

Travel: The Legacy of Remarkable Politicians and Thinkers

What do Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, H. H The Dalai Lama, Winston Churchill, John F Kennedy, Che Guevara, Eva Peron and Empress Elisabeth of Austria have in common? You could say they are all important political personalities cutting across continents and colour besides having played an important role in forging nations in the past and present centuries. Well, they also happen to be icons who left their mark and whose legacy continues.

Universally recognized and a much respected political leader was anti-apartheid activist and former South African President **Nelson Mandela**. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Mandela-related tourism attractions have exerted a considerable pull for South Africa on the world's tourism map. The FNB Soccer Stadium, Soweto where 120,000 people gathered to hear him speak since his arrest twenty-seven years earlier is one of the many destinations attracting travelers on an inspirational trek in Mandela's footsteps.



Robben Island, where Mandela was imprisoned for eighteen years, is today a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the country's biggest tourism attractions. The Mandela Museum in Mthatha, his former home-turned-museum in Soweto and the Voting Line Statue in Port Elizabeth commemorating South Africa's first democratic poll in 1994 are in high popularity.

Tour companies have been profiting from the tourists desire for Mandela-related sites, particularly in the lead-up to the Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom movie (based on his 1995 autobiography) chronicling his early life, political activism and imprisonment (released a week before his death). Mandela: Journey to Freedom is one such 10-day tour package covering a plethora of cultural landmarks associated with Mandela in Johannesburg, Robben Island and Cape Town.

In South Africa, **Mahatma Gandhi** also continues to be a favourite, particularly around Johannesburg where he stayed from 1893 and which stands testimony to many events from his life as a philosopher, an activist and a pacifist leader for free society. Gandhi's political baptism was in Johannesburg and it was here that the first seeds of passive resistance (Satyagraha) were sown.

India too has its fair share of tours associated with Mahatma. In New Delhi, tours connect various sites

linked intricately with the life and death of this world famous icon of peace and non-violence. The National Gandhi Museum displays memorabilia while the Dandi March statue depicts his protest against the unfair salt law. Gandhi Smriti where he died and Raj Ghat where he was cremated are also covered.

McLeodganj or Little Lhasa against snow-clad Dhauladhar Ranges is home to the Tibetan leader in exile, H.H The **Dalai Lama** where he took refuge from Chinese persecution since the 60s. His teachings on ethics, non-violence, peace and religion have earned him tremendous respect and popularity in present times. Thousands lend ear to his sermons – devotees, Tibet enthusiasts, Buddhist scholars, Western backpackers and even Hollywood stars.

Dallas, Texas is steeped in the history of erstwhile US President **John F Kennedy**. Here the very popular JFK History Tour and the JFK Assassination Tour cover events associated with his life and death. The tours highlights include – the grassy knoll, the JFK memorial and the exact route followed that fateful day and killer Lee Harvey Oswald's journey after he fled the Dealey Plaza to be captured at the Texas Theater. The tour touches one of the most important crime scenes of the century: the corner window on Elm Street. Despite the changed landscape, it is the closest one can get to touch history. The sixth floor JFK Museum which tells the story of Kennedy is also very popular.



In its share, Europe too does not seem left behind. **Winston Churchill**, one of the most admired political leaders of all time, remains an icon four decades after his death. The Churchill sights in London include the Cabinet War Rooms, St Margaret's where he married, Palace Gate where he lived, his statue in Parliament Square and memorial in the Abbey. His birthplace at Blenheim Palace, or Chartwell, his home (1924–1965) where the rooms and gardens remain much as he left them or his grave in Bladon (all outside London) are popular destinations.

Continental Europe is not behind. Old Vienna is steeped with the memories of Empress Elisabeth of Austria, affectionately called **Sisi**. Tourists stroll the city in her shoes covering the magnificent Hofburg Palace, the winter residence with Emperor Franz Joseph I where the Imperial Apartments and ceremonial rooms used by Sisi remain to discover Viennese Court life and throw light on her charm, intelligence, extravagance and outlook way ahead of her times. At the Sisi Museum, exhibits uphold Sisi's intriguing life – her rebellious streak and devotion to beauty. The Imperial Crypt (the Habsburgs burial place) where Sisi rests continues to draw global tourists and even a century after her death her place in popular imagination continues.

In South America, **Che Guevara** is a political icon largely because the era he typified left more cultural tracks than political ones. To the world he signifies anything from teenage defiance to rebellion. In

present Cuba, the concern is with survival rather than revolution. Contemporary political tourists consume Che memorabilia and visit sites associated with him– La Cabana in Havana, his grave in Santa Clara and the Sierra Maestra all seem caught up in the processes of globalization allowing the commodification of revolutionary symbols.



Tours in the footsteps of **Eva Peron** or Evita, former first lady of Argentina are popular in Buenos Aires. These cover Los Toldos, the town of Evita's early childhood, Junin where she was a teenager, the country house of San Vicente, Buenos Aires city associated with her rise to power in the 1940s and her mausoleum at Recoleta Cemetery. The Evita Museum highlights her life and boasts artifacts, a collection of luxurious garments, books and films. This tour is a must for anyone wishing to delve into the socio-political background of Argentina and life and work of one of its most important women in history. Long live the legacy of their personas – candles shining bright in the winds of time.

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Date: 2014-10-27

Article link:

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