

## Transcript of the Text

In order to increase your understanding of the exhibits, handy 'listening wands with four hours of taped commentary (in English French and six other languages) may be borrowed for DM8. If you are interested in learning more about a particular exhibit, simply punch in the number displayed next to you as you walk round. Just an hour from the British-built Retiro train station lie the fairy-tale islands and subtropical vegetation of the Paran? Delta and, within the city itself, no trip would be complete without a day in La Boca, the city's famously colourful port district and perhaps the only neighbourhood in the world where it's regarded as normal to paint houses, telegraph poles and trees in the colours of your local football team. Most budget travellers head for the Banglamphu district, where if you're not careful you could end up watching videos all day long and selling your shoes when you run out of money. For years, the plight of this borough's southern section overshadowed the entire area. The mere words 'South Bronx' conjured up images of run-down housing projects looming from the charred rubble of what looked like bomb sites – a whole community left for dead. You get the best impression if you arrive by ferry; the dock is only a tiny peninsula, a couple of minutes walk from the lake and the pretty town centre. The bus station is very much on the low-rent, southern side of town, where the concrete modernity is at it's most apparent and the traffic noise never stops. Arriving here – or driving in on the one-way system – have a quick shopping spree and then strike out for Las Vegas where the religion is luck, the language is money, and time is measured by revolutions of a roulette wheel. Once you're acclimatized, the whole spectacle can be absolutely exhilarating assuming you haven't pinned your hopes, and your savings, on the pursuit of a fortune. Las Vegas is an unmissable destination, but one that palls for most visitors after a couple of (hectic) days. If you've come solely to gamble, there's not much to say beyond the fact that all the casinos are free, and open 24 hours per day, with acres of floor space packed with ways to lose money: Million-dollar slots, video poker, blackjack, craps, roulette wheels, and much, much more. The casinos will just love it if you try to play a system; with the odds stacked against you, your best hope of a large win is to bet your entire stake on one single play, and then stop, win or lose. This is a good place at which to begin an exploration of the Ringstrasse, lined with monumental civic buildings "Ringstrasse Historicism" became a byword for the bombastic taste of the late Habsburg bourgeoisie. The broad sweep of the Ring wasn't just a symbol of imperial and municipal prestige: it was designed to facilitate the mobility of cannons in the event of any rebellious incursions from the proletarian districts beyond. Head up the hill to Platia Venizelou and then down into the picturesque areas past the souvenir stores. Your choices for sightseeing here are immense. You'll find world class museums in profusion. Some of the greatest architects, Schinkel Nering, Langhams to name but a few have left their mark with neoclassical and baroque structures throughout the district. Few cities can compete with the caf?s, bars and restaurants modern and trendy, local and traditional, humble and pretentious that line every street and boulevard. You can move easily, even on foot, from the calm, almost small-town atmosphere of Montmartre and parts of the Latin Quarter to the busy commercial centres of the Bourse and Opera or to the aristocratic mansions of the Marais. The lake marks the centre of town in every way, and the narrow bridge is a notorious bottleneck for traffic and strolling visitors. Almost all the action takes place hobnobbing with the ruling classes in Harrods, or sampling the offbeat weekend markets, the seedbed of London's famously innovative street fashions an inspiration to world-renowned designers, such as Alexander

McQueen, and fertile ground for the capital's own home-grown talent. The music and clubbing scene is second to none, and the mainstream arts are no less exciting, with regular opportunities to catch brilliant theatre companies, dance troupes, exhibitions and opera. Londoners' sense of superiority causes resentment in the regions but, thanks to federally funded programs and a newly created Empowerment Zone, this erstwhile urban hell is being reborn: new communities are emerging from the ashes of burned-out neighbourhoods. As a tourist destination, it should appeal only to hardcore urban archaeologists and rap fans – it was here, in parks and social clubs, that DJs like Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaata first experimented with the boom-boom-bap of cut-up records and rhyiming accompaniment. For less intrepid travellers, the subway lines – elevated here – rattle over the battle grounds, allowing you a safe glimpse while taking you to the more friendly territory of the northern parts. The museums and galleries are among the finest in the world, while monuments from the capital's more glorious past are to be seen everywhere, from Roman ruins through great Baroque churches to the architecture of the triumphalist British Empire. As you might expect, the city offers the country's most varied entertainment, ranging from traditional dancing and the orchestrated bedlam of Thai boxing, through to the sex bars of the notorious Patpong district, a tinseltown Babylon that's the tip of a dangerous iceberg. Certainly some parts are quite run down, and if you're white you should be prepared to stand out in the crowd. But a daytime visit to the main attractions should pose no problems for anyone. The East End, spreading east from the City, was a medieval centre for trades banned within the city walls, like brewing, bell-working and brick-making, and due to its position near the port became a haven for immigrants, from the Huguenots of the seventeenth century to the Bangladeshis of the 1960s and the 1970s. It was always a poor area, and Victorian philanthropists and middle-class social reformers ventured like intrepid explorers into the abyss, returning with outraged reports of overcrowding, drunkenness, prostitution and other moral atrocities. The heart of the city has been here since the double city of Berlin Colln was founded in the 13th century near The Grand Concourse, a continuation of Madison Avenue, the Bronx's main thoroughfare. It was built up in the 1920's and is now lined with grand art deco apartment buildings. At night, the West End is packed with theatregoers, while the doorways and shopfronts serve as dormitories for London's dispossessed. The city's problems come into further high relief in the Docklands, where decaying East End housing estates stand in the shadow of the Canary Wharf skyscraper, harbinger of a financial miracle that never materialized. At 116th street and Lenox Avenue is the Masjid Malcolm Shabazz, the silver-domed mosque of Malcolm X's ministry. Opposite this is the market where the street vendors who once lined 125th Street now hawk T-shirts, tapes and purportedly African souvenirs. The best way to arrive is from the sea, the traditional approach, and still the one which shows the city in its best light, with Mount Youhtas rising behind, the heights of the Psiloritis range to the west and, as you get closer the city walls encircling and dominating the oldest part of town. Kim Novak, Montgomery Clift, Tallulah Bankhead and Eleanor Roosevelt all lived a little bit further west, in the tree-lined streets of three and four story brownstones known as the Treadwell Farm Historic District, at 61st and 62nd Streets between Second and Third Avenues. The major sights from Big Ben to the Tower of London draw in millions of tourists, but there is enjoyment to be had from the quiet squares, narrow alleyways and surprisingly large expanses of greenery Hyde Park, Green Park and St James's Park are all within a few minutes' walk of the West End shops. The city's history has conspired to create this sense of being apart. When the bourgeoisie failed to fill the grandiose townhouses, the

speculators reluctantly rented them out to African-Americans. The area's population doubled in the 1920's and '30's, a growth that coincided with the cultural explosion known as the Harlem Renaissance. The best preserved and easily the most intriguing of the ruins, though, is the graceful, octagonal structure known as the Tower of the Winds. It was designed in the first century BC by a Syrian astronomer, and served as a compass, sundial, weather vane and water clock powered by a stream from one of the Acropolis springs. Each face of the tower is adorned with personifying the eight winds. Arriving by train, you'll be confronted by the monstrous new Convention Center, which opened above the station in 1997, and houses a massive food court and standard mall shops, along with its meeting spaces and countless hotel rooms. Most of the hopeful new arrivals, however, head straight for the casinos, with an ample overspill flooding the Boardwalk and beach. Beyond the Boardwalk there is little to see in Atlantic City, although a quick walk around the eerily quiet slums of the South Inlet district makes a chilling contrast to the manic jollity a mere block away. This is not an area in which to linger for any length of time, or indeed at all at night – the danger is very real, though police have made considerable inroads over the past few years. Unsurprisingly, it is uninspiring visually, dominated by tower blocks and nondescript estates, interspersed with pockets of gentrification where young professionals have snapped up bargain Georgian residences. Otis caught the public eye with a demonstration of his mechanical hoist at New York's crystal palace in 1857; that same year, he installed what is generally considered the first working passenger elevator in the five story Haughwout Building in the corner of Broadway and Broome Street. What you see now dates principally from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when Catalunya reached the height of its commercial prosperity. Despite appearances you are usually free to wander in and have a look around the spacious interior courtyards. With the guard's permission, you may walk around the campus. But under the shadow of the skyscrapers you'll find a heady mix of chaos and refinement, of frenetic markets and hushed golden temples, of dispiriting, zombie-like sex shows and early-morning almsgiving ceremonies. Look out for the President's House and the domed Caspary Auditorium. Shooting off south from Trafalgar Square, stately Whitehall, a swathe of government offices, brings you to Westminster and the Thames, with the Tate Gallery a short stroll south along the riverbank. The music, piped into the scented toilets, may not have improved with age, but the museum is a satisfying attempt to answer the seminal question, "How does a great performer top himself on stage?" You should also visit the Conciergerie, whose entrance is around the corner facing the river. This is perhaps the best collection of its kind in the world: 35 rooms of eleventh- and twelfth-century frescoes, meticulously removed from a series of small Pyrenean churches and beautifully displayed. This is probably the most African-American place in America. Its elegant stone buildings reverberate with the history of black America's struggle for equality. Its institutions and streets are christened with the names of great liberators, teachers and orators, and there are constant reminders of proud Afrocentric culture. All roads lead to Plat? a Sind? gmatos S? ndagma Square. Geared to tourism, with the main EOT branch, post office, American Express, airline and travel offices grouped around, it has convenience but not much else to recommend it. At the back of the parliament buildings, the National Gardens provide the most refreshing spot in the whole city: a luxuriant tangle of trees, shrubs and creepers, whose shade, duck ponds, cafes and sparkling irrigation channels bring relief from the heat and smog of summer. At the southern end of the park, beside one of the most hazardous road junctions in Athens, stands Hadrian's Arch, erected by the Roman emperor to mark the edge of the Classical city and the

beginning of his own. The wooden Boardwalk was originally built as a temporary walkway, raised above the beach so that holiday-makers could take a seaside stroll without treading sand into the grand hotels. Alongside the brash 99¢ shops and exotically named palm-readers, a few beautiful Victorian buildings that survived the wrecker's ball invoke past elegance, despite being dwarfed by the casinos and housing fast-food joints. Just behind the square, the Cathedral is one of the great Gothic buildings of Spain. Modern lighting shows off the soaring airiness of the interior superbly. Outside, the magnificent cloisters look over a lush tropical garden with soaring palm trees and white geese, and open into, among other things, the small cathedral museum. This beautiful Italianate museum – also an extraordinary literary research facility – was once the private library of financier J.P. Morgan. Mostly gathered during Morgan's trips to Europe, the collection includes three Gutenberg Bibles, original Mahler manuscripts, and the gorgeous silver, copper and cloisonné 12th-century Stavelot triptych. Early in the morning, when the breezes from the ocean are at their most pleasant, it is peaceful, peopled only by keen cyclists and a few lost souls down on their luck. The Central Pier offers all the fun of the fair, with rides, games and old-fashioned "guess your weight" challenges. A few blocks south, another pier has been remodelled into an ocean-liner-shaped shopping center. The small and faded Arts Center and Historic Museum, on the Garden Pier, at the quiet northern end of the Boardwalk, has a free collection of seaside memorabilia, postcards, photos and a special exhibit on Miss America, as well as travelling art shows. The money markets are located over in the eastern part of the inner core, in the district known, confusingly for first-time visitors, as the City of London, or simply the City. Modern office buildings dominate the landscape here, but the City has two of London's prime tourist sights, in the shape of St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London. Nearby, next to the Palau Episcopal and at various points in and near Plaça Laietana, you can see some of the remaining Roman walls. Napoleon III had Baron Haussmann redraw the city centre, while recent presidents have initiated the skyscrapers at La Défense, the Tour Montparnasse, Beaubourg and Les Halles shopping precinct, where Pacific Avenue meets Rhode Island Avenue, at the heart of some of the city's worst deprivation. Atlantic City's beach is free, family filled and surprisingly clean considering its proximity to the Boardwalk. Beaches at neighboring Ventnor, a jitney ride away, are quieter, but charge users \$3.50 per week. For the same fee, New Jersey's beautiful people pose on the beaches of Margate, three miles south of Atlantic City; all watched over by Lucy, the Margate Elephant at 9200 Atlantic Ave. A 65ft wood and tin Victorian oddity, Lucy was built as a seaside attraction in 1881 and used variously as a tavern and a hotel. Today her huge belly is filled with a museum of Atlantic City memorabilia, and photos and artefacts from her own history. Underground, both Roman and Visigothic remains have been preserved where they were discovered during works in the 1930s. The museum also gives access to the beautiful fourteenth-century Capella Reial de Santa Eulària with its tall single nave and unusual stained glass, and to an extension of the royal palace known as the Saló de Tinell, a fine spacious example of fourteenth-century secular Gothic architecture. It was on the steps leading from the Saló de Tinell into the Plaça del Rei that Ferdinand and Isabella stood to receive Columbus on his return from America. Beyond the bafflingly powerful pull of Madame Tussaud's, you're into a mix of characterful local neighbourhoods and excellent parks Regent's Park is the most elegant, Hampstead Heath the largest. But over the last decade the whole area has been overshadowed by the Docklands developments, the apotheosis of Conservative values. Docklands is the playground of London's newly monied classes, whereas the ancient regime prefers to

reside on the other side of the West End, in salubrious enclaves such as Mayfair, Knightsbridge and South Kensington. At the harbour, South of Market Square, the well laid out Marine Parade leads to the Eastern Docks, with the car ferry terminal. A path climbs to the Eastern Heights which give an excellent view of the harbour and hoverport. The Western Heights are occupied by the Citadel and other Napoleonic and 19C fortifications. Here King John made a submission to Pandulf, the Pope's legate, in 1213. A deep cleft separates the Western heights from Shakespeare Cliff (350 ft: footpath) so called from its traditional association with the famous passage in King Lear (IV, vi.) At its base is the supplementary ventilation system of the Channel Tunnel. For livelier scenes, explore the dark alleys of Chinatown's bazaars or head for the water: the great Chao Phraya River, which breaks up and adds zest to the city's landscape, is the backbone of a network of canals and floating markets that remains fundamentally intact in the west-bank Thonburi district. The Museu Mar's occupies the palace behind the plaza. The bulk of the museum consists of religious sculpture, including a vast number of wooden crucifixes from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. All three of these areas boast some fine architectural set-pieces, but the last of them is the one that has the greatest tourist interest, on account of the vast green space of Hyde Park and a trio of splendid museums the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, the world's most extensive showcase of the applied arts. The enormous Pergamon Museum is a feast of classical Greek Babylonian, Roman, Islamic and Middle Eastern art and architecture ranging from the bijou Dulwich Picture Gallery to the awesome Thames Barrier. The Gothic collection is fascinating, but it's the Romanesque section that is the more remarkable. At the opposite end of the scale, many visitors take a river trip or ride the new light railway through Docklands, going on to Greenwich, which is accessible from the Isle of Dogs via a foot tunnel. Plagued by hunger and under constant attack from the native Querand? Indians, the city's early settlers were soon forced to flee upriver to Asunci?n, which had been founded by a section of Mendoza's party in 1537. It was from here that Juan de Garay, some 40 years later, headed back down the River Paran? and, in 1580, successfully refounded the city. Despite this slightly inauspicious start, Buenos Aires never really looked back. The district's main attraction is the Prater (U-Bahn Praterstern), a large expanse of parkland that stretches for miles between the Danube canal and the river itself. Formerly the royal hunting grounds, the public were allowed access to the Prater by Josef II, who apparently walked here often himself, quixotically ordering passing members of the public not to salute him. The funfair at the northern end is renowned for the Riesenrad. Appropriately, it's the home of the Belgian parliament and government departments, some of the major museums and the swishest shops. Nowadays the main lure, however, is the stupendous Cath?drale de Notre-Dame, begun in 1160 under the auspices of Bishop de Sully and completed around 1245. In the nineteenth century, Viollet-le-Duc carried out extensive renovation work, remaking most of the statuary and adding the steeple and baleful-looking gargoyles, which you can see close up if you brave the 387-step ascent of the towers. Modern Buenos Aires is home to a third of Argentina's population of 33 million, and although for many the days of glory have gone, the capital continues to act as a magnet for economic migrants from the country's poorer provinces as well as from neighbouring Latin American countries. The giant ferris wheel featured in Carol Reed's film *The Third Man*. The sculpture of the west front portals is amazingly detailed, dating mainly from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries while, inside, the immediately striking feature is the dramatic contrast between the darkness of the nave and the light falling on the first great

clustered pillars of the choir. It is the end walls of the transepts which admit all this light, nearly two-thirds glass, including two magnificent rose windows in imperial purple additions made in 1267. This "Celestial Vault" is studded with neon, choreographed in dazzling nightly displays of color, and shelters a mall of bars, restaurants and souvenir stores as well as several rapidly expanding casinos. Whatever time you hit the streets, you'll find porteños -as the city's inhabitants are known (from puerto or "port") - in animated conversation over an espresso, in one of the city's ubiquitous confiterías, or cafés. A superficial acquaintance with the city might make you think of Paris, Rome or Madrid but Buenos Aires is also home to two of the world's most unusual, and least European, landscapes: the Ramblas, littered with cafés, shops, restaurants and newspaper stands, a focal point for locals as much as for tourists. Just a few blocks from the city centre you will find traditional barrios or neighbourhoods" with cobbled streets and simple one-storeyed houses and bars, whose quiet corners have inspired tangos and the poems and short stories of Argentina's greatest writer, Jorge Luis Borges. The greater part of the centre is occupied by the Lower Town, of which the Grand Place perhaps the best preserved city square in Europe is the unquestionable focus. South of here, the busy centre fades into the old working-class streets of the Marolles district and Gare du Midi, now a depressed, predominantly immigrant area; north, the shopping street of rue Neuve leads up to place Rogier and the tawdry area around the Gare du Nord. Nearby is the Fundació Joan Mir, the most adventurous of Barcelona's art museums, devoted to one of the greatest Catalan artists. A beautiful white building houses a permanent collection of paintings, graphics, tapestries and sculptures donated by Mir himself and covering the period from 1914 to 1978. A short walk over to the other side of the Palau Nacional will bring you to the Poble Espanyol or "Spanish Village" which was once inhabited by the city's elite, but they fled to the higher grounds of Barrio Norte after a yellow fever epidemic in 1871, thus establishing a precedent for the geographical division of wealth which persists to this day. Neutrally located in the centre and home to theatres, cafés and bookshops, Corrientes was once described as "the street that never sleeps". It's an epithet that could now be applied to the city as a whole: Buenos Aires is one of the world's great 24-hour cities and one of the few places in the world where you'll find yourself with standing-room only on a bus in the small hours of a weekday morning. Heading down from the Plaça de Catalunya, you gradually leave the opulent facades of the banks and department stores for a seedier area towards the port where the Ramblas cut right through the heart of the notorious red-light district, with side streets at the harbour end packed with dimly lit clubs, bars and sex shops. At the other end of the island, the dull mass of the Palais de Justice swallowed up the palace that was home to the French kings until the bloody revolt of 1358 frightened them into the greater security of the Louvre. The only part of the older complex that remains in its entirety is Louis IX's Sainte-Chapelle at 4 bd du Palais one of the finest achievements of French Gothic style, lent a fragility by its height and huge expanses of glorious stained glass, a yellowing collection of cuttings and family photos, along with electric candelabra, bejewelled quail eggs with inlaid pianos, rhinestone-covered fur coats, glittering cars and more. Popularly remembered as a beaming buffoon who knocked out torpid toe-tappers, Liberace, who died in 1987, started out playing piano in the rough bars of Milwaukee during the 1940s. A decade later, he was being mobbed by screaming adolescents and ruthlessly hounded by the scandal-hungry press. Just down the road, the reconstruction of the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion where Marie-Antoinette and, in their turn, the leading figures of the Revolution, were incarcerated before execution. is a far greater treat. Its chief interest

is the enormous late Gothic Salle des Gens d'Arme, canteen and recreation room of the royal household staff, as well as Marie-Antoinette's cell and various macabre mementoes of the guillotine's victims. From the Poble Espanyol, the main road climbs around the hill to what was the principal Olympic arena, passing some dazzling new buildings the Picornell swimming pools and the Japanese-designed Palau Sant Jordi. Those buried here include Errol Flynn, Walt Disney, Clara Bow, Nat King Cole, Chico Marx, Clark Gable, and Jean Harlow, in a marble-lined room paid for by her fiancé William Powell. If seeing the grave sites of the famous isn't enough for you, check out the replicas of the highlights of art history, all rendered with maximum vulgarity. Exhibitions focus upon photography, film and video. Not much further, hidden behind an archway just off the Ramblas and easy to miss, lies the elegant nineteenth-century Plaça Reial. It's decorated with tall palm trees and iron lamps (by the young Gaudí) and is the haunt of punks, bikers, Catalan eccentrics, the odd drunk and hundreds of alfresco diners and drinkers. Spreading west, is a sprawl of tract homes, mini-malls, fast-food drive-ins and auto parts stores. The area is much less threatening than it once was, however: the Olympic clean-up and the transformation of the Port Vell area has meant new hip bars and clubs now rub shoulders with sleazy old ones. On your way down there are plenty of interesting buildings, some of them open for visits: don't miss the glorious La Boqueria, the city's main food market, a splendid gallery of sights and smells with several excellent snack bars and a restaurant at the back selling market-fresh dishes, whose flamboyant, no-expense-spared casinos lure thirty million tourists each year. Long before they lose their sparkle, yesterday's showpieces are blasted into rubble, to make way for ever more extravagant replacements. A few years ago, when the fashion was for fantasy, Arthurian castles and Egyptian pyramids mushroomed along the legendary Strip; now Vegas demands nothing less than entire cities, and has already acquired pocket versions of New York, Paris, Monte Carlo and Venice. Almost adjacent is the shell of the Liceu, Barcelona's celebrated opera house that went up in smoke in January 1994 and is now being rebuilt. More or less opposite is the famous Cafè de l'Òpera, an opulent high society meeting place – though not as expensive as you might imagine. Cross the ramparts from the Barbakan and you're into the New Town (Nowe Miasto) district, which despite its name dates from the early fifteenth century, but was formally joined to Warsaw only at the end of the eighteenth. Ulica Freta, the continuation of Nowomiejska, runs north through the heart of the district to the Rynek Nowego Miasto, once the commercial hub of the district, Town. The crowds that cluster around the exploding volcanoes and pirate battles along the Strip remain almost exclusively adult. It's still possible to find good, inexpensive rooms, and the all-you-can-eat buffets offer unbeatable value, but the casino owners have finally discovered that high-rollers happy to lose hundreds of dollars per night don't mind paying premium prices to eat at top-quality restaurants and stay in plush hotels. Tucked into the eastern corner is the Church of the Holy Sacrament, commissioned by Queen Maria Sobieska in memory of her husband Jan's victory over the Turks at Vienna in 1683; as you might expect, highlight of the sober interior is the Sobieski funeral chapel. Behind the palace are the gardens, now a public park, and beyond that the Ghetto area. The most obvious way to approach is to take a bus or metro to the Plaça d'Espanya and walk from there up the imposing Avda de la Reina Marça Cristina, past the 1929 International Fair buildings and the rows of fountains. If you'd rather start with the castle you can pick up a cable car to the amusement park and castle. Or there's a funicular railline which runs to the northeast of Trafalgar Square through Covent Garden, formerly the capital's main fruit and veg. market, now an upbeat

shopping area revolving round the sensitively preserved market building on Covent Garden piazza. In 1939 there were an estimated 380,000 Jews living in and around this part of Warsaw - one-third of the total population. By May 1945, around 300 were left, and after the war Jewish Warsaw was replaced by the sprawling housing estates and tree-lined thoroughfares of the Muranów and Mirowski districts, a little to the west of the city centre. However, a few traces of the Jewish presence in Warsaw do remain, and there's a small but increasingly visible Jewish community here. First stop on any itinerary of Jewish Warsaw is the Ratanakosin area: the dazzling ostentation of Wat Phra Kaeo, the grandiose decay of Wat Po and the National Museum's hoard of exquisite works of art. Once those cultural essentials have been seen, you can choose from a whole bevy of lesser sights, including Wat Benjamabophit (the "Marble Temple"), especially at festival time, and Jim Thompson's House, a small, personal museum of Thai design. Inevitably the waterways have earned Bangkok the title of "Venice of the East". South of Venice, Marina del Rey and the declining resort town of Playa del Rey, the coast is dominated by the runways of LAX and the oil refineries of El Segundo. Each has a beckoning strip of white sand, and Manhattan and Hermosa especially are well equipped for surfing and beach sports. This is where England's news and money are made, and as far as its inhabitants are concerned, provincial life begins beyond the circuit of the orbital motorway. Marooned in the middle of a drab square to the north of the Ghetto area, the imposing Ghetto Heroes Monument - unveiled in 1948 - was made from materials ordered by Hitler for a monument to the Reich's anticipated victory. Don't miss the roof. Right at the harbour end of the Ramblas, Columbus stands pointing out to sea from the top of a tall, grandiose column: the Monument a Columbus. Risk the elevator to his head (it fell down in 1976) for a fine view of the city. One way or another, the place will probably get under your skin - and if you don't enjoy the challenge of slogging through jams of buses and tuk-tuks, which fill the air with a chain-saw drone and clouds of pollution, you can spend a couple of days on the most impressive temples and museums, Directly opposite the Rathaus stands the Burgtheater, flanked by two grandiose staircases decorated with frescoes by, among others, Gustav Klimt. It's far from having a monopoly on Bangkok accommodation, but it does have the advantage of being just a short walk from the major sights in the a tag that seems all too apt when you're wading through flooded streets in the rainy season; indeed, the city is year by year subsiding into the marshy ground, literally sinking under the weight of its burgeoning concrete towers. Shopping on dry land varies from ubiquitous touristic stalls selling silks, handicrafts and counterfeit watches and clothes, to completely and sometimes undesirably authentic marketplaces - notably Chatuchak, where caged animals cringe among the pots and pans. Even if the above doesn't appeal, you'll inevitably pass through Bangkok once, if not several times - not only is it Thailand's main port of entry, it's also the obvious place to sort out onward travel, with some of the world's best deals on international air tickets as well as a convenient menu of embassies for visas to neighbouring countries.