

Around the World in 12 Video Games

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AROUND THE WORLD IN 12 VIDEO

Why Nintendo games will never be a substitute for a nice, long holiday.

HOW IT WORKS

We showed Alison Comyn still pictures of 12 world locations from six games (the same screenshots are reprinted over the next four pages), then asked her to guess where in the world she was looking at. After an overlong drumroll, we then revealed if she was right or wrong – and asked her to compare the in-game location with the real-life one.



WHO IS...

ALISON COMYN?

If you're a regular viewer of the the BBC's ever-popular Holiday, you'll recognise Alison as one of the programme's regular presenters. She's experienced first-hand just about every point on the globe – and what's more, Alison is as obsessed with videogames as the rest of us, regularly "screaming blue murder" at the likes of *F1 Grand Prix*. So, who better to analyse those in-game holiday destinations?



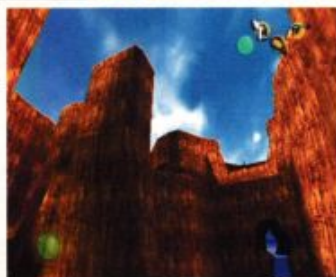
THE UTAH DESERT, USA

Indiana Jones



Recognise this sandstone, Alison? I knew it! I just always knew that the Grand Canyon was prefabricated by Walt Disney and every morning, before Ethel and Herman bring little Brad to see this wonder of the natural world, giant pipes pump water into its polystyrene base.

Er, it's the Utah Desert. Okay, so I was in the right country! Just like Arizona, the vast plains of Utah are littered with these incredible red sandstone arches, rising like monolithic spires into the scorching skies. But in this example the rocks are too square and fake-looking, and it needs to be roughed up a bit, maybe with some moss and stuff. Think Wile E. Coyote in that cartoon where he's always chasing after the Road Runner. It had a similar kind of rocky, desert-based geography, you know.



BILBAO, SPAIN

The World Is Not Enough



First thoughts, Alison? Naples, because of the sprawl of high-rise flats and the gun – although by the same token it could also be Tottenham. The architecture suggests somewhere not quite coastal Mediterranean, but Latino or Italiano-inspired. I'll stick with Naples for want of anything better.

Not too far off – it's Bilbao. Both this and Naples I find incredibly ugly, with a handful of beauty spots you have to search really hard for – though Bilbao has a lot more going for it. A modern and bustling city, the biggest in the Basque region, it is scattered with beautiful old buildings and run-down slum areas, so without any obvious landmarks, this is a fair depiction.

WORLD GAMES



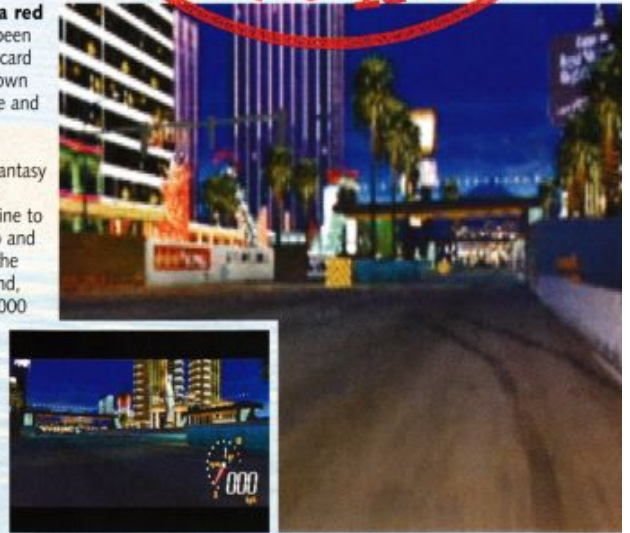
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

World Driver Championship



The Statue of Liberty is a bit of a red herring in this one... Unless she's been won by a wealthy Texan oil man in a card game, or been moved inland for her own protection. This is that bastion of taste and style, Las Vegas.

Spot on! Ah, what a place, what a fantasy rising from the bleak, endless Nevada desert. Only in America could this shrine to greed, sloth and tastelessness develop and prosper. You get the gist in this with the shadow of the plains in the background, and the familiar brilliant glow of 100,000 blinking bulbs. But it's not nearly tacky and seedy enough! Behind the glitz and razzmatazz is this underlying layer of filth and corruption – the streets might be paved with gold when you arrive, but they're paved with broken-down drunks and penniless gamblers on the way out. God bless America!



ST PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

GoldenEye 007



Any idea, Alison? This definitely looks like an Eastern Bloc country – the austere, crumbling square buildings all reek of faded communist glory.

Do the cars help? Is that a Trabant? Nah – in jaunty red? I don't think so. Anywhere less liberal than Prague or Budapest wouldn't have any cars that weren't black, so I'll go for there.

It's actually St Petersburg.

Whoa – wouldn't have guessed that one! Where's all the snow, the assorted frozen body parts, the smell of dodgy sausage, and men in black leather jackets trying to sell you lacquered boxes, fake Fabergé eggs, and those annoying little dolls which fit inside each other? Still, the buildings are fairly authentic.



AROUND THE WORLD

MONTE CARLO, MONACO

F1 World Grand Prix



Recognise this winding road? Now come on, I thought that you'd promised me a challenge.

Ah, we forgot you were an F1 fan. Even if I hadn't sashayed down the leafy streets of Monte Carlo myself, breathing deeply of its smell of cashola, I'd recognise those winding roads and grand white hotels. It's the only place to find a husband – Monaco.

Bang on! The very fact that this is a location where they really do hare round the streets at ridiculous speeds – Grand Prix or not – makes it even easier to use as a racing game location. You can imagine what spoils await at the winning line. But wouldn't it be better to show those vain, pouting bikini-clad women layering the streets?



NEW YORK, USA

Spider-Man



Do these skyscrapers ring a bell? Ah, if I could make it there... etcetera. Maybe it's cheating, but I know this game.

Bah! So the location is...? It's the city that never sleeps, New York, NY.

Correct! There's no going wrong with the Big Apple – its skyline is so familiar. But there's more to getting a location right than sticking in a few well-known landmarks. To get the true flavour of this crazy melting pot, we need graffiti, steam, noise, smells, grime and a mist of angry, taxi-induced road rage. Oh, and the obligatory cardboard boxes and clothes rails on every corner for streetwise partnered-up cops to crash through when chasing muggers.

THE JUNGLES OF CUBA

GoldenEye 007

The trees give it away, right, Alison? No prizes for guessing it's a tropical rainforest somewhere, unless it's Charlie Dimmock's latest creation in a Hounslow back garden. She might be able to identify the tree species.

So what's your guess? I'm going to plump for the Congo or Amazon, as the rope bridge suggests an Indiana Jones kinda thing.

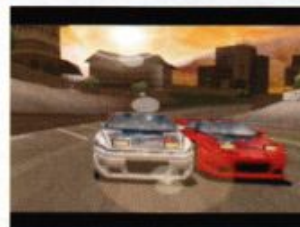


Wrong – it's Cuba. Well, seeing as Cuba has about 20 million palm trees squashed onto its swampy interior, these are quite representative. For more jungle authenticity, maybe the addition of snakes, creepy crawlies and tree rats that reach up to two feet long might have helped. But to me, Cuba will always be downtown Havana, with its faded '50s glamour, buildings almost audibly crumbling to dust, and the whiff of Latin passion mingling with rum and cigar fumes.



HAWAII, USA

World Driver Championship



Getting trickier now. This strikes me as somewhere in the Far East, with a real oriental influence.

So what's your guess? It's a hot country, and I would have guessed Jordan until I saw the rusted battleship and thought an island. Maybe Pearl Harbor?

Yes! It's Hawaii! Now that was a sheer fluke. Still, magnificent racetrack aside, it's not a bad representation of Hawaii, though it needs to be a bit more lush. But, oh, isn't it a place we know so well thanks to Saturday mornings sat in front of Hawaii Five-0. But there's not an awful lot more the developers could have done here, except maybe hang some garlands and grass skirts off the cars – but now I'm just getting silly.





LONDON, ENGLAND

The World Is Not Enough

An easy one, this. I have a feeling I used to live here! That looks suspiciously like the Docklands area of London. I think I even recognise the particular red-brick apartments depicted.

Any other clues? Just in case I've gone stark, raving mad, you've even thrown in a red bus to help me along.

Yep, it's London Town. There are just some places on this earth where, even if you were plucked from a remote Peruvian rainforest, having never seen a TV show, film or magazine in your life, and transported to its heart, you'd still know exactly where you were. Everywhere you look in London you see a vignette of life straight out of a tourist brochure, so less is definitely more for game designers. Spot on!



KYOTO, JAPAN

World Driver Championship



Some dead giveaways on-screen here. The grey sky, the green banks, the bad driving – it has to be Dublin!



Er... No, hang on – the skyscrapers, and some sort of oriental pergola straddling the track... now I'm confused. No idea. Malaysia?



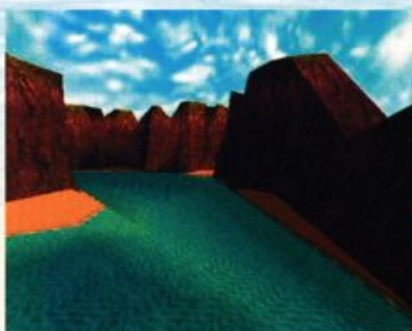
Pretty close – it's Kyoto in Japan. Well, whaddaya know? My knowledge of Japan is confined to the city regions, although I guess the tall buildings give you something of a clue. Maybe the racetrack is well-known – I do know that the Eastern version of the Michelin Bridge is the Torii at the Heuin Shrine in Kyoto, so it's that clever use of landmarks again!

PALAWAN, PHILIPPINES

Indiana Jones

A more Holiday-like location, eh, Alison? Indeed – I may have to recce this one with a closer look.

Any ideas? The azure waters and black granite rocks suggest somewhere in the Indian Ocean – the Seychelles, or maybe even Mauritius.



Try Palawan in the Philippines. Ooh, very swanky indeed. The Philippines gets a bit of a bad rap because of Manila. But this archipelago of 7,000 islands in South East Asia has some of the best coral in the world and over 2,000 species of fish, so it's an excellent diving location. One problem they have, though, is with their waste disposal, so even though the clear water, beautiful beaches and wildlife are spot-on representations, I suggest our man Indy would be more concerned with floaters than sharks...



LISBON, PORTUGAL

World Driver Championship



Any ideas? I was thrown a little at first by the windmill, thinking that it doesn't look like the Netherlands. With the cobbled streets, the whitewashed walls and orange roofs on the hut-like houses, I'm thinking more of a Mediterranean influence here.

So...? Well, there are only two places like that where I've seen major use of wind-power, and that's Mykonos in Greece and somewhere in Portugal. I think I'll go for the singing windmills of Portugal.

Quite right – it's Lisbon. The buildings are definitely very Iberian in style, and Lisbon is such a pretty place, very hilly, so that would be a real feature. It's got some great ways of getting around the two very distinct parts to the city – new and old. You can choose from the cute trolley cars, or a precarious cable car which affords you great views over the jumble of villages below. If something is whizzing past you on a racetrack, it may as well be as picturesque as this.

