

# WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN PAKISTAN



The remains found in the neighbouring city of Sahr-i-Bahlol indicate the followers of Buddhism who resided in the fortified town supported the monastery. Moreover, it appears they regularly carried offerings to the monks residing in Takht-i-Bahi.

After being abandoned in 7 AD, the sites sustained some damage. However, it was re-discovered in the early 1900s. The excavations began in 1907, leading archaeologists to unearth the large complex along with other important artefacts and statues. Both Takht-i-Bahi and Sahr-i-Bahlol were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1980.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** If you're staying at Islamabad, you can make a day trip to Takht e Bahi. It'll take you about one and half hours to reach your destination. From Peshawar it takes around one and half hour.

## Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens

These are two masterpieces from the time of the brilliant Mughal dynasty, which reached its height during the reign of the Emperor Shah Jahan. The fort contains marble palaces and mosques decorated with mosaics and gilt. The elegance of these splendid gardens, built near the city of Lahore on three terraces with lodges, waterfalls and large ornamental ponds, is unequalled. The inscribed property includes two distinct royal complexes, the Lahore Fort and the Shalimar Gardens, both located in the City of Lahore, at a distance of 7 km. from each other. The two complexes – one characterized by monumental structures and the other by extensive water gardens – are outstanding examples of Mughal artistic expression at its height, as it evolved during the 16th and 17th centuries.



The 21 monuments preserved within the boundaries of Lahore Fort comprise an outstanding repertory of the forms of Mughal architecture at its artistic and aesthetic height, from the reign of Akbar (1542-1605) through the reign of Shah Jahan (1627-58). Equally the Shalimar Gardens, laid out by Shah Jahan in 1641-2 embodies Mughal garden design at the apogee of its development. Both complexes together may be understood to constitute a masterpiece of human creative genius. These two historical sites were added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1981.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** Both of these sites are located within the territory of Lahore City. It'll take you about half an hour to one hour to reach your destinations depending on the location of your place of stay.

## Rohtas Fort

Pashtun King Sher Shah Suri, the founder of short-lived Suri dynasty, built the Rohtas Fort in the 16th century. It is located near the city of Jhelum.

UNESCO described it as an 'exceptional example of the Muslim military architecture of Central and South Asia.' The remarkably intact Rohtas Fort was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Site in Pakistan in 1997.

An epitome of military fortifications in the region, this incredible fortress was built in 7 years. The rationale behind its construction was to stop the forces of Mughal Emperor Humayun from invading the region following his defeat in the Battle of Chausa. Since Rohtas Fort sits on an elevated hill on the Pothohar Plateau overlooking the passageway into the region, it is believed the structure was constructed to keep an eye on the local Ghakkar population that was traditionally loyal to the Mughals.

The sprawling fortress is surrounded by four kilometres of fortified walls reinforced with 68 bastion towers and 12 gates. Moreover, the inner boundary of Rohtas Fort housed a small village, which still exists. In addition, this historical site in Pakistan used to hold a force of up to 30,000 personnel. That makes it an incredibly difficult military stronghold to attack.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** If you're staying at Islamabad, you can make a day trip to Rohtas Fort. It'll take you about two hours to reach your destination. From Lahore it takes around three and half hours.



  
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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites are places of outstanding cultural or natural importance to the common heritage of humanity. The programme was founded with the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972 in Paris. Pakistan ratified the convention on 23 July 1976, making its historical sites eligible for inclusion on the list. Since then, UNESCO has designated six sites in Pakistan as World Heritage Sites and twenty-six sites are on the tentative list.

Pakistan has following six UNESCO World Heritage:

- Archaeological Ruins of Moenjodaro, 1980
- Ancient Monuments at Makli, Thatta, 1981
- Taxila, 1980
- Buddhist Ruins of Takht-i-Bahi & Remains at Sahr-i-Bahlol, 1980
- Lahore Fort & Shalamar Gardens in Lahore, 1981
- Rohtas Fort, 1997

## The Ruins of Mohenjo-Daro

The ancient civilization of Mohenjo-Daro dates back to 26 BC. In fact, it is believed to be the oldest physical evidence of urban planning. From well-planned streets to baked brick structures and a sophisticated drainage system, the layout of this historic settlement proves the occupants of Indus Valley were not only expert planners but were also well-versed in complex civil engineering.



After being abandoned some 3,000 years ago, Mohenjo-Daro remained buried under layers of dust and sand for several centuries. Archaeologists re-discovered it in 1920 in what is now the modern-day district of Larkana in Sindh. No temples or religious monuments were uncovered during the excavations. However, the opulence of the lost city became quite apparent after historians found valuable gold, ivory and lapis lazuli artefacts among other precious metals and stones. This historical site was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1980.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** If you're staying at Sukkur, you can make a day trip to Mohenjo-Daro. It'll take you about two hours to reach your destination.

## Makli Necropolis

Makli Hill is one of the largest communal burial sites in the world dating back to the 14th century. UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site in 1981. The massive funerary site near Thatta, the ancient capital of Sindh, is home to the tombs and mausoleums of several emperors, queens, governors, saints, philosophers, scholars and other significant people from different eras. In fact, historians believe around 5 hundred thousand to 1 million people were buried on the hill between the 14th and 18th century.

The intricate stone carvings on the gravesites in the 'City of Dead' display Hindu, Islamic, Persian, Mughal, Gujarati and Middle Eastern-style artwork. It indicates the necropolis was used by more than one religion or civilization. Although the stunning array of stone tombs have begun to crumble with the passage of time, Makli Hill is still considered an 'outstanding testament' to the ancient civilization of Sindh due to its historic importance. The sprawling necropolis covers an area of 10 kilometres.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** If you're staying at Karachi, you can make a day trip to Makli and Thatta. It'll take you about two hours to reach your destination.



## The Archaeological Complex of Taxila

Taxila, is a vast serial site that includes a Mesolithic cave and the archaeological remains of four early settlement sites, Buddhist monasteries, and a Muslim mosque and madrasa. Situated strategically on a branch of the Silk Road that linked China to the West, Taxila reached its apogee between the 1st and 5th centuries. It is now one of the most important archaeological sites in Asia. The ruins of the four settlement sites at Taxila reveal the pattern of urban evolution on the Indian subcontinent through more than five centuries. One of these sites, the Bihir mound, is associated with the historic event of the triumphant entry of Alexander the Great into Taxila.

The archaeological sites of Saraikala, Bhir, Sirkap, and Sirsukh are collectively of unique importance in illustrating

the evolution of urban settlement on the Indian subcontinent. The Taxila serial site also includes Khanpur cave, which has produced stratified microlithic tools of the Mesolithic period, and a number of Buddhist monasteries and stupas of various periods. Buddhist monuments erected throughout the Taxila valley transformed it into a religious heartland and a destination for pilgrims from as far afield as Central Asia and China.

The Buddhist archaeological sites at Taxila include the Dharmarajika complex and stupa, the Khader Mohra grouping, the Kalawan grouping, the Giri monasteries, the Kunala stupa and monastery, the Jandial complex, the Lalchack and the Badalpur stupa remains and monasteries, the Mohra Moradu monastic remains, the Pipplian and the Jaulian remains, and the Bahalar stupa and remains. This historical site was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1980.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** If you're staying at Islamabad/Rawalpindi, you can make a day trip to Taxila. It'll take you about one hour to reach your destination.



## Buddhist Ruins of Takht-i-Bahi and Sahr-i-Bahlol

Dating back to 1 AD, Takht-i-Bahi monastery is one of the most well-preserved Buddhist complexes from that time period. Due to its fortunate location in the mountainous range of what is now the modern-day city of Mardan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this stone monastery remained largely unaffected from the invaders and aggressors.

Archaeologists believe the inscriptions found in Takht-i-Bahi, which literally means 'throne of spring,' refer to Gondophares I, the founder of the ancient Indo-Parthian Kingdom. The ruins suggest the monastery started out as a small, singular structure. However, it gradually turned into an influential and vast complex of Buddhist monasteries over the next 800 years.