

UNESCO World
Heritage Site

Mount Emei Scenic Area
& Leshan Giant
Buddha

Sichuan, China



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Heritage
Convention



Brief synthesis

Together with being listed as the World Cultural Heritage, Leshan and Emeishan (Mount Emei), at the same time in 1996, creates a sacred kingdom of Buddha. Both Leshan and Emeishan have a long history and tradition of Buddhism. Leshan is proud of having the largest stone Buddha in the world, and it is by far the tallest pre-modern statue in the world. While Emeishan, one of most sacred Buddhist mountains in China, is noted for fabulous temples, Buddha statue as well as the fascinating mountain view.

Mount Emei is an area of exceptional cultural significance as it is the place where Buddhism first became established on Chinese territory and from where it spread widely through the East. Mount Emei rises in the southwestern part of the Chengdu Plain in Emeishan City, with its highest peak being 3,099 meters above sea level. The craggy southern part of the mountain is crisscrossed by ravines and covered with a dense growth of plants, while the northern part features sheer precipices, and waterfalls cascading down the slope.

The Giant Buddha of Leshan is carved on Lingyun Hill, east of Leshan City, which is not far away from Mount Emei. The solemn Buddha is 71 meters high, and its head itself is 14.7 meters high. Its ear is 6.2 meters long, eye 3.3 meters wide, and shoulder 34 meters wide. Its head is covered with 1,021 chignons. Its middle finger is 8.3 meters long, and each of the feet is 11 meters long and 8.5 meters wide, large enough to accommodate more than 100 people sitting on it. The huge figure sits with his hands resting on his knees, his head reaching the hilltop and his feet the river, occupying the entire hillside.

William Leonard-Emei Many Mountains (from Flickr)

Integrity

The heritage zones of the Mount Emei and Leshan Giant Buddha cover 15,400 ha(hectare) and 17.88 ha respectively and comprehensively represent the importance of Buddhist culture and ancient architecture. Emei is one of four sacred Buddhist mountains in China, and as such, it has been treated as a special protected place for almost 3,000 years. Protection in modern times has taken the form of laws culminating in its establishment as a "Scenic Area" in 1982. The area is subject to various regulations from the national, provincial and municipal governments and has a plan to guide its conservation. Fortunately, because of its size and the relative inaccessibility of its terrain, much of Emei remains untouched and unspoiled. The revival of Buddhism reinforces its protection as the monks can play a quasi-warden role.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the inscribed property, Mount Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area, lies to a large extent in the relationship between the man-made element and the natural environment. In these terms, the authenticity is very high. Conservation and restoration projects have been carried out on individual buildings which in general terms are authentic. As a sacred place, Mount Emei has benefited from a long-standing and traditional regime of conservation and restoration, which dated back to the mid-10th century. Today, the conservation of the property continues to be carried out by very strict standards and hence effectively maintains the outstanding values and authenticity of the property.

PROGabrijel Gavranovic-mount emei cloud sea (from Flickr)



Protection and management requirements

The management of Mount Emei has started since the middle of the 10th century, and the first General Administrative Plan of Mount Emei was produced in the early 1980s. Management follows strictly the central government's Regulations on Scenery Areas, and the Provincial government's Regulations on World Heritage Protection of Sichuan Province and the Regulations on Scenery Areas of Sichuan Province. A Management Committee of the Mount Emei-Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area with 27 sectors has been established to protect and manage the site. The Revised Master Plan for the Mount Emei Scenic Area and the Leshan Giant Plan Buddha Scenic Area has provided the legal basis and policy framework for management and conservation of the property. Any project that has dramatic impacts on the heritage value is strictly controlled and requires government approval. Both the central and local governments provide fiscal support for site protection and management.

Monkey in Mount Emei (from Flickr)



Andrea Dick-River on Mount Emei
(from Flickr)

At present, the thousand-year-old traditional link between the natural and the cultural values of the property is well-preserved. The main threat to Emei is the number of tourists and pilgrims that visit the property and the development that they bring with them. The main intrusion has been a cable car which leads to the Golden Summit of the mountain and brings some 300,000 people a year to the sensitive montane forest zone, as well as the construction of a light monorail in 1998 after inscription of the property. There are numerous drink stands and souvenir stalls which detract from the natural atmosphere of the mountain. The specific long-term management objective for the property is to ensure that, despite increasing visitor pressure, the traditional link between nature and culture is maintained and continues to be well-managed so that both integrity and authenticity of the property are conserved.



Mount Emei

Mount Emei is called the “mountain of brightness” in Buddhism. The legend goes that the Guangxiang Temple on the mountain top was where the goddess of benevolence performed Buddhist rituals, thus making it one of the four famous sacred mountains of Buddhism in China. There used to be over 100 temples and halls on the mountain, but only some 20 still stand. The Baoguo Temple situated at the foot of the mountain is the largest temple on Mount Emei, built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The red copper Huayan Pagoda inside the temple is an important relic for studying Chinese Buddhism. The 14-storyed pagoda is seven meters high, and its walls are engraved with more than 4,700 images of Buddha and the full text of the Buddhist Sutra of the Huayan Sect.

The first Buddhist temple in China was built on the summit of Mount Emei in the 1st century CE. It became the Guangxiang Temple, receiving its present royal name of Huazang in 1614. The addition of more than 30 other temples including the Wannian Temple founded in the 4th century containing the 7.85m high Puxian bronze Buddha of the 10th century, and garden temples including the Qingyin Pavilion complex of pavilions, towers and platforms dating from the early 6th century; the early 17th century Baoguo Temple and the Ligou Garden (Fuhu Temple) turned the mountain into one of Buddhism’s holiest sites.

The most remarkable manifestation of this is the 71-metre-tall Giant Buddha of Leshan. Carved in the 8th century CE

Xing Tong-Puxian Buddha at top of Emei
Mount (from Flickr)

on the hillside of Xijuo Peak overlooking the confluence of three rivers, it is the largest Buddhist sculpture in the world. A contemporary account of the creation of the Giant Buddha is preserved in the form of an inscribed tablet. Associated monuments include the 9th century Lingbao Pagoda and the Dafo (Giant Buddha) Temple dating from the early Qing Dynasty. The Wuyu Temple contains two important statues: the 9th century Dashi bronze Buddha and the 11th century Amithabha statue group, cast iron and gilded. Over five hundred Han Dynasty tombs of the 1st to 4th centuries, notable for their fine carvings and calligraphic inscriptions are located on Mahao Crag.

Mount Emei is an area of striking scenic beauty. It is also of great spiritual and cultural importance because of its role in the introduction of Buddhism into China. The conscious siting of so many of the cultural monuments, particularly of traditional architecture, within the natural environment makes it a cultural landscape of very high order.

Mount Emei is also notable for its exceptionally rich vegetation, ranging from subtropical evergreen forests to subalpine pine forests. Covering an area of 15,400 ha in two discrete areas – the Mount Emei and the Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Areas – the property is an area of natural beauty into which the human element has been integrated with skill and subtlety.

On Mount Emei, there are over 30 temples, ten of them large and very old; they are in local traditional style, and most are built on hillsides, taking advantage of the terrain. In the selection of the site, design, and construction they are masterpieces of great originality and ingenuity. The advanced architectural and building techniques are the quintessence of Chinese temple architecture.

On Mount Emei, the importance of the link between the tangible and intangible, the natural and the cultural, is uppermost. Mount Emei is a place of historical significance as one of the four holy lands of Chinese Buddhism. Buddhism was introduced into China in the 1st century CE via the Silk Road from India to Mount Emei, and it was on Mount Emei that the first Buddhist temple in China was built.

The rich Buddhist cultural heritage of Mount Emei has a documented history of over 2,000 years, consisting of archaeological sites, important architecture, tombs, ritual spaces, and collections of cultural artifacts, including sculpture, stone inscriptions, calligraphy, painting, and music, among other traditional arts.

Mount Emei is a site of special significance to conservation and science for its high floral diversity. The biodiversity of the site is exceptionally rich: some 3,200 plant species in 242 families have been recorded, of which 31 are under national protection, and more than 100 species are endemic. This is due to its transitional location at the edge of the Sichuan basin and the eastern Himalayan highlands. Within its elevation range of 2,600 m are found a great variety of vegetation zones including subtropical evergreen broad-leaved forest, mixed evergreen, and deciduous broad-leaved forest, mixed broad-leaved and conifer forests, and subalpine conifer forest. This exceptional flora is also rich in animal species with some 2,300 species recorded, including several threatened at a global scale.

Leshan Giant Buddha

The Leshan Giant Buddha is a 71-metre (233 ft.) tall stone statue, built between 713 and 803 (during the Tang Dynasty), depicting Maitreya. It is carved out of a cliff face that lies at the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi rivers in the southern part of Sichuan province in China, near the city of Leshan. The stone sculpture faces Mount Emei, with the rivers flowing below his feet. It is the largest stone Buddha in the world, and it is by far the tallest pre-modern statue in the world.

Construction was started in 713, led by a Chinese monk named Hai Tong. He hoped that the Buddha would calm the turbulent waters that plagued the shipping vessels traveling down the river. When funding for the project was threatened, he is said to have gouged out his own eyes to show his piety and sincerity. After his death, however, the construction was stuck due to insufficient funding. About 70 years later, a jiedushi decided to sponsor the project, and the construction was completed by Hai Tong's disciples in 803.

Apparently, the massive construction resulted in so much stone being removed from the cliff face and deposited into the river below that the currents were indeed altered by the statue, making the water safe for passing ships.

Leshan-Giant-Buddha (from Flickr)



A sophisticated drainage system was incorporated into the Leshan Giant Buddha when it was built. It is still in working order. It includes drainage pipes carved into various places on the body, to carry away the water after the rains so as to reduce weathering.

When the Giant Buddha was carved, a huge thirteen story wood structure was built to shelter it from rain and the sunshine. This structure was destroyed and sacked by the Mongols during the wars at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. From then on, the stone statue was exposed to the elements.

Degradation

The Leshan Buddha has been affected by the pollution emanating from the unbridled development in the region. According to Xinhua news agency, the Leshan Giant Buddha and many Chinese natural and cultural heritage sites in the region have seen degradations from weathering, air pollution, and swarms of tourists. The government has promised restoration work.



Dimensions

At 71 meters (233 ft.) tall, the statue depicts a seated Maitreya Buddha with his hands resting on his knees. His shoulders are 28 meters wide, and his smallest toenail is large enough to easily accommodate a seated person. There is a local saying: "The mountain is a Buddha, and the Buddha is a mountain." This is partially because the mountain range in which the Leshan Giant Buddha is located is thought to be shaped like a slumbering Buddha when seen from the river, with the Leshan Giant Buddha as its heart.

Associated with these temples are found some of the most important cultural treasures of China, including the remarkable Leshan Giant Buddha carved in the 8th century CE out of the hillside of Xijuo Peak. Facing the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi rivers, it is the tallest Buddha sculpture in the world with a height of 71 meters.

Leshan-Giant-Buddha (from Flickr)

Best Sites for Photography

Leshan Giant Buddha

Giant Buddha

There are two inspirations for you to take some good picture of the Giant Buddha. First is to shoot the detailed parts of Buddha, such as the Buddha head, eyes, hands, feet, even the toes, which all are very large. You can observe Buddha's facial elements from the higher points, then walk down the plank road on the cliff to see his chest and hands. When you get to the bottom, looking up, you will get shocked by the Buddha's majestic body. Here is the best point to shoot some pictures which show how tall and large the Buddha is.

The second idea is to take the panoramic view of Giant Buddha from the river or island in front of the Giant Buddha. You have



two options: 1. taking a sightseeing ship on the river from which you can get the close and full picture of Buddha; 2. find the full view from Sun Island which is only hundreds of meters from the Buddha.

Sleeping Buddha

The Sleep Buddha is not a real Buddha but a vivid shape of sleeping Buddha which is formed by three mountains – Wulong Mountain, Lingyun Mountain and Guicheng Mountain. It is about 4,000 meters long, lying down along the river. Looking from afar, the Leshan Giant Buddha is the heart of sleeping Buddha.

sjliew-sleeping buddha at Leshan
Giant Buddha (from Flickr)

Best Sites for Photography

Mount Emei

Golden Summit

Golden Summit is the second highest point on Mount Emei, 20 meters lower than WanFong Tower. It refers the geographical location as well as a group of Buddhist towers and pavilions. Golden Summit is a natural viewing deck to enjoy magnificent landscape. Overlooking far to the east, you can see Min River and other three rivers flowing through up-and-down mountains. Move your eyes to the north, the delicate Chengdu Basin lifting thousands of green hills and stretching as far as your eyes can see. You will definitely be shocked by the stately mountain range views of Himalaya from western direction.

Buddha Statue

A 48-metre-high giant Buddha statue of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra sits on the Golden Summit and blesses his 48 good wishes to all human beings. It is the highest golden Buddha in the world which now has become the symbol of Emei. Behind the statue is the Huazang Temple consisting of two traditional Buddhist houses. Both the Buddha and temple are gilded, which appears very dazzling under pure blue sky when the sunlight is shining on.

The second idea is to take the panoramic view of Giant Buddha from the river or island in front of the Giant Buddha. You have two options:

1. taking a sightseeing ship on the river from which you can get the close and full picture of Buddha;
2. find the full view from Sun Island which is only hundreds of metres from the Buddha.

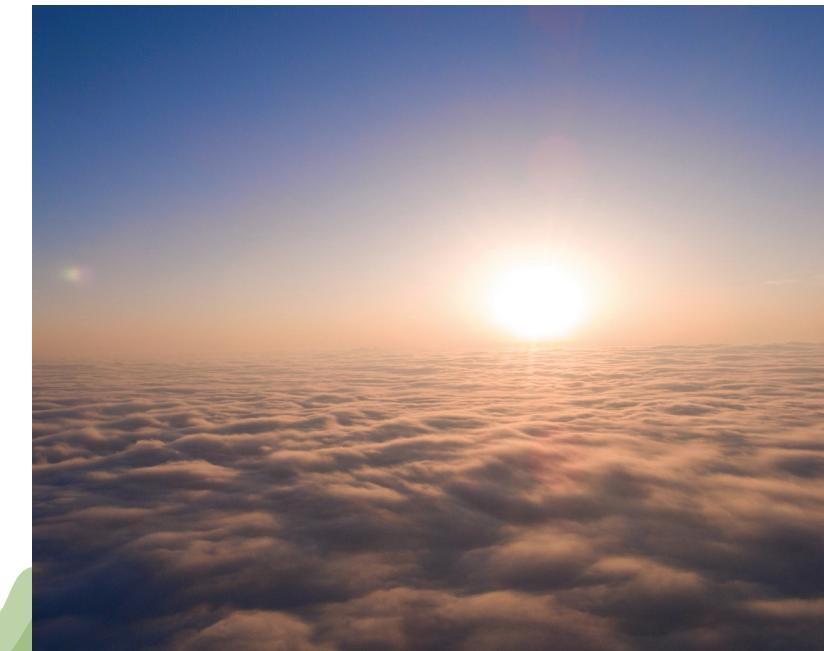
Sunrise

The sunrise on the Emei is one of the scenes that you can't miss. The eastern side of Golden Summit is the sharp cliff, and there is no other peak which is taller than Mount Emei. From the summit, you can see the sun slowly appears from a distance as far as you can see above thick clouds, and make everything, including clouds, mountains, statue, pavilions shining the golden light. The sunrise usually starts around 06:00 AM.

Cloud Sea

Since Mount Emei is the highest mountain in southeastern Sichuan, the splendid cloud sea appears easily, especially in the afternoon. In the clean days, the cloudy sea floods the entire Emei Mountain except for the Golden Summit. Other lower regions are also flooded by the cloud sea, only some high peaks, such as Wawu Mountain, Gongga Mountain keep their appearance in the cloud sea.

Reggie Lee–Sun rise (from Flickr)



Mount Emei Scenic Area

and Leshan Giant

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Mission

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

Cultural heritage refers to monuments, groups of buildings and, sites with historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value. Natural heritage refers to outstanding physical, biological and geological formations, habitats of threatened species of animals and plants and areas with scientific, conservation or aesthetic value.

David Pirmann Ephesus, Turkey -
archeological site - UNESCO World
Heritage (from Flickr)

UNESCO's World Heritage mission is to:

- encourage countries to sign the World Heritage Convention and to ensure the protection of their natural and cultural heritage
- encourage States Parties to the Convention to nominate sites within their national territory for inclusion on the World Heritage List
- encourage States Parties to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their World Heritage sites
- assist States Parties in safeguarding World Heritage sites by providing technical assistance and professional training
- provide emergency assistance for World Heritage sites in immediate danger
- support States Parties' public awareness-building activities for World Heritage conservation
- encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage
- encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage.

Brief History

1959

UNESCO launches an international campaign and collects the US \$80 million to save the Abu Simbel temples in the Nile Valley. A draft of the convention on the protection of cultural heritage is prepared.

1962

UNESCO presents its Recommendation on the Safeguarding of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites. This recommendation covers the preservation and the restoration of the aspect of natural, rural and urban landscapes and sites, whether natural or man-made, which have a cultural or aesthetic interest or from typical natural surroundings.

1965

A White House Conference in Washington, D.C., in 1965 called for a 'World Heritage Trust' to protect 'natural and scenic areas and historic sites.'

1968

IUCN develops a proposal similar to the 'World Heritage Trust' for its members.

1966

UNESCO spearheads an international campaign to save Venice after disastrous floods threatened the city.

1972

Following a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden and the work of expert groups involving IUCN, ICOMOS, and UNESCO, all the proposals came together in the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris on 16 November 1972.

1978

First twelve sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List.

1992

Marks the 20th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, the creation of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, and the adoption of the cultural landscapes category by the World Heritage Committee, making the World Heritage Convention the first international legal instrument to recognize and protect cultural landscapes.

1994

The Global Strategy for a Balanced and Representative World Heritage List is adopted by the World Heritage Committee with the goal of achieving better regional balance and greater thematic diversity in the World Heritage List. It encourages the nomination of sites in underrepresented parts of the world and especially in categories which are not yet fully represented on the List.

1994

UNESCO launches the Young People's Participation in World Heritage Preservation and Promotion Project with the aim to develop new educational approaches to mobilize young people in becoming involved in the protection and promotion of heritage.

2002

The United Nations proclaims 2002 the International Year for Cultural Heritage. To mark the 30th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO, with the help of the Italian Government, organizes in Venice the International Congress. World Heritage: Shared Legacy, Common Responsibility, with the objective to assess the past 30 years of implementation of the World Heritage Convention and to strengthen partnerships for World Heritage conservation.

Nomination Process

Only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention, pledging to protect their natural and cultural heritage, can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Criteria for selection

To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria. These criteria are explained in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention which, besides the text of the Convention, is the main working tool on World Heritage. The criteria are regularly revised by the Committee to reflect the evolution of the World Heritage concept itself. Until the end of 2004, World Heritage sites were selected by six cultural and four natural criteria. With the adoption of the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, only one set of ten criteria exists.

- represent a masterpiece of human creative genius of human creative genius
- 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
- bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared
- be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history

- be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

- be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)

- contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance

- 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

- 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

- 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.

Note

The protection, management, authenticity and integrity of properties are also important considerations. Since 1992 significant interactions between people and the natural environment have been recognized as cultural landscapes.

List of World Heritage Sites in Danger

Armed conflict and war, earthquakes and other natural disasters, pollution, poaching, uncontrolled urbanization and unchecked tourist development pose major problems to World Heritage sites. These can threaten the very characteristics for which a site was originally inscribed on the World Heritage List. Dangers can be 'ascertained,' referring to specific and proven imminent threats, or 'potential,' when a property is faced with threats which could have negative effects on its World Heritage values.

Illustrative examples of sites in danger

• City of Bam in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The ancient Citadel and surrounding cultural landscape of the Iranian city of Bam, where 26,000 people lost their lives in the earthquake of December 2003, was simultaneously inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2004. Important international efforts are mobilized to salvage the cultural heritage of this devastated city.

• Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan

This cultural landscape was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2003 simultaneously with its inscription on the World Heritage List. The property is in a fragile state of conservation considering that it has suffered from abandonment, military action, and dynamite explosions. Parts of the site are inaccessible due to the presence of antipersonnel mines. UNESCO, at the request of the Afghan Government, coordinates all international efforts to safeguard and enhance Afghanistan's cultural heritage, notably in Bamiyan.



Rayen Citadel-Walled City of Baku in Azerbaijan (from Flickr)

• Walled City of Baku in Azerbaijan

Representing an outstanding and, rare example of medieval architecture at the crossroad of the many different cultures in the region, the Walled City of Baku sustained significant damage during the earthquake of November 2000 and has been increasingly affected by the pressure of urban development, the absence of conservation policies and by questionable restoration efforts. For these reasons, it was

- Kathmandu Valley in Nepal
The exceptional urban and architectural heritage of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur has been severely affected by uncontrolled urban development. The property is composed of seven Monument Zones, which, since the time of inscription in 1979, have unfortunately been severely altered, resulting in a general loss of authenticity and integrity of the property as a whole. For these reasons, the site was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2003. UNESCO is working with the Nepalese authorities to help them develop a long-term management plan to conserve the remaining World Heritage values of the property and adopt corrective measures to address illegal building activities.

inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2003. Since then, UNESCO has been working with the State Party and the Advisory Bodies to set up a plan of action to address the conservation issues as well as with stakeholders to coordinate the implementation of safeguarding measures.

• Historic Town of Zabid in Yemen

The outstanding archaeological and historical heritage of Zabid has severely deteriorated in recent years. Indeed, 40% of its original houses have been replaced by concrete buildings. In 2000 at the request of the State Party, the Historic Town of Zabid was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. UNESCO is helping the local authorities to develop an urban conservation plan and to adopt a strategic approach to the preservation of this World Heritage site.

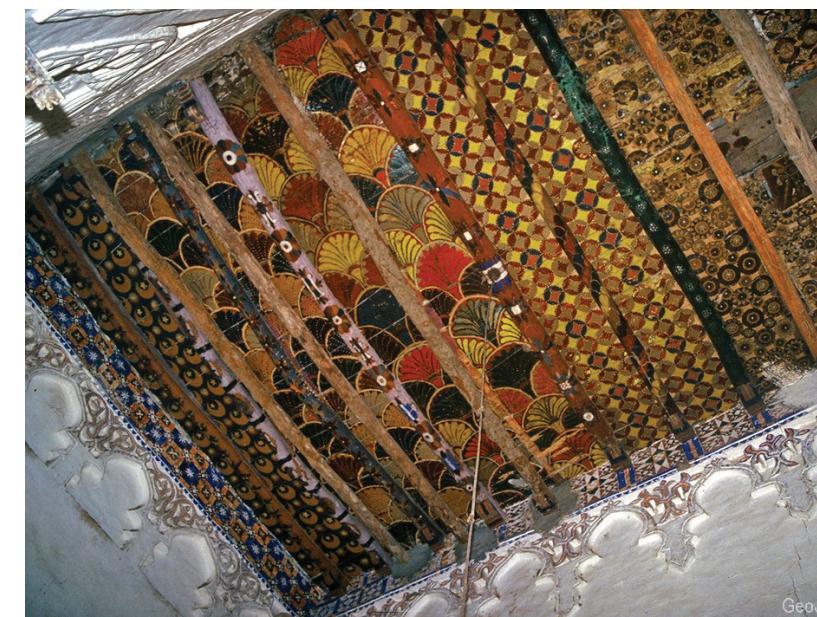
• Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve in Honduras

Commercial and agricultural intrusions into the site threaten the World Heritage values for which it had been inscribed in 1982. The advancing agricultural frontier at the west side of the reserve, pushed by small farmers and cattle ranchers, is already reducing the Reserve's forest area. The southern and western zones of the Reserve are subject to massive extraction of precious wood such as the coba. The site was thus inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1996. An eleven-point corrective action plan has been elaborated, and the management plan for Rio Platano is being carried out with a World Heritage Fund contribution.

• National Parks of Garamba, Kahuzi-Biega, Salonga, Virunga and the Okapi wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Since 1994, all five World Heritage sites of the DRC were inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger as a result

of the impact of the war and civil conflicts in the Great Lakes region. In 1999, an international safeguarding campaign was launched by UNESCO together with some international conservation NGOs to protect the habitat of endangered species such as the mountain gorilla, the northern white rhino, and the okapi. This resulted in a 4-year US\$3.5 million emergency program to save the five sites, funded by the United Nations Foundation and the Government of Belgium. In 2004, international donors, non-governmental organizations and the governments of Belgium and Japan pledged an additional US\$50 million to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo rehabilitate these World Heritage parks.



Alan Doherty-A ceiling in a town house in Zabid (from Flickr)

Success Stories

The World Heritage Convention is not only 'words on paper' but is above all a useful instrument for concrete action in preserving threatened sites and endangered species. By recognizing the outstanding universal value of a site, States Parties commit to its preservation and strive to find solutions for its protection.

If a site is inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the World Heritage Committee can take immediate action to address the situation, and this has led to many successful restorations. The World Heritage Convention is also a very powerful tool to rally international attention and actions through international safeguarding campaigns.

Finding Solutions

Often, the World Heritage Committee and the States Parties, with the assistance of UNESCO experts and other partners, find solutions before a given situation deteriorates to the extent that would damage the site.

• Giza Pyramids in Egypt

These pyramids were threatened in 1995 by a highway project near Cairo which would have seriously damaged the values of this archaeological site. Negotiations with the Egyptian Government resulted in some alternative solutions which replaced the disputed project.

• Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal

This Park provides refuge for about 400 greater one-horned rhinoceros characteristic of South Asia. The World Heritage Committee, in the early 1990s, questioned the findings of the environmental impact assessment of the proposed Rapti

River Diversion Project. The Asian Development Bank and the Government of Nepal revised the assessment and found that the River Diversion project would threaten riparian habitats critical to the rhino inside Royal Chitwan. The project was thus abandoned, and this World Heritage site was saved for the benefit of future generations.

• Archaeological Site of Delphi in Greece

At the time of its nomination in 1987, plans were underway to build an aluminum plant nearby the site. The Greek Government was invited to find another location for the plant, which it did, and Delphi took its rightful place on the World Heritage List.

• Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaino in Mexico

In 1999, the World Heritage community campaigned against a plan for enlarging an existing salt factory to commercial scale in Laguna San Ignacio in El Vizcaino Bay, the last pristine reproduction lagoon for the Pacific gray whale. The World Heritage Committee forewarned the Mexican Government of the threats posed to the marine and terrestrial ecosystems, the gray whales as key species as well as the overall integrity of this World Heritage site by locating saltworks inside the Sanctuary. As a result, the Mexican Government refused permission for the saltworks in March 2000.

• Mount Kenya National Park/Natural Forest in Kenya

The nomination of this site was first referred to the State Party by findings during the evaluation that suggested there were serious threats to the site, primarily illegal logging and marijuana cultivation inside the Park. The State Party responded with an action plan which included the provision of additional vehicles, increased patrols, community awareness projects, training of forest guards and a review of the policy affecting the adjacent forest reserve. Based on these assurances, the Committee inscribed the site in 1997. Today, some threats remain but there has been significant progress in the management of the site.

Stefan Kretzschmar-UNESCO World Heritage Site-Historic Centre of Stralsund (from Flickr)



Successful Restorations

• Angkor in Cambodia

One of the most important archaeological sites in South-East Asia, Angkor Archaeological Park contains the magnificent remains of the different capitals of the Khmer Empire, from the 9th to the 15th century. In 1993, UNESCO embarked upon an ambitious plan to safeguard and develop the historical site carried out by the Division of Cultural Heritage in close cooperation with the World Heritage Centre. Illicit excavation, pillaging of archaeological sites and landmines were the main problems. The World Heritage Committee, having noted that these threats to the site no longer existed and that the numerous conservation and restoration activities coordinated by UNESCO were successful, removed the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2004.

• Old City of Dubrovnik in Croatia

The “pearl of the Adriatic,” dotted with beautiful Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque buildings had withstood the passage of centuries and survived several earthquakes. In November and December 1991, when seriously damaged by artillery fire, the city was immediately included on the List of World Heritage in Danger. With UNESCO providing technical advice and financial assistance, the Croatian Government restored the facades of the Franciscan and Dominican cloisters, repaired roofs and rebuilt palaces. As a result, in December 1998, it became possible to remove the city from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

• Wieliczka Salt Mine in Poland

This property was inscribed in 1978 as one of the first twelve World Heritage sites. This great mine has been actively worked since the 13th century. Its 300 kilometers of galleries contain famous works of art with altars and statues sculpted in salt, all of which were seriously threatened by humidity due to the introduction of artificial ventilation at the end of the nineteenth century. The site was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1989. During nine years of joint efforts by both Poland and the international community, an efficient dehumidifying system was installed, and the Committee, at its session in December 1998, had the satisfaction of removing the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

• Ngorongoro Conservation Area in the United Republic of Tanzania

This huge crater with the largest concentration of wild animals in the world was listed as an endangered site in 1984 because of the overall deterioration of the site due to the lack of management. By 1989, thanks to continuous monitoring and technical cooperation projects, the situation had improved, and the site was removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger.



Adrian Chandler-Angkor in Cambodia
(from Flickr)