

Around the World in 40 Places: Top Public Spaces

by Jay Walljasper

□ Every community needs a commons where people can gather as friends, neighbors and citizens. This can be a grand public square, a humble Main Street or a vacant lot with a few handmade benches where locals sit down for conversation. Or even a bridge, beach or bus station, as the examples below show.

□ What's important are the connections made among people, which can lead to wonderful things: friendships, love, partnerships that flower into new ideas for businesses or community projects.

□ Project for Public Spaces, a New York-based group that works around the world helping citizens boost the sense of community in their neighborhoods, compiled a comprehensive catalog of more than 600 of the best public spaces around the world. Here is a selection of some of the most inspiring, many of them very modest and in surprisingly humble locations, which can offer ideas about creating or improving a commons in your own town.

□ You can find out more—including practical information about elements what make these places succeed as commons—and nominate your own favorite public spaces at Project for Public Spaces's Great Public Spaces Hall of Fame. You can peruse PPS's Hall of Shame to learn what mistakes not to repeat from over 60 of the most disappointing public spaces around the world.

□ Art Street

□ Taichung County, Taiwan

□ An neighborhood shopping street that makes excellent use of traffic calming measures to keep pedestrians safe and happy.

□ Asafra Beach

□ Alexandria, Egypt

□ "Alexandria is Asafra", insist the locals about this beach that runs parallel to the city's main street.

□ Balboa Park

□ San Diego, California

□ An oasis of tropical nature in the midst of a busy city, this splendid city park is home of the internationally known San Diego Zoo.

□ Bleecker Street

□ New York City

□ Once the undisputed capital of American Bohemia, this street is still a wonder to stroll with one-of-a kind small shops and inviting cafés. Along with San Francisco's North Beach,

this is the birthplace of coffee shops in the U.S.

□Cai Rang Floating Market

□Cai Thao, Vietnam

□Just like it sounds—vendors sell food, flowers and everything else from boats in the Mekong River.

□Campus Martius

□Detroit, Michigan

□A new city square animated by a sidewalk café, music performances, ice skating and public art, which helped bring people and economic development back downtown.

□Carmel Market

□Tel Aviv, Israel

□A lively cornucopia of fresh food, which some days expands into a street market offering arts and crafts, too.

□Charles Bridge

□Prague, Czech Republic

□A beloved gathering point that offers great views of the city and is a scene in itself.

□Country Club Plaza

□Kansas City, Missouri

□The world's first (1922) and probably best shopping center. It proves you can accommodate the automobile without sacrificing pedestrian amenities. It should be studied closely for ideas on how to transform thousands of failing malls around the U.S. into congenial places for the public.

□Covent Garden

□London, England

□A market hall surrounded by bustling pedestrian streets, Covent Gardens is one of the world's leading venues for street performers as well as opera productions.

□Elmwood Avenue District

□Buffalo, New York

□A great urban street anchored by funky shops, inviting cafes, pleasing architecture and lots of streetlife.

□Fez Souk

□Fez, Morocco

□Souks (street markets) are the classic form of public space throughout the Arab World. The Fez souk is a glorious maze that you'll be delighted to become lost in.

□French Quarter

□New Orleans, Louisiana

□Colonial Spanish architecture, great local food and music, plus the highest concentration of colorful characters in the whole USA. A thriving testament to the principle that old neighborhoods are a city's best asset.

□Grand Central Station

□New York City

□A palace of a train station—the number one meeting place in North America. Even the lowest-paid worker feels like a king catching a subway or a commuter train in this

beautiful place.

□Granville Island

□Vancouver, Canada

□An industrial wasteland revived in the 1970s through the creation of parks, arts institutions and a fabulous public market.

□Great Mosque of Djenne

□Djenne, Mali

□An inspiring 1907 mosque hosts a multi-ethnic market in the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa.

□The High Line

□New York City

□An elevated railway turned into a magnificent park and sculpture garden running parallel to the Hudson River on Manhattan's West Side

□High Park Children's Garden

□Toronto, Canada

□A modest organic garden tended by local kids is the pride of the neighborhood.

□Imam Square

□Isfahan, Iran

□One of the most breathtaking squares in the world. Period.

□Kyojima neighborhood

□Tokyo, Japan

□An old-fashioned neighborhood that hangs on to a deep sense of community and very walkable streets in the midst of one of the world's largest cities.

□Luxembourg Gardens

□Paris, France

□A surprisingly small park with a wealth of things to do—sail toy boats, eat crepes, watch the world pass by. This is the gold standard by which to measure urban parks.

□Mbare Market

□Harare, Zimbabwe

□You can find it all here—vegetables, plumbing supplies, thumb pianos, ceremonial herbs, you name it.

□Moscow Subway

□Moscow, Russia

□The stations are works of art in themselves with marble, chandeliers, and stunning art deco designs.

□O'Connell Street

□Ennis, Ireland

□A world-class small town main street that teems with activity all hours of the day.

□Ortaköy Square

□Istanbul, Turkey

□A small waterfront square on the Bosphorus sporting numerous cafés, restaurants, art galleries and artisan shops.

□ Pearl District
□ Portland, Oregon
□ An almost new neighborhood on vacant land downtown that shows we can still build great communities.

□ Petaling Street
□ Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
□ The bustling heart of Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown.

□ Plaza Julio Cortazar
□ Buenos Aires, Argentina
□ A square surrounded by cafés and art galleries in one of the most interesting neighborhoods in the world—Palermo Viejo.

□ Piazza del Campo
□ Sienna, Italy
□ An artistic triumph of Renaissance architecture, and one of the first squares in Europe to reassert its role as a commons by banning automobiles in the 1960s.

□ The Plateau
□ Montreal, Canada
□ A picturesque working-class quarter transformed into the artistic and cultural hotbed of Quebec.

□ Ponce City Center
□ Ponce, Puerto Rico
□ A once-rundown district that is now a showcase of classic Caribbean architecture.

□ The Prado
□ Havana, Cuba
□ A marvelous 10-block promenade through Old Havana.

□ The Ridge
□ Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India
□ A beautiful central square overlooking the city and looking out upon the Himalayas.

□ Staples Street Bus Station
□ Corpus Christi, Texas
□ A bus transfer center, of all things, brought energy back downtown in this small city. Even folks not waiting for buses like to hang out there and look over the tiles hand painted by school kids.

□ Tamansari Water Castle
□ Yogyakarta Indonesia
□ An 18th century water garden that's the centerpiece of a dynamic neighborhood.

□ Taos Pueblo
□ Taos, New Mexico
□ A high-rise adobe town that's been home to Native Americans since at least the 1500s.

□ Tivoli Gardens
□ Copenhagen, Denmark

□The never equaled ancestor of all theme parks has been a source of pleasure for visitors since 1843.

□Vietnam Veterans Memorial

□Washington, DC

□An oasis of reflection and emotion, which shows how public art can touch the lives of millions.

□Waterlooplein

□Amsterdam, Netherlands

□A world-class flea market.

□Wisconsin State Capitol

□Madison, Wisconsin

□A handsome building that is truly a crossroads of democracy, serving as a town square where citizens meet legislators as we saw in the 2011 rallies against Governor Scott Walker.

□This is updated from a list that first appeared in Ode magazine.