

Paris, 4 May 2026

Press release

Prix Versailles 2026: The World's Most Beautiful Museums

Today, 4 May 2026, the Prix Versailles is officially launching its 12th edition with the announcement of the seven projects forming the World's Most Beautiful Museums List 2026.

Across different worlds and themes, evoking everything from history and memory to science and innovation, they are revitalising the face of our contemporary built heritage.

About this selection, Jérôme Gouadain, Secretary General of the Prix Versailles, notes that:

“The World's Most Beautiful Museums List for 2026 stands out for the quality of its architectural interpretations and staging, elevating the sites with extraordinary narrative power. Together, these museums provide a real illustration of how strength and talent can be revealed through harmony, sensitivity and sharing.

Beyond welcoming their visitors, we hope these places will be sources of inspiration for all those who serve the common good of humanity.”

Three of the seven museums on the List will, at the end of the year, receive the further distinction of a World Title – Prix Versailles, Interior or Exterior.

The awards discerned by the Prix Versailles aim to promote intelligent sustainability, in which culture serves and transcends the notion of the environment.

The next World Selections for 2026 will be announced on 12 May for the Hotels category, on 1 June for Restaurants, on 15 June for Airports, on 29 June for Emporiums, on 27 July for Campuses, on 28 September for Passenger Stations and on 19 October for Sports.



PRIX VERSAILLES

WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL MUSEUMS LIST 2026

Zayed National Museum

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Science & Technology Museum

Shenzhen, China

Xuelei Fragrance Museum

Guangzhou, China

MoN Takanawa:

The Museum of Narratives

Tokyo, Japan

Lost Shtetl Museum

Šeduva, Lithuania

National Medal of Honor Museum

Arlington, United States

Islamic Civilization Center

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The Laureates are listed in the alphabetical order of the countries they represent (based on their two-letter ISO 3166 country codes).

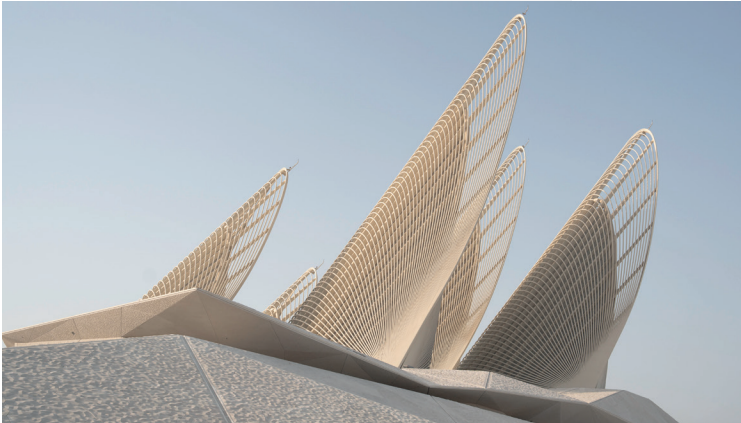


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PRESENTATION OF THE LAUREATES

Zayed National Museum

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates



© Zayed National Museum – متحف زايد الوطني

Inaugurated on 3 December 2025 in the heart of the Saadiyat Cultural District, Zayed National Museum has emerged as a new emblem of the city of Abu Dhabi.

A tribute to the legacy of the UAE's founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, it retraces more than 300,000 years of history over the course of six permanent galleries that include artefacts from the Palaeolithic, the Neolithic, the Bronze and Iron Ages, the Islamic period, and modern history.

Rising to a peak height of 123 metres, the museum is immediately recognisable by its five steel towers, inspired by the wings of a falcon in flight. Beyond their aesthetic power, those structures incorporate natural ventilation principles that reinforce the building's breezy feel.

Throughout the interior and exterior, warm white and sandy tones, exposed to natural light, make the museum a point of intersection between land and sky. In other words, it serves as something of a horizon, with the property extending all the way to the coast via Al Masar Garden and fitting into a landscape of alternating desert, oasis and urban scenery.

A pure work of art from Lord Norman Foster.



© Zayed National Museum – متحف زايد الوطني



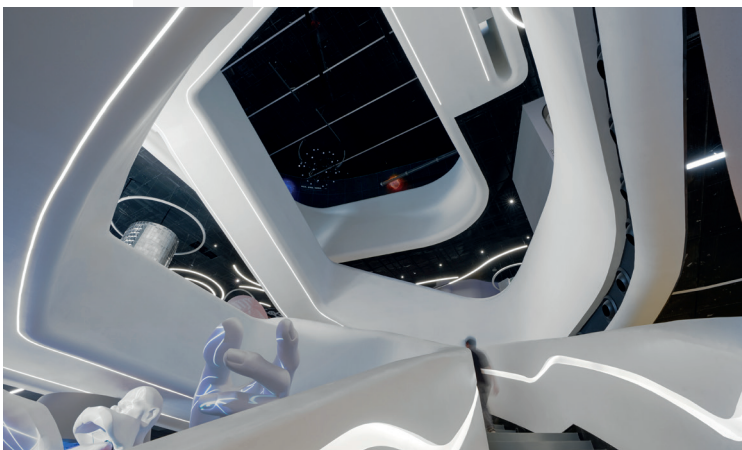
© Zayed National Museum – متحف زايد الوطني

Science & Technology Museum

Shenzhen, China



© Virgile Simon Bertrand



© Virgile Simon Bertrand

Inaugurated on 1 May 2025, the Shenzhen Science & Technology Museum was designed to be the newest symbol of the Greater Bay Area (the world's largest metropolitan region, with a population approaching 100 million residents).

A vast spaceship that seems to embrace the city, its design by Zaha Hadid Architects was guided by a desire to achieve optimal performance in connection with the site's annual solar radiation, temperatures, humidity, prevailing winds, air quality and other variable conditions of its subtropical climate.

A dynamic sequence of outdoor terraces overlooking the park serves as a natural extension of the indoor galleries.

The façade – an assembly of 95,000 irregularly shaped stainless steel panels – features a unique colour gradient that transitions from deep blue to various shades of grey, depending on the light.

The inventiveness and innovation at the heart of the museum's programme fit perfectly into this architecture that simultaneously pursues both technology and ecology.



© Virgile Simon Bertrand

Xuelel Fragrance Museum

Guangzhou, China

Conceptualised as a contemporary manifesto of the invisible art of perfumery, Xuelel stands as the world's largest fragrance museum.

The building, devised by Shenzhen Huahui Design, reveals all the work that goes into creating a scent. Its architecture features eight cylindrical spaces made of red brick which form the main body of the museum, in a nod to the processes of distilling and refining raw materials to produce perfumes.

This powerful layout supports a smooth visitor journey, like a scent trail running through the space.

Inside, sprawling galleries retrace the evolution of fragrance from its ancient ritualistic origins to the latest technological advances. Around 300 interactive smelling stations fuel the sensory experience, finishing with a roof-top garden.

A gathering place for enthusiasts and professionals alike, the Xuelel Fragrance Museum is devoted to this intangible heritage that shapes our daily lives and shared human history.



© Xuelel Fragrance Museum



© Xuelel Fragrance Museum



© Xuelel Fragrance Museum

MoN Takanawa: The Museum of Narratives

Tokyo, Japan

Opened on 28 March 2026, MoN Takanawa: The Museum of Narratives is a cultural hub spanning some 29,000 m², located within the vast Takanawa Gateway City development, on the exact site of Japan's first railway line. Its mission is both innovative and transcendent: to serve as an immersive, participatory cultural crossroads, at the intersection of art, tradition, technology and education.

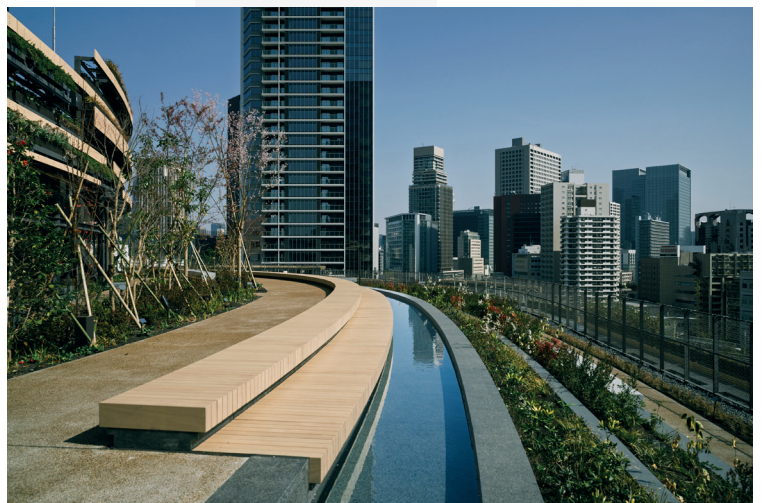
Thanks to its airy, ethereal structure designed by Kengo Kuma, the museum's architecture manages to express the evanescent, interdisciplinary nature of its subject, achieved through the employment of fragmented matter, openwork walls, dispersed dim lighting, and varied materials.

The ascending spiral façade is composed of wood and layered glass. Inhabited by more than 200 species of plants, it dissolves the boundary between inside and outside, reflecting the transient beauty of the changing seasons.

An unusual design – in striking contrast to the surrounding skyscrapers and infrastructure – whose very elegance demands a redefinition of the concept of the contemporary city.



© Yasuyuki Takaki



© Yasuyuki Takaki



© Yasuyuki Takaki

Lost Shtetl Museum

Šeduva, Lithuania

Not far from Šeduva's historic town centre, the Lost Shtetl Museum is a mirage – the only way to convey the unspeakable. Located on the plains of Lithuania, it tells the story of a world that no longer exists.

In Yiddish, *shtetl* means “small town”, and it is how Jews referred to their local communities. Before the Holocaust, the country had more than 200 shtetls; now it has none. Through true stories connected to Šeduva, the museum presents the life and traditions of a typical Lithuanian Jewish family.

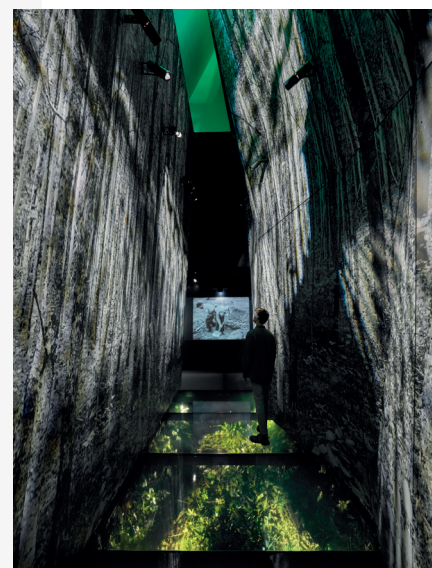
Finnish architect Rainer Mahlamäki, working in particular with Enea Landscape Architecture, came up with a unified structure whose dynamic rooftops evoke the silhouette of a small village. Its urban design is arranged in “individual houses”, each presenting a distinct chapter of the exhibition, like so many separate galleries.

With its blind gables and its grey tiled exterior, its architecture seems evanescent, shimmering gently in the countryside.

Adjacent to the museum, its Memorial Park is an extension of this living monument.



© Enea Landscape Architecture



© Andrew Lee



© Andrew Lee

National Medal of Honor Museum

Arlington, United States



© Rafael Viñoly Architects

Located in Texas, the National Medal of Honor Museum is dedicated to honouring recipients of the United States' highest military award for valour.

The steel-clad Exhibition Hall is a monumental space that reflects the strength of character that is forged in combat. That structure is suspended 12 metres in the air above a landscaped "Field of Honor", a central, open-air courtyard that serves as both threshold and gathering space.

From there, sculptural spiral staircases and fully glazed lifts take visitors to immersive galleries, creating a powerful narrative journey through the lives and legacies of medal recipients.

Supported by five megacolumns, each representing a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, the museum is bathed in natural light thanks to an oculus at its centre, symbolising the U.S. Space Force.



© Rafael Viñoly Architects

Connected to the neighbouring lakefront park and the city's entertainment district, this final project from Rafael Viñoly (1944-2023) invites visitors to reflect on courage, sacrifice and integrity and to consider how those values can shape everyday civic life.



© Rafael Viñoly Architects

Islamic Civilization Center

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

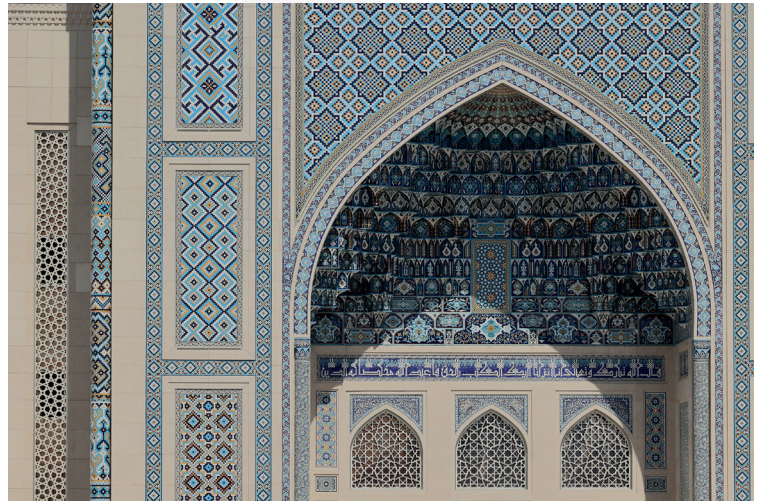
The creation of the Islamic Civilization Center – a tribute to traditional architecture and Uzbekistan’s latest contemporary jewel – was initiated by the President of the Republic, Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

The inspiration for this palace, with its monumental portals, was drawn from the traditions of the Timurid era, symbolised by a majestic dome rising 65 metres in the air.

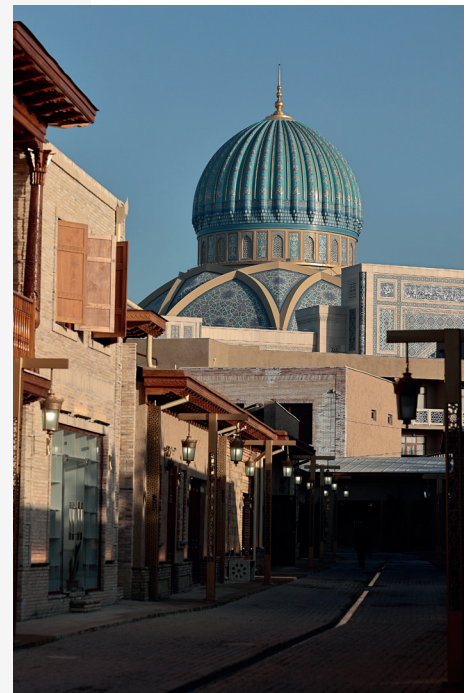
The spectacular Qur’an Hall combines light, sound and multimedia elements to engender a contemplative atmosphere. It embodies the approach that prevailed in the site’s interior design, with the four additional halls dedicated to major historical periods.

More than just a monument, the Center is also a major hub for research, education and promotion, including archives, a library, an Islamic academy, a conference room, and reception spaces.

Its scientific project, involving some 1,500 researchers from over 40 countries, has resulted in a very accessible visitor experience, at the cutting edge of innovation, making the museum a precious tool for fostering inter-cultural dialogue.



© Islamic Civilization Center



© Islamic Civilization Center



© Islamic Civilization Center



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