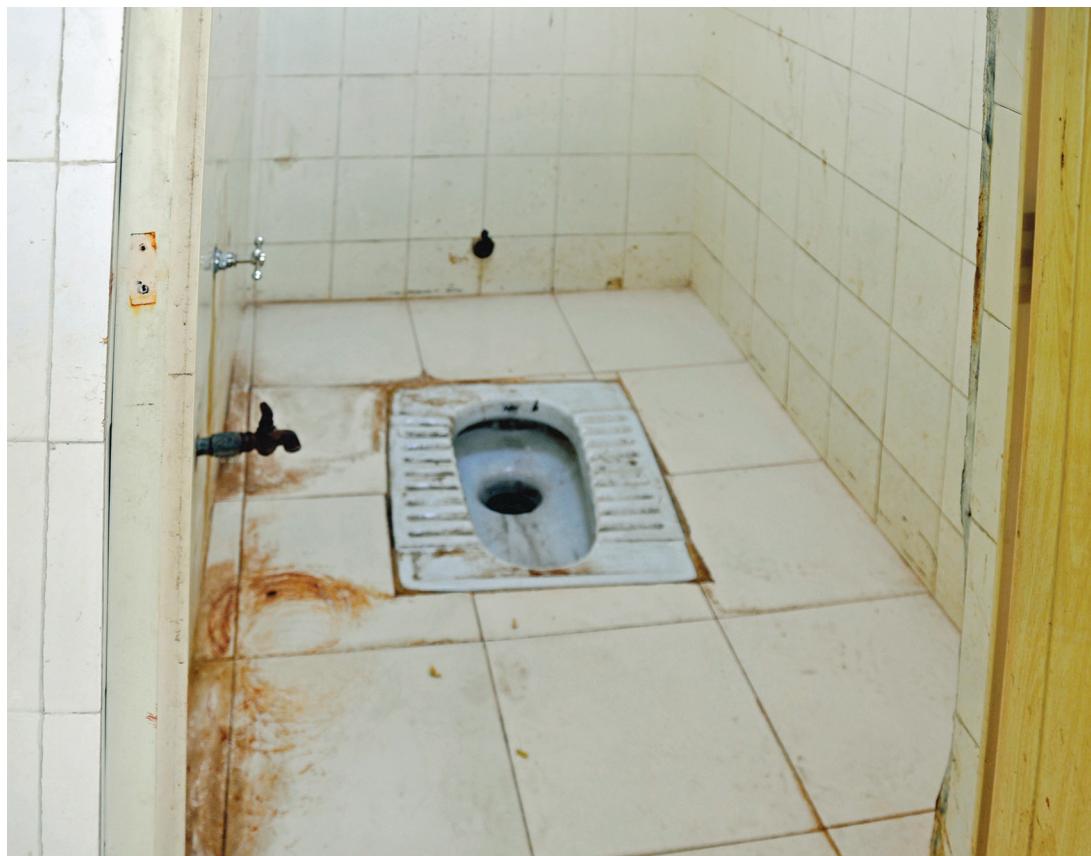


Foreword – Starting from the Bottom



Eastern-Style Toilet in India

In 2009, my wife and I spent almost three weeks in India. We visited the Taj Mahal, palaces, the place where Gandhi started his peaceful revolution and dozens of other sites we will never forget. But we also went into rural villages to interact with regular Indians. When nature's call came, we often found little more than a hole in the floor, with a water hose sometimes hung nearby. If we didn't want to use the hose for its intended purpose, we had to carry our own tissue. We got used to the idea of throwing our tissue into a little basket placed near the hole for just such a purpose.

I assumed that once people in such remote places learned about the western miracles of flush toilets with seats and squeezably soft paper, they would quickly abandon their old ways. So I was surprised when we were about to leave the airport in New Delhi. Identical doors near the security lines marked "Eastern" and "Western" were not the names of airlines. Many of the passengers, whose familiarity with western culture was reflected in their stylish jeans and sneakers, chose the door that opened to a hose and a hole in the floor. Not recognizing how condescending this sounded, I asked our guide why so many Indians still preferred the "Eastern" door. His answer was as matter of fact as it was enlightening – "It is hard to convince many people here that it is appropriate to sit on a seat that someone else has just used. Besides, that is why God gave us left hands." I had no more questions.

In trips both before and since our visit to India, we have seen places that many Americans will never see. Keeping in mind what I learned about Indian toilets, I have tried to find stories in the places we visit that exhibit not only our common humanity but the traditions and religious beliefs that both unite and divide us. This book is the result of that effort. But nothing more about toilets.

They Moved the Mountains



Temples at Abu Simbel, Egypt

Ramses II, called Ramses the Great by history, is the pharaoh most often associated with the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Although Ramses lived for 90 years and ruled Egypt for 66, he could not get enough of himself. And so, throughout his reign he built one after another self-serving monument, many surviving for more than 3000 years thanks not only to the extraordinary technology of his age but to that of our own.

The most impressive monument Ramses built to himself is at Abu Simbel, then at the southern edge of his kingdom and now a short plane ride from Aswan. Skilled workers literally hollowed out a small mountain to create a multi-room temple both honoring Ramses and warning outsiders not even to consider invading a kingdom with such a powerful ruler. To make sure everyone got the message, four 65-foot-tall seated statues of Ramses were cut from the mountain at the temple's entrance. Just inside, in a hall honoring Ramses' military exploits, eight columns also cut from the rock showed Ramses as the god Osiris. Rooms further into the mountain had more statues showing Ramses as a god. A temple to Nephertari, the favorite of his many wives, was carved into a nearby mountain, showing her as the goddess Hathor along with other statues of Ramses.

Today, the water of Lake Nasser, formed in the Nile River by the Aswan High Dam, nearly covers the mountains at Abu Simbel in which Ramses carved his temples. Archaeologists initially proposed giving underwater tours. Fortunately, some clever engineers had a better idea. Beginning in 1964, workers, supported by UNESCO, cut the temples, statues and surrounding rock into more than 10,000 blocks, some weighing 30 tons. They moved the numbered blocks to a site 200 feet higher and 600 feet further from the Nile and re-assembled them using a metal dome for support, even faithfully recreating a fallen Ramses statue at the entrance. The boundaries between the blocks are largely invisible and visitors not knowing the history often don't notice anything out of place. Ramses II, the most prodigious builder in Egyptian history, would be proud.

Will London Lose its Marbles?



Section of Parthenon Frieze in London's British Museum

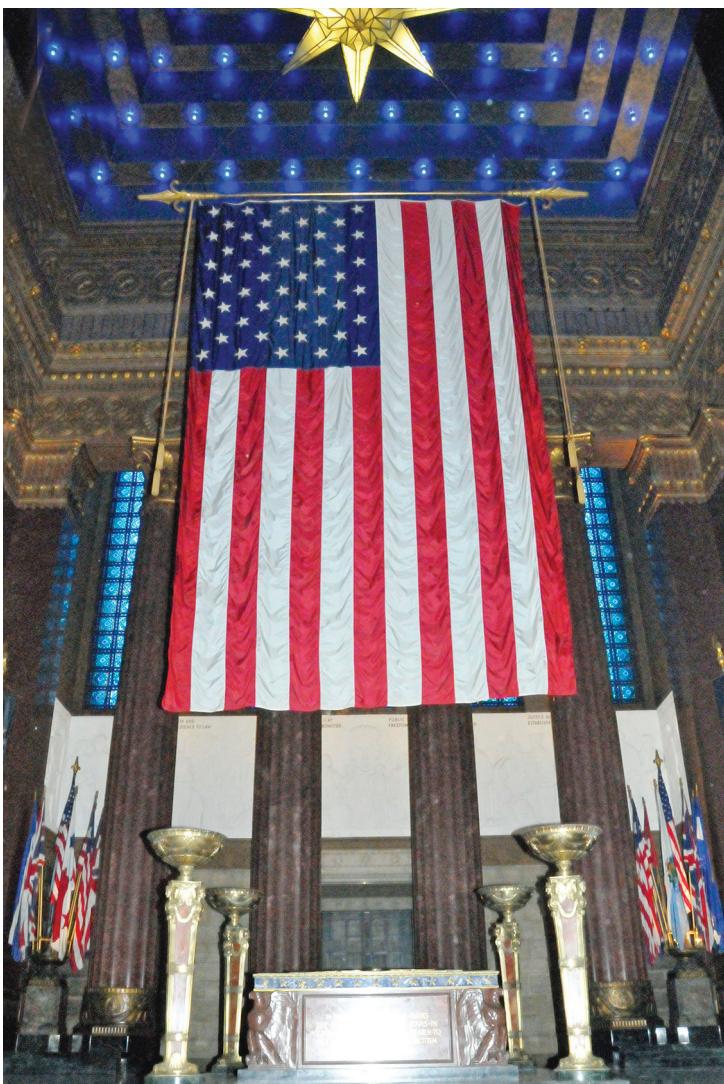
Magnificent marble sculptures from the Parthenon are among the most popular of the eight million items in London's British Museum. These so-called "Elgin Marbles" are also the museum's most controversial items, with persistent claims they were plundered from Greece.

Pericles built the Parthenon atop the Athens Acropolis in the fifth century B.C. to house a colossal statue of the goddess Athena. The colonnaded building, visible throughout the city, was the epitome of classic Greek architecture, adorned inside and out with exquisitely carved marble figures and friezes. As Athens later fell to different empires, the Parthenon was converted to a church and then a mosque and finally an ammunition dump. In 1687, gunpowder stored by the Ottomans exploded during a battle with the Venetians, severely damaging the Parthenon. The artwork was strewn amid the rubble.

In 1798, Thomas Bruce, the seventh Earl of Elgin, became British ambassador to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, then controlling Athens. Initially desiring only to make casts of the art he found in the Parthenon ruins, he later decided to take it home. Whether he wanted the pieces for his Scottish estate or to prevent further damage is still disputed. Whatever his motive, he obtained a controversial document from the Sultan purportedly giving him permission to remove "stones" from the Acropolis. Interpreting the document to permit the removal of anything made of stone, Lord Elgin personally spent 70,000 pounds to remove and ship to England about half of all the artwork of the Parthenon, including 17 pediment statues, 15 exterior panels called metopes depicting mythical battles, and 250 feet of the frieze honoring the Olympian gods that originally extended around the interior. Apparently needing money, he sold the items to the British government in 1816 for 35,000 pounds. Since the 1850s, the word "Elginism" has been used to describe cultural vandalism.

The Elgin Marbles are now displayed in British Museum's Duveen Gallery, a large room built especially for them. The Greek government has repeatedly demanded their return as stolen art, a claim the British government has rejected. UNESCO has offered to mediate the dispute.

World War Class



Shrine Room in Indiana War Memorial in Indianapolis

As we travel to see the world's treasures, we can overlook those in our own back yards. The Indiana War Memorial is just such a treasure, often ignored by people driving by it every day.

In 1920, as part of a successful plan to lure the American Legion headquarters to Indianapolis, the Indiana General Assembly appropriated \$2 million for a monument to the victors of the recent world war. General John J. Pershing broke ground for the 210-foot-tall War Memorial in 1927, which was dedicated in 1933 even though the interior remained incomplete despite additional funding from the Works Progress Administration.

The design of the three-story square building, with columns and pyramid-shaped roof, evokes the tomb of Mausolus, a wonder of the ancient world that gave us the word "mausoleum." Words carved in the limestone exterior express hope the building will "inspire patriotism and respect for the laws to the end that peace may prevail, justice be administered, public order maintained and liberty perpetuated."

The building's surprisingly capacious interior, making extensive use of marble, includes a 500-seat auditorium, meeting rooms and a museum of military history. The inspiring Shrine Room on the third floor honors the soldiers who won the "war to end all wars." Incorporating materials from all the Allies, the room features a huge American flag hanging vertically over an Altar of Consecration. The altar is surrounded by 24 fluted columns of dark red Vermont marble. High above the altar are blue lights and a crystal Star of Destiny from Sweden. Wall paintings depict the leading Allied soldiers. Marble stairways to the Shrine Room contain the names of all Hoosiers who served in World War I.

The Indiana War Memorial garnered national attention in 1953 when Edward R. Murrow's popular *See it Now* television series covered the American Legion's controversial closing of the auditorium to the Indiana Civil Liberties Union. Those days are long gone and the building is open to the public Wednesdays to Sundays from 9 am to 5 pm. The next time you long to visit a world-class building, consider a trip to the Indiana War Memorial.