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Megacities

Big cities fascinate, polarise, challenge. Cities are places where fortunes are made – and just as quickly lost. Cities present a palette of strong contrasts: glamour rubs shoulders with shabbiness, affluence with poverty, elegance with decay, charity with indifference, 5-star restaurants with simple snackbars. How does life function here, how is the chaos ordered, and how do people cope with the permanent complexity of the place?

01 New York

Images of New York are indelibly marked on the global consciousness – its dramatic skyline, the canyon-like streets, the garish spectacle that is Times Square, the bridges and majestic rivers that are the unifying contours of the city. You almost feel as though you've been there already, even if you've never made the trip. Those who do usually bring along their own preconceptions of New York. A day in New York is like taking a rollercoaster ride around the world, with pit stops in the past, the present and future.

02 Cairo

Cairo is not only the largest city in Africa, it's also the most heavily populated city in the Arab world. The mother of all cities, Cairo shows no signs of halting its growth. Three million commuters cause daily transport chaos, the city centre is a seething mass of narrow alleyways, markets and workshops, and the Al Azhar University lays claim to being the spiritual centre of Sunni Islam.

03 Shanghai

The mega metropolis that is Shanghai never sleeps – and the first hum of traffic begins in the very early hours. The heart of the Chinese economy has a poetic name – Shanghai means “over the sea”. It's a city that's growing non-stop. Faster, further, higher. And richer, swankier, brighter. It represents the resolute drive for progress, a deliberate striving for a modernity not shackled by history.

04 São Paulo

With 11 million inhabitants, São Paulo is the largest industrial conurbation in Latin America. 10 percent of the population generates a third of Brazil's entire GDP. But while the city provides the motor for growth across the whole country, it is also one of the most dangerous places in the world. And while the rich hop from rooftop to rooftop in helicopter taxis, criminal gangs control some areas to such an extent that even the police give them a wide berth.

05 Bombay

Bombay is the largest metropolis in India, and the economic powerhouse of the subcontinent. Bombay is also the most European of India's cities. English colonial buildings, skyscrapers and the Bollywood movie studios provide a stark contrast to traditional and historic temples, churches and mosques. But many people struggle to survive on a daily basis, with more than five million living in the city's slums.

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06 Lagos

The Nigerian port city of Lagos has a population of 15 million, making it one of the biggest cities on the African continent. At five percent a year, it is growing faster than any other city on earth. But the huge influx of people is putting enormous strain on public transport networks and the housing market. State authorities can barely ensure that people have access to basic utilities, such as electricity and water. Residents have devised ambitious concepts to solve the problem.

07 Frankfurt

“The world’s smallest metropolis” – Frankfurt am Main, in the centre of Germany, a European hub, an international intersection of people, markets and money. A springboard and landing strip for citizens of the world. Home to people from 180 countries, Frankfurt is a dynamic city right in the heart of Europe – cosmopolitan and tolerant.