

The World Heritage Convention

Conserving Humanity's Common Heritage

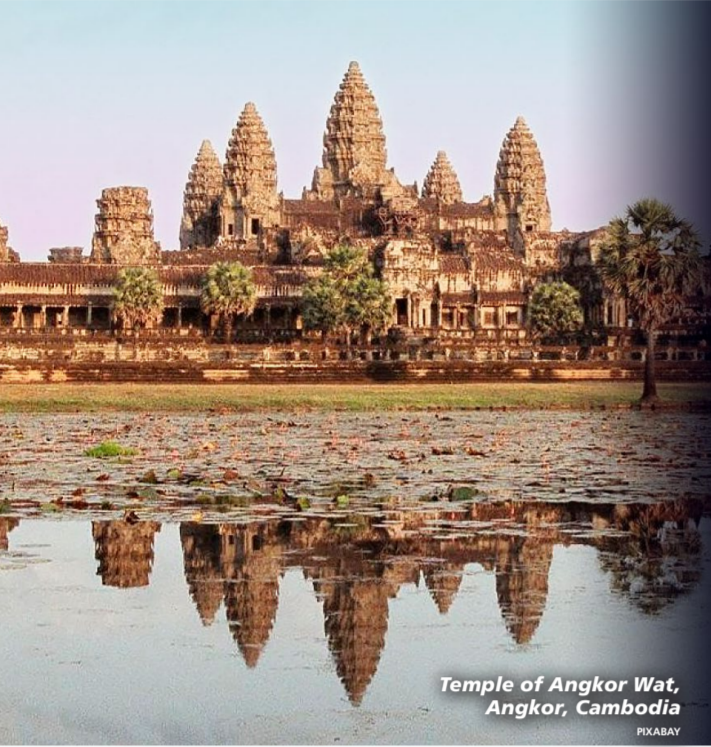
Imagine a world without the pyramids of Egypt, the Serengeti, or the Great Barrier Reef. What about the Grand Canyon, Everglades, or Statue of Liberty? World Heritage sites like these are as diverse and unique as the lands and peoples of our planet. Yet many of the world's irreplaceable properties come under threat from deterioration, natural disasters, civil strife, or insufficient resources for their care.

Conserving them helps the world connect continuously through humanity's common heritage. These sites—and our care for them—represent our human legacies, our present lives, and what we pass on to future generations. Working together, the people and nations of the world can protect the places that tell our shared human story.



The World Heritage emblem symbolizes the interdependence of cultural and natural properties. The square is a form created by humankind and the circle represents nature, the two being intimately linked. The emblem is round like the world, and at the same time it is a symbol of protection.

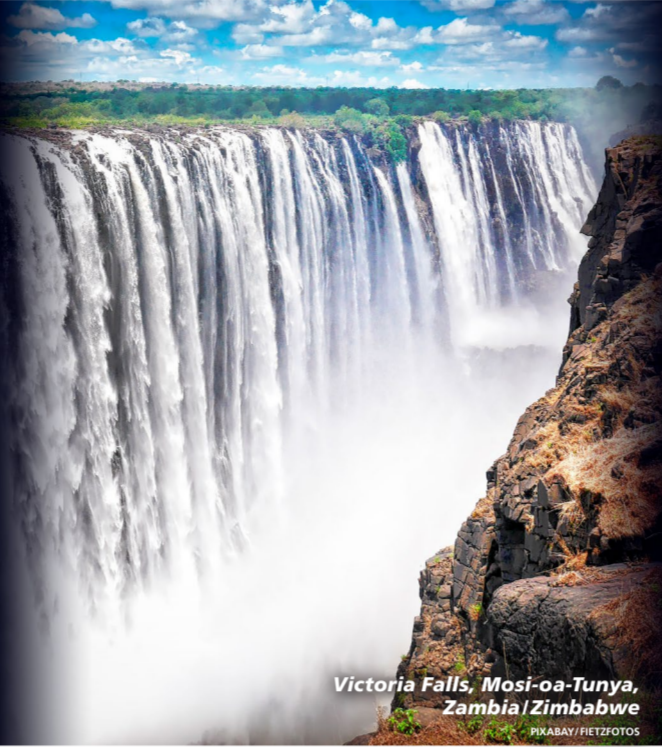
Kudu, ISimangaliso Wetland Park, South Africa
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Temple of Angkor Wat, Angkor, Cambodia
© PHILIPPE/RETZPHOTOS



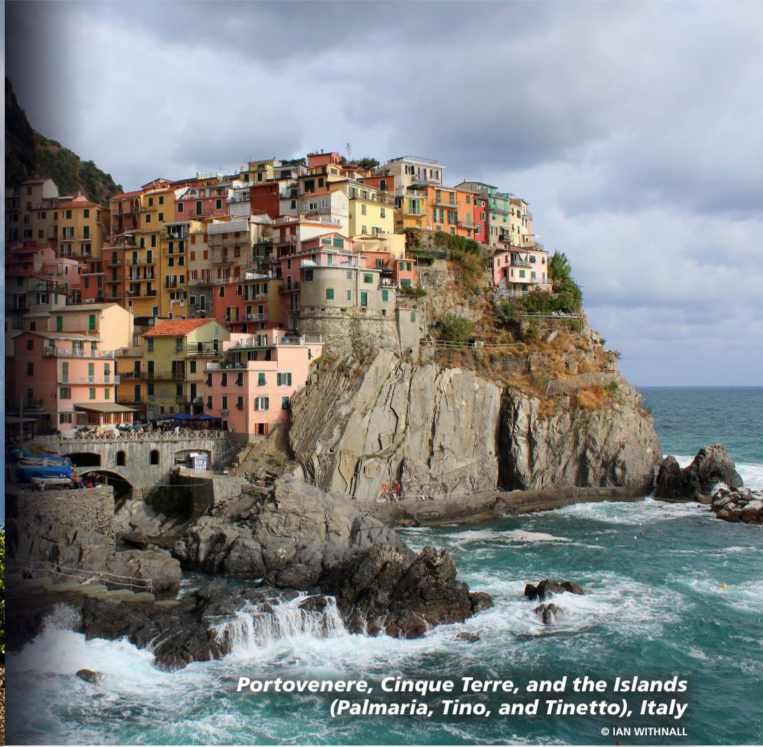
Sea lion, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador
© THOMAS FORSTOCKY



Victoria Falls, Mosi-oa-Tunya, Zambia/Zimbabwe
© PHILIPPE/RETZPHOTOS



Moai, Rapa Nui National Park, Chile
© DR. ALBAN MIBARAUD



Portovenere, Cinque Terre, and the Islands (Palmaria, Tino, and Tinetto), Italy
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A Shared Promise to Protect the World's Heritage

After the United States established Yellowstone as the world's first national park in 1872, a movement progressed to conserve more natural and cultural heritage across the United States. This movement, in a variety of forms, eventually spread across the globe. One century later, in 1972, the United States played a key role in developing an international treaty called the *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Aiming to enhance understanding and appreciation of heritage conservation, many see the Convention as applying the

US national park idea throughout the world. The United States was the first country to ratify the Convention, which today has over 190 signatory states. Yellowstone and Mesa Verde national parks were in the first group of sites selected for the World Heritage List in 1978. Now, more than 1,000 World Heritage sites in over 160 countries are recognized. The Convention has become one of history's largest collective conservation efforts, fostering international cooperation and making strides across the globe to protect humanity's shared heritage.

Safeguarding World Heritage Sites

Cooperation is vital to conserving World Heritage sites. Nations identify and nominate their properties to be considered for the World Heritage List—a global collection of properties whose preservation is enhanced through international cooperation. The World Heritage Committee reviews the properties for their “outstanding universal value” to humanity, and selected sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List. Nations pledge to protect their sites while retaining sovereignty and control over them.

The National Park Service administers several World Heritage sites in the United States; others are managed by states, tribes, local governments, or private owners. The United States and Canada jointly nominated bordering parks to be two World Heritage sites: Waterton-Glacier and Wrangell-St. Elias/Glacier Bay/Tatshenshini-Atkasut. These designations underscore the nations' mutually beneficial interaction in long-term resource management and day-to-day activities.



Selection Criteria

To be included on the World Heritage List, a site must be of “outstanding universal value” and meet at least one of ten selection criteria. A site must also meet standards for integrity (must be complete) and authenticity (must be credible and truthful) and have good management and strong legal protection.

CULTURAL CRITERIA

- i • Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- ii • Exhibit an important interchange of human values on developments in architecture, technology, monumental arts, town planning, or landscape design.
- iii • Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization that is living or has disappeared.
- iv • Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural, or technological ensemble or landscape that illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.
- v • Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use, or sea use representative of a culture.

- vi • Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

NATURAL CRITERIA

- vii • Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- viii • Be outstanding examples representing major stages of Earth's history.
- ix • Be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes.
- x • Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-place conservation of biological diversity.



Global Partnerships

The National Park Service (NPS) Office of International Affairs works to promote the NPS mission to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the United States and the world. NPS works with World Heritage site managers to help them better protect their own natural and cultural heritage, providing technical assistance and promoting exchanges of best practices in site conservation and management.

Zebras, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania
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EXPLORE, LEARN, AND PROTECT!

The National Park Service Junior Ranger program provides learning opportunities for people of all ages. To earn your official World Heritage Junior Ranger badge and certificate, complete a series of fun activities, then share your answers with National Park Service staff. Learn more at www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/world-heritage-junior-rangers.htm.

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National Park Service World Heritage in the United States
www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/worldheritage.htm

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
World Heritage List
whc.unesco.org/en/list/

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