Ancient Religious Sites
The Karnak Temple Complex Egypt

Begun in the 14th century BC, by the pharaoh Ramses II, the temples of Karnak are some of the most famous in the world. Tourists flock to Luxor in their millions. Sitting next to the Nile, Karnak forms one of the largest religious sites in the world. It is packed with stone carved temples and sanctuaries. The great temple of Amun-Re, alone, is worth the effort of visiting, but requires more than a single day to fully appreciate. The friezes, obelisks and forests of pillars will be familiar to you even if you have never been there. Hollywood is fascinated by all things Egyptian, so watch out for Karnak in the background of Transformers: Revenge of the fallen.
The Ziggurat of Ur: Iraq

The epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest written story we possess. In this epic, composed in at least the second millennium BC, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, boasts of the mighty temples he has constructed. Those temples must have resembled the Great Ziggurat of Ur. The ziggurat, first built in the early Bronze age and reconstructed several times since, is a massive step pyramid built to honor the god Nanna. The structure visible today was heavily repaired by Saddam Hussein and sustained minor damage in the first Gulf war. Few people will get to visit the site but it must surely be one of the greatest wonders of the ancient world still visible.
Pyramids of Teotihuacan: Mexico

Once one of the great cities of the world, Teotihuacan’s origins remain hotly debated. There is no agreement as to which people built the city, though it is known to have reached its zenith around 450AD. Whoever built it, Teotihuacan is one of the most recognizable sites in the New World. Two great pyramids, those of the Sun and Moon, dominate the city. The pyramids were famously used for human and animal sacrifice, probably in the dedication of new buildings in the city. A broad Avenue of the Dead runs from the pyramid of the Moon, passed that of the Sun, and down towards the temple of Quetzalcoatl. Walking along this road it is easy to imagine the great religious festivals that must have occurred there.
Delphi: Greece

Delphi was the center of the cult of Apollo, and respected by all the Greek city states as sacred. The temple complex, now ruined, lies on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, home of the Muses. The ruins of the temples, stadium, and shrines of Delphi still speak to an important gathering place. No important matter of state could be settled without seeking the advice of the Oracle at Delphi. The Oracle, a woman priestess known as the Pythia, would sit above a crack in the rock under the temple and inhale the divine vapors (volcanic gases). While in a trance caused by the gases she would utter nonsense-words, the speech of the Apollo, and these would be interpreted by priests. Those hoping for such a divine experience today are out of luck, no gases are emitted under the temple any more. This probably is what caused worship at the site to fail.
Borobudur: Indonesia

Borobudur is an 8th century Buddhist structure, lost in the jungle until rediscovered in the 19th century. The structure is composed of two million cubic feet of stone set in six square platforms. Each platform is decorated with carved friezes. Five hundred statues of the Buddha are set in niches for worshipers to pray before. The six levels form a path that must be followed to reach the very top. The path is not easy and one must cover a distance of two miles. As you progress along the path the friezes display images of the law of Karma and the life story of the Buddha. At the summit there are three ‘stupa’, stone mounds which once held relics. Volcanic eruptions are a risk to the site. The most recent eruption, in 2010, covered the site with a thin layer of ash. It is feared that an eruption may damage the fine carving which covers the monument.
The Pantheon: Rome

The Pantheon, "All God", is one of the best preserved Roman buildings. A temple had been on the site for many years but the one visible today is that designed by the Emperor Hadrian, and built in 126AD. The building was converted to a Christian church in the 7th century, but can still be enjoyed in something like its original form. The front of the building resembles a classic Roman temple portico, supported by columns. Roman temples, for the main part, were to be enjoyed from the outside. The Pantheon is different – it can only be appreciated from inside. Behind the portico is the rotunda, a round space, under the largest dome built by the ancients. Set in the center of the dome is a circular hole, the oculus. The oculus is the only source of light and is an elegant allegory of God. At no time will the light ever touch the floor, as if to say that all we can know of God is by indirect means.
Ka'ba: Saudi Arabia
The Ka'ba (Arabic الكعبة; also spelled al-Ka'bah or Kaaba) is a small building located within the courtyard of al-Haram Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'ba is the holiest site in Islam; the Haram Mosque was built around it and because of it. The qibla, the direction Muslims face during prayer, is the direction facing the Ka'ba. The Ka'ba houses the mysterious Black Stone, which was revered in Mecca in pre-Islamic times as well. It became a Muslim relic in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and pilgrims to Mecca try to stop and kiss it while circumambulating the Ka'ba during the hajj.
In Hinduism, the river Ganga is considered sacred and is personified as a goddess Gaṅgā. It is worshipped by Hindus who believe that bathing in the river causes the remission of sins and facilitates Moksha (liberation from the cycle of life and death) the water of Ganga is considered very pure. Pilgrims immerse the ashes of their kin in the Ganges, which is considered by them to bring the spirits closer to moksha. It is believed that she has a sister called Namami devi Narmadey she is also called Narmada. It is believed that every Ganga saptmi ganga use to come and take a bath in narmada ji.

Several places sacred to Hindus lie along the banks of the Ganges, including Gangotri, Haridwar, Allahabad and Varanasi. During the Loy Krathong festival in Thailand, candlelit floats are released into waterways to honour Gautama Buddha and goddess Ganga for good fortune and washing away sins (pāpa in Sanskrit, used to describe actions that create negative karma by violating moral and ethical codes, which brings negative consequences.) Many religious people take bath in this river as it is believed that it cleans the body as well as the mind (from sins) and make them divine. This is the reason why people throw the corpses of the deceased into the Ganga.
Hagia Sophia, Turkey

Unfortunately nothing remains of the original Hagia Sophia, which was built on this site in the fourth century by Constantine the Great. Constantine was the first Christian emperor and the founder of the city of Constantinople, which he called "the New Rome." The Hagia Sophia was one of several great churches he built in important cities throughout his empire. Following the destruction of Constantine's church, a second was built by his son Constantius and the emperor Theodosius the Great. This second church was burned down during the Nika riots of 532, though fragments of it have been excavated and can be seen today. Hagia Sophia was rebuilt in her present form between 532 and 537 under the personal supervision of Emperor Justinian I. It is one of the greatest surviving examples of Byzantine architecture, rich with mosaics and marble pillars and coverings. After completion, Justinian is said to have exclaimed, Νενίκηκά σε Σολομών ("Solomon, I have outdone thee!").
Wailing Wall (Western Wall): Jerusalem

When Rome destroyed the Second Temple in 70 C.E., only one outer wall remained standing. The Romans probably would have destroyed that wall as well, but it must have seemed too insignificant to them; it was not even part of the Temple itself, just an outer wall surrounding the Temple Mount. For the Jews, however, this remnant of what was the most sacred building in the Jewish world quickly became the holiest spot in Jewish life. Throughout the centuries Jews from throughout the world made the difficult pilgrimage to Palestine, and immediately headed for the Kotel ha-Ma’aravi (the Western Wall) to thank God. The prayers offered at the Kotel were so heartfelt that gentiles began calling the site the “Wailing Wall.” This undignified name never won a wide following among traditional Jews; the term “Wailing Wall” is not used in Hebrew.
The Via Dolorosa pilgrimage has been followed since early Christianity, beginning as soon as it became safe to do so after Constantine legalized the religion (mid-4th century). Originally, Byzantine pilgrims followed a similar path to the one taken today, but did not stop along the way. Over the centuries, the route has changed several times.

By the 8th century, the route had changed: beginning at the Garden of Gethsemane, pilgrims headed south to Mount Zion then doubled back around the Temple Mount to the Holy Sepulchre. The Middle Ages saw two rival routes, based on a split in the Latin Church: those with churches to the west went westward and those with churches in the east went eastward.

From the 14th to 16th centuries, pilgrims followed the Franciscan route, which began at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and included eight stations. Around this time, the tradition of 14 Stations of the Cross was developing in Europe. To avoid disappointing European pilgrims, the difference was made up with the addition of six more stations.

Today, the main route of the Via Dolorosa is that of the early Byzantine pilgrims, with 14 stations along the way. However, alternative routes are followed by those who have different opinions on the locations of various events. Anglicans believe Jesus would have been led north towards the Garden Tomb, while Dominican Catholics start from Herod's Palace near Jaffa Gate.
Dome of the Rock, Arabic Qubbat al-Ṣakhrah, shrine in Jerusalem built by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān in the late 7th century CE. It is the oldest extant Islamic monument. The rock over which the shrine was built is sacred to both Muslims and Jews. The Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, is traditionally believed to have ascended into heaven from the site. In Jewish tradition it is here that Abraham, the progenitor and first patriarch of the Hebrew people, is said to have prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Both the Dome and Al-Aqṣā Mosque are located on the Temple Mount, the site of Solomon’s Temple and its successors, an area known to Muslims as Al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf. The Dome’s structure and ornamentation are rooted in the Byzantine architectural tradition, yet its construction in the 7th century represents an early stage in the emergence of a distinct Islamic visual style.