

109 Places Rated

Where history reigns, visitors follow. But how are the world's great bastions of the past holding up under the passage of time and the pressure of traveler footprints? Our 280 experts vote on the health and well-being of our historic destinations.

By Jay Walljasper
Introduction by Jonathan B. Tourtellot

It's time travel of a sort. You know the feeling. In rural Vermont, you walk into a country grocery store, the screen door slapping shut behind you, and you've stepped back 80 years. Walk the streets of Verona, Italy, and you'd be stepping back 800—if it weren't for all the tourists. In this, our fifth annual survey of destination stewardship, we look at how well historic places are withstanding mass tourism, neglect, ravages of nature, and wrecking balls—as well as the more subtle threat of overplaying the past, where a place ends up embalmed as a lifeless museum—or Disneyfied into a parody of true heritage.

For this survey, conducted by the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations, we chose more than a hundred historic places around the world. We then asked an international panel of 280 experts to evaluate the destinations based on our six criteria (see page 121). This being a destination survey, we skipped living museums and stand-alone sites and chose only populated communities possessing a historic character, district, or dominant site. The score for each place is the average of the panelists' ratings, with a sample of comments they posted in the course of the survey. You can read more at traveler.nationalgeographic.com. We also skipped destinations we'd rated in recent surveys; you can see their scores on page 123.

Austria's Wachau Valley and Melk Abbey got top honors with a score of 88 for excellent preservation of both landscape and structures. Surprising to some might be one of the best U.S. ratings: a 78 for Columbus, Indiana, renowned for its modern architecture. Yes, baby boomers, the National Trust for Historic Preservation now considers "modern" historic.

Lowest on the survey, Colorado's Central City scored only 34. Panelists agreed that behind its historic facades, the town had lost its soul to ranks of gleaming slot machines. But programs like those of the Trust (see page 117) can help places do better.

In the end, people make the difference. No surprise there. A homegrown sense of stewardship, along with the support of caring visitors, is what will secure the future of our pasts. —J.B.T.

Strung like pearls along the Danube River, the villages of Austria's Wachau Valley (top score of 88) reflect dedication to preservation—of the natural as well as the man-made.

SISE BRINBERG AND COTTON COULSON/KEWENESS



BEST-RATED PLACES

In excellent shape, relatively unspoiled, and likely to remain so.

Rank 1. Austria: Wachau/Melk Abbey (SCORE: 88) “You really step back in time” at this “impressively maintained” Benedictine monastery overlooking the Danube. Villages “seem to try to outdo each other in promoting their heritage.” A “nice combination of agro-tourism and gourmet tourism.” “Wonderful.”

2. Ontario: Rideau Canal Corridor (SCORE: 84) Flowing 126 miles from Ottawa to Lake Ontario, the 1832 canal “displays a high degree of authenticity.” Named a World Heritage site in 2007, it is a “cornerstone of economic and social sustainability.” Lined by parks and historically alluring communities, the corridor is a “high-quality model of collaborative action in creating sustainable heritage tourism.”

3. Belgium: Historic Center of Ghent (SCORE: 81) “Wonderful mix of a living city and a vibrant past. Much more real than lovely Bruges, just up the road.” Local people cherish the character of this medieval city, yet there’s not a “mono-economy of tourism.”

4. Japan: Nikko Historic Areas (SCORE: 81) “A temple site in a large mountain park” that enchants with picturesque hills, waterfalls, “well-protected historic buildings,” and, of course, “perfectly manicured” gardens.

5. Austria: Graz (SCORE: 80) “The best heritage city in Austria,” known as a university town. Travelers have discovered its “very well preserved historic center with innovative new buildings that connect past and future.”

6. Sweden: Stockholm’s Gamla Stan (SCORE: 80) The 800-year-old center of Stockholm, on its own island, stands as an “urban heritage benchmark.” Remarkably, “intense tourism retailing appears to have maintained cultural integrity rather than detracted from it.”

7. France: Aix-en-Provence (SCORE: 80) One of the most celebrated towns in one of the world’s most celebrated tourist destinations, Aix nonetheless possesses “one of the best balances between tourists and local residents imaginable.” Too much traffic, but overall “a vibrant, well-conserved place.”

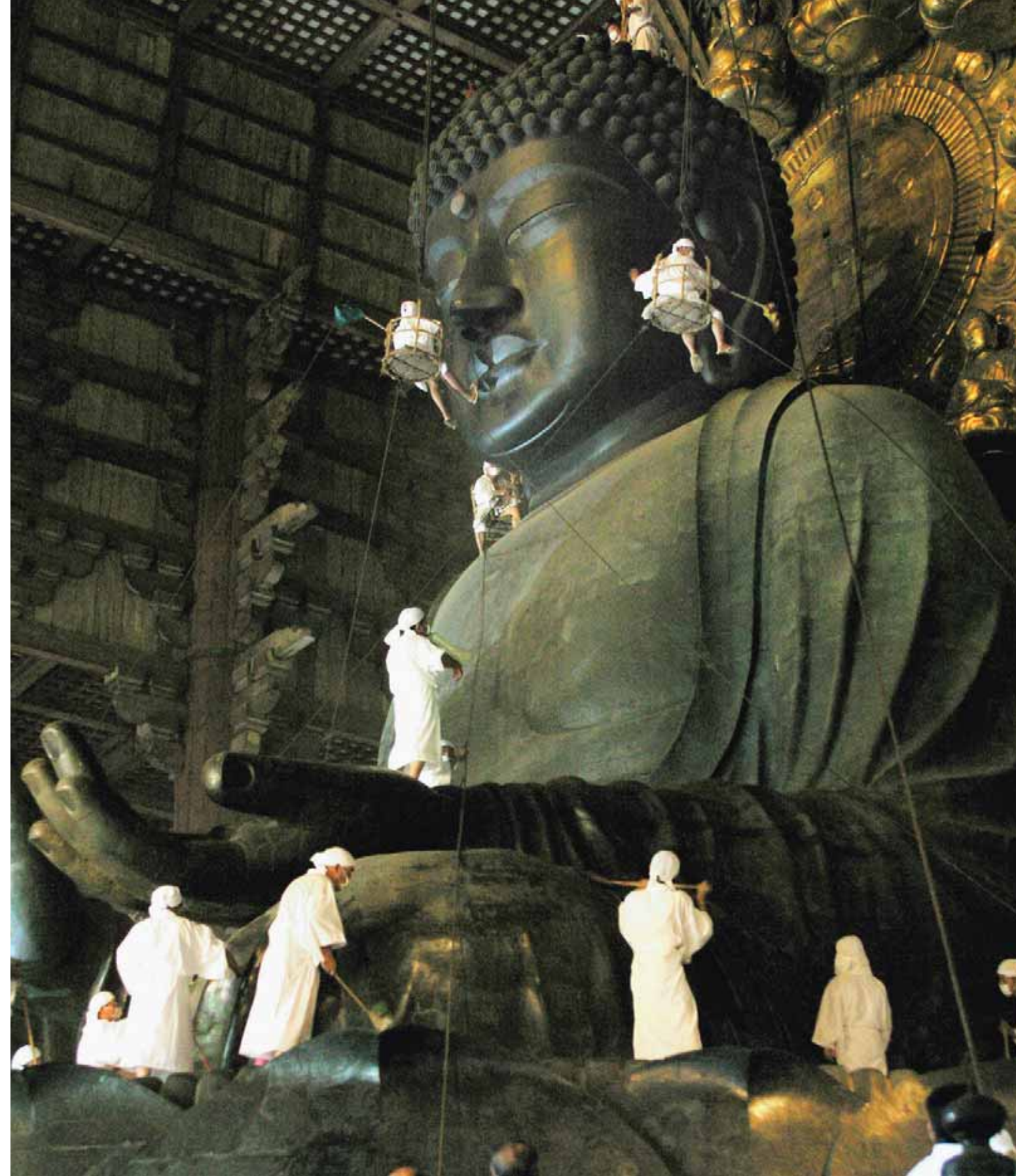
8. Germany: Potsdam Historic Areas (SCORE: 80) “Assuming its deserved place as one of Ger-

many’s important cultural centers,” this home of the Prussian kings is “aesthetically appealing”: Parks, palaces, and landscape architecture are in fine shape. “Potsdam is well on its way to a sustainable future.”

9. France: Dijon and Burgundy Region (SCORE: 80) With “unique French qualities befitting a premier wine destination,” the villages and landscapes are “atmospheric.” Sometimes feels a bit “crowdy,” in the memorable phrase of one panelist, but “the quality cuisine, ambience, and landscape overcome minor irritations.”

10. Argentina: Mendoza Wine Estancias (SCORE: 79) With vineyards and the Andes as backdrop, Mendoza is a “pleasant walking city with lots of cultural activities and first-rate restaurants.” “Tourism development has been measured and sensible”; “the wine gets better every year.”

11. Indiana: Columbus (SCORE: 78) Although it’s surprising to see a Midwestern burg in the company of Dijon and Stockholm, this “jewel in the region” boasts “world-class” mid-century modern architecture. The “charming downtown historic district” adds to the attraction, but the countryside’s “unchecked growth” makes for a “terrible gateway.”



Taking care: Restoration and maintenance have long been the name of the game in Nara, Japan (score: 78). Here, an imposing Buddha that was completed in A.D. 752 undergoes cleaning right before a festival. As glimpsed from the gracious arcades of the Opera House, the clean, quiet streets and 17th-century Town Hall (left), in Lyon, France (score: 80), simply appear to be elements of daily life, rather than a stage for tourists.

KAGAZI/SHUTTER (LEFT), JUNIKO KIMURA/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT)

PARATI, BRAZIL: “Between the emerald green Bocaina Mountain National Park range and the magnificence of clear-water Ilha Grande Bay lies a rare beauty.” —Roberto Mourão, tour operator



12. Japan: Ancient Nara (SCORE: 78) Landmark Buddhist temples in an “enchanting” bucolic town bring hordes of tourists; even so, Nara remains a premier destination because of “immaculate” restoration and management. But, “there’s quite a lot of development.”

13. Mexico: Querétaro City and Sierra Gorda (SCORE: 78) With its car-free center, Querétaro “maintains its provincial and colonial air.” Smog, however, is becoming a problem. Gateway to central Mexico’s ecological jewel, Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, which “protects forests and several missions in small towns.”

14. France: Lyon Historic Areas (SCORE: 77) Long famous for cuisine, Lyon, “one of the most impressive places in France,” earns lavish compliments for its “authenticity,” “recreational amenities,” “sustainable development,” and “impressive archaeological remains.” The old town’s “alleyways and courtyards are a pleasure to wander, although modern Lyon is fast encroaching.”

15. South Carolina: Charleston (SCORE: 77) This “real open-air museum” ranks “first for historic preservation and forward-thinking on tourism” in the U.S. However, “the integration of the African-American community and its heritage” could be better.

Lush Parati, Brazil (score: 76), a Portuguese colonial city whose historic streets in the center of town are closed to traffic, remains just about as it was 250 years ago. Among the newer treasures in the city of Munich (score: 72), the Pinakothek der Moderne museum opened in 2002 to showcase 20th- and 21st-century art, architecture, and design (opposite).

16. Czech Republic: Medieval Cesky Krumlov (SCORE: 76) “Managing rather well” despite crowds of tourists, Cesky Krumlov seems to transcend such quibbles as “kitsch and crass commercialism” and “being turned into a museum.” Local officials appear dedicated to “enhancing the authenticity of the place.”

17. Scotland: Edinburgh Historic Areas (SCORE: 76) “Changed over the past 40 years from a dull city to a vibrant one,” Scotland’s new old capital exhibits an “exquisite blend of past and present that doesn’t kowtow to tourists.” Fears about two proposed multiuse complexes have prompted a UNESCO World Heritage investigation.

18. Brazil: Parati (SCORE: 76) “A rare beauty almost unchanged in more than 250 years,” this city near Rio, on the “crystal-clear water of Ilha Grande Bay,” is not far from 300 “unforgettable” beaches. “Well-trained guides would assist with maintenance.”

Traveler and the National Trust

We publish these annual surveys in part to promote public discussion and action in support of destination stewardship. We encourage communities to take measures that will, in effect, raise their scores, and so become even better places to visit and live. In an unprecedented move, therefore, we are working with *Preservation* magazine, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, to help show why some U.S. places do well, others not so well, and what can be done about it.

Go to www.preservationnation.org/magazine to read *Preservation's* in-depth online profiles of five towns selected from this survey. You can also learn about Trust programs, such as Main Street and Heritage Tourism, that help communities make the most of their historic assets. For your own visits, check out the Trust’s Historic Hotels of America directory at www.historichotels.org.

• SEE MORE COMMENTS on each of these destinations at www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler

METEORA, GREECE: “Too many huge tourist buses creeping up the winding road...disgorging too many visitors at once for the small-scale, fragile nature of the entry areas...leading to the monasteries.” —Alison Gardner, travel editor

19. Oregon: Ashland (SCORE: 75) “One of America’s most delightful small towns,” famous for its Shakespeare festival, which “threatens to overwhelm the community.” But folks work hard to foster “appropriate development that seeks to link old and new.” Other parts of the state may be more dramatic, but Ashland is “an example of how tourism can work in historic venues.”

20. England: York (SCORE: 75) A city resplendent with history, York has drawn visitors for some 2,000 years. This “well-managed” city charms visitors and locals with “understated loveliness,” though “genuine local community life is disappearing” from the center of York.

21. Australia: Sydney Harbour (SCORE: 75) Offering one of the few unquestioned “masterworks” of modern architecture (the Opera House) and a “great engineering feat” (Sydney Harbour Bridge), along with “quite good ecological protection,” the harbor “combines old and new into a visually and contextually stimulating experience.” The history, however, is sometimes drowned out by all the other attractions.

PLACES DOING WELL

Retaining sense of place, with a few surmountable problems.

22. Croatia: Korcula (SCORE: 74) “A charming Venetian-type town” on a Dalmatian coast isle; “picturesque medieval character.” “Stone fences, vineyards, and olive orchards” dot the countryside. Downside: a new overbuilt highway.

23. Minnesota: Red Wing (SCORE: 74) “A small town with tremendous character, both natural and architectural,” downriver from the Twin Cities. Locals “appear committed to the preservation of their assets,” though better advantage could be taken of the scenic locale.

24. Washington: Port Townsend (SCORE: 74) This quiet Puget Sound port town shows how “industry can coexist with tourism.” “Charming, walkable”; but “quite touristy in high season.” “Slow growth seems to be working miracles.”

25. Japan: Kamakura (SCORE: 74) An important center of military culture and religion during

the Kamakura shogunate era (1192-1333), the town now functions harmoniously as a modern, “heavily visited” seaside destination enriched by notable Buddhist and Shinto shrines.

26. New Hampshire: Portsmouth (SCORE: 73) A fading seacoast city that bounced back to life by rediscovering its 17th-century heritage. “Attractive, lively downtown, full of well-preserved buildings.” What it needs now is a “better connection to its waterfront.”

27. Nova Scotia: Lunenburg (SCORE: 73) A British seaport founded in the 1700s that’s becoming “Coney Islandized.” One of the few man-made World Heritage sites in Canada; most experts believe it’s a good example of a “living heritage community,” although visitors would benefit from better historical info and signs.

28. Greece: Meteora (SCORE: 73) Six 15th-century Orthodox monasteries perch on sheer sandstone cliffs. Sustainable tourism is a challenge under these conditions; nonetheless, “environmental quality is quite high” even if the small complex is “rather overcrowded” at times. A “unique site with unique history.”

29. Italy: San Gimignano (SCORE: 73) This small medieval hill town, famous for its 14 towers, manages remarkably well—despite being “severely hit by people coming to live out their Tuscany fantasies.”

30. Germany: Munich Historic Areas (SCORE: 72) A green city, Munich scores well for its “high environmental standards,” including strong promotion of bicycling. Some complain this “complex city” is hard for visitors to negotiate, that “crowds can be intense.”

31. Virginia: Charlottesville and Monticello (SCORE: 72) “Magical and compelling.” “World-class treasures” in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson endure on the University of Virginia campus and in the mountaintop home he designed, even with the “tangled traffic.”

32. Quebec: Montréal Historic Areas (SCORE: 72) “The feel of a European city” not just in language but “architecture, preservation, character,” and walkability. Old Quarter, admirably revived, doesn’t pander to tourists. Risk of “inappropriate development” looms.

33. North Carolina: Asheville (SCORE: 71) The home of the Biltmore estate has been “utterly transformed; now a lively place with attractive streets and vibrant arts scene.” Despite the “growing pains” of popularity, Asheville has “done a great job of historic preservation.”



Modest 19th-century row houses line the handsome brick streets of Old Town, in Alexandria, Virginia (score: 68); the so-so riverfront teems with shops and restaurants. While stunningly sited Meteora, Greece (score: 73)—home to a collection of well-maintained, unique monasteries—has seen a spike in tourism that has changed the character and integrity of the place (below), it gets praise for ecological integrity.

34. Georgia (U.S.): Savannah (SCORE: 71) “Tourism is not smothering history.” Delightful squares laid out in the mid-1700s “remain intact”; downtown art college “adds a great deal of zip and fun.” A drawback: petty crime.

35. Arizona: Hopi Villages (SCORE: 70) “Tourism is secondary to cultural integrity.” Visitor limits assure authenticity in America’s oldest continuously settled communities. Lack of jobs on the Hopi Reservation threatens the “vibrant culture” by forcing young people to leave.

36. Germany: Dresden Historic Areas (SCORE: 70) The city of churches and palaces has reclaimed its prewar splendor. But “one of the most heartening stories of the postwar era” is marred by construction of a freeway-style bridge over the scenic Elbe River.

37. Massachusetts: Historic Boston (SCORE: 70) The controversial Big Dig freeway tunnel project turned out to be “an enhancement,” knitting old neighborhoods back together. Scores well for “local color” and “historic walks,” but “suffocating congestion” can be a problem.

38. Florida: Winter Park (SCORE: 70) This “gracious town retains its reputation as an oasis” amid central Florida’s runaway development. Even with the chain restaurants, “it is very much a place where people live.” But stronger protection needed for the “old Florida feel.”



LAMU, KENYA: “Wonderfully authentic architecture. Lovely small museum. But fairly palpable tension between local Muslims and tourists.” —Jeannette Belliveau, travel writer



The absence of cars adds to the ambiance in architecturally intriguing Lamu, Kenya (score: 65), at risk because of corruption.

39. Italy: Bologna Historic Areas (SCORE: 70) “Nothing looks like it’s been put on specially for tourists.” But the great restaurants, architecture, and “thriving university city” spirit come with traffic, noise, and “wear and tear.”

40. Mississippi: Natchez (SCORE: 70) A tale of two cities: “great historic resources and great poverty.” Still, this “antebellum river port” pleases with “fantastic architectural heritage and the stories, of all cultures, to back it up.”

41. Maine: Portland Historic Downtown (SCORE: 70) Portland may be a superb example of a place that’s reaping the rewards of preserving its fabric and character,” bustling with shops, cafés, museums, and people, but the city leans too heavily on chain businesses.

42. Estonia: Medieval Tallinn (SCORE: 70) A “gorgeous city, increasingly touristy but still

charming.” “One of Europe’s best historic-preservation success stories,” though it is compromised by stag-party tourism.

43. Germany: Aachen Old Town (SCORE: 69) Heavily bombed during WWII, the restored medieval quarter now earns praise for a “stunning historical aura.” The area gracefully handles crowds of tourists, but some complain about the “removal of street tramways.”

44. Lithuania: Vilnius Historic Center (SCORE: 69) “Beautifully preserved” with “a lot of green space,” Lithuania’s capital has burst out of Soviet gloom. It needs to do a better job of telling its story and dealing with graffiti.

45. Illinois: Galena (SCORE: 69) Made famous by Ulysses S. Grant, the city boasts a “remarkably intact architectural heritage” and “cohesive community”; but the threat of unchecked development looms in surrounding areas.

46. Kentucky: Old Lexington, Horse Country (SCORE: 69) America’s horse capital “has gone

far in taming sprawl through land preservation.” Local folks seem bent on keeping Lexington’s countryside “pristine,” but the town itself could use more attention.

47. Virginia: Alexandria (SCORE: 68) Alexandria’s Old Town has streets to stroll and maybe too many shops and restaurants in colonial era buildings. “But tourism development seems to offer little benefit to local residents.” The riverfront, marred by an energy plant and warehouses, is a missed opportunity.

48. Alaska: Sitka (SCORE: 68) A unique coastal town on the panhandle offering spectacular scenery along with both colonial Russian and Native American Tlingit heritage. But frequent cruise ships can “overwhelm the place.”

49. Ecuador: Cuenca (SCORE: 68) In the Andes mountains, near hot springs, “aesthetically beautiful” Cuenca earned UNESCO World Heritage status in part for its architecture. Traffic and noise pollution need attention. “Future depends on proper planning now.”

50. Mexico: Morelia Historic Areas (SCORE: 68) “One of the most beautiful colonial towns in Mexico, with a peaceful provincial atmosphere.” There’s concern, though, regarding air pollution, traffic, and “ugly development.”

51. West Virginia: Harpers Ferry (SCORE: 67) “Feels like an authentic Civil War-era town despite the tacky-tacky tourist places.” Auto access restricted given limited parking; a bus runs from the National Park visitors center.

52. Ontario: Niagara-on-the-Lake (SCORE: 67) “May be the most beautiful small city in Canada. Quite touristy, but has done a great job of preserving its charm.” Some say it’s become “a theme park.” A wealth of nearby wineries.

53. Poland: Warsaw Stare Miasto (SCORE: 67) Warsaw was rubble after World War II, but its Old Town was “meticulously reconstructed.” Enlivened by “organized and spontaneous cultural activity” that helps authenticate what could otherwise be a Slavic Disneyland.

PLACES IN THE BALANCE

A mixed bag of successes and worries, with the future at risk.

54. Guatemala: Antigua (SCORE: 66) “A great destination with restored convents, churches, plazas, and courtyards,” but overcrowding, truck traffic, and crime cloud the horizon. “Surrounding towns need to be ‘Antigua-ized’ to take the strain off.”

55. Turkey: Istanbul Historic Areas (SCORE: 66) “The contemporary urban development and

tangible heritage make multicultural Istanbul a unique destination.” New pedestrian streets and tram lines in the historical center. Still, Istanbul suffers the congestion, growth pressures, and pollution you’d expect in a developing-world city of ten million.

56. Colombia: Colonial Cartagena (SCORE: 65) A “spectacular,” well-maintained fortress and colonial city. The encroachment of modern sprawl coupled with glaring economic inequities could become problems, but there’s a sense that “people here seem to be happy with their city.”

57. Mexico: Colonial Campeche (SCORE: 65) A walled, “nicely preserved” 16th-century city on the Yucatán peninsula showcases “natural charm.” Some worry that a “Cancún approach” may foster unsustainable tourism.

58. Kenya: Lamu (SCORE: 65) A town hewn from stone in the 1100s, on an Indian Ocean island. “Exceptional combo of nature and traditional culture. No cars is a highlight!” Threats: political corruption, sex tourism, and “foreign real estate interests ruining the social fabric.”

59. England: Canterbury (SCORE: 65) “The cathedral’s well preserved,” but crowds and commercialism overpower its spiritual resonance. “A modern city and ancient heritage in general harmony.” Better public transit needed.

60. Indonesia: Ubud (SCORE: 65) The artistic capital of Bali has been “successfully preserved” because it attracts visitors who “tend to be more respectful of the local culture.” But Bali is Indonesia’s number one destination, sparking fears of tourist overdevelopment.



Disneyland? Nope. Welcome to Sighisoara, Transylvania (score: 59), a 13th-century Romanian town awash in Dracula kitsch. Vlad the Impaler—the “real Dracula,” some say—was born here.

How the “Places” Survey Works

This survey—our fifth “places rated” effort—evaluates the qualities that make a destination unique, measuring “integrity of place.” It is not a popularity contest, but rather an assessment of **authenticity and stewardship**. Thus the little-known town of Red Wing, Minnesota, can rate much higher than Pennsylvania’s Lancaster County.

Because evaluating an entire destination involves such unquantifiables as aesthetics and cultural integrity, we decided the best measure is informed human judgment. And so we assembled a panel of 280 well-traveled **experts in a variety of fields**—historic preservation, ecology, sustainable tourism, geography, travel writing and photography, site management, indigenous cultures, archaeology.

We asked panelists to evaluate just the places with which they were familiar, using our customary **six criteria** weighted according to importance: environmental and ecological quality; social and cultural integrity; condition of historic buildings and archaeological sites; aesthetic appeal; quality of tourism management; and outlook for the future.

Experts began by posting **points of view** on each destination—anonously, to ensure objectivity. Then, after reading each others’ remarks—a variation of a research tool called the Delphi technique—panelists filed their final scores. For the list of panelists who participated in this survey, see www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler.

The resulting **Stewardship Index** rating is an average of informed judgments about each place as a whole—including its many faces. Like the scores posted by Olympic judges, our experts’ ratings reflect both measurable factors and the intangibles of style, aesthetics, and culture. And like an athlete, each historic destination rated here has a chance to improve.

SEE MORE COMMENTS on each of these destinations at www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND: “The mansion area is gorgeous, although too much shopping development has detracted from the historic town. Totally congested. Tacky sprawl outside central area.” —Roberta Hilbruner, government sustainable-tourism advisor

61. Greece: Olympia (SCORE: 65) A silver- or bronze-medal vacation spot; not a gold. “Impressive, breathtaking,” but challenged by crowding, poor environmental planning, overzealous reconstruction of ruins from the original Olympic games, and the 2007 fires.

62. Hungary: Budapest Historic Areas (SCORE: 64) “One of the most beautiful urban landscapes in Europe” appears to be on the upswing, even though “shoddy building maintenance, poor planning policies, and overly Western-style development pose some worries.”

63. Australia: Ballarat, Victoria (SCORE: 64) Inland from Melbourne, a Victorian-era gold mining city that takes pride in its “great building restoration program.” Mines open for

tour; the “sound-and-light show” entertains some and leaves others unimpressed.

64. India: Khajuraho (SCORE: 64) Well-kept temples famed for their erotic art are the draw, “but there is so much more in a cultural landscape that sadly lies hidden.” Local tourism strategy borders on “prurient voyeurism.”

65. New Jersey: Cape May (SCORE: 64) A “well-maintained,” “walkable” treasury of Victorian architecture, this Jersey Shore town “holds on to its dignity despite being overrun by traffic” and “tacky commercial development.”

66. Pennsylvania: Philadelphia Historic Areas (SCORE: 64) An urban national park has done “great work” preserving and interpreting colo-

nial history. Interesting sites “tucked away” in the old city await discovery. Scars remain from past misguided renewal efforts.

67. Sri Lanka: Galle (SCORE: 64) This “charming town” with a colonial Dutch fort was battered in the 2004 tsunami, but has bounced back perhaps better than ever as locals realize “they cannot just take their heritage for granted.” But “houses are being bought by foreigners who visit them rarely and let upkeep lapse.”

68. Malaysia: George Town (SCORE: 64) Things are improving in this old British trading town, as witnessed by its July 2008 designation as a World Heritage site. Locals are “working hard to keep the integrity intact” in the face of massive development pressure. Opinions vary widely on overall prospects.

69. Peru: Colonial Arequipa (SCORE: 64) Called “well-kept” and “elegant” in contrast to Peru’s tourist center, Cusco, colonial Arequipa is prone to earthquakes and still making repairs from a big one in 2001. Locals “do not always benefit from tourism development.”

70. Massachusetts: Lowell (SCORE: 63) “A dying mill town has come back to life,” though it’s “sliced up badly by city and highway planners.” Home to a national park celebrating America’s industrial history, Lowell is gritty, post industrial—“not everybody’s cup of tea,” but “a preservation success story.”

71. Syria: Old City of Damascus (SCORE: 63) “A city that requires little restoration because it operates as it has for centuries.” Air pollution, traffic, and weak regulation of development threaten the “special atmosphere” of the bazaars and old city. Scant information for travelers, but people are “extremely hospitable.”

72. Ireland: Dublin Historic Areas (SCORE: 63) “Distinctly urban, sometimes dirty—but real and largely appealing.” Dublin’s “great character” goes a long way in trumping “awful traffic problems” and “a lot of antisocial behavior at night.”

73. France: Fortified Carcassonne (SCORE: 63) “At a distance, Carcassonne remains spectacular, picturesque, iconic; up close it’s corny, tacky, overcrowded.” Southern France’s legendary city-in-a-fortress still awes, though a “fun-fair ambience in high season” detracts.

The Breakers and many other “cottages” built along the Cliff Walk in Newport, Rhode Island (score: 62), stand as largely unspoiled, open-to-visitors monuments to bygone privilege.



Poor management at historic sites in Ayutthaya, Thailand (score: 53), has paved the way for vandalism, including the beheading of Buddhas.

74. Maryland: Annapolis (SCORE: 63) The home port of the U.S. Naval Academy, on the Chesapeake Bay, is “full of charm and elegant 18th-century architecture.” Packs in folks seeking “maritime merrymaking.” Nearby, “you hit uninspired office buildings and car dealerships.”

75. New Mexico: Santa Fe (SCORE: 62) A small town with a big reputation, Santa Fe ranks lower than expected because “pricey,” out-of-town retail is diluting its one-of-a-kind, authentic character. Sprawl on the outskirts “can seem to dwarf the historic downtown.”

76. Italy: Verona Historic Areas (SCORE: 62) Fair Verona is “well-preserved, but overloaded with tourists from spring through autumn. Juliet’s house is probably the best example.”

77. Connecticut: Mystic Seaport (SCORE: 62) Considering most buildings were moved to the site, a “good historic presentation of a 19th-century seaport.” Some concerns about summer crowds and creeping theme-park feel. Yet “historic New England context is strong.”

78. Rhode Island: Newport (SCORE: 62) Once a playground for the wealthy, Newport still charms with 19th-century mansions and picturesque narrow streets. But “the downtown waterfront area is a disappointing hodgepodge,” and traffic clogs up in peak season.

79. India: Medieval Orchha (SCORE: 61) “Largely unspoiled” destination in central India known for its wall paintings. But limited tourism means less incentive to take care of the place. “There is much in Orchha that is endangered.”

80. Uzbekistan: Bukhara (SCORE: 61) Fabled city of central Asia “retains much charm even though its bazaar, mosque, and historic core were completely rebuilt by the Soviets in the 20th century.” The back streets are the real deal. Pleasingly walkable with “excellent accommodations and good food.” Troubles ahead if local officials continue to view tourism as a cash cow.

81. Virginia: Richmond Historic Area (SCORE: 61) The capital of the Confederacy “has great historic resources but has done a terrible job of protecting them.” An “engaging” riverfront revitalization instills hope for improvements.

82. Vietnam: Hoi An (SCORE: 61) A small coastal city saved by tourism, this “historic gem” is now suffering from too much of a good thing. “A great place to be when the tourism buses have left in the afternoon.”

83. Florida: St. Augustine (SCORE: 61) The oldest city in America pleases with a Spanish colonial fort and “first-class restorations done mostly in the 1900s.” Unfortunately, “souvenir shops have all but taken over” the old city. Crowd capacity is a mounting problem.

84. India: Puducherry (Pondicherry) (SCORE: 61) A small city in southern India with a distinct French flavor, “from building styles to police uniforms.” Picturesque and sustainably managed, although the local community is not benefiting much from the restoration.

85. North Carolina: Wilmington (SCORE: 60) Although “an unexpected pleasure and interesting destination,” the appeal of this city is at risk due to out-of-control “strip malls, billboards, traffic,” and beach development. “In danger of becoming far too upscale.”

Historic places previously rated

This survey omits a few historic places that appeared in past destination surveys. Here are the scores (from 2006, unless otherwise noted).

Granada (Alhambra), Spain	81
Guanajuato, Mexico	79
Córdoba, Spain	79
Bath, United Kingdom	78
Versailles, France	77
Quebec City, Canada	77
Siena, Italy	77
Avignon, France	75
Assisi, Italy	75
Kyoto, Japan	74
Delphi, Greece	73
Hvar, Croatia ('07)	71
Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, U.S.A.	69
Masada, Israel	69
Dubrovnik, Croatia	68
Xian (Qin Emperor site), China	66
Florence, Italy	65
Rhodes, Greece	63
Crete, Greece ('07)	62
Mont-St-Michel, France	62
Salvador, Brazil	61
Santorini, Greece ('07)	61
Petra, Jordan	60
Borobodur, Indonesia	58
Agra (sights), India	56
Stonehenge, United Kingdom	56
The Great Wall, China	56
Malta, Mediterranean ('07)	55
Cusco and Machu Picchu, Peru	54
Jerusalem, Israel	54
Acropolis area, Athens, Greece	53
Pyramids, Giza, Egypt	50
Angkor, Cambodia	48
Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet, China	46
Venice and lagoon, Italy	46
Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain ('07)	37



Mont-St-Michel, France (score: 62).

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86. New York: Lower Hudson Valley (SCORE: 59) “Beautiful small towns, important historic sites, and tranquil landscapes interspersed with ugly developments.” The area scores poorly for “interpretation and signage,” which discourages the kind of sustainable tourist initiatives that could enhance this region.

87. Romania: Sighisoara and Saxon Transylvania (SCORE: 59) Culturally unique, “though the unified shopfronts give many streets the air of a film set.” Still, there’s a “perfectly restored medieval town”; surrounding villages dot “beautiful rolling-hills landscape.” But outsiders are in control of tourist development.

88. Uzbekistan: Samarkhand (SCORE: 59) A jewel of Islamic architecture rich in Central Asian cultural appeal but failing in the ecological-protection arena. “One wonders if the government realizes the huge tourism potential.”

89. Laos: Luang Prabang (SCORE: 59) “One of the most charming, authentic historic small towns in Asia,” on the Mekong River, in the mountains. Tourism is taking over fast. Development, largely tasteful, isn’t always authentic or beneficial to locals. “More could be done to improve environmental management.”

With the plethora of neon-encrusted casinos and an influx of tourists coming primarily to gamble, the authenticity of the historic areas of Macao, China (score 54), is threatened.

90. India: Blue City of Jodhpur Historic Areas (SCORE: 58) “Among the world’s most beautiful cities,” for its architecture and Mehrangarh Fort. But “polluted and crowded; commerce and traffic inform every moment.”

91. Colorado: Telluride Valley (SCORE: 58) “Gorgeous” mountain scenery in a “gem” of a well-preserved ski town. But an influx of money means Telluride is “being overrun with megamansions,” with “locals being priced out.”

92. South Africa: Cape Town Historic Areas (SCORE: 57) A legendarily beautiful city visibly suffering from “the gap between extreme wealth and poverty.” “Historic charm gets lost in the shopping malls,” though there are “robust, diverse, cosmopolitan” qualities. “Still a great destination unless you get mugged.”

93. Massachusetts: Salem (SCORE: 56) The capital of “witch kitsch” does not enchant our panel. Praise for the “excellent Peabody

Essex Museum and other historic sites” is dwarfed by stuck-in-the-seventies urban planning and poor tourism management.

94. Vietnam: Hanoi Historic Areas (SCORE: 56) Unlike many growing Asian cities, “Hanoi is beautiful with an easy urbanity,” intact French Quarter, and “charming” parks. Tourist information is inadequate and “heavy-handed.” Tidal waves of mopeds in the streets.

PLACES WITH TROUBLES

Under severe pressures; many places working to recover.

95. China: Macao Historic Areas (SCORE: 54) Once celebrated as an atmospheric sin city; now challenging Las Vegas as a gambling capital, with “massive concrete developments.” Traces of its Portuguese past in the “authentically restored” historic core.

96. England: Stratford-upon-Avon (SCORE: 54) “Crowded but fun,” but tragically “overrun by trinket shops.” It will get worse: The local government plans to develop Shakespeare’s hometown as “a major shopping center.”

NATALIE BEHNING/ORBIS

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PENNSYLVANIA/MARYLAND/VIRGINIA “HALLOWED GROUND”: “Most battlefields are protected...but overall the region puts building of all sorts at the top of the priorities list.” —James Conaway, travel writer

97. Thailand: Ayutthaya (SCORE: 53) Seat of the 14th-century empire that grew into Siam, endowed with Buddhist and archaeological attractions but faulted for “preserving dead monuments while neglecting valuable living culture.” Though “heritage sites are poorly managed,” says one panelist.

98. Malaysia: Old Port of Melaka (SCORE: 50) This old port still serves up charm, but intense development on landfill means it’s been severed from its historic waterfront context. It takes “an extra effort to find authentic Melaka behind the manicured heritage facade.”

99. India: Amritsar Historic Areas (SCORE: 50) The Golden Temple, “one of the world’s must-see cultural destinations,” is the equivalent of Mecca for Sikhs. Elsewhere here, “all is chaos, with cars, roads, and shoddy architecture.”

100. Louisiana: New Orleans Historic Areas (SCORE: 47) “In the flurry to rebuild, historic reconstruction has been forgotten.” It’s a social, economic, and environmental disaster area, yet “tourism is on the upswing” because of “a national treasure that has survived.”

101. India: Golden City of Jaisalmer (SCORE: 46) On the Pakistan border, with “camel safaris, magnificent palaces, and a beautiful golden fortress.” But some key buildings are in “imminent risk of collapse,” and “traditional bazaars are transforming into tourist shops.”

102. Georgia (U.S.): Atlanta Historic Areas (SCORE: 46) “Historic Atlanta? Give me a break! A soulless downtown and exceptional urban sprawl.” Sweet Auburn, where Martin Luther King, Jr., grew up, is the highlight, but its “historic urban fabric is lost.”

WORST-RATED PLACES

Severe problems; some destinations fighting back, some not.

103. South Dakota: Deadwood (SCORE: 45) Long a gambling town, this is where lawman and gunslinger Wild Bill Hickok met his end at a poker table in 1876. Today, casinos packed with slot machines overrun the town, trashing “the historic integrity of its building interiors.” “Hokey and rather unpleasant.”

104. Pennsylvania: Lancaster County (SCORE: 45) “The Amish are lost amid the sprawl and schlock.” Local officials seem serious about protecting “what’s left” of this one-of-a-kind cultural landscape. Stay tuned.

105. Pennsylvania/Maryland/Virginia: “Hallowed Ground” US 15 Corridor (SCORE: 45) The old highway from Charlottesville to Gettysburg is a history hot spot—a destination in and of itself. But “historic communities, battlefields, and rural areas” are threatened by “suburbanization” and “development at any cost.”

106. Turkey: Hierapolis-Pamukkale (SCORE: 45) Archaeological treasure featuring spring-fed Roman baths where you can splash about. But unchecked tourism, “terrible management,” and environmental atrocities mean many baths have had to close. Some progress now being made toward clean-up.

107. Arizona: Tombstone (SCORE: 39) An icon of the American West, Tombstone today “looks more like a tacky movie set than a town of real historic value.” The rich vein of history here is completely overlooked.

108. Cambodia: Phnom Penh Historic Areas (SCORE: 36) Wonderful natural and cultural qualities, but “government indifference has left it a backwater.” Billboards, teardowns of colonial buildings for high-rises, virtually no enforcement of preservation regulation to govern foreign developers—“a very sad story.”

109. Colorado: Central City (SCORE: 34) A 19th-century gold-mining boomtown lost beneath the 21st-century casino boomtown. “There’s little authentic left other than some building facades.” “This is a disaster. The character and the culture have been totally lost amid the noise of slot machines.”

Manassas National Battlefield’s 1860s Stone House—Pennsylvania/Maryland/Virginia “Hallowed Ground” (score: 45)—sees onslaughts of vehicular traffic where soldiers once marched.



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