



Atlas of Improbable Places: A Journey to the World's Most Unusual Corners

Travis Elborough , Martin Brown

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This atlas of weird and unusual locations from National Geographic unveils the strange-but-true history, trivia, and geography of our planet's most intriguing and curious places. From deserted cities and strange settlements, to remote islands and underground labyrinths, this atlas features more than 50 unusual locations around the world—from San Juan in Parangaricutiro, a town entirely submerged by lava, to Leap Castle in Ireland, allegedly the most haunted house in the world. Inviting text by British cultural commentator Travis Elborough is paired with photos, artfully drawn maps, and illustrations. Over the course of five chapters, readers will explore floating worlds, utopian cities, deserted places, man-made oddities, obscure locations, mysterious underground realms, and more. Lyrically written and beautifully illustrated, this book will inform, enlighten, and intrigue you as it takes you on a journey to far-off, peculiar, and often unreachable parts of our world.

Atlas of Improbable Places: A Journey to the World's Most Unusual Corners Details

Date : Published October 4th 2016 by National Geographic (first published 2016)

ISBN : 9781426217135

Author : Travis Elborough , Martin Brown

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Travel, Science, Geography, History

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From Reader Review Atlas of Improbable Places: A Journey to the World's Most Unusual Corners for online ebook

Sud666 says

I am a person who truly enjoys traveling. I have been to every continent (save Antarctica) and am always looking for new and interesting things to see and do. Thus this Atlas was a very cool thing.

It is a listing, with description, of 51 of the oddest things out in the world to see. For example in Wales there is a place called Portmeirion. A beautiful architectural work it boasts even a full scale ship model on its grounds.

Or the Hearst Castle in California, or Teufelsberg in Berlin where this is an abandoned Cold War era spy station, Battleship Island an abandoned city on an island in Japan, etc.

The 51 entries are subdivided into sections which are:

Dream Creations

Deserted Destinations

Architectural Oddities

Floating Worlds

Otherworldly Spaces

Subterranean Realms

Each entry is shown on a map and has pictures and a description of what makes this place unusual. All in all this is a must read for the adventurous traveler who likes to see things outside of the tourist haunts. Some of these I have already seen and many I have not. Time to change that..thanks to this book that points out some of the coolest odd places on Earth.

Nathan Albright says

It's not surprising that I am attracted to atlases of odd and unusual places [1]. I always considered it axiomatic that odd people would be interested in odd places. Moreover, we live in a world where it is assumed that exploration and satellite mapping and technology have made the world an entirely understood places where there is no weirdness left. On the contrary, technologies have often revealed that the world is more weird than we previously thought. There are still mysterious cities that we know existed--like the ancient Mittani capital--that still are unknown, and this book does a good job of revealing to the reader the way that the world still retains a strong sense of weirdness in ways that are not always easily understood. There are many ways that the world can be more strange, and quite a few of them are shown here--whether we are looking at cities where creation has overwhelmed human design, or places where human beings have done very strange things that deserve to be remembered, and also places that have a certain je ne sais quoi to them that draws attention.

There are 51 locations talked about in this book of a bit more than 200 pages, all of them with maps and photos and supporting text, divided into six sections. The first section contains a few cities that serve as "dream creations," including utopian cities, quirky experiments in squatting, and the home that Hearst built for himself, as well as an area reclaimed from the sea by the Dutch and made into their fourteenth state. The

next section talks about some deserted destinations including Cuba's former model panopticon penitentiary, a deserted mining island off the coast of Japan, an abandoned English fort, a lost city in Mexico abandoned after a volcanic eruption, and a drained port in the Aralkum Desert. Following this comes a look at architectural oddities, including the only place on the list I have yet to see personally, the concrete henge at Maryhill, Washington, along with some odd Euro bridges based off of currency, the controversial Senegal monument to African freedom, and one odd place I want to see a lot, the London Bridge of Lake Havasu, Arizona. After that comes some looks at odd floating worlds, including strange islands and the uninhabited Great Blasket off the coast of Ireland, a few otherworldly places that are strange and terrifying for various reasons, and a few subterranean realms including Cincinnati's abandoned subway system.

There are quite a few ways in which these particular places discussed in the book are improbable. Some of them represent places where mankind has seized land that one would think would belong to creation, such as an entire Dutch state made of polders and filled with towns and farms. Other places are situations where creation, in the form of volcanoes and deserts, has taken over areas that people had once made home. Still others are the result of economic changes that made it impossible to finish what was done, or are the result of decisions made that were later canceled or repurposed. It is remarkable to ponder the ways that our decisions remain as relics and ruins long after the need or want for those places to carry on does, and how transient the glory that we seek for ourselves through our construction. Visiting odd and quirky places is a good way of pondering many complex questions on the way that people are both powerful and weak when it comes to dealing with the ways of God's creation and in imitating His example.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2013...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

Cody says

Content was interesting but the photography was abysmal.

Tracey Allen at Carpe Librum says

The *Atlas of Improbable Places - A Journey to the World's Most Unusual Corners* by Travis Elborough is a stunning hardcover book with maps from Alan Horsfield.

This collection of deserted islands, subterranean secrets and bizarre and strange locations around the world is broken down into categories, including: Deserted Destinations, Architectural Oddities, Floating Worlds, Otherworldly Spaces (my favourite) among others.

The lack of colour photographs often had me seeking more information online, however some of the highlights of the book for me included the following places:

- Slab City in California, USA (squatter metropolis)

- Battleship Island, Japan (deserted mining settlement)
- Oradour-sur-Glane, France (village abandoned since WWII)
- Wittenoom, Western Australia (asbestos town)
- The Kingdom of Redonda, Caribbean (uninhabited island)
- Poveglia Island, Italy (former plague quarantine island)
- Aokigahara, Japan (the demon forest)

With such a stunning cover and dust jacket (complete with gold foiling), not to mention the beautiful cartography and endpapers, I'm at a complete loss as to why the photos are black and white. Colour photographs would have enhanced this Atlas ten-fold and their absence is the only reason I'm giving a rating of 4 stars instead of 5 stars.

Atlas of Improbable Places is recommended for readers curious about the world around them and the strange impact humans have on their environment. Also recommended for those who enjoy travel, geography and history. Great coffee table book too.

* Copy courtesy of Murdoch Books *

Chesterfield Books says

Received this book as a gift because I love to travel. Kept me entertained for a few hours. If you like history and odd, unusual or abandoned public works -- subways, penitentiaries, tunnels -- this book is a great way to waste away a rainy afternoon. Includes brief histories and black and white photos of the sites surveyed.

Gwen says

This was a beautifully crafted book: thick paper, elegant (if rather pointless--why the focus on "urban areas" without the context?) maps, sometimes stunning photography (although why the black and white? and why just 1 or 2 per location?) and a wonderful layout.

However, the content of the book was lacking. The places/events had very little context, and if you didn't already know something about the topic, the entries were confusing. The maps, while nicely done, didn't really place each location in context with the surroundings. The US/Canadian maps didn't have states/provinces labeled, so any location marker felt devoid of meaning. Each entry needed more photographs, preferably in color.

Mostly, I'd just stick to *Atlas Obscura: An Explorer's Guide to the World's Hidden Wonders* for similar ideas.

Interesting locations to research:

- Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India
- Oradour-sur-Glane, Limousin, France
- Wittenoom, Western Australia
- Concrete City, Pennsylvania, USA
- Varosha, Famagusta, Cyprus

- Great Blasket, Blasket Islands, Ireland
 - Holland Island, Maryland, USA
 - Ross Island, Andaman Archipelago, India
 - Hirta, St. Kilda, Scotland
 - Underground Postal Railway, London, UK
 - Moose Jaw tunnels, Saskatchewan, Canada
 - Cincinnati subway, Ohio, USA
-

Ashley says

Best for: People who enjoy books on world curiosities that don't focus on making fun of or judging individuals. People who like books with three-four page chunks that can be read at once.

In a nutshell: The authors provide quick backgrounds on 51 places spread (very inequitably) across six continents, divided into categories of Dream Creations, Deserted Destinations, Architectural Oddities, Floating Worlds, Otherworldly Spaces, and Subterranean Realms.

Worth quoting:

N/A

Why I chose it: I'm always looking for places to add to my list of things I want to see in person. Plus, I like to learn about ostensibly weird shit.

Review:

When I was a teenager, my family took a trip to the Pacific Northwest, and went on the Underground Tour in Seattle. For those not familiar, part of the city closest to the water was raised at least a full story after a fire destroyed a bunch of buildings [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seattle...>], putting shops and residences that were once at street-level down a dozen feet. The tour takes people through reconstructed older facades, and points out that the purple glass we walk over at street level was a way to allow light down to the still-functioning buildings below. I was fascinated.

A decade ago my sister and I visited Berlin and went on a tour of underground bunkers [<https://freetoursbyfoot.com/berliner-...>]. I believe I found this one because, again, I like history but also unexpected and potentially weird things.

Neither of those items are listed in this book, but they aren't that far off. The book includes some fantastical places [Hearst Castle <http://hearstcastle.org/>], some disturbing ones — especially if you don't like dolls — (Isla de las Muñecas <http://www.isladelasmunecas.com/>), some truly bizarre ones (Darvata <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darvaza...>), and some sad ones (Oradur-sur-Glane <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oradour...>). I'd only heard of maybe three of the places discussed in the book, and I want to go visit at least a few of them.

The book was generally good, but I have a couple of complaints keeping it from hitting five stars. The first is the distribution of sites. It felt a bit lazy to have so many concentrated in North America and Europe. There

were also many in Asia, but only one in Africa, two in South America, and two in Oceania (and the one in Africa is mostly a criticism of art, which felt a bit off). The other is if you're going to make a book focused on fascinating places, your pictures NEED TO BE IN FULL COLOR. I know it's way expensive. But black and white photos do not in any way capture the vast majority of these locations. I finally had to just look up each place on my phone as I read a chapter. That seems unnecessary. Even with those two complaints, however, I would still recommend this book.

(I couldn't help but think about the town of Paradise, California [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-c...>], as I read this book. Many, though not all, are abandoned spaces; some are that was as the result of some natural or unnatural disaster. And I wonder: in fifty years, will parts of the now-destroyed city in Northern California be added to this book? Or will they be featured in a different book, one focused on how cities can rebuild?)

Netts says

So-so. Really suffers from the cheapskate decision to print all photographs in black and white.

Shelby says

3 Stars

I am a person that likes to travel every once in a while. After reading this book it gave me a better view of the whole world. I did learn a lot just by reading this book. I was for sure I wasn't going to learn a thing while reading this book, but I actually did. I am really glad that I got a bigger point of view of the world. One thing that I did not like was how long it was. I know they want you get a view of the world, but I think it could be a little bit shorter than what it is. I probably would not read this book again just because it is a book that is good for only one time. I would recommend this book to anyone that likes to travel.

Henrik Warne says

Quite a few interesting places, but the presentation isn't very good. Black and white pictures and maps that are hard to read. Could have been done much better.

Andrea says

This book gives the reader a peek into some of the quirkiest corners of our world, both natural and man-made. Of the latter, I can only think that some people have very big dreams, and others just have too much money!

But on balance I think I was more drawn to the built/created places, possibly because of what they say about the people behind their conception. And generally these were the ones with the fascinating bits of history and/or social commentary to go with them. For example, there's the story of the bridges depicted on the Euro notes. They weren't allowed to be real bridges when the designs were commissioned - rather they were to be

examples of different styles of bridges, based on design elements. But now there is a town in the Netherlands that attracts probably more tourists than it should, because it went ahead and built all the bridges across its canals! Another one that stuck with me was the African Renaissance Monument in Senegal - on the westernmost point of Africa - built by a North Korean company specialising in propaganda paintings, murals and monumental statues. The Senegalese government was (embarrassingly!) unable to pay for the monument, but luckily the North Koreans accepted payment in kind, in the form of land, which they sold for a profit!

The author must have had an absolute ball researching this book.

Figgy says

Review to come.

Schopflin says

This gets four stars although it's actually incredibly frustrating: the articles all stop just as they're getting interesting and the photos don't match up to the gorgeous maps and descriptions. But I'd be lying if I said I wasn't enthralled.

Shannan says

This is a very easy book to read and enjoy. I'd like to have Google Earth open if I was to read this again. I've come across a few of these places in other works before, Coma for example I discovered in a 'This American life podcast' but there are so many others I'd never heard of. I'd start a travel plan or an extended read based on the cool places in this one book.

Jim Angstadt says

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Fun and shallow, this is a list of weird, amusing, historical, and unusual places.

Don't sit in a comfortable chair to read this; be at a computer with a large screen. Use Google maps and photos to get another viewpoint on these places.

Some of these sites have a history that tells us a little about ourselves and the world we live in. But that's a byproduct. Just enjoy the unusual.

