10 Places You Must Visit Before They Disappear

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MANSFIELD, OH- More than likely, you've heard the phrase "The Seven Wonders of the World." But did you know that all but one of these spectacular ancient wonders have disappeared from the face of the earth? The original seven wonders were considered the lighthouse of Alexandria in Egypt; the statue of Zeus at Olympia, Greece; the hanging gardens of Babylon in Iraq; the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus in Turkey; the temple of Artemis in Turkey; and the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt - the only one still in existence today.



The lesson here is obvious. You shouldn't take the fascinating and beautiful things in this world for granted because one day they could disappear. The following are ten world treasures that are, sadly, at risk of disappearing from the face of this earth for various reasons. If you haven't already seen these amazing places, you might want to consider moving them to the top of your must-see list now.



1. The Endangered Serengeti - Tanzania

Today, the endless plains of the Serengeti are still teeming with gazelle, lions, elephants, giraffes and cheetahs - just to name a few of the species that can be seen in this huge Tanzanian national park. The Serengeti is also the site of the greatest mammal migration on earth.

Every year approximately 2 million wildebeest, zebra and Thomson's gazelle move through the park, following the life-giving rains and the resulting grass. Accompanying the vast herds are hungry predators, such as lions and hyenas. And following all of the animals are thousands of humans crowded into Jeeps and looking for that perfect picture.

Unfortunately, the wild world of the Serengeti is under attack. The government of Tanzania wants to build a road through h the park that would connect its coastal area to Lake Victoria as well as to the African countries that lie to its west. If this road is built, conservationists feel that it could cut right through the great migration's route near the Kenyan border. How bad could this be for the Serengeti?

In an opinion piece for "Nature" magazine, scientists wrote that the road "could lead to the collapse of the largest remaining migratory system on earth." As of May 2014, the fate of the road - and the migration - is still in the hands of the Tanzanian court system. For now, the road system has been blocked legally, but public and industrial pressure will continue to be exerted to allow it to be built.



2. Much Grief for the Great Barrier Reef - Australia

The breathtaking Great Barrier Reef in Australia covers 1,680 miles and is the largest coral reef in the world. It is actually made up of 2,900 separate reefs and about 900 islands. Its turquoise blue waters are home to 1,500 species of fish, including some of the most beautiful and colorful in the world, as well as turtles and mollusks. But sadly - according to the New York Daily News - 50 percent of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia has disappeared in the last 27 years.



There are a number of reasons for the decline. Climate change has led to warmer seas, which in turn has caused coral bleaching. In addition, industrial and agricultural waste as well as nasty crown-of-thorns starfish have all taken their toll on this amazing ecosystem. Recently a researcher from the University of Queensland stated that if nothing is done to correct global warming, the Great Barrier Reef could be irreversibly damaged by 2030.

To make matters worse, the Australian government is considering expanding a coal port, which will result in the dumping of dredged sediment within parts of the Great Barrier Reef. UNESCO is so alarmed by the idea that it is considering listing the park on its World Heritage in Danger list. Another project also threatens the reef. The government has allowed the Great Keppel Island Resort to build a massive facility within the reef, but details are still being worked out.



3. Angkor Wat: Death by Tourists - Cambodia

Although the jungle had tried over the years to swallow Angkor Wat, the magnificent complex of temples has managed to survive, even as its stones were gripped by the suffocating roots of gigantic strangler fig trees. This unique site is rich in architecture and artistic masterpieces of the 9th to the 14 th centuries, and strongly displays the cultural development of the region. There are more than 100 stone temples still in existence. The community also used advanced hydrologic engineering systems for its day. Amazingly, the 12th-century complex also managed to outlast the destructive Khmer Rouge regime, who once used its walls for target practice.

At one time, Cambodia's Angkor Wat was a site that only the most intrepid traveler would venture to. In 1993, for example, less than 8,000 travelers visited Angkor Wat, according to the Guardian. Today, however, this architectural masterpiece is being threatened by the crushing weight of thousands of tourists who crowd the complex's magnificent sandstone temples from morning to night. In 2010, an estimated three million travelers from around the world went to visit this 500-acre UNESCO World Heritage site.

But it's not just the weight of the tourists that is threatening Angkor Wat. The large number of hotels that have been built to accommodate these tourists is also creating another threat to the temples, which are built on a mixture of sand and water. Unfortunately, these hotels are draining gallons of ground water from under these ancient temples, which is threatening their stability. Some fear that this depletion of the ground water could even result in the eventual collapse of the world-famous Angkor Wat temples.



4. A Disappearing Giant: The Amazon Rainforest - South America

Covering an astounding 1.4 billion acres, the Amazon Rainforest is the largest tropical rainforest in the world. More than half of this huge rainforest can be found in Brazil, with the rest spread out over the countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.

An incredible number of species of animals, reptiles, birds and fish live in this rainforest - in fact, 20 percent of the world's bird species can be found in the Amazon. Many new creatures and exotic plant life await discovery. Researchers continue to find unknown life forms and species as they continue to work and explore this vast but rapidly disappearing jungle. More importantly, the Amazon rainforest produces approximately 20 percent of the world's oxygen.



But, believe it or not, this huge rainforest - even as vast as it is - could disappear entirely from the face of the earth in just 50 years, according to the World Wildlife Fund. Deforestation is slowly whittling away at the Amazon Rainforest. Locals and others have already cleared away more than 20 percent of this important ecosystem for farmland and mining.

And then there are the loggers who ship the Amazon's valuable wood to other countries or turn it into charcoal. Climate change has also affected the rainforest. A recent study showed that the Amazon's dry season has increased by a week each decade, which means that there is now a greater risk of forest fires in the southern portion of the rainforest.



5. In Name Only: Glacier National Park - United States

Sadly, this Montana park - one of the most beautiful in the United States - is quickly losing the very thing that made it famous - its glaciers. When Glacier National Park was first founded in 1910, there were approximately 150 glaciers scattered about this beautiful park. Now, however, there are only 25 glaciers left, and scientists believe that by 2030, there will be zero.

Worse, there are some people who believe that the remaining glaciers are actually disappearing at a faster pace than this predicted rate. Not surprisingly, the biggest threat to the few glaciers left is global warming.



Glacier National Park, which covers a million acres, will still have lots to offer its guests once its iconic glaciers - which are the remnants of a glaciation that occurred about 12,000 years ago - are gone. For one thing, it is home to some of the rarest animals in North America, including elk, mountain goats, grizzly bears and even wolves. It also has many incredibly beautiful sights, which make for great pictures and memories.

However, the loss of the glaciers, which serve as a reserve of water for the park during the summer months, will definitely affect the park's ecosystem. Scientists also fret that without the glaciers, the temperature in the park will rise and some local aquatic creatures that are sensitive to this type of temperature change may become extinct. If you want to see the glaciers, which is what the park became known for, now is a good time to plan to see it - and show your kids its beauty in ice - while it remains.



6. A Watery Grave: Venice - Italy

One of the most picturesque and romantic cities in all of Italy, Venice is typically a photographer's dream. During most of the year, its charming canals and lovely bridges make perfect backdrops for pictures, but during some months in the spring and fall, the city's streets are inundated by acqua alta flooding. In 2012, for example, nearly 70 percent of the city was damaged by the worst flooding the city had seen in 22 years. Unfortunately, things are only predicted to get worse.

According to the Guardian, in 1900, Venice's famed St. Mark's square flooded around ten times a year. Today, however, flooding swamps the square about 100 times each year, which is not surprising since the city is reportedly sinking at a rate of 0.08 inches per year. And with global warming causing the seas to rise, some scientists are predicting that this beautiful city will be uninhabitable by 2100.



The city is also losing many of its inhabitants. In 1951, the city was home to just over 170,000 residents. Today, however, only about 60,000 people call Venice home. Most residents are driven away by high home and food prices, while others leave because of the crush of tourists - estimated to be between 15 to 18 million each year. Now is a great time to see this amazing city before the flooding creates a lot more damage.



7. The Next Atlantis: The Maldives

It's no surprise that the stunningly beautiful Maldives Islands are a very popular destination for

honeymooners. This island country boasts crystal clear blue waters teeming with colorful fish, white sand beaches and to-die-for overwater bungalows with views of the sea below.

Unfortunately, the 1,190 islands that make up the Maldives may not be around for very much longer. The Maldives is the lowest lying country in the world and it is quickly being swallowed up by the Indian Sea.

According to the Toronto Star, entire communities on these islands have had to relocate due to rising sea levels. In addition, ABC News reported that about a third of the nation's islands have suffered substantial erosion. Some scientists are predicting that the island nation, which has an average height of only four feet above sea level, and a maximum height of only 8 feet above sea level, could be underwater within the next 100 years. More than 80 percent of the islands are less than three feet above water level.

In 2009, the president of the Maldives and his ministers - wearing scuba gear and wetsuits - even held a meeting 20 feet below the surface of the sea to bring attention to the dire circumstances their nation is facing. The President of the country is currently seeking to buy land in India to eventually move the more than 365,000 people to as the islands continue to sink - eventually out of sight. If you want to see these beautiful islands - now is the time.



8. The Not So Cold Truth: Antarctica

Antarctica is on the bucket list of many travelers, especially those who want to check off that they've seen all of the continents. And even though Antarctica may seem like a lifeless continent, it and its surrounding waters are actually home to a number of fascinating creatures, including emperor penguins, leopard seals and many species of whales. Unfortunately, global warming has caused irreversible change to this icy continent.

According to LiveScience, the sea ice in some areas of the Antarctic Ocean is now absent three months longer than it had been just 20 or so years ago. Sadly, this loss of sea ice has had a devastating effect on some of the continent's species. For example, since 1975, the population of Adelie penguins has been reduced by 80 percent. And it's not just these penguins that are at risk because of the melting sea ice. Scientists fear that the population of emperor penguins will be reduced by up to 80 percent by the year 2100.

Tourism has also had a negative effect on Antarctica. From 1992 to 1993, only 6,700 tourists visited Antarctica. By 2007, that number had risen to 45,000. In order to protect the icy continent, restrictions were put into place and now ships with more than 500 passengers are no longer allowed in its straits. In addition, only 100 visitors are allowed on shore at a time and only for very brief periods.



9. The Lost City Could Be Lost Again: Machu Picchu - Peru

Located high in the Andes Mountains, mysterious Machu Picchu has become an irresistible draw for travelers from around the world. The site is considered to be the peak of the greatest architectural and artistic beauty of the entire Inca civilization. It consists of more than 200 different structures, some involving religious, astronomical and agricultural purposes. It is also believed to be the last stronghold of the Incas. Unfortunately, the beautiful 15th century Inca ruins are now being threatened by all of those visitors, which in 2013 numbered 1.2 million.

According to NBC News, archaeologists have long complained that the fragile ruins are being damaged by all of those visitors tromping around in boots and climbing and jumping on the site's structures. They have also expressed concern about the erosion caused by tourists that wander off into areas where they shouldn't venture.



In response, the Peruvian government has put some restrictions into place that will hopefully protect Machu Picchu, including a limit of only 2,500 visitors per day to this UNESCO World Heritage site. In addition, the park is planning on implementing several new regulations by the middle of 2014.

One of those regulations will require that foreign visitors hire an official guide to enter the Inca Citadel; while another one will limit the amount of time that a person can spend in certain areas of Machu Picchu, such as at the Water Mirrors and the Temple of the Sun.



10. Darwin's Disappearing Discovery: The Galapagos Islands - Ecuador

The Galapagos Islands are being loved to death, with tourists from around the world flocking to this unique chain of 19 islands to see for themselves the incredible wildlife that Charles Darwin first described in his 1859 book "On the Origin of Species." All of the islands and the area around them make up the Galapagos Marine Reserve. Being that it is about 600 miles from the coast of Ecuador, its distance helps to protect its diversity and abundant life forms.

Unfortunately, all of those visitors have had a negative effect on the unusual creatures found on these islands - many of which have no fear of humans or other animals. Visitors are often amused to find sea lions playfully swimming alongside them or are surprised when they have to walk around boobies that are lying in their path and in no hurry to move.

Unfortunately, this fearlessness means that these animals can easily fall prey to domesticated animals or rats that have gone ashore from cruise ships. Smugglers have also taken some of the rare animals found on these islands to sell to collectors in other parts of the world.

The government of Ecuador is trying to save the Galapagos by limiting the number of visitors to these islands each day and also by restricting where tourists can walk. It also seeks to protect the ecosystem by keeping out foreign species, and watching to ensure native peoples are careful to avoid harmful activities. Time is certainly a factor, and seeing the Galapagos Islands now could easily be the best time to do it.

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