THE MYSTERY OF THE REEF OF HEAVEN

In a remote corner of the Pacific Ocean, off the island of Pohnpei in Micronesia lies one of the world's great archaeological mysteries: the only ancient stone city built on a coral reef. No one knows who built it or how.

Micronesians say their ancestors called it *Soun Nan-leng*, The Reef of Heaven. Their name for it today is *Nan Madol*, the City of Ghosts.

On artificial islets connected by a series of canals are massive walls up to 25 feet high enclosing temples, tombs, ritual centers, and platforms for thatch homes – all made of giant columnar basalt stone. Eons ago, lava flows on Pohnpei cooled into vertical pillars. Over a thousand years ago, ancient Micronesians began hauling these basalt logs miles away to build this stone city. With an average weight of 5 tons, 10,000 pounds – and some up to 25 tons, 50,000 pounds each – how they did this remains unexplained. It lies deserted today, abandoned and lost for centuries.

Paddling a kayak through the canal maze of Nan Madol to clamber over these monumental stone complexes in solitary silence – for visitors are rarely here – leaves you in a state of unforgettable awe. (*Glimpses of Our Breathtaking World #6* Photo ©Jack Wheeler)