

7 Seven city



photo: Topfoto

1 Slap on the equator, Singapore - with 4 million people crowded onto just 647 square kilometres - has become a model city by encouraging home (rather than car) owners. Over 90 per cent of its people own their own homes - a world record - giving them a stake in the city. Only one in ten has a car, keeping air pollution down, with most people relying on excellent public transport. Waste is disposed of meticulously and the city has 2,340 hectares of parks, just under 3,000 hectares of nature reserves and 2,158 hectares of protected watershed, with perhaps the world's only urban tropical rainforest trapping and filtering rainfall to meet half Singapore's water needs.

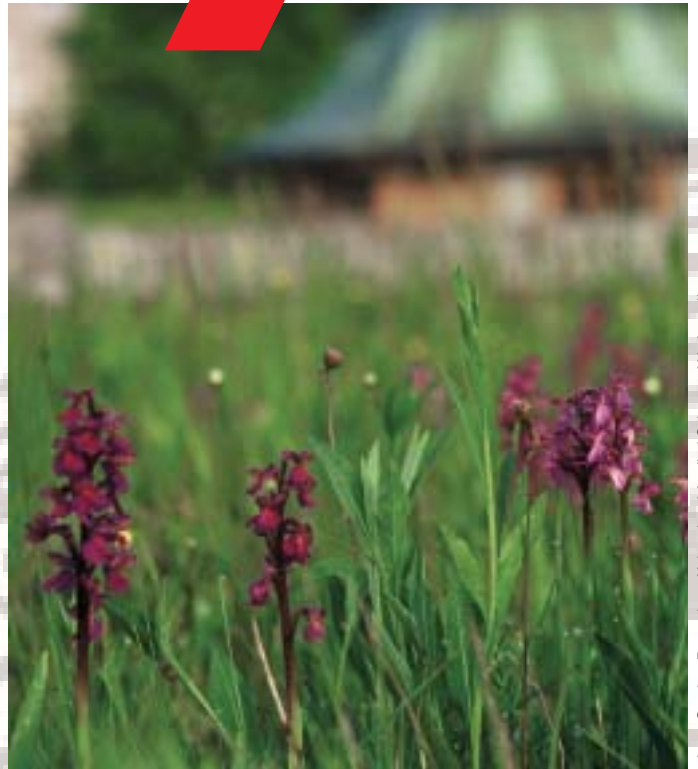


photo: Stephan Brenneisen, University of Applied Sciences, Wädenswil

3 Water filtration plants are generally pretty boring places - but not the Moos plant in Zurich, even though it was one of the first ferroconcrete buildings to be erected in the Swiss city. When it was put up in 1914, planners gave it a green roof of soil and gravel, to keep the water inside cool. But it is now one of the last remaining examples of the Swiss grasslands left to grow undisturbed, rich in flowers that were typical at the start of the 20th century. Over 175 species - including nine orchids - grow on its three hectares of roofs, and there are even proposals to classify them as a national park.

4 Right in the middle of North America's most famous city is one of its most important wildlife sites. Central Park, a vast green oasis amid Manhattan's concrete stalagmites, was purposely laid out in the mid 19th century - when New York had only half a million inhabitants - to allow the power of nature to lift citizens' spirits. And how! It is today one of the United States' best birdwatching sites, and was designated an Important Bird Area in 1998. In all, 275 bird species have been recorded there - 192 of them live there all the year round, or are regular visitors - and monarch butterflies stop off there on their long migration south to Mexico. ▶

photo: Sylvia Pollex/Still Pictures



photo: VIEW/Dennis Gilbert

2 Berlin's Reichstag, the seat of the German Parliament, is now a beacon of sustainability as well as of democracy. The historic building, more than a century old, was restored in the 1990s as a herald of the new millennium. It is heated and lit by vegetable oil, burned onsite - reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 94 per cent - and uses energy so sparingly that it acts as a power station for the new government quarter nearby. Its glass cupola - a new landmark for the city - reflects light into the chamber: during the day a moveable shield blocks glare from the sun, but at night it allows light to shine out like a beacon.

wonders



5 Damascus, continuously inhabited since before the time of Abraham, is the world's oldest city, and is still culturally one of its richest. Founded in the 3rd century BC, making it more than 4,000 years old, it has had a dramatic history. It witnessed St Paul's conversion and later escape by being lowered down its walls in a basket, and resisted several failed attempts to take it during the Crusades. It boasts 125 ancient monuments, and in 1979 was inscribed on the list of the planet's most precious places - the UN's World Heritage Sites.

photo: Topfoto



photo: Ecosan

6 Beijing is planning something else to show the world when people flock to the city for the Olympics. By 2006 an entire newly built suburb of the Chinese capital, called Yang Song, will be using a new waste treatment system. Ecosan can separate faeces, urine and wastewater from washing and recycles them all. The water can be reused, the faeces composted for fertilizer or used to produce biogas, and the urine can be tapped for its rich nutrient content: corn grown with urine fertilizer in the United States has grown 50 per cent bigger than normal. China hopes that visitors to the Olympics will spread this new answer to the sanitation crisis around the world.

7 Critics predicted pandemonium when London first introduced its hotly contested congestion fee in 2003 to control gridlock. Yet soon after the city began charging motorists £5 (\$8) to enter central zones on weekdays between 7 am and 6:30 pm, congestion decreased by almost one third and average journey times halved. (Hybrid cars like the Toyota Prius, described on page 9, are exempted). Air pollution is down by 12 per cent, and more than half of Londoners now support the charge. The city now plans to ban the most polluting coaches and lorries altogether, and has started to clean up emissions from its 20,000 famous black cabs.

photo: Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

