



BUCKET-LIST ALTERNATIVES

Now's the time to sell an equally spectacular alternative to these once-in-a-lifetime sights, says **Adam Shaw**

Watching an ethereal sunrise at Angkor Wat, envisaging the might of Ancient Greece at the Acropolis and looping round the Pyramids of Giza on a camel are all worthy of any respectable traveller's bucket list.

But as operators see more demand for trips that feature these kinds of experiences, this year could provide an opportunity to sell alternative trips to clients looking to branch out and visit somewhere less well known, but equally spectacular, away from the crowds.

"Since travel has opened up post-pandemic, perhaps unsurprisingly we're seeing these

once-in-a-lifetime trips being booked in far greater numbers," says Jae Hopkins, marketing director at Explore.

However, Joanna Reeve, head of business development at Intrepid Travel, adds: "Travellers want to tick off those bucket-list experiences, but they also want to get away from the crowds and experience a destination from a different perspective."

So, with that in mind, here are three just-as-epic alternatives to bucket-list sights around the world – from Nubian Kushite pyramids in Sudan to an ancient Greek marvel in Sicily and the world's largest Buddhist temple in Indonesia.



LIKE THIS?

GIZA PYRAMIDS

The iconic pyramid complex situated just outside Cairo is a regular feature on tours to Egypt. Built around 4,500 years ago to house the dead pharaohs of the fourth dynasty, it is a designated Unesco World Heritage Site, while the Great Pyramid is the oldest – and best-preserved – of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

MEROE PYRAMIDS

WHAT IS IT? The ancient city of Meroe, in modern day Sudan, was the capital of the powerful Kingdom of Kush, which flourished from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD. The Nubian Kushite civilisation mysteriously vanished, leaving behind an array of pyramids, funerary temples and homes.

WHY GO? This Nubian empire sprawled from the Mediterranean deep into Africa, and the pyramids offer a glimpse into its relatively unknown history and distinct designs. Many of the structures, built more than 2,500 years ago, are still in good condition, their walls decorated with bas-reliefs showing the lives of the Kushite royals and gods. Set among the stunning Sudanese desert, on the east bank of the Nile, clients will be treated to sweeping views of red-gold dunes with pyramids dotted throughout.

BOOK IT: An eight-day Beneath the Sands of Sudan tour with Wild Frontiers starts at £3,495 per person, based on two sharing, excluding international flights, departing November 11. wildfrontierstravel.com

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LIKE THIS?

THE ACROPOLIS

Set high on a rocky outcrop above Athens, the Acropolis is a set of buildings considered to be the finest surviving examples of Ancient Greek architecture. Its most notable building, the Parthenon, was a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena and is considered a lasting symbol of democracy, as well as of the arts and culture of Greek Antiquity.

VALLEY OF THE TEMPLES

WHAT IS IT? These remarkably well-preserved Hellenistic structures are situated in Agrigento on the Italian island of Sicily. There are remains of seven temples at the site, all built in Doric style, with the Concordia, complete apart from its roof, bearing a striking resemblance to the Parthenon.

WHY GO? A jewel in Sicily's archaeological crown, the site once known as Akragas was a flourishing Greek cultural centre, founded in the 5th century BC and described as "the most beautiful of mortal cities". The remaining temple complex is easily manageable and offers great views of the surrounding ocean. There's also a museum showcasing thousands of artefacts from the time, including lion sculptures and collections of clay masks. Beyond the Valle di Templi, Sicily boasts a unique food culture (think fava bean stew and all types of cannoli); one of the world's most active volcanoes in Mount Etna; and a well-preserved medieval capital in Palermo.

BOOK IT: Riviera Travel offers an eight-day classic tour of Sicily from £1,439, including flights from Gatwick, departing April 19. rivieratravel.co.uk/agent-welcome



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LIKE THIS?

ANGKOR WAT

The largest religious monument in the world, Angkor Wat is the defining symbol of Cambodia, featuring on everything from its currency to its national flag. Covering more than 160 hectares, the 12th-century complex is filled with lotus-shaped towers, decorative columns and arches, and thousands of statues of Hindu and Buddhist deities.

BOROBUDUR

WHAT IS IT? Set in the heart of Indonesian island Java, this is the largest Buddhist temple in the world. Built in the ninth century, it is said to blend indigenous traditions based on honouring one's ancestors with the Buddhist goal of achieving nirvana. It was abandoned after it was covered in volcanic ash sometime between the 10th and 15th centuries before being rediscovered in 1815.

WHY GO? The striking design features five tiers of pyramid-shaped blocks, topped with three circular platforms and finished off with a monumental stupa (a mound-like structure containing relics). Around the main building are 72 further stupas, each containing a beautifully carved Buddha statue. Zoom out and – thanks to its location in the volcanic Kedu Valley, close to the city of Yogyakarta, an arts and cultural centre in its own right – fertile plains and lush green peaks give this captivating Unesco-protected temple complex an equally stunning backdrop.

BOOK IT: The nine-day Best of Java tour with G Adventures starts at £711, excluding flights, with departures from April 29. gadventures.com



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