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EURO VALUES
SAVING BIG IN 7 CITIES

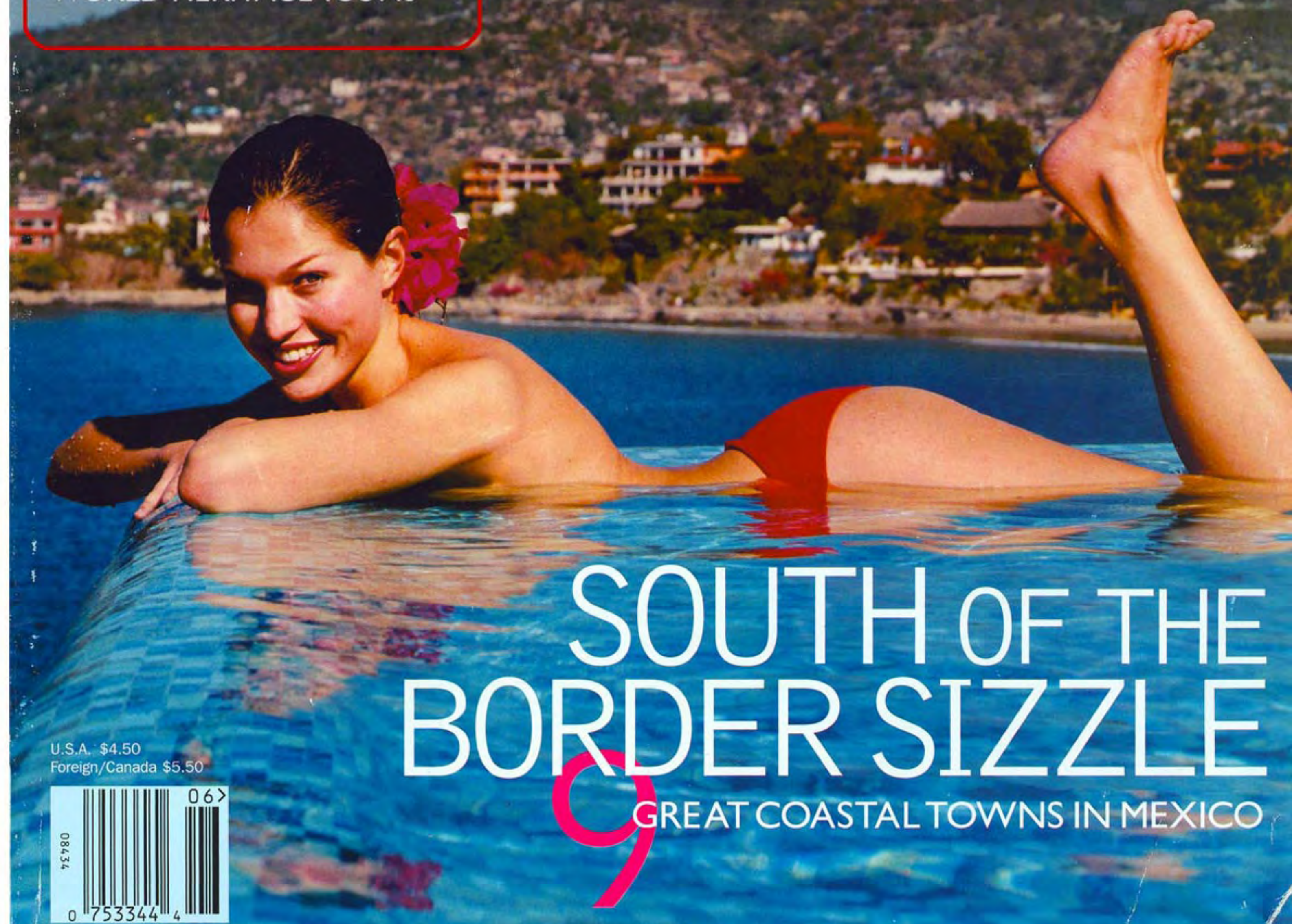
TRUTH IN TRAVEL

JUNE 2004

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AND ITS COAST REVEALED

7 ASIAN GEMS
A VIVID VIRTUAL TOUR OF
WORLD HERITAGE ICONS

SPECIAL REPORT
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Sichuan Province, China
**GIANT BUDDHA
OF LESHAN**

Here's an eyeful of the Giant Buddha of Leshan—at over 230 feet, the tallest in the world. But the eighth-century figure, carved into a Sichuan hillside, has a pretty nice view himself: He overlooks the shipping traffic at the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu, and Qinqi rivers. The site shares its World Heritage status with Mount Emei, a 60-square-mile area containing 30 Buddhist temples (including China's first), about 25 miles away. Most of both locations' tens of thousands of annual visitors stay in nearby Emeishan City, a three-hour drive from Chengdu, the provincial capital.



Around the World **in** 360°

Tito Dupret has a mission: To photograph great monuments in the round, preserving them virtually. **Pico Iyer** reports on how it's developing



The photographer takes images of a site and then stitches them into a panorama that circles back on itself and scopes up and down

Hoi An, Vietnam
FUJIAN ASSEMBLY HALL
 Twenty miles south of Danang, Hoi An was once a trade center for Asian and European merchants. Its pagodas, market, and ethnic assembly halls (like this one for the contingent from Fujian, China) make it the best preserved of Southeast Asia's trading ports. Another back-in-time touch: On the fourteenth night of every lunar month, multicolored paper lanterns illuminate the town.

SOMETIMES I

wander amid white-globed lanterns in the narrow lanes of Gion, the old geisha quarter of Kyoto, and feel I could be in the twelfth century. Dusk falls, the shrines light up, and a *maiko*, or apprentice geisha, slips out of a door and into the dark. From the windows of teahouses come the sounds of *koto* music. Then I'm abruptly pulled out of the dream by the blast of pachinko parlors and the neon flash of bars on the other side of Shijo Street.

The hills to the northeast of Japan's ancient capital are obscured now by high-rises, and tens of thousands of old wooden houses have been razed, replaced with concrete in the last few years. Were it not for preservationists, the city might resemble an Old Kyoto theme park.

It was with these losses in mind that UNESCO designated seventeen monuments around Kyoto



Dupret with a Sichuan local.

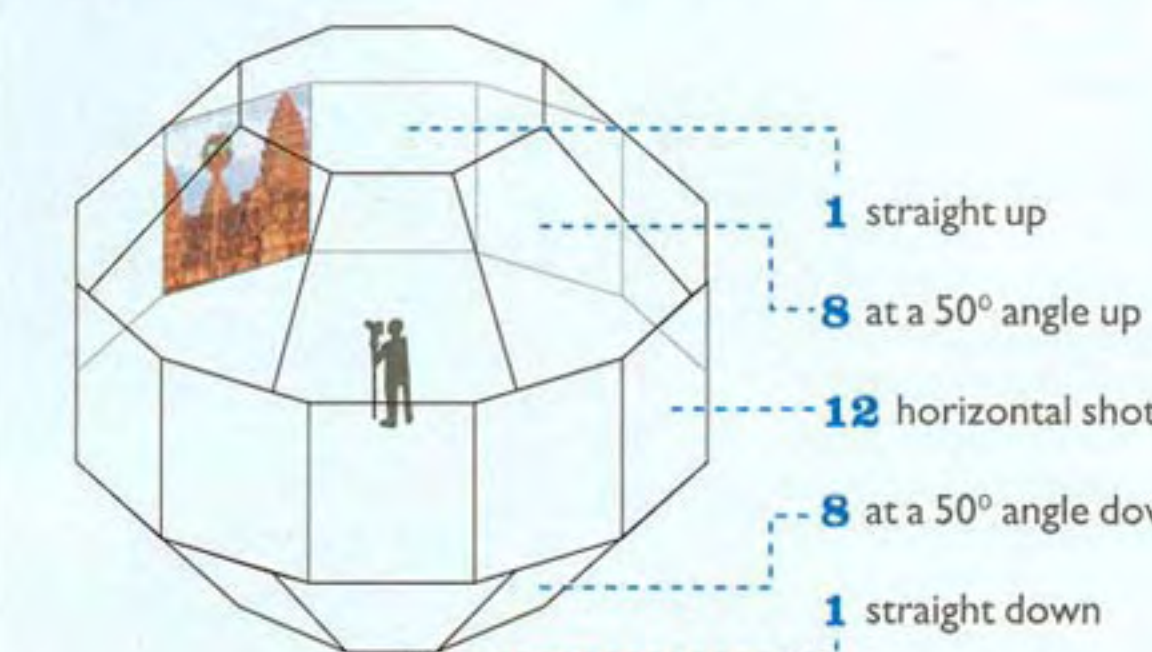


Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka
THUPARAMA DAGOBA
 A five-hour drive north from the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo, Anuradhapura was the first Ceylonese seat of government. Centered around a still-living bo tree, planted in the third century B.C. from a cutting of the Buddha's Tree of Enlightenment, the city was hidden by jungle for centuries and rediscovered in the 1800s. The site is mostly in ruins; among the restorations is Thuparama Dagoba, which enshrines Buddha's collarbone. The columns around it once supported a roof.

World Heritage Sites in 1994, the year of the city's twelve-hundredth birthday. The rock garden at Ryoanji, the golden temple of Kinkakuji, the hillside Kiyomizu temple above Gion, now all have a measure of protection from the pressures of forward motion. Yet everywhere our global cultural legacy can feel like an heirloom in the hands of a child racing across a slippery floor . . . and centuries disappear in an instant. The beauty of our age is that we can go

How It Works

To re-create the experience of visiting a location, photographer Tito Dupret follows a process that, though not complicated, is certainly painstaking. With his camera resting on a monopod, he captures the visuals that encircle him. Once he's rounded out his take with shots

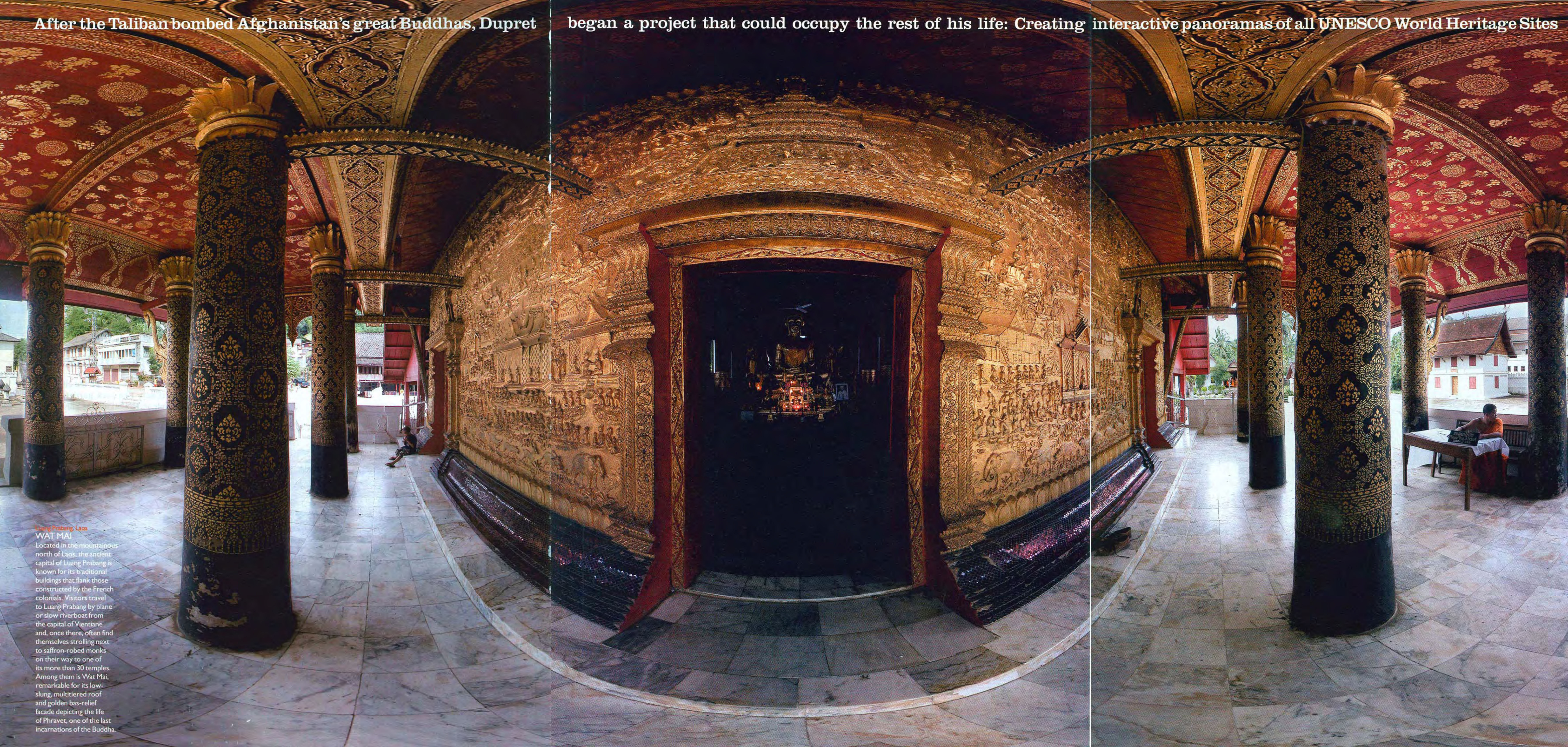


from above, below, and all around him, Dupret connects the frames into a single, continuous, enveloping image, seemingly recorded all at one time.

To view Dupret's work, log on to www.world-heritage-tour.org.

After the Taliban bombed Afghanistan's great Buddhas, Dupret

began a project that could occupy the rest of his life: Creating interactive panoramas of all UNESCO World Heritage Sites



Luang Prabang, Laos
WAT MAI
Located in the mountainous north of Laos, the ancient capital of Luang Prabang is known for its traditional buildings that flank those constructed by the French colonials. Visitors travel to Luang Prabang by plane or slow riverboat from the capital of Vientiane and, once there, often find themselves strolling next to saffron-robed monks on their way to one of its more than 30 temples. Among them is Wat Mai, remarkable for its low-slung, multitiered roof and golden bas-relief facade depicting the life of Phravet, one of the last incarnations of the Buddha.



Angkor, Cambodia
BAYON TEMPLE
Southeast Asia's most important archaeological site, Angkor comprises all that remains of the Khmer empire, strewn over 150 square miles of jungle. Hundreds of thousands visit the complex each year, many flying from Bangkok to the nearby town of Siem Reap. Angkor Wat has the most name recognition, but neighboring Angkor Thom is equally worthy of acclaim for its Bayon Temple's innumerable sculptural decorations, including heads of bodhisattva deities.

Angkor is on a separate World Heritage in Danger list; even if it withstands the plague of tourists, it could still fall victim to

political instability—one reason visitors now descend on it so eagerly

to Kyoto, the Pyramids, the Taj Mahal, which our grandparents could only dream of. The challenge of the current moment, the need for vigilance, arises from that same fact.

TITO DUPRET, A THIRTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD BELGIAN WHO has been traveling since his teens, remembers going to the magnificent rock-cut churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia, to make a documentary video, and wondering how such majesty could withstand the chaos and poverty around it. When he heard about the Taliban's 2001 bombing of the great Buddhas of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, he decided that he "was unable to continue my wise and comfortable little life in Belgium anymore." Realizing that it was up to him—up to all of us—to do what he could to preserve the great monuments of the world before time, acts of God, or human caprice could fell them, he took to the road on a project that could occupy the rest of his life: Creating interactive panoramic images of all the World Heritage Sites designated by UNESCO.

When Dupret began, three years ago, technology allowed online viewers to access cylindrical panoramas, which they could jiggle left and right so as to get a living sense of, say, the Piazza San Marco from Manhattan's St. Mark's Place. But technology has advanced to such a point that he now puts together spherical panoramas which allow the viewer to feel as if he or she is standing in that temple in Hoi An, Vietnam, turning to see it in the round, from every angle, and in absolute silence. His images—viewable on his Web site (www.world-heritage-tour.org)—are, he says, "a brick on the wall of global information, to serve students, researchers, and people unable to travel on their own for whatever reason."

The way Dupret works is simple: He carries a backpack containing a laptop, a digital camera, and a monopod and visits the sites dressed casually, like a tourist. He spends up to a week at each (even that is not



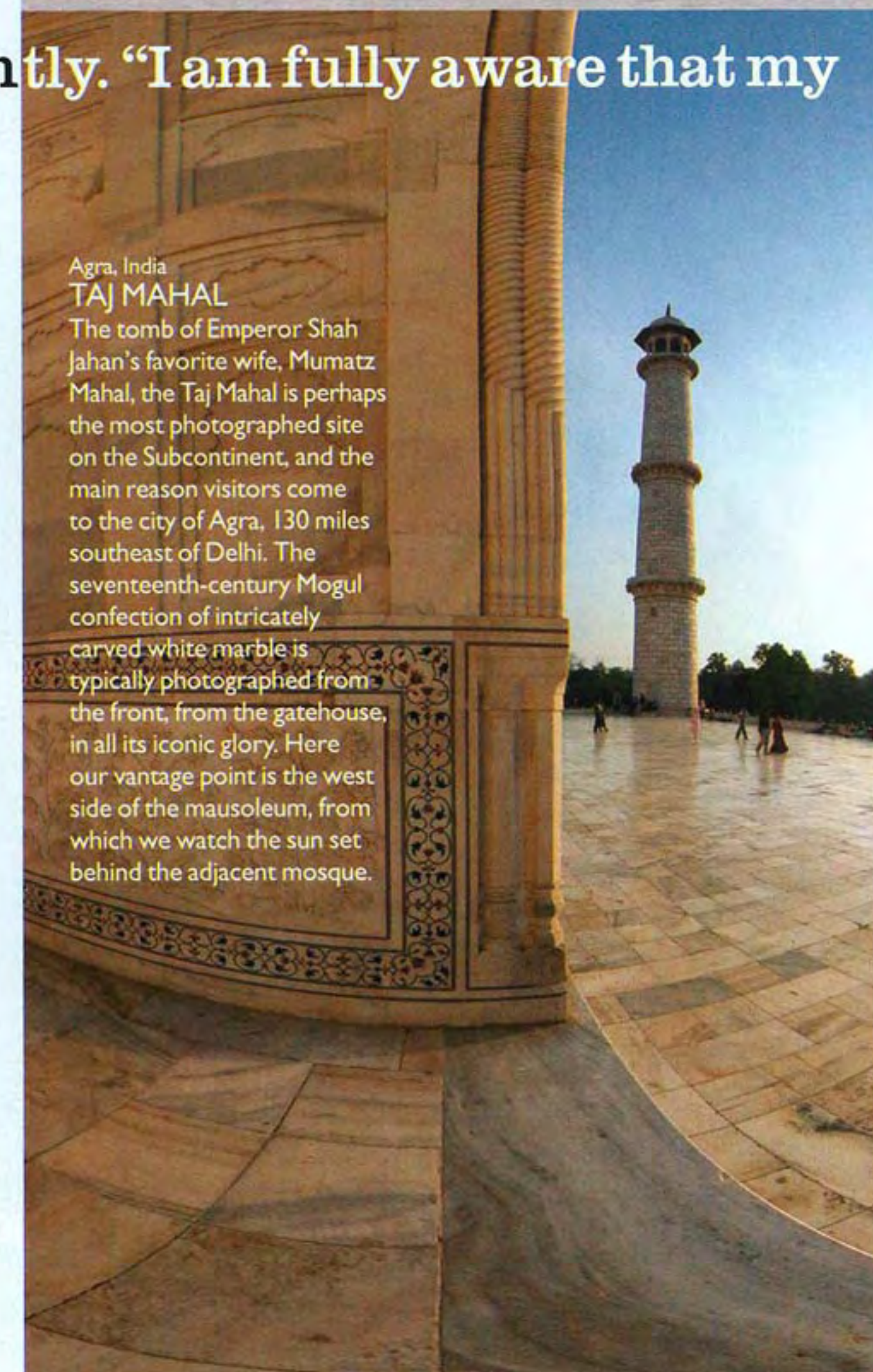
Ayutthaya, Thailand
WAT YAI CHAI MONGKON
At the height of the power of Siam (now Thailand), Ayutthaya was its capital. Founded in the mid fourteenth century on a three-mile-wide island about an hour's drive north of Bangkok, it was sacked by the Burmese in 1767. Much of the former capital, once home to more than a million, is in shambles, but a few well-preserved (or -restored) monuments remain. Wat Yai Chai Mongkon, built as a meditation site, is best known for its Reclining Buddha, representing the Enlightened One after death.

The number of sites increases constantly. "I am fully aware that my

enough, he says), taking twenty-eight pictures all around, plus one up and one down, and then spends a day or two stitching them into a panorama that circles back on itself and scopes up and down. The number of World Heritage Sites increases constantly, even as Dupret covers monuments: At press time there were 754, up from 644 when he began. But being like Zeno's arrow—never fully arriving at its target—is part of the plan's beauty: The more sites are marked off, the better for preservation all around. "I am fully aware that my task is impossible to achieve," he says, "but that's not a reason not to do it."

UNESCO makes every effort to protect these places, but the funding for World Heritage Sites totals only four million dollars annually—for the Statue of Liberty, Quebec's Old Town, and all the other locales deemed worthy. Once a site makes the World Heritage list, it becomes—so the theory goes—part of the birthright, and the responsibility, of us all, which means that if an earthquake damages, say, the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, India, the international community can (and does) come to the rescue, with funds and expert guidance.

But none of this fully protects any monument from nature, history, or politics. Angkor, for example, is on a separate World Heritage in Danger list; even if it withstands a recent plague of tourists, it could still fall victim to convulsive local politics or to regional instability—one reason visitors are descending on it so eagerly. And Kyoto, spared the bombs of World War II, may yet succumb to runaway development. "I hope to encourage people to travel on their own," says Dupret, "because nothing can replace one's own experience." For those who can't, he gives us the world's great monuments, to enjoy in peace, to leave in peace, and to explore, one hopes, for eternity. □



Agra, India
TAJ MAHAL
The tomb of Emperor Shah Jahan's favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal is perhaps the most photographed site on the Subcontinent, and the main reason visitors come to the city of Agra, 130 miles southeast of Delhi. The seventeenth-century Mogul confection of intricately carved white marble is typically photographed from the front, from the gatehouse, in all its iconic glory. Here our vantage point is the west side of the mausoleum, from which we watch the sun set behind the adjacent mosque.

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