

 My top 5 favourite cities: Bangkok at sunset

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OK, so I'm a real city boy, and there's nothing I like more than sitting at street-side caf   watching the hustle and bustle.

All cities have their own colours, their own way of moving, and their own feel, but what makes a city a truly global place, a top traveller's destination? The answer to that question can only be a personal one, so in a break from the norm here, in no particular order, are my top five world cities:

### **Moscow, Russia**

I always cite Moscow as the most interesting place I have ever visited - to questioning looks from recent visitors to the Russian capital.

I understand that Moscow has gone through somewhat of a transformation in the eight or so years since I visited, but my memories of the crumbling soviet monuments, tank guarded street corners, bustling market places and enthusiastic nightlife still remain.

The Moscow Underground system is by far the most impressive and depressing in the world. Built in the Soviet era, and adorned with renaissance artwork, indulgent chandeliers and marble floors, the stations speak out as some sort of grand palace. All very opulent until you stop and realise the implications of such excessive luxury when compared to the desperation and famine

experience by the average Russian under Soviet rule.

Moscow's Red Square is the city's breathtaking centerpiece, headed by the quirky and beautifully ornate St Basil's Cathedral. The Kremlin complex with its gated entrance and cannons, and numerous memorials, is another must-see, and history enthusiasts are best advised to take a guidebook or arrange a tour.

## **Bangkok, Thailand**

Absolutely the busiest place I have ever been - but one of the most exciting.

Bangkok is must-visit stopover destination for anyone holidaying in Thailand's idyllic islands. So many visitors hop on their connecting domestic flights without even a glimpse outside the airports doors.

Hot, sweaty, noisy, grimy and chaotic, Bangkok is an experience. Temples, statues and floating markets. Street-vendors selling deep fried locusts, cold Singha beer and crispy scorpions â€” all I can say is Bangkok is an experience.

Perhaps not a place to spend too much time, Bangkok can get a bit overwhelming after more than three or four days, but it's something you just have to see.

## **Melbourne, Australia**

Often overshadowed by Sydney, for me Melbourne is Australia's real city. Cool, urban and understated, Melbourne blends real cultural credentials and bohemian street culture with fantastic results.

On the whole the city's main streets resemble most other western cities, but turn off the strip and down a back alley and you realise where Melbourne's real pulse is.

Chic urban clothes shops, thrift stores, funky independent cafes, record stores and graffiti covered walls - Melbourne comes alive behind its day-to-day façade.

The city's beach district, St Kilda, is great for restaurants and bars, and the area around the iconic Flinders Street station is full of great things to see and cut price hostels.

In summary - Sydney is great for the postcard sights and photographs, but Melbourne is best for the memories and adventure.

### **Edinburgh, Scotland**

Majestic, beautiful, historic and lively - Edinburgh is small but perfectly formed, and in my opinion the UK's best city.

Aesthetics and architecture, history and heritage, shopping and socialising, culture and that all-important cosmopolitan vibe are just some of the important factors when deciding on a city break; and Edinburgh has them all.

Strolling down the cobbled streets (or should I say up as everywhere you go in Edinburgh seems to be uphill) towards Princes Street and the imposing castle perched up on Castle Rock, Edinburgh oozes culture at every turn.

A day visit during the festival fringe is a good place to start - but this is also the time of year when the city gets swamped by foreign tourists and it can at times lose its sophisticated charm.

## **Barcelona, Spain**

Barcelona is a city which takes a couple of visits - first off you'll rush around trying to climb the Sagrada Familia, visiting Casa Mila, La Rambla, and so on.

Next time you visit the city's charm will really hit you, and while another trip to Gaudi's famous cathedral will probably ensue, as will countless beers along the bustling La Rambla, you'll be able to soak up a bit of the atmosphere.

Visit the huge open market just off La Rambla to grab some local wine, bread and cheese, then head north-west up to Parc Guell for a picnic. Some of my favourite lazy days have been spent amongst the abstract art, ramshackle caves and winding paths of Parc Guell, all with views of the whole city looking out towards the Mediterranean.

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