

#24 The City's Memories

OWHC-AP MAGAZINE DECEMBER | 2025

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The City's Memories

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Publication Date	December 2025
Published by	OWHC-AP
Planned by	OWHC-AP & Hanguk Ad
News Coverage	Hanguk Ad
Edited by	Hanguk Ad

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OWHC-AP MAGAZINE
DECEMBER | 2025

prolog

The City,

Walks

Through

Memory



Cities remember time in their own ways. Ancient city walls quietly speak of the desperate efforts to protect that era, while winding alleyways tell stories of the everyday lives of ordinary people who once walked them. Without needing to open a history book, we encounter moments where the past and present meet each day in the urban landscape.

However, if these memories remain solely in the past, they are no different from exhibits in a museum display case. True heritage gains vitality not as a preserved past, but when it breathes alongside our daily lives today. We speak of a city's memory not simply to yearn for the old days, but to confirm the meaning of where we stand now and to discover the direction in which we should move forward.

In a rapidly changing world, cities sometimes try to erase their memories too easily. In pursuit of taller and more convenient buildings, they tear down traces of lives accumulated over time. Therefore, preserving a city's memory goes beyond keeping old buildings—it is an effort not to forget who we are and to protect the patterns of our lives.

From grand architectural structures visible to the eye to invisible stories passed down by word of mouth, cities are composed of countless fragments of memory. Following these layers of memory, we step into the deep stories that cities hold.

Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto

Japan, 1994

Since emerging onto the stage of history in 794 as Heian-kyō, Kyoto has served as the deep roots sustaining Japan's spirit for over a millennium, until the mid-19th century. While the entire city is often described as a living museum, walking slowly through its streets reveals the texture of time—still breathing, still circulating.

Kyoto's memory is carved in wood. Wooden architecture burns easily and decays under wind and rain. Yet Kyoto has never rejected this impermanence. Instead, the city has continuously replaced pillars and re-thatched roofs, carrying memory forward through cycles of decay and renewal. The massive wooden pillars of Kiyomizu-dera, perched securely on a cliff top, silently testify to the wisdom of ancient craftsmen who chose to age alongside nature rather than conquer it.

If architecture is a vessel that holds human life, then gardens are mirrors reflecting the human soul. Standing before the stone garden of Ryōan-ji, all grandeur vanishes, leaving only stillness. With nothing but white sand and fifteen stones—no water at all—this space expresses mountains, water, and the cosmos. It is a philosophical device that makes the invisible visible and the inaudible heard, recording the spiritual ideals that people of that era sought to reach. The reality Kyoto faces today is challenging. The noise of surging tourists and the logic of large-scale development threaten the quiet layers of memory preserved for over a millennium. Kyoto's efforts to protect its

identity—by limiting building heights and striving to preserve historic landscapes—represent a determined struggle to safeguard human dignity and spiritual values that must not be lost.

When the seasons change, maple leaves fall onto the pond at Kinkaku-ji, and snow blankets the sand garden of Ginkaku-ji. Within this timeless scenery, Kyoto asks. What will we remember, and what will we leave behind? Through the flow of time, Kyoto remains a city of memory where past and present quietly converse.





Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa

China, 1994



At 3,700 meters above sea level, where every breath comes hard, lies Lhasa. This city holds layers of time as profound as its physical elevation. Since the 7th century, when Songtsen Gampo of the Tibetan Empire established his seat here, Lhasa has functioned as both the heart of Tibetan Buddhism and the center of governance.

The city's memory crystallizes into monumental vertical architecture. Rising as if one with the rock of Marpo Ri (Red Hill), the Potala Palace demonstrates how grand human construction can exist without overwhelming nature. The contrast between white and red is striking. If the White Palace—residence of the Dalai Lama and seat of governance—records secular authority, then the Red Palace, housing the stupas of successive Dalai Lamas, serves as a repository of religious aspiration toward immortality. The unique social structure in which religion and politics were unified remains fossilized within this vast architectural complex.

If architecture holds the memory of authority, then the footsteps of pilgrims

flowing beneath it sustain the memory of faith. The waves of people performing five-point prostrations around Jokhang Temple demonstrate that Lhasa is not a fossilized relic. Their acts of bowing at the lowest position form a striking contrast with the palace built at the highest point, balancing the spiritual equilibrium of this city.

Yet even in this once-tranquil highland city, winds of change blow fiercely. Rapid urbanization and the expansion of modern commercial facilities threaten the skyline long dominated by the Potala Palace. Beyond the physical preservation of heritage, the most pressing question Lhasa faces today is how to protect the spiritual values and unique landscape embedded within it.

* A form of bowing in which one kneels on both knees, places both arms on the ground, and lowers the body until the forehead touches the ground.



Kathmandu Valley

Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, 1979 / Extended 2006

The Kathmandu Valley, nestled at the southern foothills of the Himalayas, is a crossroads where two great Asian civilizations—India and Tibet—meet, and a vast melting pot in which Hinduism and Buddhism blend peacefully. Inscribed as Asia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, the valley testifies to the pinnacle of distinctive architecture and art achieved by the Newar people through its seven monument zones.

The three Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur symbolize dynastic authority, yet what fills these spaces is the everyday life of ordinary people directed toward the divine. The eyes of wisdom painted on the massive stupas of Swayambhunath and Boudhanath have gazed down upon the city for centuries, silently witnessing the birth, aging, sickness, and death of humanity. The temples and palaces are not fossilized relics but living sites where incense still burns and prayers are still offered.

The devastating earthquake of 2015 left another painful layer in the city's memory.

When countless temples collapsed and towers broke, people chose not to despair but the path of clearing rubble and rebuilding brick by brick. In the process of restoring shattered cultural heritage, the city recovered the spiritual center of its community and reconnected the threads of memory that had nearly been severed.

In the Kathmandu Valley, myth became history, and history became daily life once again. The harmonious coexistence of different faiths without conflict, and the sight of destroyed heritage rising again through people's hands, speak to the values of coexistence and recovery that humanity must preserve. Kathmandu is a sacred place of memory where gods and humans, past and present, mingle without boundaries, creating a sense of eternal time.





Hoi An Ancient Town

Hoi An Ancient Town, Vietnam, 1999





The Thu Bon River is both the beginning and the end of Hoi An. From the 15th to the 19th century, ships from East and West sailed ceaselessly along this narrow waterway. Merchants riding the seasonal monsoons dropped anchor here, unloaded their cargo, and planted their cultures in this land. Hoi An is the grand result of a cultural fusion created when these seafaring foreigners mingled with the indigenous people.

The worn wooden houses lining every street display a peculiar yet harmonious entanglement of Chinese tiles, Japanese roofs, and Vietnamese frameworks. The Japanese Covered Bridge (Chùa Cầu), built by Japanese settlers in the 1590s, serves as both a bridge crossing the waterway and a temple honoring the divine, silently testifying to the prosperity and history of exchange in the Japanese quarter of that era.

On streets where time seems to stand still, the distinctive yellow walls glow in

the sunlight. The breeze flowing through narrow alleys seems to carry the scent of marketplaces where spices and silk were traded centuries ago. Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999, this ancient town is not so much a static museum piece as a vibrant site of life where people still buy and sell goods today.

When night falls, Hoi An unveils another memory. The tens of thousands of lanterns released onto the river serve as both a ritual commemorating past prosperity and an earnest prayer for future well-being. In this place where different cultures have melted into a single landscape without collision, we witness the beauty created when diversity harmonizes. Hoi An is a city of coexistence and harmony, born from the meeting of disparate elements.

#1 Cities and Heritage

Beyond Fossilized Time,

Living Heritage

As Heritage Where Life Flows



Coexistence of Residents and Heritage: Living Heritage

The 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention in 2022 marked a pivotal shift in UNESCO's heritage policy—from physical preservation to social function. Amid the complex crises of climate change, pandemics, and rapid urbanization, heritage has been redefined beyond mere objects of protection to become core assets that enhance urban resilience and drive sustainable development.

The MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration adopted that same year designated culture as a global public good, proclaiming that the stewardship of heritage must expand from states and experts to local communities. This represents the international community's formal recognition that heritage value resides not only in the form of structures but also in the lifestyles of residents who occupy and animate those spaces, and in intangible transmission activities.

Accordingly, contemporary World Heritage City policies address heritage as an integrated element of urban planning through the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach. The understanding is that heritage authenticity is secured only when it functions as living heritage—not as fossilized tourist resources, but as forces that improve residents' living conditions and circulate local economies.

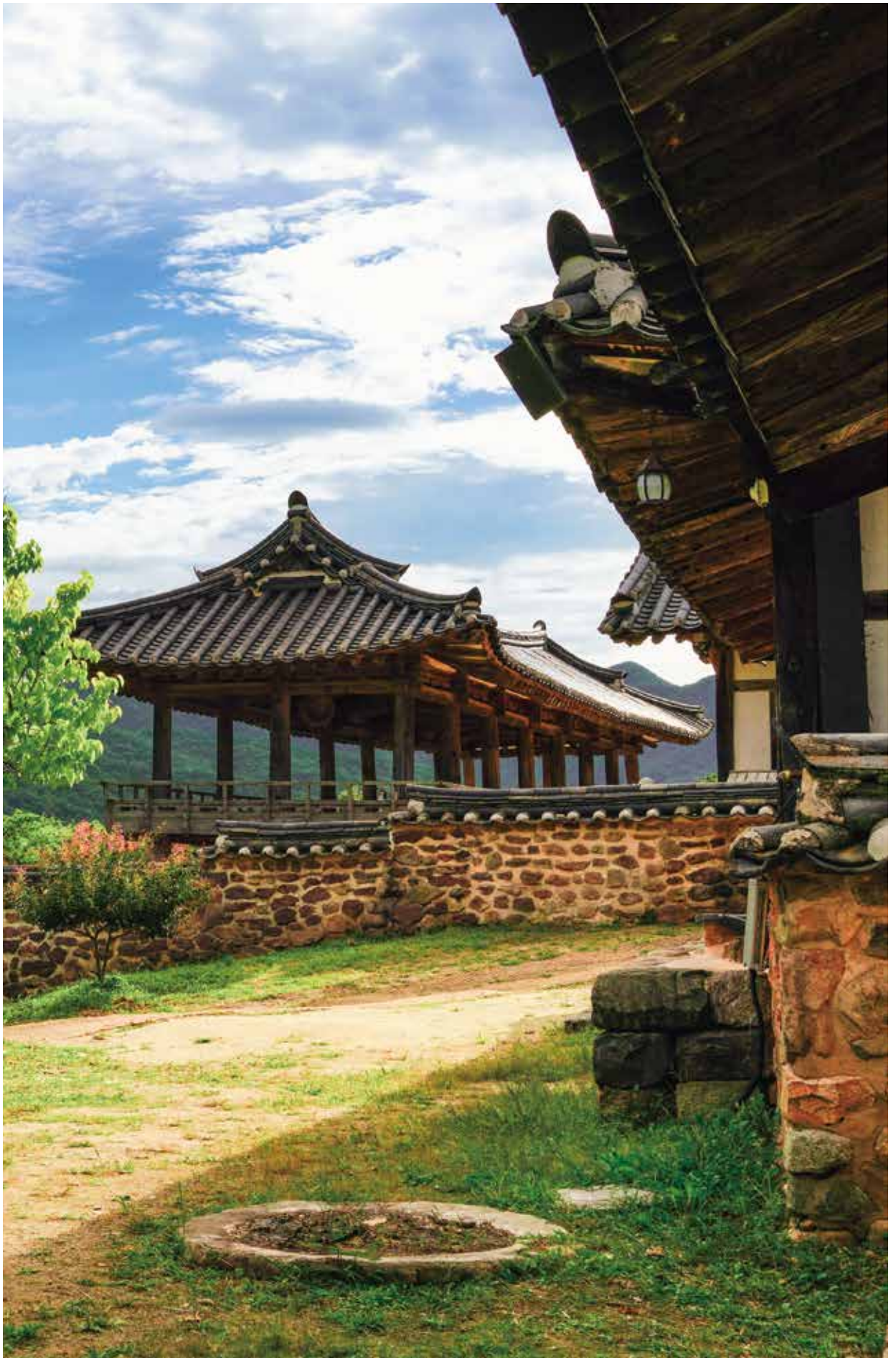
This section analyzes how these international policy frameworks are being implemented in actual urban contexts. The Neo-Confucian Academies (seowon) of Andong and Yeongju, Luang Prabang, and George Town are empirical cases proving that residents' daily lives are the driving force sustaining heritage value. The coexistence of heritage and community represents the most viable solution for overcoming the crisis of identity loss facing modern cities. This is the most realistic and urgent challenge that World Heritage Cities must address today.

Learning and Ritual

Dwelling Amidst Mountains and Waters

Heritage is material evidence that has endured the weathering of time. However, when that heritage is not confined within museum display cases but continues to function in the lives of modern people, it possesses something beyond evidence—it has life. Seowon, Korean Neo-Confucian Academies, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019, is an exemplary form of living heritage where intangible values—ritual ceremonies and scholarly practices continuing to this day—are layered upon the tangible value of Joseon Dynasty Neo-Confucian educational facilities.

In particular, Andong—called the capital of Korean spiritual culture—and Yeongju—home of the scholarly tradition—are vivid sites proving that seowon are not merely old buildings. The Dosan and Byeongsan Seowon in Andong and Sosu Seowon in Yeongju maintain their architectural forms from centuries past while simultaneously functioning as focal points for local communities and as powerhouses generating the humanistic values needed in modern society. The social function of cultural heritage and its value as a public good, emphasized by the 2022 MONDIACULT Declaration, had already been realized here for centuries through concrete operational systems.



Architecture That Listens to Nature, Becoming a Space for Learning

Seowon are fundamentally divided into spaces for learning (ganghak) and spaces for memorial rites honoring revered scholars (jehyang). However, the greater architectural principle penetrating the Seowon of Andong and Yeongju is unity with nature. This aligns with the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach adopted by UNESCO in 2011—understanding buildings not as independent entities but within an integrated context that includes surrounding natural topography and ecological environments. Byeongsan Seowon in Andong is a

masterpiece of such nature-embracing architecture. It nestles into the embrace of the Nakdonggang River and mountains rising like folding screens, without resisting them. In particular, the Mandaeru Pavillion, the heart of the learning space, demonstrates the aesthetic of borrowed scenery (chagyeong) by leaving the spaces between columns open, drawing the cliffs of Byeongsan Mountain and the river waters into the building itself. This was not merely an observation deck. Students frequented the Mandaeru Pavillion to contemplate the principles of nature and used the space as a scholarly venue for cultivating mind and body. Sosu Seowon in Yeongju is no different. Korea's first seowon to receive a royal

charter, it is situated between the clear sounds of Jukgyecheon Stream and a dense pine forest planted by scholars. The layout of Sosu Seowon displays freedom that existed before the standardization of typical seowon architectural forms. Rather than establishing an artificial axis and arranging buildings in a rigid row, learning and memorial spaces were flexibly positioned according to natural topography. The view of Jukgyecheon Stream from Gyeongryeomjeong Pavilion at the entrance taught students both the joy of learning and the principles of nature simultaneously. The process of discovering human virtue within nature—this is the philosophy shared by the seowon architecture of Andong and Yeongju.





Not Fossilized Ritual, but Veneration Ceremonies Continuing in Contemporary Life

The core of authenticity that seowon possess as World Heritage Sites lies not in their physical structures but in the intangible practices conducted within them—rituals and educational activities. Unlike many cultural heritage sites that have devolved into theatrical reenactments staged for tourists, the Seowon of Andong and Yeongju maintain veneration ceremonies led by local Confucian scholars (yurim) who conduct them strictly according to traditional protocols. This is the true substance of living heritage.

At Dosan Seowon Confucian Academy in Andong, veneration ceremonies honoring Master Toegye Yi Hwang are conducted twice annually on designated ritual days in the second and eighth lunar months. These ceremonies are led by the Dosanseowon Management Committee, descendants of Toegye, and local Confucian scholars. As the ceremony approaches, local scholars convene to select ritual officiants through collective deliberation. The chosen officiants enter the seowon several days beforehand to undergo purification and prepare ceremonial offerings. The solemn act of presenting wine cups at Sangdeoksa Shrine transcends mere commemoration—it serves as a reaffirmation of commitment to practice Toegye’s teachings in contemporary life.

Sosu Seowon Confucian Academy in Yeongju likewise conducts veneration ceremonies twice annually on designated ritual days in the third and ninth lunar months. These ceremonies honor four Confucian scholars, including Master Hoeheon An Hyang. Confucian scholars in the Yeongju region regard Sosu Seowon as their spiritual foundation, and through the veneration ceremonies, they strengthen intergenerational communication and bonds. The veneration ceremonies at Sosu Seowon have particularly served as a public forum for maintaining social order and affirming the community’s moral norms. Thus, the seowon rituals in these two cities are not nostalgic commemorations of the past but ongoing social practices that reaffirm community identity and strengthen social cohesion.

Opening Closed Doors, Becoming Cradles of the Humanities, Nurturing Global Citizens

Since 2022, UNESCO has emphasized that heritage sites must serve as sources of resilience for overcoming contemporary social crises. Aligned with this vision, the Seowon of Andong and Yeongju are expanding their functions from closed spaces to open ones, from past scholarship to future wisdom.

Andong has modernized the seowon's educational function through the Dosan Seowon Seonbi Culture Training Center. Established near the seowon, the center welcomes tens of thousands of participants annually—from elementary and secondary school students to business executives, civil servants, and international visitors—for one-night, two-day or two-night, three-day programs. The curriculum extends far beyond simple guided tours of the seowon. Participants visit Toegyë's head family residence to converse with the principal lineage descendant and engage in meditation and ritual practices that embody the spirit of gyeong (reverence and mindful discipline). Master Toegyë's simple yet essential teaching—to become a good person—is reinterpreted and conveyed as contemporary leadership and character education. This demonstrates that seowon function not merely as historical sites, but as practical humanities spaces that heal the ills of modern society.

Yeongju has popularized the values of seowon and transformed them into festive spaces through the Yeongju Korea Seonbi Culture Festival. Held annually each May in the Sosu Seowon and Seonbichon Village area, this festival has made the once solemn seowon more accessible. Through evening openings of Sosu Seowon, the serene nighttime atmosphere is shared with citizens, while classical Chinese poetry competitions and madangnori (traditional folk theater) offer approachable encounters with the seonbi spirit. The festival also operates the "Sosu Seowon Stay" program, where participants don scholars' robes and spend the night at the seowon, experiencing the daily life of Confucian students from centuries past. These initiatives have transformed heritage sites from fossilized spaces into open cultural complexes where anyone can visit to rest, enjoy, and learn.



Coexistence: A Proposal Toward an Ancient Future

The seowon of Andong and Yeongju pose an important question: For whom does heritage exist? Preserving physical authenticity intact is a fundamental premise of conservation. However, if such spaces become fossilized with no human presence, they are little more than dead heritage. The strength that enabled seowon to endure for over 600 years and gain recognition as World Heritage lies in the “people” of the local communities who have preserved and nurtured these sites.

The deliberations of Confucian scholars selecting ritual officiants at Dosan Seowon, the smiling faces of children at Sosu Seowon’s festival grounds, the contemplation of travelers gazing upon the Nakdonggang River from Mandaeru Pavilion at Byeongsan Seowon—all these acts converge to give full meaning to the heritage that is seowon.

The coexistence of architecture and nature, the coexistence of ancient rituals and contemporary daily life, and the coexistence of local residents and global citizens—Korea’s seowon represent a tangible model demonstrating how heritage can sustain its vitality through these multiple dimensions of coexistence. Here we witness not merely old buildings but a spiritual lineage that has flowed across centuries. And that current continues to flow serenely toward the future, even now.



A City Where Two Timelines Flow, Preserved Through the Everyday Lives of Its Residents

Luang Prabang, situated on a peninsula at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, is a space where two disparate worlds coexist as if by miracle. Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, this city boasts a singular landscape fusing the Buddhist traditions established when it served as the capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom in the 14th century with the French colonial architectural styles that prevailed from the late 19th through mid-20th centuries.

As such, Luang Prabang represents the most ideal realization of UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) concept, yet it has recently faced new trials. The city's environment transformed dramatically following the opening of the Laos-China Railway and the reopening of borders in May 2022. Gentrification and overtourism, driven by surging visitor numbers and external capital, now pose unprecedented threats to the city. Yet Luang Prabang remains steadfast. Armed with strict architectural regulations and residents' steadfast preservation of intangible heritage, the city continues to demonstrate the value of living heritage even amid turbulent change.









Architectural Fusion, Harmony Forged by Disparate Civilizations

Luang Prabang's architecture can be characterized as a delicate harmony of heterogeneous. Traditional temples exemplified by Wat Xieng Thong display the graceful curves characteristic of Lao design, their roofs descending so low they nearly touch the ground. Alongside these stand two-story brick buildings erected during the French colonial period. What proves fascinating is that these colonial structures did not simply replicate Western styles but evolved into a distinctive form that embraced Laos' climate and materials, incorporating terracotta tile roofs and expansive balconies.

The key institution preserving the urban fabric is the Heritage House (Maison du Patrimoine, MdP). Established in 1996, this organization trains architects and urban planners through international cooperation with the French city of Chinon and provides residents with education in traditional construction techniques. Wielding authority over building permits for construction and renovation, it rigorously regulates everything from window frame materials to roof angles and building heights. These are not regulations imposed to control residents. Rather, they constitute guidelines that provide technical consultation, enabling residents to properly apply traditional methods when repairing their homes. This system, combining regulation with support, represents practical governance that helps preserve the city's physical authenticity within residents' daily lives.

Tak Bat, Not a Tourist Attraction but Sacred Daily Life

Luang Prabang's dawn awakens in hues of saffron. Before sunrise, hundreds of monks emerge barefoot onto the streets to receive offerings in tak bat (morning alms giving ceremony)—the quintessence of living heritage in this city. For monks, it constitutes a practice of spiritual discipline; for residents, it marks the beginning of each day through the merit earned by giving alms. This ritual, sustained for over 600 years, demonstrates that Luang Prabang is not merely a tourist destination, but a spiritual space governed by Buddhist values.

However, the surge in tourism has at times threatened this sacred ceremony. As incidents of camera flashes and disruptive behavior became frequent, the local community and the Buddhist Sangha (monastic community) initiated self-regulatory measures. They established and disseminated a Code of Conduct for tourists and created systems requiring hotels and travel agencies to educate visitors in advance. Residents conduct the ritual in silence not as a performative spectacle for tourists but to preserve their own faith. Thanks to these efforts, tak bat continues to function as an anchor sustaining residents' lives, maintaining its religious authenticity despite the tide of commercialization.

Transmitting Traditional Skills for Sustainable Livelihoods

Since the railway opened in December 2021, Luang Prabang has faced new challenges of gentrification and overtourism. The phenomenon of indigenous community departing as their homes are converted into guesthouses and cafés poses the greatest threat to the city's authenticity. One notable response to this challenge comes from private organizations such as the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC). Founded in 2006, TAEC is both a museum that collects and exhibits the clothing, textiles, and tools of Laos' ethnic minorities, and a social enterprise. The Centre works directly with local artisans to produce handicrafts and sell them at fair prices.

Through the sale of these handicrafts, TAEC ensures fair income for residents who possess traditional skills, providing an economic foundation that allows them to preserve their heritage while remaining in their home communities. Moreover, through programs such as weaving workshops, TAEC encourages travelers to participate not merely as spectators but as active learners who engage with and experience the value of this heritage. This serves as a concrete demonstration that heritage becomes sustainable only when it functions as part of the local economic cycle.



A City of Serene Resilience

Luang Prabang is not a city frozen in time. Like the flow of the Mekong, it possesses the flexibility to accommodate the changes of each era without losing its essence. The Heritage House's rigorous oversight, the voluntary adherence to ritual practices by the Sangha and residents, and efforts toward economic self-reliance through traditional skills—these are the forces that enable this city to remain not a museum, but a living community.

In the stillness of dawn, an elderly woman's hands offering sticky rice; the sound of an artisan's hammer repairing an aged wooden house according to traditional methods. Luang Prabang's heritage lives within such tangible scenes of daily life. Here, we learn a wisdom of coexistence that transcends the binary of development versus preservation—a wisdom that recognizes the dignified lives of residents as the very vitality of heritage itself.



A Landscape Where Converging Waters Become Life

Along the western coast of the Malay Peninsula, the Straits of Malacca served for centuries as a vital maritime artery linking East and West. Trading vessels from India, China, and Europe, carried by the monsoon winds, converged here, and from these currents emerged the distinctive cities of Melaka and George Town. Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008, these two cities represent an exceptional example of the architectural and cultural landscape created through more than 500 years of cultural fusion between Asia and Europe.

The heritage value of these cities lies not in monumental architecture but in the shophouses lining the streets and the multicultural daily life unfolding within them. The sight of people of different religions and languages coexisting side by side, separated by only a shared wall, and the way centuries-old traditional commercial activities operate in tandem with modern urban functions—these elements exemplify the living heritage that UNESCO champions.



Shophouses, Architecture of Survival Between Trade and Home

The defining element of these two cities' streetscapes is the shophouse. This distinctive architectural form—with commercial space on the ground floor and residential quarters above—emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries from a convergence of Southern Chinese migrants' pragmatism, European construction techniques, and adaptation to the local Malay climate.

The architectural features of the shophouse transcend mere aesthetics. Within the narrow, elongated structure lies an airwell—a central courtyard that circulates tropical heat and admits natural light. This represents an environmentally responsive wisdom devised to endure hot, humid conditions in an era before electricity. Moreover, the five-foot way (kaki lima)—a regulation requiring a covered walkway of approximately 5 feet (1.5 meters) in width along the building frontage—was an innovative urban planning measure that transformed private property into public passage. This arcade serves both as a communal space sheltering pedestrians from the tropical sun and rain, and as a social space where merchants and passersby interact.

The shophouses of George Town and Melaka remain living communities to this day. Beneath weathered wooden signboards, third-generation artisans continue family trades—crafting lanterns, making incense, hammering metalwork. These commercial activities demonstrate that the buildings serve both as a means of sustaining residents' livelihoods and as the driving force that circulates the cities' economies.





Peranakan and the Clan Jetties, Cultures Shaped by Fusion

These two cities share the distinctive Peranakan culture. Formed through intermarriage between male Chinese migrants and local Malay women, this culture displays a vibrant aesthetic of fusion across all aspects of life—clothing, cuisine, language, and architecture. Jonker Walk in Melaka and the Pinang Peranakan Mansion in George Town confirm that this hybrid culture is not merely a relic of the past but a vital root sustaining Malaysia's multicultural identity today. Just as Nyonya cuisine—which blends Chinese ingredients with Malay spices—continues to grace dining tables, cultural fusion remains an ongoing process.

The Clan Jetties along George Town's waterfront represent another form of living heritage. This stilt-house settlement, built over the water by Chinese immigrants who worked as port laborers in the 19th century and organized themselves by clan surname, remains home to clan communities including the Chew, Tan, and Lee. Though it is a tourist destination with constant visitor traffic, residents continue to uphold their own way of life—burning incense at entrances and performing ceremonies facing the sea. This demonstrates how residential rights and traditional lifestyles can negotiate and coexist even as heritage becomes commodified for tourism.





Systematic Management Combating Gentrification

Following the UNESCO inscription in 2008, the two cities underwent rapid transformation. The surge in tourism, combined with the 2000 repeal of the Rent Control Act, drove rental increases, resulting in gentrification that displaced long-term tenants and traditional artisans who had sustained the shophouses.

In response, the Penang State Government established George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) in 2010 to undertake systematic management. GTWHI focuses not merely on preserving physical structures but on safeguarding intangible heritage and the lives of residents. The signature initiative is the creation of a database documenting traditional merchants and artisans. The organization conducted comprehensive surveys recording makers of ritual items, songkok (traditional cap) artisans, lantern crafters, and others throughout the city.

Furthermore, the Living Heritage Treasures awards were established to provide annual stipends to artisans who have devoted their lifetimes to preserving traditional skills. Beyond mere subsidies, the program operates apprenticeship initiatives to ensure these skills are passed to the next generation and develops experiential programs linking artisans with tourists to support economic self-sufficiency. This represents a sustainable governance model that enables residents to recognize and safeguard the value of their heritage.

Moreover, in the recovery process following the pandemic, collaboration with local communities was further strengthened. Local residents have been directly involved in developing Disaster Risk Management (DRM) plans, and manuals have been distributed to protect the densely concentrated wooden structures of historic districts in the event of fires or floods. These practical measures allow aging shophouses to endure not as hazardous structures, but as heritages that can be responsibly managed.

Coexistence, Cultural Vitality Shaped by Diverse Traditions

Melaka and George Town eloquently demonstrate the cultural richness created when different civilizations, religions, and ethnicities blend rather than collide. On George Town's Harmony Street, the Kapitan Keling Mosque, a Hindu temple, and a Chinese temple stand side by side; near Melaka's Cheng Hoon Teng Temple, the Kampung Kling Mosque and a Hindu temple similarly coexist. In both cities, religion serves not as a source of conflict but as a backdrop for mutual respect among different ways of life.

The young artisans supported by GTWHI in George Town, the residents conducting their daily lives in stilt houses, and the people of diverse ethnicities moving through Melaka's Dutch Square—their presence demonstrates that heritage is not a stage for reenacting past glories but a vessel containing the lives of people living in the present. George Town and Melaka are grand laboratories of coexistence that have sustained urban vitality through embracing rather than rejecting difference, and they serve as signposts pointing the way forward for multicultural societies.



Wounded Lands,

Memory and Reconciliation



How Memory Landscapes Foster Peace

Sites of Memory and Reconciliation

Humanity's heritage does not always record only the glories of brilliant civilizations. Sites of tragic history—war, massacre, and forced displacement—also constitute an essential dimension of the heritage we must not forget but preserve. These are termed “negative heritage” or “dark heritage.” They are not spaces that display past suffering but rather weighty mirrors that compel humanity to confront and reflect upon its transgressions.

The criterion for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List lies in Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The reason these tragic sites are recognized for this value is clear: they most dramatically embody the spirit of the UNESCO Constitution's opening declaration: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” Sites such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial and the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp function not as evidence of destruction but as humanity's resolute pledge never to repeat such tragedies, serving as educational grounds for peacebuilding.

Memory is painful, but forgetting is dangerous.. The international community has increasingly redefined such heritage as “places of memory,” positioning them as spaces where former adversaries can acknowledge shared suffering and pursue reconciliation. This becomes not merely an excavation of past wounds but the most powerful means of healing collective trauma and conveying the values of human rights and peace to future generations.

The way cities bearing tragedy choose to remember is not to conceal or glorify their wounds. Rather, it is to lay them bare and transform them into a shared human legacy. The process of transforming sites beyond the preservation of past suffering into spaces for dialogue toward future peace represents the most profound cultural act in rebuilding cities.. Memory and reconciliation are the sole and steadfast way for wounded cities to rise again.



A Witness to Frozen Time, a Garden of Peace

Hiroshima Peace Memorial_Japan

Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Genbaku Dome, Japan, 1996



Time Frozen, and a River Flowing Once More

The morning of August 6, 1945, was exceptionally clear. Summer sunlight pouring from a cloudless blue sky would have been peaceful. But that tranquility fell into eternal silence at 8:15 a.m., in a single flash. Where everything in the city vanished in an instant, only one structure remained standing, its skeletal frame exposed. We call it the Genbaku Dome.

Only 160 meters from the hypocenter. That the Dome remained standing rather than collapsing at ground zero, where everything else melted away, was nothing short of miraculous. As if eloquently declaring that we must never forget the pain of that day, nor the preciousness of peace that we must safeguard thereafter, the Dome was left standing alone. The sky visible through the Dome's steel frame remains piercingly blue. The stark contrast between that blue sky and the ashen ruins whispers quietly to us: though peace may seem as natural as air, it is the most fragile jewel we must guard with all our hearts at all times.

Memories of Beautiful Days: The Industrial Promotion Hall

The Genbaku Dome was once a source of civic pride. Born in 1915 from the hands of Czech architect Jan Letzel, the building was known as the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. Its red brick walls reflecting in the river and its elegant green dome were, to Hiroshima's citizens, both a symbol of modernization and a beloved landmark.

Inside the building, Hiroshima's regional products were displayed, exhibitions were held, and laughter never ceased. To lovers strolling along the riverbank, it was a romantic scene; to children, a fascinating Western-style building. The Dome holds intact the memories of those happy everyday moments. Though windows, roofs, and floors have now vanished, within its skeletal frame still lingers the warmth and hope of the people who passed through a century ago. Gazing at the Dome, we imagine the landscapes of warm and beautiful lives that existed beyond the ruins of destruction.

A Girl's Diary and the Courage Worth Preserving

After the war ended, the city agonized deeply over what to do with the grotesquely remaining Dome. The devastating sight that survivors had to face each morning upon waking was an unbearable sorrow. The longing to demolish the building and construct new hope in its place was desperate. Wanting to forget painful memories is a natural human instinct.

But the city chose to remember. At the heart of that courageous choice lay the fervent prayer of a young girl. Suffering from leukemia caused by radiation exposure, Hiroko Kajiyama wrote in her diary from her hospital bed: "May that Dome alone remain forever, so that such tragedy may never happen again." Though the girl passed away, the yearning for peace left in her diary moved the hearts of many.

The people of the city launched a fundraising campaign to protect the Dome. They filled the crumbling brick crevices with epoxy resin and reinforced the rusted steel frame to support the structure. This was an act that transcended the mere repair of a deteriorating building. It was adults' solemn promise and expression of love that they would never pass down such sorrow as theirs to future children. Thus, the Genbaku Dome was reborn, transcending its physical ruins to become a sanctuary of peace that humanity must share.





The Axis of Peace, a Corridor of Solace and Hope

Today, the Genbaku Dome functions as part of a vast park. The Dome is connected across the river to the Peace Memorial Park, together forming a single, overarching narrative. Architect Kenzo Tange, who designed this park, conceived the entire space as a pathway to peace.

Beginning at the Peace Memorial Museum in the southern end of the park and passing through the Cenotaph, one's gaze naturally extends toward the distant Genbaku Dome. Along this invisible line—the axis of peace—we encounter the past, present, and future at once. In gazing upon the Genbaku Dome, we remember the pain of the past; standing before the Cenotaph, we reflect on who we are today; and as we depart the museum, we renew our pledge to peace in the future.

The park has now become a place of rest for the city's people, where lush greenery thrives and clear waters flow. Children play on the lawns, and lovers stroll along the riverbank. Where there was once a land of death, life now blooms, and laughter takes root. This is true healing. By refusing to turn away from the wounds of the past, but instead allowing new life to grow upon them, the city finally arrives at a lasting peace.

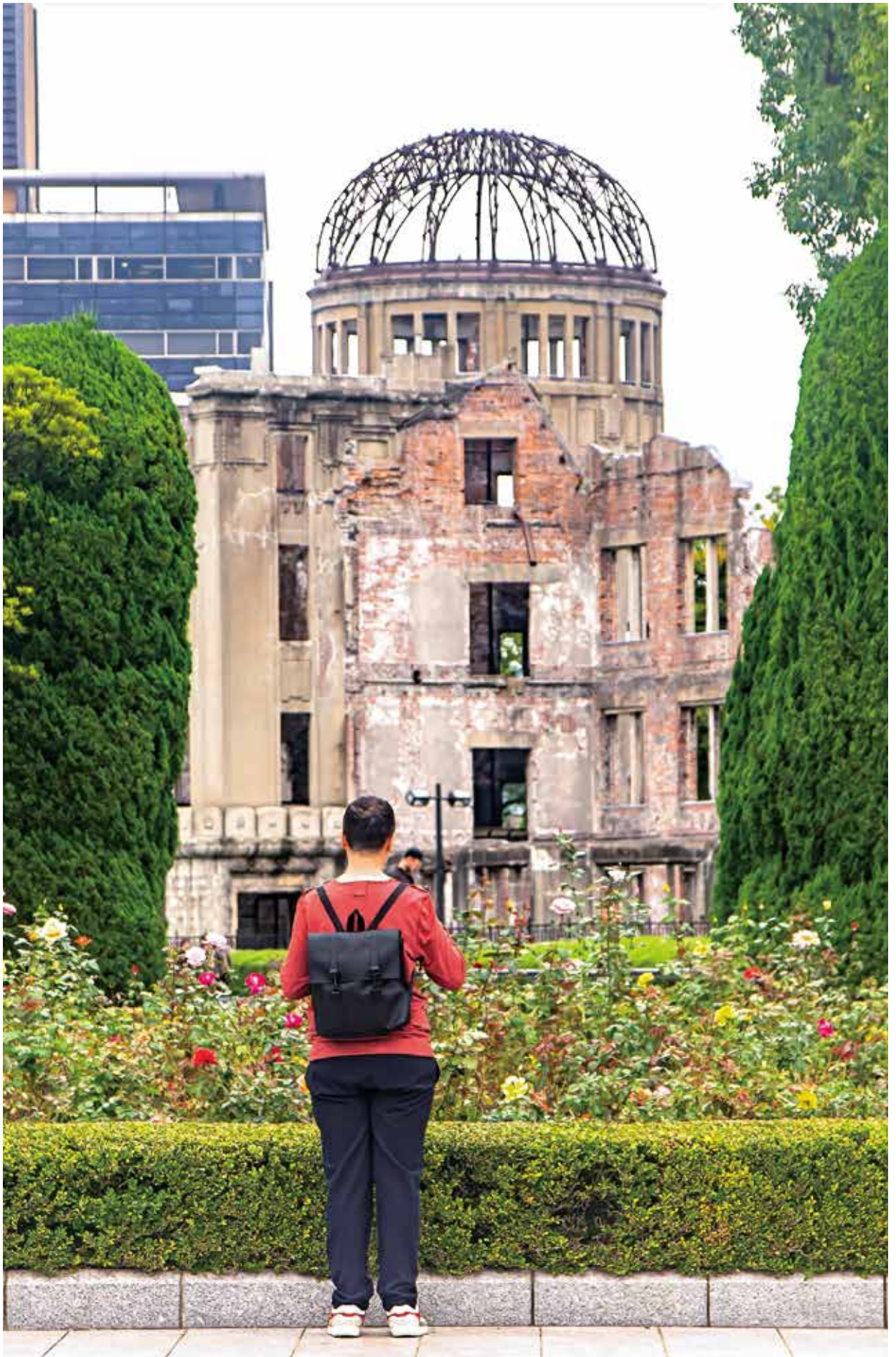
Lanterns on the River, Light Shared with the World

Every year on the evening of August 6, the Motoyasu River flowing before the Genbaku Dome is blanketed with thousands of lanterns. Citizens inscribe their wishes on paper lanterns and set them adrift on the river. "I love you," "We will not forget," "World peace." The lanterns, each a different hue, warmly illuminate the dark waters, drifting toward the sea and out into the world.

Those who visit this place come from diverse nationalities, races, and religions. Yet the moment they stand before the Dome, they become one. They are connected through shared sorrow, mutual compassion, and dreams of a peaceful world. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial is a place of reconciliation where, through the pain humanity has endured together, we confirm how profoundly interconnected we are.

The wind blowing through the weathered bricks now carries the gentle fragrance of flowers, instead of the acrid smell of gunpowder. Doves, symbols of peace, alight to rest upon the skeletal steel structure. The Genbaku Dome remains silent, yet through its very presence offers us its greatest solace: "It's all right. There will be peace now." Within that warm silence, we see hope. We see humanity's resilient vitality—its unfailingly ability to bring forth flowers even from ruins—and its unbreakable will toward peace.



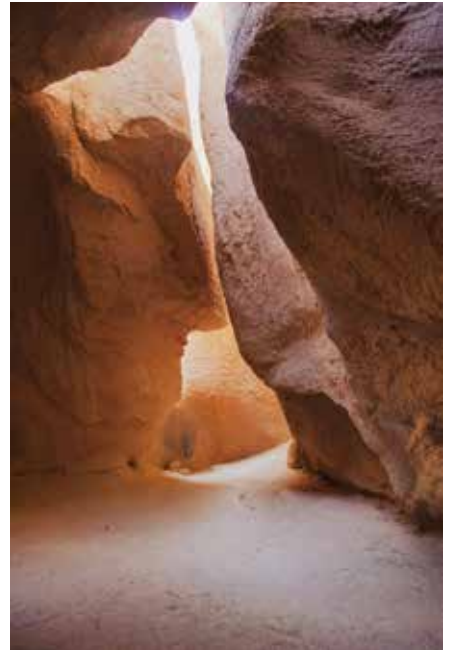




Prayers Caved in Stone, Memories That Survived Darkness

Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia, Turkey

Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia, Turkey, 1985



Landscape Shaped by Time, God's Canvas

The moment we set foot in Cappadocia, at the heart of Turkey's central Anatolian Plateau, we encounter a landscape so strange and majestic that it defies the limits of language. It evokes the illusion of having crash-landed on an alien planet rather than Earth, or of entering a vast sculpture garden shaped by divine hands. The extraordinary rock formations rising above the endlessly spreading tawny earth—like mushroom clouds, sometimes like the pointed chimneys of fairies—are masterpieces sculpted over countless millions of years.

This landscape began in the distant past when Mount Erciyes and Mount Hasan violently erupted in fire and ash. The enormous volumes of volcanic ash and lava expelled by these volcanoes blanketed the entire region, hardening over time to form layers of soft tuff. This was then covered by harder basalt, and over tens of thousands of years, wind, rain, and rivers slowly etched away the softer layers, leaving only the harder ones behind. As a result, we can encounter one of nature's most original and astonishing skylines.

Yet in 1985, UNESCO designated this place not merely as natural heritage, but as mixed heritage. This was because within the overwhelming natural landscape, embedded along the grain of these rocks, lay the sublime history of humans who tenaciously carved out lives and preserved their faith. Cappadocia is a grand collaboration, completed by humanity's blood, sweat, and fervent prayer upon the vast canvas provided by nature.



Soft Stone, a Shelter That Nurtured Life

The ancient people who first came to Cappadocia intuited that these bizarrely wondrous rocks were not mere masses of stone. The tuff formed from hardened volcanic ash, though rough in appearance, possessed a soft nature—easily carved with even simple metal tools. Moreover, this stone hardened upon exposure to air, making it an ideal and durable building material.

Rather than conquering or destroying nature to erect buildings upon it, people chose to burrow into nature's embrace. They hollowed out the rock's interior to create living spaces, installed kitchens, and fashioned storage chambers for grain. Within the rock, they discovered the most perfect shelter, protecting them from summer's scorching heat and winter's severe cold. Behind the cold outer walls of these stone mountains breathed warm homes, where families gathered to share meals and warmth.

This form of habitation demonstrates humanity's remarkable adaptability. Atop the rocks, they built dovecotes and used the droppings as fertilizers for vineyards; below, they created wine cellars, offering prayers for abundance. A life in which nature and humanity coexist without harming one another—this is the first wisdom Cappadocia imparts to us.



The Miracle of Derinkuyu: A Labyrinth Beneath the Earth

If a panorama of extraordinary rock formations unfolds above ground, beneath our feet exists another universe, almost beyond imagination. This is the vast underground city known as Derinkuyu. From the persecutions of Christians during the early Roman Empire to the seventh-century invasions by Islamic forces, those who held fast to their faith fled deep into the earth, where even light could not reach, in order to survive.

Descending to a depth of 85 meters underground—equivalent to a 20-story apartment building—this subterranean city is no mere hiding place. It is a perfectly self-sufficient city, capable of sustaining up to 20,000 people at once. Following the narrow, steep passages downward, one finds schools, chapels, communal kitchens, stables, and even prisons for confining criminals.

Most astonishing is the engineering born of sheer survival instinct. Vertical ventilation shafts connecting the surface to the deepest levels continuously supplied fresh air, making breathing possible even far beneath the earth. Wells linked to underground aquifers provided water, and when enemies invaded, inhabitants rolled massive circular stone doors—operable only from within—to seal the entrances.

In pitch-black darkness, huddled within narrow passages, what they sought to protect was one thing alone: faith. Even amid fear with no end in sight, they opened schools to teach children and gathered in chapels to pray. Touching the cold stone walls of Derinkuyu, one feels the extremity of human resolve in preserving belief. This is not merely a refuge, but a testament to the human spirit—one that refused to be extinguished, even in the storm of persecution.

Art in Darkness, the Frescoes of Rock-Hewn Churches

Entering the open-air museum of the Göreme Valley, one soon realizes that the entire rocky mountainside once functioned as a vast monastery. Hidden within the sheer cliffs and rock crevices are more than 360 rock-hewn churches. Their exteriors appear to be nothing more than rough masses of stone, yet the moment we step inside, we are met with a millennium of Byzantine art unfolding before our eyes.

The frescoes adorning the interiors of Tokalı Kilise (the Buckle Church) and Karanlık Kilise (the Dark Church) are nothing short of wonderful. The domed ceilings and walls are filled with depictions of Christ's life and the solemn visages of saints. What is astonishing is that the colors of these paintings remain vivid even after a thousand years. Paradoxically, it is thanks to the darkness—with almost no windows allowing light to enter—that these colors have been preserved in near-perfect condition, untouched by fading.

In an age when pigments were precious, monks created their paints by mixing earth, plants, and animal blood gathered from the surrounding land. Though their materials may have been humble, the devotion contained within these paintings burned more fiercely and earnestly than in any Renaissance masterpiece. Even amid the ordeal of Iconoclasm, they never laid down their brushes. The hands that guided those brushes by the light of a single candle in pitch-black caves were themselves acts of prayer and devotion offered to God. The eyes of the saints inscribed on the rock walls ask us today: What is it that you yearn for with such desperation?



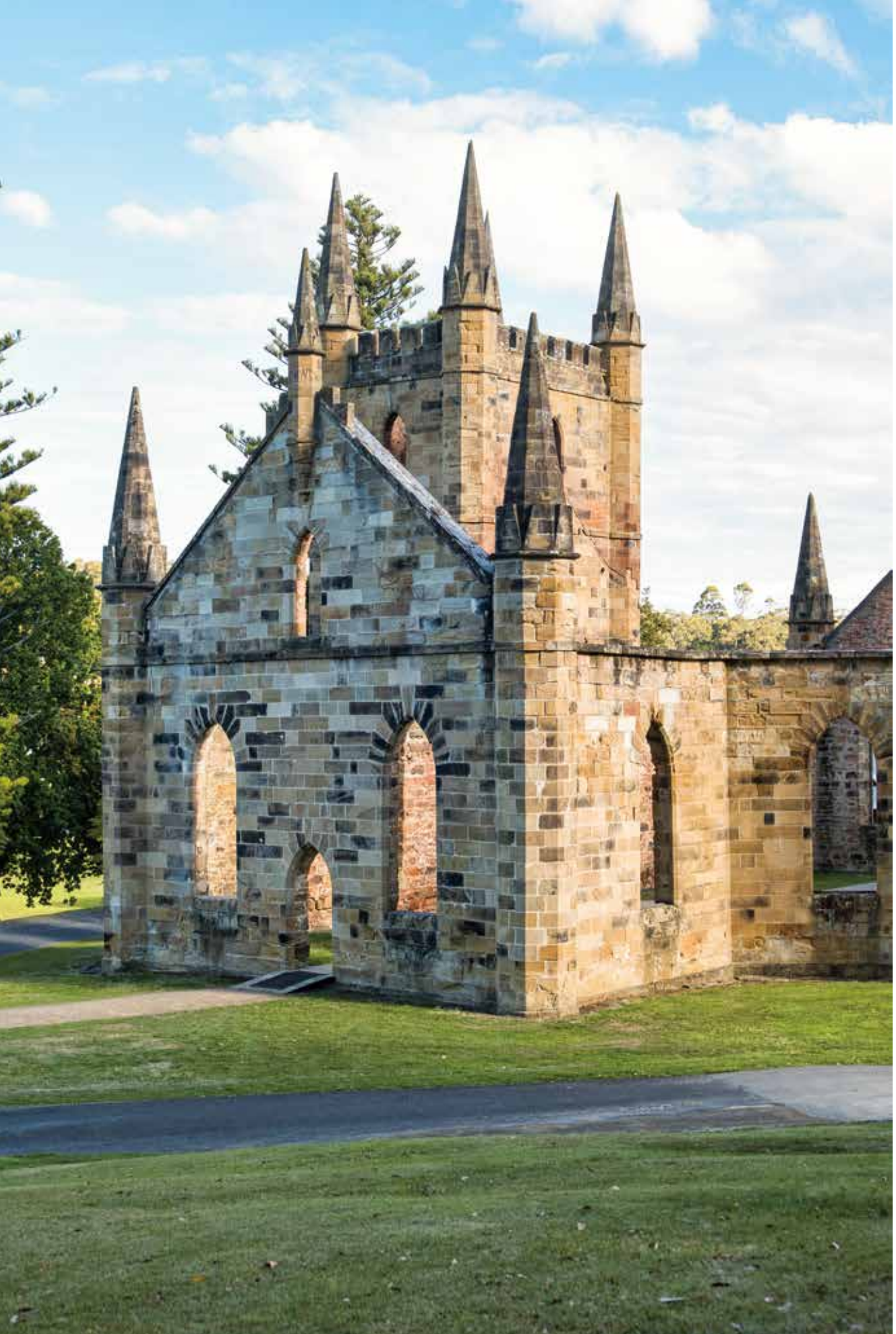
A Sanctuary of Peace Born from Conflict

This was once a site of terror, where people held their breath to evade the blades of Roman soldiers, a land of persecution where they trembled at the sound of Islamic cavalry hoofbeats. Yet today, Cappadocia has become a sanctuary of peace, drawing people from around the world.

At dawn, before darkness lifts, the sight of hundreds of hot air balloons rising to drift above the extraordinary rock formations unfolds like a dream, serene and unreal. The bizarrely wondrous rocks spreading below are no longer hiding places but vantage points from which to celebrate the magnificence of nature. The painful wounds of the past and memories of fierce survival have been transformed into a beautiful landscape, offering quiet solace to those who visit.

In Göreme's rock-hewn churches and in Derinkuyu's deep underground, we witness humanity's great triumph. This is not a victory won by sword and spear, but a triumph of the spirit—preserved through patience and faith. Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia speak quietly to us: that even in the deepest darkness, hope can take root; that the human will to preserve conviction is stronger than solid rock. The long prayers and patient endurance embedded in every rock crevice have converged over time, and this place is now remembered as a true landscape of reconciliation and peace.

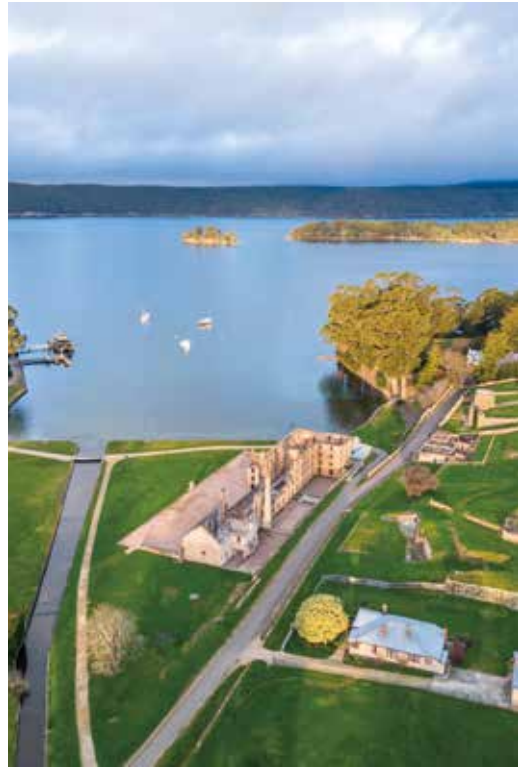




Silence at the World's Edge, an Enduring Question of Freedom

Port Arthur Convict Sites_Australia

Australian Convict Sites - Port Arthur, Australia, 2010



At the Southern Sea's End, the Final Place of Exile

At the southeastern tip of Tasmania, Australia, the Tasman Peninsula is a land so remote and isolated that it may rightly be called the edge of the world. Here, where sheer coastal cliffs and the deep blue waves of the Southern Ocean relentlessly crash, the landscape unfolds in breathtaking beauty. Yet in the 19th century, this very beauty became the walls of an inescapable natural prison. The British Empire sent convicts deemed irredeemable or dangerous to society to this distant land. Port Arthur was the final destination where those forgotten by the world arrived, and the beginning of a relentless and unforgiving fate.

From 1830 to 1877, this place revealed the darkest face of the British Empire's penal system. More than 12,000 convicts passed through here. They cleared forests and carved stones to build the very prison that would confine them. The red brick buildings of Port Arthur—today part of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Australian Convict Sites—are massive sculptures formed from the blood, sweat, and despair of convicts. This is not merely a historic site, but chilling testimony to how human free will was systematically controlled and suppressed by power and institutions.

The Separate Prison and the Punishment of Silence

What most distinguishes Port Arthur from other places of exile is the unique incarceration system known as the Separate Prison. Completed in 1848, this prison reflected what was then considered a revolutionary panopticon structure and philosophy of rehabilitation. Authorities who believed that physical suffering alone—such as flogging—could not reform humans undertook an experiment aimed at reshaping the mind, not merely confining the body. Their chosen instruments were isolation and silence.

Convicts incarcerated in the Separate Prison were subjected to total isolation. Confined within thick-walled solitary cells, they spent 23 hours a day alone. When taken outside, they wore hoods so they could not see one another's faces, and speaking was strictly forbidden. Even the guards gave directions through sign language, and sound-absorbing mats were laid across the floors so that not even footsteps could be heard. The only sound permitted was that of hymns and sermons during Sunday chapel services. Yet even then, convicts sat in individual partitioned stalls, unable to see the person beside them, forced to fix their gaze straight ahead.

This brutal silence inflicted wounds far deeper than physical punishment. In absolute solitude—denied recognition of their existence and stripped of human connection—many convicts lost their sanity or took their own lives. The Separate Prison stands as paradoxical proof that for human beings, communication and relationships are survival necessities as vital as air or water. The wind whispering through the crumbling bricks of the prison seems to carry the voices of souls who, some 170 years ago, screamed in silence while trapped within these walls.





The Isle of the Dead, Unmarked Graves and Lost Names

A small island floats in the waters off Port Arthur. Called the Isle of the Dead, this place is the final resting place for those who lost their lives at Port Arthur. Between 1833 and 1877, the remains of approximately 1,100 people were buried here. Yet the island's landscape starkly reveals the class society of the time, a hierarchy that persisted even in death.

On the island's higher ground rest soldiers, officials, and their families. Ornate headstones stand at their graves, with names and birth and death dates clearly inscribed. In contrast, the graves of convicts buried on the lower ground have no headstones at all. Only small markers planted atop earth mounds hint that someone was buried there. Those who in life were called by numbers instead of names were denied names even in death. Yet today, we feel a deeper silence and a heavier compassion before those nameless graves. They were shadows pushed behind the Empire's prosperity, but they were the true builders of the nation now called Australia. The Isle of the Dead reminds us once more of their erased existence, long forced into forgetting.

Layered Tragedy and Memory for Healing

The tragedy Port Arthur held did not stop in the 19th century. On April 28, 1996, the worst mass shooting in modern Australian history occurred here. Thirty-five innocent lives were lost to an act of indiscriminate violence by a single individual. At a place where people had come to remember past violence, horrific violence erupted once again. This event brought immense shock and deep trauma to Australian society.

Immediately after the incident, there was public opinion that the site should be closed. Having become a place of such profound pain, many found it difficult to summon the courage to face it again. Yet Port Arthur once more chose remembrance over erasure. They did not cover or conceal the scene of tragedy. They preserved the ruins of the café building where the incident occurred and created a Memorial Garden around it.

The garden is quiet and peaceful. Fresh flowers are always placed before the memorial inscribed with the victims' names, and the sky and drifting clouds are reflected in the pond. This is not a space for anger and hatred, but a space devoted to consolation and healing. The Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority did not separate the 19th-century convict history from the tragedy of 1996 but embraced every layer of suffering this place has endured, without exclusion. This is an effort to transform the history of violence into a living classroom for peace and human rights.

Memories, the Key to the Future

Today, Port Arthur is not merely a tourist destination. UNESCO inscribed the eleven Australian Convict Sites, including this place, on the World Heritage List, describing them as outstanding examples that demonstrate the structure of colonial society formed through forced migration and penal systems, and the human rights issues that emerged within them.

The red bricks of the ruined prison burn even redder as they catch the evening light. That intense color seems like a warning signal, urging us never to forget past suffering. Yet at the same time, the carefully tended gardens and the blue sea testify humanity's resilience—its ability to rise beyond suffering. Here, we witness human cruelty and fragility, but we also discover the strength to console one another and begin again.

Port Arthur asks us: How are we remembering the wrongs of the past? And through that memory, what kind of future will we create? This place, once a site of exile at the edge of the world, has now become a vast school teaching people worldwide the precious value of human rights and peace. What emerged when the prison doors were opened was not the convicts, but our own reflection. Port Arthur remains submerged in silence, yet it speaks of freedom and peace more powerfully than words ever could.





The Weight of Evidence, Memory That Refuses to Be Silent



Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945), Poland

Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945), Poland, 1979



A Silent City at the End of the Railway

Oświęcim in southern Poland, called Auschwitz in German, holds one of the heaviest truths humanity must bear in memory. Between green birch forests and deceptively tranquil fields, red brick buildings and endlessly stretching barbed wire suddenly emerge. In 1979, UNESCO inscribed this place on the World Heritage List as evidence of the cruel crime humanity committed and as a warning that such tragedy must never be repeated. This is a vast silent city that bears irrefutable witness to how human dignity can be annihilated, and how heavy and precious the value of peace truly is.

The inscription above the camp entrance, Arbeit Macht Frei (Work Sets You Free), stands as a bitter irony, reminding us that this was a place of death where freedom was stripped away. The path leading beyond the rusted iron gate is a path of pilgrimage, tracing the remnants of countless severed lives. Here we confront the coldest violence humans have inflicted upon one another, and we remember the quiet, noble struggles of countless souls who, even in absolute despair, fought not to lose their humanity.



Reason Turned Violent, the Scene of Industrialized Death

If Auschwitz I was a site of forced labor utilizing existing barracks, Birkenau (Auschwitz II), located three kilometers away, was a factory of death—designed with chilling thoroughness for extermination. The hundreds of wooden barracks erected across vast fields, the gas chambers, and the ruins of the crematoria that burned corpses prove that the massacres perpetrated by Nazi Germany were not spontaneous madness but meticulously calculated bureaucratic and administrative processes.

The railroad tracks extend deep into the camp. People brought by train from across Europe without knowing why stood at the crossroads of life and death as they passed through the Gate of Death here. The old freight car halted on the tracks still retains the terror and despair of that time. Today, we stand before those rusted wheels and face history itself. We reflect on the shadow of modern civilization that reduced human beings to instruments in the name of efficiency and rationality, and we learn, painfully, what catastrophe can result when technology and reason are severed from ethics. The vast grounds of Birkenau are empty, yet that emptiness cries out for the dignity of life with a voice louder than any rhetoric.

Material Evidence of Absence

Inside the camp buildings that have become a museum, objects that lost their owners are piled like mountains. Tens of thousands of pairs of worn shoes, suitcases inscribed with names, eyeglasses, and shorn hair. This massive grave of objects reveals not statistics, but the lives of individuals—people who once carried warm blood in their veins and held dreams for the future.

Even in a single dented pot or a single worn doll, someone's everyday life and cherished memories still reside. These objects visible beyond the glass walls are silent, yet their overwhelming physical presence presses heavily upon the viewer's heart. They are evidence of forcibly interrupted lives and of existence violently erased. Before these objects, we meet the victims again—not as abstract figures, but as dignified human beings no different from ourselves. Before two tons of human hair, we shudder and dare to imagine the suffering that preceded such loss. These harrowing pieces of evidence resist oblivion and remind us that remembering the truth is an ethical responsibility borne by those who live on.



Reconciliation and Education Emerging from Ruins

Auschwitz has been reborn as a place that speaks of hope at the furthest edge of despair. Postwar Germany actively participated in preserving and managing this site, acknowledging and repenting for the crimes of the past. The sight of descendants of perpetrators and victims gathering here to lay flowers and speak of peace is a profoundly moving testament to what true reconciliation can be.

Millions of people from around the world visit this place every year. Through programs such as the March of the Living, young people from across the globe walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau and learn, with their own steps, the irreplaceable value of life. This is a vast school where one learns understanding and tolerance in place of hatred, and the universal value of human rights.

Wildflowers of unknown names bloom through the cracks in the ruins of the gas chambers. Even in ashen soil, life sprouts again, and the seasons come unfailingly. The ruined camp has now become a sanctuary where humanity yearns for peace. Here, we confirm solidarity that transcends grief. By revealing the pain of the past without concealment, we lay firm stepping stones toward a more humane future.

Memory as a Signpost from Oblivion to Peace

Auschwitz Birkenau asks us sternly: How deeply do we empathize with the suffering of others? And when prejudice and hatred raise their heads once more, do we have the courage to say "no"?

As the UNESCO Constitution states: Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed. Auschwitz stands as one of the firmest foundations for building those defenses, and for humanity's enduring promise. The red brick buildings stand silently, yet through their very existence they continue to speak to us without ceasing. Remember. And remain vigilant.

The wind blowing through the barbed wire now carries prayers for peace instead of screaming. In that wind, we console the spirits of the victims and renew our responsibility as the living. Auschwitz is an eternal mirror reflecting humanity's conscience. Before that mirror, we learn that we must choose love over hatred, equality over discrimination, and peace over war. This is the greatest legacy that Auschwitz—once a land of death—offers to the world today.



#3 OWHC-AP News

OWHC —

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The 5th
OWHC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference

October 14-16, 2025 3 Days

Hue City, Vietnam: SilkPath Grand Hue Hotel

NEWS

Coexistence of Heritage and Daily Life, Rethinking Habitability



A New Milestone for Sustainable World Heritage Cities, Established in Hue, Vietnam

From October 14 to 16, 2025, Hue City—Vietnam’s ancient capital and a UNESCO World Heritage city—was filled with vibrant energy as heritage cities from across the Asia-Pacific region converged. The 5th Regional Conference of the Organization of World Heritage Cities Asia-Pacific (OWHC-AP), hosted by the OWHC-AP Regional Secretariat (based in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea) and held in Hue City, successfully concluded its three-day program.

This conference holds great significance as a platform for proposing a new direction for heritage cities facing the dual challenges of climate change and rapid urbanization. The conference brought together approximately 200 participants—including delegations from 13 cities across 6 countries, World Heritage experts, and youth—who gathered to engage in collective dialogue. Korean member cities included Chair City Gyeongju, along with Andong, Gimhae, Gochang-gun, Hwasun-gun, and Gwangju (Gyeonggi-do), joined by representatives from Vietnam (Hue, Hoi An), China (Dunhuang), Indonesia (Denpasar, Sawahlunto), the Philippines (Vigan), and Sri Lanka (Kandy).

Core Agenda: From Preservation to Habitation, Launching the New Urban Project (NUP)

The overarching theme running through this conference was habitability as a foundation for the sustainable development of World Heritage cities. This signifies a paradigm shift away from heritage conservation policies of the past, which concentrated primarily on preserving the physical form of historic assets, toward improving the quality of life and living environments of the people who inhabit these places.

The most notable session was the special presentation on the New Urban Project (NUP), led by the OWHC General Secretariat in Quebec City. In his keynote address, Mikhaël de Thyse, Secretary-General of the OWHC, defined World Heritage cities as “living spaces where people breathe and carry on their daily lives, not static museums,” emphasizing that “restoring the residential function of historic city centers—amid the threats of climate crisis, gentrification, and overtourism—is the first step toward genuine heritage protection.” He presented guidelines for applying the NUP—scheduled for formal adoption at the 2026 World Congress in Marrakech, Morocco—to the Asia-Pacific region and called for proactive engagement from member cities.

Academic Symposium: Experts Examine the Future of Heritage Cities

In-depth discussions continued during the academic symposium and expert workshops under the theme of strategies to enhance the sustainability and habitability of World Heritage cities. Professor Cho Jae-mo of Kyungpook National University, in his presentation on world heritage and the evolving city through layers of time, proposed flexible conservation strategies that respect accumulated historical layers while accommodating contemporary urban functions, rather than resisting change outright. Professor Kim Ji-hong of Hanyang University followed with a presentation on world heritage, its surrounding context, and the role of heritage managers, emphasizing that heritage management must expand beyond individual cultural properties to encompass the broader urban environment.

Vivid voices from Vietnam followed. Dr. Le Thi Minh Ly, Vice President of the Vietnam Cultural Heritage Association, introduced Vietnam's revised Cultural Heritage Law of 2024 and shared practical measures designed to guarantee residents' right to housing within the legal framework. Dr. Phan Thanh Hai, Director of the Department of Culture and Sports of host city Hue, presented a case study of Hue as Vietnam's representative heritage city, drawing attention by introducing concrete strategies currently being implemented to balance heritage conservation with improved habitability amid rapid urbanization.

International cases and technological alternatives were also presented. Dr. Ang Ming Chee of George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) in Malaysia emphasized that "site managers must act as coordinators linking local communities and public administration, rather than merely serving as regulators," presenting a resident-led management model that resonated strongly with participants. Finally, Hong Seung-mo, CEO of Post Media, presented a future-oriented model of heritage management utilizing digital heritage and smart city technologies, demonstrating how technology can simultaneously enhance residents' quality of life and the value of heritage assets.

Case Sharing by Cities:

Hwangchon Village in Gyeongju, A Model of Resident-Led Regeneration

The Mayors' Meeting provided an opportunity for each city to share on-the-ground challenges and solutions. The presentation by Gyeongju City's Railway Urban Regeneration Division drew particular attention. Through a presentation on strategies to enhance the sustainability and habitability of a World Heritage city—centered on the case of Hwangchon Village—Gyeongju vividly illustrated how the village, long neglected due to its designation as a cultural property protection zone, recovered vitality through residents' voluntary initiative and participation.

Gyeongju's case, in which residents renovated abandoned houses into village hotels and revitalized alleyways as cultural spaces, was widely recognized as offering practical insights for heritage cities across Asia grappling with tensions between strict preservation regulations and residents' property rights. Song Ho-jun, Vice Mayor of Gyeongju, emphasized that "the true stewards of heritage preservation are ultimately the residents who live there," adding that "creating conditions in which residents can remain, and live fulfilling lives is the most reliable path to sustainable heritage conservation."



Solidarity with Future Generations: Youth Envisioning Heritage's Future

This Regional Conference distinguished itself not merely through experts' theoretical discussions, but by actively engaging youth, the future custodians of heritage. Fifty students from five high schools in Hue City participated in the Youth Hand-in-Hand Camp, held as a supplementary program, and engaged in spirited competition.

Conducted in the format of quiz competition, students tested their knowledge not only of their own national heritage, but also of diverse World Heritage Sites across the Asia-Pacific region. While solving quizzes, students gained opportunities to understand their cultures and reflect on how they should protect heritage as global citizens. The winner said, "I learned how precious our city's heritage is, and how it is connected to heritage in other countries." This was a symbolic moment demonstrating that education and awareness-raising among the next generation are essential to ensuring the sustainability of heritage preservation.

Creative Content Competition Award Winners Exhibition: Heritage Reimagined Through Digital Innovation

During the Regional Conference, the OWHC-AP Creative Content Competition Award Winners Exhibition was held in the third-floor lobby of Silk Path Grand Hue Hotel. This exhibition brought together winning entries from a competition open to member cities across the Asia-Pacific region, introducing diverse works reflecting current trends, including photographs and videos.

The exhibited works received acclaim for capturing not only the inherent aesthetic value of World Heritage but also the daily lives and stories of people living alongside heritage from creative perspectives.

Beginning a New Journey: Looking Ahead to Andong 2027

At the closing ceremony that marked the finale of the General Assembly, voting was conducted to select the next host city. Andong-si, Republic of Korea, was ultimately selected to host the 6th OWHC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in 2027. As a city with a triple crown of UNESCO World Heritage Sites—including Hahoe Village, Dosan Seowon and Byeongsan Seowon, and Bongjeongsa Temple—Andong garnered support from member cities by emphasizing its identity as the capital of Korea's spiritual culture and its rich Confucian cultural heritage.

In his acceptance speech, Jang Cheol-ung, Vice Mayor of Andong, stated, "Based on the humanistic values and traditions that Andong embodies, we will gather wisdom to address the challenges facing heritage cities in the Asia-Pacific region," adding that "we will prepare the most authentically Korean General Assembly, where tradition and modernity harmonize."

The 5th Hue Regional Conference, through the new discourse of Habitability, presented practical directions for heritage cities and served as an opportunity to strengthen the solidarity of the OWHC-AP network. The Asia-Pacific Regional Secretariat plans to support the implementation of the New Urban Project (NUP) within the region and strengthen its policy-sharing platform among member cities. When heritage functions not as a preserved past but as a present asset that enriches the lives of residents, the future of our cities will become more sustainable.



62+63



OWHC-AP News

#4 About Heritage



About Heritage



heritage



01

An Iron
Kingdom
Reemerges as a
Global City

Ancient Tombs
in Daeseong-
dong, Gimhae

Gaya's Memory
and Daily Life on
an Urban Hill

Cities are collections of memories. Artifacts embedded deep in the earth testify to the past, and the footsteps of people walking above record the present. Gimhae in Gyeongsangnam-do, Republic of Korea, is a city where these two time periods meet most dramatically. Two thousand years ago, it was the capital of Geumgwan Gaya, which flourished as a center of East Asian maritime trade while cultivating iron culture in the southern Korean Peninsula. And in 2025, it is a modern city that became an official member of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), carrying those brilliant memories and stepping onto the world stage. Gimhae is now a living laboratory and a representative case demonstrating how heritage from the past can coexist with the city's daily life beyond museum glass walls.



Joining the OWHC, Gaya Steps onto the International Stage

In July 2025, Gimhae received its official membership certificate from the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC). This is another remarkable achievement following the inscription of the Gaya Tumuli, which includes the Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong, Gimhae, on the UNESCO World Heritage List in September 2023. The OWHC is an international organization in which over 300 heritage cities worldwide gather to exchange information and collaborate on heritage preservation and management. As Korea's 16th member city, Gimhae has established a foundation for introducing the uniqueness of Gaya culture to the world and sharing advanced heritage management policies.

Since April, Gimhae has submitted its letter of intent, conveying to the international community its vision and aspirations as a World Heritage city. This membership transcends mere administrative procedure. It is the city's determination to recreate in the 21st century the openness and dynamism of Gaya, once known as the Iron Kingdom that led civilizational exchange in ancient East Asia. With this as a turning point, Gimhae participated in the 5th OWHC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in Hue, Vietnam, with full membership status, beginning its journey as a global city that leads international discussions on cultural heritage and the urban future.

"Seven Stories, One Gaya," Toward Integrated Heritage Management

Alongside the leap toward the international stage, a domestic focal point for the systematic preservation and management of the Gaya Tumuli has also been established. Gimhae City further solidified its status as a World Heritage city through the launch of the World Heritage Nomination Office for Gaya Tumuli, which commenced operations on September 1 and held its official opening ceremony on October 13. Headquartered at the Gaya National Center of History & Culture in Gimhae, the foundation serves as the control tower for the integrated management of the serial property scattered across three provincial governments (Gyeongnam-do, Gyeongbuk-do, and Jeonbuk-do) and seven local governments, including Gimhae, Haman, and Goryeong, under the vision of "Seven Stories, One Gaya."

The foundation plans to establish a scientific preservation management system, conduct research to redefine the value of Gaya history, and build a tourism belt that highlights regional characteristics. The foundation's launch, which brings together Gaya's scattered memories into a single framework and seeks to cultivate them as a world-class cultural tourism resource, will become a firm foundation for transmitting World Heritage in its entirety to future generations.

Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong: The Urban Repositories of Memory

The Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong (Historic Site No. 341), a symbol of Gimhae, possess distinctive locational characteristics that set them apart from other heritage sites. Unlike most royal tombs and tumuli complexes, which are typically situated on secluded mountain slopes outside city centers, the Gaya tumuli—including Daeseong-dong—are in the very heart of Gimhae's busiest downtown area, on a low hill called Aeguji (meaning "Little Gujibong Peak") rising just 22.6 meters above sea level. This reveals the worldview of the Gaya people from the 1st to 5th centuries: the ruling elite of Geumgwan Gaya created their burial grounds close to their living spaces, expressing a desire to remain with their community even after death.

This site served as the collective cemetery for the ruling class of Geumgwan Gaya. Excavations have yielded massive wooden chamber tombs and an abundance of grave goods. Iron ingots, iron armor, and weaponry demonstrate that Gaya was indeed the Iron Kingdom. Meanwhile, Chinese bronze mirrors, Japanese pinwheel-shaped bronze artifacts, and bronze cauldrons from northern nomadic peoples provide decisive evidence that Gaya served as an international trade hub connecting not only the Korean Peninsula but also China, Japan, and the northern regions. UNESCO recognized this value when it inscribed the seven Gaya Tumuli complexes—including the Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong—on the World Heritage List, evaluating them as "exceptional testimony to Gaya, which maintained an autonomous and horizontal system with neighboring states."

Taegukjeon Hall, Gaya Theme Park



Hongsalmun (Red Spiked Gate), Tomb of King Suro



Starry Nights on Aeguji Hill, Engaging Heritage After Dark

Heritage comes alive when touched by human warmth. In 2025, Gimhae brought the Daeseong-dong Ancient Tombs into the daily lives of its citizens through the Korea Heritage Service's World Heritage Utilization Program. Under the theme "Evening Strolls at Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong," a series of programs transformed what had been a solemn historic site into an inviting, romantic cultural space.

It began with "Starry Nights on Aeguji Hill," held from May through July. Local residents had long called the low hill where the ancient tombs stand "aeguji," meaning "Little Gujibong Peak"—where King Suro was said to have descended from heaven. The program revived this affectionate local name, inviting participants to climb to the summit at dusk for meditation and stargazing. Even amid the city's glow, they gazed at a quiet night sky, imagining the same stars that Gaya people saw two thousand years ago. Guided by a meditation instructor through ten minutes of silence, participants absorbed the ancient tombs' tranquil presence, then sketched their impressions on traditional fans—a moment of healing and comfort offered by heritage itself.

From July through September, during summer vacation, families could join the "Daeseong Mystery Squad." This hands-on program had participants explore the tumuli and museum, solving quizzes and completing missions related to Gaya history and artifacts. As detectives roaming the burial ground in search of Gaya treasures, children and parents decorated cookies shaped like excavated relics while naturally absorbing the World Heritage site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). It demonstrated that heritage education need not rely on tedious lectures—it can be joyful play.

Sunset and Song, the Tumuli as a Cultural Stage

The greatest response came from Concerts at Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong Under the Sunset, held three times from August through October. Beginning at dusk, as the gentle ridgelines of the ancient tombs turned golden, these concerts created a spectacle in which heritage, nature, and art became one.

At the first performance on August 23, gayageum ensemble MUA played the gayageum—Gaya's emblematic instrument—letting ancient sounds resonate through a contemporary setting. On September 27, classical string ensemble KamString took the stage, followed on October 18 by fusion gugak group Eb. Residents spread blankets on the museum's outdoor lawn, enjoying melodies that flowed against the open backdrop of the tumuli. Like Paris's Montmartre Hill, the Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong became an outdoor performance venue where art and romance could breathe freely for the public.

Hands-on activities that accompanied the concerts—crafting Gaya artifact replicas and creating three-dimensional drawings—allowed visitors to experience Gaya not only through their eyes and ears but also through their hands. Open to all without advance registration, these concerts proved that heritage is not something to be protected behind fences, but a cultural asset that enriches citizens' lives.

Gimhae Heritage Night





With Communities, Building a Sustainable Future for Heritage

On November 1, 2025, Gimhae held the “Daeseong-dong Ancient Tombs Small Concert & Flea Market,” concluding a year of monthly programs with a grand finale. This was the final stop in a series of events hosted by the World Heritage Nomination Office for Gaya Tumuli across all seven tumuli sites, part of the Korea Heritage Service’s World Heritage Promotion Support Project.

The event was designed not merely as a performance, but as a community-centered festival. While a Gaya musical inspired by the Gujiga and brass band performances filled the stage, a flea market featuring local small business owners and young entrepreneurs took place throughout the tumuli grounds. A cultural marketplace organized primarily by online mothers’ groups, along with traditional kite-making workshops in partnership with the Goseong Nongyo Preservation Society, demonstrated how heritage utilization projects can contribute to local economic vitality and community cohesion. Residents who attended remarked, “The tumuli felt less like a solemn historical site and more like an open space in our neighborhood where culture and art come together,” welcoming this transformation of heritage.

Gimhae’s efforts continue into 2026. The city was selected for the Korea Heritage Service’s 2026 World Heritage Utilization Grant Program, securing KRW 338 million in national and provincial funding. With this support, Gimhae will invest a total of KRW 550 million won to expand projects across three areas: the World Heritage Festival, the World Heritage Promotion Support Project, and World Heritage Utilization Programs.

Most notably, the 2026 World Heritage Festival is a large-scale project jointly pursued by the seven local governments where Gaya Tumuli are located, promising to become a global celebration that shares Gaya’s historical value with the world. Meanwhile, popular programs like “Starry Nights on Aeguji Hill” will continue with enhanced content.

Ancient Tombs in Daeseong-dong are no longer a space of death. They are a space of life, where the breath of Gaya people from two millennia ago mingles with the laughter of Gimhae’s residents today. By embedding heritage into the daily lives of its citizens rather than preserving it behind glass, Gimhae demonstrates that what is most local is most universal. As a member of the Organization of World Heritage Cities, Gimhae has just begun a beautiful journey toward coexistence between heritage and the living city.

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02

Evidence of Exceptional Artistry and Cultural
Development:
The World Heritage Site of the
Petroglyphs Along the Bangucheon Stream





Inscription of the Petroglyphs Along the Bangucheon Stream as a World Heritage Site

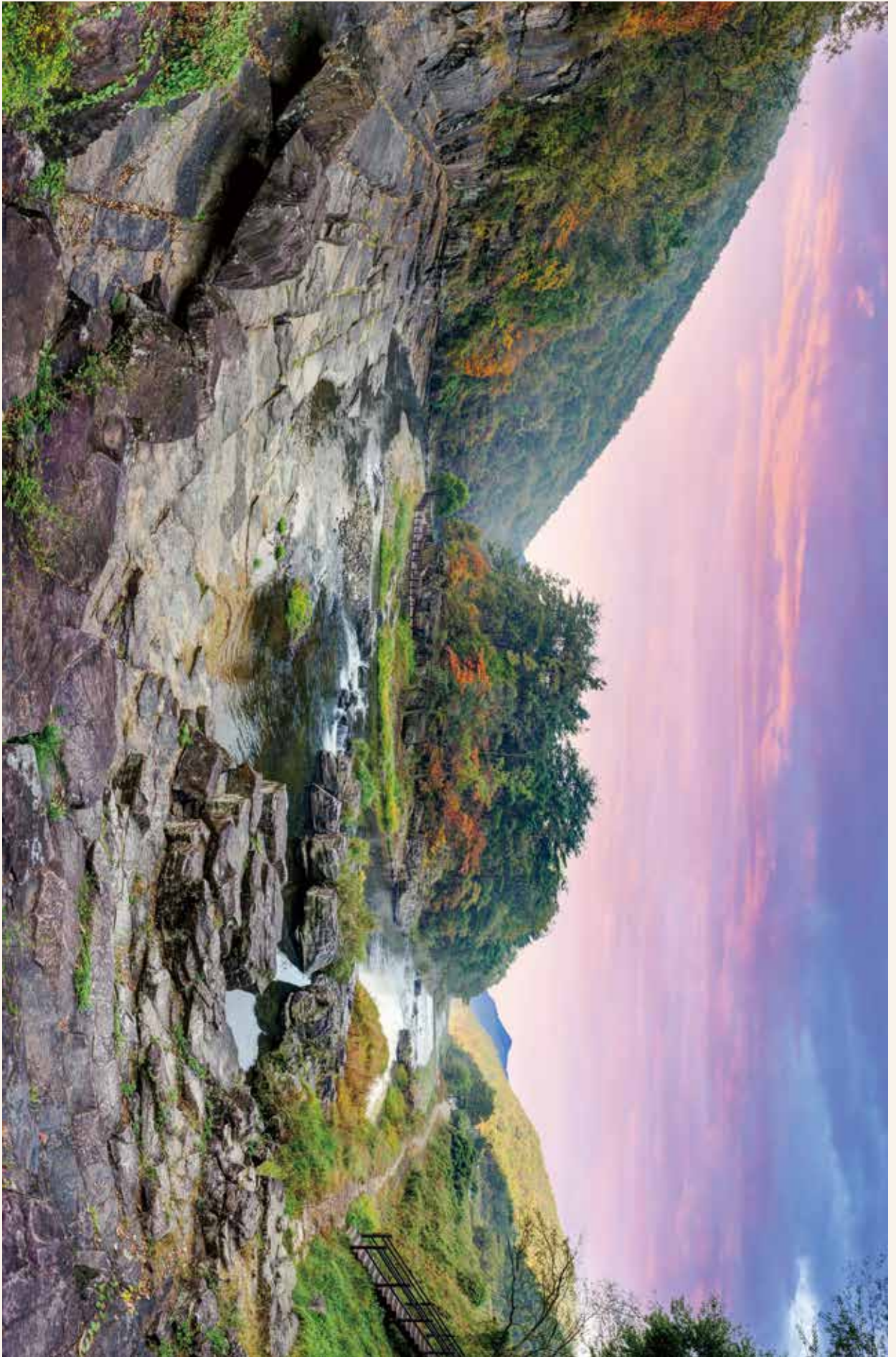
Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream encompasses two significant rock art sites along an approximately 3-kilometer stretch of stratified cliffs bordering the Bangucheon Stream on the southeastern coast of the Republic of Korea: the Daegok-ri Petroglyphs and the Cheonjeon-ri Petroglyphs. These rock panels contain dense concentrations of engravings created by successive generations spanning from 5000 BCE to the 9th century CE. Carved using stone and metal tools, the petroglyphs depict a wide range of imagery, reflecting both prehistoric and historic cultural expressions.

As described on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website, Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream refers to two rock panels containing remarkable concentrations of petroglyphs set within a landscape shaped by a meandering waterway and sedimentary cliffs along the Bangucheon Stream (current administrative name: Daegokcheon Stream) on the southeastern coast of the Korean Peninsula. These two panels are designated as Korea's National Treasures: the Daegok-ri Petroglyphs and the Cheonjeon-ri Petroglyphs. In terms of chronology, the Daegok-ri site contains images from the Neolithic period, while Cheonjeon-ri bears densely packed images and inscriptions spanning the Neolithic through the Bronze Age and into the Silla period. The property encompasses a narrow 3-kilometer landscape formed along a waterway framed by mountains and rock formations that likely inspired the rock carving tradition of artists in this region.

The Daegok-ri Petroglyphs and Cheonjeon-ri Petroglyphs represent an extensive range of images carved successively by generations of local artists over approximately 6,000 years, using stone and metal tools. Over millennia, the coastal inhabitants of East Asia exercised remarkable artistry in carving these images and inscriptions. The animals, human figures, hunting scenes, concentric circles, lozenge patterns, and inscriptions carved into the rock panels display an astonishing degree of realism and dynamism. The depictions of marine and terrestrial animals are so detailed that individual species can be identified. The prehistoric images depicting whales and specific stages of whaling—a subject rarely addressed in rock art worldwide—exemplify this artistic mastery with particular vividness. The arrangement of images and inscriptions is equally exceptional. As evidenced by the concentrated execution of individual motifs and the compositions organized according to chronological phases, Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream exhibits a distinctive compositional structure rarely found among other rock art heritage sites.

The images within Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream, rendered in distinctive compositions grounded in exceptional observational skills, serve as evidence of the remarkable aesthetic sensibility of the Korean Peninsula's inhabitants who created these rock carvings. The images and inscriptions within Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream provide an exceptionally fine demonstration of a rock carving tradition that continued over an extended period from the Neolithic through the Bronze Age and into the Silla period. As heritage that attests to sophisticated forms of artistic expression, Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream is distinctive in presenting the cultural development of the Korean Peninsula's coastal inhabitants in a concentrated yet readily legible form through a single, continuous landscape canvas.

Based on this assessment, Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream was inscribed as the Republic of Korea's 17th World Heritage site in July 2025 under Criterion (i): "The petroglyphs display a wide range of images executed with outstanding artistic mastery by the coastal inhabitants of East Asia over millennia," and Criterion (iii): "The petroglyphs attest to a rock carving tradition practiced for approximately 6,000 years within the landscape formed by the Bangucheon Stream." This represents a significant achievement, marking the first Korean heritage site inscribed under Criterion (i) in 30 years, since Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple were inscribed in 1995. Globally, the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream joins Côa Valley in Portugal, Tanum in Sweden, Hail in Saudi Arabia, and Murujuga in Australia as one of only five rock art sites worldwide recognized specifically for their artistic value. Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream has thus become East Asia's representative heritage among a carefully selected group of prehistoric art sites from each continent. This recognition demonstrates the stature of the artistic value inherent in Korea's cultural heritage. Locally, residents identify Ulsan as the starting point of Korean art and trace the origins of K-culture's global presence back to the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream.



A Meaningful Case Study in Sustainable Protection and Management

Like a Christmas miracle, the National Treasure Cheonjeon-ri Petroglyphs was first reported to academia on December 24, 1970, and National Treasure Daegok-ri Petroglyphs on December 25, 1971. Separate from the recognition of these remarkable discoveries, serious concerns soon arose regarding their preservation. This was due to the construction of Sayeon Dam in 1965, located approximately 2.3 kilometers straight south of the Daegok-ri Petroglyphs. Of the two sites, the Daegok-ri Petroglyphs in particular endured submersion for an average of eight months per year, as it lies within the reservoir zone of the Sayeon Dam. Although the petroglyphs remained invisible for much of the year, determining appropriate preservation measures for the Daegok-ri site proved extremely challenging. This difficulty stemmed from the fact that Sayeon Dam—constructed as part of Korea’s First Five-Year Economic Development Plan—not only prevented flooding in Ulsan’s urban areas, including large-scale national industrial complexes, but has also served as a drinking water source for parts of Ulsan since the 2000s. However, following the construction of Daegok Dam upstream on the Daegokcheon Stream in 2005, submersion at both petroglyph sites was reduced. The Cheonjeon-ri Petroglyphs became entirely free from partial submersion caused by upstream valley water flow, while the average submersion period at the Daegok-ri site decreased dramatically—from eight months to approximately three months per year.

Central and local governments engaged in extensive policy consultations on petroglyphs preservation, during which they experienced significant setbacks, including the failure of the Kinetic Dam construction proposal. Ultimately, an institutional agreement was reached in 2014 to lower the Sayeon Dam water level below EL. 48 meters until a final preservation solution could be implemented. As a result, submersion pressure on the Daegok-ri Petroglyphs was further reduced to an average of one to two months per year. More recently, central and local governments, together with related agencies including the Korea Water Resources Corporation, decided to install floodgates at the EL. 47 meter point of the spillway at the aging Sayeon Dam as part of a dam stability enhancement project. Originally intended solely to improve seismic performance, the project was expanded—using full national funding—to include floodgate installation as a key protective measure during the World Heritage inscription process. The project is currently in the detailed design phase and is proceeding on schedule toward completion in 2030.

The installation of floodgates at the Sayeon Dam spillway represents the most critical protection and management measure for the World Heritage inscription of the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream. It has drawn attention as the most sustainable option among multiple preservation proposals, as it establishes preservation conditions nearly equivalent to the natural state prior to dam construction while still allowing partial use of the drinking water resource. The Daegok-ri Petroglyphs are located in a valley section where, even before the dam’s construction, water levels could rise to 55 meters within a single day during torrential rains with a 200-year recurrence interval. Installing spillway floodgates at EL. 47 meters recreates environmental conditions most closely resembling the natural hydrological state, while retaining the dam’s structural presence. This allows partial water use during dry seasons and enables controlled flow velocity during water-level adjustments—an advantage over scenarios without any dam infrastructure. Furthermore, because both upstream and downstream dams—Daegok Dam and Sayeon Dam—will be equipped with floodgates, the two petroglyph sites located in the valley section between them can be protected through flexible, coordinated water-level management. Furthermore, because both upstream and downstream dams—Daegok Dam and Sayeon Dam—will be equipped with floodgates, the two petroglyph sites located in the valley section between them can be protected through flexible, coordinated water-level management.

The UNESCO World Heritage system itself originated from efforts to protect Egyptian monuments threatened by the Aswan Dam. In the past, heritage was relocated to accommodate dam construction (Aswan, Egypt), or dam projects were abandoned to protect heritage (Côa Valley, Portugal). Today, however, we have reached a point where development pressures cannot simply be ignored, requiring new discourse on sustainability—as exemplified by Ulsan, Republic of Korea. This constitutes the meaningful case study in protection and management that Korea presents to the world through the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream, earning strong recognition from the international community. The overarching framework of the protection and management plan for Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream can be defined as sustainable heritage protection grounded in learning from past failures and progressively strengthened through understanding and communication.

This framework is clearly reflected in the site’s Integrity and Authenticity, demonstrating that its Outstanding Universal Value and



defining attributes have been fully preserved through collaborative efforts to mitigate the dam's impacts. Moreover, the site's protection and management plan—rooted in early recognition of preservation challenges and distinguished by systematic, iterative monitoring unprecedented in the global rock art field—is reflected in the exceptionally positive evaluations across all eight criteria presented alongside ICOMOS's recommendation for inscription.

The World Heritage inscription of Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream was achieved 55 years after their discovery and 15 years after initiation of the inscription process. As East Asia's representative rock art heritage—celebrated for its outstanding artistic value epitomized by whale imagery, yet long burdened by preservation challenges—the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream have ascended to the global stage through tremendous effort and now stand as World Heritage that all humanity must protect perpetuity. I sincerely hope that continued interest and affection from audiences both in Korea and abroad will accompany the Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream—a World Heritage site distinguished for its journey toward collective understanding and shared stewardship beyond conflict and opposition.

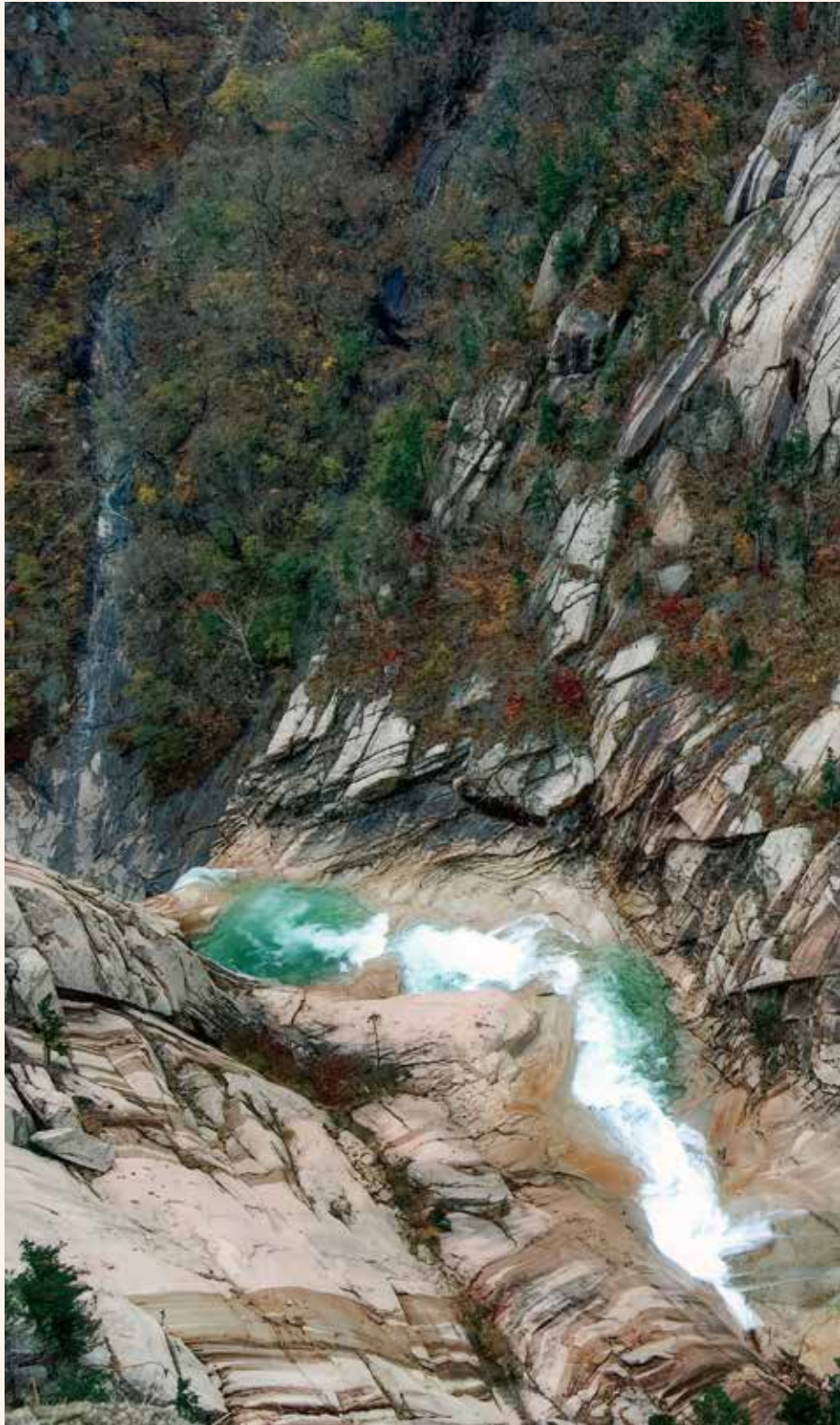


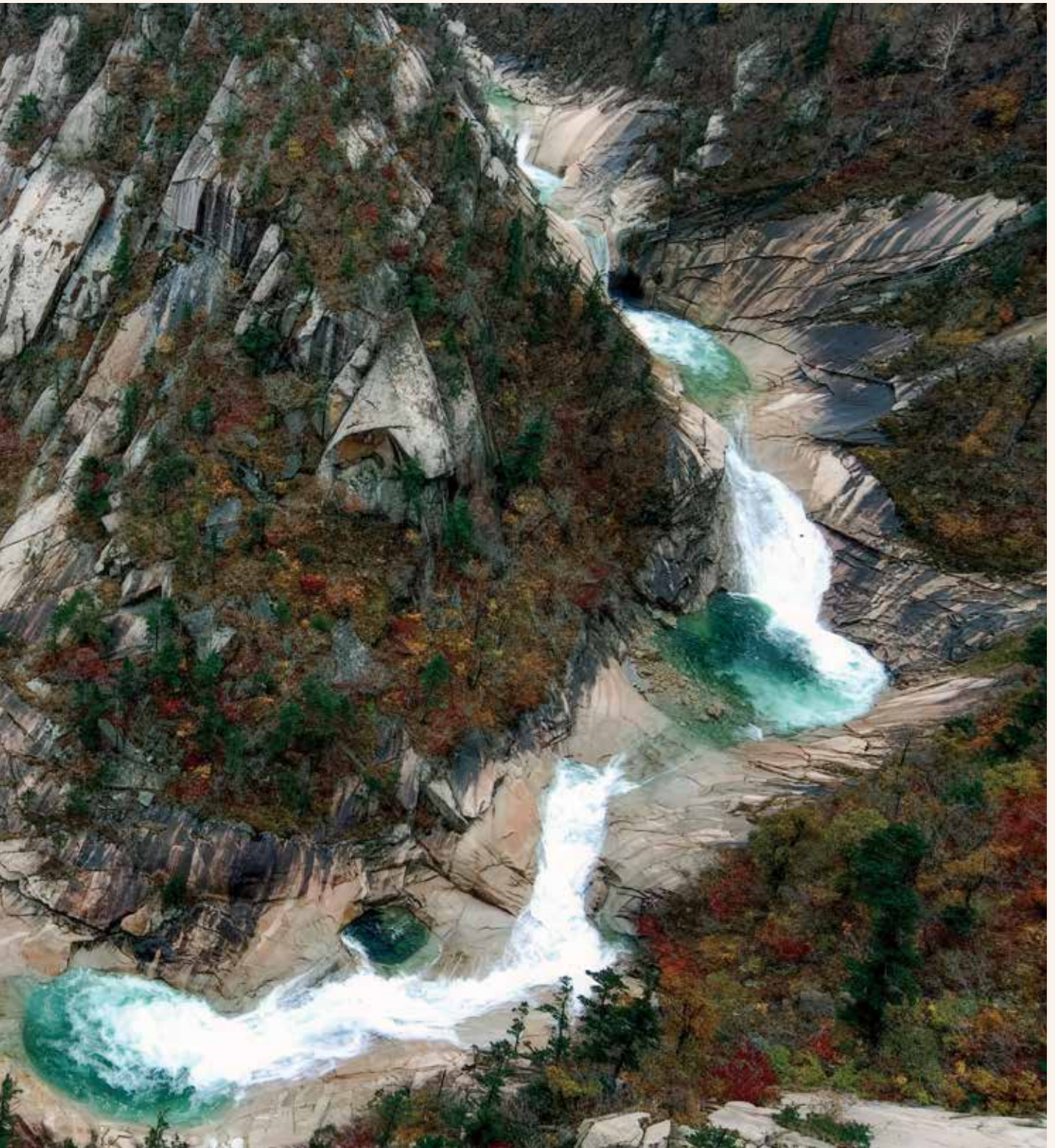
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03

World Heritage Inscription of Mount Kumgang and Its Significance





Kim Seo-rin, Research Professor, Centre for World Heritage and Sustainable Development,
Korea National University of Heritage

Mt. Kumgang Inscribed on the World Heritage List

In July 2025, Mt. Kumgang—Diamond Mountain from the Sea—was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 47th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held in Paris, France. This represents North Korea's third World Heritage inscription, following the Complex of Koguryo Tombs (2004) and Historic Monuments and Sites in Kaesong (2013), and holds particular significance as the first mixed natural and cultural heritage World Heritage site on the Korean Peninsula.

Moreover, Mt. Kumgang was inscribed as a property recognized within the cultural landscape category, a designation that emphasizes the interaction between human activity and the natural environment. As of 2025, there are 1,248 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, of which only 41 are mixed natural and cultural heritage sites, accounting for approximately 3.3% of the total. Mixed heritage sites are considered the most challenging category, as they must simultaneously satisfy the inscription for both cultural and natural heritage and demonstrate outstanding universal value in both domains in a balanced and integrated manner. Given that South Korea has pursued cultural landscape and mixed heritage nominations but saw most cases reclassified as cultural heritage sites due to verification challenges and limitations in data compilation, North Korea's successful inscription of Mt. Kumgang as a mixed heritage site carries notable institutional significance.



Inscription Process of Mt. Kumgang as a World Heritage Site

North Korea adopted a long-term, phased approach toward the World Heritage inscription of Mt. Kumgang - Diamond Mountain from the Sea. Although Mt. Kumgang was placed on UNESCO's Tentative List in 2000, little substantive progress was made for more than a decade, until full-scale preparatory work began around 2016. According to domestic North Korean sources, a multidisciplinary research team—comprising specialists from cultural and natural heritage institutions as well as university researchers—was formed during this period, initiating systematic surveys and comprehensive data compilation on Mt. Kumgang's geological, biological, and cultural heritage (Rodong Sinmun, Sep. 3, 2025).

Based on years of field investigations and data accumulation, North Korea officially submitted the nomination dossier for Mt. Kumgang to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in February 2021. The nominated property consisted of four component parts, with a total core area of 21,114.70 hectares and a buffer zone covering 69,062.76 hectares. The four component parts were designated as: ① Outer Kumgang-Inner Kumgang Area; ② Lagoon Samil Area in Sea Kumgang; ③ Haemanmulsang Area in Sea Kumgang; and ④ Chongsokjong Area in Sea Kumgang. Throughout the nomination process, North Korean authorities conducted repeated comparative analysis of Mt. Kumgang's landscape, geological formations, biological diversity, and cultural attributes against comparable World Heritage sites worldwide, referencing international guidelines and prior inscription cases. According to reports, the nomination dossier underwent multiple rounds of revision, including content enhancement and structural reorganization, with substantial effort devoted to translating extensive supplementary materials and establishing supporting legal and institutional frameworks (Rodong Sinmun, Sep. 3, 2025).

The evaluation followed standard UNESCO World Heritage inscription procedures. The on-site evaluation originally scheduled for 2023 was postponed at North Korea's request. Following the submission of additional materials and interim reviews by the advisory bodies, a joint ICOMOS-IUCN field mission was conducted in the Mt. Kumgang area in October 2024. ICOMOS, the advisory body for cultural heritage, recommended inscription under Criterion (iii), while IUCN, the advisory body for natural heritage, recommended inscription under Criterion (vii). Although North Korea initially proposed Criterion (viii) based on geological significance, the advisory bodies did not accept this criterion, concluding that Mt. Kumgang's geological features did not sufficiently demonstrate distinctiveness or representativeness when compared with existing World Heritage sites.

Adjustments were also made to the evaluation of the component parts. While ICOMOS recognized ① Outer Kumgang-Inner Kumgang and ② Lagoon Samil as cultural heritage (cultural landscape), IUCN recognized

only ① Outer Kumgang-Inner Kumgang under natural heritage criteria. Accordingly, the World Heritage Committee accepted the advisory bodies' recommendations, inscribing ① and ② as a mixed heritage property, while excluding components ③ Haemanmulsang and ④ Chongsokjong areas from inscription. Although speculations arose before and after the Committee session that North Korea might submit an amendment to maintain or expand the scope of inscription, no such amendment was ultimately submitted, and the State Party accepted both the advisory evaluations and the Committee's final decision.

In sum, the inscription of Mt. Kumgang unfolded through a long-term, step-by-step process: Tentative List inscription in 2000, systematic field research and data accumulation beginning in 2016, official nomination submission in 2021, field evaluation in 2024, and final inscription by the 47th World Heritage Committee in 2025. Rather than relying solely on Mt. Kumgang's longstanding image as a renowned sacred mountain, North Korea invested substantial time, scientific effort, and institutional coordination to meet the rigorous evidentiary and comparative requirements of the World Heritage system, ultimately establishing a mixed heritage framework that integrates both natural and cultural values.





World Heritage Values of Mt. Kumgang

Three criteria were applied in the nomination of Mt. Kumgang—Criteria (iii), (vii), and (viii)—with Criterion (iii) for cultural heritage and Criterion (vii) for natural heritage ultimately accepted.

- Criterion (iii): Mt. Kumgang was recognized as a sacred mountain that bears witness to Korean Buddhist mountain traditions that have continued from the 5th century to the present. It was acknowledged as an outstanding example of an associative cultural landscape, integrating tangible heritage elements—such as temples, hermitages, stupas, rock inscriptions, and pagodas—with intangible heritage elements including pilgrimage traditions, Buddhist practices, legends, and poetry.

- Criterion (vii): Mt. Kumgang displays exceptional natural beauty through its pale granite landscape, well-devoted weathering formations, dramatic vertical rock peaks and deep valleys, waterfalls and pools, and panoramic vista systems extending toward the coastline. Additionally, the well-preserved state of diverse ecosystems, including subalpine shrub zones, wetlands, and old-growth forests, as well as seasonal and meteorological variations that transform the landscape, were recognized as core components of its World Heritage value. In contrast, Criterion (viii) was not adopted, as Mt. Kumgang's geological characteristics were not sufficiently demonstrated to possess Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) when compared with other World Heritage sites.

Meanwhile, the concept of cultural landscape, which denotes heritage

formed through long-term interactions between humans and nature, was first introduced into the World Heritage system in 1992.

Mt. Kumgang was proposed as a heritage property simultaneously exhibiting the characteristics of both an organically evolved landscape and an associative cultural landscape.

Particularly as an associative cultural landscape, Mt. Kumgang served as a major subject of poetry and painting for numerous literati and artists during the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties, resulting in the accumulation of extensive literary records and pictorial materials. Accordingly, Mt. Kumgang holds expanded significance beyond conventional World Heritage interpretations, functioning as a symbolic landscape onto which the spiritual culture and artistic traditions of the Korean Peninsula have been projected in layered and multidimensional ways, rather than merely as a religious site.

However, evidence demonstrating the uninterrupted continuation of pilgrimage practices to the present was limited, preventing the argument for Mt. Kumgang as an organically evolved landscape from being sufficiently substantiated.

Future Tasks: Tourism Development, Conservation Management, and Inter-Korean Cooperation

The most critical challenge following Mt. Kumgang's World Heritage inscription concerns how to establish an appropriate balance between tourism development and conservation management. North Korea clearly signaled its intention to utilize Mt. Kumgang as a core tourism asset, particularly in connection with the development of the Wonsan-Kalma Coastal Tourist Zone. Developments such as visits by Russian media outlets and discussions regarding the resumption of international transportation networks indicate that the World Heritage inscription is being strategically linked to international tourism initiatives.

Reflecting this situation, the World Heritage Committee requested the prompt finalization of tourism development plans for Mt. Kumgang and recommended the establishment of concrete plans to assess the impacts of tourism development on its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The Committee emphasized the necessity of conducting a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) encompassing the entire tourism development framework, in order to evaluate cumulative and combined impacts, rather than limiting assessments to individual project. This requirement can be understood as a minimum institutional safeguard aimed at preventing structural and irreversible damage to Mt. Kumgang's natural environment and cultural heritage arising from increased tourism pressure.

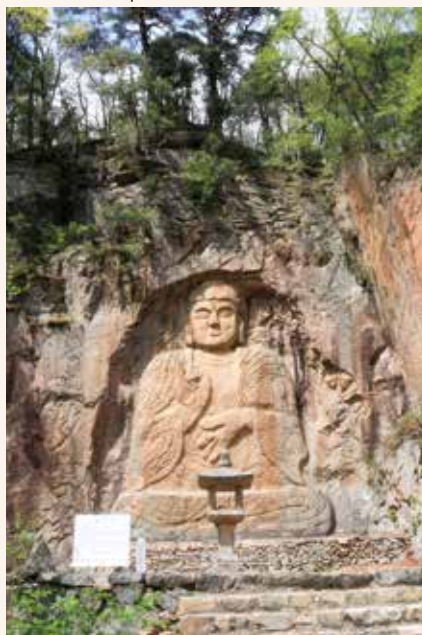
Another key challenge lies in the institutionalization of Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). The Committee recommended that procedures for assessing the impacts of development projects on World Heritage values be formally incorporated into relevant legislation, and that environmental and heritage impact assessments be made mandatory at the project level. This implies that an OUV-centered impact assessment framework must be incorporated into related laws such as the Law on the Protection of National Heritage and the Law on the Protection of Scenic Sites and Natural Monuments, as well as within development permitting systems. Given that road construction, accommodation facilities, and tourism infrastructure are highly likely to directly affect both cultural and natural attributes, effective conservation management cannot be ensured without systematic project-level impact assessments.

A comprehensive reorganization of the management system is also required. The World Heritage Committee recommended revising the existing management plan to align it with tourism development

plans and supplementing it with an operation-focused management plan that includes performance indicators to evaluate management effectiveness. Furthermore, the establishment of preservation plans for wooden structures, surveys and registration of rock inscriptions and historic paths, reviews of the boundaries of temples and hermitages, and capacity building for management personnel capacity were presented as essential measures for integrated cultural and natural heritage management.

Finally, the Committee's recommendation regarding the continuation of Buddhist pilgrimage traditions warrants particular attention. This constitutes an institutional acknowledgment that Mt. Kumgang is not merely a tourist destination but a living site of Buddhist cultural heritage. It also opens pathways for inter-Korean cooperation in heritage management mediated through Buddhist traditions. Potential cooperative initiatives include the phased resumption of pilgrimage activities, joint surveys of temples, hermitages, and rock inscriptions, and collaborative compilation and organization of related historical texts and records, all of which fall within the institutional framework of World Heritage governance.

Ultimately, the success or failure of Mt. Kumgang's inscription will depend on post-inscription management. Maintaining a balance between tourism development and conservation, institutionalizing impact assessment mechanisms, establishing an integrated management system, and fostering cooperative frameworks grounded in Buddhist cultural traditions constitute the core conditions for sustaining Mt. Kumgang's value as a mixed natural and cultural heritage site.

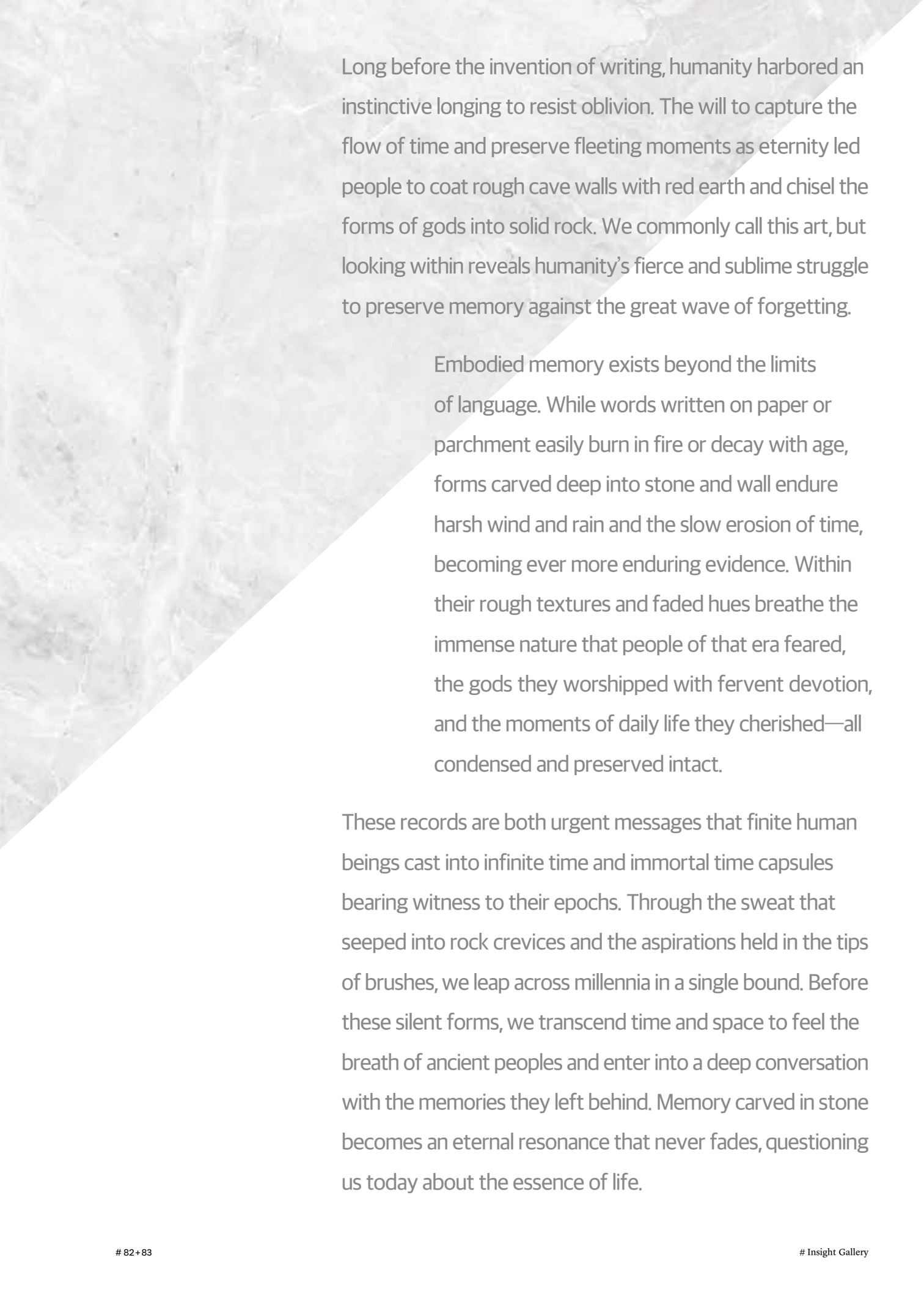


#5 Insight Gallery

Eternal Memory

in Stone
and Wall

Insight Gallery



Long before the invention of writing, humanity harbored an instinctive longing to resist oblivion. The will to capture the flow of time and preserve fleeting moments as eternity led people to coat rough cave walls with red earth and chisel the forms of gods into solid rock. We commonly call this art, but looking within reveals humanity's fierce and sublime struggle to preserve memory against the great wave of forgetting.

Embodied memory exists beyond the limits of language. While words written on paper or parchment easily burn in fire or decay with age, forms carved deep into stone and wall endure harsh wind and rain and the slow erosion of time, becoming ever more enduring evidence. Within their rough textures and faded hues breathe the immense nature that people of that era feared, the gods they worshipped with fervent devotion, and the moments of daily life they cherished—all condensed and preserved intact.

These records are both urgent messages that finite human beings cast into infinite time and immortal time capsules bearing witness to their epochs. Through the sweat that seeped into rock crevices and the aspirations held in the tips of brushes, we leap across millennia in a single bound. Before these silent forms, we transcend time and space to feel the breath of ancient peoples and enter into a deep conversation with the memories they left behind. Memory carved in stone becomes an eternal resonance that never fades, questioning us today about the essence of life.

Murals of the Ajanta Caves

Ajanta Caves, India, 1983



Along the steep cliffs of the Deccan Plateau where the Waghora River winds, the Ajanta Caves, concealed within their folds, are humanity's brilliant record of light drawn from darkness. The 29 caves created over centuries from the 2nd century BCE to the 5th century CE were not mere temples but ardent sites of spiritual practice. Paradoxically, because they were hidden by forest and vines for over a millennium, cut off from human footfall, the murals have remarkably preserved the vivid colors of 1,500 years ago. The delicate brushwork painted over rough basalt walls coated with mixtures of earth, straw, and animal hair transcends stone's cold materiality to radiate a sense of warm vitality.

The Jataka tales of Buddha's past lives and the gentle smiles of bodhisattvas, painted by the faint light of torches, embody the fervent aspiration of finite human beings to advance toward eternal truth. The world within the murals, encompassing everything from splendid court life to the humble daily lives of common people, is a vast repository of memory vividly testifying to the spiritual world and lived experiences of ancient Indians. Ajanta shows us that darkness does not obscure light but can instead become a protective veil, safeguarding our most precious memories.

Bas-reliefs at Angkor Thom

Angkor, Cambodia, 1992



Angkor Thom, the final capital of the Khmer Empire—its name meaning “Great City”—is both a universe built in stone and a monumental history book. The endless bas-reliefs along the galleries of the Bayon Temple at the city’s heart are a sweeping panorama of life that 12th-century Khmer people carved into stone. Tens of thousands of forms carved with exquisite precision from cold gray sandstone, as if kneaded by hand, transcend stone’s frigid materiality to radiate warm vitality. They majestically depict the empire’s glorious wars of conquest and mythological tales—yet never neglect the lives of nameless common people wedged between stories of gods and kings.

Women selling and haggling over fish at the market, men cheering at cockfights, a mother giving birth to a child. These vibrant scenes carved in stone transform the solemn religious temple into the palpable reality of human existence. The stonemasons who chiseled away at the rock hoped to eternally preserve not only the empire’s majesty but also the cooking smoke and drops of sweat they encountered every day. The bas-reliefs of Angkor Thom are simultaneously a record of power and embodied memory, where the breath of ordinary people has hardened like fossils to reach us.

Five-story Stone Pagoda at Jeongnimsa Temple Site, Buyeo

Baekje Historic Areas, Republic of Korea, 2015



The Five-story Stone Pagoda at Jeongnimsa Temple Site, standing alone in Buyeo, the ancient capital of Baekje known as Sabi, is the heritage that most perfectly embodies the aesthetic consciousness of Baekje people, who chose elegance over splendor and gentleness over intimidation. This pagoda, which has maintained its place through 1,400 years of relentless time, represents a technical achievement that translated the soft curves and structural aesthetics of wooden architecture into solid granite. The buoyant upward sweep created by the thin, wide-spreading roof stones seems to lift toward the heavens the ideal world that Baekje dreamed of.

Yet the pagoda is also a painful medium of memory, bearing witness to the tragedy of a fallen dynasty. On the first-story body stone, Tang Dynasty general Su Dingfang, who destroyed Baekje, carved a record of his victory. The grief and humiliation of a lost nation are preserved deep within the stone. Nevertheless, the pagoda has silently embraced even this wound without losing the inherent spirit of Baekje. The Five-story Stone Pagoda at Jeongnimsa Temple Site is both the soul of Baekje that became stone to gain eternal time and the most solid and beautiful silent memory that the vanished dynasty left to posterity.

Murujuga Rock Art

Burru Peninsula/Murujuga Rock Art, Australia, 2023



Upon the red earth of Murujuga in western Australia unfolds one of humanity's oldest and most extensive galleries of memory. Within this dark red basalt terrain exist over one million petroglyphs chiseled by Aboriginal peoples tens of thousands of years ago. These images transcend mere artistic expression to constitute a cosmology and encyclopedia of survival from an era before writing. The diverse forms—from the now-extinct thylacine to geometric patterns to human faces—record intact the environment that changed through the flow of time and the lives lived alongside it.

For Aboriginal peoples, these rock images are sacred scriptures where ancestral spirits dwell and communicate with the present. By carving images into rock, they recorded Songlines and transmitted to descendants how to coexist with nature and the laws to uphold. The deep grooves carved into red rock surfaces leap across tens of thousands of years to vividly convey humanity's most primordial memory. Murujuga is both humanity's oldest signature left upon nature and a record of pure spirit that predates civilization itself.

Shadows of Prosperity, When Greed Swallows Traces of Time



The most lethal threat World Heritage faces today is not the weight of time but human activity itself. Rapid urbanization, indiscriminate resource extraction, and unsustainable overtourism instantly jeopardize the vitality of heritage that has endured for thousands of years. We call these human-caused threats. While nature possesses the power to heal itself, wounds left by human greed often cross irreversible tipping points. Forests torn open under the banner of development and landscapes corrupted by commercial logic permanently destroy the inherent authenticity and integrity that heritage possesses. The fact that a significant portion of UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger stems not from war or natural disaster but from misguided management and development plans speaks volumes. Balancing conservation and development remains one of humanity's most intractable challenges. Yet as long as attempts persist to reduce heritage's value to the logic of capital, the clock of loss will not stop ticking. This paradox—that what we are obliged to protect is being destroyed by our own hands—demands immediate change in our actions. The muddied waters of Ha Long Bay and the clear-cut forests of East Rennell send us silent warnings. This is the reality of threats humans have inflicted upon heritage. The time has come to confront a grave question directed at humanity's conscience: where must we draw the line for the sake of sustainable coexistence?



Ha Long Bay

Ha Long Bay, Vietnam, 1994 / 2000

In northeastern Vietnam's Quang Ninh Province, some 1,600 limestone pillars rising from emerald waters resemble jewels cast forth by dragons descended from heaven. Ha Long Bay is a masterpiece of karst topography sculpted by over 500 million years of geological time, a landscape painting that most dramatically reveals nature's mysteries. UNESCO recognized this unparalleled scenic value and geological importance by inscribing the site as a World Natural Heritage Site twice, in 1994 and 2000. The silhouettes of islands emerging dimly through mist have become a wellspring of inspiration for countless artists and travelers, and a source of national pride for Vietnam.

Yet the reality Ha Long Bay confronts today resembles less a natural wonder than a precarious landscape forged by human desire. The massive tourism development that arrived with rapid economic growth has transformed a sea that once harbored primordial mysteries into a vast commercialized zone. High-rise hotels, resorts, and theme parks sprouting like mushrooms along the coastline obscure the skyline of limestone peaks that have endured for tens of thousands of years, flooding the area with artificial light pollution. Land reclamation projects that fill in the sea to expand territory have altered ocean currents and buried the ecological cradles of mangrove forests and coral reefs beneath concrete.

Moreover, cruise ships and tour boats carrying thousands of visitors daily leave behind oil slicks and waste upon the water. Overtourism has long since exceeded Ha Long Bay's environmental carrying capacity. Additionally, pollutants discharged from nearby coal mining operations and thermal power plants are staining the bay's once-clear air and water a murky gray. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have repeatedly expressed grave concerns about Ha Long Bay's environmental pollution and ecosystem degradation, urging strict control of development pressures.

Ha Long Bay now stands amid a taut standoff between development and conservation. The moment when forests of buildings erected by humans overwhelm the forests of stone sculpted by nature, the emerald paradise we so loved may vanish forever into legend. The muddied waters of Ha Long Bay pose a question: Is the prosperity we pursue worth the irreversible loss it leaves behind?



East Rennell

East Rennell, Solomon Islands, 1998

At the southernmost point of the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, Rennell Island is the world's largest raised coral atoll. Of this island, the southern region comprising one-third of its area—East Rennell—is a natural laboratory that has harbored the secrets of evolution while remaining isolated from the outside world. Inscribed as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in 1998, this place embraces a unique ecosystem where forests, lakes, and sea converge. At the island's heart lies Lake Tegano, a brackish lake formed when seawater became trapped within an ancient coral atoll ring—both a sanctuary for endemic species found nowhere else and the lifeblood of the island's inhabitants. The dense forest serves as a treasury of life where countless bird species and rare plants coexist, a biological legacy humanity is duty-bound to protect.

Yet in 2013, this once-peaceful island suffered the dishonor of being inscribed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. The cause of this crisis was indiscriminate human logging. Commercial logging operations that began in the western forests outside the heritage area severed the forest's ecological connectivity, and the repercussions swept directly into East Rennell, the protected zone. Where massive trees had been felled, red earth lay exposed; when rain fell, sediment washed downstream, staining the once-clear waters of Lake Tegano and nearby seas a deep crimson.

As the forest disappeared, the ecosystem's balance collapsed. Invasive species such as rats and snails, introduced via logging trucks and boats, now threaten the survival of native species. As the shade and moisture regulations the forest once provided weakened, the impacts of climate change became ever more lethal. Soil salinization caused by rising sea levels has devastated the taro and coconut crops villagers cultivated, exacerbated water shortages, and shaken to its very foundations the way of life indigenous peoples maintained for hundreds of years.

The tragedy of East Rennell is the consequence of human greed that views nature solely as a resource. Once destroyed, the primeval forest may take hundreds of years—perhaps an eternity—to restore. Even now, somewhere on the island, the roar of chainsaws echoes and red muddy water flows into the sea. This is not merely the sound of trees falling, but the sound of a fragment of Earth collapsing and the anguished cry of nature at the breaking point of silence.

The Enduring Power of Voices Weathered by Time

Cities are built not only of stone and brick. Even where physical form has vanished, what continues to flow to the very end are the stories and songs passed from mouth to mouth among people. Long before the invention of writing, humanity carried history through rhythm and melody, containing community identity within vessels called myths and legends. This is the most enduring rampart of memory, though invisible.

Heritage transmitted through orality possesses vitality. Unlike artifacts frozen within museum display cases, stories and songs are continually reborn through the breath of performers. The sound of horse hooves galloping across the Mongolian steppes, the mettle of heroes crossing the Kyrgyz mountain ranges, and the melodies of joy and sorrow echoing through Korean marketplaces are not mere artistic acts. They are the wisdom of life transmitted across eras to future generations, and powerful spiritual bonds that unite communities into one.

The reason UNESCO protects Intangible Cultural Heritage is clear. This “living heritage” is the wellspring of cultural diversity and definitive proof of humanity’s creativity. Epic poems, pansori, and traditional drama recover unrecorded histories and safeguard vanishing values, keeping them beside us.

These vast narratives inscribed not in writing but in voice—memories freer for lacking physical form and more tenacious for remaining unwritten—speak to us: The most ancient memories dwell within the warmest of human connection.





01 The Heroic Epic of Jangar

Mongol Tuuli: Jangar, Inscribed 2009/2010

The Mongolian epic Jangar is oral literature transmitted for hundreds of years through the mouths of nomads. It recounts the adventures and struggles of the hero Jangar, who grows up an orphan and, together with twelve warriors, builds and defends the utopian land of Bumba. This epic is not merely an old tale but has long served as a spiritual pillar that strengthens community bonds and preserves Mongolian identity amid the harsh steppe environment. Performers called epic singers recite tens of thousands of verses while playing the traditional instrument tovshuur. This is a living encyclopedia of Mongolian nomadic civilization that records history where written language cannot reach and transmits distinctive philosophies and aesthetics to future generations.

*Jangar is a core work included in Mongol Tuuli (Mongolian epic), which was inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2009. UNESCO's intangible heritage lists are divided into the List in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, for heritage at high risk of disappearance requiring immediate action, and the Representative List, which showcases cultural diversity. Mongol Tuuli was recognized as heritage requiring urgent protection. (Note: Mongolia's traditional throat singing art Khöömei was inscribed on the Representative List in 2010.)

02 Epic of Manas

Epic of Manas, Kyrgyzstan, 2013

Manas is a heroic epic often described as both the soul and encyclopedia of the Kyrgyz nation. Encompassing the grand saga of the legendary hero Manas and his descendants across three generations, it recounts the history of unifying scattered tribes and defending independence against foreign invaders. Its vast scale—exceeding half a million lines—is overwhelming enough to be registered in the Guinness Book of Records, and the Manaschi, who recite it, are revered as possessors of special spiritual power. Manas transcends mere literature; it is a cultural repository encompassing the history, customs, morality, and beliefs of the Kyrgyz people. Performed even today at national events and festivals, it continues to play a pivotal role in affirming national identity and unity.



03 Pansori

Pansori Epic Chant, Republic of Korea, 2003

Pansori is Korea's unique narrative music in which a single vocalist weaves a long story by blending chang (song), aniri (spoken narrative), and neoreumse (gesture and acting) to the drum beats of a drummer called gosu. Originating around the 17th century as a form that depicted the lives and sorrows of commoners with humor, it gradually incorporated the literary tastes of the yangban (aristocratic class), developing into a distinctive art that transcended social boundaries. Transmitted solely through oral tradition and apprenticeship without musical scores, it is characterized by improvisation shaped by live performance and shared breathing with the audience. Pansori is an art that most dramatically embodies human joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure through sound, and an irreplaceable intangible heritage that encapsulates the rhythms of the Korean language and the emotions of the Korean people.



04 Ramlila, the Traditional Performance of the Ramayana

Ramlila, the Traditional Performance of the Ramayana, India, 2008

Ramlila is a traditional performance that dramatizes the ancient Indian epic, the Ramayana, and is performed across India during the Hindu festival of Dussehra. It recounts the story of Prince Rama, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, who defeats the demon king Ravana and restores righteousness. This performance is not merely theater but a religious ritual and communal celebration through which the entire community reaffirms the moral principle that good triumphs over evil. Not only actors but entire local populations participate—building stages and collectively sustaining the narrative—thereby facilitating intergenerational communication and serving a powerful social function that reinforces the shared identity of Hindu culture.

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The Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC)

is an international advisory council representing cities with UNESCO World Heritage.

Founded in 1993, OWHC is headquartered in Quebec, Canada, with five regional secretariats globally.

As of 2025, there are around 120 member cities, and global and regional conferences are held every other year to discuss the sustainable development of world heritage cities. Finding and implementing better ways to conserve and manage World Heritage Sites by sharing vast knowledge and information are the shared hope and goal of the OWHC member cities.

The Organization of World Heritage Cities Asia-Pacific Regional Secretariat (OWHC-AP)

was established in Gyeongju, Korea in 2013 as a branch office to oversee member cities in the Asia-Pacific region.

As of 2025, the Asia-Pacific region has 27 member cities dispersed across 8 countries, encouraging collaboration on the protection of world heritage cities, as well as the significance and importance of world heritage to the public, via a variety of activities such as academic, educational, artistic, and promotional projects.





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OWHC-AP MAGAZINE
DECEMBER | 2025



OWHC-AP

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