

ASIANGeographic NO. 164

THE YELLOW EDITION

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NO. 164



All That Glitter's IS Gold

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{ EDITOR'S NOTE }



Sirachai Arunrugstichai



If you've crossed paths with the Sinosphere on any level, you've probably noticed that it's currently the Year of the Dragon (*longnian* 龍年). And if you were *really* paying attention, you would have spotted that it's technically the Year of the *Wood* Dragon, since wood (*mu* 木) was the basic element that came around as we rang in the Lunar New Year in 2024.

What you may not know is that you should not be getting a new puppy this year, you should avoid having your bed in the northwest corner of your bedroom, and you should definitely not marry anyone born in the Year of the Tiger – if tranquillity and harmony is what you seek in your marriage. More importantly, though, since gold and yellow are the auspicious colours associated with the wood dragon in Chinese astrology, you might want to make regular use of that mustard-coloured jacket from the back of the wardrobe and maybe even treat yourself to some nice new 24-carat jewellery!

All of which brings us to this very special *Yellow Edition* of *ASIAN Geographic*, which is positively gleaming with gold-hued and yellow-tinged stories. In “All That Glitters Is Gold”, on page 20, discover the significance of the precious yellow metal not just in the Sinic world but across Asia. Travel with us along “The Mighty Yellow” (page 72) and explore what makes China's second-largest river so unique. And in “Yellow in Peril” (page 62), learn why yellow seahorses (along with dozens of other *Hippocampus* species) are dying in terrifying numbers – and no, traditional Chinese medicine is not the real culprit.

Ian Bongso-Seldrup

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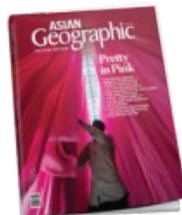
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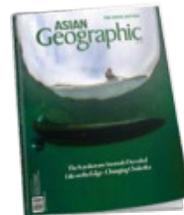
THE PINK EDITION AG No. 160

Beginning our unique series of colour-themed issues, *The Pink Edition* looks at the sides of Asia with a pinkish hue, from the rose-tinted alleyways of Jaipur, India's storied "Pink City", to the coral-coloured beaches of the Philippines. We celebrate the "pink power" of Asian women with a look at 20 amazing female icons, trailblazers, and deities; how the world's largest pink diamond, unearthed in India, was passed from one obsessive Iranian ruler to the next; and where to find pink cherry blossoms if you don't live in Japan. This is Asia through truly "rose-tinted glasses"!



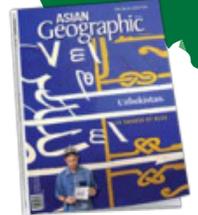
EXPEDITIONS EDITION AGP No. 161

As *ASIAN Geographic* commemorates its silver anniversary in 2024, we're inviting you to head out with us on expedition to some of the most fascinating parts of Asia-Pacific. In this special issue of *Passport*, we tell you everything you need to know about where we're going and the cultural and historical experiences you can expect on these one-of-a-kind trips. Start planning your adventure with *ASIAN Geographic Expeditions* in 2024!



THE GREEN EDITION AG No. 162

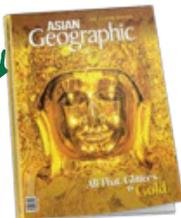
We consider how much progress we've made towards the "green" Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how Asia is playing a leading role in developing models of sustainability and building green technologies. We take an in-depth look at the northern Russian Far East and Pakistan's Karakoram mountains and find out how a warming world is changing the way of life for people at Asia's most extreme fringes. Also in *The Green Edition*, we consider the world's fastest-growing religion, Islam, bringing the symbolism of green in Muslim culture to the fore.



THE BLUE EDITION AG No. 163

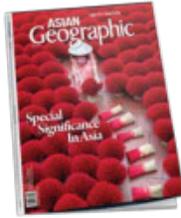
In *The Blue Edition*, we consider just some of our "blue" planet's most important marine ecosystems, zeroing in on the threats they face, through a stunning infographics section. We look at the special days throughout the year that we celebrate our ocean planet and the aquatic animals that inhabit it, and how we are raising awareness about the need to protect our waterways. And we travel to two locations where blue is best—the beautiful underwater world of the Philippines and the spectacular historic land of Uzbekistan.

Asian Geographic Images of Asia
The winning images and shortlisted entries



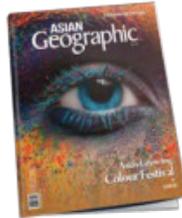
THE YELLOW EDITION
AG No. 164

Continuing our colour-themed issues, *The Yellow Edition* celebrates Asia's golden shades with their associations to the world's greatest kingdoms, sultanates and emirates, and their great wealth, both material and spiritual. At the same time, we look at how gold is valued across Asia today and how many of the region's greatest monuments are clad in gold.



THE RED EDITION
AG No. 165

With its symbolism of luck, happiness, fertility, energy and wealth in Chinese culture, red has a special significance in Asia. Marking the importance of the colour across the region, *The Red Edition* not only looks at its cultural and religious power, but also at its strong associations with politics, authoritarianism, and conflict, and the consequences for Asia's oppressed minority groups.



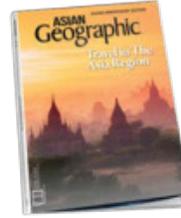
THE RAINBOW EDITION
AG No. 166

Asia's growing LGBTQ scene is ready for a party, with rainbow-coloured marches, drag shows, live cabaret, comedy performances, and more taking place all over the region. In *The Rainbow Edition*, we join in the celebrations, taking a critical look at how LGBTQ communities are being embraced, tolerated, and marginalised across Asia.



SILVER ANNIVERSARY EDITION
AG No. 167

In September 1999, *ASIAN Geographic*, an exciting new magazine dedicated to Asia hit newsstands, and a quarter of a century later, we're still going strong, uncovering the region's most captivating cultures, landscapes, and wildlife. Our celebration of that milestone achievement, this collectible *Silver Anniversary Edition* looks back at those amazing 25 years, examines how Asia has changed, and considers the challenges our region faces in the future.



KALEIDOSCOPIC ADVENTURES
AGP No. 168

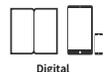
Paint the town red with us as we embark on *Kaleidoscopic Adventures* across the continent to discover the vibrant hues that define travel in the region. Whether it's the orange-tinged temples of Bagan in Myanmar, the earthy tones of the Chocolate Hills in the Philippines, or the verdant tea plantations of Sri Lanka's high country, we're revelling in all of Asia's colours!



THE BLACK AND WHITE EDITION
AG No. 169

Steeped in cultural and religious practices that have been kept alive for centuries, Asia is among the most historically rich continents on Earth. In *The Black and White Edition*, a special issue that embraces the monochrome and sepia shades of history, we travel the region in search of forgotten customs, age-old culinary traditions, and ancient architecture.

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Asia's Golden Treasures

- ◆◆◆ Whether it represents royalty, symbolises purity and enlightenment, or signifies personal wealth, gold is the only colour that matters for Asia's greatest stupas, statues, temples, and bazaars.

KYAIKTIYO PAGODA, MON STATE, MYANMAR

Pagodas painted in gold are an Asian speciality, but the pagoda at Myanmar's Golden Rock Temple isn't the main attraction. That honour belongs to the gigantic granite boulder on which the Kyaiktiyo Pagoda is perched that sits precariously at the edge of a cliff commanding spectacular views of the Eastern Yoma mountains of Mon State. About 7.5 metres tall and with a circumference of around 15 metres, the Golden Rock, as it's popularly called, is covered in gold leaf that's been pasted on by devotees. Legend has it that a strand of the Buddha's hair keeps the gravity-defying Golden Rock from tumbling down the mountain





**GOLDEN TEMPLE,
AMRITSAR, PUNJAB, INDIA**

For Sikhs, the holiest place of worship, or *gurdwara*, is the Sri Harmandir Sahib in the northern city of Amritsar, in India's state of Punjab. The magnificent temple was built from marble and copper in 1809, while the sanctum was overlaid with gold leaf in 1830. The site actually dates back to the 16th century, but the original temple was repeatedly destroyed by the Mughal and Afghan armies. Around it is a sacred pool for worshippers to bathe, which Sikhs believe purifies one's karma

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PHA THAT LUANG, VIENTIANE, LAOS

A highlight of the Laotian capital's skyline, Pha That Luang, or the Great Stupa, is one of the most important Buddhist monuments in Southeast Asia. The original pagoda, which dates back to 16th century, was heavily damaged and looted by Siamese invaders in the early 19th century, with the French rebuilding it in the 1930s and restoring its covering of gold leaf. The Pha That Luang complex includes various golden structures, including a giant reclining Buddha statue

DID YOU KNOW?

Pha That Luang is the scene of Vientiane's most important Theravada Buddhist festival. During the three-day Boun That Luang, held during the full moon of the 12th lunar month, thousands of devotees flock to Pha That Luang to pay respect to the golden stupa and make offerings to the monks.







GOLD SOUK, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Gold jewellery has always been an essential part of Arab culture, and there's no better place to find something precious and shiny than the famed Gold Souk in Dubai's commercial business district in Deira. From rings to necklaces, belts to headpieces, absolutely anything you can think of – made of gold, of course – is on offer at this sprawling market of around 400 retailers. Prices change daily and are displayed for the various karat levels, with items being weighed to find the correct price for the day

DID YOU KNOW?

The Gold Souk was once host to the Najmat Taiba, or Star of Taiba, the largest gold ring recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records. Studded with more than five kilograms of diamonds and other precious stones, the 21-carat behemoth weighs 64 kilograms and has been valued at about three million US dollars.

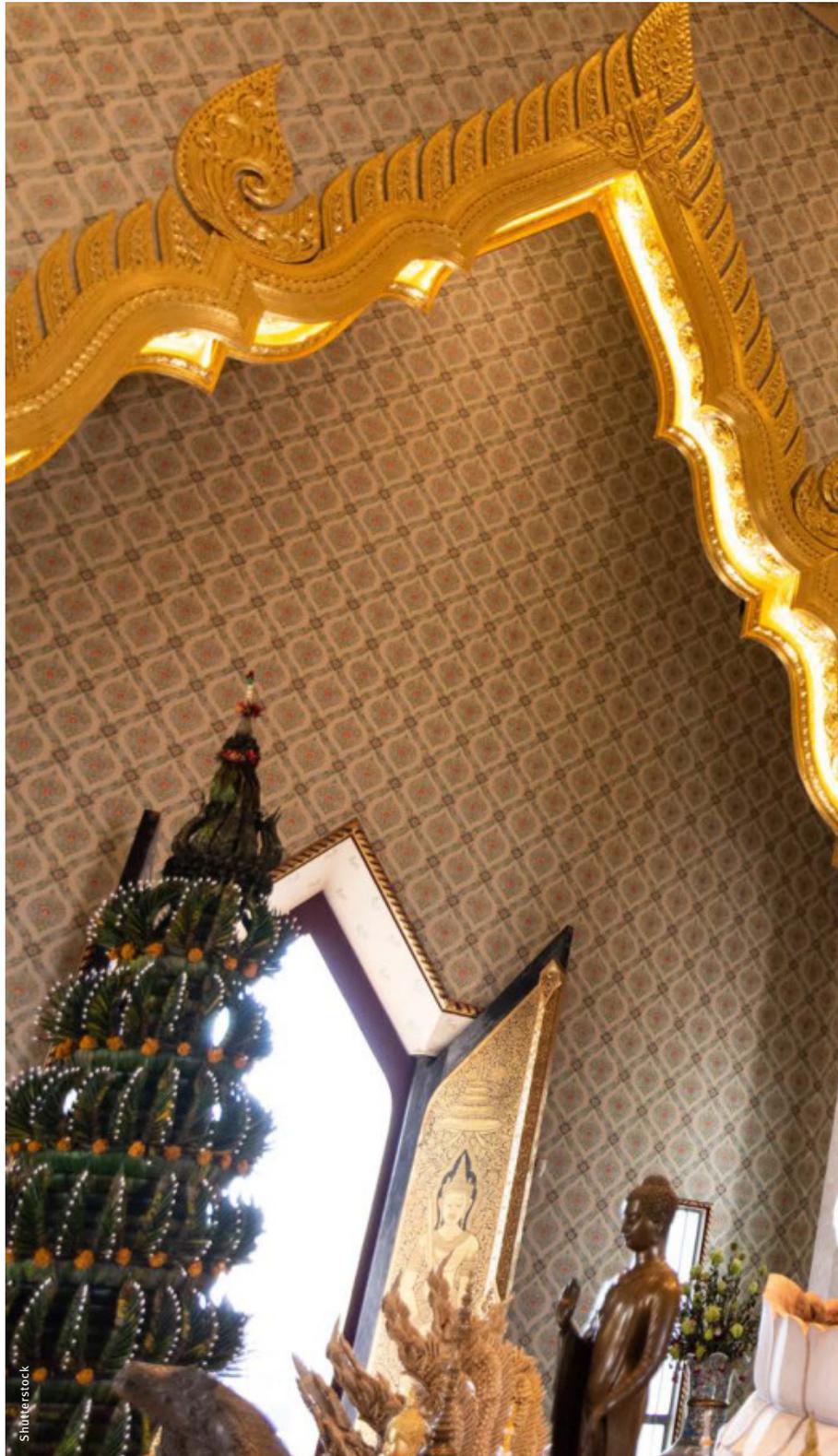


GOLDEN BUDDHA, BANGKOK, THAILAND

When it comes to golden Buddha statues, Phra Sukhothai Traimit, as it's commonly known in Thai, has no parallel: This 5.5-tonne Buddha, housed in Bangkok's Wat Traimit, is made of solid gold. Astonishingly, the statue spent around two centuries covered in a layer of stucco, an apparent effort to conceal its true value and prevent it from being stolen by 18th-century Burmese invaders. It was only in 1955, when some of the plaster coating chipped off during a move to a new location, that the gold statue within was revealed

DID YOU KNOW?

The body of the Golden Buddha is 40 percent pure gold, the portion from the chin to the forehead is 80 percent pure, and the hair and the topknot are 99 percent pure. With the price of gold currently around USD2,000 per ounce, the gold in the statue is worth a staggering 350 million US dollars.









DOME OF THE ROCK, EAST JERUSALEM, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

The world's most well-known golden dome is the shrine at the centre of the Al-Aqsa mosque compound on the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. The world's oldest surviving work of Islamic architecture, it was built in the late 7th century CE by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. The building has undergone various modifications and improvements, notably during the Jordanian government's substantial restoration programme from 1959 to 1962, when the dome's lead covering was replaced by aluminium-bronze plates adorned with gold leaf

SHWEDAGON PAGODA, YANGON, MYANMAR

Also known as the Great Dagon Pagoda and the Golden Pagoda, the Shwedagon Pagoda is the most sacred Buddhist pagoda in Myanmar. It is believed to contain relics of the four previous Buddhas of the present *kalpa* (æon): the staff of Kakusandha, the water filter of Konagamana, a piece of the robe of Kassapa, and eight strands of hair from the head of Gautama. The stupa's plinth is made of bricks covered with plates made of real gold, while the crown umbrella is studded with thousands of diamonds and rubies





All That Glitters Is Gold





◆ ◆ ◆ From Turkey to China, the yellow metal plays a central role in cultural practices and is coveted as a symbol of affluence and status

Gold jewellery for sale at the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul, Turkey: The jewellery sector is the largest source of annual demand for gold, accounting for around half of total gold demand globally



A hundred years ago, the price of an ounce of gold – about 30 grams, that is – was around USD20, and for the preceding 200 years, that price had barely changed. By 1970, it had increased slightly, to about USD35, but since then the price has undergone a dramatic rise. Today, the price of an ounce of gold is more than USD2,300, not far off its highest price ever, which occurred in May 2024. Among other factors, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the war in Gaza have significantly impacted gold prices.





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In modern times, gold's highest prices have tended to correlate with periods of economic uncertainty, high inflation, and conflict. The largest ever spike in the price of gold occurred in 1980, when the inflation-adjusted price peaked at USD2,645, as high inflation due to strong oil prices and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan prompted investors to move into the metal. Gold has been seen as a haven asset during geopolitical tension and market downturns.

▶ Plastic ornamental containers that look like gold ingots are popular during festive occasions, but real gold is also serious business in China

▶ In Hinduism, gold signifies purity and prosperity, and gold jewellery has been an intrinsic part of India's history for thousands of years

Gold is considered to be auspicious, especially in Hindu and Jain cultures.

Across Asia, gold hasn't just been held up as a reliable store of value, but it has also long been a symbol of wealth and status, as well as a fundamental part of everyday life. In India, for instance, while growing affluence is driving growth in demand, gold plays a central role in the country's culture as an important aspect of many rituals. Gold is considered to be auspicious, especially in Hindu and Jain cultures. Manu, the legendary first man and author of the *Manu-smriti*, traditionally the most authoritative of the books of the Hindu code, decreed that gold ornaments should be worn for important ceremonies and occasions.

Another important example is China, the world's largest single market for gold, where the steadily expanding middle class understands that buying gold demonstrates sound financial foresight. At the same time, gold has been present in Chinese culture since the introduction of Buddhism by travelling monks from India and

Central Asia during the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE), its adherents building golden pagodas and statues of the Buddha, and making gold offerings. Today, with its promise of good fortune, gold in the form of ornate jewellery is purchased during Chinese New Year or gifted to younger family members for special occasions.

The massive golden statue of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra atop Mount Emei, one of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains of China: Gold is a symbol of enlightenment and happiness in Buddhism, and temples and statues are often painted gold or covered in gold leaf



ANCIENT BEGINNINGS IN ASIA

The first recorded use of gold, jewellery for personal adornment and items used in religious or funerary practices, is in the fifth millennium BCE. Probably the oldest gold artefacts, dating from 4,600 to 4,200 BCE, are from Bulgaria, discovered at a burial site called the Varna Necropolis near the Black Sea coast. In Ancient Egypt, the first gold objects most likely appeared at the end of the fifth millennium BCE, while gold artefacts were uncovered in the archaeology of Lower Mesopotamia, present-day southern Iraq, during the early fourth millennium BCE.

In the Levant – the historical region corresponding to modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and certain adjacent areas – the earliest gold artefacts, also dating to the fourth millennium BCE, were discovered at the Wadi Qana cave cemetery in the West Bank, Palestine. Gold artefacts such as necklaces, rings, pendants, amulets and figurines have been excavated from the sites of the Indus Valley civilisation (3300 to 1300 BCE), in modern-day Pakistan and northwestern India.

▼ Oldest gold? Treasures of the Varna Necropolis from the Varna Archaeological Museum in Bulgaria





While the rare yellow metal soon became the principal symbol of prestige and excellence for the elite in most ancient cultures, this was not the case in ancient China, where jade had been awarded pride of place for amulets and ornaments in the Late Neolithic (circa 7000 to 5000 BCE), long before the development of metalworking. By the Shang period (circa 1600 to 1046 BCE), the earliest dynasty of traditional Chinese history firmly supported by archaeological evidence, it was cast bronze that had become the metal of choice for ceremonial vessels and other prestigious items. This was a practical consideration, given the vast numbers of vessels required to satisfy early dynastic China's ritual needs. Gold, which was readily obtainable but only in small amounts, could never have fulfilled these needs, instead being used decoratively to enrich artefacts made of other materials.

One of the first civilisations to mine and use gold extensively was ancient Egypt, with historical gold artefacts discovered throughout the centuries suggesting that the Egyptians first began mining gold during the First Dynasty of Egypt, around 3100 BCE. Gold mining in Egypt involved both surface mining such as panning for gold in riverbeds as well as underground mining, where tunnels were dug to extract gold-bearing quartz veins. The first gold mines were established in Nubia, an ancient region in northeastern Africa along the Nile River; the name "Nubia" is rooted in the word "nub", the Egyptian word for "gold". An ancient Egyptian map known as the Turin Papyrus, which was drawn around 1150 BCE and is considered the oldest surviving map of topographical interest from the ancient world, shows the plan of a Nubian gold mine.

▼ Fragments of the Turin Papyrus, an ancient Egyptian mining map for Ramesses IV's quarrying expedition, 12th century BCE



▼ The 3,300-year-old funerary mask of the 18th-dynasty ancient Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun (r. 1334–1325 BCE) is made from 11 kilograms of polished hammered gold



Around 1500 BCE, Egypt began using gold as a currency, though these early coins, shekels, were minted from electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver.

As in other ancient civilisations, in Egypt, the primary use for gold for thousands of years was in jewellery and religious items. Then, around 1500 BCE, Egypt began using gold as a currency, though these early coins, shekels, were minted from electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver. In the Middle East, the shekel became a standard unit of measure, with a coin originally weighing around 11 grams. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the first known pure gold coins were minted in Lydia, an Iron Age kingdom situated in Asia Minor, in present-day Turkey. Lydian king Croesus (561–546 BCE) is credited with issuing the first true gold coins with a standardised purity for general circulation.

In ancient China, by contrast, coins were not commonly made from precious metals like gold and silver; instead, Chinese coins were typically cast from mixtures of metals such as copper, tin and lead. An exception was the crude gold coinage issued by the ancient state of Chu during the Warring States period (circa 475 to 221 BCE), such as the “Ying Yuan”, “Lu Jin”, and “Chen Yuan”. These stamped blocks of gold, which were inscribed with one or two Chinese characters, have been unearthed in various locations south of the Yellow River.

▼ A gold Croeseid, minted by King Croesus circa 561–546 BCE: The obverse features the facing foreparts of a lion and a bull, while the reverse has two incuse squares



▶ Gold sheets of coins issued by the state of Chu, one inscribed with the characters “Ying Yuan” (郢爰, above), the other with the inscription “Lu Jin” (卢金)



Images on this page:: Wikipedia



The Southeast Asian region was known to the Indian merchants of the first millennium BCE as “Land of Gold” (*Suvarnabhumi*), which is thought to refer to the mainland, including lower Burma and the Thai Malay Peninsula, and “Islands of Gold” (*Suvarnadvipa*), probably corresponding to the Indonesian Archipelago. Historical sources suggest that the Chinese were also impressed by the quantities of gold present. As such, Southeast Asian gold deposits were

possibly one of the factors stimulating early contacts with India and China, and it is quite plausible that the techniques of gold extraction and working were introduced to Southeast Asia via Indian and/or Chinese merchants seeking gold ores. It also seems plausible that the conquest of the Upper Thai-Malay Peninsula by the Indianised Kingdom of Funan (68–550 CE) may have been stimulated by a desire to control the area’s mineral resources.



Anna T.N. Bennett



Wikipedia

With the trade routes of the famed Silk Road beginning to develop from the second century BCE, gold began to travel eastwards as silk, tea, perfumes and porcelain made their way to Rome, Egypt, and Greece. At the same time, the network engendered an unprecedented exchange of ideas, scientific discoveries, and religions – particularly Buddhism – many of which were merged, assimilated and reshaped

by the societies that encountered them. Coins containing precious metals like gold played a vital role, as currency exchange was facilitated by the inherent value of coins, according to weight. Two major currencies used along the Silk Road, especially in trade with Central Asia and China, were the silver drachm of the neo-Persian Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE) and the gold solidus of the Byzantine Empire (330–1453 CE).



Wikipedia

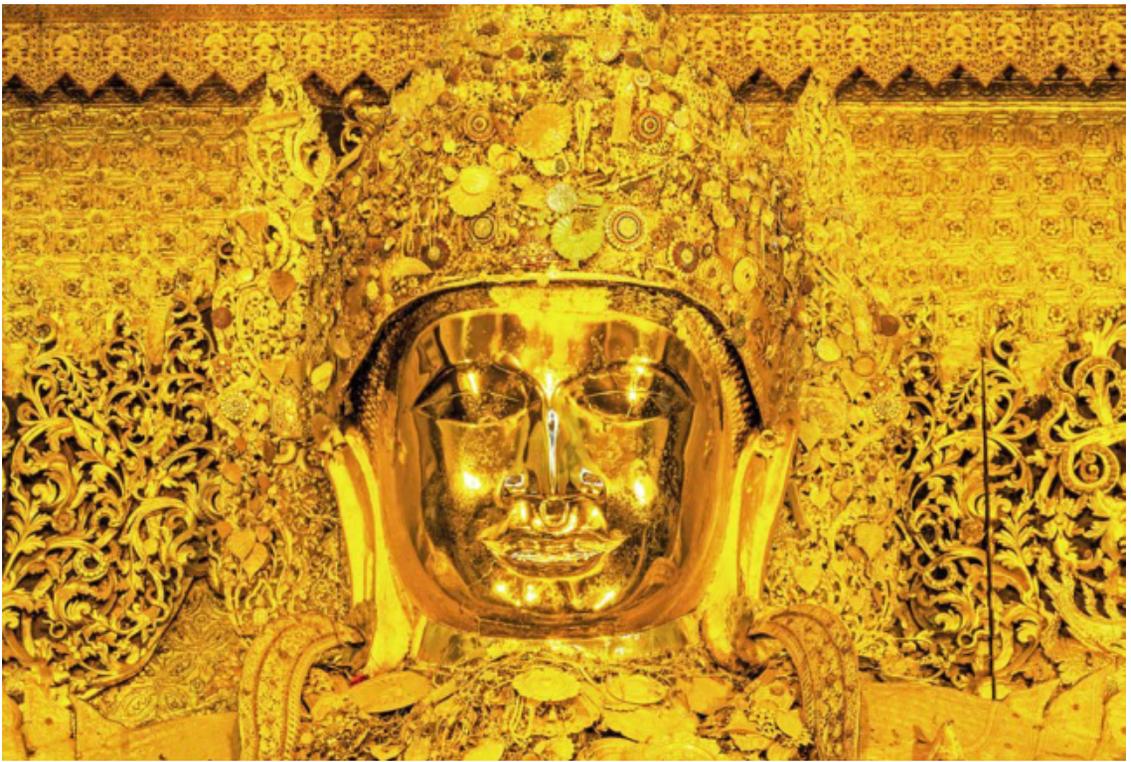
Coins containing precious metals like gold played a vital role, as currency exchange was facilitated by the inherent value of coins, according to weight.

▲ Gold solidus of Theodosius II, minted in Constantinople circa 435 CE

◀ ▲ A polyhedral gold bead from Khao Sam Kaeo (400–100 BCE) in eastern peninsular Thailand, one of the earliest archaeological sites yielding gold finds in maritime Southeast Asia

◀ Gold dinars were introduced by Ardashir I (180–242 CE), founder of the Persian Sasanian Empire, though the main denomination of the Sasanians, also introduced by Ardashir I, was the silver drachm

Interestingly, coins inspired by well-known imperial coins such as those from the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires have been encountered in many areas along the Silk Road. These weren't counterfeit coins, since they were made from valuable metals; they just had an inherent value for bartering as opposed to a value guaranteed by any imperial authority. The Sogdians, an Iranian people hailing from present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan who were among the most prominent Silk Road traders, used genuine imperial coins as well as coins that looked very similar to Sassanian and Chinese coins. Archaeologists have even found coins that look like a hybrid between Sassanian and Chinese money.



SPIRITUAL GOLD

Visit any Buddhist country in Asia – Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka – and gold is everywhere. Whether it's gold paint, fine gold leaf or solid gold, the gleaming colour adorns everything from temples to stupas to statues to figurines. For Buddhists, gold symbolises the sun or fire. As a pure and revered energy source, the sun is regularly recognised in Buddhism, and gold is the perfect embodiment of spiritual purity. In Buddhism, mixing gold with other elements is considered inauspicious, as it dilutes the natural brilliance of the gold. Thus, the gold used in Buddhist art is always pure.

The Shwedagon Pagoda, also known as the Golden Pagoda, in Yangon, Myanmar, is one of the most impressive examples of Buddhist architecture. While the first mention of the pagoda in the royal chronicles of Myanmar dates only to around 1363 CE, it is commonly believed that the pagoda was constructed more than 2,500 years ago – during the lifetime of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, in the fifth or sixth century BCE. Genuine gold plates cover the pagoda's plinth and the stupa, donated over the centuries by successive monarchs as well as common people.

▲ The 6.5-tonne Buddha statue at the Mahamuni Buddha Temple southwest of Mandalay, Myanmar, is cast in bronze and covered in gold leaves, regularly applied by male devotees

▼ Found on the banks of the Wawa River, Agusan del Sur, Mindanao, in the Philippines, the Agusan Image is an 18-centimetre, two-kilogram, 21-carat gold statuette locally believed to represent the female Buddha Tara



Wikipedia



People pray at the gilded Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, the most sacred Buddhist pagoda in Myanmar

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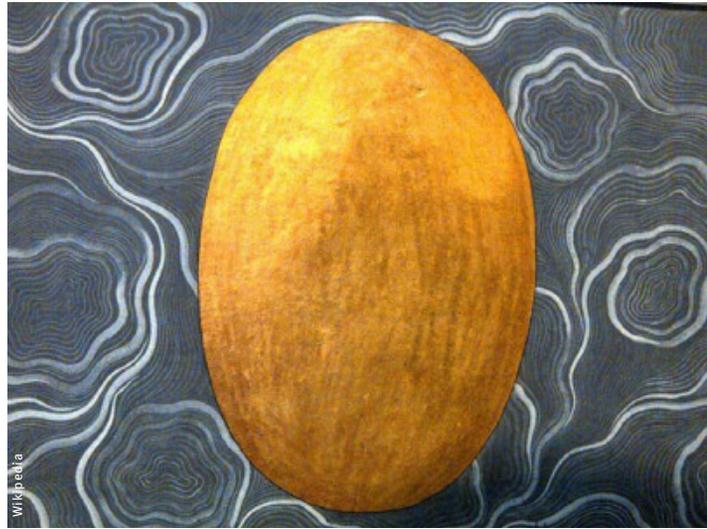
The world's biggest golden Buddha statue at Wat Muang in Ang Thong, Thailand, is painted gold and made of concrete

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In Hindu mythology, gold is associated with various deities and plays a significant role in religious ceremonies. Hindus believe that offering gold to the gods and goddesses brings good luck and prosperity. Vedic belief has it that Lord Brahma – “The Creator” within the Trimurti, the trinity of supreme divinity that includes Vishnu (“The Preserver”) and Shiva (“The Destroyer”) – was born from gold. According to one version of the creation legend, Brahma created himself in a golden embryo – also described as a “golden womb” or a “golden egg” – known as the Hiranyagarbha.

As you’d expect, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity, Lakshmi, is also closely associated with gold. She is often depicted draped in a bright red and gold saree holding an overflowing pot of gold, sat on a fully bloomed lotus and flanked by a couple of white elephants. The main religious festival dedicated to Lakshmi is Diwali, which many Hindus celebrate by buying jewellery, either an ornament or a gold coin or bar. Buying gold,



particularly gold bars or coins depicting Lakshmi, is perceived as an auspicious beginning to a blessed and plentiful year.

▲ A painting of Hiranyagarbha, the golden cosmic egg, watercolour and gold on paper, circa 1740, by Indian artist Manaku; from the Bharat Kala Bhavan museum in Varanasi, India

▼ Statues of Lakshmi, Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity, for sale during Diwali celebrations in India



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To understand the role of gold in Islam, one must begin by drawing from the *hadiths*, the record of the words and actions of the prophet Muhammad or his companions, which Muslims regard as a source for religious law and moral guidance. Referring to Muslim places of worship and the Islamic sacred book, believed to be the direct word of God, Muhammad is reported to have said, “If you decorate your mosques and embellish your Qur’anic manuscripts, ruin will be upon you.” As a result, the earliest surviving Qur’ans penned around the mid-seventh century CE, following Muhammad’s demise, are very austere artefacts.

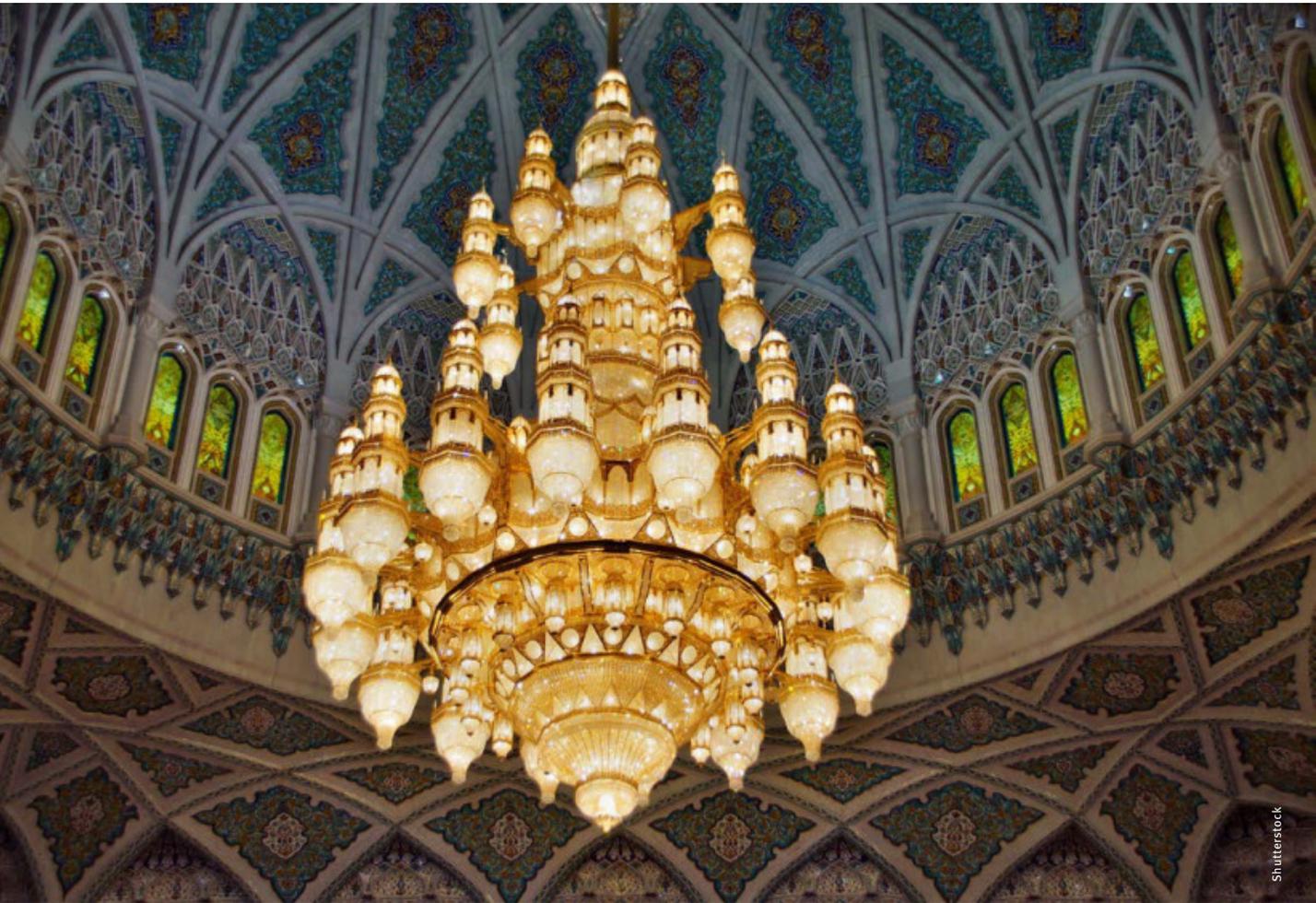
This all changed after the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE). During the reign of the fifth and sixth Umayyad caliphs, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705 CE) and his son al-Walid I (r. 705–715), gold made its first appearance in Qur’anic manuscripts. At the same, elite Umayyad patrons sponsored the production of lavish Qur’ans, decorated with patterns or illumination in gold, for

the congregational mosques of the growing Umayyad Empire’s main cities. These impressive manuscripts were intended to serve as symbols of the rulers’ piety and their supreme authority in doctrinal matters. Presumably, the introduction of gold in the decoration of Qur’ans was also an effort to rival the sophistication of contemporary Christian Bibles.

During the reign of the fifth and sixth Umayyad caliphs, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705 CE) and his son al-Walid I (r. 705–715), gold made its first appearance in Qur’anic manuscripts.

Originally built by seventh-century Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem looks resplendent with its modern gold-covered dome





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Abd al-Malik radically reformed coinage, replacing figural imagery with the *shahada*, the Muslim profession of the faith, on gold dinars, for example. He also built one of the world's most exceptional buildings, the Dome of the Rock, on the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount) in Jerusalem, employing gold and blue mosaics, inscriptions, and innovative architecture. It's worth mentioning that the caliph was not responsible for the structure's famous golden dome. In the early 1960s, the dome's original blackened lead was replaced by aluminium-bronze plates covered with gold leaf, and in the 1990s, the dome was renewed using 80 kilograms of gold donated by King Hussein of Jordan, who sold one of his houses in London to fund the project.

Were he alive today, Prophet Muhammad would presumably have disapproved of the Dome of the Rock's contemporary gold decoration as well as any number of prominent holy buildings in the Muslim world: Brunei's Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, with its gold-leaf covered dome; Oman's Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, with its 14-metre-tall gold-plated chandelier featuring 600,000 Swarovski crystals; or the United Arab Emirates' Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, with its copious use of marble, gold, crystals, and semi-precious stones – and USD545 million price tag.

▲ The impressive gold-plated chandelier in the prayer hall of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat, Oman

FUNCTIONAL GOLD

In Asia, gold isn't just deeply embedded in the cultural fabric; Asian countries have a rich tradition of viewing gold as a secure investment. Often passed down through the generations, gold is considered a tangible and enduring form of wealth. Owning gold is synonymous with status and prosperity: Displaying gold jewellery and ornaments is as much a proclamation of affluence as it is a fashion statement. Especially in rural communities, there's a tradition of buying and keeping gold, rather than using savings accounts at banks. In times of political and economic instability, locals understand that gold holds its value and represents a sound investment.

Naturally, Asia boasts some of the world's largest consumer markets, with China and India leading the pack. The sheer volume of gold demanded by these markets significantly influences global prices. Cultural events, especially festivals and weddings, see a surge in gold purchases, creating spikes in demand that impact gold prices globally. Events such as economic downturns or upswings in Asia often have a cascading effect on gold prices worldwide. By the same token, many Asian countries actively bolster their central bank reserves with gold, strategic moves that have a direct impact on gold prices.

Gold Prices from 1970 to 2024



Market data provided by ICE Data Services (July 2024)



One of the world's largest consumers of gold is Turkey. Perhaps this isn't surprising, since gold has been embedded in Turkish life for millennia: Just as merchants pioneered the use of gold coins in ancient Lydia, the precious metal plays an important and innovative role in Turkey's economy today. In the jewellery industry, gold is a medium of exchange as well as a unit of account: In Istanbul's Grand Bazaar – the heart of the country's gold market – rents are often priced in gold. For generations of Turkish savers, purchasing gold has been an effective hedge against the ravages of inflation and currency weakness. Several Turkish banks even offer gold accounts, with ATMs that allow customers to withdraw pieces of gold!

As you might expect, the jewellery sector is the largest source of annual demand for gold, accounting for around half of total gold demand globally. By far the largest jewellery markets are India and China, which together make up more than 50 percent of the global total. The Asian and Middle Eastern markets are dominated by demand for purer, higher-carat gold. In Chinese cultures, for example, a cherished custom is *Si Dian Jin* (四点金), which translates to "four touches of gold". Traditionally gifted by the groom's mother, the set of four wedding jewellery pieces – necklace, ring, bangle, and earrings – symbolise different aspects of marriage and family life. Pure 24-carat gold is *de rigueur*.

While yellow is still the most popular colour for gold jewellery, it's possible to produce gold in a diverse palette of colours, and Asian consumers are diversifying their tastes.



Back in 2011, Turkish bank Kuveyt Türk upgraded its national network of 180 ATMs to offer 1- and 1.5-gram ingots of gold bullion in addition to banknotes

Gold jewellery for sale at a shop on Kalpakçılar Caddesi, the gold jewellers' road, in Istanbul's famous Grand Bazaar



Kuveyt Türk

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Mixing other metals with 24-carat gold – the process known as alloying – reduces the malleability of gold and makes it more durable, but it can also be used to change its colour. Alloying pure gold with white metals such as palladium or silver results in white gold. It is typically also plated with rhodium to create

▼ An Indian bride wears an antique gold necklace with a pendant depicting Hindu goddess Lakshmi

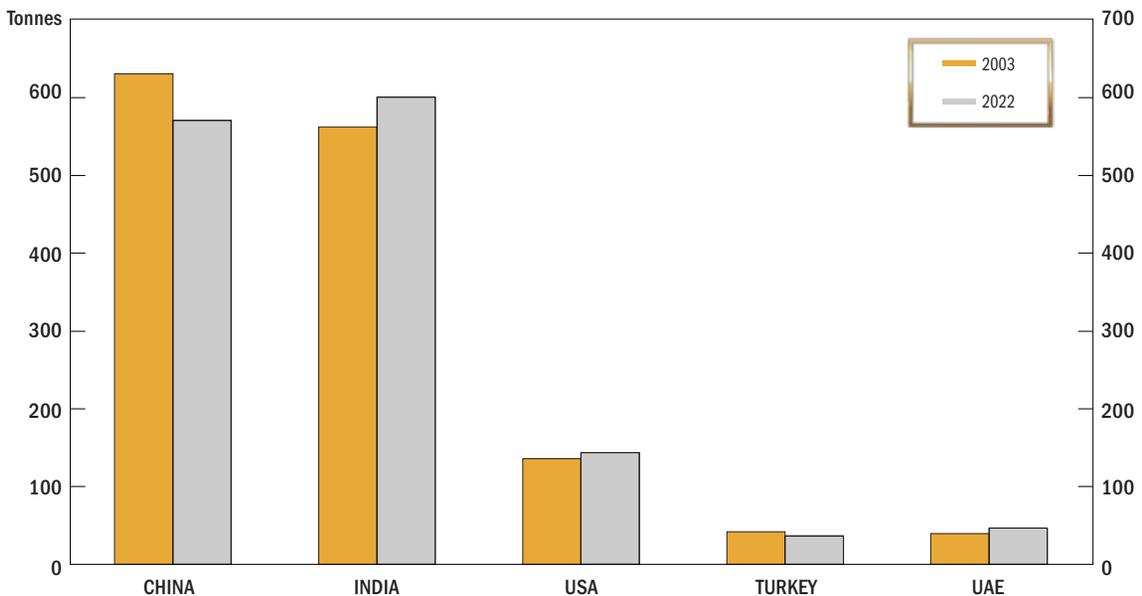


a harder surface with a brighter shine. The soft pink complexion of rose gold can be achieved with the inclusion of copper, while more unusual colours like purple and blue can be obtained with the addition of patinas or oxides on the alloy surface. Black gold derives its colour from cobalt oxide.

▼ Yellow gold jewellery is the traditional choice for Chinese weddings



Top 5 Countries' Annual Gold Jewellery Demand



Source: Metals Focus, World Gold Council (December 2023)



WHY “TROY” OUNCE?

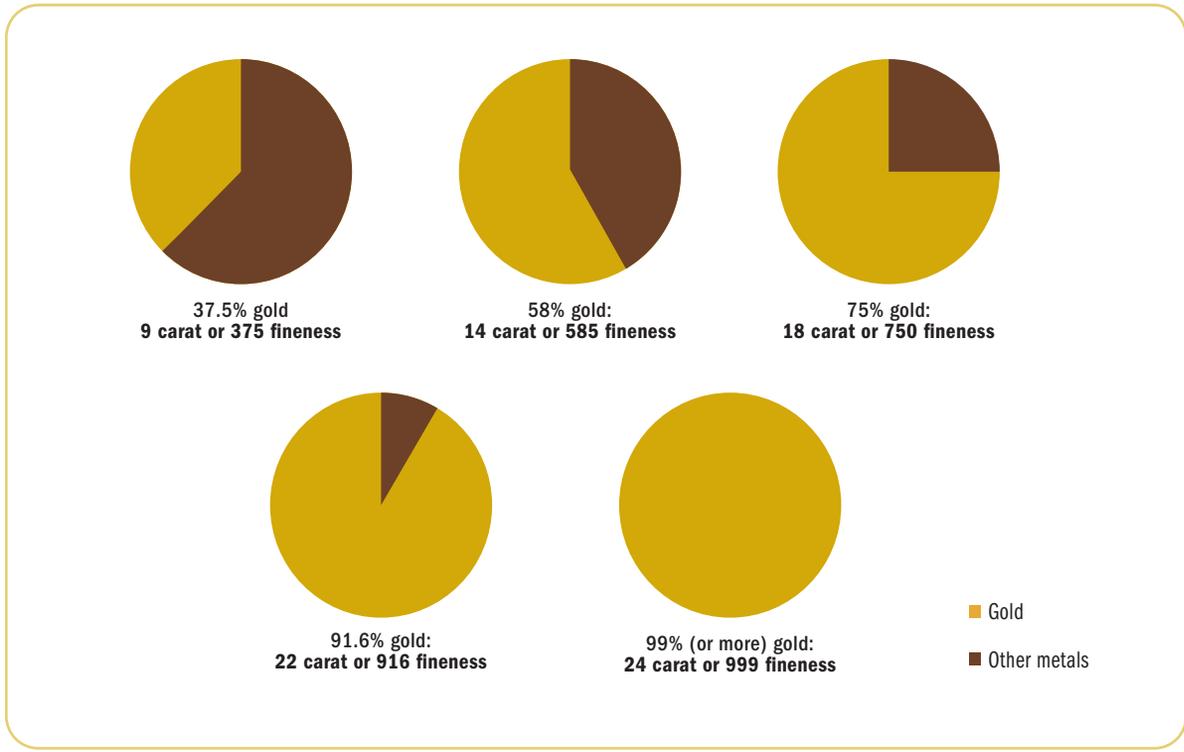
Troy weight, the system of units of mass used in the precious metals industry, originated in 15th-century Kingdom of England. The units are the grain, the pennyweight (24 grains), the troy ounce (20 pennyweights), and the troy pound (12 troy ounces). The grain unit is based upon the mass of a single ideal seed of a cereal. One troy ounce (oz t) is exactly 31.1034768 grams. The etymology is uncertain, but “troy” is generally believed to come from the French market town of Troyes, where English merchants traded from around the 9th century.



GOLD PURITY

The purity of gold is measured in carats. Caratage is the measurement of purity of gold alloyed with other metals. Pure gold with no other metals is 24-carat gold. Lower caratages contain less gold: 18-carat gold contains 75 percent gold and 25 percent other metals, usually copper or silver. The minimum caratage for an item to be called gold varies by country. In the US, 10 carat is the lowest caratage permitted to be called gold, while in France and the UK, 9 carat is the legal minimum accepted standard of gold caratage. In Denmark and Greece, it is only 8 carat.

Fineness is another way to express the precious metal content of gold jewellery and represents the purity in parts per thousand. When stamped on jewellery, this is usually stated without the decimal point. For example, “999” is 24 carat gold, “833” is 20 carat, and “750” is 18 carat. Accepted tolerances on purity vary from market to market. In China, for example, *chuk kam*, which is Cantonese for “pure gold” (literally “full gold”), comprises the majority of sales and is defined as 99 percent minimum gold, with a 1 percent negative tolerance allowed.



COLOURS OF GOLD

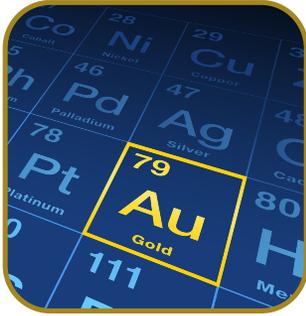
This chart shows some examples of the composition of various caratages of gold. These compositions are typical of those used by the jewellery industry to arrive at the colour/caratage combinations shown, though they are not the only ways to arrive at these combinations.



Colour	Caratage	Gold (Au)	Silver (Ag)	Copper (Cu)	Zinc (Zn)	Palladium (Pd)
Yellow	9k	37.5%	42.5%	20%		
Rose	9k	37.5%	20%	42.5%		
White	9k	37.5%	62.5%			
Yellow	10k	41.7%	52%	6.30%		
Rose	10k	41.7%	20%	38.3%		
White	10k	41.7%	47.4%		0.9%	10%
Yellow	14k	58.3%	30%	11.70%		
Rose	14k	58.3%	9.2%	32.5%		
White	14k	58.3%	32.2%			9.50%
Yellow	18k	75%	15%	10%		
Rose	18k	75%	9.2%	22.2%		
White	18k	75%				25%
Yellow	22k	91.7%	5%	2%	1.30%	
Rose	22k	91.7%		8.40%		

Source: World Gold Council

GOLD BY THE NUMBERS



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79
Gold has an **atomic number of 79**, which means there are 79 protons in the nucleus of every atom.

11.2 million
If all of the existing gold in the world were pulled into a five-micron-thick wire, it would **wrap around the globe 11.2 million times**.

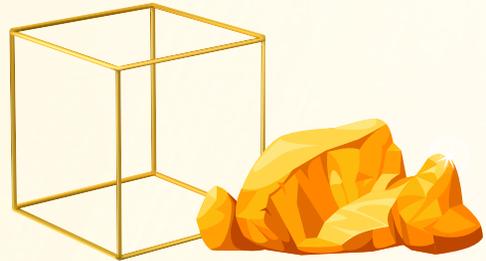


1,064°C
Gold melts at **1,064 degrees centigrade**, while the boiling point of gold is **2,808 degrees centigrade**.



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22m³
All of the gold ever mined would fit into a **crate of just 22 metres cubed**.



31.1034768g
There are a little over **31 grams in a troy ounce** of gold.



10Z
It is rarer to find a **one-ounce nugget of gold** than a **five-carat diamond**.



9m²
One ounce of **pure gold** can be hammered into a **single sheet nine metres square**.



45%
Nearly half of all gold mined today is **made into jewellery**, still the single largest use for gold.



213,000 tonnes
Since the beginning of civilisation, around **213,000 tonnes of gold** has been mined.



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750 parts per 1,000
Gold is often alloyed with other metals to change its colour and strength. Eighteen-carat gold is composed of **750 parts of pure gold per 1,000**.

80cm

The largest gold coin ever created was cast by the Perth Mint in 2012. It **measured 80cm in diameter and weighed one tonne.**



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2,316 troy ounces

The **largest ever true gold nugget weighed 2,316 troy ounces.** Named the **"Welcome Stranger"**, it was found at Moliagul in Australia in 1869.



Museums Victoria

400 troy ounces

The standard unit of traded gold, known as the **"London Good Delivery Bar"**, is made from 400 troy ounces of gold.



530,000 bars

The **US Federal Reserve holds 530,000 gold bars,** which amounts to **6,700 tonnes of gold.** At its peak in 1973, the Fed stored more than 12,000 tonnes of gold.

15,000 tonnes

Even at only **10 parts of gold per quadrillion,** the **world's oceans are estimated to hold up to 15,000 tonnes of gold.**



Source: World Gold Council

TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH THE LARGEST GOLD RESERVES



USA

8,133 tonnes (USD579 billion)
71.3% of total reserves



Germany

3,352 tonnes (USD239 billion)
70.6% of total reserves



Italy

2,452 tonnes (USD175 billion)
67.6% of total reserves



France

2,437 tonnes (USD173 billion)
68.6% of total reserves



Russia

2,333 tonnes (USD166 billion)
28.1% of total reserves



China

2,262 tonnes (USD161 billion)
4.6% of total reserves



Switzerland

1,040 tonnes (USD69 billion)
8% of total reserves



Japan

846 tonnes (USD60 billion)
4.7% of total reserves



India

822 tonnes (USD59 billion)
9% of total reserves



Netherlands

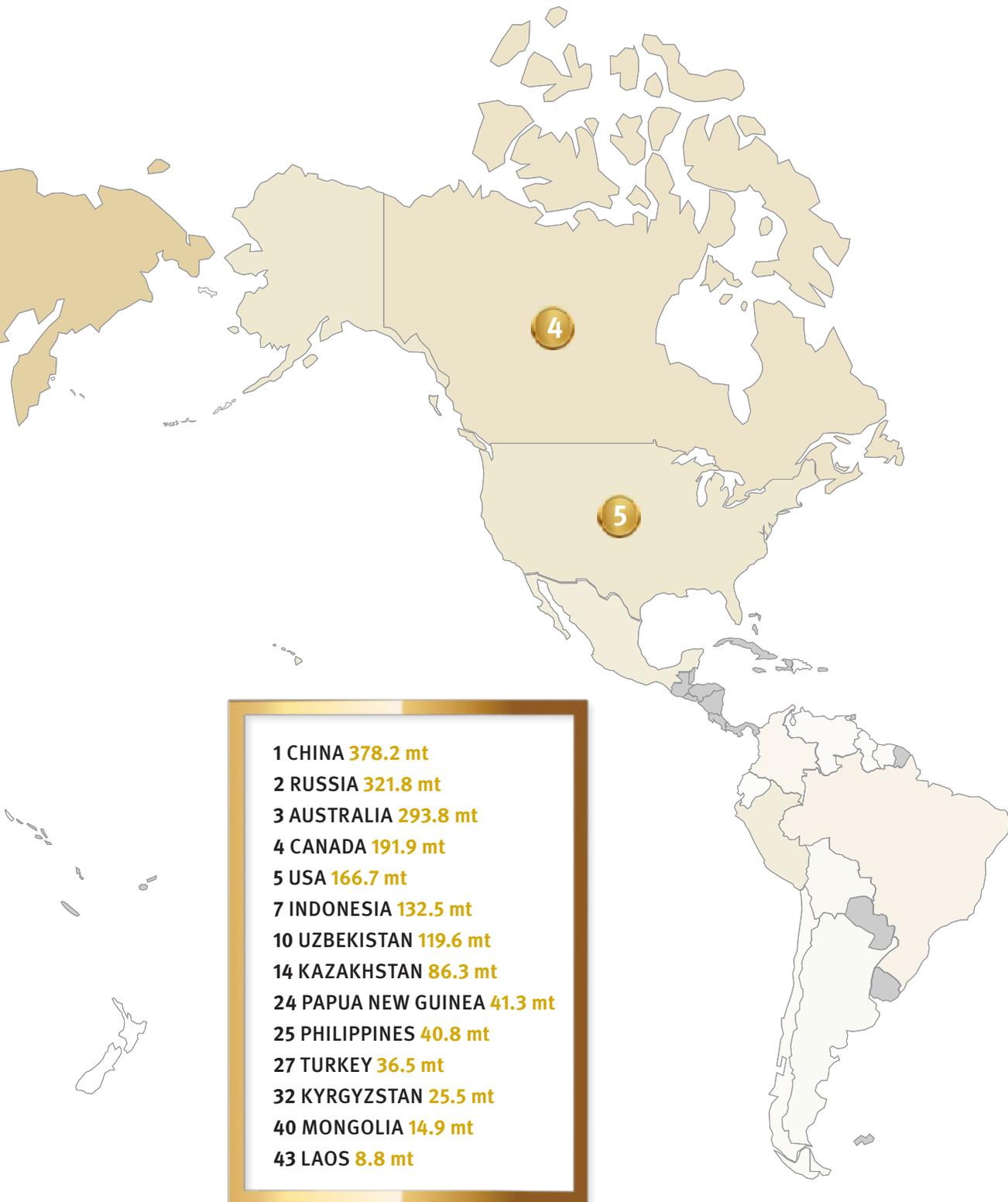
612 tonnes (USD43 billion)
60% of total reserves

Sources: Central Banks, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Gold Council



TOP GOLD PRODUCERS







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PRODUCING GOLD

According to the World Gold Council, the best estimates suggest that around 212,582 tonnes of gold has been mined throughout history, around two-thirds of which has been mined since 1950. Jewellery accounts for around 45 percent of that total; bars and coins, 22 percent; central banks, 17 percent; and other sectors, especially technology, 15 percent. The electronics sector accounts for about 80 percent of gold used in technology, the metal being ubiquitous in consumer electronics and automotive applications.

Today, gold mining is a global industry with operations on every continent except Antarctica, and gold is extracted from mines of widely varying types and scale. Overall levels of mine production have grown significantly in recent decades, even if substantial new discoveries are increasingly rare.

◀ The sprawling Grasberg open pit mine in Central Papua, Indonesia, produces gold, silver and copper; in 2023, it had proven and probable mineral reserves of 26.3 million ounces (808 tonnes) of gold

At a country level, China is the world's largest producer, accounting for around 10 percent of total global production in 2023, with Russia and Australia not far behind. Indonesia, in seventh place, and Uzbekistan, in 10th place, are two other Asian nations that make the top 10.

Behind the glittering yellow metal lies a hazardous industry responsible for catastrophic negative impacts on the environment. To dissolve the gold in low-grade gold ore, it is ground and mixed with sodium cyanide, a highly poisonous chemical that kills life in the tiniest quantities. Major environmental disasters have occurred after cyanide spills from gold mines all over the world. Impacts from gold mining include water pollution from heavy metals, extensive deforestation and soil erosion, and huge greenhouse gas emissions. For every troy ounce of gold produced, mines emit about 0.85 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Extraction also produces staggering levels of waste: Some 30 tonnes of used ore may be dumped as waste to produce one troy ounce of gold – the quantity in two or three gold rings. While the global gold mining industry produces over 3,000 tonnes of gold annually, a current market value of more than USD230 billion, every year it generates in excess of 150 million tonnes of toxic waste, typically containing dangerous chemicals like arsenic, lead, mercury, and cyanide.

One of the worst gold mining-related environmental disasters occurred in Asia, at the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine in Papua New Guinea. The collapse of the tailings dam system in 1984 caused severe harm to the environment along some 1,000 kilometres of the Ok Tedi River and the Fly River. An estimated 90 million tonnes of mine waste was discharged annually into the river for more than a decade, destroying downstream villages, agriculture and fisheries.

As long as the highly detrimental effects of gold mining remain under the average consumer's radar, the allure of gold isn't likely to dim. And with an estimated 57,000 tonnes of gold believed to exist above ground, the beguiling yellow metal will continue to seduce generations of religious devotees, wedding couples, and investors. ♦ AG

THE 10 LARGEST GOLD MINES IN THE WORLD

The world's 10 largest gold mines are located across nine different countries in North America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Together, they accounted for almost 13.4 million ounces, or 11.7%, of global gold production in 2021.

 **Nevada Gold Mines, USA**
3,311,000 oz
2.9% of global production

 **Muruntau, Uzbekistan**
2,990,020 oz
2.6% of global production

 **Grasberg, Indonesia**
1,370,000 oz
1.2% of global production

 **Olimpiada, Russia**
1,184,068 oz
1.0% of global production

 **Pueblo Viejo, Dominican Republic**
814,000 oz
0.7% of global production

 **Kibali, Democratic Republic of the Congo**
812,000 oz
0.7% of global production

 **Cadia, Australia**
764,895 oz
0.7% of global production

 **Lihir, Papua New Guinea**
737,082 oz
0.6% of global production

 **Canadian Malartic, Canada**
714,784 oz
0.6% of global production

 **Boddington, Australia**
696,000 oz
0.6% of global production

Source: S&P Global Market Intelligence



History **Spiritual Rebirth**

During the Spanish Golden Age, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan achieved the first European navigation to Asia via the Pacific, arriving in the Philippines in 1521 and claiming the islands for Spain. But by converting the first Filipinos to Catholicism, Magellan also instigated the Christianisation of the entire archipelago, a spiritual rebirth celebrated through the two most important festivals in the Philippines – Fiesta Señor and Sinulog.

▶ During the Sinulog Festival, dancers in elaborate costumes take to the streets of Cebu City to show their devotion to the Child Jesus – Santo Niño



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On September 20, 1519, a fleet of five ships and 270 men commanded by Ferdinand Magellan set sail from Sanlúcar de Barrameda in Spain to find Indonesia's fabled "spice islands". A little over a year later, Magellan arrived at the strait separating mainland South America to the north and the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego to the south. It was this sea route – later known as the Strait of Magellan – that would take him to the Pacific Ocean.

After 38 days navigating the treacherous strait, Magellan finally sighted ocean. It would take only a further 99 days to accomplish the westward crossing of the ocean – waters so curiously calm that it was named "Pacific", from the Latin *pacificus*, meaning "tranquil". The Portuguese navigator had become the first European explorer to reach the Pacific from the Atlantic, but little did he realise that his life would soon end in the sprawling archipelago that would later be named after King Philip II of Spain.

When Magellan reached the Philippines on March 17, 1521, he quickly saw an opportunity to place the hospitable indigenous people under the authority of the Spanish king – and convert them to Catholicism. Cebu became the base of Magellan's exploration and conquests, with the local ruler, Rajah Humabon, giving him a warm reception and embracing Christianity. A month after Magellan's arrival, Humabon was christened Carlos Valderrama in honour of King Charles I of Spain, while his chief consort, Hara Humamay, was given the name Juana, after Charles' mother, Joanna of Castile. After her baptism, Queen Juana was presented with an image of the Child Jesus – Santo Niño – as a gesture of goodwill for accepting her new faith.

In return for the hospitality he had received, Magellan agreed to assist the newly named King Carlos in conquering a rival tribe on the neighbouring island of Mactan, a few kilometres east of Cebu. With a modest Spanish force of 60 armed men, Magellan attempted an amphibious invasion at dawn, believing his muskets would quickly overcome the wooden spears of the natives. He was wrong. In the ensuing battle, Magellan was hit by a poisoned arrow and then hacked to death.

The surviving Spanish, in two vessels, would sail on to the Moluccas – the "spice islands" – and load their hulls. Only one of the ships would make it home, continuing west across the Indian Ocean,



▲ Ferdinand Magellan discovered the navigable sea route in southern Chile between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans that would later bear his name – the Strait of Magellan

▶ A 1589 map of the Pacific Ocean by Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius showing Magellan's ship *Victoria*, the first vessel to successfully circumnavigate the world. The map includes the Strait of Magellan (*bottom right*) and the Philippine Archipelago (*far left*)

rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and returning to the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda on September 6, 1522, almost exactly three years after setting sail. Just 18 malnourished sailors made it back, but they had become the first to circumnavigate the globe.

A subsequent Spanish expedition to the Moluccas found that the Portuguese had already established a presence there, and over the following years, Spain and Portugal fought for control of the islands and the lucrative spice trade. Finally, more than four decades after Magellan's pioneering voyage, the Spanish made a resolute effort to conquer the Philippine Islands.

On November 21, 1564, five ships, carrying 500 soldiers, set sail across the Pacific from the west coast of Mexico. The expedition was led by Miguel López de Legazpi and included navigator Andrés de Urdaneta, who was also an Augustinian friar. When López de Legazpi arrived in Cebu on April 27, 1565, he was challenged by the island's native ruler, Rajah Tupas, a cousin of Rajah Humabon, Ferdinand Magellan's former ally.

This time, the conquistadors could not be stopped. Huge cannons and heavy artillery soon forced the Cebuanos to flee to the mountains, leaving their villages to burn to the ground. But as the Spanish soldiers surveyed the debris of the village, an image of the Child Jesus was uncovered among the ashes, unscathed inside a wooden box.

The survival of the Santo Niño de Cebú was seen as a sign of a miracle by the Spaniards, and

in the centuries since, Filipino Catholics – which now constitute around 90 percent of the population – have venerated this diminutive statue as imbued with miraculous powers.

Today, the original image can be found encased behind bulletproof glass inside the chapel within the Basilica del Santo Niño, a minor basilica in Cebu City that was founded in 1565 by Andrés de Urdaneta and another Augustinian priest, Diego de Herrera. Measuring approximately 30 centimetres tall, the dark wood statue wears fine vestments and jewellery, and bears imperial regalia, including a golden crown and various sceptres. Along with the Magellan's Cross, which was planted by Ferdinand Magellan upon arriving in Cebu, the image is the oldest surviving Catholic relic in the Philippines.



Wikipedia



The survival of the Santo Niño de Cebú was seen as a sign of a miracle by the Spaniards, and in the centuries since, Filipino Catholics – which now constitute around 90 percent of the population – have venerated this diminutive statue as imbued with miraculous powers.

▶ Throngs of the faithful hear mass at the Basilica del Santo Niño during the Sinulog festival in honour of the Child Jesus

◀ The image of the Santo Niño, gifted to Cebuano queen Juana by Ferdinand Magellan and decades later discovered in a pine box by a returning Spanish expedition

CELEBRATING THE SANTO NIÑO

The Santo Niño de Cebú is at the centre of the country's two most important annual festivals, Fiesta Señor and Sinulog, which commemorate Filipinos' acceptance of Christianity and the rejection of their former animist beliefs, which began with the baptism of Cebu ruler Rajah Humabon and his consort, Humamay. Taking place throughout much of January, Fiesta Señor covers the religious activities of the Basilica del Santo Niño, while Sinulog encompasses the cultural aspects of the celebrations and culminates in a grand parade on Fiesta Day, the third Sunday in January.

Fiesta Señor begins with a dawn procession where a replica image of Santo Niño de Cebú is paraded through the streets. There are then nine consecutive days of masses, with several hundred thousand devotees flocking to the Basilica del Santo Niño daily. After this is another dawn procession, where the image of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Cebú (a Catholic title of the Virgin Mary) is brought to

the basilica for Traslación the following day, when the images of the Child Jesus and the Virgin Mary are brought to the National Shrine of St. Joseph in Mandaue City to be reunited with the icon of the church's namesake, thus forming the Holy Family.

The following day is Visperas, the eve of Fiesta Day, when thousands of devotees gather in the early morning to witness the fluvial procession, essentially a re-enactment of the arrival of Magellan in the Philippines, when the image of the Santo Niño is brought back to Cebu via a fleet of ships along the Mactan Channel. The image is returned to the Basilica del Santo Niño through a motorcade along the city streets. Upon its arrival, a re-enactment of the baptism of Rajah Humabon and Queen Humamay is performed, followed by a mass.

▶ Devotees crowd the Basilica del Santo Niño to attend mass during Sinulog





Alongside the religious activities of Fiesta Señor, Sinulog invites devotees – and visitors from all over the world – to take part in a wide range of cultural events over the month-long celebrations. The festival began in 1980 as the Sinulog Dance Contest, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Cebu and celebrating the people’s devotion to the Santo Niño. According to tradition, it is said that Rajah Humabon’s consort, Queen Juana, danced with joy upon receiving the image of the Child Jesus, and the other natives followed her example; this is regarded as the first Sinulog dance.

“Sinulog” comes from the Cebuano word *sulog*, meaning “like water current”, describing the distinctive dance movements – two steps forward and one step backward – performed to the sound of rhythmic drums. Interestingly, historical accounts suggest Cebuanos were already performing dances similar to the Sinulog to honour their animist idols long before the introduction of Christianity to the Philippines.

In the years since, Sinulog has evolved into the “Grandest Festival in the Philippines”, comparable only to the Dinagyang of Iloilo and the Ati-atihan



▶ Sinulog festival masks for sale in Cebu City

◀ A dancer in colourful garb holds aloft a replica of the Santo Niño during Sinulog

A BRIEF (COLONIAL) HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES

	<p>1543 A Spanish expedition led by Ruy López de Villalobos lands in Mindanao. He names the archipelago “Filipinas” after Crown Prince Felipe II, but fails to colonise the islands</p>	<p>1892 Andrés Bonifacio founds the revolutionary organisation Katipunan with the aim to revolt</p>
<p>1521 Ferdinand Magellan lands on Cebu and attempts to claim the region for Spain. In defending his island of Mactan, Lapu-Lapu slays Magellan</p>	<p>1565 Miguel López de Legazpi arrives in Cebu and establishes the first Spanish settlement. The Philippines is a Spanish possession for the next 333 years</p>	<p>1896 Spanish colonists imprison and kill hundreds of Filipinos in Manila. The Katipunan launches the Philippine Revolution</p>



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of Aklan, two other significant Visayan festivals that also honour the Santo Niño. By the time Sinulog’s awe-inspiring grand parade comes around on Fiesta Day, the third Sunday of the year, millions of people have descended on Cebu City to witness the parades of dancers in their vibrant, elaborate costumes and soak in the numerous events and activities, from rollicking street parties and beauty pageants to the art exhibits, concerts, and cultural shows.

Whatever your personal beliefs, it’s almost impossible not to be swept up in the joyous atmosphere and sheer spectacle of the “Mother of all Festivals”. And it’s fascinating to consider that it all started 500 years ago, when Ferdinand Magellan changed the course of Philippine history and brought Christianity to an idyllic group of islands across the Pacific Ocean. ♦ AG

DID YOU KNOW?

Independence Day in the Philippines is observed on June 12, the day in 1898 that Filipino revolutionary forces general Emilio Aguinaldo declared independence from Spain, even though the US didn’t relinquish sovereignty over the Philippines until 1946.



1898 Philippine revolutionaries declare independence, but this is rejected by Spain, which cedes its colony to the United States in the Treaty of Paris after losing the Spanish-American War of Paris after losing the Spanish-American War

1902 The Philippine–American War ends, with American occupation of the Philippines fully established and the dissolution of the First Philippine Republic

1945 The Allies recapture Manila, which suffers intense bombardment, destroying much of the city

1899 Fighting between the United States and the Philippine Republic breaks out

1941–42 The Japanese land on Luzon and overrun Manila

1946 The Treaty of Manila recognises the independence of the Philippines



Revealed Doctor Yellow

Japan Railways' special lemony Shinkansen is a rare sight to behold

When in Japan, make sure you keep an eye out for *Dokutā Ierō*. The locals believe that seeing “Doctor Yellow” – high-speed test trains painted in bright yellow – brings the viewer good luck. Since the train’s schedule is not made public, witnessing it in action is a case of chance.

As trains go, Doctor Yellow is extremely rare, not just because there aren’t many of them – they are only used on the Tokaido Shinkansen and Sanyo Shinkansen – but also because they perform their test and diagnostic function at full line speed. That means up to 300km/h in the case of the Sanyo Shinkansen or 285km/h for the Tokaido Shinkansen.



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The trains have special equipment on board to monitor the condition of the track and overhead wire, including special instrumented bogies and observation blisters. Otherwise, they are very similar to production, passenger-carrying Shinkansen trains, aside from their lemon-yellow paintwork.

Sadly, JR Tokai and JR West have recently announced that the use of the Doctor Yellow trains for inspections on the Tokaido and Sanyo Shinkansen lines will soon end. JR Tokai's test trains will cease to operate after January 2025, while JR West will terminate operations around 2027. Avid trainspotting fans, your chance to catch *Dokutā Ierō* is fast running out.

As trains go, Doctor Yellow is extremely rare, not just because there aren't many of them – they are only used on the Tokaido Shinkansen and Sanyo Shinkansen – but also because they perform their test and diagnostic function at full line speed.

◀ The high-speed test trains used on the Tokaido Shinkansen and Sanyo Shinkansen are nicknamed "Doctor Yellow"

▲ Doctor Yellow in the shadow of Mount Fuji is surely the Japanese trainspotter's ultimate capture



TOP 6 HIGH-SPEED TRAINS

Shanghai Maglev CHINA

Top operating speed: 460km/h

The Shanghai Maglev Train (SMT) tops the list with a maximum operating speed of 460km/h. Also known as the Shanghai Transrapid, it has a record high-speed of a staggering 501km/h. Unlike a conventional high-speed train, a maglev train makes use of electromagnetic force to levitate above the track, thereby eliminating friction and allowing for smooth and quiet operation. Interestingly, the train was constructed by German companies Siemens and ThyssenKrupp – not the Chinese.

▶ The Shanghai Maglev is the planet's fastest high-speed train



CR Harmony CHINA

Top operating speed: 350km/h

The China Railway (CR) Harmony is an umbrella term for the CRH series EMU high-speed trains. Like the Fuxing trains in third place, Harmony trains have a top operating speed of 350km/h, but they have set higher record speeds in testing. One Harmony model set a record test speed of 483km/h, the highest speed ever recorded by a conventional unmodified high-speed train.

▶ China's Harmony bullet train is also known as the Hexie



CR Fuxing CHINA

Top operating speed: 350km/h

The China Railway (CR) Fuxing, also known as the CR series EMU, is a series of high-speed trains with a top operating speed of 350km/h. A new high-speed connection to Tibet uses a modified Fuxing model designed to operate at high altitudes. The first high-speed railway in Southeast Asia and the Southern Hemisphere, which runs between Jakarta and Bandung in Indonesia, is also a Fuxing train. It is branded as Whoosh, short for *Waktu Hemat, Operasi Optimal, Sistem Hebat* – which roughly translates as “Timesaving, Optimal Operation, Outstanding System”.

▶ During testing, Fuxing trains have hit speeds as high as 420km/h





DB ICE GERMANY

Top operating speed: 330km/h

The flagship of high-speed rail in Germany is the ICE 3, or Intercity-Express 3. Three multisystem trains, known as ICE International, are in use in the Netherlands. In Germany, ICE 3 trains operate at the national maximum track speed of 320km/h, though one class of trains is authorised to run at speeds of 330km/h on the high-speed line between Frankfurt and Cologne – to overcome delays.

Germany isn't just known for cars: Their ICE trains are a common sight zipping across the German landscape



SCNCF TGV FRANCE

Top operating speed: 320km/h

France is the pioneer of high-speed rail in Europe, and the TGV – Train à Grande Vitesse – is a symbol of national pride. The TGV has repeatedly broken speed records, beginning way back in 1981 with a TGV Sud-Est train setting a record speed of 380km/h. In everyday operation, TGV trains run at a top track speed of 320km/h, but the latest model, the TGV-M, has a proposed maximum capability of 350km/h. It is expected to enter service in 2025.

The French were first in Europe to build a high-speed rail network, but it was 17 years after the first Shinkansen



JR Shinkansen JAPAN

Top operating speed: 320km/h

Japan may have created the original “bullet train”, but perhaps surprisingly, the Shinkansen only comes in at joint number five, with a top operating speed of 320km/h. The top speed a Shinkansen has achieved is 443km/h, recorded by the experimental Class 955 “300X” Tokaido Shinkansen during tests in 1996. JR Central is developing an experimental Maglev Shinkansen, the Lo Series, which is scheduled to be used on passenger services launching in 2027. Expected to operate at 500km/h, these trains have hit a top speed during testing of 603km/h! Japan may yet reclaim the number one spot. ♦ AG

An Lo Series Maglev Shinkansen undergoing testing on the Yamanashi Maglev Test Line



Wildlife

Big Yellow Beauty

The popular “amelanistic” form of the Burmese python is considered among the most beautiful snakes – if that’s your sort of thing



▼ Burmese pythons generally have a yellowish base colouring and dark brown blotches

Asia is a great place to find big snakes. The world’s largest and heaviest don’t live here; that honour belongs to the green anacondas (*Eunectes murinus*) of South America and the Caribbean island of Trinidad, which have been reported to measure over 10 metres and weigh in excess of 200 kilograms. But there’s a heavyweight snake that’s native to Southern and Southeast Asia that is not only one of the planet’s biggest snakes, but also considered one of the most beautiful – the Burmese python (*Python bivittatus*).

Once considered a subspecies of the Indian python (*Python molurus*) but now recognised as a distinct species, the Burmese python occurs in eastern India, southeastern Bangladesh, western Bhutan, southeastern Nepal, and southern China (including Hong Kong), as well as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and northern continental Malaysia. It has also been found in parts of Indonesia, particularly Java, Sulawesi, Bali, and Sumbawa.

These mostly nocturnal rainforest dwellers are highly water-dependent snakes and can

remain submerged for up to half an hour. As juveniles, they live on land or on trees, but they eventually grow so large that they need to stay on the ground, hiding in the underbrush. The snake spends most of its time staying still and waiting for prey to approach, using its sharp rearward-pointing teeth to seize prey and then coiling its body around the animal to kill it through constriction. Its prey – primarily small mammals and birds, but also amphibians and reptiles – is swallowed whole. Elastic ligaments in the jaws allow pythons to swallow animals up to five times as wide as their head!

Burmese pythons reach sexual maturity four years before they can breed successfully. Females normally lay between 12 and 36 eggs, but are capable of laying over 100, after a gestation period of 60 to 90 days. The mother remains with the eggs until they hatch, coiling around them to raise the temperature by several degrees. Incubation takes about two months, after which the hatchlings use their egg tooth to cut their way out. No further maternal care is given, and the young snakes will soon hunt for their first meal.



BEAUTY REALLY IS SKIN DEEP

In the wild, Burmese pythons usually have grey or green to gold base colouring, with dark brown blotches on the dorsal and lateral sides of the animal. The top of the head features a distinct arrow shape, and the belly is dotted by dark spots and blotches.

In the early 1980s, the first “albino” Burmese pythons were discovered in the wild, with python breeders successfully producing the first captive-bred albino Burmese pythons a few years later. Though popularly called albino, these snakes technically exhibit amelanism, a pigmentation abnormality characterised by the lack of pigments called melanins. A true albino has no pigment, whereas these snakes still have yellow and red

pigments; only their black pigment is absent. Young amelanistic Burmese pythons have bright red eyes and a white base colour, topped with butterscotch yellow and burnt orange markings. These markings become less distinct as they age.

Another mutation of the Burmese python was found in the wild in the mid-1990s. These snakes were coloured typically, but their patterns were different. Covering the animals in small, irregular dark blotches on the dorsal and lateral sides, the new mutation was coined “granite”. In addition to the irregular dark spots, granite Burmese pythons also feature a patternless belly, indistinct head markings and all of their light-coloured dorsal scales have a dark spot in the middle.

Young amelanistic Burmese pythons have bright red eyes and a white base colour, topped with butterscotch yellow and burnt orange markings.

▲ A Burmese python with a clutch of eggs

▲ A granite Burmese python, the result of another genetic mutation

▼ An amelanistic Burmese python, missing its black pigment





SNAKE INVADERS

As the pet industry developed various “morphs” with a different colourations and patterns, Burmese pythons gained popularity as exotic pets, with almost 150,000 snakes imported into the United States for the pet trade between 2000 and 2005 alone, according to one estimate. In Florida, escapes and releases by change-of-heart pet owners soon led to established breeding populations in the state. Hurricane Andrew, which damaged pet stores in 1992, was also blamed for releases into the Florida landscape.

The giant constrictors quickly became significant predators in South Florida, preying on the wide variety of mammals, birds, and crocodilian species occupying the Everglades National Park. The impact has been devastating, with the snakes preying on native species and outcompeting them for food and other resources. Serious declines in mammalian populations across the Everglades, including raccoons, opossums, bobcats, rabbits and foxes, have been observed. The serpents are even



competing with the top predator in the Everglades, the American alligator, and there have been many reported instances of alligators and pythons attacking or preying on each other.

The US Department of the Interior banned the importation of Burmese pythons in 2012, but the problem has only gotten worse over the years. There are likely hundreds of thousands of Burmese pythons inhabiting South Florida today, with some researchers suggesting there could be more than a million snakes in the region. There is concern that the Burmese python population could spread to other areas of the southern US, as global warming extends the habitat range of the species. Some models have indicated that as much as a third of the continental US could provide hospitable habitats for Burmese pythons by the end of the 21st century. These impressive pythons, it seems, may one day have to drop their Asian moniker as they become truly international serpents. ♦ AG



▲ The first wild “albino” Burmese pythons were discovered in the early 1980s

▲▲ Burmese pythons occur throughout much of Southeast Asia as well as eastern India and southern China

▶ An American alligator and a Burmese python locked in a struggle to prevail



Burmese Basics

Common Name : **Burmese python**
Scientific Name : ***Python bivittatus***

SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

Domain : Eukaryota
Kingdom : Animalia
Phylum : Chordata
Class : Reptilia
Order : Squamata
Suborder : Serpentes
Family : Pythonidae
Genus : *Python*
Species : *P. bivittatus*

CONSERVATION STATUS



Extinct Threatened Least Concern



Size
5–7 metres

Diet
**Mammals, birds,
and reptiles**

Average life span
in the wild
20–25 years



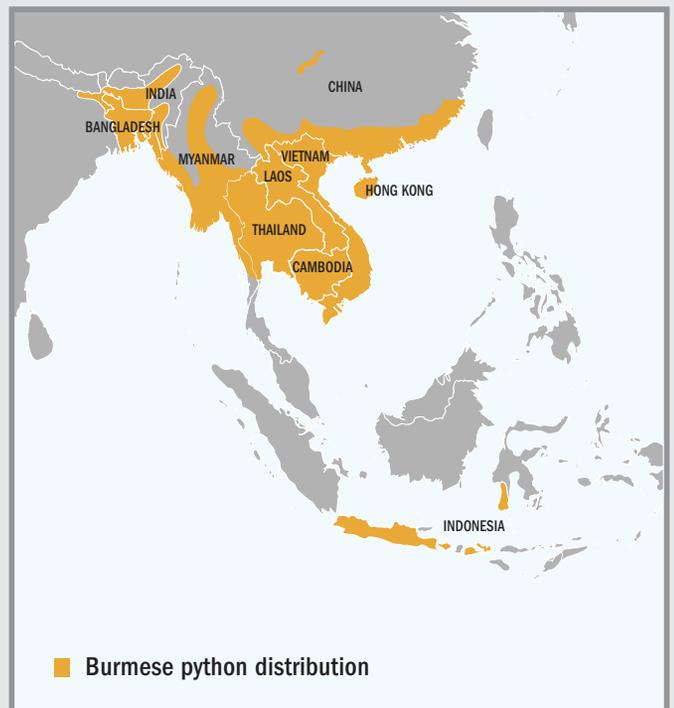
Habitats
**Tropical forest,
savannahs, riparian
areas, marshes and
swamps, and continental
tropical islands**

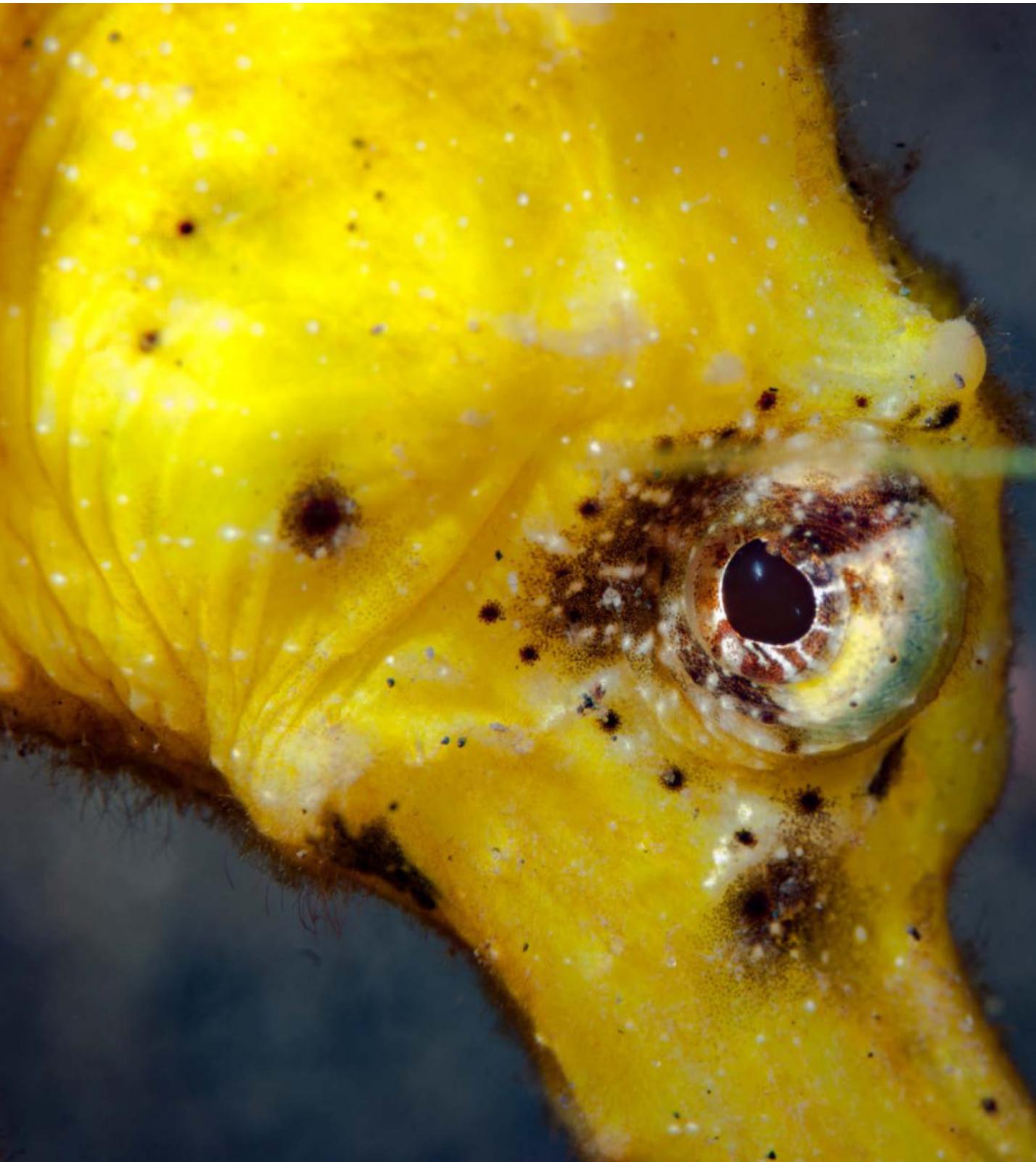
Weight
**Up to
90 kilograms**



RECORD-BREAKING BURMESE

The verified record length of a Burmese python is 19 feet, or 5.79 metres, a specimen caught by a hunter in July 2023 in South Florida's Big Cypress National Preserve, which borders the Everglades. The snakes pose such a great threat that hunters and residents alike do not need a permit to kill them, although the law requires the reptiles to be killed humanely. Hunting snakes can be a lucrative business: The annual Florida Python Challenge, an effort to keep the populations at bay, awards prize money ranging from US\$1,000 to US\$10,000.







Conservation **Yellow** **in Peril**

While the demand for use in traditional Chinese medicine is putting seahorses under pressure, it is damaging non-selective fishing that is driving depletion

In Asia, seahorses are generally bought by men over the age of 50. Blended with herbs and boiled as a tea, they're most often used to treat male sexual dysfunction, though they're also said to relieve a broad range of ailments, including skin conditions, asthma, lethargy and menstrual cramps. That, of course, is according to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), but it goes without saying that there's no scientific evidence to support the idea that ingesting seahorse boosts performance, improves your complexion or helps you breathe more easily.

Large, pale and smooth-skinned seahorses tend to fetch higher prices, making species like the yellow seahorse extremely valuable to the TCM trade.

◀ The yellow seahorse is one of the most heavily traded



Chinese medicine shops across the region are crammed with seahorses, selling for a few US dollars each. Large, pale and smooth-skinned seahorses tend to fetch higher prices, making species like the yellow seahorse extremely valuable to the TCM trade. Also known as the common seahorse, spotted seahorse, estuary seahorse and oceanic seahorse, *Hippocampus kuda* has no spines and is typically between 7 and 17 centimetres, on the large side for a seahorse. The body colouration is often yellow or yellowish, though it can also be brown or black, with numerous very fine dark spots.

The yellow seahorse could be called an Asian icon, as it inhabits waters from the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands beyond, as far north as Japan and as far south as Australia. They are found in shallow waters of estuaries, lagoons, harbours, coastal zones, and seagrass beds. But experts say their numbers are dwindling. Their conservation status was first assessed nearly 30 years ago, with a 30-percent decline in numbers reported in 1989–99. They have appeared on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species as “Vulnerable” since, though the last species



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▲ *Hippocampus kuda* is one of 12 seahorse species listed as “Vulnerable” on the IUCN Red List

assessment was more than a decade ago, and there’s an urgent need for updated information.

It’s not just *H. kuda*, of course. The last global assessment of seahorses, conducted in 2016, recognised 42 species. Of those, two species are listed as “Endangered” on the IUCN Red List, with 12 listed as “Vulnerable”, one as “Near Threatened”, and 10 as “Least Concern”. The remaining 17 are listed as “Data Deficient” – too poorly understood for their status to be assessed.

SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

Domain : Eukaryota
Kingdom : Animalia
Phylum : Chordata
Class : Actinopterygii
Order : Syngnathiformes
Family : Syngnathidae
Genus : *Hippocampus*
Species : *H. kuda*



CONSERVATION STATUS



Extinct

Threatened

Least Concern





SEAHORSE TRADE OPERATING IN THE SHADOWS

According to marine conservation organisation Project Seahorse, more than 80 countries are involved in the international trade in seahorses. Hong Kong serves as the world's largest trading hub for the dried animals, with data showing that the Chinese territory was responsible for around two-thirds of all seahorse imports between 2004 and 2017. Mainland China and Taiwan are also big net importers, while significant exporting countries include Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and India.

All this is despite the fact that all species of seahorses were listed under Appendix II of CITES back in 2002. The international treaty is designed to ensure that the international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival, and the listing in Appendix II was meant to ensure that seahorses could only be exported if they had been sourced sustainably and legally – and if there was paperwork to prove it. Unfortunately, since the inclusion of seahorses in Appendix II of CITES more than two decades ago, international trade in dried seahorses has remained large, multi-species and global.

Data reported to CITES from 2004 to 2011 concluded that annual exports, the vast majority of which was in dried seahorses, involved 23 species, 45 source countries and 29 destination countries.

Most of these dried exports went to China, coming from Southeast Asia and West Africa. Since 2011, parties to CITES began responding to the alarming data with trade suspensions, and reporting to CITES dropped precipitously. For dried trade, the average annual reported trade volume from 2012 to 2018 was just eight percent of the annual average reported from 2004 to 2011. The bans have created a thriving black market.

Project Seahorse conducted extensive studies of the seahorse trade after it ceased to be legal in the countries responsible for the biggest exports. India banned capture and trade of seahorses as far back as 2001, the Philippines followed suit the following year when seahorses were listed under Appendix II of CITES. Thailand finally banned dried seahorse exports from 2016. Indonesia also banned exports outright. Yet, when Project Seahorse investigators interviewed importers, wholesalers and retailers in Hong Kong in 2016 and 2017, asking them where their stocks of dried seahorses came from, they found that around 95 percent were imported from countries with export bans, including all of the above countries. It was clear that enforcement of the CITES measures was severely lacking.





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A FEW SEAHORSES A DAY ADD UP TO MILLIONS

According to Project Seahorse, despite the vast illegal trade in seahorses fuelled by the traditional Chinese medicine market, if the trade disappeared tomorrow, it would not save seahorses. The reason is that seahorses usually aren't being targeted by fisheries; they are valuable victims of a vast army of fishing boats that operate around the world from Latin America to Africa to East Asia to Southeast Asia. The worst offenders are trawlers, which drag their heavy nets along the seabed, scooping up everything in their path and destroying habitats along the way.

While individual vessels catch just a few seahorses per day, the cumulative catch is huge,

simply because there are just so many fishing boats on the water. Project Seahorse estimated that in Thailand almost 44,000 boats caught a mean of 0.5 to 18 seahorses per day, depending on gear type, with a shocking resultant catch of 29 million seahorses. Similarly, in Vietnam, they estimated that just over 14,000 vessels caught 0.5 to 15 seahorses per day, resulting in an annual catch of nearly 17 million seahorses. In its most recent estimate, the Project Seahorse team estimated the annual global catch at 76 million individual seahorses across 21 countries. The number is likely even higher since this estimate only includes about half the countries where seahorses are known to be caught.

◀ Jars of dried seahorses in a shop in Bangkok, Thailand

▲ Destructive overfishing by trawlers like this Chinese vessel is the real reason why seahorses are disappearing

◀◀ A man sorts through a huge pile of dried seahorses at a market in Guangzhou, China

Despite the vast illegal trade in seahorses fuelled by the traditional Chinese medicine market, if the trade disappeared tomorrow, it would not save seahorses.



Bottom trawlers have essentially destroyed the oceans where they fish, so much so that their catches aren't profitable enough to keep them in business without government subsidies. In 2022, the World Trade Organization (WTO) adopted a historic agreement to put an end to these harmful overfishing subsidies, which amount to an estimated USD35 billion annually. Specifically, the deal prohibited giving subsidies that enable illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; fishing of overfished stocks; and fishing of unmanaged stocks on the high seas. Regrettably, the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi concluded in March 2024 with just 71 of the 110 member countries needed to ratify the deal signing up.

As long as an agreement to curb fishing subsidies remains elusive, *Hippocampus* species like the yellow seahorse – along with countless other animals – will continue to be caught in the tens of thousands of trawl nets devastating seafloor habitats across the world's oceans. Without a concerted effort by the nations of



Sirachai Arunrugstichai

▲ Fisheries bycatch is a devastating threat to marine animals, including seahorses

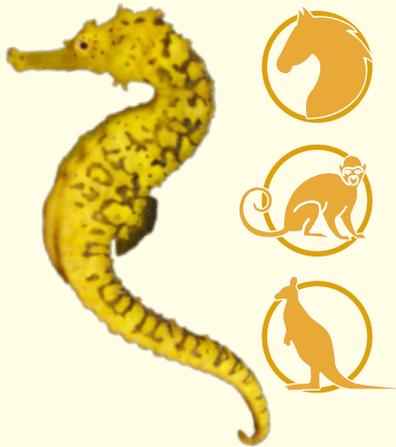
▼ The World Trade Organization's 13th Ministerial Conference in March 2024 failed to deliver on ending fisheries subsidies

the world to put an end to destructive overfishing, even the endless supply of dried seahorses in Asia's Chinese medicine shops will eventually dry up. ♦ AG



WTO/Prime Vision

5 AMAZING FACTS ABOUT SEAHORSES



1

While the name *Hippocampus* comes from the Greek words for “horse” (*hippos*) and “sea monster” (*campus*), as well as a **horse-like head**, they have a **tail like a monkey** and a **pouch like a kangaroo**



FAITHFUL TO A SINGLE PARTNER



Pygmy seahorse

30cm

Australian big-bellied seahorse

2

Seahorse sizes vary with species, ranging from tiny, **2cm pygmy seahorses** to the large, **30cm-plus Australian big-bellied seahorse**

4

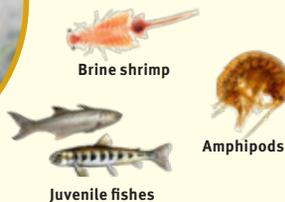
Studied in the wild, **most seahorse species appear to be monogamous**, remaining faithful to a single partner for a whole breeding season and maybe even over several seasons. Some species may be polygamous when put into a captive environment



The female deposits her eggs **in the male's pouch**



Seahorses suck their prey in **through their tubular snouts**



Brine shrimp

Amphipods

Juvenile fishes

3

Seahorses suck their prey in through their tubular snouts; they have **no stomach or teeth**. They eat anything that fits in their mouths, from **crustaceans such as amphipods to fish fry and other invertebrates**



Seahorses give birth to around **100–200** babies



5

In seahorses, the **males get pregnant**: The female deposits her eggs in the male's pouch, after which he fertilises them. Most **seahorses give birth to around 100 to 200 offspring**, typically measuring between 7 and 12 millimetres.



PRECIOUS BYCATCH: 6 COMMON SPECIES IN ASIA'S SEAHORSE TRADE



YELLOW/Common SEAHORSE

Scientific name : *Hippocampus kuda*
Distribution : Northwest Indian Ocean to central Pacific Ocean

CONSERVATION STATUS



LONGNOSE/THREE-SPOT SEAHORSE

Scientific name : *Hippocampus trimaculatus*
Distribution : Indo-Pacific, from India to Tahiti, Japan to Indonesia

CONSERVATION STATUS



HEDGEHOG SEAHORSE

Scientific name : *Hippocampus spinosissimus*
Distribution : India and Sri Lanka to Taiwan, northern Australia

CONSERVATION STATUS



GREAT/KELLOGG'S SEAHORSE

Scientific name : *Hippocampus kelloggi*

Distribution : Indo-Pacific, especially
East Africa to Japan

CONSERVATION STATUS



SLENDER/LONGSNOUT SEAHORSE

Scientific name : *Hippocampus reidi*

Distribution : Caribbean Sea, western
North Atlantic Ocean, especially Brazil

CONSERVATION STATUS



TIGER-TAIL SEAHORSE

Scientific name : *Hippocampus comes*

Distribution : India, Southeast Asia

CONSERVATION STATUS



The *Mighty* *Yellow*



◆ ◆ ◆ **Over 5,000 kilometres long and flowing through nine provinces and autonomous regions, the Yellow River is China's second largest, after the Yangtze, while its basin is deemed the cradle of Chinese civilisation**

The first bend of the Yellow River, found on the easternmost Tibetan Plateau at around 3,400 metres, is a stunning sight in autumn



The Tibetan name is “River of the Peacock”, in Mongolian it is sometimes called the “Queen River”, and ancient Chinese records have referred to it as the “Murky River”, but for the rest of us, it can only be the Yellow River – 黄河 in Chinese. Regarded by scholars as a birthplace of ancient Chinese civilisation, the river and its tributaries flow past some of the country’s oldest cities, including Lanzhou, Baotou, Xi’an, Taiyuan, Luoyang, Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, and Jinan. It has also flooded more than 1,500 times in the last 4,000 years, changing course on a dozen occasions. Today, the nearly 5,500-kilometre-long waterway irrigates as much as 15 percent of China’s arable land, feeds around 12 percent of the population, and supplies water to more than 60 cities.

Why yellow? This is a reference to loess – the fine, silt-like sediments formed by the accumulation of wind-blown dust – that the river carries to the sea

▲ The source section of the Yellow River flows between the Bayan Har Mountains and the Amne Machin Mountains in Qinghai province

The Yellow River begins its epic journey across north-central China on the Tibetan Plateau in southern Qinghai province, crossing six other provinces (Sichuan, Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, and Shandong) and two autonomous regions (Ningxia and Inner Mongolia) in its course to the Bohai Sea, the innermost extension of the Yellow Sea. About 1,900 kilometres east to west and around 1,100 kilometres north to south, the drainage basin is roughly 750,000 square kilometres – an area about twice the size of Japan.

Originating at an elevation above 4,600 metres in the Bayan Har Mountains, the source tributaries drain into Gyaring and Ngoring Lakes (respectively known as Zhaling and Eling Lakes in Chinese), which freeze over in winter. The river then enters a region of deep gorges, winding its way first southeast, then northwest around the Amne Machin Mountains, and the east again before leaving the Tibetan Plateau near the city of Lanzhou in Gansu province.

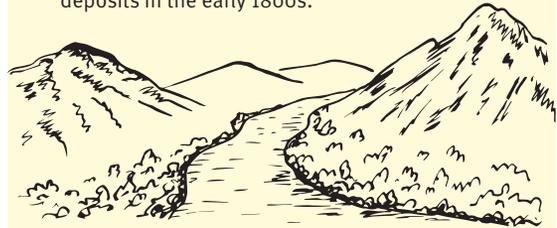
▼ Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu province in northwestern China, is located on the banks of the Yellow River

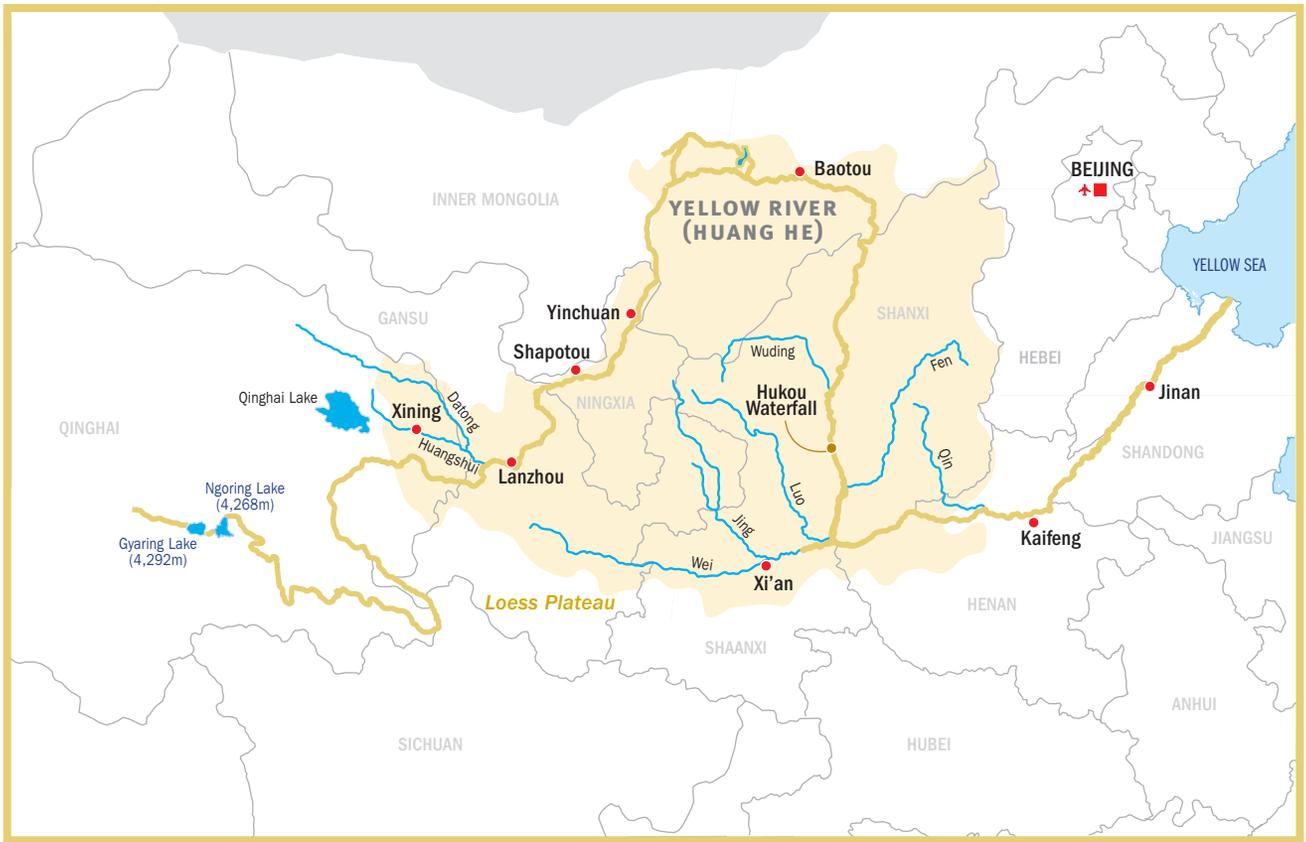
By the time the river passes through Lanzhou, it has already acquired the ochre-yellow colour from which it takes its name.

Why yellow? This is a reference to loess – the fine, silt-like sediments formed by the accumulation of wind-blown dust – that the river carries to the sea. The vast majority of the erosion – contributing more than 90 percent of the silts – occurs as the river passes through the Chinese Loess Plateau, which extends eastward from the Tibetan Plateau to the North China Plain at elevations ranging from around 900 to 2,100 metres.

DID YOU KNOW?

The word *loess* is of German origin and means “loose”. It was first applied to Rhine River valley sedimentary deposits in the early 1800s.





▲ Originating in the Bayan Har Mountains and emptying into the Yellow Sea, the Yellow River has a watershed that covers most of northern China

▼ Picturesque rock formations at the site of the Liujiaxia Dam, a major hydroelectric dam on the upper Yellow River in Gansu province



In fact, so much silt is contained in the Yellow River that sediment deposits in the lower course raise the riverbed several metres above the surrounding ground. At Kaifeng, in Henan province, the river is as much as 10 metres above ground level, earning the river the name “Earth Suspended River” (地上悬河) in the lower reaches. Here, the river broadens out to flow across the North China Plain, a vast alluvial fan broken by low hills that has long been one of China’s main agricultural regions. Despite the tens of thousands of kilometres of levees that have been constructed through the centuries, the plain is also an area that has experienced cataclysmic floods.

By building overflow channels and increasingly taller levees, China has attempted to control the Yellow River throughout most of its history. In 1955, the government embarked upon an ambitious 50-year flood-control programme, including levee construction and repair, reforestation in the loess region, and the building of a dams to control the river’s flow, supply water for irrigation, and produce electricity. Those efforts have largely been effective, despite controversy surrounding the dam projects, and the river has not seen a major flood since 1958.



SEDIMENT LOAD OF MAJOR RIVERS COMPARED

1. YELLOW RIVER, CHINA

34kg of silt per cubic metre of water



2. COLORADO RIVER, NORTH AMERICA

13kg per cubic metre



3. AMU DARYA, CENTRAL ASIA

5kg per cubic metre



4. NILE RIVER, AFRICA

1kg per cubic metre





NASA



NASA

▲ Satellite images of the mouth of the Yellow River in 1989 (left) and 2020 (right): Since the mid-19th century, the lower reaches of the river and the delta have been extensively engineered to control flooding and to protect coastal development

▼ Located at the junction of Shanxi and Inner Mongolia, the Lao Niu Bay scenic area showcases the Yellow River at its prettiest



Shutterstock

Today, the Yellow River basin faces myriad challenges after decades of unsustainable land use and unchecked dumping of sewage and toxic chemicals. Recent studies have concluded that microplastic pollution in the silts and surface waters could have serious consequences for human health and aquaculture. Water and sediment flows to the Yellow River Delta have steadily declined in recent decades, due to both reduced rainfall and dramatically increased demand for water upstream. Indeed, the river has

sometimes run dry well before reaching the delta, severely damaging wetlands and aquaculture and worsening the water pollution problem.

Without doubt, the nicknames for the Yellow River will keep flowing, while the deep duality about her intentions persist. Is she the benevolent “Mother River” (母亲河) or the malevolent “River of Disaster” (灾难河)? Is she “China’s Pride” or “China’s Sorrow”? Either way, when it comes to the mighty Yellow River, we can be quite sure her waters will never run clear. ♦ AG

THE GREAT FLOODS OF THE YELLOW RIVER



“The Yellow River Breaches its Course” by Ma Yuan (1160–1225), a Chinese painter of the Song dynasty

The devastating floods of 1887, 1931 and 1938, caused by the overflowing of the Yellow River, are considered to be the world’s three deadliest floods. Collectively killing millions of people, they are among the most catastrophic disasters ever recorded.

By most estimates, the flood that occurred in August 1931 is the deadliest natural disaster in history, with as many as four million people losing their lives in the flood and to the ensuing disease and famine. An earlier flood in September–October 1887 was responsible for up to two million deaths.

The third flood, which was initiated in June 1938, was man-made. In a desperate attempt to block a Japanese military advance during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), Chinese Nationalist armies under the command of Chiang Kai-shek destroyed the levees near Kaifeng in Henan province. Over the next decade, the Yellow River’s waters spread southeast into the Huai River system via its tributaries, inundating vast quantities of land in Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces. It is believed the disastrous strategy killed more than 800,000 people and displaced nearly four million between 1938 and 1947.



TOP 5 TRAVEL HIGHLIGHTS ALONG THE YELLOW RIVER

1

CATCHMENT AREA (QINGHAI, GANSU)

The widely accepted source of the Yellow River, the Zhaling and Eling Lakes (Gyaring and Ngoring, respectively, to Tibetans) are several hours' drive from the nearest town (Maduo). Unfortunately, overtourism degraded this beautiful remote area in mountainous Qinghai province, and it has been closed to visitors in recent years.

▶ The first bay of the Yellow River's Ninety-Nine Bays, at the junction of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces



2

SHAPOTOU (NINGXIA)

Skirting alongside the Tengger Desert as it enters Ningxia province, the Yellow River is a particularly impressive sight at the resort of Shapotou in Zhongwei county. Tourists can cruise the river on a sheepskin raft, zipline over the water, ride a camel, and try their hand at sand-surfing. About 20 kilometres northeast of Shapotou Scenic Area is Tengger Wetland Park, home to lush grasses, tranquil lakes and numerous bird species.

▶ Tourists floating along the Yellow River on a sheepskin raft in the resort of Shapotou in the the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region



3

BAOTOU (INNER MONGOLIA)

Next on the river's meandering course is Inner Mongolia, and at the largest city in the province, Baotou, you can stroll along its banks and contemplate the green and purple sunsets – a consequence of the industrial city refining half of the world's rare-earth minerals. Wudangzhao Lamasery, 50 kilometres northeast of Baotou, is one of the four most-important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in China.

▶ One of the highlights of a visit to Baotou is the beautiful Wudangzhao Lamasery, also known as Badakar Monastery





4

HUKOU WATERFALL (SHANXI/SHAANXI)

Around 400 metres across as it courses along the Shanxi-Shaanxi border, the Yellow River is abruptly squeezed through a gap between the mountains only about 20 to 30 metres wide, creating the jaw-dropping – and ear-splitting – Hukou Waterfall. One of the top tourist sites in the country, the waterfall, China's second largest, receives tens of thousands of visitors daily.

▲ The spectacular Hukou Waterfall is the largest waterfall on the Yellow River

5

KAIFENG (HENAN)

As the Yellow River makes its way to the Yellow Sea, it widens to around three kilometres across at the city of Kaifeng, which boasts a lovely riverfront viewing area. The Chinese capital during the Northern Song dynasty, between 960 and 1127, Kaifeng is known for having the oldest Jewish community in China as well as having a substantial Muslim enclave, notable for its numerous women's mosques. The city's Iron Pagoda, so-named because its colour resembles that of iron, has stood for nearly 1,000 years – despite dozens of earthquakes and numerous disastrous floods in the region.

▶ Kaifeng's millennium-old Iron Pagoda is still standing after countless devastating floods throughout history



The Yellow Crane Tower

Cui Hao

昔人已乘黄鹤去，此地空余黄鹤楼。

A man of yore rode off on a yellow crane,
and all that's left here is Yellow Crane Tower.

黄鹤一去不复返，白云千载空悠悠。

The yellow crane, having flown, never returned;
the white clouds for a thousand years freely drift.

晴川历历汉阳树，芳草萋萋鹦鹉洲。

Now the trees of Hanyang are arrayed before the clear river,
And fragrant grasses grow lush on Parrot Island.

日暮乡关何处是？烟波江上使人愁。

And where are the gates of home in the fading light?
The fog rippling over the river evokes such woe.

CUI HAO 崔颢 (704–c. 754) was a poet of the Tang dynasty in China. He was considered an important early exponent of the regulated verse form of Classical Chinese poetry. *Yellow Crane Tower* is a well-known poem of his, written in seven-character-per-line regulated verse. The poem is about the Yellow Crane Tower in what is now Wuhan in Hubei province. The building got its name from an incident in Taoist legend, which is alluded to in the poem: After many years of meditation, a man becomes a *xian* (仙), or immortal, and is carried off into the heavens riding a yellow crane.

Huanghe Lou (黄鹤楼)
painted by Xia Yong (夏永)
during the Yuan dynasty
(1271–1368)

ASIAN
Geographic

passport

Chengdu: Land of Abundance



Jiutian Tower, also known as "Nine Heaven Tower", is a beautiful 70-metre-high traditional Chinese pagoda in Tazishan Park, in the eastern suburbs of Chengdu

The hub of Western China and the gateway to Tibet, this bustling city in central Sichuan offers a heady mix of old and new with its towering skyscrapers, ancient Tibetan quarters, traditional teahouses and opera theatres, and ultramodern museums housing Bronze Age artefacts.

On a clear day, Chengdu is graced with the sight of Mount Gongga – “the King of Sichuan Mountains” – rising majestically from the foothills of the Tibetan Plateau. In this city of 21 million people, a quarter million or more are Tibetans, seeking employment and education in a cosmopolitan environment where deep-rooted cultural traditions are juxtaposed with fast-paced modernity. For elderly Tibetans, Chengdu offers a respite from the brutally cold highland winters, while entrepreneurial young Tibetans are running competitive businesses, often promoting Tibetan products and services, including with social development objectives. This is China’s gateway to the Tibetan world.

The main Tibetan quarters in Chengdu are in the Wuhouci neighbourhood, with

many Tibetans living in an area just south of the historic Wuhou Temple. Here, you’ll experience vibrant streets lined with Tibetan signs and prayer flags, charming restaurants and teahouses, and shops selling Tibetan language books, Buddhist ritual items, and Tibetan delicacies like yoghurt and dried yak meat. You can’t miss the sight of women in traditional dress, Tibetan monks in their distinctive burgundy robes, and, if you venture into a local *namgya* club, young Tibetans trying to make it big as a singer. Nearby is the Wuhou campus of Southwest Minzu University, where the focus is on education for minority groups, including Tibetan studies, and where more than 30,000 full-time students from 56 ethnic groups are enrolled.





Shutterstock

◀◀ Jinli Old Street in Wuhouci, near the main Tibetan quarter, is the perfect place to grab some souvenirs and try the local food

▲ A modern replacement of a bridge constructed in 1746, the stunning Anshun Bridge features one of Chengdu's most popular restaurants

▼ The Yingmenkou Flyover keeps the traffic flowing in Chengdu, a busy city of 21 million people



Shutterstock

TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND ANCIENT ARTEFACTS

Tibetans aren't the only ones keen to show off their cultural traditions. Chengdu is the home of Sichuan opera, which dates back to the 1700s but is very much alive today at popular venues like Jinjiang Theatre and Shufeng Yayun Opera House. Tourists both from China and overseas are mesmerised by a wide variety of performances, including acrobatics, shadow puppetry, fire-breathing, and the fascinating regional art of face-changing (*bian lian*), where vividly coloured masks are swapped from one to another almost instantaneously with the swift swipe of a fan or wave of a hand.

For a glimpse much further back into Chengdu's past, there are two impressive museums that show off the region's remarkable ancient history. In 2001, a real estate developer stumbled across a drain containing exquisite artefacts dating back around 3,000 years: bronze daggers, jade spearheads, stone figurines, pottery urns, and gold masks. These were remnants of Jinsha, the urban centre of

the Shu Kingdom, an ancient civilisation of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River that existed from the 12th century BCE to the 7th century BCE. Instead of sending these artefacts to a museum, authorities turned the area into a viewable excavation site, with glass pathways allowing visitors to see the ruins of the ancient settlement up close.

You'll find more fascinating historical artefacts from around the region at the striking ultra-modern cuboid structure that is the Chengdu Museum, on the west side of Tianfu Square. With around 200,000 objects dating from the Neolithic period to that of the Republic of China, spread across six floors, the expansive museum offers a remarkable window into Sichuan's multilayered history. Among the most extraordinary are the 3,200-year-old bronze masks discovered at Sanxingdui, an archaeological site in Guanghan, about 23 kilometres from Chengdu, that reveals an even earlier culture linked to the ancient kingdom of Shu.

▼
 A performer
 enthralled audiences
 with traditional
 face-changing art,
 or *bian lian*, at the
 Chunxifang Chunxilu
 covered street





Wikipedia

▲ The unique Jinsha Site Museum allows visitors to see the excavation site for themselves

▶ A 3,200-year-old bronze mask from the Sanxingdui archaeological site on display at the Chengdu Museum



Unsplash

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

CHENGDU CITY

WHERE

The capital city of Sichuan and the hub of Western China, Chengdu is around 2–2.5 hours by plane from Beijing, Shanghai or Hong Kong.

HOW

You can fly directly to Chengdu Shuangliu International airport from many cities around Asia, including Bangkok, Dubai, Singapore, Taipei, and Tokyo. Chengdu's extensive metro system is the easiest way to get around the city, while taxis are plentiful and inexpensive.

INFORMATION

Jinsha Site Museum
www.jinshasitemuseum.com

Chengdu Museum
www.cdmuseum.com/en



GIANT PANDA BREEDING RESEARCH BASE

Few things say “China” more than giant pandas, and Sichuan is one of three provinces in south central China, along with Shaanxi and Gansu, where these universally adored black-and-white bears can be found. So, it’s not surprising that Chengdu’s Giant Panda Breeding Research Base ranks as among the city’s most popular attractions.

Home to about 120 giant pandas as well as 75 red pandas (another strong contender for planet’s cuddliest creature), the base, which is around 18 kilometres north of the city centre, is the easiest way to get a glimpse of the country’s iconic residents. Befitting their status as China’s national animal, the giant pandas are given the royal treatment. The recently opened Panda Pavilions, a collection of cedar-clad, light-filled buildings nestled within the facilities, house the bears’ expansive activity areas and lavish living quarters, while providing fascinating exhibition and education spaces.

Of course, with giant pandas being a conservation-reliant vulnerable species, the base’s main business is ensuring these famously love-shy creatures are comfortable enough to breed. Lucky visitors will witness how successful the centre is at encouraging love-making if

they visit during summer or autumn, when the nursery incubators might be showing off a tiny newborn or two.

It probably doesn’t need to be said that the base has a reputation for being perpetually busy. Avoid the weekends at all costs, when the crush of humanity will take the pleasure out of your visit. If you arrive at 8am, when the centre opens, you’ll see the pandas at their most active, as they enjoy their morning feed. Although you may spot them having a late afternoon snack, most of their afternoons are spent sleeping. In the height of summer, they may retreat to their air-conditioned living quarters for a snooze.

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHERE

The panda park is around 18km north of the city centre. The nearest metro station is, appropriately enough, Panda Avenue, which is on Line 3.

HOW

There’s a free bus transfer, available between 8.30am and 4pm, from exit A of the Panda Avenue metro station. There are also various dedicated buses from the city centre, while a taxi costs about ¥50 (USD7).

INFORMATION

www.panda.org.cn/en

▲ See China’s cuddliest residents up close at Chengdu’s Giant Panda Breeding Research Base

WENSHU MONASTERY

Chengdu's largest and best-preserved Buddhist temple is a monastery dedicated to the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Manjushri, known in China as Wenshu. While the complex that stands today was built in the 18th and 19th centuries, the site traces its roots all the way back to the Sui dynasty (581–618).

Initially a modest courtyard, the monastery underwent a major transformation during the Song dynasty (960–1279), when its name was changed to Xinxiang Temple. In a mystical twist during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), whispers of the Manjusri bodhisattva's ethereal presence sparked a resurrection. Reborn as the Wenshu Monastery, it continues to pay homage to the revered Manjusri, a bodhisattva representing the transcendent wisdom of the Buddhas in Mahayana Buddhism.

With incense hanging heavily in the air and the constant murmur of chanting from the prayer halls, the complex retains an atmosphere of tranquillity and

solitude that refuses to be spoiled by the crowds of worshippers and smartphone-toting tourists. Within the ancient walls, a treasure trove of Buddhist scriptures, paintings, and calligraphy awaits, imparting stories of enlightenment to those who listen.

Beyond the offer of quiet contemplation, the temple beckons devotees and travellers alike with its popular teahouse and vegetarian restaurant, wonderful attractions in their own right. A bastion of old-school charm, the teahouse offers the perfect surroundings to appreciate Chinese tea culture while enjoying traditional shows presented by folk artisans, while the restaurant fuses spirituality with culinary excellence to serve up a feast of delectable vegetarian dishes. There are many more teahouses crowding the old neighbourhood streets surrounding the temple, presenting the ideal opportunity to try a street snack and pick up a souvenir or two.

▼
Upturned eaves reaching towards the heavens at the charming Wenshu Monastery



MOUNT EMEI AND THE HUAZANG TEMPLE

The highest of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains of China, Mount Emei is the most important reason to visit Chengdu for millions of Chinese. A roughly three-hour trip by high-speed train, bus and cable car, Emeishan, as it's called in Chinese, is the place where Buddhism became established in the country when the first Buddhist temple was built on the summit in the 1st century CE.

It is said the first temple, Puguang Hall, was built by a medicinal plant farmer. This became the Guangxiang Temple, and then the Huazang Temple, which was completed in 1377, during the early Ming dynasty. The temple has been razed by fire numerous times, most recently in 1972, during the Cultural Revolution, when it was used as a TV transmission tower and a power generator malfunctioned, engulfing the summit in flames and destroying countless relics.

As part of the “Jinding Renovation and Revival Plan” in 2004, Huazang Temple was given a major overhaul to restore

its former glory, which included the installation of a 48-metre-tall, 660-tonne bronze statue of Samantabhadra (Puxian in Chinese), the bodhisattva (or “buddha-to-be”) associated with practice and meditation. The Ten-faced Puxian Stupa, which is covered head to toe in gold, is the most eye-catching feature of the summit complex.

Huazang is by no means the only temple on Mount Emei. There are around 30 on the mountain, including the oldest surviving structure, the Wannian Temple’s “Beamless Brick Hall”, which was built around 1600. If you’re adventurous (and fit), and don’t mind rather modest accommodation, you can hike up (and down) the mountain with overnight stays in many of these temples. The paths are paved and there are plenty of teahouses for refuelling on the way – plus, at the end of your descent, you can enjoy a well-deserved dip in a hot spring at one of the hotels near the foot of the mountain.

▼ Jinding, or Golden Summit, the main peak of Mount Emei, is the location of Huazang Temple, with its Ten-faced Puxian Stupa





LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA

The ancient temples dotted across Emeishan aren't the only reason why this area is considered one of Buddhism's holiest sites. Facing Mount Emei, around 40 kilometres away, is a remarkable manifestation of Chinese devotion: the Giant Buddha of Leshan. Carved in the 8th century CE on the hillside of Xijuo Peak, overlooking the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi Rivers, it is, at some 71 metres tall, the largest stone Buddhist sculpture in the world. The Mount Emei Scenic Area and the Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area have been listed together as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996.

The statue depicts a seated Maitreya Buddha, a bodhisattva regarded as the future Buddha, who will appear to preach dharma when the teachings of Gautama Buddha have faded away from public consciousness. Worshipping Maitreya was particularly popular between the 4th and 7th centuries, and Maitreya's images can be found throughout Buddhist temples in China. The Leshan Buddha – sitting impassively against the mountain with its hands on its knees, looking across the rivers with heavy-lidded eyes – is easily the most spectacular of them all.

▲ The 71-metre-tall Leshan Giant Buddha looks towards Mount Emei, 40 kilometres away

DID YOU KNOW?

The Chinese expression for “pilgrimage”, *cháo shèng* (朝圣), is a shortened version of *cháo bài shèng shān* (朝拜圣山), meaning “paying respect to a holy mountain”. The Four Sacred Mountains of Buddhism are Wutaishan in Shanxi Province, Emeishan in Sichuan, Jiuhuashan in Anhui, and Putuoshan in Zhejiang.



While the Leshan Giant Buddha is by far the tallest pre-modern statue in the world, it pales in comparison to the tallest, also found in China, the Spring Temple Buddha, which is 128 metres tall. If one includes the lotus throne on which it stands and the other stacked base platforms, the monument's total height is some 208 metres.

It took 90 years to carve the huge statue, beginning in 713 CE, at the start of the reign of the Tang dynasty emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756 CE). The massive undertaking was the idea of a Chinese monk named Haitong, who believed the Buddha would calm the turbulent waters that plagued passing boats. After the statue's completion in 803 CE, a huge 13-storey wooden structure was built to shelter the Buddha from the elements, but this was destroyed in conflicts at the end of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368).

The Leshan Buddha is both an architectural and engineering marvel. The head is 14.7 metres long and 10 metres wide with a total of 1,021 buns of coiled hair. The shoulders are 28 metres wide, while its smallest toenail can accommodate a seated person. In addition, there's a drainage system made up of hidden gutters and channels, scattered on the head and arms, behind the ears and in the clothes, which helps carry away rainwater and keep the inner parts dry.

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

MOUNT EMEI AND LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA

WHERE

Emei Mountain is located on the western rim of the Sichuan Basin, about 150 kilometres southwest of Chengdu. Leshan Giant Buddha is near the city of Leshan, about 35 kilometres east of Emeishan City.

HOW

There are high-speed trains from Chengdu and Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport to Emeishan City, taking around 1–1.5 hours. From Emeishan Railway Station, it's a 20-minute bus ride to the foot of the mountain, a further 1.5 hours by bus to around 2,000 metres, a 45-minute hike to about 2,500 metres, and finally a short cable car ride to the Golden Summit at 3,077 metres. High-speed trains between Emeishan City and Leshan take 15–25 minutes.

INFORMATION

whc.unesco.org/en/list/779

Gateway to the Tibetan World

With Chengdu being the most important hub connecting Tibet with the outside world, there are dozens of daily flights between the Sichuan capital and Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Flights to Tibet from Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou all go through Chengdu.

The 2.5-hour flight from Chengdu is the quickest way to get to Lhasa, but if you've got more time to spare, you can travel to Tibet overland and fully soak in the breathtaking scenery. The Chengdu-Lhasa Train (Z322) departs every other day from Chengdu West Railway Station at 9:11pm and arrives at Lhasa at 7:41am – around 36 hours later – after travelling 3,070 kilometres and crossing five provinces. The soft sleeper (USD150 one way) – as opposed to the hard sleeper (USD100) or the hard seat (USD50) – is highly recommended, not least because you have access to a Western-style toilet. The return train is the Z324.



Time zone



UTC+08:00

Capital



Beijing

Language



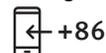
Mandarin Chinese

Currency



Chinese renminbi (YUAN)

Calling code



Electricity



220V

Plug type

A, C (European-style)

Chengdu Hotel Spotlight

TRIKA TSANG INTERNATIONAL HOTEL

Images Trika Tsang

For an authentic taste of Tibet in the heart of Chengdu, the most luxurious option is the majestic Trika Tsang International Hotel. Located in the district of Jinniu, in the centre of the city near modern attractions such as the Chengdu Tianfu Art Museum and the Chengdu Museum of Contemporary Art, Trika Tsang invites guests to experience the essence of Tibet combined with the latest modern comforts and top levels of service.

The cultural immersion begins when you enter Trika Tsang, as you are greeted by tasteful ethnic décor, colourful *thangkas* (Tibetan Buddhist paintings), harmonious white pagodas, exquisite wood carvings, ancient pottery, and intricate handicrafts, transporting you to the hinterland of the Tibetan Plateau.

Trika Tsang is located in Jinniu, central Chengdu





▼ Trika Tsang hotel manager (left) with ASIAN Geographic publisher John Thet

▲ **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**
The hotel's exquisite lobby; enjoy the very best of regional cuisine; make yourself at home in one of the elegant rooms; the suites boast beautiful living rooms



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ADDRESS
No. 18, Jinyu Street, Jinniu District, Chengdu

WEBSITE
www.trikatsanghotel.com

INFORMATION
+86-28-8087-7777

EMAIL
sm.resv@trikatsanghotel.com



Across the hotel's 40,000 square metres, guests experience the ultimate fusion of tradition and modernity in the beautifully appointed rooms, impressive 700-square-metre performance hall, stylish private conference rooms, elegant restaurants and teahouses, and charming boutiques showcasing the region's culture and heritage.

As a unique boutique hotel in the gateway city to Tibet, Trika Tsang integrates a great many regional cultural symbols into its spaces, from the bathrooms to the elevators, with every architectural detail conjuring the unique charm of the region's buildings and landscapes. You'll find inspiration taken from such celebrated landmarks as the famed Potala Palace, the sprawling 17th-century dzong fortress in Lhasa; Yumbu Lhakhang, the ancient

structure in the Yarlung Valley that, according to Tibetan tradition, was built for the first Tibetan king, Nyatri Tsenpo; and Samye Mighur Lhundrub Tsula Khang, the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Tibet, completed in 779 CE during the reign of Kin Trisong Deutsen.

Make yourself at home in one of 200 air-conditioned rooms overlooking the bustling city and take advantage of modern amenities such as a minibar, flat-screen TV, and complimentary wireless Internet. Dine like a Tibetan noble at a palace banquet and experience authentic regional flavours at one of the hotel's two restaurants, quench your thirst in the comfortable lounge, or stay in and luxuriate in the 24-hour room service. Soak in Tibetan aesthetics, meticulous service, and modern luxuries at the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. ◆AG

▲ Expect warm traditional hospitality at Trika Tsang



National Geographic Society/Pablo Albarenga

One Year of the Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition

The National Geographic Society and Rolex have been partners for nearly 70 years. Together, they've supported bold explorers taking on ground-breaking expeditions to the most remote parts of our planet, transforming our understanding of the Earth and its conservation. In April 2022, their latest collaboration began as seven teams of explorers and researchers set off into the depths of the Amazon.

Compared to the terrestrial rainforest, the Amazon's nearly 7,000-kilometre-long waterways have not received much scientific limelight, but this is changing thanks to the multidisciplinary teams of ecologists, climate scientists, cartographers,

geologists and conservationists taking part in the Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition. Guided by the generational knowledge of local communities, the teams have been exploring different parts of the Amazon River basin to understand its intricacies.

The expedition is being documented by National Geographic Explorer and Photographer, Thomas Peschak. With his history, first as a marine biologist, then as a celebrated wildlife photojournalist, he is the perfect person to chronicle this expedition. His previous work has always focused on the ocean, but now, by diving underwater and climbing rocky ledges, he's covering the Amazon River right from its source in the Andes, down to where its waters join the Atlantic Ocean.

Over the past year, all the teams have made significant progress, marking the first pages of a fascinating story.

▲ Sunrise over the Muriá River in Curuçá. Here National Geographic Explorers Angelo Bernardino and Margaret Owuor are working with local communities to study the mangrove forests and understand the importance of this unique ecosystem

From the Andes to the Atlantic, the 6,400 kilometre-long Amazon River, and its thousands of tributaries, are the lifeblood of the region. Together, they form a giant aquatic web the size of Australia.

– Thomas Peschak, National Geographic Explorer and Photographer

▶ National Geographic Explorer and photographer Thomas Peschak has been following teams of scientists and explorers on the Rolex National Geographic Society Perpetual Planet Amazon Expeditions to illuminate the diversity and connectivity of the people and wildlife across the Amazon River basin

Thomas P. Peschak



WORLD'S FIRST FRESHWATER MANGROVES DOCUMENTED

Within the first few weeks of their exploration of the Amazon delta, the team led by National Geographic Explorer Angelo Bernardino identified the world's first-known freshwater mangroves. Most mangroves grow partially submerged in the salty seawaters of intertidal zones along coasts, but the mangrove forest that Bernardino discovered has a unique mix of tree species growing in little to no salinity. This finding has increased the known area of mangroves in the region by 20 percent

▼ National Geographic Explorers Margaret Owuor and Angelo Bernardino in the mangrove forest that neighbours Muriá river, Pará, Brazil. Owuor and Bernardino are working with communities at the mouth of the Amazon to map the ecosystem services provided by the mangroves and determine their economic value

and is the first one to be published from the Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition.

Bernardino teamed up with National Geographic Explorer Margaret Owuor to survey the mangroves, interview the local communities, and carry out the first-ever mapping of the ecosystem services they provide.

They have been helped by another National Geographic Explorer, Thiago Silva, who is shedding new light on another phenomenon of the Amazon basin – that of regular flooding that submerges forests along its banks. Silva has been using drones, laser scanning, and painstakingly measuring trees, to create the first-ever 3-D models of the Amazon basin's flooded wetland forests. His work will help forecast how to respond to water stresses in the future. He has been using cutting-edge specialized equipment to help Bernardino and Owuor to understand the unique mangroves they have been studying in the Amazon Delta.

The Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition brought together people with different specialities, with different research areas, and that made our trip so much richer.

– Angelo Bernardino, Marine Ecologist, National Geographic Explorer



National Geographic/Pablo Albarenga



André Dib/National Geographic

LOCAL COMMUNITIES SEE RETURN OF THOUSANDS OF RIVER RESIDENTS

Other teams are focusing on the unique residents of the Amazon's waterways, and how they coexist with people.

National Geographic Explorer Fernando Trujillo has been monitoring the rapidly disappearing pink river dolphin and working with local communities to help them coexist peacefully with the dolphins, which are often seen as competition for local fisheries. So far, he has surveyed nearly 1,300 kilometres of the river across four different countries, estimating that there are close to 1,400 of the Amazon's iconic pink river dolphins in the area.

Rolex Awards for Enterprise Laureate João Campos-Silva and fellow National Geographic Explorer Andressa Scabin have been working with local communities to tag and track large, over-exploited freshwater species such as giant Amazon River turtles, manatees, pink dolphins, giant otters and black caimans, in order to protect these animals. They became the first people to GPS-tag an arapaima, the world's largest freshwater fish, and their work in community-based conservation has seen unprecedented recovery of wildlife,

including the release of almost 200,000 giant turtle hatchlings in 2022.

National Geographic Explorers Ruthmery Pillco Huarcaya and Andy Whitworth are also tracking a critical species of great importance to Indigenous people: the Andean bear. The bears are crucial to the Amazon's water cycle for the role they play in dispersing tree seeds in the cloud forests, helping to form the "wall" of dense vegetation on the western face of the Andes that catches water evaporating from the Amazon and feeds it



André Dib/National Geographic



National Geographic/André Dib

◀ A fresh catch of arapaimas are transported across the floodplain in the Amazon Rainforest, near the Lago Serrado community

back into the forest. As a member of the Indigenous Quechua community, Huarcaya was raised with stories and legends about the bears. Now, along with Whitworth, she's trying to understand how threats like deforestation and climate change affect its existence, and consequently the water flow that keeps the rainforest alive.

HIGHEST WEATHER STATION IN THE AMAZON

In July 2022, National Geographic Explorers and climate scientists Baker Perry and Tom Matthews installed the highest weather station in the tropical Andes at 6,349 metres, just 35 metres from the peak of Nevado Ausangate, the highest peak in the densely populated Cusco region. The weather station has been producing unique, real-time meteorological data that will help elucidate how climate change is affecting the Amazon's primary source of fresh water for communities downstream.

◀ National Geographic Explorer and biologist Andressa Scabin counting pink river dolphins in the Juruá River, which runs along the Lago Serrado community

▲ National Geographic Explorer Baker Perry at base camp ahead of an expedition up Nevado Ausangate, the highest mountain in the Vilcanota basin, Peru. Baker Perry, Tom Matthews and their team have installed a weather station near the mountain's summit to provide valuable real-time data on weather patterns over the Amazon

The Amazon is one of the most important regions globally, for influencing atmospheric circulation, especially of water between the land and the atmosphere. Without the support of Rolex in particular, these expeditions would not have happened, and we would not have the knowledge that we do of the critical water towers of the Amazon basin.

– Baker Perry, Climate Scientist, National Geographic Explorer

Just one year since its launch, the Rolex and National Geographic Perpetual Planet Amazon Expedition is transforming what we know about this celebrated region. By bringing the waterways to the fore, the expedition is showing how they connect the land from its highest peaks to its coastal forests, supporting plant, animal and human life every step of the way. With another year to go, Peschak's pictures and the scientists' findings could soon rewrite the story of the mighty Amazon River, the heart of the planet.

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For more information, visit www.rolex.org



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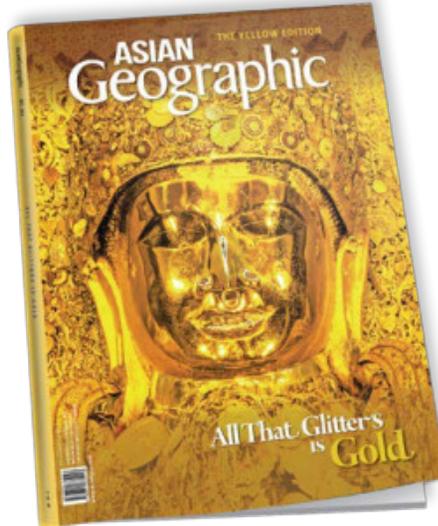
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EDITION

ASIAN
Geographic
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OCT

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DEC



ON THE COVER:

The 6.5-tonne Buddha statue at the Mahamuni Buddha Temple southwest of Mandalay, Myanmar, is cast in bronze and covered in gold leaves, regularly applied by male devotees

Image: Shutterstock



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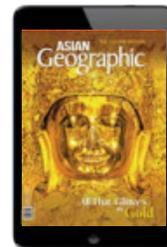
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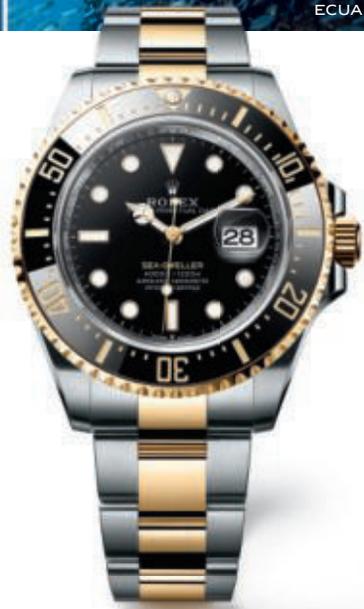


ON OUR WATCH

Hope can now be spotted across all our planet's seas and oceans. Sites are made into aquatic havens by local communities, to safeguard the richness and diversity of the ecosystems they depend on. Sylvia Earle's invaluable experience as an explorer and marine biologist continues to help further their goal, through her organisation, Mission Blue. Together, they have created over 130 Hope Spots and counting. Carrying a message of hope for generations to come. It is that vision, that dedication to a perpetual planet, which we are proud to stand by. **For as long as it is needed.**

Rolex supports Mission Blue in its commitment to protecting 30% of the oceans by 2030.

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हन्दी मैगज़ीन

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कुरकिट टुडेग हथोभा अर्नखीहनिदुस्तानमुक्ता सरति चंपकप्रतियोगिता दरपण सक्सेस मरि
सामान्य ज्ञान दरपण फारम एवं फुड मनोहर कहानियां सत्यकथा सरस सललि स्वतंत्र वार्ता लाजवाब आउटलुकसचची शकिषावनति
मायापुरी रूपायन उजाळा ऋषा पुरसाद जोश रोजगार समाचार जोश करंट अफेयर्स जोश सामान्य ज्ञान जोश बैकग्री और एएसएससी
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