

# Hoi An on list of heritage sites at climate change risk

By **Nguyen Quy** January 9, 2019 | 01:47 pm GMT+7



Tourists sit on a boat in Hoi An in November 2017 as heavy rains triggered by storm Damrey submerged the ancient town. Photo by VnExpress/Quynh Tran

The ancient town of Hoi An is on the list of UNESCO-recognized heritage sites at risk from climate change.

American news channel *CNN* recently warned that climate change is drastically impacting some of the world's most treasured heritage sites, and the ancient town of Hoi An, which lies on the Thu Bon River around 30 kilometers south of Da Nang, is one of them.



The news site cited a joint report by the United Nations Environment Program, UNESCO and the Union of Concerned Scientists, which said Hoi An is prone to flooding during the rainy season and that climate change is expected to worsen the situation in the coming years.

Much of Hoi An is at or no less than two meters above sea level, making it vulnerable to sea-level rise and storm surges, the report says.

In November 2017, Hoi An, which was named by UNESCO a world heritage site in 1999, experienced the worst flooding in history when many parts of the town were flooded following heavy downpours triggered by storm Damrey. The storm killed at least 106 people and caused around VND22 trillion (nearly \$1 billion) in loss in the central region.

Rising sea levels have caused serious coastal erosion at Cua Dai Beach, a major tourist draw near the ancient town. It already loses between 10 and 20 meters of land to erosion annually.

[Cua Dai](#) was once at risk of disappearing from the global tourism map. In October 2014, huge waves demolished a concrete embankment and eroded nearly 200 meters of the beach on a three kilometer stretch. Scientists blamed the erosion on upstream hydropower plants that robbed the beach of its sand.

Local authorities spent around VND70 billion (\$3.08 million) building a new embankment, installing iron pilings and dumping sand in the area to save Cua Dai, which they viewed as a valuable tourism resource for Hoi An.

The whole of An Dinh district in Hoi An, filled with heritage houses dating back from the 16th and 17th centuries, could be flooded annually by 2020, according to a recent U.N.-Habitat vulnerability assessment.

Other climate change vulnerable world heritage sites listed by the *CNN* list include the Yellowstone National Park in the U.S., the Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal, the Philippines' Cordilleras, Venice in Italy and Japan's Shiretoko Peninsula.



"Virtually every World Heritage site has some level of threat from climate change," said Adam Markham, deputy director of the Climate and Energy Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, based in the U.S., as cited in the report.

One in four natural World Heritage sites are highly threatened by climate change, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) global assessment of 241 natural sites.

This has doubled from 2014 to 2017, according to the report, making climate change the "fastest growing threat."

Vietnam is one of the top five countries most adversely affected by climate change, according to Vietnam's Institute of Strategy and Policy.

Over the last 50 years, Vietnam's average annual surface temperature has increased by approximately 0.5 -0.7 degree Celsius, while the sea level has risen by approximately 20 centimeters.

The United Nations warns that if sea levels rise by one meter, Vietnam will face a loss of \$17 billion each year; one fifth of the population or some 18 million will be homeless and 12.3 percent of farmland will disappear.





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