

Top Marx

Look at the condition of communism today and it's easy to conclude that Karl Marx has been forgotten.

China is now home to twice as many KFC outlets as it is giant pandas. Vietnam is famed for its vast income and gender inequalities. While Laos' clampdown on the media is a big commie tick, its free market policy is like defecating directly into Lenin's cold, dead gullet. Each of these states, a mere two decades after some vexed Germans shouted at a wall, are now about as socialist as Joseph McCarthy in a kaftan.

However, not every socialist state has opened its arms and spread its legs to greet horny, rampant capitalism: there are still three corners of the globe where hard-line communism stubbornly prevails. Three of the most unique and alien places on earth. Which also makes them three of the most interesting places to visit. □□□□



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Cuba



In many ways, Cuba is just another Caribbean paradise isle of pristine beaches, poncy hotels, sweaty nightclubs and overpriced trinkets. Yet with socialist giveaways on every corner, from omnipresent Che murals to dilapidated American Buicks, it doesn't take Tony Robinson levels of surface-scratching to see that Cuba is an island unlike any other:

Socialist since 1959, the country now boasts over two-and-a-half million tourists each year. While most stick to the bespoke capitalist bubbles along the coast, sipping mojitos, smoking Montechristos and swaying to samba music, an intrepid few venture inland to see Castro's Cuba for what it really is: a steaming shit pile of socialist contradictions.

You will, of course, see the revolutionary hotspots: the guerrilla camps, military forts and heroic graves that once represented a brighter future. But then you'll also see the realities of post-revolutionary life: from the dreary state-run restaurants, empty-shelved ration shops and cardboard-tasting peso pizza to locals' tales of their daily struggle to make ends meet. It's a stark lesson in the practicalities of ideology.

What makes Cuba truly inimitable, though, is how it combines this ideology with its Caribbean character: Cuba is Marxism and mambo in equal parts. Communism with rhythm. There's nowhere else like it.

COMMIE COUNT: 7/10

Transdniestr



Transdniestr, a tiny region in the east of Moldova, broke away from the then-Socialist Republic in 1990, following rumblings of reform from Chisinau. After a two-year girly fight, a fresh yet familiar socialist system was formed under pastry-faced autocrat Igor Smirnov. And it's one which continues to this day.

For foreigners, getting into Transdniestr is a challenge in itself, as they are routinely subjected to a police interrogation and relieved of their imperialist cash. But it's a price worth paying, as entering the eerily

silent capital Tiraspol is like going back to Cold War Russia. Flying hammer and sickle flags, imposing Lenin statues, anti-American sentiments scrawled on Soviet tanks: Transdniestr is a real commie cliché.

Although capitalism is slowly making its mark, with new high-end shops and swanky hotels in evidence, Transdniestr remains an unparalleled opportunity to see how life once was for millions of Europeans. It's the last kid on the Bloc. Just don't leave it too long to visit, because Ronald McDonald can't wait forever.

COMMIE COUNT: 8/10

North Korea



If travel is about experiencing other ways of life, then it doesn't get more 'other' than this. North Korea is the most isolated country on earth, cut off from reality by a totalitarian communist government that imprisons its citizens in a 1950s vacuum. This not only means North Koreans have never questioned Lady Gaga's gender or not shut up about *The Wire*: they have no idea man has been to the moon.

Consequently, visitors must accept strict limitations on what they say, as well as what they see. But that doesn't mean the tourism is humdrum. Visit the DPRK and you'll get to board a captured US warship, be dwarfed by a colossal bronze dictator and witness the largest gymnastics festival on earth. Oh, and you'll get sneaky peeks of malnourished workers in rice fields and rats scurrying through the metro too.

You also have an opportunity to compare socialist state propaganda to authenticated history first-hand. For

example, visitors are informed that Kim Jong-Il was born on Korea's highest mountain, with his birth heralded by a double rainbow and a new star in heaven. In reality, he was born in a shit hut in Siberia.

Visiting the DPRK can be a frustrating experience, but it's also fascinating, complex and bizarre. The least seen and least known travel destination in the world today. And that makes it the most interesting of all.

**COMMIE COUNT:
10/10 (Top Marx!)**

