

Our Earth

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**City Lights**

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**Charles V.**

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A symbol of massive crowds and solitary desires, the city holds promise for all those that pass through it. Its meandering streets, unexplored neighbourhoods and incessant noise create a landscape that captivates the observer. The lights of the city can conceal or reveal it, transforming its appearance hour by hour, offering countless facets to the passerby. While the light of morning pulls the city from its torpor and renews it for the dawning day, the nocturnal illumination plunges the pedestrian into the strangeness of its mysteries, creating a striking and ephemeral beauty. Between the shadow and the light, these original photographs reveal the fragile glow of the city, and help us rediscover the eternal pulse of these great capitals, simultaneously surprising and sublime.

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# City Lights



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Business Centre, Moscow, Russia.

## Introduction

Although the deliberate harnessing of light began in ancient times, as demonstrated by countless remnants of torches or other oil lamps found at historic sites, public lighting long remained essentially non-existent, except during feasts and festivals. It was not until the 15<sup>th</sup> century that people began to hang lights in their homes; however, maintenance of such lamps was the responsibility of the home-owner, and any neglect on his part would plunge the narrow streets into darkness. At this time, the candles that filled the lanterns gave off but little light, so when the first streetlamps with reflective mirrors were installed in 1771, the improved illumination was remarkable. In 1785, Swiss physicist Aimé Argand perfected a lamp, known as the Argand lamp, which improved the quality of lighting that had formerly been weak and irregular.

While the oil lamp continued to undergo enhancements with various inventions, particularly those of Antoine-Arnault Quinquet and Ambroise Bonnaventure Lange, gas lighting was experiencing its beginnings in Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (China had already been using it for a long time), thanks to the discovery in 1792 of a method for distilling coal by Scottish engineer William Murdoch and French inventor Jean-Pierre Minckelers.

The kerosene lamp enjoyed immense success in the 1860s as a result of numerous oilfields in the United States. However the spreading use of electricity, which had been encouraged by the experiments and discoveries of Humphry Davy in England and Léon Foucault in France, but most particularly those of Russia's Paul Jablochkoff, an engineer who invented an electric candle in the late 1870s, signified a veritable revolution. In 1879, Thomas Edison finalised an incandescent lamp that found its way to Europe in 1882. That same year, Edison invented the first electric telephone exchange, which ran an electric current throughout Wall Street, confirming his status as the founding father of modern electricity.

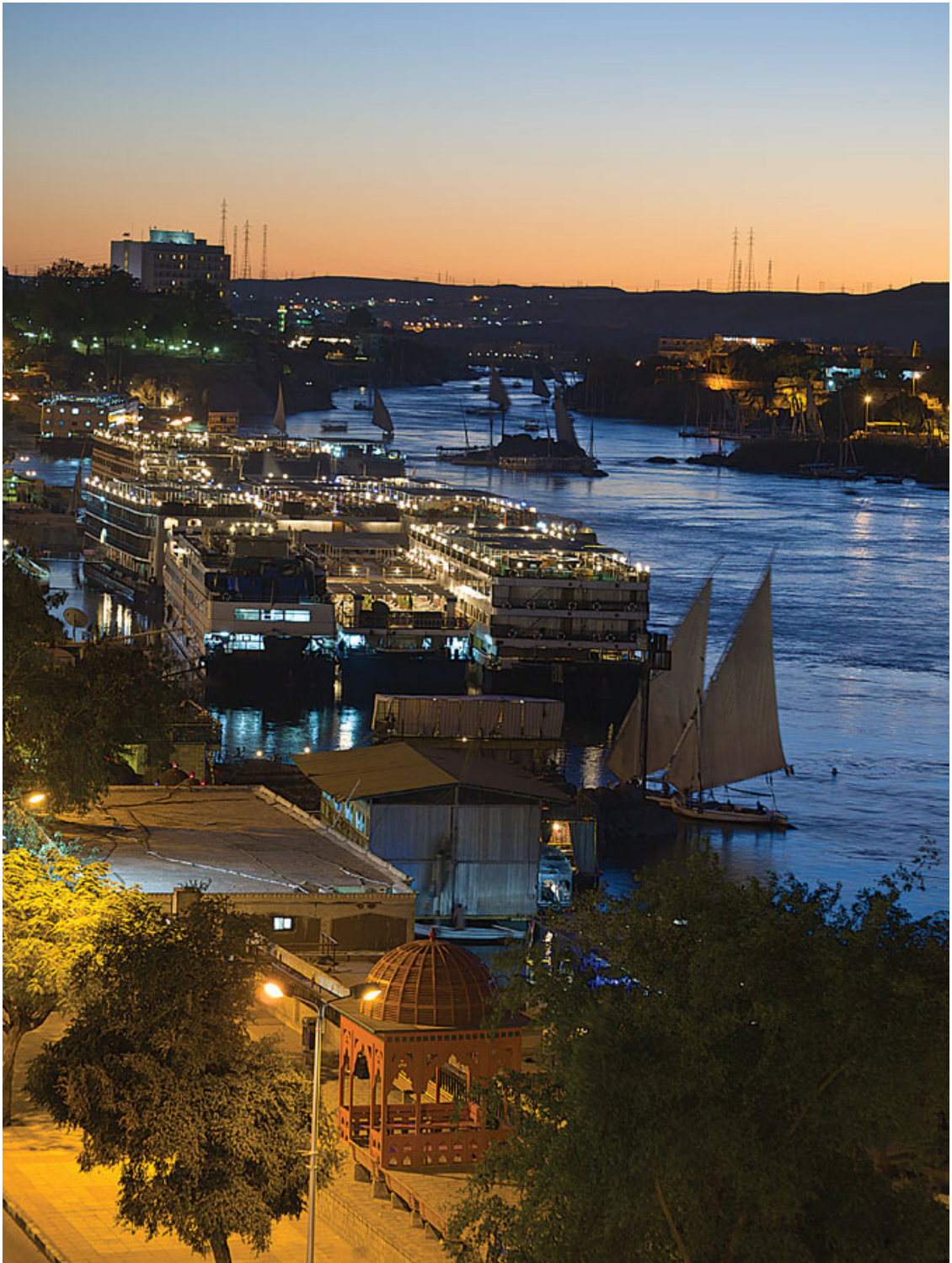
If public lighting originally permitted people to orient themselves first and foremost, its most valued quality, perhaps, was its related role in promoting public security by casting light on shadowed, disturbing streets.

In addition to serving as a reliable public utility, urban lighting offered new liberty to populations, who no longer had to set their life's rhythms according to the sun's movements. From this point on, a nocturnal social life flourished and numerous nighttime entertainment venues began to emerge.

Today, light is no longer restricted to purely utilitarian service. Not only is it used as an essential element in billboard advertisements – notable examples include the massive, lighted ads of Picadilly Circus, Broadway or Times Square – but in connection with architecture, illumination can become a veritable artistic medium. Many cities now organise sound and light shows, where engineers and designers try to outdo each other in terms of inventiveness to produce dazzling spectacles. Bridges, skyscrapers and other monuments are now liberated from cold and the night sky, rising draped in light as powerful celebrations of electricity.



## Africa



Aswan after sunset – view over the Nile, Aswan, Egypt.





Durban, South Africa.



Djemaa el Fna, Marrakech, Morocco.

Djemaa el Fna square was constructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the entrance to the medina, the historic heart of Marrakech. Its name, which means ‘assembly of the dead’, dates back to the square’s former incarnation as a place where the heads of people executed by order of the sultan were publicly displayed. Situated between the souq and the Koutoubia Mosque, whose minaret is illuminated at night by a cloak of lights, Djemaa el Fna is undeniably a landmark of the city.

From dawn until dusk, the market swarms, a joyous bazaar where tourists and locals mix. In the square cluster stands selling fresh fruit, juice and traditional dishes; water carriers, snake charmers and children playing with monkeys also gather in the space. In the late afternoon and evening, Djemaa el Fna lights up. The lights come on and artists that were absent before enter the scene, filling the square with dancers, narrators, musicians and poets.

Essentially the nerve centre of Marrakech, offering a magnificent concentration of regional cultural traditions, Djemaa el Fna was appointed as an indispensable cultural heritage site by UNESCO in 2008.



Union buildings in Pretoria, South Africa.





Hassan II Mosque, Casablanca, Morocco.



Pyramid of Khafre, the Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Giza (also called the Pyramid of Cheops), Giza, Egypt.



Johannesburg, South Africa.

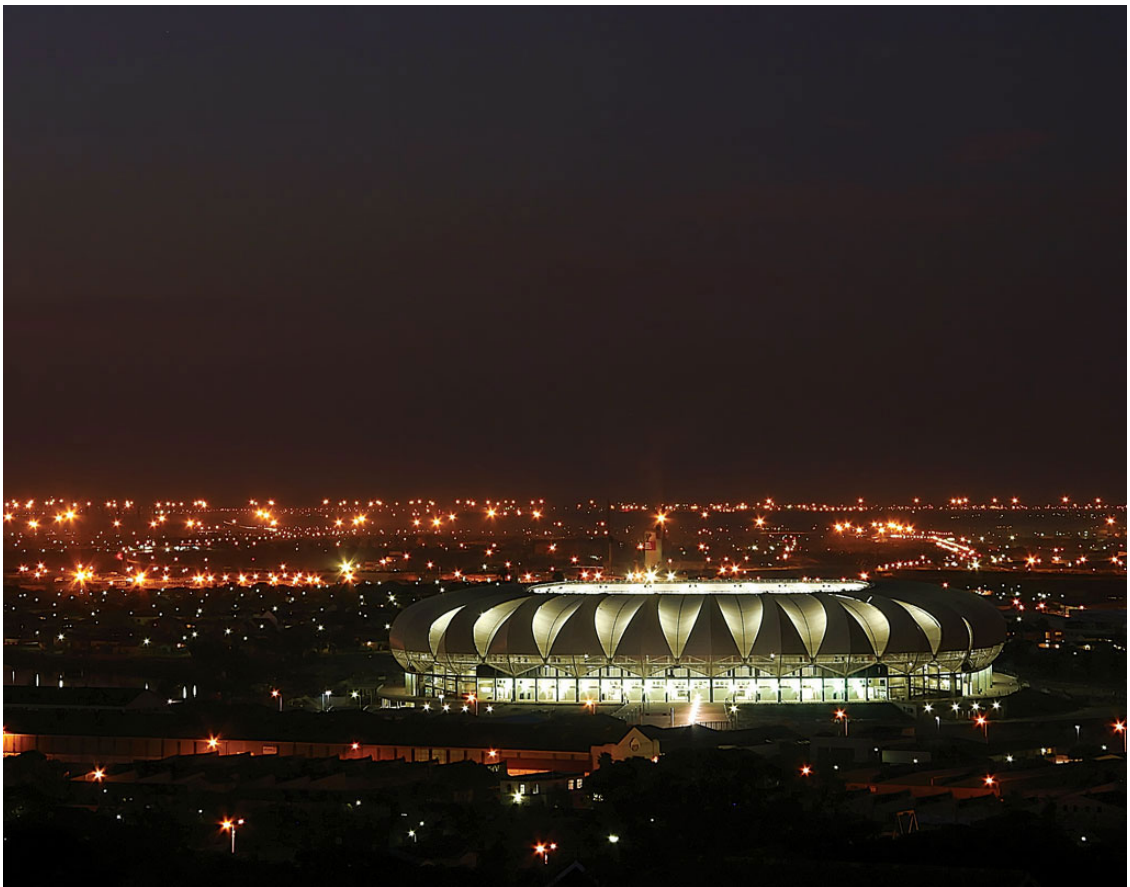
Johannesburg is the largest city in South Africa and situated in the wealthiest province of the country, Gauteng. A sprawling urban area, Johannesburg – called Jo’burg by many – is a rapidly growing city that is constantly undergoing development, as it is the centre of the country’s commercial, financial, industrial and mining enterprises.

The Hillbrow Tower, visible to the far left of this photograph, is a telecommunications tower built in Hillbrow, a suburb of Johannesburg, between 1968 and 1971. With its height of nearly 270 metres, it dominates Johannesburg’s skyline and has become a landmark of the city, evident in the use of the tower as part of the ‘b’ in the city’s official logo.





Mponeng Gold Mine, Carletonville, South Africa.



Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.



Hammamet, Tunisia.

Rich with a lively history, Hammamet was founded in Roman times. As evinced by the remnants of thermal baths and the etymology of its name – the plural of ‘hammam’ in Arabic, meaning ‘baths’ – Hammamet was long considered a thermal town. Sparkling during ancient times, the city passed through a dark period during the Middle Ages and reemerged into the light during the modern era.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by accepting developments such as electricity, Hammamet opened itself up to modernity. Since then, a number of artists, writers, poets and painters, including Gustave Flaubert, Oscar Wilde, August Macke and Paul Klee, have been charmed by the beauty of the city and turned it into a highly sought-after holiday resort. In the 1920s, Romanian millionaire Georges Sebastian built a luxurious villa in Hammamet, establishing the reputation of the city. As it became a seaside resort and grew in popularity, Hammamet continued to attract personalities like Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower. After World War II, during which Sebastian’s villa had served as the general centre of operations for German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the estate was sold and converted into a cultural centre that now welcomes the annual International Festival of Hammamet.





Grand Mosque, Sousse, Tunisia.





Cape Town, South Africa.



Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

Located at the border between Africa and Asia, Sharm el-Sheikh is a small city on the tip of the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

Recently become a popular tourist destination, Sharm el-Sheikh benefits from the cultural and historical richness of the region. Originally a fishing village on the coast of the Red Sea, a body of water whose beauty is an irresistible attraction to tourists, Sharm el-Sheikh also profits from a temperate climate, with temperatures remaining between 16 and 35 °C throughout the year. The city's hotels and nightlife have greatly developed with the influx of visitors, with a number of new buildings accommodating trendy bars and nightclubs that keep the city lively and exciting.

Adding to its international appeal, Sharm el-Sheikh has welcomed several international peace conferences, earning the nickname 'City of Peace'.



## Asia



Shanghai, China.



Yokohama, Japan.

One of Yokohama's most popular landmarks, the Cosmo Clock 21 opened in 1999 and quickly became a symbol of the city. With a height of 112.5 metres, Cosmo Clock 21 is one of the largest Ferris wheels in the world. At night, the Cosmo Clock 21 is illuminated with patterns that repeat every 15 minutes, using different designs and colours according to the season.





Sensoji Temple, Asakusa, Tokyo, Japan.



Sun and Moon Pagodas on Banyan Lake, Guilin, China.





Skyline of Shanghai, China.



Fukuoka, Japan.

A product of the fusion of the ancient city of the same name and the city of Hakata, which took place in 1889, Fukuoka is the largest city on the Japanese island of Kyūshū.

The city's proximity to the Asian continent, being as it is closer to Seoul than to Tokyo, along with its port and the incredible cultural richness of the region, which was exposed to Mongol invasions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, make Fukuoka one of the most attractive cities in Japan.

In a 2009 poll, Fukuoka ranked sixteenth on the list of the World's Most Liveable Cities, due to its metropolitan features and numerous green spaces. It was also chosen by *Newsweek* in 2006 as one of the most dynamic cities in the world.





Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, formerly Victoria Terminus, Mumbai, India.



Taipei, Taiwan.





Ben Thanh Market, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

This market, located in central Ho Chi Minh City, has become one of the symbols of the city and is a must-see for tourists visiting the south of Vietnam.

The market first formed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when street vendors assembled near the Saigon River. It was formally established as a covered market after the French colonial forces took Gia Dinh Citadel in 1859, and since then it has seen several reconstructions. Today, it is the city's largest market, attracting scores of people every day. It is also anticipated that Ben Thanh Market will become the District 1 station for the future Ho Chi Minh City metro system.

At night, the main market locks its doors and vendors set up outdoor stalls along the streets around the building, creating the Ben Thanh night market. Here you will find bags, clothing and shoes, as well as souvenirs of Vietnam. The night market is also well-known for its vast array of traditional food, offering dishes from all across the country to passersby.



Manila, The Philippines.



Harmandir Sahib, called the Golden Temple and the Holy Lake, Amritsar, India.





Khaju Bridge over Zayandeh Rud, Isfahan, Iran.



Naqsh-e Jahan Square and Imam (Shah) Mosque, Isfahan, Iran.

Naqsh-e Jahan Square, whose name translates to ‘image of the world’, also known as the Imam Square, is located in the centre of Isfahan in Iran. Rich in historical significance and honoured as a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is lined with buildings from the Safavid era, which lasted from around 1501 to 1736. This photo highlights the Shah Mosque, situated on the square’s south side.

The Shah Mosque was built under the orders of the monarch Abbas I of Persia in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. A masterpiece of Persian architecture, adorned with colourful mosaics and elaborate calligraphic inscriptions, the mosque is a landmark of the city and a national emblem.



Bangkok, Thailand.





Mosque at night, unknown location.





Shibuya district, Tokyo, Japan.  
© Barbara Helgason | Dreamstime.com

The Shibuya district in Tokyo, established in 1932, is the area surrounding the busy Shibuya Railway Station and the business district of the same name. It is considered one of the fashion “hot spots” of the country and known for its active nightlife. It attracts many of the city’s youth, who flock to its streets in search of the latest trendy boutique. One shopping centre, called Shibuya 109, is believed to be the origin of the *kogal* subculture, which involves young women dressing up like Japanese schoolgirls.

At night, Shibuya becomes alive with shoppers in search of the latest trends, as well as young fashion mavens out on the town, hoping to see and be seen.



View from Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong, China.

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