

# THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION


**The World Heritage Convention** is the legal instrument for the protection and preservation of the tangible cultural and natural heritage worldwide. Its implementation is supported by a set of Operational Guidelines prepared and updated by the World Heritage Committee. The World Heritage Centre of UNESCO provides the Secretariat of the Convention and support the States Parties in its implementation.

The Convention recognizes the natural heritage at the same level as the cultural heritage, underscores the way people interact with nature, and stresses the need to preserve the balance between the natural and the man-made environment.

Its uniqueness lies in its universal implementation, by which States Parties recognize that, without prejudice to national sovereignty or property right, the conservation and protection of the World Heritage properties in their national territories are shared with the international community because of their outstanding universal value.

A site has outstanding universal value when the World Heritage Committee considers that it meets at least one of the following criteria :

- i. represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- ii. exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or 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 which is living or which has disappeared;
- iv. be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- v. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment, especially when it has become vulnerable due to impact or irreversible changes;
- vi. be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic or literary works of outstanding universal significance; (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
- vii. contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of outstanding natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- viii. be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- ix. be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- x. contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation.

To date, 191 States have ratified the Convention and 981 sites in 160 countries have been included on the World Heritage List. The last country which has ratified it is Bahamas (2014/05/15) 

US Virgin Islands © Jason P. Heym, Seascope Pool Center, Inc., 2004



Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System © Evergreen



1972

Adoption of the **Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage**. This unique international treaty links for the first time the concepts of nature conservation and preservation of cultural properties, recognizing the way people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

1975

The World Heritage Convention formally takes effect upon ratification by the first 20 States Parties. The **List of World Heritage in Danger** is created to draw attention to properties needing special international consideration and priority assistance. The **World Heritage Fund** is established to assist States Parties identify, preserve and promote World Heritage sites through both compulsory and voluntary contributions.

1978

The World Heritage Committee develops selection criteria for inscribing properties on the World Heritage List, and draws up **Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention**, setting out among other principles those of monitoring and reporting for properties on the List. Ecuador's Galápagos Islands becomes the first of twelve sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Galápagos Islands, Ecuador © UNESCO

1992

With 377 sites inscribed in the first twenty years of the Convention, the **World Heritage Centre** is established to oversee the day-to-day management of the Convention. A new category of sites is added, making the Convention the first legal instrument to recognize and protect **cultural landscapes**.



Trinidad and the Valley de los Ingenios, Cuba © M&amp;G Thierin-Weise

# THE 1972 CONVENTION

The Committee adopts the **Global Strategy** for a Balanced, Representative and Credible World Heritage List, aimed at addressing the imbalances on the List between regions of the world, and the types of monuments and periods represented. The Strategy marks the progression from a monumental vision of heritage to a much more people-oriented, multifunctional and global vision of World Heritage. The **Nara Document** on Authenticity is adopted, recognizing the specific nature of heritage values within each cultural context.

1994

On the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Convention, the Committee adopts the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage, inviting all stakeholders to support World Heritage conservation through four key Strategic Objectives (the '4 Cs'): **Credibility, Conservation, Capacitybuilding and Communication**. The World Heritage Partners Initiative, known today as PACT, is launched to encourage public-private partnerships and set in place a framework through which a wide range of institutions as well as individuals can contribute to the conservation of World Heritage sites around the world.

2002



Willemstad Historic Area, City Centre and Port, Curaçao © UNESCO

The World Heritage Committee adds a fifth 'C' – **Community** – to its Strategic Objectives, highlighting the important role of local communities in preserving World Heritage.

2007

40 years and 936 World Heritage sites. A year of activities, including events, conferences, workshops, exhibits and a targeted communication campaign, celebrates the 40th Anniversary of the adoption of the World Heritage Convention, with a focus on **World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Local Communities**.

2012

Historic Bridgetown Bar, Barbados © M. Manske, 2010



Historic Inner City of Paramaribo, Surinam © UNESCO



Historic Town of St. George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda © National Museum of Bermuda

