



Left: The Smithsonian is home to the exceptional Hope Diamond
Above: The famed Arcot II diamond on display at the V&A

Cultural jewels

Gemstones and jewellery have captivated mankind for centuries. Here, **Susanna Clarke** explores some of the museums around the world where you can find priceless examples that are breathtakingly beautiful, quirky or totally unique

DIAMOND MUSEUM

Amsterdam has been an important diamond trading and polishing centre for over 300 years – find out all about it at the Diamond Museum, created by Coster Diamonds, which has been based in Amsterdam since 1840. Read about their geological origins, find out the history of their use in jewellery, see replicas of famous stones, and even watch master craftsmen in the on-site workshop. If you want to get even closer to diamonds, the museum's day-long course is a fun way to learn more.

The art of diamond craftsmanship is placed on the Dutch list of National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Master Diamond Cutter will not only teach the basics of cutting and polishing a diamond, but also give you your own diamond to work on and then take home. The day also includes a tour of the museum and details about valuation and the '4 Cs' – cut, carat, colour and clarity. The workshop costs €475 and includes the diamond and an authentic Diamond Certificate.

Diamantmuseum Amsterdam

*Paulus Potterstraat 8,
1071 CZ Amsterdam,
The Netherlands
www.diamantmuseumamsterdam.nl*

H STERN'S WORLD HEADQUARTERS

The tour of H Stern's World Headquarters, in the heart of the Ipanema District, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Rio for an excellent reason – the complex offers a rare and fascinating insight into the art of the goldsmith. Brazil is rich with beautiful

gemstones – aquamarine, Imperial topaz, tourmaline, amethyst, emerald and rubellite are all found here, so jewellery featuring these colourful stones makes a unique souvenir (though of course other gems may also feature in the wide range of designs). The guided tour reveals the process from rough stone, through the cutting, polishing and setting stages, to the creation of the finished piece of jewellery, as well as showing the showroom and gemmological laboratory. Free and safe return transport from your hotel is available upon booking.

H Stern World Headquarters

*Rua Garcia D'Avila 133,
Ipanema,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
www.hsternrio.com*

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

As the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design, it's no surprise that London's Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) boasts one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of jewellery to be found anywhere. The museum's William and Judith Bollinger Gallery displays more than 3,500 jewels, telling the story of jewellery in Europe from Ancient Greece to the present day. Historic highlights include jewelled pendants given by Queen Elizabeth I to her courtiers and diamonds worn by Catherine ➤

the Great of Russia, while there are also designs from the great jewellery houses of the 20th century – including Cartier and Fabergé – and jewels designed by an international selection of modern makers. The contemporary work ranges from ring sets by Wendy Ramshaw to a carved pin in recycled acrylic by Peter Chang and a vivid papier-mâché neckpiece by Marjorie Schick. The recent exhibition 'Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection', meanwhile, focused on the evolution and enduring influence of Indian jewellery from the Mughal Empire to the modern day.

Victoria & Albert Museum

*Cromwell Road,
London SW7 2RL
United Kingdom
www.vam.ac.uk*

SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

The Hope Diamond at the Smithsonian has been pulling the crowds since 1958 – over 100 million people have seen it since then. The story of the Hope, a 45.5-carat of magnificent blue colour, is one of mystery and intrigue – all fully explained in the gallery. However, don't make the

Right: A stunning necklace from the Al Thani Collection on display at the V&A (top), and a regal exhibit at Amsterdam's Diamond Museum (bottom)
Below right: The Smithsonian's spectacular 23.10-carat Carmen Lúcia Ruby ring

Hope your only stop. The adjacent Gem Gallery is equally worthy of attention. This is the home of the 37.8-carat Chalk Emerald, one of the world's finest Colombian emeralds; the 23.10-carat Carmen Lúcia Ruby, a faceted Burmese sensation; and the covetable Cartier-designed Bismarck Sapphire necklace. Also here is the Cindy Chao Black Label Masterpiece Royal Butterfly Brooch – one of the quirkiest jewellery items ever made. Composed of over 2,000 fancy-coloured gems, it totals 77 carats, but what's particularly special is that many of the stones change colour or fluoresce under UV light, giving it an ethereal glow that just isn't present in its daytime setting.

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

*10th St. & Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20560, USA
www.mnh.si.edu*



YAMANASHI GEM MUSEUM

With a backdrop of Mount Fuji, this modern museum is located in the centre of Japan's gem mining Prefecture and within easy reach of the other attractions in the Five Lakes region. Over 500 varieties of precious and semi-precious stones from Japan, Asia and further afield are on display. Around half the

exhibits are cut stones or jewellery, but among the most astonishing items are examples of inlaid lacquer work and traditional Japanese stone carving, such as wafer-thin bowls and tiny sculptures. The raw stones are also stunning – standout examples are the 1,270kg giant quartz crystal and a spectacular Korean amethyst cluster. There's also a shop where you can purchase items made with the same types of gems on display.

Yamanashi Gem Museum

*6713 Funatsu Fujikawaguchikomachi, Minamitsuru-gun
Yamanashi
401-0301, Japan
www.gemmuseum.jp*

