

Africa's most endangered heritage sites

The alluring African continent is host to some of the best UNESCO Heritage Sites. Not only is it the cradle of mankind, but it boasts beautiful forests, natural reserves that are home to thousands of wildlife and parks among many others. The continent is also home to renowned conservationists including the Leaky family who has contributed to the discovery of human fossils.

However, this sweet story is slowly turning sour, as Africa's heritage sites gradually get damaged. According to UNESCO, out of the 89 sites in Africa, 16 are included on the List of World Heritage Sites in danger by the World Heritage Committee. Jovago, online hotel booking company, has put together a list of some of the most endangered Sites in Africa.



Source: africannaturalheritage.org

Aïr and Ténéré Natural Reserves – Niger

Located in northern Niger within the Sahara Desert, the Aïr is famous for its rock art dating from 6000 BC to around AD 1000. The Natural Reserves also has a variety of landscapes, plant species and wild animals. Though it is considered one of the largest protected areas in Africa covering approximately 7.7M hectares Aïr and Ténéré Natural Reserves became endangered in 1992 as a result of political instability in Niger.

Conflict among the populations has also become a big threat, with poaching and illegal grazing posing a great danger to the reserves. Measures to protect the reserve include tough penalties against poachers.

Sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has most of its heritage sites facing damage threats. Garamba National Park, for example, was home to the world's last known wild population of Northern White Rhinoceros. Poaching of the rhinos made the park endangered, but efforts to save the wildlife were successful. However, the Garamba was later impacted and destroyed again in 1991 when the Sudanese

People's Liberation Army (SPLA) attacked and captured a nearby town. An influx of the town's inhabitants sought refuge in the park while SPLA hunted game from among the remaining wild animals. As a result, Garamba Park was once again listed as a World Heritage Site in danger.

Other sites destroyed or endangered in Congo especially due to political instability associated with the 1994 Rwandan Genocide include: Salonga National Park, Virunga National Park, Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Okapi Wildlife Reserve.

Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Ruins of Songo Mnara



Both Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are located in Stone Town, in East Africa's Tanzania. Mosques, cemeteries and most houses along these two sites are built from rough coral and mortar; reminiscing a few centuries' old slave and spice trade. Years of neglect and lack of rehabilitation of the once vibrant heritage sites has led to the two being listed among the endangered ones in Africa.

Timbuktu

During the 12th and 14th Centuries, Timbuktu was a thriving trade center that was the envy of many empires in West Africa. The town that is currently in Mali no longer exudes the glow of a burgeoning city, but rather an impoverished state that has greatly suffered desertification. According to UNESCO, this is attributed to continuing rapid urbanisation, with modern-day buildings towering the ancient architectures of Timbuktu. Among the affected features include the Tomb of Askia, which is also on the list of the heritage sites in danger in Africa.

Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi



Uganda's Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi is a burial site for four Kings of Buganda popularly known as Kabakas, plus other members of the Buganda royal family. The tombs remain a major spiritual site for the Baganda people. Unfortunately, a fire tragedy that occurred in March 2010 destroyed some of the major buildings comprising the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi, rendering the site among the endangered Heritage Sites in Africa.

Many countries view danger-listing as a blow to tourism because it reduces the number of visitors and take away the country's opportunity to attract new tourists. Most African countries make it to the list of endanger heritage due to lack of budget and attention to sights. Experts suggest that governments, as well as concerned stakeholders, should put in place and implement measures to regulate tourism activities not only in Africa but also across the globe. This will go a long way to preserving Heritage Sites and protecting them from possible endangerment.

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