

UNESCO recognises heritage sites, ancient to modern, around the world

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The Ganesh Pol (Ganesh gate) at the main entrance to the Amber Fort in Jaipur, India, Nov 3, 2018. Jaipur, a fortified and planned city founded almost 300 years ago, is among 29 new entries that UNESCO added to the World Heritage List, acknowledging historic and cultural landmarks, and natural wonders. The New York Times

From iron works in Burkina Faso that date back nearly three millennia, to the fortified and planned city of Jaipur in India, to the Guggenheim museum in New York City, UNESCO has added a broad array of cultural and natural marvels to its World Heritage List.

To be included on the list, a site must meet at least 1 of 10 criteria, like being a landmark of human history or culture, an ecological wonder, or “a masterpiece of human creative genius.” UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee considered 35 nominations this year and accepted 29 from around the world, some of them composed of multiple sites, covering the full range of categories.

That is “a relatively high but not unusual number,” said Mechtild Rössler, the director of the organisation’s World Heritage Centre in Paris.

The World Heritage List, which began in 1978, includes more than 1,100 sites nominated by their respective nations, like the Acropolis in Athens and the Great Wall of China, each one of “outstanding universal value,” Rössler said. The centre announced the new additions Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

They include landscapes as disparate as the Vatnajökull National Park in Iceland, an otherworldly region of active volcanoes, glaciers and rare geological formations; Le Colline del Prosecco di Conegliano e Valdobbiadene, a winegrowing area in northeastern Italy; and Budj Bim in southwestern Australia, whose wetlands are one of the world’s oldest human aquaculture sites.

In Burkina Faso, the heritage designation names 15 still-standing smelting furnaces, mines and other sites linked to ancient iron production, some dating to the eighth century BC.

Jaipur, famed for its architecture, was founded almost 300 years ago as a planned city, laid out on a grid with wide boulevards, colonnades and public squares.

Eight major works designed by Frank Lloyd Wright were inscribed on the World Heritage List, including the Guggenheim and the famed Fallingwater house in Mill Run, Pennsylvania — the first recognition on the list of American modern architecture.

The new inclusions in the list were welcomed enthusiastically on social media, particularly by officials in their respective countries, where the designations can bolster tourism as well as local pride.

“Jaipur is a city associated with culture and valour,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India said on Twitter on Saturday. “Elegant and energetic, Jaipur’s hospitality draws people from all over.”

Eric Garcetti, the mayor of Los Angeles, wrote on Twitter that Hollyhock House, one of the Wright works honored on the heritage list, was “one of LA’s greatest cultural treasures.”

“This home will inspire Angelenos for generations to come, and its well-deserved place on @UNESCO’s #WorldHeritage List is a fitting tribute,” he wrote.

Dan Andrews, the premier of the Australian state of Victoria, tweeted that “Budj Bim has become the first site in Australia to receive @UNESCO World Heritage protection solely for its Aboriginal cultural importance.”

In some cases, a nomination might not go forward, to give a country more time to work on its management plan for the site. That happened this year with the “Sunken Pirate City” in Jamaica, a 17th-century haven for buccaneers that was submerged by an earthquake.

“The nomination was not ready and we will assist them,” Rössler said.

She also said she would like to see more nominations from Africa, which this year produced only one.

“There is an imbalance on the list,” Rössler said. “We have a very high number of nominations from countries in Europe, and no or few nominations from Africa.”

“There is a capacity building issue in the African continent,” she added.

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