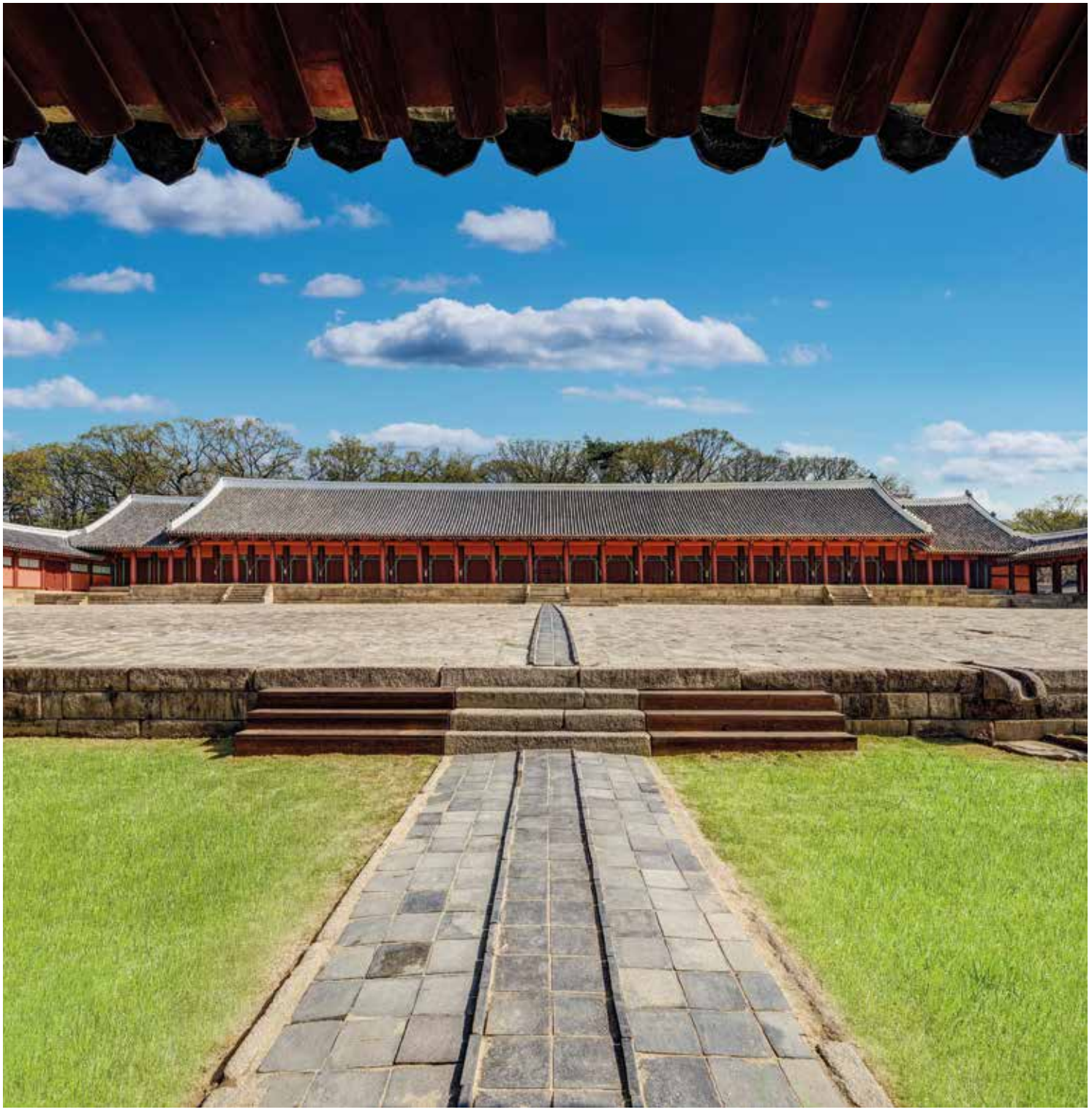
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Foreword

Khaled El-Enany
UNESCO Director-General



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The 48th session of the World Heritage Committee, hosted for the first time by the Republic of Korea in Busan, opens at a time when the international community is facing growing political, technological and environmental challenges.

In this unique context, this session must serve as a privileged forum for dialogue and mutual understanding, guided by our shared responsibility to preserve the world's heritage as a whole. For beyond these precious sites, a common ideal is taking shape: that of a heritage which fosters dialogue, social cohesion and economic development for the benefit of all peoples.

With 17 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, the Republic of Korea abounds with examples where the richness of natural landscapes and cultural expressions reflects the close connection between heritage and society, such as Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats – home to remarkable biodiversity, with 2,150 recorded species of flora and fauna – or, in the heart of Seoul, the Changdeokgung Palace Complex – the result of an architectural tradition rooted in harmony between humans and their environment.

This heritage continues, even today, to fuel the cultural and creative industries of the Republic of Korea. Film and music, particularly K-pop, contribute to the country's international influence while reinterpreting narratives deeply rooted in its history and culture.

Like the Republic of Korea, every country has a heritage to share with the world – a source of pride, hope and opportunity for everyone. To date, the World Heritage Convention has 196 States Parties, and the World Heritage List includes 1,248 properties in 170 States Parties. That is why I remain particularly committed to supporting the 26 States Parties that do not yet have a property inscribed on the List. At this session, the Committee will also review the nomination files submitted by some of these 26 States Parties for potential inscription. In the spirit of inclusion and equity, we must support them with determination and continue our efforts to create a List that is more representative, more balanced and therefore more conducive to our joint work.

At a time when increasing pressures and climate change threaten heritage around the world – particularly in Small Island Developing States – the challenges of preservation necessarily extend beyond national contexts alone and call for global and coordinated responses.

For while each inscribed site tells a unique story, together they form a universal narrative: that of humanity, which recognises in its diversity a shared heritage and a duty towards future generations.

Inscription on the World Heritage List is never an end in itself. It marks the beginning of a lasting commitment to dialogue, mutual understanding and peace.

right
Dosan Seowon, part of Seowon, Korean Neo-Confucian Academies (Republic of Korea)

© World Heritage Integrated Management Center for Korean Seowon





Letter from the Editor

Across the world, heritage reminds us of how societies drew on their history to build the future. As both a legacy of the past and a resource for future generations, it embodies the resilience, creativity and spirit of transmission that enable communities to preserve their identity and adapt to the transformations of their time. This conviction, at the heart of UNESCO's mission, takes on particular resonance on the occasion of the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee, held this year in the Republic of Korea.

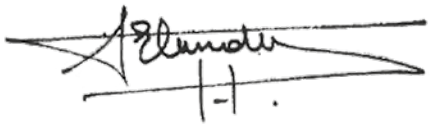
The Korean experience vividly illustrates how heritage can accompany the transformations of a society while preserving the foundations of its identity. Over the decades, the country has succeeded in protecting and promoting its cultural and natural heritage while embracing innovation and international cooperation. Today, the Republic of Korea actively contributes to capacity building, knowledge sharing and the implementation of conservation projects benefiting many States Parties to the World Heritage Convention.

The Korean cultural and natural sites inscribed on the World Heritage List bear witness to the profound connection between memory, identity, ecosystems and sustainable development. From the Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple, to the Seowon, Korean Neo-Confucian Academies, to the Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes of Jeju, they reflect the richness of a heritage shaped by the dialogue between nature, culture and knowledge. Korean traditional architecture, grounded in harmony with the landscape, reveals a particular attention to spaces for sharing, contemplation and encounter.

In this issue, architect Seung H-Sang recalls that architecture is not only about constructing buildings but also about preserving and transmitting the narratives attached to these places. This vision aligns with that of UNESCO, which considers heritage a living legacy connecting past, present and future. These sites also tell a story of cultural and spiritual coexistence in which the commitment of communities remains essential to their proper conservation.

Throughout this issue, you will also discover initiatives promoting greater inclusivity within World Heritage sites, notably by facilitating the experience of persons with disabilities, individuals with visual impairments or neurodivergent people. This growing attention to the universal accessibility of these sites reminds us strongly that World Heritage goes beyond mere protection. It contributes to the transmission of human values and plays an essential role in fostering resilience and cohesion within our societies.

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Lazare Eloundou Assomo
Director of the World Heritage Centre

left
Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats (Republic of Korea)

© World Heritage Promotion Team of Korean Tidal Flats

Message

As the head of the Korea Heritage Service, I am deeply honored to host the first-ever session of the World Heritage Committee to be held in our country. The Republic of Korea gained membership in UNESCO 76 years ago in 1950. The country became embroiled in the Korean War just 11 days after joining the body and had to rely on international aid during its post-war recovery. Once a major beneficiary of international aid, the Republic of Korea recently joined the ranks of donor countries. Having achieved this remarkable leap, the country is now poised to take on a leading role in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of all humanity.



© Korea Heritage Service

Dr. Huh Min
Administrator of Korea Heritage Service

In the lead-up to the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee in Busan, the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention are facing challenges of unparallelled complexity and severity. The current changing climate, accelerating urbanisation and multiple armed conflicts are serious and complicated enough to define our situation as a polycrisis. I look forward to the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee in Busan reaffirming our shared responsibility for safeguarding our World Heritage properties. Together with the other 20 members of the Committee, the Republic of Korea is committed to reinvigorating a spirit of solidarity and collaboration that transcends geographical, cultural and disciplinary divides as we set new directions and principles for the future of the World Heritage Convention.

I would like to suggest that all the participants take some time to enjoy the historic sites of the Republic of Korea, particularly those in the host city of Busan, and appreciate the messages of peace they deliver. A visit to the K-Heritage House at the session's venue is an excellent opportunity to create lasting memories of Busan and Korea, as the space provides a wide range of displays, performances and experiences for learning more about the World Heritage properties in the Republic of Korea and enjoying other elements of Korean culture. It highlights how Busan overcame the devastation of the Korean War and achieved a striking recovery while also relating the stories of peace infused in the historic sites from the period.

I hope that this 48th session of the World Heritage Committee in Busan will offer opportunities to strengthen the common values of humanity while creating an unextinguishable beacon of hope in this period of polycrisis. I believe that our discussions at the upcoming session will lay a foundation for great strides towards this goal. I ask all participants in this session – state delegates, heritage experts and observers – to join in this meaningful step forward.

World Heritage as a bridge between cultures

It is a profound honor to host the World Heritage Committee in the Republic of Korea for the first time since joining the World Heritage Convention in 1988. Busan, as a leading city in advancing discussions on sustainable peace and solidarity, provides a meaningful setting for addressing the challenges of World Heritage.

World Heritage is not merely a vestige of antiquity – it represents priceless and irreplaceable assets of humanity as a whole. It serves as a bridge between cultures, safeguarding the shared memory of humanity and laying the foundation for passing a peaceful world on to future generations.

In 1972, UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention to protect and preserve heritage of Outstanding Universal Value. Over the past half century, it has achieved significant results, with 1,248 properties inscribed across 170 countries.

Nevertheless, the world today faces multiple challenges, including climate change and rapid technological transformations driven by artificial intelligence. This is a critical moment to consolidate our collective insights on how we can uphold the fundamental mission of World Heritage conservation and management, while effectively navigating these emerging crises.



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H.E. Mr Lee Byong Hyun
Chairperson of the 48th session
of the World Heritage Committee

The Committee has long served as a forum for deliberating on various obstacles. I hope this session will mark a starting point for discussions on capacity-building and governance – grounded in a spirit of collaboration and solidarity – to overcome the trials ahead together.

Harmony of culture and nature

World Heritage in the Republic of Korea

right
Buyongjeong Pavilion, Changdeokgung Palace Complex
(Republic of Korea)

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Haeinsa Temple Janggyeong Panjeon, the Depositories for the *Tripitaka Koreana* Woodblocks

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995

The Janggyeong Panjeon depositories at Haeinsa Temple, which is located on Mount Gaya in Hapcheon, house the most complete collection of Buddhist texts: the 'Tripitaka Koreana'. The depositories became a World Heritage property in 1995, while the woodblocks they enshrine were separately inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2007.

The Tripitaka Koreana is a collection of Buddhist scriptures compiled over 16 years from 1236 to 1251, during the Goryeo Dynasty. It consists of 81,352 woodblocks in total, organised into 6,809 volumes and relating 1,514 scriptures. The publication of this extensive collection was a grand public project led by the central government that involved the enthusiastic participation of Buddhist practitioners and laypeople. Each woodblock measures approximately 70 centimetres long by 24 centimetres high and holds 23 lines per side, with every line consisting of 14 Chinese characters.

Multiple artisans participated in the carving, but they all worked in the same Ouyang Xun script, giving the impression that it was done by a single hand. It demonstrates how this project was carried out with a clear division of labour and a strict workflow, from reviewing and selecting Buddhist texts to transcribing them in regular script, editing them, as well as carving them onto woodblocks. Few errors have been reported in the texts on this vast body of woodblocks, reflecting an exceptionally high quality of proofreading work.

The Janggyeong Panjeon depositories are scientifically designed to ensure that the carved wooden blocks are preserved in impeccable condition over the centuries. Research has confirmed that the natural ventilation built into the structures creates optimal temperature and humidity levels for the preservation of the woodblocks. The slatted windows, which pierce the walls, vary in size to facilitate a steady flow of air through the buildings. The woodblocks and the racks holding them are laid out to maximise the internal circulation of air. The floors are finished with layers of lime, charcoal and salt to moderate humidity and control insects.

Haeinsa Temple has been conducting cultural and educational programmes targeting the region's children and teenagers to enhance their understanding of the temple's history and culture. Participants attend lectures on Haeinsa Temple and Buddhist culture, take a tour of the depositories, learn about the science involved and try their hands at woodblock printing.

The temple recently opened the Janggyeong Dogam Carving School to teach traditional carving skills, helping preserve and promote the tradition used in the production of the Tripitaka Koreana woodblocks. So far, approximately 500 people, both Buddhist monks and the general public, have taken classes. This programme has supported the transmission of traditional carving techniques.

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Exterior of Janggyeong Panjeon

right
Palman Daejanggyeong carving workshop

next page
Interior of Janggyeong Panjeon

© HAEINSA







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Jongmyo Shrine

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995

Located in central Seoul, Jongmyo is an exceptional example of royal Confucian ritual architecture in East Asia, both for its unique spatial composition and its excellent state of conservation. First constructed in the late 14th century, it was destroyed during the Japanese invasions in the 16th century, rebuilt in the early 17th century and expanded several times thereafter to take its present form.

Jongmyo Shrine houses the spirit tablets of the kings of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) and their consorts. It symbolised the legitimacy and authority of the royal household, where the Joseon kings and members of their courts regularly performed rites for the royal ancestors. Jongmyo Jerye, the royal ancestral ritual at Jongmyo, was one of the Five Rites of the State (the 'Orye') and was of immense importance to the ruling household.

Jeongjeon, the main building of the Jongmyo complex, is a long, horizontal structure with 19 spirit chambers set side by side. The stone platform extending from the front of the building was used to observe royal ancestral rituals. The intimate integration of a structure that enshrines royal spirit tablets with the space for the performance of associated rituals has few parallels worldwide.

The woods surrounding the Jongmyo compound provide a border with the urban centre, and the compound's architecture has been preserved as it was during the Joseon era. As required for all old wooden buildings, the structures have undergone several rounds of repair. These efforts are based on thorough historical research and are performed exclusively by nationally certified craftspeople using only traditional techniques, methods and materials.

The Jongmyo compound includes ritual buildings and annexes that support ritual performances. The construction of the buildings was carried out under the rigorous supervision of the royal household to create a space that faithfully reflected Confucian principles, including ancestor worship. The royal ancestral ritual and its music – respectively known as Jongmyo Jerye or Daeje ('great ceremony') and Jongmyo Jeryeak – have both been inscribed on the national intangible cultural heritage list and benefit from systematic safeguarding efforts.

Interrupted in the early 20th century, Jongmyo Daeje was resumed in 1969 and has been transmitted to the present day as an annual event held on the first Sunday of May. It maintains a solemn, dignified atmosphere and strictly adheres to Confucian protocols. An occasion encompassing sophisticated rites, music and dance from the Joseon Royal Court, the Jongmyo royal ancestral ritual and its music were proclaimed by UNESCO one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 (now called Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity).

The Korea Heritage Service recently introduced an 11-day Jongmyo Week to coincide with the Jongmyo Daeje event and provide diverse cultural and educational programmes to the public. The Jongmyo Jeryeak Night Performance allows visitors to appreciate the solemnity and magnificence of royal ancestral ritual music after dark. People can try their hands at the musical instruments used in the Jongmyo ritual and learn about the royal ritual table.

left
Colonnaded corridor of the main hall

next page
The royal ancestral ritual

© Ko Hon Chiu Vincent





© Joseon Royal Palaces and Tombs Center

Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995

Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple were built in the mid-8th century on the slopes of Mount Toham to the east of the capital of the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE–935 CE). A leading royal court official named Kim Dae-seong commissioned their construction to express wishes for sustained prosperity for the royal family and the kingdom.

Located near the summit of Mount Toham, Seokguram Grotto overlooks the sea off the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula. This architectural complex, in what is now the city of Gyeongju, is a representative component of the Republic of Korea's religious heritage that showcases the peak of Silla Kingdom's technical and artistic development.

Seokguram Grotto is a rare example of the Buddhist pantheon, integrating architecture and sculpture. This Buddhist sanctuary was constructed by fitting granite blocks without mortar. It is comprised of a main domed rotunda, a rectangular antechamber and a corridor connecting the two spaces. In the centre of the main rotunda is a grand statue of the Buddha in a seated position, surrounded by Buddhist figures exquisitely rendered in bas-relief on the walls. They include bodhisattvas, the Ten Disciples, as well as the two Devas.

Bulguksa Temple is located on the western slopes of Mount Toham. Literally meaning 'the Buddha land', Bulguksa was designed to manifest the Silla people's conception of this realm. Halls housing Amitabha Buddha, Vairocana Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha enclosed within ancient corridor structures are arranged in an orderly manner. A balance is achieved between the two stone pagodas This architectural complex showcases the peak of Silla Kingdom's technical and artistic development. Seokgatap and the creatively dynamic Dabotap. The temple's platform displays a stable combination of dressed and undressed stone blocks. The two sets of stairs leading up to the main hall enshrining Shakyamuni Buddha, known as the Cheongungyo and Baekungyo Bridges, were built using arch construction technology. These features demonstrate the advanced skill of the Silla Kingdom in both masonry and artistic expression.

Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple, Korea's quintessential Buddhist cultural heritage, are utilized as representative images in various forms of promotional materials for Korean cultural heritage. They have also served as venues to promote the excellence and beauty of Korean cultural heritage during national-scale diplomatic events. Notably, official events for both the 2005 Busan APEC Summit and the 2025 Gyeongju APEC Summit unfolded against the historic backdrop of Bulguksa Temple.

The year 2025 marked the 30th anniversary of the inscription of Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple on the World Heritage List. To celebrate this anniversary, the Silla-era staircases of Cheongungyo and Baekungyo were temporarily accessible to visitors during the annual World Heritage Festival. This public event contributed to raising awareness of the significance of the Silla-era monuments and their protection.

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Seokguram Grotto

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Bulguksa Temple

© CHA Yoon-jeong







© CHA Yoon-jeong



Changdeokgung Palace Complex

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997

Changdeokgung Palace, one of the royal palaces of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), is located in the centre of today's Seoul. This World Heritage property has long been considered the most quintessentially Korean of the royal palaces and is celebrated for the masterful integration of its architecture and landscaping with the natural setting.

Changdeokgung was constructed as a secondary palace to the east of the main palace, Gyeongbokgung, in the early 15th century. Since the site was hilly and possessed uneven terrain, geomantic principles were deployed to make the most of the topography. The result was a two-sectioned spatial composition with palace buildings in the relatively flat southern portion of the compound and a grand garden in the hilly northern reaches. It created a striking harmony between architecture and nature, distinguishing it from other royal palaces in East Asia.

After serving the Joseon royal household for approximately 200 years, Changdeokgung was destroyed during the Japanese invasions in the late 16th century. In the early 17th century, it became the first Joseon palace to be reconstructed, functioning as the main palace for more than 250 years. Changdeokgung is equipped with all the architectural and natural elements required of a traditional Korean royal palace, including the facilities needed to observe Confucian rituals. The palace complex includes the gate of sincere edification, where the king and people communicated, a ceremonial area for official audiences with the king, an administrative space for governance, a residential area for the royal family, as well as a garden that provided a recreational space for the king's leisure.

This World Heritage property has long been considered the most quintessentially Korean of the royal palaces.

The architecture of the palace and the indigenous tree cover in the rear garden have been intact since they were formed during the Joseon era. The area's topography and landscape also have changed little. Repairs and restoration have been performed on worn structures by nationally certified specialists, informed by historical research and carried out using only traditional skills and materials.

Many public programmes are conducted at the palace, and the Korea Heritage Service has recently introduced the Summer Escape to the Palace, a special seasonal programme to promote the palace as an enjoyable and friendly space. A building in the administration area that once served as the pharmacy for the royal household has been opened as a shelter for visitors, providing them a place to get respite from the summer heat. They are served a cold drink based on the traditional five-flavour tea ('omija cha'), a beverage once enjoyed by the royal family. Traditional trays, cushions, mats and other furnishings enhance the historical ambiance of the space.

left
Jinjangnye (royal banquet ceremony)

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Injeongjeon Hall

© Korea Heritage Service Royal Palaces and Tombs Center





© Korea Heritage Service

Hwaseong Fortress

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997

Hwaseong Fortress is a fortified city constructed from 1794 to 1796 by order of King Jeongjo. The walls measure 5.4 kilometres long and vary from 4 to 6 metres high, enclosing approximately 130 hectares. As the 22nd monarch of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), he intended the new city to express his filial devotion to his deceased father, Prince Sado, whose tomb had been relocated nearby. The king also expected that the new city would serve as a means to enhance royal authority.

Located in present-day Suwon, Gyeonggi-do Province, this 18th-century military structure incorporates many advanced scientific ideas of the time from both the East and the West. The fortress also embodies an innovative urban form that allowed it to successfully fulfil its military as well as administrative and commercial functions.

Some parts of the fortress sustained damage in the early 1950s during the Korean War, but they were repaired and reconstructed over the following decades. Meticulous efforts were made to apply the same materials, techniques and methods as were used for the original structure. The process was carried out after thorough historical research and was based on the detailed historical document recording the 18th-century construction of the fortress known as 'Hwaseong seongyeok uigwe' (Royal Protocol on the Construction of Hwaseong Fortress), inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2007. As a result, major elements of the fortress – including the walls, four main gates, as well as the key defensive facilities – have regained their structural integrity while keeping their authenticity.

Many flagship local cultural events in Suwon revolve around Hwaseong Fortress, including the Suwon Hwaseong Cultural Festival, the Reenactment of King Jeongjo's Procession to Prince Sado's Tomb in 1795 and the Suwon Hwaseong Media Art Festival. More than 1 million people visit Hwaseong Fortress each year.

Local communities living in and around this World Heritage site are important agents in the conservation and promotion of Hwaseong Fortress. The local Suwon government launched an educational initiative in 2024 known as Resident Craftsmen of Hwaseong Fortress, the first of its kind in the Republic of Korea. This project trains selected citizens in traditional Korean plastering, a time-honoured skill subject to national certification, so that they may conduct minor repairs on Hwaseong Fortress. In April 2026, these 15 trained local residents sat for the national certification examination for Heritage Conservation Craftspeople, with six individuals successfully securing the qualification.

Residents in the Haenggung-dong administrative district, home to the temporary royal palace known as Hwaseong Haenggung within the fortress, formed the Haenggung Village Cooperative Association. Together, they operate a Hwaseong nighttime tour programme, serving as heritage interpreters. Through this active cooperation with the local community, intangible values of the Hwaseong Fortress are being brought to the fore, evolving into a true 'living' World Heritage.

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Northeastern Guard Pavilion

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Reenactment of King Jeongjo's Royal Procession

© SUWON SPECIAL CITY






조 대 왕
청 연 군 주



Gochang, Hwasun and Ganghwa Dolmen Sites

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2000

Dolmens are a form of prehistoric stone tomb that emerged as part of megalithic culture, offering testimony to the organisation of prehistoric societies and how they mobilised labour. The dolmens in Gochang, Hwasun and Ganghwa were inscribed on the World Heritage List for their diversity of types, their great concentration, as well as their superb state of conservation.

The Gochang, Hwasun and Ganghwa Dolmen Sites offer data on the evolution of the dolmen construction tradition in prehistoric East Asia. Diverse types of dolmens can be found at the Gochang site, making it an ideal location to observe the typological transformation of dolmens over time. The Hwasun site retains traces of prehistoric quarries and stone-transportation routes, providing concrete evidence of the construction process of these prehistoric tombs. The Ganghwa site is home to examples from even earlier periods, which are characterised by the placement of dolmens on mountain tops or ridges. The three dolmen sites complement one another, and together they tell a relatively complete story of how the dolmen tradition was born, developed and transformed alongside technological advancements.

Contrary to megalithic sites across the globe that commonly feature a single type of megalithic monument, this World Heritage property clearly demonstrates a continuous trajectory of cultural change over time, as reflected in dolmen construction. The information collected from the three dolmen sites not only illuminates prehistoric burial practices but also the social organisation, labour coordination and social order of the era.

The three dolmen sites tell a relatively complete story of how the dolmen tradition was born.

A wide range of cultural and educational programmes is offered at the three sites, such as pottery making or hunting and farming games. The Gochang Dolmen Site offers a vibrant lineup of exhibitions, educational programmes and events, anchored by the Gochang World Heritage Dolmen Museum – Korea's only museum dedicated exclusively to dolmens. Visitors can also enjoy various attractions, including a sightseeing train offering views of around 500 dolmens, and the Jungnim Prehistoric Village, where they can experience daily life during the Bronze Age.

Local seasonal festivals and community events in Hwasun also feature dolmen themes, allowing residents and tourists alike to explore the prehistoric stone tombs. All of these contribute to strengthening the local sense of belonging and to boosting the economy.

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Dolmens in Dosan-ri in Gochang

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Dolmens between Hyosan-ri and Daesin-ri in Hwasun

© Gochang-gun





Gyeongju Historic Areas

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2000

The Gyeongju Historic Areas comprise five component zones in the heart of the capital of the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE–935 CE), in the present-day Gyeongju. Its many monuments and sites offer exceptional testimony to the Silla culture, a dynasty that endured for approximately 1,000 years.

The Mount Namsan Belt is dotted with numerous Buddhist statues, stone pagodas and temple remains. In this district, a pond was found that legend identifies as the birthplace of Park Hyeokgeose, the founder of Silla. The Wolseong Palace Belt gained its name from the site of a royal palace called Wolseong, or 'Half-Moon Palace'. Other features found in this area include Gyerim Forest, the legendary birthplace of Kim Alji, the progenitor of the royal Kim clan; the site of a princely palace (Donggung) home to Wolji Pond; and Cheomseongdae Observatory, the oldest astronomical platform in East Asia.

The Tumuli Belt houses the grand mounded tombs of Silla kings and other members of royal and noble families. Digs at these tombs have produced an abundance of exquisite artefacts, including six golden crowns, a painting of a winged horse, and gold and glass artworks.

The Hwangnyongsa Temple Belt contains the ruins of Hwangnyongsa Temple, which once housed a nine-story wooden pagoda – the largest of its kind ever built in East Asia. The excavation of the site has yielded a rich array of artefacts, indicating the scale of this Silla-era Buddhist temple and providing material for the study of Silla's culture and history. Also included in this area are Bunhwangsa Temple, which is renowned as the home of the oldest surviving Silla stone pagoda; a temple built in imitation of a brick pagoda; and the remains of Guhwang-dong Wonji, a uniquely contoured pond in a zigzag shape.

The Sanseong Belt features the Myeonghwal Mountain Fortress on Myeonghwal Mountain. These fortress walls, built to protect the capital of Silla, have a circumference of approximately six kilometres. Information on the date of their construction is scarce, but the text of Samguk sagi (Records of the Three Kingdoms) recounts that Japanese troops attacked the fortress walls in 405 CE, suggesting that their construction predates the 5th century.

The Gyeongju Historic Areas are brimming with performances, photo exhibitions, tours and many other public programmes in every corner of the districts. The Namsan Research Institute has published information on tour courses within the Mount Namsan Belt and operates daytime and nighttime field trips in the area. The Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage carries out activities for Wolseong Palace, including an educational course that provides on-site interpretations. The Gyeongju institute also operates exhibition and interpretation programmes for the Jjoksaem District and Sungmundae within the Tumuli Belt. All of these public programmes are made possible by the enthusiastic participation of the local communities and their close cooperation with the Gyeongju city government.

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Cheomseongdae Observatory

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Donggung Palace and Wolji Pond at sunset

© Korea Heritage Service







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Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2007

Jeju Island was created by volcanic activity that began approximately 1.8 million years ago and lasted until thousands of years ago. The island is a geological and biological treasure trove: diverse, distinctive volcanic landforms are found throughout the island, and it is home to 2,000 plant species and 5,000 animal species. These features underpin the environmental significance of the island, which was internationally recognised in 2007 as the first natural site to attain World Heritage status in the Republic of Korea. The area delineated for the inscription totals 18,846 hectares, accounting for about 10 per cent of Jeju's total area.

Major features include Mount Halla, Seongsan Ilchulbong and the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System. Set at both the geographical and symbolic centre of Jeju, Mount Halla hosts distinct ecosystems on its different elevations. The wide range of vegetation growing on the mountain includes a forest of Korean fir trees and allows the mountain to present different colours and views depending on the season. Seongsan Ilchulbong, a volcanic rock formation seemingly rising from the sea, is a tuff cone formed by explosive eruptions of magma as it met seawater. This landform, thought to resemble a fortress, is widely recognised for its aesthetic and geological significance.

In the north-eastern quadrant of Jeju Island, lava erupting from a parasitic cone named Geomunoreum travelled about 14 kilometres and left a network of underground tunnels known today as the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System. Most of the system has been preserved as it was originally formed. The numerous diverse calcite formations found throughout the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System have earned it a reputation as one of the most beautiful lava tube clusters on the planet.

The Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes property exemplifies a cooperative management model balancing heritage conservation, economic development and a sense of ownership among the local community. Representatives of the neighbourhoods around the World Heritage property form the World Natural Heritage Resident Council, serving as a bridge between the local community and the government authorities and ensuring that people's voices are reflected in conservation and promotion policies.

The significance of Jeju Island as a World Heritage property has been integrated into diverse local cultural programmes, such as the Geomunoreum Trekking Tour, the Seongsan Sunrise Festival and the World Heritage Festival. An educational programme trains Jeju residents as heritage interpreters, utilising their local knowledge to facilitate visitors' understanding and contributing to generating income. Local communities are also crucial in taking care of footpaths for visitors, monitoring environmental changes and recording the volume of visitation.

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Seongsan Ilchulbong

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Baengnokdam Crater Lake on Mount Halla

© Ki, Jin-seok





© Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2009

The Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty is a serial property consisting of 40 tombs of the dynasty's rulers spread across 18 different locations in the Republic of Korea. The tombs of Joseon monarchs and their consorts were carefully sited according to 'pungsu' geomantic principles and laid out in an orderly fashion to facilitate the observance of ancestral rites, which continue to be performed today. Distinctive structures and specialised items are hierarchically arranged from the mundane to the sacred areas of a royal tomb compound, forming a harmonious ensemble and offering exceptional testimony to the royal traditions and history of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Alongside the burial area, the royal tombs feature a ceremonial area and an entrance. In addition to the burial mounds, associated buildings include a T-shaped wooden shrine, a shed for steles, a royal kitchen, a guards' house, a red-spiked gate and the tomb keeper's house.

All 18 tomb sites remain mostly as they were during the Joseon Dynasty and have maintained the sacrosanct atmosphere from that time. This is particularly true among the examples located in less urbanised areas. With alterations only to the entrance areas of a few of the royal tombs, this World Heritage property has preserved its authentic form and design to the present.

Conservation efforts have been taking place at the Joseon royal tombs from the moment of their construction to the present, maintaining their original state in terms of not only architectural elements and spatial arrangement but also the natural setting. Today, development is rigorously restricted in the area around each royal tomb as well. No construction proposal within the buffer zone of a royal tomb may proceed unless it conforms to a set of standards – such as height and floor restrictions – to protect the exceptional landscape setting of the tombs. These restrictions are equally applied to all 40 royal tombs across the 18 locations.

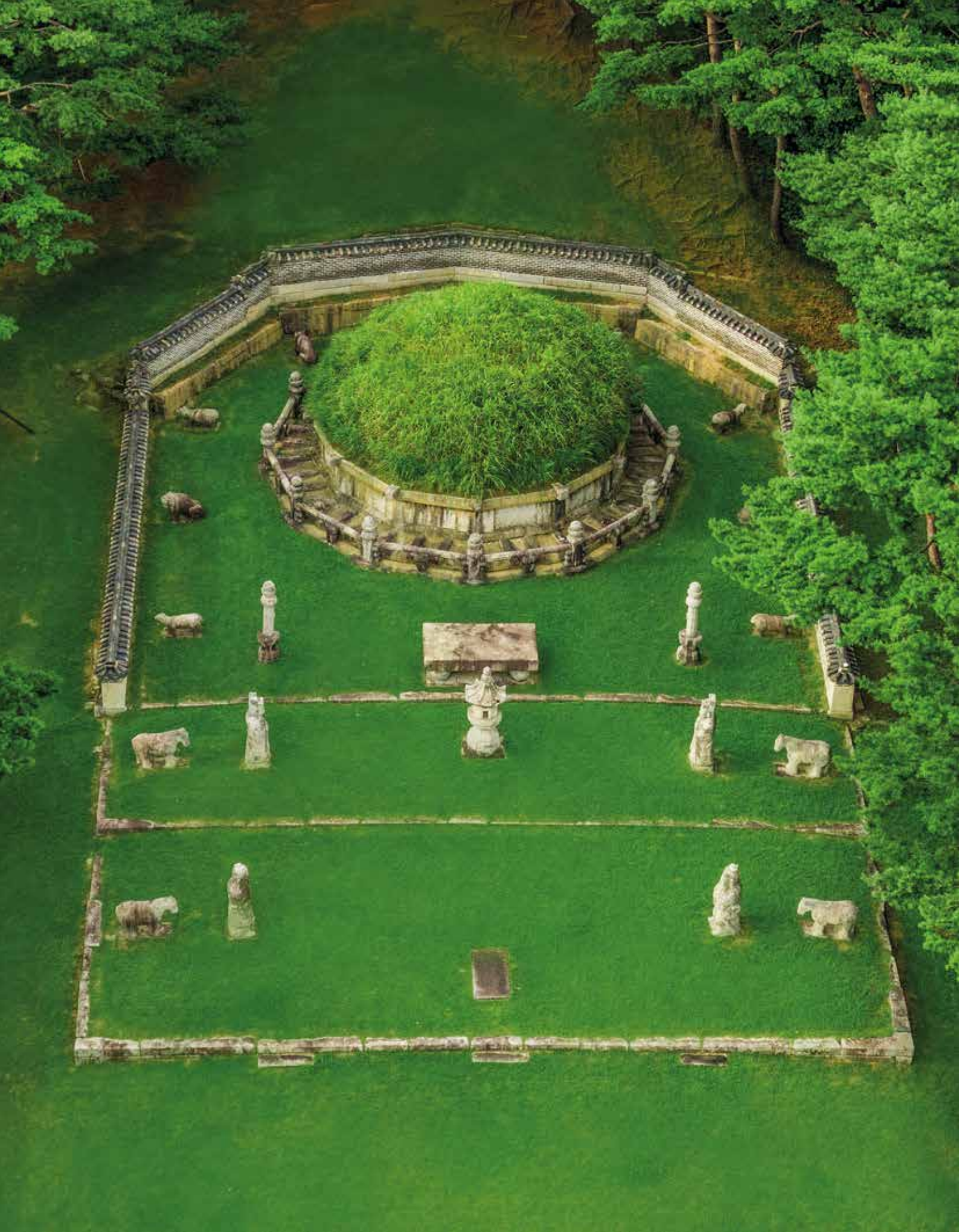
Additionally, the central government cooperates with the relevant local municipalities to regularly share information about the plans and progress of any construction near the royal tombs. Efforts go beyond preserving the materiality of the tombs. Their significance is disseminated nationwide through various public programmes, most notably the World Heritage Joseon Royal Tombs Festival. The opening ceremony of this annual event rotates across the tomb sites, encouraging support from the local governments concerned. The multimedia and fusion performances at the festival, along with field visits, natural exploration, music and lectures, are all being expanded.

A reenactment of a king's visit to the royal tombs, known as the Royal Procession to the Tombs, offers a rare opportunity to see a Joseon-era ceremony come to life, while the Tales by a Royal Tomb Official programme provides a theatrical interpretation including puppetry and quizzes. A nighttime tour is also available, allowing participants a special experience accompanied by an array of enjoyable stories. The recently introduced Exhibition of Royal Tomb Rituals draws on augmented reality technology to propose digital representations of ritual offerings.

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Geonwolleung Tomb and Neungchim (burial mound)

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Myeongneung Tombs of Seooreung

© Korea Heritage Service Royal Palaces and Tombs Center







© Korea Heritage Service Royal Palaces and Tombs Center



Historic Villages of Korea: Hahoe and Yangdong

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010

Located in the south-eastern region of the Republic of Korea, Hahoe and Yangdong Villages are two definitive examples of clan villages from the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), both carefully sited to have mountains behind them and face out onto a river. The local houses were specially designed to withstand the country's hot, humid summers and cold, dry winters, while maintaining a layout tailored to Confucian ideals. Both villages retain the major elements of an aristocratic clan village, including clan-head houses, satellite houses for other clan members, study halls, agricultural areas and distinctive natural settings. These tangible factors are complemented by intangible heritage, such as a range of rituals, games, written works and artefacts dating back to the Joseon era.

Home to the Pungsan Ryu clan for more than 600 years, Hahoe Village in Andong epitomises a traditional Korean settlement focused on striking a balance between humanity and nature. This historic village is known for the meanders of the Nakdong River as it curves around the front of the settlement. Within the village, tiled-roofed houses for aristocrats are laid out harmoniously with the thatched homes of commoners.

The Confucian infrastructure, including pavilions and academies, remains well preserved. It is widely celebrated as a superb showcase of a Joseon-era clan village with carefully maintained clan-head houses and other time-honoured architecture, along with traditional rituals and ceremonies, most notably the local mask dance known as Hahoe Byeolsingut.

Yangdong Village in Gyeongju embraces Mount Seolchang, with houses found along the four main ridges and valleys of the hill. While houses for aristocrats were typically sited on higher elevations, the clan-head houses of Yangdong were not placed directly on the crests of the ridges but below them. The aristocrats' houses here take on a square-shaped layout with a central courtyard characteristic of traditional housing in the south-eastern reaches of the Republic of Korea. Their quarters for the head of the family ('sarangchae'), women's quarters ('anchae') and servants' quarters ('haengrangchae') were arranged to effectively fulfil the expectations of Confucian morality.

This hierarchical but harmonious cluster of tile-roofed and thatched houses is set against mountain ridges, a river and fields, offering an image of the distinctive landscape of a traditional Korean settlement.

These two clan villages are more than just historical architecture: they are living heritage that people call home. Hahoe Village operates a range of cultural and educational programmes, including performances of the mask dance, education on traditional etiquette and opportunities to experience traditional houses. In Yangdong Village, the community celebrates the first full moon of the year: 'Jeongwol Daeboreum'. People from outside the village can take part in events such as tug-of-war games or the traditional bonfire event known as 'daljip taeugi'.

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Thatched houses in Yangdong Village

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Hahoe Byeolsingut Talnori performers

© Yangdong Village





© ANDONG CITY

Namhansanseong

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014

Namhansanseong is a set of fortifications established by expanding and reinforcing an older fortified area in the 17th century. It emerged as a fortified city with ramparts running along mountain ridges that encompassed a temporary royal palace, military facilities and ordinary residences. Built and defended by Buddhist monk-soldiers, Namhansanseong fulfilled important administrative and military functions in Joseon Dynasty.

The city embodies a synthesis of the defensive military engineering concepts of the period and changes in the art of fortification following the introduction from the West of weapons using gunpowder. It is adapted to its mountainous terrain, which facilitated defence against these new types of firearms. Over the course of the Joseon Dynasty, this fortified city became an emergency capital where the king and his court could seek refuge in times of crisis and sustain the governance of the country.

Namhansanseong has been recognised as an outstanding example of a fortified city that attests to the technological advances in defensive facilities that took place in 17th-century East Asia. The Act on the Conservation and Utilization of Cultural Heritage and the Natural Parks Act provide a legal basis for protective measures. The relevant local government cooperates with the Namhansanseong World Heritage Center (Gyeonggi-do) in implementing effective conservation and management projects.

This fortified city from the Joseon era is still brimming with vitality. A vast array of cultural programmes is on offer, allowing people to experience the Namhansanseong fortifications. Through the World Heritage Namhansanseong Utilization Program and the Discover the Mountain Fortress City initiative, people can participate in building a model of the fortress walls, wearing traditional costumes, making traditional handheld fans and interacting with augmented reality and virtual reality installations.

Built and defended by Buddhist monk-soldiers, Namhansanseong fulfilled important administrative and military functions.

The Namhansanseong History and Culture Center operates a regular programme of weekend World Heritage classes, with a view to providing easy access to education on Namhansanseong and World Heritage in general. Traditional cultural events are led by the local communities, including a New Year's Day event, the Yeongwolje celebration for the first full moon of the year and ceremonies at the Sungnyeoljeon and Hyeonjeolsa shrines. The local government has been supporting these community-led events to ensure that the local communities can remain engaged as major stakeholders in the conservation and utilisation of this World Heritage site.

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Haenggung Palace

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Yeonjubong Peak

© Namhansanseong World Heritage Center






© National Museum of Korean Cultural Heritage Center



Baekje Historic Areas

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2015

Baekje Historic Areas consist of eight archaeological sites associated with the later stages of the Baekje Kingdom (18 BCE to 660 CE), one of the three ancient states that occupied the Korean Peninsula. The Baekje Kingdom assimilated advanced technologies and cultural elements from China, reinterpreted them from a local perspective and developed its unique culture, which then spread to Japan and other parts of East Asia. Throughout this process, Baekje served as a hub for cultural exchange across the region.

The eight component sites are distributed across what are now Gongju, Buyeo and Iksan, three areas that accommodated the capital of Baekje at different points during the kingdom's later period (from 475 to 660 CE). In Gongju, the remains include Gongsanseong Fortress and the Tomb of King Muryeong and Royal Tombs. In Buyeo, Archaeological Site in Gwanbuk-ri and Busosanseong Fortress, the Jeongnimsa Temple site, the royal tombs in Neungsan-ri, as well as the Naseong City Wall can be found. Lastly, Iksan is home to the royal palace at Wanggung-ri and the Mireuksa Temple site. These eight sites collectively demonstrate how the capital of Baekje evolved through its later period in terms of its siting, layout, defensive measures and royal funerary practices.

This World Heritage property attests to the cultural interchanges that took place between Korea, China and Japan in ancient times and to the resulting spread of sophisticated building techniques, Buddhism and its associated practices across the region. The property also provides exceptional evidence of the political, religious and artistic traditions of the Baekje Kingdom.

This World Heritage property attests to the cultural interchanges that took place between Korea, China and Japan in ancient times.

The authenticity and integrity of the Baekje Historic Areas are supported by monitoring, historical research, archaeological investigations and conservation measures. In 2016, a community-based conservation model was launched, where community members monitor the property regularly and submit reports. Subsequently, their feedback informs the preparatory process of management policies. Community members also serve as heritage interpreters and participate in the operation of visitor programmes.

Access to the Baekje Historic Areas is being expanded through digital technology. Augmented and virtual reality content helps visitors gain a better understanding of the property, much of which remains buried underground. Online educational programmes also enable people across the globe to enjoy the property. The Baekje Historic Areas combine heritage conservation with efforts to support the local economy and enhance cultural pride, all while maintaining a sustainable management model that ensures the property's transmission to future generations.

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Gongsanseong Fortress

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Jeongnimsa Temple site

© Baekje World Heritage Center





© Baekje World Heritage Center

Sansa, Buddhist Mountain Monasteries in Korea

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018

Literally meaning mountain monasteries, the term 'sansa' speaks to the emphasis that Korean Buddhist temples place on integration into their natural settings. The serial property includes Tongdosa, Buseoksa, Bongjeongsa, Beopjusa, Magoksa, Seonamsa and Daeheungsa Temples, established in the 7th to 9th centuries. Since their construction, all seven temples stand at their original sites and maintain their influence and reputations as spiritual centres of Buddhism.

Buddhist mountain monasteries provide a place for lay practitioners to perform acts of faith, while monks can carry out their monastic routines and go about their lives. They distinguish themselves from other types of temples by their hilly locations and spatial composition. All the inscribed sansa are located on the lower slopes of mountains and employ rivers or other water channels as natural borders, integrating into the surrounding topography.

The seven temples have been rebuilt and repaired over the centuries, giving them the structures they possess today. The period after the Japanese invasions of the late 16th century witnessed an amplification of the definitive spatial features of Buddhist mountain monasteries. First is the centralisation of the 'madang' (open yard) surrounded by a Buddha hall, pavilion and other structures. There is also the trisection of the temple compound into one area for the monastic communities to conduct its religious practices, another where they carry out everyday activities and a third for both the monastic community and lay practitioners to perform acts of faith.

Their time-honoured history is evidenced in their stone and wood structures dating back hundreds of years, today an abundant reservoir of tangible and living heritage. They have been undergoing a continuous process of creative evolution that both safeguards the past and accommodates the present. The monastic residents of each temple perform rites and offer lectures on a regular basis. Ceremonies rooted in the history of Korean Buddhism are carried out in all the temples, while each temple also performs rituals specific to its unique cultural and historical needs. These ceremonies, both communal and individual, are performed by both monks and lay practitioners. The monastic tradition of engaging in a meditation retreat twice a year (summer and winter) remains alive.

The seven inscribed temples have played a critical role in raising awareness of Buddhist history and Korean culture among the public, beyond Buddhist practitioners. The temples offer a diverse range of cultural initiatives for the public, including experience programmes, concerts and light installations. Special attention is paid to disaster preparedness through prevention activities by resident monks in close cooperation with fire services.

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Palsangjeon wooden pagoda of Beopjusa Temple

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Daeungjeon Hall of Seonamsa Temple

© Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism




不離祇園大道場
莫謂慈容難得見



© Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism



Seowon, Korean Neo-Confucian Academies

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2019

Nine private Neo-Confucian educational institutions established during the 16th and 17th centuries – Sosu Seowon, Namgye Seowon, Oksan Seowon, Dosan Seowon, Piram Seowon, Dodong Seowon, Byeongsan Seowon, Museong Seowon and Donam Seowon – comprise this World Heritage property. Distributed across the middle and southern reaches of what is now the Republic of Korea, these academies are recognised for their exceptional testimony to the institutionalisation of Neo-Confucian philosophy and its establishment in the local context of the Joseon era.

Introduced from China, Neo-Confucianism soon took hold in the country and underwent transformations in its social functions and architectural expression. This process gave rise to a distinctive social model that combined pursuits such as learning, self-cultivation and the enhancement of social order.

The nine academies were sited with careful consideration of the surrounding mountains, water channels and other topographical features, and the buildings were designed to be intimately integrated with the surrounding landscape. The property embodies Neo-Confucian principles in its architectural form and layout, with the lecture and ritual areas of the academies hierarchically separated and laid out along an orderly axis. This spatial composition is intended as a visual expression of the emphasis Neo-Confucian philosophy places on self-cultivation and social order.

Seowon were multifunctional institutions that integrated education, ritual commemoration and scholarly exchange. Established and operated autonomously by local Neo-Confucian literati, they served not only as centers of learning but also as spiritual hubs where eminent scholars were venerated and intellectual traditions were transmitted across generations.

Since joining the World Heritage List, the nine Seowon have been maintained under an integrated management system. Diverse entities, including the central government, the relevant provincial and local governments, as well as the managing group for each academy, cooperate to apply their shared conservation principles and actively consider the historical and regional needs of each component. Through this strategy, the academies are being managed as a unified heritage site, with their distinctive features fully intact.

A wide range of visitor programmes is actively offered across all nine Seowon. These include lectures on Neo-Confucianism and its traditions, ritual ceremonies honoring the Confucian scholars enshrined at each Seowon and various participatory activities. Through these programmes, Seowon are being reestablished not merely as places to visit, but as contemporary educational resources and living spaces for cultural practice and engagement. Members of local communities serve as heritage interpreters, maintain the surrounding areas and help host cultural events, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability of the heritage site.

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Entrance to Dosan Seowon

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Museong Seowon

© World Heritage Integrated Management Center for Korean Seowon





©World Heritage Integrated Management Center for Korean Seowon

Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2021

Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats, consisting of Seocheon Getbol, Gochang Getbol, Shinan Getbol and Boseong-Suncheon Getbol, are found along the southern and south-western coasts of the Korean Peninsula, roughly corresponding with the eastern side of the Yellow Sea.

The getbol – meaning tidal flats in Korean – are a treasure trove of biodiversity. The property provides an irreplaceable habitat for 47 endemic species, including the tiger crab (Orithyia sinica), and 22 migratory bird species listed on the Red List of Threatened Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, including the spoon-billed sandpiper with its global population of only 400 to 600. The diverse intertidal ecosystems created within the property – muddy, sandy and rocky habitats – support 2,150 species of flora and fauna, such as 118 waterbirds, 375 benthic diatoms and 857 macrobenthos.

Due to its location at a bottleneck along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway migration route connecting Siberia and Alaska to Australia and New Zealand, these tidal flats offer a much-needed stopover site to many migratory birds. They are also a critical breeding ground along their long journeys.

Scientific conservation is combined with efforts to vitalise local economies, encouraging a sustainable future for these wetlands in five municipalities. Local communities apply traditional practices for the use and management of the tidal flats. In Gochang, a competitive birdwatching event known as the Big Bird Race is held with a view to engaging people in collecting data on birds while raising awareness of the getbol. In Suncheon, the local government is collaborating with residents to remove utility poles and flood rice paddies to turn them into habitats for hooded cranes. There is a similar cooperative initiative in Shinan, where the local government and fishing communities have joined forces to release juvenile long-armed octopuses and restore the health and biodiversity of the tidal flats.

These tidal flats offer a much-needed stopover site to many migratory birds.

Efforts are also being made to train residents in conservation. The Young Leaders Forum provides emerging adults with an opportunity to learn about the tidal flats and discuss how to protect them. Jobs are being created in Seocheon by training local residents as heritage interpreters specialising in tidal flats.

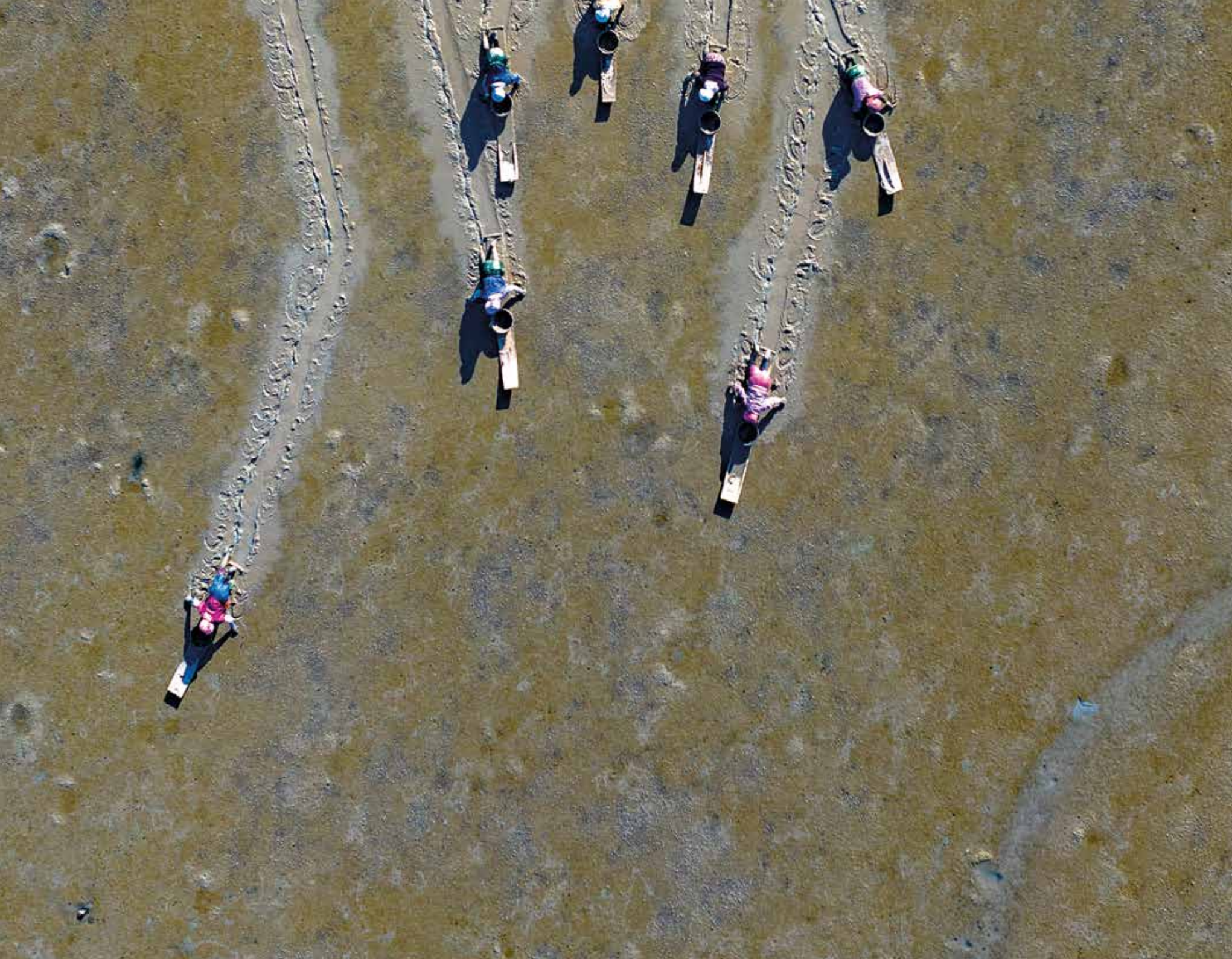
The World Heritage School, an educational programme operated in Gochang, allows children to gain experience in ecology as they learn about the environment. In Boseong, the traditional mudflat sleds known as 'ppeolbae' have become the centrepieces of a popular festival, drawing visitors from outside areas and contributing to the local economy. These initiatives and more show how the getbol support the lives of local communities, making the site an exemplary model for human-nature coexistence.

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Hooded Cranes resting in a seepweed colony

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Ppeolbae fishing of Jangdo Island, Boseong

© World Heritage Promotion Team of Korean Tidal Flats







© World Heritage Promotion Team of Korean Tidal Flats



Gaya Tumuli

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023

The Gaya Tumuli consists of seven tomb sites from the Gaya Polities: Daeseong-dong Tumuli, Marisan Tumuli, Okjeon Tumuli, Jisan-dong Tumuli, Songhak-dong Tumuli, Yugok-ri and Durak-ri Tumuli and Gyo-dong and Songhyeon-dong Tumuli. The geographical distribution, locational characteristics, types of burial and grave goods of these seven cemeteries collectively attest to Gaya's distinctive political system: a cluster of confederated entities that coexisted in the southern portion of the Korean Peninsula from the first to the sixth centuries.

Each of the seven sites has a tomb cluster located on a highly visible hilltop in what used to be the polities' political centre. They developed over an extended time to serve the needs of the ruling elite of their respective Gaya polities. The distinctive types of tombs and grave goods shared across the cemeteries indicate the boundaries of the Gaya Confederacy, while the local variation demonstrates the independence of the member polities.

The prestigious objects and trade goods excavated from these seven cemeteries, which all reflect similar levels of power and authority, illustrate that the member states of the Gaya Confederacy were political equals with high levels of autonomy. The Gaya Tumuli bear exceptional testimony to the unique ancient East Asian civilisation of Gaya as it coexisted with its more centralised neighbours and maintained its distinct confederated political system.

The Gaya Tumuli World Heritage Management Foundation has been implementing a range of cultural and educational programmes for diverse age groups and engaging local communities in their operations. These programmes are designed to bring heritage and people closer and to encourage visitors to expand their understanding of the Gaya Tumuli through various perspectives and interactions. Special focus is placed on children and adolescents, with the aim of instilling in them an awareness of the property's significance. An initiative is underway in cooperation with local artist groups to create content integrating the importance of heritage conservation with fun and exciting experiences.

The geographical distribution, locational characteristic, types of burial and grave goods of these seven cemeteries collectively attest to Gaya's distinctive political system.

These efforts contribute to boosting the public's interest in the Gaya Tumuli and adding to the vitality of the neighbourhoods surrounding the cemeteries. Local communities are playing a leading role in developing tour routes linking the Gaya Tumuli with other local historical resources and providing guides for these programmes.

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Okjeon Tumuli

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Gyo-dong and Songhyeon-dong Tumuli

© Gaya Tumuli World Heritage Management Foundation





© Gaya Tumuli World Heritage Management Foundation

Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2025

Petroglyphs along the Bangucheon Stream span a three-kilometre stretch near the south-eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula. Amid the rugged rock formations along the meandering course of the stream, petroglyphs are found concentrated on two rock surfaces, respectively known as the Petroglyphs of Bangudae Terrace in Daegok-ri and the Petroglyphs of Cheonjeon-ri. Countless generations of local artists executed the rock carvings, from 5,000 BCE to the 9th century CE. The property demonstrates the long-spanning tradition of rock carving – extending from the Neolithic period through the Bronze Age and up to the Silla period – within the distinctive landscape of the Bangucheon area. It succinctly illustrates the different stages of cultural development of the local people over those periods.

Carved with both stone and metal tools, the petroglyphs at the Daegok-ri and Cheonjeon-ri sites demonstrate an extensive repertoire of motifs spanning the prehistoric and historic periods. The property attests to the levels of artistry reached by East Asian coastal inhabitants over approximately 6,000 years, manifested in the superb realism of the images, the acute observation that went into capturing the details of the figures they depicted, as well as the distinctive compositions of the images on the rock panels. The animals, human figures, hunting scenes, concentric circles, diamonds and writing carved into the rock show great realism and dynamism, while displaying a specific composition of figurative images and epigraphs. Their artistic mastery and creativity are particularly visible in the depictions of whales and whale hunting.

The animals, human figures, hunting scenes, diamonds and writing carved into the rock show great realism and dynamism.

The World Heritage inscription of the petroglyphs was only possible after finding a solution to the flooding of some of the petroglyphs at the Daegok-ri site, as some of the carvings were submerged in times of heavy rain due to a downstream dam that provided an important source of drinking water. Potential solutions needed to take into consideration both heritage conservation and fresh water supply for residents. The central and local governments engaged in a long series of discussions and addressed the challenge by installing gates in the spillway of Sayeon Dam. This effective conservation measure based on a concrete government plan provided a stable foundation leading to the World Heritage listing. Local communities and civic groups also played an important role, organising and participating in diverse conservation and promotional programmes.

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Petroglyphs of Bangudae Terrace in Daegok-ri

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Landscape of Petroglyphs of Bangudae Terrace in Daegok-ri

© Ulsan Metropolitan City






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Deep Dive

Cultural landscapes, nature's embrace



By **Gaia Vince**



© Hortobágy National Park Directorate/István Derencsényi



At first glance, the vast blue-green-grey expanse appears like a sea. But we are inland, here, in the desert landscape of western Mexico between the foothills of the Tequila Volcano and the deep valley of the Rio Grande River. On closer inspection, the aqua vista breaks into ribbons, the regularity of which is immediately revealing: humans made this landscape. This is the Agave Region of Jalisco State, and the regular lines are the countless rows of blue agave, a domesticated succulent that has been cultivated here for at least 2,000 years.

Agave is a slow-growing, very large succulent with thick, fleshy, spiked leaves arranged in a structural rosette. After around a decade or more of growth, it produces a gigantic central stalk, blooms once and then begins to decline. There are 200 different varieties, but the blue agave, grown exclusively here, is as much a symbol of Mexico as its famous product, tequila.

The cultural property Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila, with its environment created through human practices passed down through generations and still flourishing today, was inscribed exactly two decades ago on the World Heritage List. It represents a unique site of longstanding collaboration between a people and their natural environment and plays an important role in the collective identity of Mexicans today.

'Mexican culture, as it has been transmitted abroad, is made up of three elements: tequila, the charro (the Mexican cowboy) and mariachi music, which all originate from the same region. A lot of mariachi songs are about tequila,' says Luis Ignacio Gómez Arriola, a site manager of the cultural landscape and an architect, based in Guadalajara, Jalisco. 'Normally, if I go abroad and someone asks me where I'm from, I'll answer "Mexico", and automatically they'll respond "tequila". The image is very strong.'



© Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México

Tequila production is relatively recent, Gómez Arriola explains, an invention of the Spanish conquistadors from the 16th century. However, there is evidence of agave production at this site going back to ancient times. Terracotta statuettes of farmers carrying bundles of agave or harvesting tools have been unearthed in the region. They were carved by Indigenous Mesoamericans as mortuary offerings and date as far back as 300 BCE. One statuette, called the West Mexican Shaft Tomb figure, is shown carrying pulque, a fermented agave drink – the ancestor of tequila – that was drunk by selected members of society.

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Hortobágy National Park - the *Puszta* (Hungary)

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Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila (Mexico)

above
Luis Ignacio Gómez Arriola

© Ko Hon Chiu Vincent

Before the Spanish arrived, agave was grown for its heart. Once the leaves are sliced off, the part remaining, called the piña for its resemblance to a pineapple, contains a large amount of starch. These cultivated piñas were lightly steamed for 26 hours to convert the starch into sugars.

'It makes a very sweet food with lots of calories,' Gómez Arriola states. 'You can take the sweet juice from cooked and fermented agave, and it has a small amount of alcohol – around 6%. This is called "mosto".'

The site contains archaeological reminders of the Teuchitlan cultures that shaped the Tequila area from 200 to 900 CE, using agave as food, fermented juices and fibres for cloth.

The Spanish, accustomed to European grape culture and wines, added their knowledge of distillation to produce a new drink. 'The Spanish arrived with the Arab technique of distillation using stills. They knew that by distilling something with a low alcohol content, they could increase the alcohol level. In Europe, there were spirits, such as brandy and cognac,' Gómez Arriola explains.

'The first distillation of the mosto brings the alcohol to 26%, and then a second distillation takes it to 50% to make tequila,' he adds.

Growing traditions

The small pre-Hispanic plantations soon swelled as production stepped up, and the site contains centuries-old workers' houses, as well as an old press. Donkeys were used to pull the heavy stones to compress the steamed piñas and extract their juice.

> 'The agave cultivation practices are the same as in the pre-Hispanic period. They have not changed for 2,000 years.'

Preserving a living, working cultural landscape like this means maintaining the important continuity that exists – the cultural integrity – through time. 'The agave cultivation practices are the same as in the pre-Hispanic period. They have not changed for 2,000 years, and that is one of its great cultural values,' Gómez Arriola says.

'The only thing that has changed is the volume. Today there are millions and millions of plants, whereas in the pre-Hispanic period there were only small plantations. And a hundred years ago there were seven varieties of agave used to produce tequila, but now, because of the tequila denomination of origin and tequila regulations, the only plant used is blue agave.'

There are inherent risks with monocultures, including the susceptibility to disease, and research is ongoing to address this. 'The blue agave is planted and harvested by human hands – it is not mechanised. That is its added value, and that aspect is very important,' Gómez Arriola notes.

The labour involved and the commercial and prestige value of the tequila produced means that local people can generate an income. The region has bucked the trend of many agricultural areas which have seen significant emigration to the cities because farming is no longer profitable. This is an important part of managing the site in a sustainable way and ensuring it has a future with communities at its heart.

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Žatec and the Landscape of Saaz Hops (Czechia)

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'It is important that communities remain involved and that the activity provides a sustainable way of life, so that the chain is not broken – that one generation helps the next generation continue producing. This year, we are celebrating 20 years as a World Heritage site. The beneficiaries should be the community and the residents.'

Beyond monumental heritage

Like the impressive living vistas of the Agave Region, cultural landscapes are defined as places that represent the combined works of nature and people, testifying to the evolution of human society and settlement in a particular environment. These places often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land use by communities, who frequently maintain a spiritual relationship to nature.

In the early 1990s, a major change in the interpretation of the World Heritage Convention was taking place, increasingly recognising the non-monumental character of the heritage of cultural landscapes – thereby further opening the door to cultures in regions beyond Europe. The first such property to be inscribed on the World Heritage List under the revised criteria describing cultural landscapes was the spectacular Tongariro National Park in 1993. Here, on New Zealand's North Island, natural and cultural values intertwine; the mountains at the heart of the park carry spiritual significance for the Maori people. To date, there are 134 cultural landscapes inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Protecting cultural landscapes helps keep alive local methods of sustainable land use and support biological and cultural diversity across the world. Every two years, the UNESCO-Greece Melina Mercouri International Prize for the Safeguarding and Management of Cultural Landscapes, named for the former Minister of Culture of Greece, honours exemplary efforts to safeguard and enhance living cultural landscapes. Last year's laureate was 'Wazee wa Mazingira', the Council of Elders, commended for their leadership in safeguarding the Mount Kulal Biosphere Reserve in northern Kenya.

Cultural landscapes represent the combined works of nature and people, testifying to the evolution of human society and settlement.

Mount Kulal – meaning 'temporary resting place' – is a sacred landscape for the Samburu, Turkana, Rendille, Gabra and El Molo communities. Forests, gorges and water sources intertwine with traditions, rituals and ancestral knowledge, guiding each generation in the stewardship of the massif. The Elders blend traditional practices with contemporary

previous page
Tongariro National Park (New Zealand)

left
Viñales Valley (Cuba), one of the first laureats of the UNESCO-Greece Melina Mercouri International Prize for the Safeguarding and Management of Cultural Landscapes

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'We allow local communities to continue to farm right inside the core and buffer zones, as we understand it's a living heritage.'

conservation approaches, overseeing forest patrols, resource use, restoration programmes and invasive species management. By upholding deep cultural and spiritual connections with the environment, Wazee wa Mazingira ensure the transmission of ancestral knowledge and sustainable resource management across generations, linking past, present and future custodians of Mount Kulal.

Ancient innovators

Across the Pacific Ocean, in Papua New Guinea, we find the extraordinary Kuk Early Agricultural Site. Located in the Upper Wahgi Valley of the Western Highlands Province, the site joined the World Heritage List in 2008.

Archaeological surveys of a nondescript swampy farmland, where local people grow sweet potatoes, taros and bananas, revealed something incredible: evidence of the independent invention of agriculture in Oceania, including significant landscape engineering, the genesis of which dates back more than 7,000 years. It means Kuk is among the oldest agricultural sites in the world.

Kuk shows the technological leap made when humans went from using foraged plants to deliberately planting and harvesting them. Here, agricultural practices evolved over time from the creation of mounds on wetland margins to the drainage of the wetlands through the digging of ditches with wooden tools from 4000 BCE onwards. The drainage essentially converted the natural swamp into an artificial grassland suitable for growing crops.

'The agricultural developments at Kuk also contributed to the spread, settlement and growth of present-day cultures and societies across Oceania. So, Kuk has immense educational, historical, scientific and social value for past, present and future generations of Papua New Guinea,' says Jim Onga, manager for the country's World Heritage sites.

'The communities in the area feel strong pride in the UNESCO World Heritage listing. It proves our ancestors were innovators – that agriculture started here independently. It was not imported.'

Farmers today, the Melpa-speaking Kawelka people of the area who are the traditional custodians of the land, still grow the same food crops as did their ancestors on land bordering the archaeological reserve.

'We allow local communities to continue to farm right inside the core and buffer zones, as we understand it's a living heritage,' Onga explains. 'Kuk remains part of living agricultural practice – the same valley that supported early farmers and now supports modern highlands farmers. It's a landscape where ancient and current agriculture overlap.'

Through an Incorporated Land Group, the Kawelka manage the Kuk swamp site, balancing the preservation of its archaeology with local economic development. There are significant challenges in managing the site, including climate change, which threatens to wash away or dry out the archaeological remains; blocked drainage systems that risk flooding; and a lack of expertise to help with these issues and inform the local communities about the site in general.

'We lack education materials, like information pamphlets and posters, in both English and our language for people to read and to fully understand

right
Cultural Landscape of Maymand
(Islamic Republic of Iran)

next page
Kuk Early Agricultural Site (Papua New Guinea)

© Maymand Cultural Heritage Base







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the importance and significance of the site. We also do not have a website for Kuk, and this all comes down to funding,' Onga states.

The World Heritage listing of the Kuk site is important recognition of the value and importance of the culture of Papua New Guinea – a nation with rich, ancient and diverse culture, hosting over 800 languages.

'Kuk's inscription as a cultural landscape helped expand the idea that heritage can be living landscapes shaped by people and nature over time. It recognised farming, water management and community practice as heritage, not just stone buildings. This opened the door for other agricultural, spiritual and mixed sites worldwide,' Onga notes.



© Jim Onga

Earth architects

Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba, was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape in 2004. Located in a territory that spans north-eastern Togo and north-western Benin, the site is inhabited by the Batammariba people, a society of crop-farming livestock herders. Their name, Batammariba, translates to 'architects of the earth'. Over the past nearly two millennia, they have forged a unique landscape that infuses the natural environment with a spiritual and cultural interpretation, blending the human-made world of agriculture and terraced hills. Part of this extraordinary landscape is the famous mud-built tower dwellings.

This is very much a living landscape whose remarkable mud tower-buildings, known as 'sikien' ('takienta' in the singular), are still occupied and have become a symbol of Togo and Benin. The Togolese sikien, many of which are two stories, date back to the 16th century, while the original Batammariba settlements on the Benin side date back to the 6th century, constructed prior to the people's migration to what is current-day Togo. The distinctive fortress-like homes were first developed by the Batammariba as a way to defend themselves against slave raids and to allow them to live in spiritual harmony with nature.

'This is a community that is very close to nature, that respects nature. People perform their initiation rites and ceremonies in the groves and forests. There are sacred trees as part of the traditional animist religion of the ancestors. You will see, for

above
Jim Onga (to the right) during a site visit

left
The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area (Saudi Arabia)

© Thomas Creissen

example, on their altars, the skulls of animals hunted as well as agricultural products, such as grains and tubers,' states Adama Ayikoue, who manages the site and is Director of Cultural Heritage at the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts in Lomé, Togo.

In 2023, UNESCO approved a boundary extension to the World Heritage property to include Benin. Since then, Togo and Benin have begun a process to jointly manage the site, with an oversight body supervised by the cultural heritage departments of the respective countries.

Several thousand sikien have been identified across Koutammakou, including 1,716 still inhabited in Togo and 1,400 in Benin. Maintaining them with local materials helps keep the ancient building traditions, rituals, skills and knowledge alive. The Batammariba way of life is intrinsically sustainable. 'Everything they use to construct, maintain and decorate their homes comes directly from nature,' Ayikoue says.

'The beams around which they build their mud-brick structures are made from specific types of durable wood that are resistant to termites and such. So very early on, they began cultivating these types of wood, which would allow them to sustain their construction methods,' he explains.

Throughout the centuries, these homes, fortresses and spiritual centres in Koutammakou have been repaired, maintained and renewed by their occupants. Traditional building methods mean that when a structure deteriorates, its old earthen core is broken down and incorporated into a newly rebuilt takienta (literally, she who guards). As both a temple and a fortified refuge, a takienta protected its inhabitants from enemy attacks, which they repelled with arrows fired through slits cut into the walls. It served to maintain links with the dead buried in the cemetery and the powers of the earth through invisible underground networks. The ancestral

right
Adama Ayikoue in Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba (Togo)

below
Takienta on top of a hill at Nata, part of Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba (Benin)



© Sébastien Moriset

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lineage of the structures dates back centuries, even if individual walls are frequently rebuilt.

'The Batammariba also did everything they could to ensure they had enough straw, because it was used for thatching the buildings. Similarly, they used the husks of the néré tree, which produces an oilseed.' In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to find enough wood and straw for new houses close to the villages, which is something Ayikoue's team hopes to address.

Living in harmony

The larger fortresses are also lived in and dynamic. 'The fortress structure protects the people living in them from wild animals. They have their kitchens inside, and there are also places where they can keep livestock, because they raise poultry and goats. They even have oxen and cows that they keep inside,' he says.

The architecture itself is functionally symbolic. For instance, the entrance has three horns attached to it. 'When the owner dies, one horn is broken off. So, when you walk past a house, you can tell if a widow lives there, because instead of three horns, you'll see that one has been broken off, leaving only two,' Ayikoue explains.

Since the World Heritage inscription, the number of visitors attracted to this unique landscape has increased. 'The local people are used to seeing tourists. Most people on the site are happy to open up their private lives. I know half a dozen families who have converted their sikien into guesthouses and homestays. And every time, visitors are happy to sleep under the stars, to experience life in a takienta. There is synergy between the Koutammakou conservation and promotion service, the guides – who are locals – and the visitors,' Ayikoue notes.

At the same time, it is vital to respect the wishes of the communities. 'There are people who don't want to be put on display. We mustn't lose sight of those who value their privacy, who don't want visitors.'

'I never stop learning here. They've managed to harness nature while respecting it.'

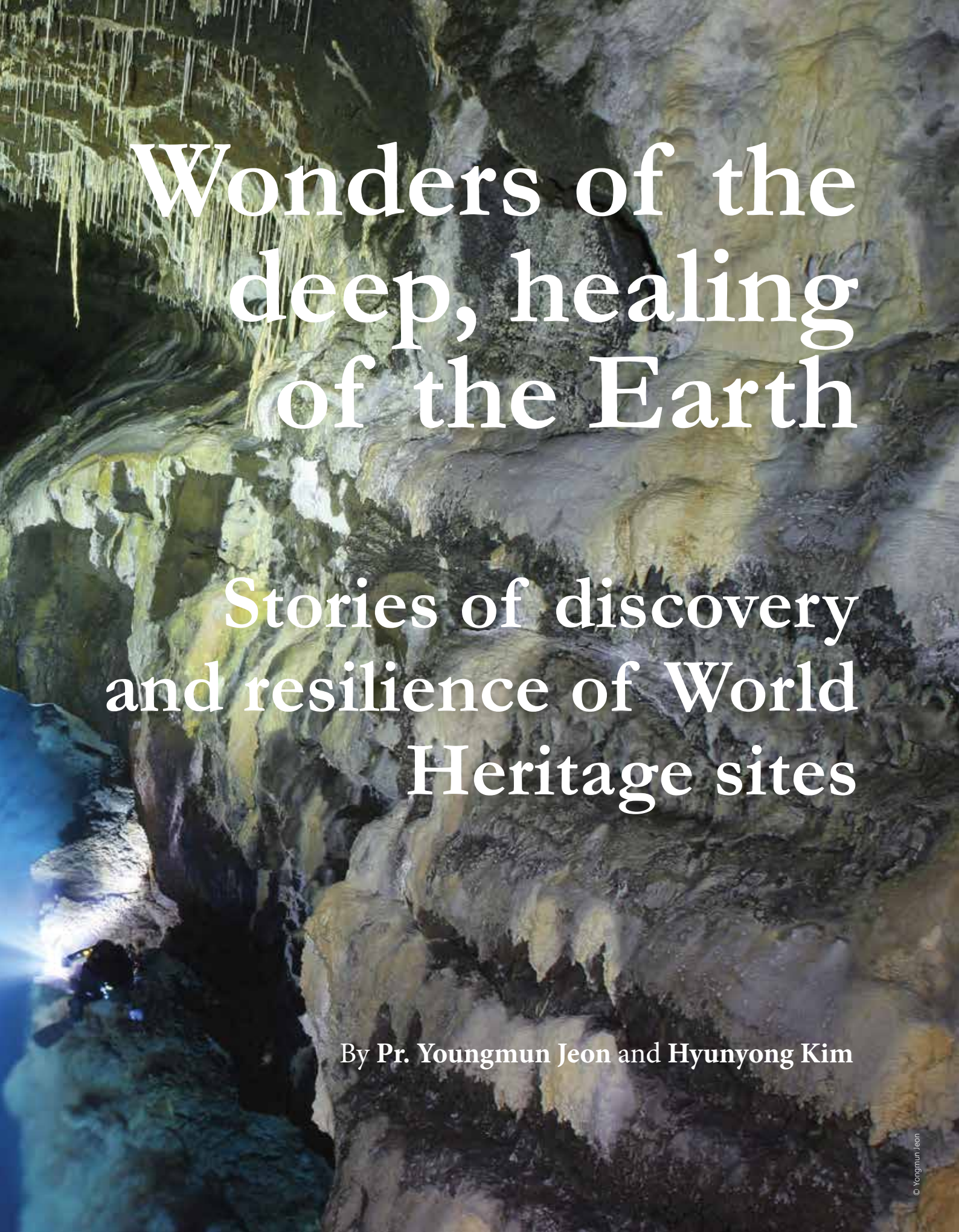
Like the agave landscape in Mexico and the Kuk site in Papua New Guinea, Koutammakou is an extraordinary place where a society has managed to find a way of living in harmony with nature. Cultural landscapes offer valuable lessons for all of us, especially today.

As Ayikoue puts it: 'I never stop learning here. They've managed to harness nature while respecting it.'

left
Aasivissuit – Nipisat. Inuit Hunting Ground between Ice and Sea (Denmark)

© Johannes Müller





Wonders of the deep, healing of the Earth

Stories of discovery and resilience of World Heritage sites

By **Pr. Youngmun Jeon** and **Hyunyong Kim**

© Youngmun Jeon

The Republic of Korea is home to 17 World Heritage sites, representing places of exceptional significance to the country and the world. Among these properties, which preserve memories and stories of the past, two sites illustrate the richness of Korean heritage, spanning nature and culture, geologic and historical eras, as well as underground and surface worlds: the remarkable geological discoveries in Yongcheon Cave (a lava tube within the Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes property inscribed in 2007) and the Mireuksa Temple site (a component of the Baekje Historic Areas property inscribed in 2015) undergoing enduring efforts to repair the damage of time.

Two sites illustrate the richness of Korean heritage, spanning nature and culture, geologic and historical eras, as well as underground and surface worlds.

Underground marvels of Yongcheon Cave

The story of Yongcheon Cave starts about 8,000 years ago, when eruptions in the north-eastern quadrant of Jeju Island created a 456-metre-high volcano that is today called Geomunoreum. As the explosive volcanic activity subsided, large amounts of basaltic lava gushed down the slope of the land, travelling approximately 14 kilometres towards the coast of Jeju Island. Vast empty spaces were carved out as the molten lava flowed, producing a network of underground tunnels, known as the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System.

In addition to Yongcheon Cave, the system encompasses many of the other most famous caves on Jeju Island, such as Sujik Cave, Bengdwi Cave and Utsanjeon Cave. At the downhill end of this 14-kilometre subterranean labyrinth, Yongcheon Cave long remained undiscovered, in darkness.

Discovery by chance

In May 2005, an ordinary utility pole construction site led to an incredible find: digging carried out for the installation of the poles unveiled a lava tube of astounding scale. Digital scanning has measured the main tube of Yongcheon Cave as 2,431 metres long, with its ceiling

previous page
Entrance of Yongcheon Cave lava tube

right
Ceiling speleothems (straw stalactites) in Yongcheon Cave lava tube

© Yongmun Jeon




Castrol

reaching up to 20 metres high. With 170 metres of branch tubes and 800 metres of lake at the end, Yongcheon Cave reaches 3,401 metres. The cave's elevation ranges from 52.2 metres above sea level at its most upstream point to below sea level in the lake area. This extensive cave curves like a snake winding towards the north-eastern coast of Jeju Island.

Calcium carbonate in the marine sand on the island's surface dissolved in rainwater and seeped into the ground, creating secondary deposits in the lava tube. Magnificent speleothems, including straw stalactites, cave pearls and flowstones, are illuminated against the black backdrop of basaltic lava. Some were formed along the roots of plants with geological and aesthetic significance.

Shaped by ancient floods

When Yongcheon Cave was discovered, the first 170 metres of the lake were explored by boat. It was underwater investigations by divers that eventually found the lake to be 800 metres long. The rise in sea level at the end of the last Ice Age appears to have caused the cave to flood and formed the lake at the end of the lava tube. This explains why underwater walls in the cave preserve similar features to terrestrial caves, such as lava shelves and ropy surfaces.

The lake has a dramatic two-level structure. The beginning is shallow, where the floor of a hollow cave is covered with water. Further into the tunnel, the lake deepens, and its width reaches up to 20 metres.

Owing to the cave's location between land and ocean, a careful look at the water in the lake reveals a clear divide between the upper and bottom layers. Fed by rain and groundwater, the upper layer of the water is rich in oxygen and low in salinity. In contrast, the bottom layer has a low level of oxygen yet is of high salinity, sourced from the sea. The water level in the lake fluctuates with the tides and sometimes experiences a sudden hike in temperature with the influx of warm water during heavy summer rains.



© Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

above
Underwater view of the lake

left
Survey of the lake section

next page
General view of the entrance of Yongcheon Cave lava tube

© Jeju Special Self-Governing Province


© UNESCO



Life in the dark

The pitch-black lake seemed inhospitable to any form of life, but an underwater exploration in 2010 discovered a small, transparent fish. Confined to a lightless underground lake for thousands of years, the fish has taken a completely different evolutionary path than other goby species; it has a transparent body devoid of pigmentation, only vestigial eyes and an enlarged head that helps it maximise its other senses. DNA analysis has confirmed that this lake fish is genetically distinct from its closest relative – the well earthworm goby (Luciogobius pallidus) – by 8.9 per cent.

Various man-made objects have also been discovered around the lake, shedding light on the culture of the people who lived on Jeju Island in the 8th century. Among artefacts found in the water are pottery, metal items and a bundle of 10-metre-long wooden poles deployed as a bridge across the lake. The most notable discovery is an integral skeleton of a one-year-old wild boar lacking any signs of butchery, suggesting that people performed rites in the lava tube, offering a wild boar as a sacrifice. Their opening into Yongcheon Cave was eventually covered with deposits of sand, and the cave remained lost to history until it was rediscovered in 2005.

With ongoing efforts to scientifically conserve the cave system, this underground gallery will continue to reveal stories of wonders dating back thousands of years and the vitality of our planet.

below
Goby fish found in the lake

right
Ancient artifacts (pottery) discovered in the lake



© Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

© Jeju Special Self-Governing Province





Today, it is both the largest and oldest remaining stone pagoda in the country.

Stone pagoda at the Mireuksa Temple site

With more than 500 stone pagodas registered on its national and local heritage lists, the Republic of Korea is a land of pagodas. Most of these structures date to somewhere between the 7th and 14th centuries, corresponding to the last decades of the Three Kingdoms period, as well as the Unified Silla era and the Goryeo Dynasty era.

Over the centuries, these stone pagodas have been subject to significant weathering and deterioration. In the early 20th century, research primarily focused on the artefacts housed within the pagodas, particularly from archaeological and art history perspectives. By the 1990s, attention shifted towards systematic documentation and application of scientific conservation methods. Entering the 21st century, rapid advancements in the repair and preservation of stone heritage and buildings emerged, exemplified by the restoration of the stone pagoda at Mireuksa Temple site.

The temple was constructed in the 7th century during the reign of King Mu, the 30th monarch of the Baekje Kingdom. It has a distinctive layout characterised by three Buddha halls arranged from east to west. A pagoda was set in front of each of these halls; the east and west pagodas were constructed in stone, while the middle one was made of wood.

Following the destruction of the wooden buildings and pagoda of the Baekje temple complex around the 16th century, only the western stone pagoda survived in a half-toppled state, along with some stone foundations for buildings. Today, it is both the largest and oldest remaining stone pagoda in the country. It is an early example of stone pagodas built in imitation of the composition and construction of wooden pagodas, providing an important source of information for the study of ancient Korean architecture.

The Mireuksa Temple site was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2015 as part of the Baekje Historic Areas property, serving as a unique testimony to the Buddhist culture of the kingdom.

Dismantling the pagoda

Detailed Structural Safety Assessment conducted in 1998 determined that the western pagoda was structurally unstable, with the reinforced concrete applied in 1915 showing clear signs of deterioration. Consequently, the Cultural Heritage Committee – an advisory body to what is now the Korea Heritage Service – recommended dismantling the stone pagoda for repair.

Historical and archaeological records on the stone pagoda prior to the concrete reinforcement were

left
Panoramic view of Mireuksa Temple site

© National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

limited. The committee therefore decided to base the scope and methodology of the repair on findings obtained through research and surveys conducted during the dismantling process, which began in 2001.

In the following years, a heated debate emerged among academics and civil society organisations over the extent to which the western pagoda should be restored. Opinions were sharply divided between those advocating for its restoration to the presumed original nine-story form and those favouring the preservation of the existing six-story structure.

Dismantling of the pagoda and archaeological investigations at the site continued until 2010. The findings revealed several constraints on the proposal to restore the structure to nine stories. No documentary or physical evidence was found to suggest that the pagoda had ever extended seven or more stories, and proceeding without such evidence was considered a risk to the site's authenticity.

Additionally, the surviving stone elements had significantly deteriorated: weathering and other factors had reduced their structural capacity to an estimated 50 per cent of the capacity of the new stone. It was anticipated that restoring the nine-story pagoda would inevitably require the replacement of many original stone elements in order to withstand the increased load.

A heated debate emerged among academics and civil society organisations over the extent to which the western pagoda should be restored.

Restoration principles

After several rounds of consultation and the collection of expert opinions, a document outlining guiding principles was prepared in 2011. They were aligned with international conservation standards, often encapsulated in the tenet that 'restoration must stop where conjecture begins'. The four principles established for the repair of the western pagoda clearly stipulated that it be repaired to six stories, thereby preserving its authenticity by avoiding speculation and minimising the risk of historical distortion.

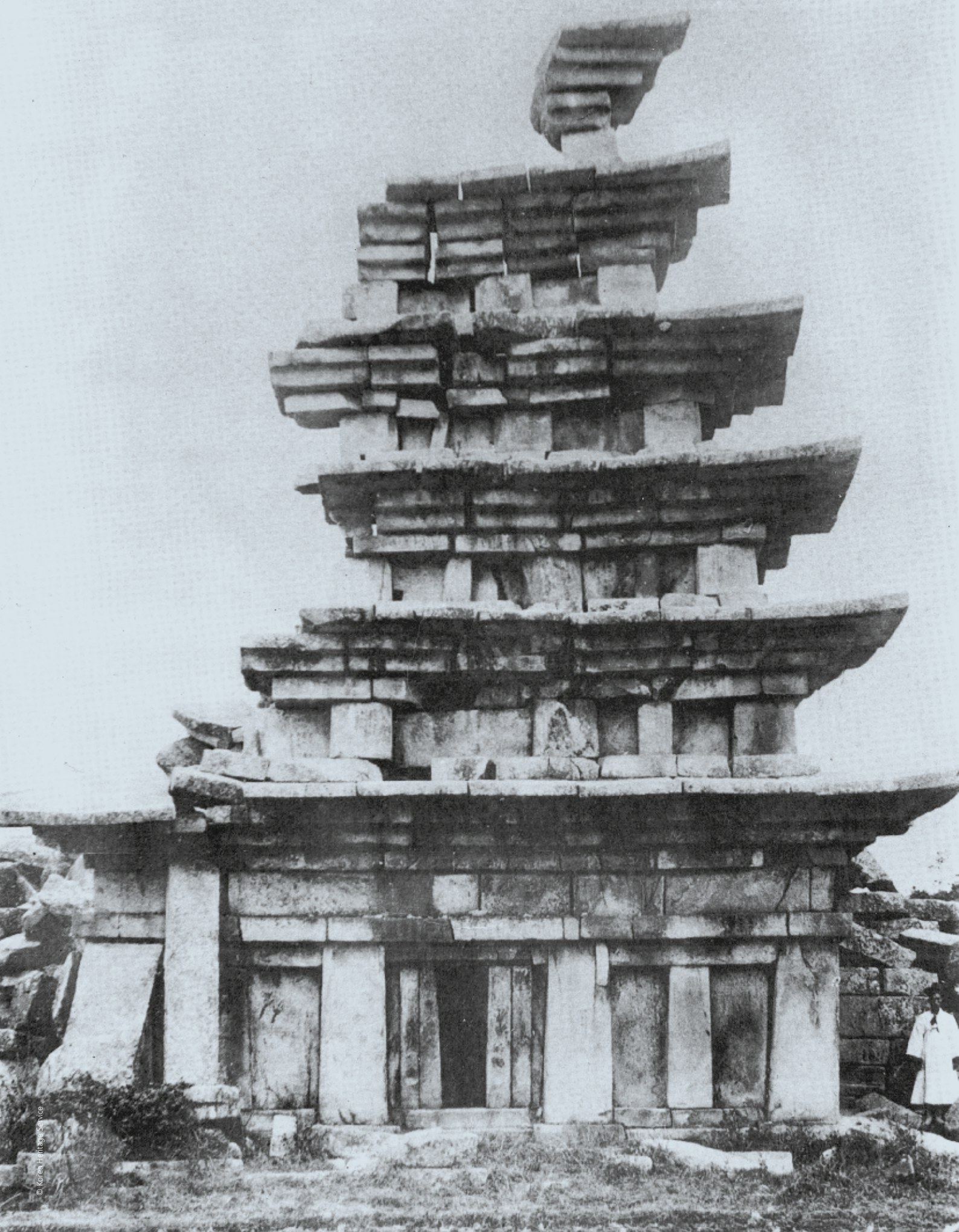
Interdisciplinary research was also conducted throughout the repair process, encompassing architecture, conservation science, archaeology and art history. During the dismantlement in 2009, reliquaries were discovered within an opening in the central pillar stone of the first story, regarded as one of the most remarkable archaeological discoveries in the Baekje area. Among the retrieved artefacts was a gold plate with records engraved on both sides. The inscriptions confirm that the Mireuksa Temple was established with the patronage of a Baekje queen and that the reliquaries were enshrined in the year 639. Reassembly of the pagoda began in 2013 and was completed by the end of 2017. Following the removal of the temporary protective shelter erected for the repair, the repaired western pagoda at Mireuksa Temple site was opened to the public in 2019.

right
Reassembling the stone blocks for the first story of the pagoda

next page
East side of the stone pagoda at the Mireuksa Temple in 1910 and after repair in 2020

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10Ton
(주)송도건설



© Korea Heritage Service


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Global expertise

The repair of the western pagoda at the Mireuksa Temple site remains the country's longest-running stone architecture conservation project, representing a two-decade effort to safeguard cultural heritage. Throughout the process, materials and techniques characteristic of the Baekje era were employed to the greatest extent possible, with modern materials introduced only where strictly necessary.

The practical and technical lessons derived from this project led to substantial improvements in both the capacity for and the quality of stone heritage conservation. This accumulated expertise has since been applied to Korea's official development assistance initiatives for World Heritage properties in Asia, including Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape (Lao People's Democratic Republic), as well as Angkor (Cambodia).

The restoration of the stone pagoda reflects the Republic of Korea's commitment to the international conservation principles advanced by UNESCO. Having withstood centuries of human interventions and natural deterioration, the western pagoda offers valuable insight into the careful balance required to safeguard the historical significance of cultural heritage for future generations.

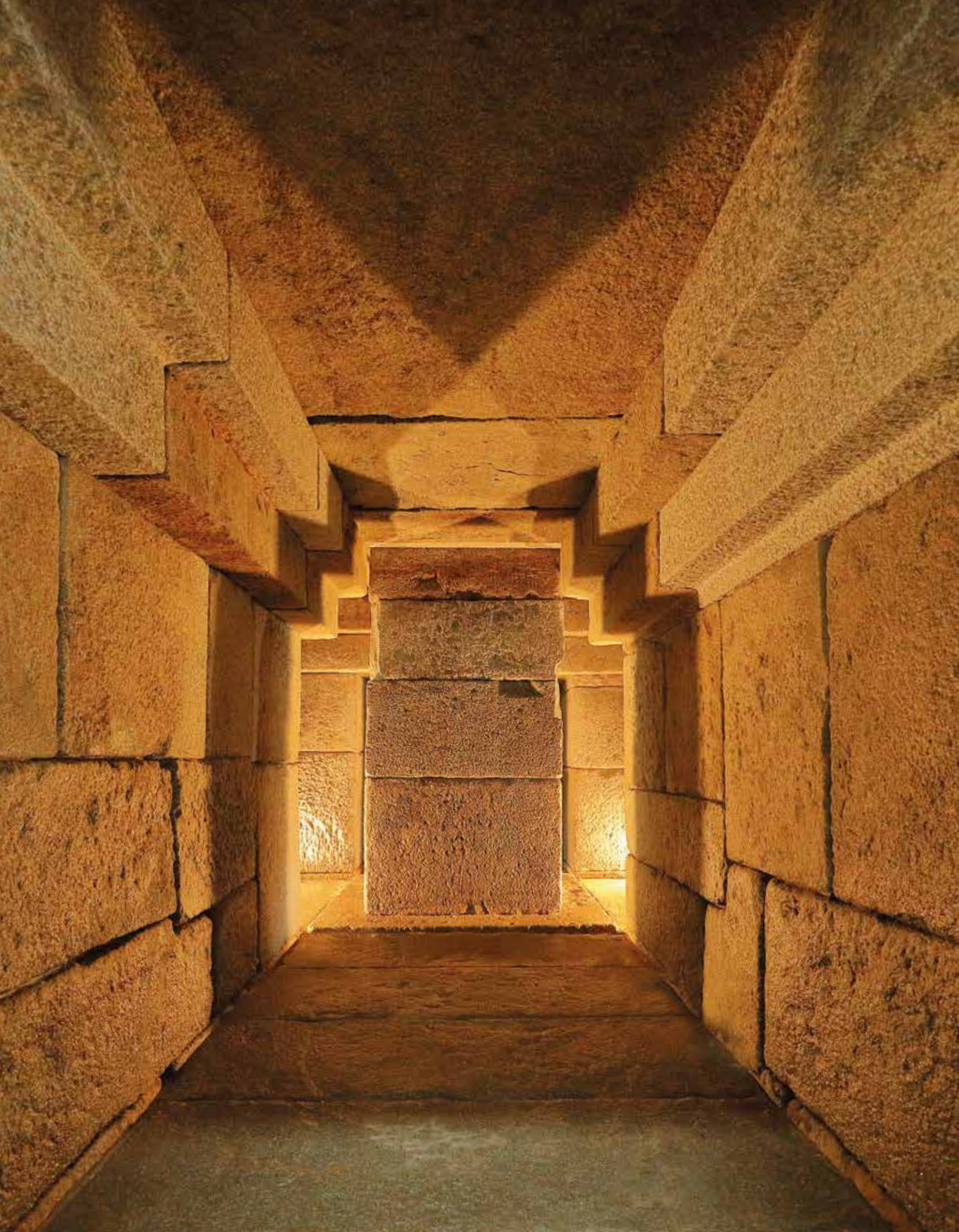
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Sarira reliquary upon discovery (2009)

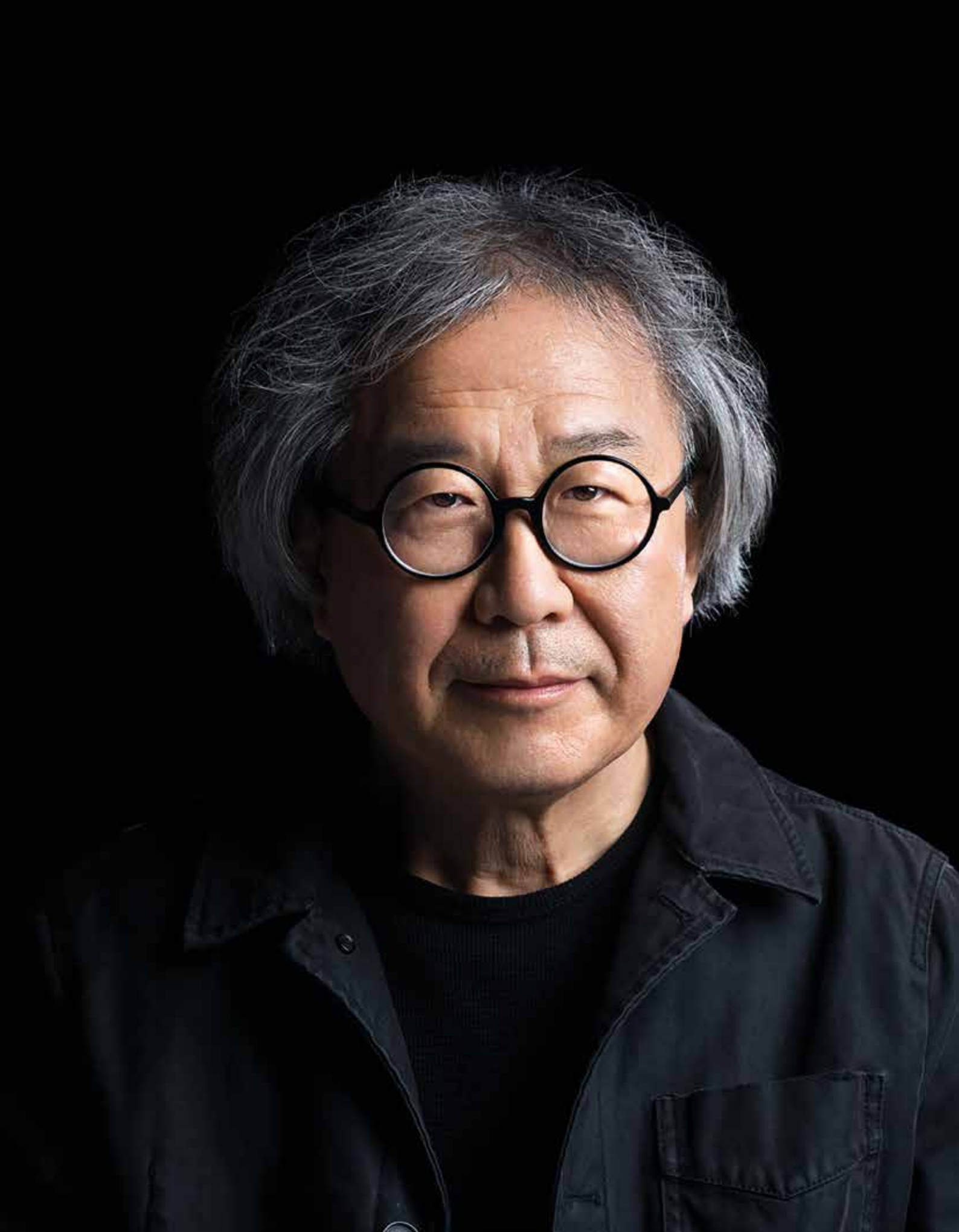
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Interior of the first story of the stone pagoda at Mireuksa Temple site



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Seung H-Sang, architect

Preserving and transmitting the land's memories

© Kim Jongoh

Seung H-Sang is a renowned Korean architect whose works are centred on the 'beauty of poverty', rooted in his critical perspective on Western culture of the 20th century. Born in 1952, Seung was a core member of the 4.3 Group, which influenced the Korean architectural society and participated in founding the Seoul School of Architecture. His career is marked by major roles including Director of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2008, Director of the Gwangju Design Biennale in 2011, the first City Architect of the Seoul Metropolitan Government and Chief Commissioner of the Presidential Commission on Architecture Policy of Korea.

In 2002, he was named 'Artist of the Year' by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea – the first time this honour was bestowed upon an architect. Other national and international accolades include 'Order of Cultural Merit, Eun-gwan', 'Honorary Fellowship of the American Institute of Architects' and 'Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class (Austria)'.

Through his firm IROJE architects & planners, established in 1989, Seung continues to realise projects that draw inspiration from traditional architecture while breathing new life into it.

You have been working in architecture for over half a century. How have World Heritage properties and other traditional Korean architecture influenced your work?

It has been 51 years since I started practising architecture. I cannot imagine my work without the influence of traditional architecture. I have been deeply affected by Korean buildings and structures from the past, and I feel profoundly indebted to them. Traditional architecture has taught me not only about architectural philosophy but also about how elements and spaces are patterned and organised, and even how a city can function better. For me, old buildings are not just relics from the past; they are living heritage that will carry on well into the future. I have drawn particular inspiration from how traditional architecture of Korea prioritised spaces that are 'invisible', while that of the West focused on visual elements such as form and presence. A notable case is the World Heritage site

'I have drawn particular inspiration from how traditional architecture of Korea prioritised spaces that are "invisible", while that of the West focused on visual elements such as form and presence.'

previous page
Seung H-Sang

right
Aewol Hangeo

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Jongmyo Shrine. Within the complex, there is Jeongjeon Hall, the main royal ancestral ritual building. The hall has been recognised not only for its architecture per se but for the striking impact it creates when considered together with the spacious empty 'woldae' (elevated ceremonial platform) in front of it.

Another example can be found in the open yard 'madang', one of the most important concepts in traditional Korean architecture. The madang is an empty space enclosed by structures. This area is used for multiple functions: it can be a playground for children, a space for observing ancestral rites and even a site for laundry or kimchi making. When not used for these activities, the madang is emptied again to encourage contemplation. This is what I call 'unspecified emptiness'. It can even be said that the living quarters to its back, sides and front are there to form the madang.

The aesthetic of emptiness culminates in Byeongsan Seowon, another World Heritage site. Sitting on the floor of the Lecture Hall, you can enjoy breathtaking scenery seen through Mandaeru Pavilion across the madang. In addition, there are many other traditional Korean buildings that suggest responses to a number of questions modern architects are wrestling with. They include Dongnakdang House in Gyeongju, a perfect place to appreciate the joy of solitude, the World Heritage-inscribed Seonamsa Temple, which is known for its non-hierarchical and democratic layout, as well as another World Heritage temple, Tongdosa, illustrating an organised network of major and small roads.

Among your many projects, which one epitomises the influence of traditional Korean architecture?

My work finds its starting point in the design of Sujoldang House. The philosophy embodied in this project aligns with the 'beauty of poverty', which is also the title of my first book, published after I started my independent



© Kim Jongoh

above
Seung H-Sang and his team

left
Seonamsa Temple in autumn, part of Sansa, Buddhist Mountain Monasteries in Korea

© Council for Inscription of Buddhist Mountain Monasteries in Korea on the World Heritage List (CIBM)





© World Heritage Integrated Management Center for Korean Seowon

practice in 1989. Sujoldang House was built as a residence for the current Director of the National Museum of Korea, You Hong-jun. I designed Sujoldang by defying the then-popular notion of a dwelling, most descriptively expressed as 'a house on a meadow'. Instead, I prioritised the value of emptiness in design by adding three madang within an area of approximately 230 square metres. Even 30 years after completing the project, I still revisit its design to be certain about where I stand as an architect.

Without exception, every project among the hundreds I have completed has drawn on the wisdom of traditional architecture. The Seongok Seowon project I recently worked on is yet another example strongly inspired by traditional architecture. It can be said that ideas borrowed from traditional architecture are all and everything to my work.

What has led you to use traditional architecture as a primary source of inspiration?

Architecture occupies land. Every land occupied by a traditional architectural structure is unique in the world. It contains a distinctive set of narratives created by nature and culture that have accumulated over countless generations. Koreans of the past referred to it as 'teomuni', which means the pattern of a land plot. I would translate teomuni as 'land-script' in English. For me, designing a building is to add an additional layer to the narratives held by the plot, expanding its teomuni.

'Architects are not supposed to simply draw a picture on a blank canvas. Their mission is to record, preserve and pass on the stories told by the land.'

Architects are not supposed to simply draw a picture on a blank canvas. Their mission is to record, preserve and pass on the stories told by the land. Land always holds the answers to any question when designing a building. To become a good architect is to be able to hear stories of the land.

What is an interesting project in Korea that manifests an intersection between heritage and contemporary architecture?

I would like to mention a recent cultural regeneration project in Gumi in which I am involved. It is a grand-scale project dealing with an area of 130,000 square metres that used to accommodate a textile manufacturing complex. When I visited the site, I found mixed states of the site: some buildings had been displaced, some remained relatively intact and others were in a state of disrepair.

previous page
Mandaeru Pavilion of Byeongsan Seowon

right
Sujoldang House

© Kim Jongoh





Upon closer examination, however, I realised that they all bore traces of their life from before. I suggested preserving rather than erasing them because all these memories create a narrative, which keeps a place alive. These traces tell stories of who was here, what they did and how hard they worked. In this way, the past can be connected to the present and delivered to the future, sustaining the long history of the place. The lives of people there can become more abundant.

It should be noted that to preserve the past does not mean to fossilise it. Wooden architecture, in particular, can only maintain its vitality when touched, used and inhabited by people. I believe that architecture is about helping continue life in the present based on accumulated layers of memory.

How can we ensure that heritage exists in harmony with architecture?

Architecture is incomplete without time. It is natural for architecture to change with the passage of time. The landscape of a city should not be transformed by a revolutionary stroke but in a gradual manner. A drastic alteration does not benefit the people living there. The present we live in will soon be the past of the future. We just temporarily inhabit the land, which will soon belong to following generations. We thus should hand it over to future generations as intact as we received it. This is the attitude we should maintain to show courtesy to the past and take responsibility for the future.

left
Seongok Seowon

below
Seung H-Sang in his studio



© Kim Jongoh

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Together, stronger: Inclusivity at World Heritage sites



By **Lerato Mogoatlhe**



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When it comes to World Heritage sites, the Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower in Azerbaijan ranks among some of the most storied. It was inhabited as far back as 10,000 years ago and is still standing as a testament to humanity's ingenuity. Every stone on the preserved defensive wall, spanning a kilometre, tells tales that date back to the 12th century – stories of Baku's strategic role as a Caspian Sea port shaped by the social, architectural and cultural influences of the Zoroastrian, Persian, Arabic and Ottoman empires.

Spending hours meandering around the narrow cobblestoned alleys is an experience like no other. You are reminded of our shared humanity and the importance of heritage sites as keepers of memory. It is no wonder it was inscribed as Azerbaijan's first UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

The inner city (Icherisheher), at the western edge of the Caspian Sea that has shaped humanity from prehistoric times, is among those leading the next frontier in how World Heritage properties are experienced: accessible and inclusive.

Aytaj Alisultanli is a member of the Board of the Directors, "Icherisheher" State Historical and Architectural Reserve. Since 2025, Alisultanli and the Administration team have spearheaded accessibility efforts, resulting in significant changes; the Walled City is now a place where limited mobility is no longer an impediment for visiting. The initiative was inspired by the growing need to adapt historic urban spaces to contemporary expectations of safety, inclusivity and comfort, while respecting the authenticity of the place.

'Accessibility became a stronger strategic priority in 2025 as part of the Administration's broader transformation towards a "Smart Heritage" model with inclusive and sustainable heritage management. The catalyst was the recognition that a historic city cannot be preserved only as a physical monument. It must also remain accessible, active and meaningful for people.'

'The catalyst was the recognition that a historic city cannot be preserved only as a physical monument.'

Over the past year, the Administration has been working on a more people-centred approach to heritage management, where mobility, navigation, digital access, public-space quality and the visitor experience are considered holistically. 'Accessibility is approached not only as a visitor service issue but also as part of a broader responsibility.'

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Casa Batlló, part of the Works of Antoni Gaudí (Spain)

right
Buildings inside the Walled City of Baku

© Roberto Canton





Accessibility as a priority

This is what access and inclusion look like at the Walled City of Baku: existing older ramps have been repaired and new ones installed in sections where step-free access had not previously been available. A dedicated accessible route in the park leading from Neftchilar Avenue towards Maiden Tower Square ensures more convenient and barrier-free access to the Maiden Tower area. Traffic-calming measures have reduced vehicle speeds, and speed-limit controls have been implemented across the site, improving safety and creating a more comfortable environment for all.

Additionally, for visitors who cannot climb to the top of the tower – the most ancient monument of Icherisheher and a symbol of the city of Baku – the Administration provides access through exterior interpretation, informational materials, guided explanations, visual content and digital storytelling. Multimedia and virtual experiences allow visitors to better understand what they cannot physically experience.

This is especially important because accessibility in heritage sites is not only physical. 'More continuous and accessible movement has been provided around the full perimeter of Icherisheher, allowing visitors with limited mobility, elderly visitors, parents with strollers and other user groups to move more comfortably and safely around the historic area,' Alisultanli says.

'One of the most important types of feedback we receive is that even small improvements can make a meaningful difference. Clearer navigation, easier movement, reduced traffic pressure, staff assistance or digital information can significantly improve the experience of elderly visitors, families with children and people who may not be able to move through Icherisheher easily. For many visitors, the emotional value is very strong. Icherisheher is not only a tourist destination – it is a place connected with memory, identity and national heritage.'



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above
Aytaj Alisultanli

left
A golf cart operating in Icherisheher, Walled City of Baku

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Walled City of Baku with the Maiden Tower

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Frontliners of inclusivity

About 4,200 kilometres away in Barcelona, Spain, Casa Batlló attracts one million visitors every year with its avant-garde design. One of the components of the serial World Heritage property Works of Antoni Gaudí, the building is considered the epitome of the famed Catalan architect's work at its most playful and fanciful. It features balconies that look like masks, columns that are shaped like bones and a rooftop that resembles a dragon's back. Casa Batlló is a masterpiece that turns a building into a place where imagination meets fire, air, water, wind, earth and space. In this house of enchantment, a new chapter of inclusion is now unfolding.

Neurodivergence is a term that encompasses a natural diversity of human cognition, including autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In 2021, Casa Batlló started a neurodiversity initiative from a simple but powerful conviction. 'Our purpose of making people happy through art should not be limited to visitors but should also extend to the people who make the cultural experience possible every day,' states Ana Acosta, who manages the initiative.

What started as a workplace inclusion project has evolved into a profound organisational transformation. Today, Casa Batlló employs 100 team members who are neurodivergent and adapts physical spaces for them by considering lighting, colours and noise levels. Neurodivergent employees also represent approximately 85% of the visitor-facing staff.

This makes Casa Batlló the first cultural institution in the world to have a neurodivergent team assisting visitors. At the core of the initiative's success are team members like Joan Boter who is on the autism spectrum. 'It is a great relief, when you see people in similar situations, that you are not the only one who processes these things in this way,' he explains. 'This makes the experience at Casa Batlló magical.'

He highlights the training that the team receives as a key ingredient in the initiative's success. 'We were trained in a gradual way, which helped me a lot to adapt to the position. Personally, I love the whole art world. I am studying art history. To be able to work in a place like this has been a magnificent experience and still is,' he says.

The team, through role playing, explores Casa Batlló from the point of view of neurodivergent visitors. 'During the training, we were given a good basis. But, in



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above
Ana Acosta

left
Facade of Casa Batlló with a colourful mosaic made of broken ceramic tiles

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the end, the day-to-day is what toughens you up to know if this or that can happen. I really like interaction with the public, for example, providing headphones or validating tickets.'

Boter feels that he is constantly learning on the job. 'I memorised the speech in several languages in order to better serve visitors. I like, for example, practising Italian, even if it's only four sentences, or practising French. I like this, and for me it is a challenge. I have a good time, and I think this is transmitted to people. I think this is the key to our work.'

Acosta also believes that there is more to be done. 'Our vision is to continue evolving as a cultural institution where neurodiversity is fully normalised and celebrated. We hope to deepen accessibility practices, strengthen community engagement and continue demonstrating that inclusion and excellence can grow together.'

She adds: 'This initiative has demonstrated that World Heritage sites can be living, inclusive spaces that actively contribute to social progress. One of the most important lessons we have learned is that inclusion should not be viewed as a special project. It must become part of the institution's identity, strategy and daily operations.'

A major recognition came in the form of the 2025 European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award in the category of citizen participation and awareness-raising. It highlighted Casa Batlló's commitment to social and cultural innovation and its efforts to promote inclusivity and raise awareness of neurodiversity in cultural heritage. 'This experience has taught us that diversity is not something to manage: it is something to value. Different perspectives strengthen organisations, enrich cultural experiences and create stronger communities,' states Acosta.

To Boter, it is essential to communicate why inclusion matters. 'I think the message we give is important. A message of acceptance of different sensitivities. A message of tolerance. A message of empathy. I believe that these are values that nowadays, unfortunately, if you look at TV or other media, are being lost. There are many prejudices. These prejudices must be broken, and the best way is to show the reality, show that reality is diverse.'

right
Joan Boter

below
Vortex chandelier in Casa Batlló



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CASA BATLLÓ
GAUDÍ BARCELONA


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‘The experience of visiting heritage places has long depended primarily on visual perception.’

Experiencing heritage without sight

For persons with visual impairments, it is often difficult to meaningfully engage with heritage, not due to a lack of interest but because access to heritage remains overwhelmingly through visual mediums. In Yogyakarta, on the Indonesian island of Java, UNESCO hosted an inclusion-focused workshop where participants with visual impairments were invited to share the challenges and frustrations of visiting World Heritage sites. Heritage professionals and local cultural authorities also joined the session, creating a space for them to rethink how heritage sites are experienced by visually impaired visitors.

‘The experience of visiting heritage places has long depended primarily on visual perception. The very notion of “sightseeing” assumes that visitors appreciate monuments, landscapes and architectural beauty through what they can see. Interpretation tools commonly used at heritage sites – such as signboards, brochures, maps and, more recently, digital screens – are also largely designed for sighted audiences. Even audio guides often rely on visual references, using phrases such as “as you can see” or “on your right, you will notice”, which can unintentionally exclude visitors with visual impairments,’ explains Moe Chiba, Chief of Culture Unit at UNESCO Jakarta Office.

A pilot activity took place at Plaosan Temple in Sleman, where descriptive guiding techniques enabled participants to better understand the temple’s history, carvings, symbolic figures and architectural details. Combining vivid verbal explanations with carefully guided tactile interaction, visitors immersed themselves in the richness of Indonesia’s cultural heritage.

Akbar Ariantono, a participant with a visual impairment, shares, ‘Through the guide’s storytelling, I could imagine what Plaosan Temple was like in the past. It helped me connect with its history in a way I hadn’t experienced before.’

The workshop was co-created with concerned members of the community, which Chiba believes was essential for its success. It generated several important and encouraging outcomes for both heritage professionals and participants with visual impairments. To Chiba’s delight, all responding stakeholders indicated in their evaluation that the workshop challenged or reshaped their previous assumptions about accessibility and disability within heritage contexts.

Balancing act

Managing World Heritage sites means preserving what is called the ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ – a unique combination of what makes the place a shared treasure of humanity. And while adding new features and modifications are allowed, they cannot compromise the integrity of sites.

Alisultanli says, ‘The key principle is that any accessibility intervention must respect the Outstanding Universal Value, authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage property. In practice, this means that interventions must be designed to be minimal, sensitive and, where possible, reversible.’

At the Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower, this balance is achieved by applying a strict case-by-case method. ‘In a modern building, accessibility solutions can often be direct and

left
Akbar Ariantono visiting Plaosan Temple

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standardised. In a medieval urban environment, however, solutions must be adapted to the site's topography, materials, narrow streets, archaeological layers and conservation requirements.'

For Casa Batlló, 'any adaptation must respect the authenticity and conservation requirements of the site, while ensuring visitors can meaningfully connect with its cultural significance. We continually evaluate visitor needs and operational practices to ensure that inclusion becomes part of the management framework rather than an additional layer,' notes Acosta.

But this responsibility extends beyond preserving architecture. 'We believe heritage should be a living space that reflects contemporary society and contributes positively to it. Gaudí taught us to find beauty in irregularity and harmony in difference.'

'We believe the most transformative innovation is often human rather than technological.'

Working together

Digital technologies like mobile applications, QR-based information systems, digital navigation, multilingual content, audio guides and online visitor information have contributed to making sites around the world guest-friendly.

'These tools help visitors plan their visit, understand routes, access information about monuments and experience the site more independently. For people with limited mobility, technology can reduce uncertainty before and during a visit. It can help them understand what to expect, choose more suitable routes, access content remotely or on-site and experience areas that may be physically difficult to reach,' Alisultanli explains.

In Barcelona, new technologies combined with partnerships have proved fundamental to turning Casa Batlló into an inclusive space. At the same time, Acosta and the team's approach remains human-centred. 'We believe the most transformative innovation is often human rather than technological: creating environments where different ways of thinking and experiencing the world are valued and empowered.'

Alisultanli concurs, noting that infrastructure is just one aspect of making heritage sites belong to everyone. Site managers, tour guides and frontline staff must be empowered with the necessary skills and resources. 'The Administration works to strengthen awareness among site managers, guides and frontline staff regarding the needs of visitors with limited mobility, elderly visitors and other

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Rida Amalia learning the structure of Plaosan Temple with its miniature

right
Participants of the UNESCO workshop

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groups requiring assistance. The emphasis is on respectful communication, safe support, patience and dignity,' she stresses. 'The aim is not to make visitors feel dependent but to ensure that they receive assistance when needed in a professional and considerate way.'

Case in point, the participants in the Yogyakarta workshop benefited from the human-led approach. 'The personalised support provided by the youth guides increased their sense of safety and encouraged more active participation throughout the visit,' says Chiba. They reported 'greater clarity, comfort and confidence while navigating and experiencing the heritage site.'

Inclusion is not just an objective. 'By directly involving persons with visual impairments in discussions and developing interpretation approaches, we created an environment where participants felt more confident articulating their needs, preferences and expectations to heritage professionals. This shifted the dynamic from passive consultation to active collaboration.' Despite the strides being taken to make World Heritage more accessible, there is still much work to be done. Acosta believes that more partnerships with heritage stakeholders, communities, human rights organisations and advocates are needed. 'Priority is not simply expansion but meaningful replication. We are particularly interested in sharing methodologies and lessons learned with other cultural institutions and heritage sites.'

'Cultural heritage can be a powerful force for social transformation. Preserving heritage and promoting inclusion are not separate missions. When combined, they create institutions that are more relevant, more human and more sustainable for future generations,' she states.

Boter strongly agrees. 'It is like Gaudí's "trencadís" (broken up tiles); it has many colours. It is therefore the best way to create a better future – for us as well as for others. Because we all have to live on this planet.'

below
Wheelchair-accessible signage in Machu Picchu (Peru)



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The Archive

World Heritage Review, n°7 January 1998

'We must take into account the economic, political and environmental context of each site and begin to plan for conservation through present and future maintenance.'



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This issue of the *World Heritage Review* considered how heritage stewardship evolves from the moment a site is inscribed to the World Heritage List. Italy's Vesuvian archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum illustrated how UNESCO listing promotes research and widens access to knowledge. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the World Heritage status prompted Maritime Greenwich to develop a comprehensive management plan.

For India's Mughal gardens – including the Red Fort gardens in Agra and the tomb gardens of Humayun in Delhi – their conservation was presented as a dynamic process grounded in garden archaeology and sensitivity to local needs.

The Review also spotlighted the coexistence of biodiversity, local cultures and urban traditions across many sites, such as those in Panama. Lake Baikal (Russian Federation) revealed the spiritual traditions of the Buryats and Evenks, with sacred sites central to rituals and daily life. Las Médulas (Spain) demonstrated the impact of human ingenuity on landscape through Roman hydraulic mining, while Querétaro (Mexico) exemplified the harmony of Indigenous and Spanish urban traditions.



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Pusan National University

80 Years of Commitment to Cultural Heritage

Pusan National University (PNU), Korea's first comprehensive national university plays a vital role in preserving the nations cultural heritage and advancing research on World Heritage.

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Founded on May 15, 1946, as Korea's first comprehensive national university, PNU has grown into the nation's leading national university as it marks its 80th anniversary in 2026.

Known for its integrity and strong principles, PNU has earned enduring trust and support from the public while continuing to uphold its mission of academic excellence and national service while accompanying Korea's historic journey of industrialization and democratization.

PNU ranks highly in major global university rankings such as QS and THE. Through active engagement with leading international networks, including the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), and through its outstanding research accomplishments, the university contributes to strengthening Korea's national competitiveness and promoting the advancement of humanity.

Pusan National University Museum & Department of Archeology

Established in 1955 in the aftermath of the Korean War, the Pusan National University Museum has played an important role in safeguarding exceptional cultural heritage and making it accessible beyond regional and national boundaries. In September 1956, the museum received and securely housed 18,833 significant cultural artifacts from the National Museum of Korea, which had been



evacuated to Busan, thereby contributing to the preservation of invaluable cultural assets during a critical period.

For nearly four years, the museum ensured the protection and systematic management of these artifacts, fulfilling a vital role as a "refuge for national treasures" during the post-war reconstruction period. Since then, the museum has continuously carried out archaeological investigations and research across a broad spectrum of sites, ranging from prehistoric to historic periods. In particular, its excavations of ancient Gaya tombs in the southern Korean Peninsula have contributed significantly to clarifying their cultural characteristics and historical significance and have played an important role in supporting their inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Department of Archaeology at PNU offers a comprehensive curriculum that equips future archaeologists with both solid theoretical foundations and practical expertise. In 2025, it was ranked first among regional flagship universities in Korea in subject-specific global university rankings, reaffirming its leading role in research, education, and field investigations in cultural heritage.

Together, the Museum and the Archaeology Department are dedicated to enhancing public understanding of and engagement with cultural heritage through diverse educational programmes, hands-on experiences, and public lectures. In particular, their career exploration programmes for secondary school students are designed to inspire younger generations to appreciate the value of cultural heritage and to encourage them to carry this legacy forward.





Museum collections



Excavation sites



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Historic Jeddah: Preserving Heritage, Reviving Legacy

The Kingdom's commitment to preserving and revitalizing Historic Jeddah was reinforced through the launch of the Jeddah Historic District Program in 2018, under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, followed by the initiation of the Historic Jeddah Regeneration Project in 2021. These initiatives go beyond preserving the past; they aim to shape a vibrant future for Historic Jeddah through the careful restoration of heritage buildings, the activation of cultural spaces, and the revitalization of the district's urban identity.

Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah stands today as a testament to Saudi Arabia's commitment to safeguarding its cultural and architectural heritage. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014, the district spans 2.5 square kilometers and has historically served as a crossroads for diverse cultures and communities.

The walled city of Jeddah was the major human settlement on the shores of the Red Sea. Other cities existed along both coasts, connected to Jeddah through a complex and continuous network of trade and exchange. Jeddah was the foremost among them due to its role as Makkah's harbor for Muslim pilgrims arriving by sea through Bab Al-Bunt. It functioned as a gateway for pilgrims traveling to Makkah, a major trading port on the Red Sea, and a key mercantile center linking the Indian Ocean trade routes with the Hijaz region and beyond. In this way, Jeddah formed part of a wide geographic and cultural network of exchange.

Since the 15th century CE, Historic Jeddah served as the primary gateway for pilgrims travelling to Makkah, welcoming visitors arriving by sea from across Asia, Africa, and the wider Islamic world. As one of the most important trading ports on the Red Sea, the district became a meeting point of cultures, traditions, languages, and commerce, shaping the unique identity and character of the city. The continuous movement of pilgrims and merchants through Historic Jeddah played a defining role in its architectural, social, and commercial evolution, establishing the district as a vital hub connected to the journey of Hajj.

This historical role laid the foundation for Jeddah's lasting cultural and architectural significance today. Historic Jeddah remains a national priority for preservation and cultural regeneration, reflecting its importance as one of the most significant heritage destinations in the Kingdom and the wider Red Sea region. The success of these preservation and revitalization efforts relies on the active participation of the local community and heritage stakeholders. Local craftsmen, artisans, entrepreneurs, and businesses continue to play an essential role in this ongoing regeneration, ensuring the district's heritage remains alive for future generations.

All of this ensures that Historic Jeddah continues to embody the ambitions of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 through the preservation and revitalization of its historic fabric. The district reflects centuries of exchange in human values, architecture, building techniques, and trade across the region, while its urban layout and traditions associated with the Hajj pilgrimage continue to stand as symbols of cultural exchange and connectivity.



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Innovation and collaboration to support resilient coral reefs

In April 2024, the fourth global coral bleaching event was confirmed. Eighty two countries and 84 per cent of the world's reefs were reportedly impacted, including the Great Barrier Reef.

This further demonstrated the significant threat that climate change continues to pose for reefs, ecosystems and World Heritage sites globally.

Emission reductions alone will not safeguard the world's coral reefs. Additional options are needed to ensure they have the best chance to survive and prosper.

Australia's Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program (RRAP)—one of the world's largest, collective efforts to help a significant ecosystem resist, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change.

RRAP commenced in 2020 and was established through a partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

It has brought more than 300 Australian and international experts together to create an innovative suite of solutions to help coral reefs be more resilient into the future. While these solutions are focused on the Great Barrier Reef, they could be applied to reefs worldwide.

RRAP is accelerating the development and implementation of a suite of interventions. This includes interventions to cool and shade areas of the Great Barrier Reef, assist coral species to adapt to a changing environment, and support natural restoration of damaged and degraded reefs.

One subprogram being delivered through RRAP is enhanced corals and treatments, where researchers are investigating methods to increase the heat tolerance, bleaching resistance, and survival rates of corals.

A 2024 collaborative study led by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) with Southern Cross University showed that corals across the entire Great Barrier Reef may hold important genetic properties relating to heat-tolerance.

RRAP researchers have been investigating practical options to use those genetics to help coral adapt and be more resilient. This includes using coral aquaculture in a controlled environment to grow large quantities of corals that are more tolerant to heat, before deploying them back on the Great Barrier Reef.

Low-cost devices have also been developed to ensure the successful settlement, survival and growth of young, heat-tolerant corals.

The Pilot Deployments Program (PDP)—transitioning reef restoration techniques from research to large-scale, real-world deployment on the Great Barrier Reef.

The PDP is the operational testing component of RRAP, funded by the Australian Government's Reef Trust and led by AIMS.

Initially, two RRAP interventions are undergoing pilot deployment through the PDP—seeding of coral larvae and seeding of corals propagated by aquaculture.

In late 2025, one of the world's largest reef restoration tests on a coral reef ecosystem was delivered under the PDP. This work was led by AIMS and delivered by marine industry partners and Indigenous Rangers.

During the mass spawning event on the Great Barrier Reef, coral spawn was collected on multiple reefs and several coral species were reproduced in an aquarium, to rear millions of young, healthy corals. These corals were deployed onto test reefs near Cairns, Port Douglas and around the Keppel Islands, further south.

Images left to right: ©AIMS photographers Gus Burrows, Saskia Jurriaans, Marie Roman.







AIMS researchers will then monitor them to assess the effectiveness of large-scale restoration methods in terms of coral survival, growth and response to stressors such as bleaching and competition with algae. This will help inform future restoration activities.

Working from boats on Woppaburra Sea Country and in classrooms at Rosslyn Bay, Indigenous Rangers also helped gather coral spawn, nurture coral larvae and deploy young corals back onto areas of the Reef.

The involvement from Indigenous Rangers is part of Indigenous Futures, which is led by AIMS and trains Indigenous Rangers in reef restoration. It aims to empower participants to lead restoration activities for their sea Countries.

RRAP continues to be underpinned by strong partnerships with Traditional Owners, recognising their ancestral knowledge and the benefits of seeing the Great Barrier Reef as a cultural landscape beyond its biophysical features.

Supporting reef restoration efforts worldwide

Outside of Australia, RRAP is extending its international reach and supporting reef restoration efforts in other countries.

ReefSeed is a portable, self-sufficient coral aquaculture system that uses science and technology developed under RRAP. It can be packed away and moved in sea containers to remote areas and can produce millions of coral larvae to support reef restoration.

In 2025, ReefSeed was successfully put through its paces in the Maldives. With support from AIMS researchers, Maldives Marine Research Institute biologists fertilised and reared coral egg and sperm bundles into coral larvae in ReefSeed units. The larvae were then successfully settled and transferred to reefs on specially designed ceramic devices.

RRAP and the PDP are not silver bullet solutions to address the impact of climate change. They are important steps forward in helping reefs worldwide to adapt and be more resilient into the future.

RRAP is delivered through a collaboration of leading research institutions, government and partners. This includes the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, AIMS, CSIRO, James Cook University, the University of Queensland, Southern Cross University and Queensland University of Technology.

More information at **gbrrestoration.org**

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TWO TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS. ONE POWERFUL BELIEF.

Thirty-five years after the 1930 Dandi Salt March led by Mohandas K. Gandhi in India, the world witnessed again the capacity of nonviolence for social change during the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March led by Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States. The success of the Indian Independence Movement convinced King and other African American leaders to visit India and study *satyagraha*, Gandhi's "truth force" of nonviolent resistance. Upon first meeting such leaders in 1935, the Mahatma told Black theologian Howard Thurman "it may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered to the world." Completing a spiritual journey across the Indian subcontinent in 1959, King said, "I left India more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom." Other disciples of *satyagraha* joined King in nonviolent protests at the sites featured on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, where visitors today can walk in the footsteps of those who made history.

"TO OTHER COUNTRIES I MAY GO AS A TOURIST, BUT TO INDIA I COME AS A PILGRIM."

— DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



UNITED STATES CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL

What happened here changed the world.

EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH

Movement churches functioned like ashrams, training civil rights activists in nonviolence. Attending Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, King learned a new Black theology reinforced at Morehouse College by President Benjamin Mays, who had met Gandhi in 1936, and at Boston University by fellow Morehouse graduate Howard Thurman.



DEXTER AVENUE KING MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

After studying *satyagraha* in India in 1948, Bayard Rustin returned to the United States to work with the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Rustin joined fellow Gandhi disciple Glenn Smiley in training the volunteers of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in nonviolence, including King, who led the protest from his pulpit at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.



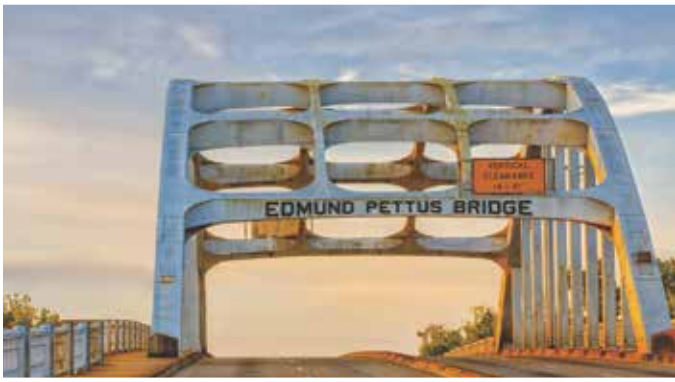
ANNISTON GREYHOUND BUS DEPOT

Howard Thurman's student James Farmer—a co-founder of the Congress of Racial Equality that pioneered the sit-in tactic at lunch counters—organized the 1961 Freedom Ride, recruiting black and white civil rights activists to sit on interstate buses in an integrated fashion. Defending racial segregation in Anniston, Alabama, white supremacists beat the bus carrying nonviolent riders when it reached the depot.



EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE

Protests over voter registration in 1965 led to calls for a nonviolent march from rural Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery, an action that recalled India's 1930 Salt March *satyagraha*. When on Bloody Sunday Alabama authorities violently suppressed Black activists at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, federal officials intervened, authorizing King to lead the Selma to Montgomery March.

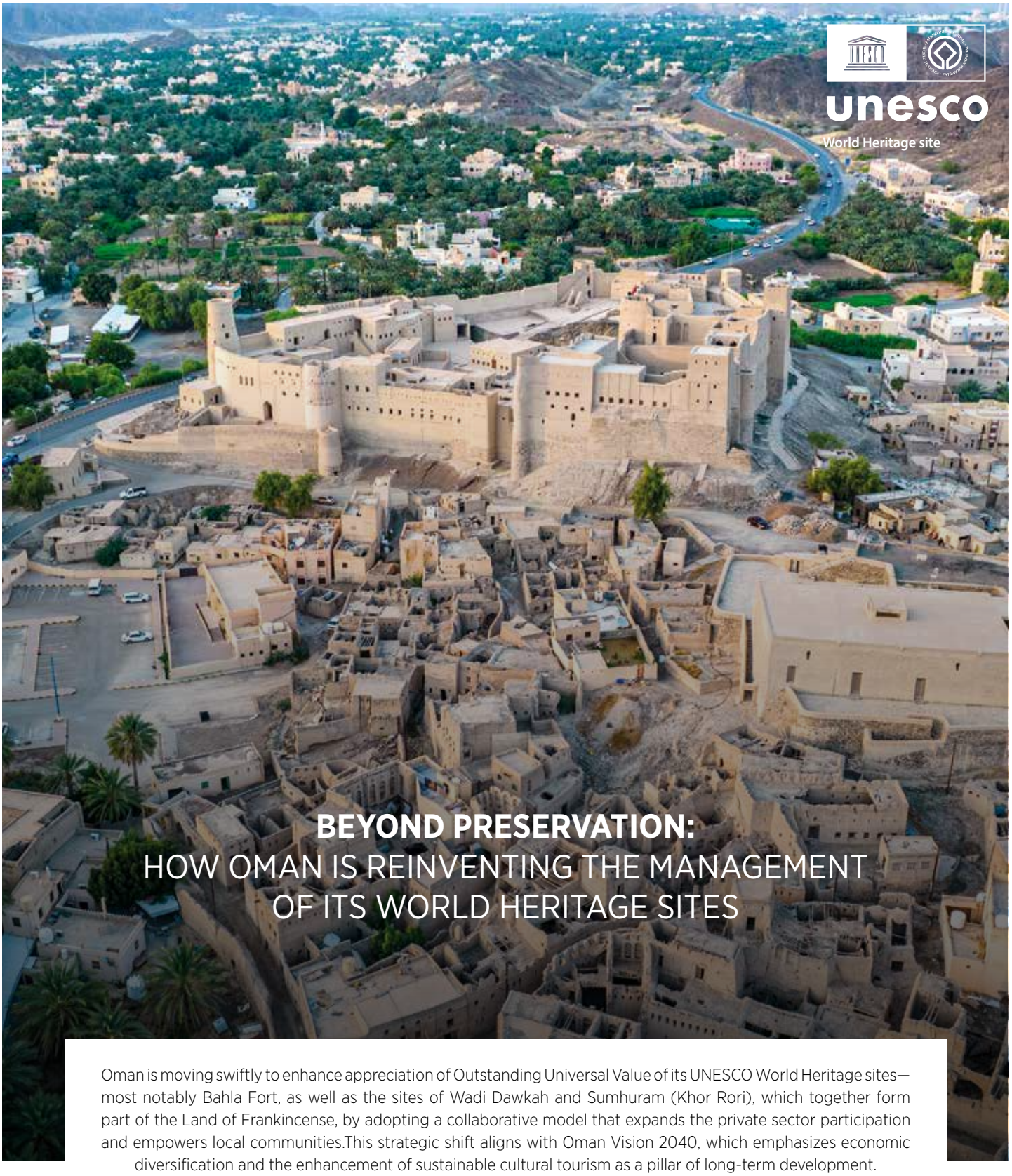


LORRAINE MOTEL

Once a missionary in Nagpur, India, where he had studied *satyagraha*, James Lawson came back to the U.S. and in 1968 chaired the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee. He convinced King to join the protest as a prelude to the Poor People's Campaign planned for Washington, D.C. On the eve of a nonviolent march, an assassin shot King as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.



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World Heritage site

BEYOND PRESERVATION:
HOW OMAN IS REINVENTING THE MANAGEMENT OF ITS WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Oman is moving swiftly to enhance appreciation of Outstanding Universal Value of its UNESCO World Heritage sites—most notably Bahla Fort, as well as the sites of Wadi Dawkah and Sumhuram (Khor Rori), which together form part of the Land of Frankincense, by adopting a collaborative model that expands the private sector participation and empowers local communities.This strategic shift aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasizes economic diversification and the enhancement of sustainable cultural tourism as a pillar of long-term development.

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Current initiatives signal a transition from traditional preservation-focused management towards a more dynamic, operational model built on investment partnerships, enhanced visitor services, and enriched cultural experiences, while continuing to safeguard the sites' historical significance. At Bahla Fort, Oman's first UNESCO World Heritage site (inscribed in 1987), management and operations have been entrusted to a local private partnership with the aim of elevating service quality and boosting economic returns. This approach also integrates the local community into site related activities, generating long-term employment opportunities and reinforcing the cultural and economic vitality of the surrounding area.

The model further supports traditional crafts and folk arts through year-round cultural events, exhibitions, and community-based activities that sustain and showcase both tangible and intangible heritage. Specialized management and professional operations are enhancing public awareness of the site's value and strengthening its promotion as a cultural destination. This approach follows a balanced framework that combines economic sustainability with the protection of cultural authenticity, ensuring that Bahla Fort remains a hub of knowledge, culture, and tourism.

Wadi Dawkah—one of the principal sites of the "Land of Frankincense" World Heritage property (inscribed in 2000) has undergone a notable transformation in its management approach in recent years, driven by advanced public–private partnerships. At the forefront of this shift is Amouage, the luxury fragrance house rooted in Omani perfumery traditions, which has emerged as a key player in shaping the valley's environmental stewardship, economic development, and cultural sustainability.

Through its partnership with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Amouage has launched a comprehensive conservation program that reinforces the site's long-term sustainability. This initiative includes the cultivation of thousands of frankincense seedlings, the expansion of protective fencing, and the modernization of irrigation systems to ensure the survival of more than 1,200 ancient Boswellia sacra trees. Beyond ecological stewardship, the company has integrated local communities into every stage of the frankincense cycle—from planting and harvesting to the development and marketing of frankincense-based products thereby enhancing both livelihoods and the cultural continuity of the valley.

Amouage has also conducted pilot harvesting operations that revive traditional knowledge systems, while supporting digital platforms and scientific studies in partnership with local and international institutions, including the Environment Society of Oman, thereby deepening the site's research profile. At the same time, the company is enhancing visitor experiences through curated cultural tourism programs and laying the groundwork for a modern visitor center and new service facilities. Together these initiatives reinforce Wadi Dawkah's status as a global cultural destination, one that empowers local communities while advancing the longterm sustainability of Oman's ancient frankincense heritage.

This evolving approach clearly demonstrates that local communities are no longer peripheral to heritage sites but have become essential partners in their management and development. Their engagement not only strengthens cultural identity but also generates direct economic benefits. At the same time, private sector participation introduces innovation and contributes to the creation of integrated tourism products. Together, these efforts are transforming heritage sites from mere places of visitation into vibrant cultural destinations that actively support local economies.

Photos: 1. Bahla Fort World Heritage site; 2. Traditional pottery workshops; 3. Land of Frankincense World Heritage site; 4. Harvesting frankincense.

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