India’s Journey of Heritage Preservation

Mains Syllabus: GS I - Indian Heritage and Culture.

Why in the News?

World Heritage Day is celebrated every year on 18th April to honor and protect cultural and natural heritage.

What is the World Heritage Convention?

- **World Heritage Convention** – It is formally known as the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage," was adopted by UNESCO in 1972.
- **Aim of the convention** - To identify, protect, and preserve cultural and natural heritage sites of outstanding universal value.
- This agreement explains what countries need to do to find and take care of special sites that can be added to the World Heritage List.
- **Signatories of the convention** - As of October 2024, 196 countries have joined the World Heritage Convention and India became part of this Convention in November 1977.
- **World Heritage Sites** – They are special places on Earth that have great value for all of humanity.
- **Types** - These can be cultural, natural, or a mix of both.
- **Recognition** - UNESCO gives the World Heritage title to places that are culturally, historically or scientifically important.
- **World Heritage List** – It includes 1,223 sites that are considered valuable to all of humanity.
- These include 952 cultural sites, 231 natural sites, and 40 sites that have both cultural and natural importance.



- **World Heritage Sites of India** - India has 43 World Heritage Sites, with Agra Fort, Taj Mahal, Ajanta, and Ellora Caves among the first listed in 1983 and 62 more on UNESCO's Tentative List.

  In July 2024, "Moidams: The Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty" from Assam was recognized as the 43rd site.

India on the World Heritage Map



Total World Heritage Sites (2024)	More on UNESCO's Tentative List
43	**62**

Newest Addition **(July 2024):**

Moidams – The Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty, Assam

First Inscribed Sites **(1983):**

- Agra Fort
- Ajanta Caves
- Taj Mahal
- Ellora Caves



What are the importances of World Heritage Sites?

- **Cultural Identity** - They represent the legacy of humankind, offering insights into past civilizations, artistic achievements, and the natural world.
    - **Ajanta and Ellora Caves (Maharashtra)** - These rock-cut caves feature stunning sculptures, paintings, and monasteries dating back to the 2nd century BCE, representing Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.
- **Education and Research** - They offer invaluable resources for studying history,

biodiversity, and sustainable practices.

- **Tourism** - Attracting visitors from around the world, they boost local economies and foster global understanding.
    - **Kaziranga National Park (Assam)** - A UNESCO-listed wildlife haven, famous for the world's largest population of the Indian one-horned rhinoceros, is a famous eco-tourism site of India.
- **International Cooperation** - The World Heritage Convention encourages countries to unite and share responsibility for the world's heritage.
    - **Khangchendzonga National Park (Sikkim)** - A sacred landscape blending biodiversity with Tibetan Buddhist beliefs.
- These sites can become symbols of peace, encouraging countries to work together to protect shared heritage.
- **Conservation** - Protecting these sites ensures the safeguarding of endangered natural habitats and architectural wonders.
    - **Sundarbans National Park (West Bengal)** – It is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger and the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.
- **Environmental Protection** - Natural heritage sites are critical for maintaining ecosystems, biodiversity, and combating climate change.
    - **Western Ghats (Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka)** - One of the world's eight "hottest hotspots" of biological diversity.

What are the Government's Initiatives to Promote India's Rich Cultural Heritage?

- **Building Monuments of National Importance** - India has 3,697 ancient monuments and archaeological sites declared of national importance.
- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is responsible for their conservation and maintenance.
- **Revival and Redevelopment of Heritage Sites**: - India has revived key heritage sites through conservation and development projects.
    - The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Varanasi
    - Mahakaal Lok in Ujjain
    - Ma Kamakhya Corridor in Guwahati
- **Chardham Road Project** – It improves connectivity to sacred sites.
- Projects in Somnath and the Kartarpur Corridor promote cultural heritage and easier access for devotees.
- **Retrieval of Antiquities** - Archaeological Survey of India has retrieved 655 antiquities from foreign countries from the year 1976 to 2024, of which 642 antiquities have been retrieved since 2014.
- **Adopt a Heritage' Scheme** - Launched in 2017 , it allows private and public groups to help develop facilities at protected monuments using their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds.
- **46th Session of the World Heritage Committee** - Archaeological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, successfully hosted the session in Delhi in 2024.
- **Must See Portal** - The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has created a portal to showcase "Must-See Monuments and Archaeological Sites of India.
- **Digitization of Cultural Heritage in India** - The National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA), set up in 2007, works to digitize and document India's

heritage and antiquities.

- So far, over 12.3 lakh antiquities and 11,406 heritage sites have been recorded.
- **Indian Heritage in Digital Space (IHDS)** - It aims to use digital technology to preserve and present India's cultural legacy through immersive tools and research support.
- **Classical Languages Recognition** - 11 Indian languages were recognized as classical languages to preserving India's diverse and ancient linguistic heritage.

  In 2024, the Government granted classical language status to Assamese, Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, and Bengali, raising the total to 11 classical Indian languages.

- **India's first Archaeological Experiential Museum** - It was inaugurated in Vadnagar in 2025 to showcase Vadnagar's 2,500-year-old history with over 5,000 artifacts, including ceramics, coins, tools and skeletal remains.
- **India's Literary Milestone on the MOWCAP Register** - Three of India's literary treasures (Ramcharitmanas, Panchatantra, and Sahrdayāloka-Locana) were inscribed into the 2024 Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific (MOWCAP) Regional Register.

Conclusion

- World Heritage Day reminds us that protecting our heritage is a shared responsibility.
- From ancient monuments to timeless literature, India continues to preserve its cultural and natural legacy through strong national efforts and global collaboration.
- These efforts ensure that our rich heritage inspires, educates, and unites generations to come.

Reference

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