



# ALUMNAE ASSOCIATION of SMITH COLLEGE

## ***Great Faiths*** ***A Journey By Private Jet*** ***to the World's Sacred Places***

**March 18 – April 9, 2007**

### **DETAILED PRELIMINARY ITINERARY**

#### **Day 1, March 18 - Depart Gateway City**

Depart on individual commercial overnight flights to Rome.

#### **Days 2 & 3, March 19-20 – Rome & Vatican City**

Meet your traveling companions at a welcome dinner. Rome's enormous Colosseum, completed in A.D. 80, hosted gladiatorial combats, public executions and even naval battles. The marble façade was later reused for the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, one of Christendom's holiest sites. After Emperor Constantine officially recognized Christianity, he ordered a great basilica built on the spot where Peter was believed to be buried. Also within Vatican City is an overwhelmingly rich art collection. Enjoy a museum tour and exploration of the Sistine Chapel and upper galleries. *Hotel Exedra, Rome*

#### **Days 4 & 5, March 21-22 - Bethlehem & Jerusalem, Israel**

Throughout its tumultuous history, Jerusalem and its myriad historic monuments have held rich spiritual meaning across several faiths. Jews revere the Western (Wailing) Wall, a remnant of King Herod's temple. Against the legendary stones, Jewish pilgrims lament the sorrows of Israel and leave prayers. Muslims reaffirm their faith beneath the Dome of the Rock, where the Prophet Mohammed left his footprints as he ascended into heaven to join Allah. For Christians, holy sites include Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, birthplace of Jesus, and Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where it is believed Christ was crucified, buried and resurrected. *King David Hotel, Jerusalem*

**Days 6 & 7, March 23-24 – Varanasi & Sarnath, India**

Hinduism, the world's oldest major religion, has as its hub the holy city of Varanasi on the banks of the sacred Ganges River. Over the past 3,000 years, Hindus have come to Varanasi to wash away their sins in the Ganges. Daily life is suffused with the chant of priests, the sound of temple bells and the fragrance of flowers and incense. Rise early to watch the crowds of pilgrims lining the *ghats* (river banks), performing their sacred rituals as the sun rises above the Ganges. Visit Sarnath, revered by Buddhists as the place from which Buddha's first teachings flowed. Later, cruise the Ganges to a beautifully restored private mansion for an evening of traditional Hindu ceremonies, music and dancing. *Taj Ganges Hotel, Varanasi*

**Days 8, 9 & 10, March 25-27 – Kyoto & Nara, Japan**

The center of Japanese culture for more than 1,000 years, Kyoto epitomizes the beauty of Japanese wooden religious architecture and gardens. Visiting shoguns were entertained in the elegant Ninomaru Palace within Nijo-jo Castle. The Buddhist goddess of mercy is honored with 1,001 gilded statues at Sanjusangendo Temple, and Ryoan-ji Temple boasts masterful Zen gardens. Nara enjoyed great prosperity, emerging as the fountainhead of Japanese culture during the 8th century. Todai-ji Temple, the world's largest wooden building, contains an enormous bronze statue of the Great Buddha. In Nara-koen Park, approach Kasuga Taisha Shrine by pathways lined with thousands of suspended bronze and stone lanterns. *Miyako Hotel, Kyoto*

**Day 11, March 28 – Chengdu, China**

After exploring the Treasure Hall of Todai-ji Temple, with displays Shinto ceremonial regalia and *bugaku* masks, our private jet carries us to Chengdu for dinner and overnight before we board a local flight to Lhasa the following morning. *Kempinski Chengdu Hotel, Chengdu*

**Days 12 & 13, March 29-30 – Lhasa, Tibet**

Located on one of the highest plateaus on Earth. Potala – "Buddha's Mountain" – was the site chosen for the world's largest Buddhist monastery and palace of the Dalai Lama. Countless paintings, murals, shrines and statues adorn the Potala's 100 chapels, and the palace includes an enormous jeweled statue of Buddha. We offer alternate excursions to Xi'an or Kunming for travelers who wish to avoid the high altitudes of Tibet. *Lhasa Hotel, Lhasa*

**Day 14, March 31 – Golden Temple of Amritsar, India**

The beautiful and serene Golden Temple of Amritsar is the most sacred of Sikh sites. Within the sanctuary lies the Sikhs' sacred scripture, a collection of devotional poems, prayers and hymns which are chanted all day long and induce a reverie in the pilgrims strolling the grounds. Following an afternoon in Amritsar, we fly to Delhi to overnight. *The Oberoi, Delhi*

**Days 15 & 16, April 1-2 – Lalibela, Ethiopia**

Overnight in Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa, then in the morning board a local flight to Lalibela. The towering edifices of Lalibela's eleven extraordinary Christian churches, carved from solid bedrock during the 12th and 13th centuries, are almost completely hidden in deep trenches and caves. Legend has it that King Lalibela traveled to heaven in a dream and saw a city of rock churches, which he vowed to replicate on Earth. Explore the labyrinth of tunnels and passageways that connect crypts, grottoes and galleries. The churches retain their exquisite embellishments and traditional religious art. Late in the afternoon we return to our hotel in Addis Ababa. *The Sheraton, Addis Ababa*

**Days 17 & 18, April 3-4 – Cairo, Egypt**

Modern Cairo – the largest city on the Africa continent – is the cultural heart of Islam. Explore the Mohammed Ali Mosque, lavishly adorned in alabaster, visit the historically-rich Ben Ezra Synagogue and discover the 4th-century Church of Saints Serguis and Bacchus. Nearby on the Giza plateau sit the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx, enduring symbols of ancient Egyptian strength and wisdom. *Four Seasons Giza, Cairo*

**Days 19 & 20, April 5-6 – Yerevan, Armenia**

Armenia, an island of Christianity in Central Asia, has a history deeply rooted in religion, preserved in pink stone architecture, illuminated manuscripts and sacred music. Near Mount Ararat visit Khor Virap, where St. Gregory the Illuminator was imprisoned until his king accepted the unifying power of Christianity. Discover thousands of ancient texts in Yerevan's Matenadaran Museum, and explore 1,700-year-old Echmiadzin Cathedral. *Hotel Marriott Armenia, Yerevan*

**Days 21 & 22, April 7-8 – Istanbul, Turkey**

Its skyline a jumble of domes and minarets, exotic Istanbul is a crossroad for Christianity and Islam, and an amalgam of East and West. The capital of the Eastern Roman Empire under Constantine the Great, it remained the capital through 16 centuries of Byzantine and Ottoman rule. Explore the sixth-century Hagia Sophia, an architectural jewel and the greatest church in Christendom until Saint Peter's Basilica was built in Rome a thousand years later. Also marvel at the vivid Iznik tiles of the Blue Mosque and discover sumptuous harem rooms in Topkapi Palace. *Swissotel the Bosphorous, Istanbul*

**Day 23, April 9 – Rome & Return to Gateway City**

Return to Rome aboard our private jet, then connect with regularly scheduled commercial flights home.