

COMMENT

# Top 5: Superlative sacred buildings

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# BEST OF



The larger, more pompous and older, the more impressive sacred buildings are. But our top 5 have even more to offer.

Houses of worship and ritual places have always been influential places. This is shown by their architecture. Whether temple, synagogue, church, mosque or ritual memorial – sacred buildings have always been built with great effort. After all, they represent divine powers. Our top five shows that it is not only size and age that count, but also the attention to detail. And, as with any other property, a spectacular location adds value to many a house of worship.

## 5. The most beautiful synagogue

Probably the most colourful of all synagogues is located in the Czech Republic, in Prague's Jewish quarter, Josefov. It was designed by architect Wilhelm Stiassny in 1906. The elaborate Moorish Revival-style architecture, with its loving details, attracts thousands of visitors every year. And rightly

so, because the impressive dome and the artistic, colourful design of the walls, façade and windows over a generous area make the Jerusalem Synagogue not only the largest in Europe, but also, for many people, the most beautiful – an architectural work of art.



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## 4. The most idyllic temple

The Seiganto-ji Temple is probably one of the most idyllic Buddhist religious buildings. It is the first of 33 temples on the Saigoku Pilgrimage Route in Japan. Devout Buddhists have been making the pilgrimage to this place since the 5th century. Located right next to the sacred Nachi-no-(Ō)taki waterfall and declared a UNESCO World Heritage

Site, the temple has become a popular tourist destination. The main building, dating from 1590, is a classic example of Asian sacred architecture. Its location in the midst of nature, at the sacred Nachi-no-ochi waterfall, which is also the largest waterfall in Japan, makes the Seiganto-ji Temple an exceptionally worth seeing sacred building.



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### 3. The most rustic place of worship

The Borgund Stave Church is considered the best-preserved church of its kind. It is located in the Norwegian town of Borgund. The stave church was probably built towards the end of the 12th century, at a time when paganism was still widespread.

Mythical symbols and mythical creatures, such as dragon heads on the ceiling, bear witness to the

pagan influence on the then new Christian religion. The exceptionally well-preserved wooden structure with its rustic details make this church a place of pilgrimage for believers, architecture fans and those interested in history. As a parish church, it was replaced by a new building as early as 1868.



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## 2. The most iconic chapel

The Chapel of the Holy Cross in Arizona was opened in 1957. It was designed by Roman Catholic architect Marguerite Brunswig Staude in memory of her deceased parents. It was built with the aim of helping people 'find God through art', as they say. That is why the chapel has been open to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation, ever since it was

built. In the barren landscape of the red sandstone desert, known as the backdrop for numerous Western films, the modern monument has become one of the most important tourist attractions in the region and a hotspot for fans of modern sacred architecture.



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# 1. The most eye-catching church

The pilgrimage church Santuario de Las Lajas in the gorge of the Río Guaitara, Colombia, is impossible to miss. It has been a popular Roman Catholic place of pilgrimage since the 18th century. The construction of the enormous building in the neo-Gothic style lasted from 1916 to 1949. The completion was the responsibility of the Ecuadorian engineer J. Gualberto Pérez and Lucindo Espinosa. However, the

church is not only an eye-catcher because of its exposed location in the gorge's rock face. Its size, the massive walls with typical Gothic elements and turrets, lush vaults and the colourful stained glass windows by the German artist Walter Wolf Wasserhoven attract numerous devout pilgrims every year.



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# Bigger, higher, older

- The **largest temple complex** in the world is Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The monument is four times larger than the entire Vatican City.
- The Hagia Sophia in present-day Istanbul set new standards with its then **unique dome construction**.
- The Ulm Minster has the **tallest church tower** with its approximately 161-metre-high west tower, which was completed in 1890.
- The **oldest** sacred structures known to us today are the stone circles at Göbekli Tepe. They were created around 10,000 years ago as a ritual site and are thus more than 7,000 years older than the oldest Egyptian pyramid.