

Some inspiring and very large buildings have been erected for religious worship. Often, as with medieval cathedrals in Europe, construction took many years. Sometimes, the same building has served two faiths – Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (now Istanbul) was built as a Christian church, but later became a Muslim mosque. It is now a museum.

What are the world's biggest religious buildings?

The world's biggest Christian church is **St Peter's in Rome (1506–1614)**. But bigger still is the Hindu temple-city of Angkor Wat. Built by the Khmer people of Cambodia in the 1100s, its moated enclosure measures 1,500 by 1,400 m, and it has five central towers, the tallest 70 m high. The moat around Angkor Wat measures 6 km. The temple was abandoned in the 1400s.

🕒 *Angkor Wat rises from the jungle, which for centuries has threatened to completely engulf it.*



Where can 300,000 people pray together?

In a mosque. It is where followers of Islam (Muslims) gather for prayers. The biggest Muslim mosque is the Shah Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan. Inside its courtyard, 40,000 people can worship. The building is named after a ruler of Saudi Arabia who helped pay for its construction. It is situated on the outskirts of Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad, which means 'place of Islam'.



🕒 *Buddhism spread from India across Southeast Asia to the islands of Indonesia. Borobudur is on the island of Java.*

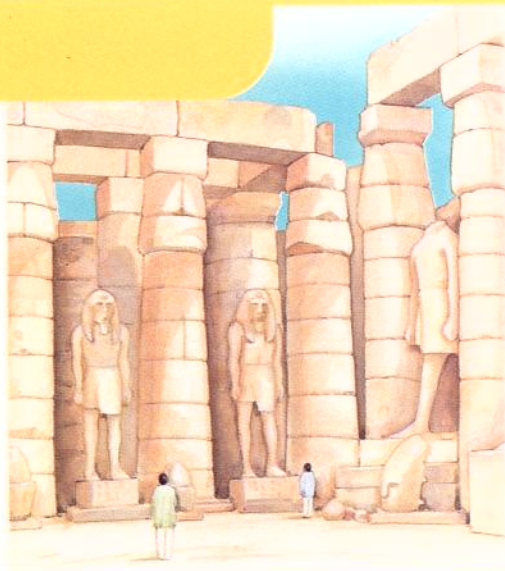
Which temple has 500 Buddha

The biggest Buddhist temple is Borobudur in Java, Indonesia. Built in the AD 700s, it fell into disuse about 1000 years ago, but was restored in the early 1900s. It was built by shaping a small hill and covering it with stone blocks. The Borobudur temple has 500 images of Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) and thousands of other sculptures. The decoration shows links with Persian, Babylonian and Greek styles. Since 1972 the temple's 800,000 stones have been taken away, cleaned and replaced.

Biggest temple

The biggest temple ever built was the Temple of Amun at Karnak in Egypt. It was erected in about 1250 BC. However, hardly anyone walked through its vast halls or had access to the building. Only a few priests were allowed inside. Its massive courts and pillared halls were bigger than Angkor Wat.

🕒 *Visitors can still see the remains of the Temple of Amun in Egypt.*



Sometimes cathedral builders aim too high! The main spire of Lincoln Cathedral in England was the highest in the world (160 m) until 1548, when it collapsed. Each of its three towers had spires – today there are none.

🕒 *The statue of Christ the Redeemer above Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*

Amazing facts

Longest cathedral nave: St John the Divine, New York City – 183 m

Britain's largest cathedral: Liverpool's Cathedral Church of Christ

Church with most statues: Chartres Cathedral, France – 10,000

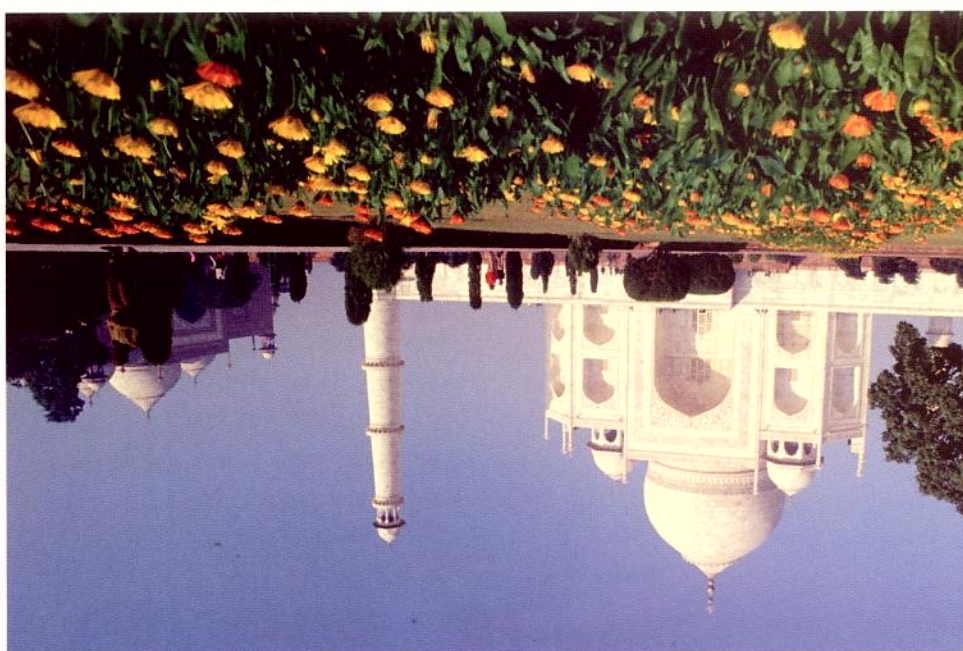
Tallest cathedral spire: Ulm cathedral, Germany – 161 m

Tallest minaret: Hassan II Mosque, Morocco – 176 m

Highest spire in Britain: Salisbury Cathedral – 123 m

Biggest Jewish synagogue: New York City

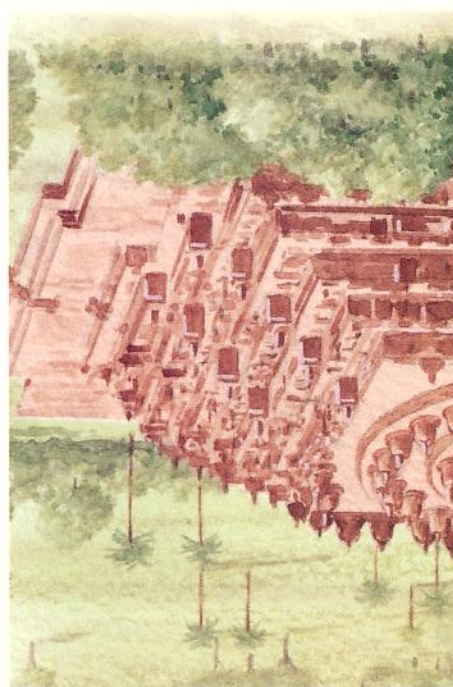
→ Ulm Cathedral was begun in 1377 but the immense stone tower at its western end was not completed until 1890.



① The Taj Mahal, located near the city of Agra in India, is considered to be one of the world's greatest architectural treasures.

What is the Taj Mahal?

The Taj Mahal is a tomb, built for Mumtaz Mahal, wife of the Mogul emperor of India, Shah Jahan. When she died in 1629, her husband ordered a special tomb to be built for her. It took 20,000 workers 20 years to complete the white marble building with its graceful minarets (towers). Under the white marble dome, which is 60-m-high, the emperor and his wife are buried together.



Which is Britain's most famous cathedral?

Probably St Paul's Cathedral in

London. Sir Christopher Wren's building

(1675–1710) replaced a medieval cathedral

burned down in the Great Fire of 1666.

However, it has rivals, such as Westminster

Abbey, begun by Edward the Confessor in the

1040s, and York Minster, England's biggest

medieval cathedral. Many people also visit

Canterbury Cathedral, which dates from the

1070s, and Salisbury Cathedral, which

has the tallest spire in England at 123 m.

The world's biggest cathedral (though not

the biggest church) is the medieval-style

Cathedral of St John the Divine, which is in

New York City.

② St Paul's Cathedral survived bombs during the Blitz in World War II (1939–45).

