# Inside the world’s most ambitious yet abandoned planned cities



Throughout history, urban planners and visionaries have embarked on ambitious projects to create cities designed to embody the future. These planned metropolises often aimed to address the challenges of their times while anticipating future needs. However, despite visionary designs and grand aspirations, many of these cities eventually faced decline, abandonment, or significant deterioration. Below is an overview of 16 such cities from around the world, whose trajectories offer insight into the complexities of urban development.

Ordos Kangbashi in Inner Mongolia, China, was completed in 2010 with the expectation of housing over a million residents, featuring modern architecture and wide boulevards. Initially lauded as a landmark project, it became known as the world’s largest ghost town after an economic downturn during which prospective residents were unable to afford the inflated housing prices. While some people have since moved in, large areas remain empty, with deteriorating buildings designed by notable international architects standing unused.

Pripyat, built in 1970 as a model Soviet city for workers of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, was designed as an urban paradise offering wide avenues, cultural amenities, and modern apartments for approximately 50,000 inhabitants. The 1986 nuclear disaster abruptly transformed Pripyat into one of the world’s most well-known radioactive ghost towns. Nature has since reclaimed the area, with flora growing inside buildings and wildlife roaming what was once a vibrant community.

California City, conceived in 1958 in the Mojave Desert as a contender to rival Los Angeles, was planned to be a sprawling suburban metropolis. Developer Nat Mendelsohn laid out an extensive grid of streets and infrastructure. However, the city’s grand vision largely failed to materialise, leaving a vast expanse of streets visible from space yet largely devoid of residents.

Hashima Island in Japan, also known as Battleship Island, was once the most densely populated place on Earth and featured pioneering concrete high-rise apartments. The island’s economy collapsed in the 1960s when petroleum replaced coal as Japan’s primary energy source, leading to its abandonment in 1974. Today, its concrete structures stand as decaying remnants exposed to sea and weather.

Varosha in Cyprus was a modern Mediterranean resort and a favourite among celebrities such as Elizabeth Taylor and Brigitte Bardot before it was abandoned following the 1974 Turkish invasion. The area remains closed off, with empty hotels and apartments falling into disrepair while furniture from the 1970s remains untouched indoors.

Naypyidaw, Myanmar’s capital constructed in the early 2000s, was built with expansive infrastructure, including 20-lane highways and luxury hotels, to embody national aspirations. Despite significant investment, the city remains notably underpopulated, with government workers occupying only portions of the urban expanse, leaving many sections largely empty.

Fordlandia in Brazil was Henry Ford’s 1920s attempt to establish an American-style industrial and agricultural town in the Amazon rainforest. The project included modern housing and amenities for rubber plantation workers but failed due to worker resistance and rubber tree disease. The town now lies abandoned and reclaimed by jungle.

Thames Town, part of China’s ‘One City, Nine Towns’ initiative, replicates an English market town complete with cobblestone streets and Victorian houses. Intended for 10,000 residents, it failed to attract many due to high costs and now primarily serves as a site for tourist photography, slowly deteriorating.

Akranes in Iceland, once a flourishing fishing town with modernised infrastructure, faced economic collapse in the late 20th century due to shifts in fishing quotas and industry changes. Industrial facilities and factories along the coast now stand abandoned as the population has declined.

Eko Atlantic, a large-scale project built on reclaimed land near Lagos, Nigeria, aimed to be ‘Africa’s Dubai’ with state-of-the-art infrastructure and sustainability plans. Delays, funding difficulties, and environmental concerns have left the development partially completed and partly unoccupied, with erosion threatening surrounding areas.

North Wilkesboro in North Carolina was once an industrial hub known for advanced factories and a pioneering NASCAR speedway. As manufacturing moved overseas in the 1980s and 1990s, the town experienced decline, leaving many buildings empty until recent efforts began attempting revitalisation.

Linfen in China underwent rapid industrialisation and urban growth but became notorious as ‘the world’s most polluted city.’ Its modern construction suffered extensive damage from acid rain and pollution, contributing to increased health risks and creating an environmental crisis.

Trujillo New Town in Spain was a 1960s project to modernise rural areas with contemporary architecture and agricultural advances. However, funding shortages halted construction, leaving an incomplete town with deteriorating concrete structures amidst the countryside.

Nova Cidade de Kilamba, built by Chinese developers near Luanda, Angola, was intended for 500,000 people but initially stood nearly empty due to high apartment costs. Occupancy has since improved, but many buildings showed signs of wear even before being occupied.

Norilsk in Russia was designed as a Soviet industrial city above the Arctic Circle featuring cold-weather architecture adapted to harsh conditions. Today, it is Russia’s most polluted city, with buildings stained by copper smelting and acid rain creating ecological damage extending miles beyond the urban area.

Adamstown near Dublin was planned as a sustainable urban township during Ireland’s economic boom with modern amenities. The 2008 financial crisis halted development midway, leaving residents in a largely unfinished community marked by vacant lots and incomplete infrastructure.

These cities reflect a broad spectrum of urban planning efforts that sought to realise visionary ideals but encountered diverse obstacles, ranging from economic challenges and environmental disasters to political events and shifts in industry. The varied outcomes highlight the complexities involved in translating ambitious urban concepts into sustainable and thriving communities. The Go2Tutors is reporting on these examples as part of a wider reflection on the unpredictable nature of urban development and planning.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost-town/index.html> - This article discusses the development of Ordos Kangbashi in Inner Mongolia, China, highlighting its initial acclaim as a landmark project and its subsequent status as the world's largest ghost town due to economic downturns and unaffordable housing prices.
2. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost-town/index.html> - The piece details the modern architecture and wide boulevards of Ordos Kangbashi, which were designed to accommodate over a million residents but remain largely uninhabited, with deteriorating buildings by notable international architects standing unused.
3. [https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost town/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost%20town/index.html) - The article notes that while some people have since moved into Ordos Kangbashi, large areas remain empty, and many buildings designed by notable international architects stand unused.
4. [https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost town/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost%20town/index.html) - The article mentions that Ordos Kangbashi was completed in 2010 with the expectation of housing over a million residents, featuring modern architecture and wide boulevards.
5. [https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost town/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-ordos-ghost%20town/index.html) - The article discusses how Ordos Kangbashi became known as the world's largest ghost town after an economic downturn during which prospective residents were unable to afford the inflated housing prices.
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