cliffs glowed in brilliant white, Elara knew: the Needles are not permanent statues. They are ticking clocks of geology, ending the history of the land with every beat of a wave, only to begin a new, smaller but equally proud history. They were the Isle of Wight's majestic final farewell to the Atlantic Ocean.





SINT-JANSHUIS WINDMILL

Jan Van der Velde had been accustomed to the sight since childhood. He lived in a small, gabled flat near the eastern edge of Bruges' historic city centre, and from his window he could see it: the Sint-Janshuis Mill. It was one of the few wooden mills that had survived the passage of time and stood proudly on one of the green hills along the canal ring (the so-called *vesten*). It was not the oldest, but it was Jan's favourite mill. The Sint-Janshuis mill was a classic post mill (*standerdmolen*), which meant that its entire wooden structure rested on a single strong post and could be turned to face the wind. It was a symbol of Flemish perseverance. Jan was not the miller, but a baker whose grandfather had once bought his flour from this mill. But in recent years, with the advent of modern industry, the mill's sails turned only for tourists and historical remembrance. One grey November day, as a strong North Sea wind blew across the flat polders, Jan closed his shop early. He felt the melancholy of the cold season, which turned the canals into steel-grey mirrors. He walked to the *vesten*, where the Sint-Janshuis mill stood enthroned on the hill. He saw the old miller, Pieter, adjusting the sails, even though he knew that the ground flour had little commercial value. 'Good evening, Pieter,' Jan called out against the wind. 'Are you letting the old spirit breathe again?' Pieter, his face marked by wind and flour, nodded. 'The mill has to work, Jan. If it stands still, it dies. The mechanics forget, the beams swell. It needs the wind to remember what it was built for.' He pointed to the huge wooden sails, which began to turn slowly and majestically in the strong wind. The creaking of the old oak beams and the deep roar of the blades created a powerful, earthy sound. 'This mill,' Pieter continued, "is the history of Bruges. It's not just the beauty of the canals and bell towers. It is the work. It is the bread made with the power of the wind and the tenacity of the Flemish people." Jan stood there watching the mill battle against the north wind and convert it into motion. He understood that Sint-Janshuis was not just a backdrop. It was a living monument to a time when people depended on the power of nature. The mill was the heartbeat of old, working Bruges – and it reminded him that true permanence lies in constant, meaningful movement. That evening, Jan returned to his warm bakery, inspired by the wind of the mill. He knew that as long as the sails of the Sint-Janshuis mill turned, the soul of the city would remain alive.

KOUTOUBIA MINARET

Jamila knew Marrakesh like the back of her hand, but the sight of the Koutoubia Minaret captivated her every day anew. It was not only the tallest building in the city; it was its heart and compass. Built in the 12th century under the Almohad dynasty, the minaret towered majestically above the rooftops of the medina. Its ochre-coloured bricks, glowing in the blazing Moroccan sun, were adorned with turquoise tiles and intricate geometric patterns that embodied thousands of years of Islamic art. Jamila sold spices in Djemaa el-Fna, the bustling square that lay in the constant shadow of the minaret. Every morning, just before the first call to prayer, she would look up at the square tower. There was a famous legend about the Koutoubia: when construction was completed, the caliph noticed that the foundation deviated by a few degrees from the perfect alignment with Mecca. Although the error was minimal, he insisted on demolishing the minaret and rebuilding it. The minaret we see today is the second one – a testament to the Almohads' absolute commitment to precision and devotion. One day, Karim, the young apprentice at Jamila's stall, complained about his work. 'People always want spices they already know. I want something new, something that stands out more!' Jamila looked up. The top of the minaret was crowned with three golden balls (or apples). Legend has it that they were made from the melted jewellery of one of the Caliph's wives, who had accidentally eaten two dates during Ramadan. As atonement, she donated her jewellery. 'Karim,' Jamila said softly, as the muezzin's call wafted down from the top of the tower, 'look at the Koutoubia. It is a monument to error and perfection.' She explained to him how the caliph once saw a flaw where people saw only beauty, and how he turned it into a lesson in unyielding devotion. 'Your work, Karim, may seem ordinary, but it is the first construction. You must carry it out with the precision of the second construction. People come to Marrakesh because this tower reminds them that the greatest structures are not those that are completed the fastest, but those that are built with the greatest respect for the idea.' When the call to prayer ended, Karim closed his eyes and breathed in the scent of saffron and coriander. He understood that the soul of Marrakesh did not lie in the noisy alleys, but in the silent, mighty tower, which, with its immaculate height and history of error, called for devotion. The Koutoubia was not just the shadow of Marrakesh; it was its conscience.





HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT

The architect Imre Steindl died before seeing his masterpiece completed. But he knew that the building he designed would not be an ordinary parliament; it was to be a monument to the eternal soul of the Hungarian nation. The story began in 1885, after the unification of Buda, Óbuda and Pest. The young, proud nation needed a representative building worthy of its thousand-year history. The style had to be grand, and Steindl chose Neo-Gothic, inspired by the Palace of Westminster in London but refined with Hungarian splendour. For years, the Parliament grew, brick by brick, spire by spire. It was a tremendous effort: over 100,000 cubic metres of stone, half a million decorative stones and forty kilograms of pure gold were used in its construction. It was a building that displayed wealth and architectural audacity. Old lady Katalin had known the Parliament building since childhood. Her grandfather had worked as a craftsman on the filigree balustrades. She remembered how, as a little girl, she had marvelled at the 90 statues of Hungarian kings and military leaders that adorn the façade. For Katalin, the most important place inside was the dome hall. There, beneath the impressive Renaissance dome that pierces the neo-Gothic structure, lies the nation's true treasure: the Holy Crown of Hungary (Szent Korona). This crown, which has adorned Hungarian kings since the 11th century, symbolises Hungary's continuity and sovereignty. Its presence in the parliament building is no coincidence; it emphasises that political power in Budapest is inextricably linked to historical continuity. One evening, as darkness enveloped the city, Katalin stood on the banks of the Danube. The lights of the parliament were on. 365 red lamps illuminated the façade – one for each day of the year. The monumental structure shone across the water, its 96-metre-high dome (a reference to the year 896, when the Hungarians settled in the region) reflected in the calm surface. Katalin thought of the turmoil the building had survived: revolutions, wars, occupations. Yet it stood there, an unshakeable anchor. She knew that the Hungarian Parliament building was more than just a place where laws were made. It was a stone crown for the city and an unbreakable reminder that Hungary's identity lay in the Danube, its history and the proud, shining structure on its banks.

EXHAUSTED

After a day full of intense impressions and fascinating art in the famous Staedel Museum in Frankfurt, three children gave in to the fascination of the paintings – but not with jubilant enthusiasm, rather in the form of blissful exhaustion. They had previously explored the masterpieces of artists from different eras with wide-eyed wonder until the flood of images, stories and the quiet grandeur of the rooms had exhausted their energy reserves. Now they are lying peacefully asleep on a soft bench, their little heads resting on the cool leather. Their cheeks are flushed and their closed eyes speak of a state of deep calm. Presumably their dreams are just as colourful and lively as the paintings they have just admired. There is something magical about this moment: three young visitors taking a well-deserved break in the midst of the venerable art collections. Perhaps one day they will return, with new eyes and full of energy, to rediscover the treasures of the museum. Until then, this image of childish tiredness remains a warm part of the vivid stories that unfold at the Staedel Museum.





TEA ESTATES

The history of the tea plantations of Munnar is a tale of colonial entrepreneurship, landscape transformation and resilience. It all began in the mid-19th century, when British colonial rulers discovered the cool climate and pristine hills of the Western Ghats in Kerala, which at that time were only traversed by wild elephants on their migratory paths. In 1862, Colonel Douglas Hamilton followed these trails as part of an expedition. However, the pioneer of commercial tea cultivation was the European planter A. H. Sharp, who established the very first tea plantation on approximately 50 hectares of land on the so-called Parvathi Estate in 1880. In the following decades, numerous tea plantations emerged from many small and large businesses, forever shaping the landscape and producing a total of 16 tea factories by 1915. This era was not without its challenges. A devastating monsoon in 1924 severely affected the plantations, but they recovered. After Indian independence, the tradition of tea cultivation continued, and today the lands, partly under the management of the Tata Group, are among the largest tea producers in southern India. Today, Munnar is known for its vast, emerald green 'carpets' of tea bushes and is home to some of the highest tea plantations in the world, such as the Kolukkumalai Tea Estate. Museums, such as the KDHP Tea Museum, preserve the history of this fascinating development from untouched wilderness to a centre of the Indian tea industry.

MONSOON VALLEY

The story of Monsoon Valley is one of visionary pioneering spirit and the successful attempt to establish a thriving wine culture in tropical Thailand, despite widespread scepticism. It all began in 2001, when Thai entrepreneur Chalerm Yoovidhya, a passionate wine lover, returned to his homeland after studying abroad. Inspired by his experiences in traditional wine regions, he was convinced that high-quality wines could also be produced at Thailand's 13th parallel – an assumption that many experts considered impossible. He established his first winery in Tab Kwang, near the picturesque Khao Yai National Park, a region already considered a traditional grape-growing area in Thailand. The fertile red soil and favourable microclimate there proved ideal for growing Shiraz grapes. The success in Tab Kwang encouraged him to explore other locations. In 2002, a new opportunity arose as part of a royal research project in Phetchaburi. The trial plantings there yielded surprisingly good results, prompting Chalerm to purchase a large plot of land for commercial cultivation in the nearby Hua Hin region. This area, which was formerly a corral for wild elephants, became the main location of today's Monsoon Valley vineyards. With the support of international experts, including German winemaker Kathrin Puff, who has been in charge of wine production since 2007, Monsoon Valley developed innovative cultivation techniques to overcome the challenges of the tropical climate. Today, Monsoon Valley is considered a pioneer of 'New Latitude Wine' and has played a key role in raising the international profile of the Thai wine scene. The wines, including varieties such as Colombard, Chenin Blanc, Shiraz and Sangiovese, have won over 300 awards worldwide and are served in top restaurants in Thailand and abroad. The story of Monsoon Valley is proof that passion, innovation and a belief in the unexpected can break the boundaries of traditional viticulture.





PULLED BY THE ROOTS

In Karlsruhe, the city that resembled a monumental construction site during the decades-long construction period of its so-called 'combined solution' – the construction of a tram tunnel under Kaiserstrasse – a unique interplay of infrastructure project and art in public space was created. In the summer of 2015, on the occasion of the city's anniversary (300 years of Karlsruhe), the city administration and the Centre for Art and Media (ZKM) used the construction sites as a canvas for the art project 'The City is the Star – Art at the Construction Site'. In this context, Argentine artist Leandro Erlich was invited to intervene in the process with one of his spectacular installations. At the market square, the heart of the construction site, he realised the work entitled 'Pulled by the Roots'. Erlich's installation was a surreal and at the same time poetic sight: a two-storey, detailed house hanging from the hook of a huge construction crane, as if it were being torn out of the ground or transported to a new location. The roots of the house dangled freely in the air and the foundation was seemingly exposed. The artwork deliberately played with the reality of urban transformation through underground construction and addressed universal issues such as uprooting, migration and home. It created a visual irritation that amazed passers-by and residents and encouraged them to view the construction site not only as a necessary evil, but as a place of change and artistic reflection. The installation 'Pulled by the Roots' became one of the most iconic symbols of 'construction site art' in Karlsruhe and showed how art can redefine public space during profound urban changes.

KEW ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS

The history of Kew Royal Botanic Gardens in London is a fascinating journey from a royal summer residence to a world-famous centre of botanical science and biodiversity. Its origins date back to the 17th century, when Baron Henry Capel of Tewkesbury created exotic gardens here. However, it was actually founded as a botanical garden in 1759 by Princess Augusta, the mother of King George III. She began collecting rare plants and laid the foundation for what is now one of the most extensive botanical collections in the world. In 1772, King George III inherited the estate and merged it with the neighbouring royal estate in Richmond, creating Kew Gardens as we know it today. In the 19th century, particularly under the leadership of renowned botanists Sir William Jackson Hooker (from 1841) and later his son Joseph Dalton Hooker, the gardens underwent rapid expansion and development. They became a global centre for scientific research and the international exchange of plant specimens. This era also saw the creation of iconic structures, including the famous iron and glass Palm House in the 1840s, which is considered the most significant surviving example of Victorian architecture of its kind. Over the centuries, Kew Gardens has played an important role in science, for example in introducing crops to other parts of the British Empire. It also made a contribution during times of war, including through research into medicinal plants and the promotion of self-sufficiency in vegetables (the 'Dig for Victory' campaign) during the Second World War. Today, the gardens are home to over 50,000 living plant species and a huge herbarium. In 2003, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens were recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and continue to be a leader in plant research and conservation, including through their Millennium Seed Bank, which preserves seeds from thousands of plant species for the future.





TÜBINGEN

The history of Tübingen is inextricably linked to its role as one of the oldest and most renowned university towns in Europe, whose 'genius loci' (spirit of place) is still alive today. The origins of the settlement go back a long way, but the first documented mention of Hohentübingen Castle dates back to 1078. Tübingen was first granted town privileges in 1231. A decisive turning point in the town's history occurred in 1342, when the impoverished Counts Palatine of Tübingen sold the castle and the town to the Counts, later Dukes, of Württemberg. The year 1477 marked the beginning of an era that continues to shape Tübingen to this day: Count Eberhard im Bart founded the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen. Inspired by his mother Mechthild von der Pfalz, he created a centre for the humanities and natural sciences that quickly gained in importance. Numerous intellectual giants such as Johannes Kepler, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling studied and worked here. The Reformation in the 16th century further shaped the town, and the university became an important Protestant centre of education. In the 20th century, especially during the Nazi era, Tübingen played an inglorious role as a stronghold of the völkisch movement, with almost 50% of voters voting for the NSDAP in 1933. After the Second World War, the city became part of the French occupation zone and the French military government had an influence on city affairs until 1991. Today, Tübingen is known for its picturesque old town with half-timbered houses, the Neckar River with its punting boats, and its lively student atmosphere. The university remains the dominant factor in the city, which must face the question of whether it is a university with a city next to it.

QUALILI

Volubilis is one of Morocco's most impressive Roman ruins, closely linked to the country's complex past. The name 'Qualili', which is mentioned in some contexts, refers to the post-Roman era, when the original ancient city had already been forgotten. The region around present-day Volubilis was first settled in the Neolithic period. The Carthaginians later established the first settlement there, which was taken over and expanded by the Romans. Around 40 AD, Volubilis was elevated to the capital of the Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana. The city experienced its heyday in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD as an important administrative centre and benefited from the export of agricultural products such as grain and olive oil to Rome. Magnificent villas with ornate mosaics, temples and a representative triumphal arch still bear witness to its former prosperity. In the 3rd century AD, the Romans withdrew and Volubilis lost its importance. In the following centuries, the city, now known as Qualili, was a melting pot of different cultures, especially after the arrival of Muslim rulers. In the 8th century, a large part of the population was resettled in the nearby, newly founded city of Moulay Idriss Zerhoun. During this period, the name Qualili was often used to refer to the ruins of the abandoned Roman city. The ruins remained largely intact until a devastating earthquake in the 18th century destroyed large parts of the complex. The stones from the ruins were then used as building material for the construction of the new imperial city of Meknes. In the 19th century, French archaeologists began systematically excavating the site and brought Volubilis back to light. Today, Volubilis, where the history of the Romans and subsequent cultures in Morocco can be felt, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The archaeological site tells the story of a vibrant trading metropolis that fell into oblivion after the decline of Roman influence, but was rediscovered as an important part of Morocco's cultural heritage.





RIVER KWAI BRIDGE

The Bridge on the River Kwai is a tragic tale of human suffering and forced labour during the Second World War, also known from the famous, albeit fictionalised, novel and film 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'. In 1942, after the occupation of Thailand, the Japanese army urgently needed a logistical link to transport supplies and troops for its planned attack on British India. The solution was to build a 415-kilometre railway line through the impassable jungle from Thailand to Burma (now Myanmar), known as the 'Death Railway'. The Japanese used over 65,000 Allied prisoners of war (POWs) – including British, Australian, Dutch and American nationals – as well as over 100,000 Asian forced labourers for this immense project. Under inhumane conditions, marked by torture, hunger, disease and extreme exhaustion, they had to build the line through jungles and across rivers in record time. The bridge over the Mae Klong (now known as the River Kwai Yai) was a central and particularly difficult structure on this line. The work took a terrible toll: it is estimated that more than 100,000 Asian civilians and around 16,000 Allied prisoners of war died during the construction of the entire railway line. The bridge was completed in 1943, but was attacked and partially destroyed by Allied bombers in 1944, with three sections of the bridge being hit. After the war, the bridge was repaired and is still in use today, albeit only on a section of the original 'Death Railway'. It now serves as a memorial and tourist attraction in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, commemorating the immense suffering and sacrifice that went into its construction. Museums and memorials in the area, such as Hellfire Pass, preserve the memory of this dark episode in history.

HELMSLEY

Helmsley, a picturesque market town in North Yorkshire, England, looks back on a rich and varied history marked by its strategic location, military significance and economic transformation. Settlement of the area began in prehistoric times, but the town's actual history is closely linked to the Norman Conquest and the granting of the land to Robert de Mortain, half-brother of William the Conqueror, in the late 11th century. A decisive turning point was the construction of Helmsley Castle. Around 1120, Walter Espec received the land and built the first castle, initially as a wooden and earthen ringwork. Later, in the late 12th century, the castle was rebuilt by the de Ros family into a formidable stone fortress, whose imposing ruins still dominate the townscape today. The strategic importance of the castle promoted the growth of the surrounding settlement. Around 1191, Helmsley was granted a borough charter by Robert de Ros, which spurred its development into a thriving market town. For centuries, the economy was dominated by sheep farming, wool production and weaving. During the English Civil War in the 17th century, the castle became a royal stronghold and was besieged by parliamentary troops for three months in 1644. After its capture, it was partially demolished to prevent further military use, although the Elizabethan mansion within the walls was spared. In the 18th century, the estate passed into the hands of the wealthy Duncombe banking family, who built the magnificent Duncombe Park nearby and left the castle to decay, turning it into the romantic ruin it is today. In the 19th century, despite the decline of traditional weaving, the town underwent modernisation with the arrival of the railway and the construction of important buildings such as the town hall and All Saints' Church. Today, Helmsley is a popular tourist destination and is considered the gateway to the North York Moors National Park, retaining its historic atmosphere as a charming market town with a rich architectural heritage.





KUMBHAL GARH FORT - THE GREAT WALL OF INDIA

The fortress of Kumbhalgarh in Rajasthan, India, was an impregnable stronghold, known primarily for its massive defences and as the birthplace of a legendary Rajput warrior. The present-day fort was built in the 15th century, more precisely between 1443 and 1458, by Rana Kumbha, the ruler of the Mewar kingdom, on the ruins of an older structure. Located on a 1,100-metre-high hill in the Aravalli Mountains, the fortress was virtually impregnable due to its remoteness and natural barriers. The most outstanding feature is the gigantic ring wall, which stretches for an impressive 36 kilometres and is up to 7 metres wide. This makes it the second longest continuous wall in the world, surpassed only by the Great Wall of China, and earned Kumbhalgarh the nickname 'The Great Wall of India'. The wall was so wide that it is said that four horses could gallop side by side on it. Kumbhalgarh often served as a safe haven for the rulers of Mewar in times of need, especially when their main fortress, Chittorgarh, was under threat. The fortress is also the significant birthplace of Maharana Pratap, one of the most respected and courageous Rajput warriors, who was born there in 1540. Despite numerous attacks by the Sultanates of Gujarat and Malwa, as well as by the powerful Mughals under Akbar, the fort has only been conquered once in its long history, and even then only for a short period of about seven years in the 16th century. Today, Kumbhalgarh Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an impressive testament to medieval Indian military architecture and a popular destination for visitors who want to admire its rich history and spectacular views.

CANNSTATTER WASEN - FOLK FESTIVAL

The Cannstatter Wasen, one of the largest and most traditional folk festivals in the world, does not begin with beer tents and fairground rides, but with a natural disaster and a famine. The trigger for the founding of the festival was the eruption of the Tambora volcano in Indonesia in 1815. The huge amounts of ash in the atmosphere led to climate change and crop failures worldwide, known as the 'Year Without a Summer'. The Kingdom of Württemberg was also severely affected, and the population suffered bitter hardship. King Wilhelm I and his wife Katharina Pawlowna recognised the urgency of taking action. In order to revive agriculture and secure the long-term supply of food for the population, they founded the 'Centralstelle des landwirtschaftlichen Vereins' (Central Office of the Agricultural Association) in 1817 and, out of gratitude and to motivate the people, established an annual festival. On 28 September 1818, the day after the king's birthday, the first 'Main Agricultural Festival in Cannstatt' took place. The name "Wasen" comes from Old High German and simply means 'wet, grassy land' or 'meadow' – the Neckar meadows in Cannstatt served as a natural floodplain. The centrepiece of the first festival was the fruit column, a landmark that still exists today, decorated with agricultural products and commemorating the original purpose of the festival. There were presentations of livestock and agricultural innovations to encourage farmers and promote agricultural science. Over time, the purely agricultural festival developed into a general public entertainment event. More and more attractions were added: showmen, beer taps, horse races and sports competitions. The first parade took place in 1841. Today, the Cannstatter Wasen is the venue for two major events: the Cannstatter Volksfest (also known as 'der Wasen') and the Stuttgart Spring Festival. All that remains of the agricultural show is the Agricultural Main Festival, which takes place every four years, but the tradition of the fruit column and the historic parade on the opening day preserve the memory of the modest, hardship-marked beginnings of this huge festival site.





MANI STONES

The mani stones at Kunzum Pass are deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, which shape life in the remote Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh. The Kunzum Pass (Kunzum La), located at an altitude of 4,551 metres, is an essential crossing point connecting the Lahaul Valley with the Spiti Valley. It is considered not only a geographical gateway, but also a sacred place protected by the local goddess Kunzum Mata (Durga), in whose honour there is a small, colourfully decorated shrine at the top of the pass. The mani stones (also known as 'mani walls') are an integral part of this spiritual landscape. These are stones or stone slabs engraved with the powerful Buddhist mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hum' ('Hail to the jewel in the lotus'). The tradition of carving these stones and placing them in significant locations such as pass summits, on the outskirts of villages, along paths and rivers is a form of meditation and prayer. Devout Buddhists believe that writing down the mantra and placing the stones spreads good wishes, generates positive energy and offers protection from negative forces. Traditionally, one should walk past the mani walls in a clockwise direction (to the left) to bring good luck and follow the Buddhist belief in the direction of rotation of the universe. The collection of mani stones at Kunzum Pass has grown over generations. Travellers and pilgrims crossing the challenging and often dangerous pass leave a stone here as an offering to the protective goddess and as a prayer for a safe journey. Thus, the thousands of stones at Kunzum Pass do not tell a single, dated story, but rather a collective, ongoing narrative of deep faith, piety and the constant search of the people in this harsh Himalayan region for protection and blessings on their journey.

REICHENAU MONASTERY

The Reichenau Monastery, a former Benedictine abbey on the island of the same name in Lake Constance, represents the history of a spiritual and cultural centre that exerted enormous influence throughout Europe in the early Middle Ages. The abbey was founded in 724 by the wandering bishop Pirmin. He settled on the island, which at that time was still covered in forests and swamps, with about 40 monks. In the 9th and 10th centuries, Reichenau developed into a cultural centre of the Frankish Empire and later of the Holy Roman Empire. The abbey had one of the most important libraries of its time and a widely renowned scriptorium. Precious manuscripts and illuminations were created here, which today are part of the UNESCO World Documentary Heritage. Scholars such as Walahfrid Strabo worked in Reichenau and shaped European intellectual life. The abbots of the monastery, including the diplomatically skilled Hatto III, also exerted political influence at the imperial court. Three Romanesque churches on the island, most of which were built between the 9th and 11th centuries, bear witness to the architectural significance of the abbey. These include St. Mary and St. Mark's Minster, St. Peter and Paul's Church, and St. George's Church in Oberzell with its world-famous Ottonian murals. The well-preserved murals and architecture of the churches offer a comprehensive insight into the monastic architecture of the early Middle Ages. With the end of the Ottonian Empire, the abbey lost its political and cultural significance. In 1540, the abbey was converted into a priory of the Bishop of Constance. In the course of secularisation, the monastery was finally dissolved in 1803 and the last monks left the island. In 2000, the monastery island of Reichenau with its three Romanesque churches was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. In doing so, it recognised its outstanding role as a testimony to the religious and cultural significance of a Benedictine monastery in the Middle Ages.





ANGKOR WAT

Angkor Wat is the largest religious building in the world and reflects the history of the rise and fall of the mighty Khmer Empire and the transformation of religious beliefs over time. In the early 12th century, during the heyday of the Khmer Empire, King Suryavarman II commissioned the construction of this gigantic temple. The construction of the complex, which covers over 400 hectares of land, took about 30 years and was the result of the work of tens of thousands of people. Angkor Wat was originally built as the king's state and burial temple and was dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu. The unusual westward orientation of the temple, associated with Vishnu and the west, also suggests that it was intended to serve as a tomb. Architecturally, Angkor Wat is a masterpiece and a microcosmic representation of the Hindu universe. The five central towers symbolise the peaks of the mythical Mount Meru, the abode of the gods, surrounded by a large moat representing the cosmic ocean. The elaborate bas-reliefs inside the temple depict scenes from Hindu mythology, particularly the epic Ramayana, as well as illustrations from the life of Suryavarman. Towards the end of the 12th century, under King Jayavarman VII, a religious change from Hinduism to Buddhism took place in the Khmer Empire. As a result, Angkor Wat was converted into a Buddhist place of worship. After the decline of the Khmer Empire in the 15th century, the capital was moved to Lovek, and the temples of Angkor were gradually reclaimed by the jungle. Although the site was not completely abandoned – monks continued to use it – it fell into oblivion for the Western world. In the 19th century, Angkor Wat was rediscovered by French explorer Henri Mouhot and brought to the attention of the world. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1992 and is considered a national symbol of Cambodia. Today, the landmark attracts millions of tourists who marvel at the impressive testimony to the past greatness of the Khmer Empire.

PHRA MAHATHAT CHEDI PHAKDEE PRAKAT

The Phra Mahathat Chedi Phakdee Prakat pagoda reflects the popular piety, royal veneration and belief in a peaceful future in one of Thailand's most troubled regions. It is not historic, but relatively young, and represents the desire for harmony in the Betong region in the deep south of Thailand, near the Malaysian border. The chedi, a golden pagoda in the Srivijaya style, was built in 1996 in honour of the 50th anniversary of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's (Rama IX) accession to the throne. It stands on a hill on the temple grounds of Wat Phutthathawat and is about 40 metres high. Its construction was financed entirely by the local population. The construction of the chedi was an initiative of the people of Betong to demonstrate their deep religious devotion and at the same time express their appreciation for the royal family. The fact that the project was supported by the community reflects the strong sense of community in this remote region. The chedi has become an important spiritual centre for the Buddhist community in southern Thailand. The design of the pagoda was inspired by the style of the ancient kingdoms that existed in this region, uniting both the past and the modern. The golden coating and elegant shapes make it an impressive structure. Inside, it houses relics of the Buddha, underscoring its spiritual significance. From its elevated position on the hill, the chedi offers a panoramic view of the town of Betong and the surrounding landscape with its mountains and forests. This peaceful sight contrasts with the history of violence and turmoil that the southern provinces of Thailand have experienced in the past. The chedi is thus not only a religious building, but also a symbolic place of hope for lasting peace and tolerance in the region.





MOUNTAINEERING IN THE HIMALAYAS

The history of mountaineering in the Himalayas, especially in the remote and arid Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, tells a story of pioneering spirit, spiritual reverence and the evolution from pure exploration to responsible alpinism. Unlike the more accessible regions of the Himalayas, the Spiti Valley and its rugged, high peaks remained undiscovered by Western mountaineers for a long time. The first 'expeditions' were often British colonial officials and explorers in the 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Andrew Wilson, who were less interested in mountaineering than in mapping and exploring the region. The local population, deeply rooted in Tibetan Buddhism, regarded many of the mountains as the abodes of gods and spirits. This deep reverence often acted as a natural barrier to mountaineering in the Western sense. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that organised mountaineering began to take hold in the Spiti Valley. The Indian government gradually opened the region, which had long been closed to foreigners for strategic reasons, to tourism and expeditions. Mountaineers began to devote themselves to the technically challenging and often unnamed peaks of the Spiti and Great Himalayan ranges. Expeditions in the 1970s and 1980s did pioneering work and opened up new routes. The challenges in the Spiti Valley are unique: the extreme altitude, the dry air, the remoteness from any infrastructure and the often brittle rock structures required and continue to require a high degree of preparation and skill. While Spiti is not home to any 'eight-thousanders', peaks such as Gya (6,794 m) or the mountains of the Chandra Bhaga range (CB peaks) are popular, albeit challenging, destinations. Today, mountaineering in the Spiti Valley has changed. It attracts both international expeditions and Indian mountaineers. There is a move towards more sustainable and responsible tourism, with interaction with the local culture and protection of the sensitive high mountain environment playing an increasingly important role. The history of mountaineering here is thus a continuation of human curiosity, accompanied by respect for nature and the culture of the 'Mittelland' inhabitants.

LOPBURI

The connection between the city of Lopburi, Thailand, and the long-tailed macaques is deeply rooted in local culture and religion. The monkeys are considered sacred by many locals and are revered as descendants of the monkey king Hanuman from the Hindu epic Ramayana. They live mainly around the ancient Khmer temple complexes, especially the Phra Prang Sam Yot and the San Phra Kan shrine. For decades, the cheeky, fearless monkeys have been a major attraction, drawing tourists from all over the world and bringing revenue to the city. To honour this monkey population and further boost tourism, a local businessman launched the annual 'Monkey Buffet Festival' in 1989. At this opulent festival, tons of fruit, vegetables and sweets are offered to the monkeys on elaborately decorated tables – a sign of gratitude and a spectacle for visitors. Over time, the monkey population grew uncontrollably as they were fed by humans and could no longer find natural food sources in the city. The monkeys lost their natural fear of humans and became increasingly bold and aggressive, looting shops, stealing food and causing chaos in traffic. The situation worsened dramatically, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the flow of tourists and thus food sources abruptly dried up. Hungry gangs of monkeys fought turf wars and became a real threat to residents and businesses. Today, the city administration is struggling with the problem of overpopulation. Measures such as sterilisation programmes and the construction of enclosures on the outskirts of the city have been taken to bring the situation under control. The story of the monkeys of Lopburi illustrates the complex balancing act between preserving cultural traditions and ensuring harmonious coexistence in a changing world.





TAJ MAHAL

The Taj Mahal is one of the world's most famous love stories, immortalised in pristine white marble on the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra, India. The construction of the Taj Mahal was commissioned in 1631 by Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal emperor. He had the monumental mausoleum built in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died giving birth to their fourteenth child. Before she died, she reportedly made four requests of the emperor: that he build a symbol of their love, remarry, be good to his children, and visit her grave every year. Deeply affected by his wife's death, Shah Jahan fulfilled her first request in a way that continues to amaze the world to this day. Construction took over 20 years and was completed in 1653. Thousands of craftsmen, stonemasons, artists and labourers from all over India, Persia and Central Asia were involved. The design of the Taj Mahal is an exquisite blend of Indian, Persian and Islamic architecture. The main building is made entirely of white marble, which shimmers in different shades depending on the time of day – from pale pink at dawn to golden at sunset. In addition to the mausoleum itself, the complex includes a large garden (Charbagh), a guest house, a mosque and a magnificent entrance gate. A well-known legend says that Shah Jahan planned to build an identical mausoleum for himself on the opposite side of the river, made of black marble, and to connect the two structures with a bridge. Before he could realise this vision, he was overthrown by his son Aurangzeb in 1658 and placed under house arrest in the Red Fort of Agra. From there, Shah Jahan spent the rest of his life gazing at the Taj Mahal from a small window until he died in 1666 and was buried alongside his beloved Mumtaz Mahal. Today, the Taj Mahal is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that attracts millions of visitors each year and is celebrated as the 'jewel of Muslim art in India.' It remains the ultimate symbol of eternal love and one of the most iconic and photographed sites in the world.

STONEHENGE

Stonehenge is shrouded in mystery, as there are no written records of its builders, but archaeological research has provided fascinating insights into its thousands of years of history. The history of Stonehenge begins around 5,000 years ago in the Neolithic period. The very first phase of the monument was a simple earthwork with a ditch forming a circle. Within this circle were the 'Aubrey Holes', 56 pits of unknown purpose, possibly for wooden posts or as part of an early calendar system. The most dramatic phase of construction began around 4,500 years ago. First, the smaller 'bluestones' were added. These stones, weighing up to four tonnes, came from the Preseli Hills in West Wales, an incredible distance of over 240 kilometres. How they were transported – whether by land, water or both – remains a mystery. A little later, the more massive 'sarsens' followed, huge sandstone blocks weighing up to 50 tonnes, which were brought from the Marlborough Downs, about 30 kilometres away. These formed the outer circle and the inner, U-shaped trilithons (two upright stones with a capstone). The exact purpose of Stonehenge is still debated among archaeologists, but the monument's alignment with the solstices is undeniable. The structure is perfectly aligned with the sunrise on the summer solstice and the sunset on the winter solstice. It probably served as an important gathering place, a site for religious rituals, the observation of astronomical events, and possibly as a burial site for an elite class. After about 1,500 years of use as an active ceremonial centre, Stonehenge lost its importance. Many stones fell over or were stolen. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, restoration work began to secure the monument and present it in its current form. Today, Stonehenge is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and attracts people from all over the world who are fascinated by its mysterious history, the engineering skills of its builders and its mystical aura.





SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat represents the story of a generous gift and an architectural masterpiece that was intended to symbolise the unity and diversity of Islam. The story began in 1992, when the then ruler of Oman, Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said, decided to give his people a main mosque. He wanted a place that would not only be a spiritual centre, but also an architectural gem that reflected the rich tradition of Omani and Islamic architecture while incorporating modern influences. Following an architectural competition in 1993, construction work began in 1995. Construction took over six years, until the mosque was finally inaugurated on 4 May 2001 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Sultan's accession to the throne. The design of the mosque is a deliberate mosaic of different cultures and materials to symbolise unity and equality in Islam. Materials from all over the world were used in its construction: Indian sandstone for the exterior façade and prayer hall; Burmese wood for decorations; Italian marble for the floors; a huge Swarovski chandelier from Austria (assembled in Germany) adorns the main prayer hall; and the handmade 21-tonne Persian carpet covering the floor of the main hall was the second largest in the world at the time of its completion and was made by over 600 workers in four years. The mosque features a 50-metre-high dome and a 90-metre-high main minaret surrounded by four other minarets representing the five pillars of Islam. Today, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is not only Oman's main mosque, but also a significant cultural attraction that is open to non-Muslims, introducing visitors to the beauty of Islamic architecture and culture. It remains a shining symbol of the visionary spirit of its founder and a place of worship and intercultural understanding.

BIRD VIEW POINT

The Kurja Resort with its 'Bird View Point' in Khichan, Rajasthan, is not a historical site in the traditional sense, but a modern tourist destination whose history is closely linked to a unique natural phenomenon: the annual visit of thousands of demoiselle cranes, called 'Kurja' in Hindi. The actual story begins in the 1970s in the village of Khichan, when a local philanthropist named Ratanlal Maloo began feeding the migratory birds. At first, only a few birds came, but over the decades word spread among the cranes, and today tens of thousands of them winter there every year, making Khichan the largest crane feeding centre in the world. The Kurja Resort itself was created as a direct response to this growing ecotourism. It was opened more recently, in the 2020s, as modern accommodation to provide a comfortable base for visitors who come specifically to see the cranes. The name 'Kurja' pays homage to the birds that have brought international fame to the region. The resort's 'Bird View Point' is located only about 50 metres from the birds' main feeding ground. From there, you can watch the fascinating spectacle of cranes flying in flocks to be fed, which is particularly impressive in the early morning hours between 6 and 9 a.m. The history of Kurja Resort is thus a story of change: how a local tradition of animal love became a global tourist attraction and led to the creation of modern infrastructure that enables people from all over the world to experience this impressive natural spectacle. It is an example of sustainable tourism based on a unique interaction between humans, animals and the desert landscape of Rajasthan.





THE BRIDGE TO DON DET AND DON KHON

The historic bridge that now connects the Laotian islands of Don Det and Don Khon in the '4000 Islands' (Si Phan Don) region is inextricably linked to France's colonial efforts to establish a trade route through Southeast Asia. In the late 19th century, the French colonial rulers were feverishly searching for a way to use the Mekong River as a navigable trade route into the interior of China. However, their plan was thwarted by the mighty and impassable Khone Falls (Mekong Falls), the largest waterfalls in Southeast Asia. Ships could not pass the waterfalls, leaving a gap in their planned trade route. The French came up with an ingenious, albeit costly, solution: they decided to bypass the unnavigable stretch with a railway. They built a narrow-gauge railway line about seven kilometres long to transport freight and later passengers to two of the largest islands, Don Det and Don Khon. The railway line, which existed from 1893 to 1941, also included the steel bridge that still connects the two islands today. This bridge was a masterpiece of colonial engineering and enabled the smooth transfer of goods, which were unloaded before the falls and reloaded onto ships after the falls. The railway line was the first and only one in Laos. With the withdrawal of the French and the development of alternative transport routes, particularly road transport, the railway line lost its importance and was decommissioned. Today, the tracks have disappeared, and the old bridge, a rusting but sturdy relic of a bygone era, serves as a footpath and cycle path, connecting the two islands for tourists and locals alike. It is a fascinating historical monument that reflects the creative solutions of the colonial era and the rich history of the 4000 Islands region.

BUDDHA STATUE

The history of the Buddha statues at Phra Mahathat Chedi Phakdee Prakat is closely linked to the modern history of the pagoda itself and its role as an important spiritual centre in the southern Thai province of Yala. Unlike historical Buddha statues, whose origins often date back centuries, the Buddha figures that adorn the pagoda are part of a much younger religious structure, which was erected in 1996 in honour of the 50th anniversary of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's (Rama IX) accession to the throne. The most significant statue is located in one of the four small pavilions surrounding the golden main chedi: It depicts a seated Buddha in the so-called Bhūmisparśa Mudra, the gesture of 'earth as witness'. In this posture, Buddha touches the ground with his right hand to call upon the earth as a witness to his enlightenment from Mara, the demon of illusion. The Buddha statues at the chedi are not only artistic representations, but serve as central objects of worship and meditation for believers in the region. Their placement within the temple complex follows traditional Buddhist principles and creates sacred spaces for prayers and offerings. Their history is therefore not one of antiquity, but of the recent past, testifying to deep popular piety, respect for the royal family and the desire for peace and spiritual orientation in a region marked by conflict.





AYUTTHAYA

Ayutthaya was the capital of what was once the most powerful kingdom in Thai history, the Kingdom of Siam, which lasted for four centuries. The story began in 1350 (or 1351) when Prince U-Thong (later King Ramathibodi I) founded the city of Ayutthaya and made it the second capital of the Siamese kingdom after Sukhothai. Its strategic location on an island surrounded by the Chao Phraya, Pa Sak and Lopburi rivers protected the city from attacks from the sea and made it an important centre for trade and diplomacy. Ayutthaya developed into one of the largest and most prosperous metropolises in the world, a cosmopolitan centre that attracted merchants and diplomats from China, India, Persia and Europe. The city was known for its magnificent palaces, gigantic fortresses and over 400 impressive temple complexes, whose architecture combined influences from various cultures, including the Khmer style. After more than 400 years of prosperity and 33 successive kings, the Ayutthaya era came to a tragic end. In 1767, the Burmese army conquered the city after a long siege. The conquerors systematically plundered the city, destroyed the temples, melted down Buddha statues and desecrated the sacred sites. The capital was never rebuilt, and Siamese power shifted to Bangkok. The remains of the once magnificent city lay abandoned for centuries until the Thai government began restoring the ruins in 1969. In 1976, the area was declared a historical park, and in 1991, UNESCO recognised the 'Historic City of Ayutthaya' as a World Heritage Site. Today, Ayutthaya Historical Park attracts visitors from all over the world as a huge open-air museum, where they can marvel at the well-preserved ruins, such as the famous tree-entwined Buddha head at Wat Mahathat, and keep the memory of Thailand's glorious past alive.

LEATHERWORKING IN FÈS-MEDINA

Traditional leatherworking in Medina of Fez is the story of a craft that has flourished for centuries in the heart of Morocco's oldest royal city and has changed very little. The origins of the tanneries in Fez El-Bali, the old town listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, date back to the Middle Ages. Historical evidence suggests that the most famous tannery, the Chouara tannery, was founded in the 13th century and used the water of the Fez River for its operations. The craftsmen were an integral part of the Medina's thriving economy. The tanneries are still located in the middle of the labyrinth of over 9,000 winding alleys that are inaccessible to cars. The process has remained the same for centuries: animal hides are soaked in basins filled with a white liquid, a mixture of lime, water and pigeon droppings, to remove the hair and soften the hides; the hides are then dipped into round, stone dyeing basins filled with natural dyes such as poppy seeds (red), henna (orange), indigo (blue) and saffron (yellow) to dye the leather, and after drying, the high-quality leather is processed by craftsmen in the surrounding souks (markets) into traditional Moroccan products such as shoes, bags, belts and poufs. What makes the tanneries of Fez so unique is that this traditional process is still practised today with almost no modern machinery. Despite the strong odours emanating from the tanning pits (visitors are often given mint leaves to mitigate the smell), the tanneries are one of the city's main attractions. They are a living museum that preserves centuries-old craftsmanship and the importance of leather to the identity and economy of the medina of Fez.





TENNYSON MONUMENT

The Tennyson Monument on the Isle of Wight pays tribute to one of the greatest Victorian poets, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and his deep connection to the island's dramatic landscape. Alfred Tennyson, who was appointed Poet Laureate in 1850, sought a retreat from the hustle and bustle of London life with his family. In 1853, they leased Farringford House in Freshwater Bay in the west of the Isle of Wight and bought it shortly afterwards with the income from his poems, including 'Maud'. For almost 40 years, until his death in 1892, Farringford was his beloved home. Tennyson was a passionate walker and climbed the nearby chalk hill, then called High Down, almost daily to enjoy the breathtaking views of the English Channel and the white cliffs. He composed many of his most famous works, including 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'Crossing the Bar', during these walks, inspired by the 'six times per pint' good air and the majestic landscape. After his death in 1892, although he is buried in Westminster Abbey, friends and neighbours set up a fund to erect a permanent memorial at his favourite spot. In 1897, an imposing 15-metre-high Celtic cross made of Cornish granite was unveiled at the highest point of the hill, now known as Tennyson Down. The inscription on the monument reads: 'In memory of Alfred Lord Tennyson this Cross is raised as a beacon to sailors by the people of Freshwater and other friends in England and America'. Today, the monument stands as a landmark visible from afar on the crest of the cliffs, a silent testimony to the poet who spent his 'happiest days' on the island and whose spirit can still be felt in the wild beauty of the landscape.

CROCUSES OF ZAVELSTEIN

The wild crocuses of Zavelstein are a famous attraction that tell the story of nature, chance and the beauty of spring in the Black Forest. The main characters in this story are not ordinary garden crocuses, but wild crocuses (*Crocus neglectus*). The mystery begins with the question of how this plant, which is actually native to the Mediterranean region and occurs in very few locations north of the Alps, found its way to little Zavelstein. There are various legends surrounding the arrival of these Mediterranean guests: one popular story says that crusaders brought the bulbs or seeds back from the Holy Land or Italy and planted them in Zavelstein. Another theory speculates that monks from a nearby monastery introduced the crocuses as medicinal plants or for saffron production (although this is a different species of crocus). Regardless of their exact origin, the crocuses have flourished in Zavelstein. Every year in March, millions of these deep purple and white flowers transform the meadows below the historic castle ruins into a spectacular sea of blossoms. This natural phenomenon, which often lasts only a few days, is a widely known event and has earned the town the nickname 'Veilchenstädtle' (Violet Town), even though the flowers are actually crocuses. Today, the area around the crocus meadows is a nature reserve. The history of the wild crocuses is thus also a story of successful nature conservation, ensuring that this unique, colourful spring wonder will be preserved for future generations. The flowers have become a symbol of Zavelstein and the beginning of spring in the region.





ENERGY REVOLUTION

The energy transition and the development of renewable energies, which began more recently, are also showing visible results in the Thümmlitzwalde region. Unlike historical buildings, the wind turbines in Thümmlitzwalde, near Leipzig, do not have a centuries-old history. Rather, their construction is the result of efforts in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to use environmentally friendly energy sources. The story began in the 2000s and 2010s, when awareness of climate change and the need to move away from fossil fuels grew. In the Thümmlitzwalde region, an area in Saxony with sufficient wind resources, plans were developed to build a wind farm. Various projects have been implemented over time. A notable example of the development of the technology is a project in which two new, more powerful wind turbines were built in 2022 by the Danish company Eurowind Energy, replacing older, smaller turbines. These modern turbines feature taller hub heights and higher power outputs to maximise energy generation efficiency. The history of wind power plants in Thümmlitzwalde is thus an ongoing story of technical progress and regional contribution to the energy transition. It illustrates the shift from the use of traditional energy sources to the generation of clean electricity from wind power, which is having a lasting impact on the region's landscape.

SPEICHERSTADT

The Hamburg Speicherstadt is the world's largest contiguous historic warehouse complex and an impressive testament to Hamburg's port history. Its history began at the end of the 19th century, when Hamburg agreed to join the German Customs Union. In return, a free port area had to be created where goods could be stored and refined duty-free. Between 1883 and the late 1920s, the Speicherstadt was built on thousands of oak piles in the canals of the Elbe islands of Kehrvieler and Wandrahm. Entire residential areas had to be cleared for the construction, and over 20,000 people were resettled. The first phase of construction was officially inaugurated in 1888, with even Emperor Wilhelm II in attendance. The striking brick buildings with their neo-Gothic gables and turrets served as huge warehouses for valuable imported goods such as coffee, tea, cocoa, spices, tobacco and, later, oriental carpets. Hydraulic winches were used to hoist the goods directly from the barges that sailed through the canals into the storage floors. Over time, traditional warehousing lost its importance and the Speicherstadt underwent a transformation. Today, it is home to a diverse mix of modern offices, museums (such as Miniatur Wunderland), cafés, shops and carpet dealers. The Speicherstadt has been a listed building since 1991. Its unique architecture and historical value as a symbol of international trade led to its recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015, together with the neighbouring Kontorhaus district. Today, the Speicherstadt is a lively architectural highlight and a must-see for every visitor to Hamburg.





ICE CRYSTALS

In Lenzkirch, a picturesque community in the Black Forest, the history of ice crystals is inextricably linked to the region's cold winters and the natural phenomenon of hoarfrost. Here, where winters are often long and snowy, certain weather conditions transform the landscape into a true winter wonderland. The story begins not with people, but with the physical conditions of the Black Forest: in the valleys of Lenzkirch, especially around the idyllic Windgfällweiher and Schluchsee lakes, moist air collects during high-pressure weather conditions in winter. When this moisture encounters the ice-cold surfaces of trees, bushes and buildings, countless delicate ice crystals are formed through sublimation – the direct transition from water vapour to ice. For centuries, this phenomenon was a natural part of rural life in the Black Forest, a sign of the deep cold and harshness of winter. The glittering, bizarre shapes on the fir trees and meadows were simply part of everyday life. In more recent times, with the advent of tourism in the 19th and 20th centuries, the beauty of these ice crystals became a tourist attraction. Lenzkirch developed into a popular destination for winter hikers and those seeking relaxation, who were attracted by the fairytale landscape covered in hoarfrost. The 'history of ice crystals' thus transformed from an everyday natural phenomenon into an important part of regional identity and winter tourism. Today, experiencing these ice crystals is a highlight for visitors. They are a fleeting but annually recurring natural wonder that fascinates people in Lenzkirch and beyond and underlines the special atmosphere of the winter Black Forest. Each ice crystal is unique, and together they tell the silent story of the cold, clear winters in Lenzkirch.

HERZOGSTAND

The Herzogstand is not the site of a single dramatic historical battle, but rather a mountain whose history has been defined over centuries by its appeal to nobility, its role as a vantage point, and the development of tourism in the Bavarian Alps. The name 'Herzogstand' (literally: 'duke's location') dates back to the Dukes of Bavaria. As early as the Middle Ages and in the early modern period, the Wittelsbach dukes and electors used the mountain and the surrounding area as a royal hunting ground. It was their favourite place to watch the hunt and enjoy the impressive view of the Walchensee and Kochelsee lakes. One particularly prominent visitor was King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who loved the mountain. In 1865, he had a wooden viewing platform built on the summit, which became known as the 'Fürstenstand' (prince's stand) and no longer exists today. He spent hours there in silence, admiring nature. A major turning point in the history of the Herzogstand was the development of tourism. In order to make the mountain accessible to a wider audience, the Herzogstandbahn cable car was opened in 1927. The cable car made the summit easily accessible to hikers and day trippers and contributed to the mountain's popularity. During the Second World War, the region around Walchensee and the Herzogstand itself became a strategic location, as it was home to the Walchensee power stations, which were important for the energy supply. After the war, the mountain developed into a popular destination for hikers, paragliders and skiers in winter. Today, the Herzogstand is an iconic landmark of the Bavarian Prealps. The history of the mountain reflects its transformation from an exclusive hunting ground for nobles to a natural paradise accessible to everyone, which continues to delight its visitors with the same breathtaking views that once fascinated the Bavarian rulers.





TREETOP TOWER

The 'Treetop Tower' in Bad Herrenalb, correctly referred to as the observation tower on the Bad Herrenalb treetop path, is a relatively modern landmark whose history is closely linked to a significant event in the town's recent history. The history of the tower began with preparations for the State Garden Show, which took place in Bad Herrenalb in 2017. The town took the opportunity to make lasting improvements to its infrastructure and tourist attractions. This gave rise to the idea of a treetop walk with a striking observation tower. The walk and the accompanying tower were completed in time for the opening of the horticultural show. They were designed to offer visitors a unique perspective on the nature of the northern Black Forest and the Alb Valley. The structure blends harmoniously into the landscape and offers barrier-free access to the treetops. After the end of the State Garden Show, the treetop walkway and its tower remained as a permanent attraction. It became an important part of the spa town's tourist offering and has since attracted visitors who want to experience the Black Forest from a height of up to 40 metres. The history of the tower is thus one of targeted urban and tourist development, aimed at making the natural beauty of the region accessible in an innovative way and securing a lasting legacy for the town beyond the garden show.

PUMPKIN PYRAMID

The pumpkin pyramid in Ludwigsburg is closely linked to the creation of the world's largest pumpkin exhibition in Blühendes Barock and began in 2000. The inspiration for the exhibition itself originally came from a Swiss farm in 1997. Volker Kugel, then director of Blühendes Barock, brought the idea to Ludwigsburg. After initial scepticism, the very first pumpkin exhibition took place in 2000 – and was themed 'Pumpkin Pyramids'. Several huge pyramids were erected in the park at that time, which proved to be a great success. The initial craze quickly developed into an annual visitor magnet. Over the years, the exhibitions have been further developed and have begun to form sculptural works of art from the more than 450,000 pumpkins on display, with a new theme each year, such as 'Pumpkin Animal World' or 'Girl Power in Pumpkin Garb'. However, the pumpkin pyramid remained a central and iconic element of the exhibition. It is not only an impressive work of art that showcases the immense diversity of over 450 pumpkin varieties, but also a symbol of the success and creativity of the event. Today, the pumpkin exhibition is an integral part of Ludwigsburg's autumn tradition and a popular photo opportunity for the approximately 300,000 visitors who come each year. It represents the transformation from a simple idea to a world-renowned event that bathes the city in a sea of colours in autumn.





THE SHRINE OF THE BOOK

The Shrine of the Book was created as a result of one of the most significant archaeological discoveries of the 20th century: the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1947, Bedouin boys stumbled upon clay jars containing ancient scrolls in caves near Qumran on the Dead Sea. These manuscripts, dating from between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD, are the oldest surviving copies of biblical texts and are of inestimable historical and religious value. When the first seven of these precious scrolls were acquired, the need arose for a special, secure place to store and display them. The construction of the shrine was financed by Hungarian-Jewish philanthropist David Samuel Gottesman and designed by architects Armand Phillip Bartos and Frederick John Kiesler. The planning and construction phase lasted from 1950 to 1960. The unique design of the building, which opened in 1965, is deeply symbolic. The striking white dome, shaped like the lid of one of the clay jars in which the scrolls were found, dominates the structure. This contrasts with a black basalt wall. This contrast between white and black alludes to the symbolism of the 'sons of light' versus the 'sons of darkness,' a theme described in one of the scrolls found. The interior is designed to resemble a cave, recreating the atmosphere of the site where the scrolls were found in Qumran. At the centre of the shrine is the complete Isaiah Scroll, the oldest complete copy of a biblical book. To protect the delicate manuscripts, which are over 2,000 years old, they are only displayed for short periods of time and presented on a rotating basis. The Shrine of the Book is now an integral part of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and is considered an international landmark of modern architecture, serving as the guardian of these priceless ancient texts.

SPITI VALLEY

Jilang is a small village in the remote and arid region of Spiti in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. As it is a very small settlement, its history is not documented separately in major historical chronicles, but is part of the broader history of the Spiti Valley, which is known for its deep cultural connection to Tibet. The history of Jilang is that of a typical Himalayan village whose existence has been shaped over centuries by isolation, self-sufficiency and deeply rooted Tibetan Buddhism: the history of the Spiti Valley dates back to the 7th and 8th centuries, when it was incorporated into the expanding Tibetan Empire. This led to a strong 'Tibetanisation' of the indigenous population. The inhabitants of Jilang speak a Tibetan dialect and follow cultural and religious traditions very similar to those in Tibet and Ladakh. Throughout history, control of Spiti changed hands several times between the kingdoms of Guge, Ladakh, Kullu and Chamba. Despite these changing rulers, the villages often enjoyed a high degree of local autonomy due to their remoteness, administered by hereditary governors known as 'nonos'. Like the rest of the Spiti Valley, Jilang was largely cut off from the rest of the world until the second half of the 20th century due to its extreme altitude and difficult passes such as the Kunzum Pass. It was only after China's annexation of Tibet (1951) and the Indian government's classification of Spiti as a sensitive border region that roads were built in the 1950s and 1960s, gradually breaking the isolation. To this day, the history of Jilang is one that is told by the locals through oral traditions, local festivals and daily life in harmony with the harsh nature on the edge of the Himalayas. Jilang represents the resilience of high mountain communities that have preserved their unique culture and way of life despite political changes and extreme environmental conditions.





MADRASA BEN YOUSSEF

Morocco's largest and most important Islamic university, Madrasa Ben Youssef in Marrakesh, is a masterpiece of Andalusian-Arabic architecture. The first school on this site was founded in the 14th century by Sultan Abu al-Hasan of the Merinid dynasty. However, the impressive building we see today was rebuilt in the 16th century, more precisely in 1565, on behalf of the Saadian Sultan Abdallah al-Ghalib. An inscription above the entrance portal reads: 'May the highest hopes of those who enter my door be exceeded.' The madrasa, which spans 130 rooms, was once the largest Islamic university in the Maghreb and could accommodate over 900 students. Not only religious studies were taught here, but also subjects such as philosophy, medicine, geography, physics and chemistry. Students from all over Morocco and Andalusia lived, studied and prayed in this building, which was an important centre of knowledge and understanding in the region. The building is considered the pinnacle of Saadian architecture and is known for its magnificent courtyard with a large water basin. The ornate decorations, including mosaic tiles (zellij), carved stucco and cedar wood, show the influence of earlier Moroccan and Andalusian architectural styles. The school was finally closed in 1960. After extensive restoration work, the madrasa was opened to the public as a historical site in 1982. Between 2018 and 2022, it was closed again for renovation work before reopening in all its splendour. Today, the Ben Youssef Madrasa is one of the most remarkable and most visited historical monuments in Marrakesh.

CONISTON WATER

Coniston Water, one of the larger lakes, is located in the heart of the Lake District National Park in Cumbria, England. The shores of the lake were already settled in prehistoric times. In the Middle Ages, the area was strongly influenced by Furness Abbey, which owned extensive lands and practised agriculture. With the Industrial Revolution, the region underwent a transformation. The lake was used to transport slate from the nearby quarries of Coniston and copper ore from the mines at Old Man of Coniston. Steamboats, including the Gondola (a replica of which still sails on the lake today), transported the goods across the water. In the 19th century, Coniston Water became a refuge for artists and writers. The famous Victorian thinker, artist and social reformer John Ruskin moved to Brantwood, a house on the eastern shore of the lake. After his death in 1900, he was buried in the nearby St Andrew's Church, and his home is now a museum. Later, the peaceful landscape also inspired children's author Beatrix Potter, who owned land in the area. In her stories, the lake became 'Lake in the Hills'. A darker but famous episode in the lake's history is the era of speed records. Between 1939 and 1967, the Campbell family – father Malcolm and son Donald – attempted to set world speed records on the water at Coniston Water. In 1967, tragedy struck: Donald Campbell died while attempting to set a new record of over 300 miles per hour (approx. 480 km/h) on his jet boat Bluebird K7. The wreck and Campbell's body were not recovered from the lake until 2001. Today, Coniston Water is a popular destination for sailors, canoeists and hikers who enjoy the peace and beauty of the landscape while exploring the traces of its rich and varied history.





MONTE SCHERBELINO

The Monte Scherbelino in Pforzheim is a unique and symbolic monument whose history arose directly from the rubble and destruction of the Second World War. The story begins with one of the most devastating air raids of the Second World War. On 23 February 1945, Pforzheim was almost completely destroyed by an Allied bombing raid. Over 17,000 people lost their lives and the city lay in ruins. The clean-up work in the post-war period was a gigantic task. The unimaginable amounts of rubble and debris had to go somewhere. People began to pile the rubble in one place on the outskirts of the city. Over the years, this mountain of 'Scherbeln' (Swabian for shards/rubble) grew steadily. This is how it got its nickname 'Monte Scherbelino'. It was a sad but necessary symbol of the destruction and the will of the people of Pforzheim to rebuild. Once the clean-up work was complete, the mountain was covered with soil and planted with vegetation. The memorial to destruction became a green hill. Today, Monte Scherbelino serves as a viewpoint on the Wallberg. From the top, there is a panoramic view of the city and the surrounding countryside – a stark contrast to the rubble that once formed it. The history of Monte Scherbelino is thus a story of resilience and reconstruction. It is a silent but powerful monument that bears the scars of Pforzheim's past and at the same time symbolises the transformation from destruction to new life and hope.

WULAR LAKE

Wular Lake in the Kashmir Valley is India's largest freshwater lake. While it served as a central lifeline for the local population in the past, its history is now also marked by ecological challenges. The lake is located in the Bandipora district, about 32 kilometres northwest of Srinagar, deep in the heart of the Indian-administered part of Kashmir. For centuries, the lake has been an important transport route for trade and a centre for fishing, providing a livelihood for thousands of families. In the 15th century, the then ruler Zain-ul-Abidin had an artificial island, Zaina Lank, built in the lake, the ruins of which are still visible today. In recent times, the lake has faced serious environmental problems caused by human intervention, such as the conversion of shore areas into farmland and the discharge of sewage. These developments have led to a dramatic reduction in the size of the lake and threatened biodiversity, especially the birds that winter in the wetlands. The international Ramsar Convention recognised the lake as a wetland of international importance, paving the way for extensive restoration projects. The history of Wular Lake is thus one of conservation and struggle for a unique ecosystem located in the heart of the Kashmir Valley.



MANAMA

A few years ago, AIDA added Manama, the capital of Bahrain, to its oriental cruise itinerary, especially for the winter months. Ships such as the AIDAdiva call at the spacious Khalifa Bin Salman Port, which is located just outside the city. Manama, which translates as 'place of dreams', attracts tourists with its mix of modern skyline, ancient history and Arab culture. Manama's history as an important trading port dates back to the time of the ancient Dilmun civilisation. Manama's skyline is a masterpiece of modern architecture. Just a short drive away is the Manama Souk, accessible through the historic Bab el-Bahrain (Gate of Bahrain) gate. Here, traditional Arabian beauty unfolds: winding alleys, the scent of exotic spices and perfumes, colourful textiles and bustling activity. The Bahrain World Trade Centre, with its integrated wind turbines, is an iconic example of innovation and design. These skyscrapers are reflected in the calm waters of the Persian Gulf. The Bahrain National Museum is a must-see. It offers a deep insight into the country's rich, millennia-old history. Another architectural gem is the Al-Fateh Mosque, one of the largest mosques in the world, which impresses with its magnificent Islamic architecture and is also accessible to non-Muslims. Qal'at al-Bahrain (Fortress of Bahrain), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, whose ruins tell the story of various civilisations and offer a breathtaking view of the sunset over the Arabian Gulf. The city manages to preserve its rich heritage while boldly embracing modernity.





RICE FARMERS

Rice cultivation in Attivatti, Goa, is much more than just agriculture; it is a deeply rooted part of the cultural heritage and identity of this small Indian state. For generations, Goa's farmers have cultivated lush green fields using traditional methods based on centuries-old knowledge. The history of rice cultivation in Goa is closely linked to the monsoon and a unique traditional land management system called 'Comunidade', in which the land was managed communally. A particular innovation is the so-called 'Khazan' lands, an ancient system developed over 3,500 years ago. These are reclaimed marshlands and mangrove areas where farmers built dykes and sluice gates to regulate the influence of salt water. This enabled the cultivation of special salt-tolerant rice such as the "Korgut" variety, often in rotation with shrimp farming. The arrival of the monsoon traditionally marks the beginning of the main planting season (June to September), a labour-intensive process in which the seedlings are often planted by hand in the flooded fields. This time is characterised by rituals, folk songs and community spirit. Although modern, higher-yielding hybrid varieties dominate today, traditional rice cultivation continues to thrive and is cherished as an important cultural asset. The rice fields shape the landscape of Goa and are a living symbol of the resilience and heritage of the local communities.

HOHENZOLLERN

The history of the Hohenzollern family and their ancestral castle is a saga of rise, power and architecture dating back over a thousand years. The dynasty that would eventually rule Prussia and the German Empire began on a striking mountain peak in the Swabian Alb. Here, on the Zollerberg, the first castle was built in the 11th century. It was the modest starting point for the Counts of Zollern, who over the centuries rose to become one of the most powerful princely houses in Europe through skilful politics, marriage and expansion, changing their name to 'Hohenzollern'. The original fortress was destroyed in 1423 but quickly rebuilt. However, with the growing influence of the family – who henceforth ruled from Berlin – the remote ancestral seat lost its practical significance and fell into ruin in the 18th century. The turning point came in the 19th century when King Frederick William IV of Prussia, fascinated by the romance of the Middle Ages and the history of his ancestors, decided to rebuild the ancestral seat. The present castle, built between 1850 and 1867 in a magnificent neo-Gothic style, is less a fortress than a monument to the dynasty and its glorious past. Today, Hohenzollern Castle is a living museum that tells the story of this powerful family and presents visitors with the Prussian royal crown and countless art treasures. It towers majestically over the landscape, a symbol of the Hohenzollerns' long journey from a small Swabian count's house to an imperial dynasty.





BEDOUIN CAMEL RIDER

Camel riders in Dubai look back on a centuries-old tradition that is deeply rooted in Bedouin culture and continues to this day. In the past, camels were indispensable for survival in the inhospitable desert. The Bedouins, the traditional inhabitants of the desert, used them as a versatile source of livelihood: they provided milk, meat and wool for clothing and shelter. Above all, however, the 'ships of the desert' were the only efficient means of transport for trade and connection between settlements on the Arabian Peninsula. Camel riders, often Bedouins, were masters at handling these animals and skilfully navigated the vast seas of sand. With Dubai's rise to a modern metropolis in the 20th and 21st centuries, the role of camels changed dramatically. The car replaced the camel as a means of transport, but their cultural significance remained. The royal family of the United Arab Emirates has been actively involved in preserving and promoting the traditions surrounding camels. Today, you can experience the history of camel riding at camel races, a modern interpretation of the ancient tradition and a popular sport. The animals compete against each other on specially designed race tracks such as the Al Marmoom Camel Race Track. Instead of human jockeys, remote-controlled robot jockeys are now used to meet animal welfare standards. The races attract spectators from all over the world and are a symbol of pride in cultural heritage. Camel riding on desert safaris and tourism offer visitors an authentic way to experience traditional Bedouin culture. On organised tours through the desert, tourists can enjoy the tranquillity of the landscape and get a glimpse of what life was like for camel riders in the past. Whether at the race track or on a peaceful desert safari, the history of camel riders remains an integral part of Dubai's national identity and a fascinating link between the Bedouin past and the glamorous present.

LIBERTY BRIDGE

The Liberty Bridge (Szabadság híd) in Budapest is an architectural gem and a proud symbol of the city's resilience. Its history began under a different name. The bridge was originally built in elegant Art Nouveau style and opened in 1896, just in time for Hungary's millennium celebrations, as the Franz Joseph Bridge. The Austrian Emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph I himself attended the ceremonial inauguration and is said to have hammered the last symbolic silver rivet into the structure. It captivates with its unique lattice girder construction, which imitates the aesthetics of a chain bridge. Decorated with the Hungarian coat of arms and mythological turul birds on the tops of the pylons, it was an eye-catcher from the very beginning. It also suffered the fate of all Budapest bridges. On 16 January 1945, the retreating German Wehrmacht blew up the bridge to stop the advance of the Red Army. Reconstruction began immediately after the war. It was the first of Budapest's destroyed bridges to be reopened on 20 August 1946 and was given its current, symbolic name: Liberty Bridge. Today, it is the shortest bridge in the city centre and a living landmark connecting Buda and Pest. In summer, it is occasionally closed to traffic to serve as a unique, temporary park and viewpoint over the Danube.





BATHING HUTS

The history of the colourful bathing huts on Lyme Regis beach is a charming development deeply rooted in Victorian and Georgian bathing culture. It all began in the 18th century, when sea bathing became fashionable on medical advice, but social customs demanded strict discretion. The solution was the so-called 'bathing machines' – small wooden huts on wheels. These were pulled into the sea by horses. The bathers, usually finely dressed ladies and gentlemen, changed inside and then slid directly into the salty water, protected from prying eyes. Lyme Regis, Dorset, had its first bathing house as early as 1755 and made extensive use of these machines. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, customs became more relaxed and 'mixed bathing' became acceptable. The 'bathing machines' lost their wheels and simply remained on the beach. They transformed from mobile changing rooms to stationary shelters that offered protection from the wind and weather and provided space for a picnic or a cup of tea on the beach. In Lyme Regis, especially along Cart Road and Monmouth Beach, these huts are now an iconic sight. They are painted in charming pastel colours – soft shades of pink, green and yellow reminiscent of Neapolitan ice cream. Many are privately owned, others can be rented, but all serve the same purpose: they provide a cosy retreat to enjoy the picturesque coastline and relaxed atmosphere. The bathing huts are thus a living legacy of the Victorian era and an integral part of Lyme Regis's charm today.

ELBPHILHARMONIE

The beginnings of the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg were hotly debated due to bold visions, structural challenges, enormous cost increases during the construction phase and a triumphant transformation that changed the skyline of the Hanseatic city forever. It all started with the historic Kaispeicher A in Hamburg's harbour, a massive brick building that was once used to store cocoa, tea and tobacco. It formed the solid foundation for something completely new. The idea of the architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron was revolutionary: to place a spectacular glass structure on top of the old warehouse, reminiscent of a wave, an iceberg or a sail. The vision was to create an outstanding concert hall that would lead the city architecturally into the future. The construction was anything but easy. Complex statics, the construction of the huge 'Grand Hall', which rests on 1,200 steel springs to acoustically decouple it from the rest of the building, and above all the costs – which exploded from an original 77 million euros to over 800 million euros – led to years of debate, construction stoppages and headlines. The project became a symbol of German large-scale construction projects with 'poor planning'. Despite all the adversity, the Elbphilharmonie was completed. On 11 January 2017, it was opened with a festive concert. Overnight, public opinion changed. The building that had been the target of so much criticism became a world-class landmark. The 'Elphi', as the people of Hamburg affectionately call it, is not only a concert hall with unique acoustics and a freely accessible viewing platform, the Plaza. It is a symbol of modern Hamburg, which masters the balancing act between historic harbour charm and architectural avant-garde and attracts millions of visitors every year.





HOOKAH

In the magnificent chambers of Mehrangarh Fort, high above the blue city of Jodhpur, Rajasthan, the hookah (water pipe) was much more than just a smoking device; it was a symbol of status, relaxation and the rich tradition of the Rajput court. Founded in 1459 by Rao Jodha, the fort served as an impregnable citadel and residence for the Maharajas of Marwar. In this world of warriors and palace intrigue, the enjoyment of a hookah offered a moment of tranquillity. One can imagine how a Maharaja, perhaps Maharaja Man Singh or Takhat Singh, would retreat to the artistically designed Phool Mahal (Flower Palace) or Moti Mahal (Pearl Palace) after a long day of state affairs. There, surrounded by murals and exquisite architecture, he would sit on silk cushions. A servant would hand him an ornate hookah. These early water pipes, originally made from coconut shells and bamboo, evolved into elaborate objects made of glass, metal and precious stones in the royal courts. The tobacco, often flavoured with spices or fruit, smouldered under the charcoal. The smoke, cooled by water, was inhaled slowly and deliberately. It was a ritual, a sign of leisure and wealth reserved only for the highest ranks. The hookah was also an important social instrument; offering a pipe to a guest was a sign of honour and hospitality. Today, as visitors stroll through the museum at Mehrangarh Fort, they can admire historical hookahs in the galleries, which serve as silent witnesses to this elegant bygone era. They tell the story of a lifestyle in which even the simple act of smoking was imbued with royal dignity and ritual.

SAMPHENG MARKET

Samphanthawong Market, often known simply as Sampheng Market, is the bustling heart of Bangkok's historic Chinatown and one of the city's oldest trading centres. Its history dates back to 1782, when the first Chinese immigrants settled in this area after being forced to make way for the construction of the Grand Palace. Originally, the area was centred around a canal called Khlong Sampheng, which was later filled in to make way for roads. What was once a simple collection of shops and stalls quickly developed into the dominant trading centre of the growing Chinese community and later the entire city. The market in the narrow alley, now officially called Soi Wanit 1, was known for its bustling wholesale and retail trade. Over the centuries, the market has undergone constant change. The formerly notorious area, which was also known for its opium dens and brothels in the 19th century, has been transformed into a chaotic jumble of small shops that now sell everything from household goods, fabrics and toys to jewellery and electronics. Samphanthawong Market is a living piece of history that reflects the resilient and enterprising nature of the Chinese-Thai community. Despite the rise of online shopping and more modern shopping centres, it remains an important and fascinating place for locals and visitors alike, preserving the traditional, bustling flavour of Bangkok.





GRAND THEATRE OF RABAT

The Grand Théâtre de Rabat (Grand Theatre of Rabat) is a masterpiece of modern architecture and a central part of the cultural reorientation of the Moroccan capital. The futuristic building was designed by the world-famous Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid. It is one of her last major works before her death in 2016 and is considered an architectural heritage site of international standing. The theatre is located on the banks of the Bouregreg River between the twin cities of Rabat and Salé. Its flowing forms and curved lines are inspired by the river landscape and deliberately break with the traditional box-shaped image of a theatre. The building is the largest theatre in Africa and the Arab world. Planning began in 2010, the foundation stone was laid in 2014, and completion was in 2021. The project was part of Morocco's national cultural programme and was intended to establish Rabat as a cultural centre. Among other things, it houses a large auditorium with 1,800 seats, an experimental studio and an open-air amphitheatre for up to 7,000 spectators. The official inauguration took place in October 2024, attended by the King's sister, Lalla Hasna, among others. The Grand Théâtre de Rabat is thus not only a venue, but also a bold architectural statement that combines tradition and modernity and carries Morocco's cultural ambition out into the world.

KARDUNGLA PASS

The Kardungla Pass (also known locally as Khardung La) in the Himalayan region of Ladakh is a legendary mountain crossing, known as the gateway to the Shyok and Nubra valleys. In the past, the pass was an important part of the ancient Silk Road. For centuries, caravans of camels and mules transported goods such as textiles, spices and other commodities between Central Asia and India. Due to its proximity to the disputed border between India and Pakistan (Line of Actual Control), the pass gained enormous military significance in the 20th century. India's Border Roads Organisation (BRO) built a passable road that was essential for supplying remote military posts. For a long time, Khardung La, with a supposed height of over 5,600 metres, was known as the highest passable road in the world and was celebrated as such in countless travel guides. However, more recent and accurate measurements using GPS have corrected the actual height to around 5,359 metres. There are now even higher passable passes in Ladakh, namely the Umling La Pass (5,798 m) and Mig La Pass (5,913 m). Regardless of the corrected altitude data, the Khardung La Pass remains an iconic destination. It is one of Ladakh's biggest tourist attractions and a challenge for cyclists and motorcyclists who want to experience the breathtaking scenery and thin mountain air. At the top of the pass is a small temple, cafés and a sign proudly proclaiming the traditional altitude.





NYMPHENBURG PALACE

It was a sunny Tuesday afternoon, and young student Max was cycling carefree through Munich. His destination was Nymphenburg Palace Park, where he was meeting up with friends. His old, rickety bicycle, an heirloom from his grandfather, squeaked with every turn of the pedals, but Max loved it. When he reached the magnificent palace canal, he stopped briefly to admire the majestic façade of the palace. The swans glided elegantly across the water, and the tranquillity of the place never ceased to fascinate him. He pushed his bike a short distance along the bank, as cycling was not permitted in the inner park. Suddenly, with a loud, metallic clang, his rear wheel seized up. The chain had broken. Max cursed quietly and examined the mishap. There was no quick fix; he had to walk. Pushing his bike, he walked along the path to the Marstallmuseum, hoping to find help or at least a bike rack there. He knew that the museum itself housed an impressive collection of historic carriages and sleighs belonging to the Bavarian rulers. But now, of all places, he was standing with his broken bike in the very place where the most expensive vehicles in Europe were on display. He looked around and noticed an elderly lady smiling as she approached him. She was wearing a gardener's apron and seemed to work there. 'Problems with your vehicle, young man?' she asked in a friendly voice. 'Yes, the chain is broken. And that in the face of royal splendour,' replied Max with a smile. The lady laughed. 'You know, that's not so inappropriate. There's a very special vehicle in the Marstallmuseum. A pedal-powered garden carriage, a kind of historical bicycle rickshaw, which Elector Karl Theodor used in the 18th century.' Max was surprised. 'Really? A pedal car for the Elector?' 'Indeed. Technology in the service of garden art, as they used to say,' she explained. 'Even kings sometimes wanted to pedal themselves. So you see, your bicycle is in good company. Maybe not quite as magnificent as the coronation carriage of Charles VII, but historically relevant in its own way!' Max had to laugh. The idea of an elector whizzing through the park on an early prototype bicycle amused him. The lady showed him an inconspicuous back entrance to the Marstallmuseum, where he could safely park his broken bike. As he set off to look for his friends on foot, he glanced back at the majestic palace. His broken bicycle had taught him a small, amusing lesson in Bavarian history. From now on, he would no longer see the Marstallmuseum as just a place for carriages, but also as the home of the first Nymphenburg 'bicycle'.

TRADITIONAL WATERING

In the village of Kamba, nestled in the sandy landscape of western Rajasthan, the sky had been a flawless, cruel blue void for months. The fields around the village were cracked and hard. The older villagers, led by the wise Sarpanch (village head) Ratan Singh, gathered every evening and gazed at the sky, hoping for the arrival of the monsoon. The people of Kamba did not rely on modern canal irrigation; their lives were governed by the traditional 'pair' system. This clever system made use of every rare gift from the heavens. The village was situated in such a way that a natural slope, called an 'agar' (catchment basin), directed rainwater towards the lower-lying fields and the village. Ratan Singh remembered the wisdom of his ancestors. Weeks before the expected rainy season, the villagers had prepared their traditional structures, called "khadins" or 'bandhs'. These were long, low earthen walls that were carefully constructed across the gentle slopes. They served to collect and store the rare surface runoff water instead of simply letting it run off. One evening, when the drought was at its worst, dark clouds gathered on the horizon. The villagers, including the young farmer Gopal, were ready. When the rain finally fell in thick drops, they eagerly began to channel the water through small, strategically placed channels into the fields behind the earthen walls. The water was not used immediately to irrigate the crops. Instead, they allowed it to seep into the sandy soil in a controlled manner. The water remained in the fields for days until the soil was saturated. This allowed the soil to store moisture that was sufficient for the entire growing season of crops such as millet (bajra) and legumes. Near the fields, in the 'agor' (storage area), families had also dug small, covered, cylindrical pits called 'beris' or "kuis". These reached the seeping groundwater known as 'rajani pani' (the seeped water). This precious, pure water was carefully used for the drinking water needs of the people and livestock. When the sun returned and the fields looked like a series of temporary ponds after the rain, the villagers no longer looked desperately at the sky, but at the wet ground. Thanks to their ancient traditions of water management, they had captured the 'gift from heaven'. For Gopal and the people of Kamba, this was more than just irrigation; it was a centuries-old partnership with the harsh desert, a lesson in patience and sustainability that ensured the survival of their village.





PINDROPPAINTER

It was a crisp morning in Thorpeness, a coastal village in Suffolk, when painter Susanna set up her easel at the edge of the Meare. The Meare, a sprawling artificial lake dotted with small islands and whimsical buildings, was Stuart Ogilvie's imaginative creation that had defined the village since the 1920s. Susanna MacInnes, known locally as the 'Pindroppainter' because she literally dropped a pin on the map to paint there, loved the unique atmosphere of Thorpeness. She was inspired by the soft colours of the coastal landscape, reminiscent of the Impressionists, but also by the freedom of abstract expression. That morning, she wanted to capture the famous 'House in the Clouds', a converted water tower towering high above the treetops. She mixed her titanium white, a colour that was always present in her palette. The tranquillity on the water was perfect, interrupted only by the gentle lapping of small sailboats on the lake. As she applied the first soft lines of the sky to the canvas, an elderly gentleman named Arthur stopped by with his dog. Arthur had lived in Thorpeness all his life and had known G. Stuart Ogilvie, the founder of the holiday village. 'Good morning, Susanna!' he greeted her. 'The tower looks particularly majestic this morning.' 'It does, Arthur,' Susanna replied with a smile, without looking away from her canvas. 'It's the way the light is touching the clouds. Almost as if the sky itself wants to be a painting.' Arthur looked over her shoulder for a while. He admired her ability to capture the essence of the moment, the balance between realism and imagination that she strove for in her work. 'You capture the magic of our village, Susanna. Just what Ogilvie intended when he created this place – a place of fantasy.' Susanna continued painting, her brushstrokes fluid and decisive. She enjoyed interacting with the people who often watched her work on location, whether on the Suffolk coast or on her travels. The surroundings of Thorpeness, with its Tudor and mock Jacobean houses, offered endless motifs. At the end of the day, as the sun sank lower and a warm glow lay over the sea, her painting was almost finished. It was not just a depiction of the landscape, but a documentation of the atmosphere, the people and the unique history of this enchanted place in Suffolk. She signed it with her distinctive 'pindrop' style, satisfied with another 'honestly captured' moment in her beloved Thorpeness.

DEFORESTATION

In the Laotian province of Khammouane, near the village of Mahaxay, the Xe Bang Fai River winds its way through a landscape characterised by limestone cliffs. For the people of Mahaxay, the river is a lifeline, a source of food and a transport route. But its history is also marked by the visible scars of human intervention – the tree stumps that rise eerily out of the water. Old fisherman Boun was known in the village of Mahaxay for his calm nature and his stories. Every morning, long before the sun bathed the surrounding karst mountains in golden light, he pushed his small wooden boat into the Xe Bang Fai. In some places, the journey was arduous, as the water was littered with the remains of a bygone era: silent witnesses to deforestation. Many years earlier, when Boun was still a young man, large timber companies had arrived in the region. The forest lining the river had been dense and full of life. The trees were felled and, for ease of transport, thrown into the river to be floated downstream to the sawmills. It was a time of economic boom, but also of great loss. Countless tree trunks sank or got stuck. What remained were the tree stumps, which now protruded from the water like toothless jaws. For Boun and the other fishermen, these stumps were a double-edged sword. They made navigation dangerous, especially when the water level was low. Boun had to know every shoal, every sunken stump, to avoid capsizing or damaging his engine. But over time, the fishermen learned to accept the scars of the river, as the stumps became important anchorages. They provided shelter and habitat for fish and had thus become an integral part of the local ecosystem. One day, Boun's grandson, young Somlith, was helping his grandfather haul in the nets. He was frustrated when the net got caught on a particularly stubborn stump. 'Grandfather, why don't we just remove them all? They're just obstacles!' Boun, whose hands were marked by decades of labour, smiled gently. 'Look closely, my boy. The river hasn't forgotten them. It has embraced them.' He pointed to a large stump that was almost completely overgrown with vines and moss. Small fish swam busily in its shade. 'They remind us of what we have lost,' Boun continued, 'but they also show us how nature heals and adapts. The river bears these scars with dignity. We must learn to live with them, not fight against them.' Somlith nodded slowly. He saw the beauty in the river's resilience and understood that the stumps were more than just obstacles; they were part of Mahaxay's history, a constant reminder of the past and a foundation for present life in the river.





KINGS OF THE DESERT

In the endless expanse of the Thar Desert, near Jaisalmer in Rajasthan, lies Sam Sand Dunes, a place where golden dunes stretch as far as the eye can see. Here, where the wind shapes the sand into intricate patterns, camels are the kings of the desert and indispensable companions to humans. The young Rajput Rawal loved the evening hours in the Sam Sand Dunes most of all. It was the time when the scorching heat of the day gave way to a cool breeze and the setting sun bathed the vast sand dunes in a spectacular sea of gold, orange and deep red. Rawal was a camel driver, like his father and his father before him. His two camels, the proud old Dschumri and the young, impetuous Sultan, were more than just work animals; they were part of his family. One evening, as the last tourists returned to their camps to enjoy traditional Rajasthani music and dance, Rawal remained alone with his camels on a high dune. He gazed out at the endless expanse of the Thar Desert. The camels, these sturdy 'ships of the desert,' were perfectly adapted to the harsh life here. Their broad, padded hooves prevented them from sinking into the soft sand, and their ability to go without water for days made them the only true masters of this landscape. Without them, there would be no life in the remote villages, no transport, no tourism. Rawal thought of the stories of the ancient caravans that transported goods along the same routes long before cars came along. The camels were the link to the outside world, the bridge between cultures. Suddenly, Sultan, the younger camel, raised his head and let out a deep, gurgling sound. It was not a sound of fear, but one of familiarity. Dschumri lay down in the cooling sand with a sigh. Rawal stroked Dschumri's neck. The animals radiated an incredible calm and dignity that contrasted with the constant movement of the sand. At that moment, as the stars began to twinkle in the clear desert sky, Rawal felt deeply connected to this place and its traditions.

FORESTRY

In the hills of the northern Black Forest, around picturesque Schömborg, the forest is much more than just a backdrop for hikers. It is at the heart of local identity and economy. This story is about the deep roots of the people in forestry. Hans was a man of the forest, a third-generation forester in Schömborg. He knew every tree, every path and every stream in his district. For him, the Black Forest was not a static place, but a living organism that needed to be cared for. One sunny morning, the air filled with the resinous scent of fir trees, Hans took his grandson Leon on a walk through the forest. Leon, a teenager who was more interested in smartphones than tree bark, trudged reluctantly alongside his grandfather. 'Look at this spruce, Leon,' said Hans, placing his hand tenderly on the rough trunk. 'It's over 120 years old. It has survived wars, storms and the arrival of cars.' Leon shrugged. 'It's just a tree, Grandpa.' Hans laughed softly. 'No, my boy. It's our bread, our history, our home. Forestry here in Schömborg built our villages.' He pointed to the old, well-preserved half-timbered houses that could be seen through the trees. 'The wood for them came from here. It protects us from erosion, provides clean water and is the air we breathe.' They walked on, deeper into the forest, to a clearing where young seedlings had been carefully planted in rows. 'Sustainability,' Hans explained, 'that's the word we love most here. We only take as much from the forest as will grow back. We care for it so that it remains healthy and resilient to climate change. It's a cycle we've respected for centuries.' He showed Leon how to clear a young tree of overgrown plants and explained the importance of timber harvesting for the local economy – from the sawmill workers to the craftsmen who made furniture or ornate carvings from the wood. Leon's resistance began to crumble. He no longer saw just a monotonous mass of green, but a carefully managed habitat that gave people work and meaning. As they made their way home, Leon stopped and looked back at the huge, majestic fir trees that dominated the horizon. 'Grandpa,' he asked, 'if this tree here... the old spruce... has to be felled, who decides that?' Hans smiled, pleased with his grandson's new interest. 'I decide that, Leon. And I do so with the respect that such an old friend deserves. Because we are not the masters of the forest, we are its guardians. That is the meaning of forestry in Schömborg.' Leon nodded. For the first time, he understood the deep, silent bond that connected his family and their village to these huge, silent giants. He knew that one day he too would contribute his part to this legacy.





BRIGHT SUNFLOWER

Midsummer had a firm grip on the fields between Gräfenhausen and Birkenfeld. The air shimmered above the asphalt, but the landscape exuded a deep, contented peace. There, where the soil was a little stonier and the heat burned relentlessly, she stood: Helia. Helia was no ordinary plant; she was a sunflower, and the largest and brightest in the entire field. She towered a head above her neighbours, and her flower head, larger than a dinner plate, was a single, radiant wheel of gold. The farmer, Mr Schneider, had planted the sunflowers mainly as bird feed, but Helia had immediately caught his eye. She was an incorrigible optimist who turned towards the sun all day long. One late afternoon, a young photographer from Pforzheim, Lena, came to Gräfenhausen with her equipment. She was looking for a motif that captured the essence of summer in this region – something that was not only green, but vibrant. Lena had almost given up. Most of the flowers were drooping wearily in the heat. But then she saw Helia. Helia stood in all her glory. Her bright yellow petals seemed not only to reflect the light, but to actively draw it from the fading sun. The dark, almost black core in her centre was a stable anchor. Lena set up her camera, but the image she saw in the viewfinder was flat. It lacked feeling. She moved closer to the flower. Helia seemed to look at her with quiet dignity. It was as if the flower was saying, 'I endured the full heat to become this gold.' Lena understood. The flower was not only beautiful; it was resilient. It was the perfect symbol of the tenacity of life, asserting itself even in the scorching summer heat of Baden-Württemberg. Lena waited. When the sun finally touched the horizon and the last soft light of the 'golden hour' bathed the scene in a warm glow, Lena clicked. The photo she took showed Helia, the bright sunflower, against the dark background of the nearby forest near Birkenfeld. She did not look exhausted, but triumphant. Helia radiated the promise of abundance and perseverance. Lena knew that she had not just photographed a flower. She had captured summer itself in Gräfenhausen – a quiet, golden miracle in the midst of ordinary fields.

