

# WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Mainstreaming Sustainability into Tourism For The Protection of The World Heritage

## WHAT IS WORLD HERITAGE?

World Heritage sites are places around the world that have been internationally recognized for their outstanding value as natural and cultural treasures. Sites currently on the World Heritage List include Independence Hall, Stonehenge, the Galapagos Islands, the wildlife reserves of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the historic Centre of Prague, the Pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China.

There are currently 878 World Heritage sites (679 cultural, 174 natural and 25 mixed properties) in 145 countries. All sites are protected by the 1972 World Heritage Convention, signed to date by 185 countries and administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

## WHAT IS THE WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM (WHA)?

Created in 2005 by the United Nations Foundation and Expedia, Inc. under the guidance of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, the World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism is an industry-led initiative created to support World Heritage conservation, promote sustainable tourism, and foster economic development for local communities in and around UNESCO World Heritage sites. In 2008 the WH Committee recognized the importance of and endorsed the WHA public-private partnership.

The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism engages the travel industry, facilitating collaboration with the UN, governments and civil society, promoting environmentally and economically sustainable business practices around World Heritage sites, educating travelers about the importance of responsible tourism around the sites, and supporting sustainable development of local communities. Our goal is to galvanize widespread support for World Heritage conservation, sustainable tourism, and local economic development for communities in and around World Heritage sites.

## WHY DO WE NEED THE WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE?

The Alliance provides a venue for developing public-private partnerships under the umbrella of the UN to address the main objective of the Marrakesh Process, namely promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns through active participation of key stakeholders: governments, industry, WH site managers, communities, and travelers. While it addresses most of the priorities of the Sustainable Tourism Task Force it can be framed under "Promoting Natural and Cultural Heritage as Assets for Sustainable Tourism Development"

## HOW DOES THE WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE WORK?

The WHA has adopted a set of principles to guide travel industry members in their efforts to foster sustainable tourism in and around World Heritage sites. These principles are aligned with the new Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria ([www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org](http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org)), a partnership of more than 30 public and private partners – led by the Rainforest Alliance, UNEP, UN Foundation, and UNWTO – to promote the universal adoption of sustainable tourism. It will also be aligned with the WH criteria with supporting principles and approaches for tourism and public use currently under development.

In exchange for this commitment, WHA members receive access to resources such as staff training courses, communications materials to educate travelers, and access to a matching grant facility (with co-financing provided by the United Nations Foundation) to support local communities in and around the World Heritage sites where members are active.

The WHA is currently involved in the conservation of 20 World Heritage sites found in 6 different countries including Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize, Jordan, Dominica, and the United States. While these projects are being carried out, education and awareness building of World Heritage conservation and sustainable tourism continues to take place world-wide.

## WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE?

Members of WHA are comprised mainly of governments, travel and tourism industry and civil society committed to preserving and protecting these destinations World Heritage sites and promoting local economic development. The WHA has established its membership categories as travel industry members and associate partners. The industry includes lodging providers, tour operators, cruise lines and airlines. Associate partners include local and national government bodies, NGOs and other civil society groups concerned with tourism, sustainability and cultural or environmental preservation.

In early 2009, the WHA has 65 members – 43 travel industry members and 22 associate partners – working to accomplish the mission.

## WHAT IS FRIENDS OF WORLD HERITAGE?

While the World Heritage Alliance focuses on engaging the travel industry, it has established an initiative called Friends of World Heritage (FOWH). It is a grassroots initiative of the UN Foundation, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and Expedia, Inc. aimed to promote World Heritage conservation and responsible tourism among individuals. The mission of FOWH is to create and enlarge a constituency of World Heritage supporters and travelers to ensure the protection of these sites for future generations. FOWH is an online resource of dynamic, interactive content – including stories in World Heritage sites, travelers' diaries on everyday experiences, events on World Heritage, and downloadable e-cards of renowned sites.

## WHAT IS THE FRIENDS OF WORLD HERITAGE FUND?

Through Friends of World Heritage, individuals can donate to support communities working to develop sustainable tourism in and around World Heritage sites in the developing world where resources are most scarce. All donations are matched by both Expedia and the UN Foundation, turning \$1 into \$3. Since 2007, Friends of World Heritage has awarded around \$350,000 in grants to communities around 9 World Heritage sites.

## WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE?

It is the objective of WHA to grow within the next year to become a global initiative. Currently the WHA is limited to working in a few regions and will look to expand the program by:

- Strengthening existing local and regional processes through building local implementing networks that carry out the mission of WHA
- Establishing global partnerships to build awareness and grow support for WH preservation
- Growing the presence of the Alliance, through public-private partnerships in new regions
- Increasing awareness and education of travelers through FOWH
- Increasing support for communities and sites through the Friends of World Heritage Fund

Further information can be found at [www.worldheritagealliance.org](http://www.worldheritagealliance.org) or by emailing [worldheritagealliance@unfoundation.org](mailto:worldheritagealliance@unfoundation.org)

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

The WHA is looking to establish partnerships with governments, organizations and individuals committed to sustainable tourism in the context of World Heritage conservation and community development. These partnerships will enable the Alliance to extend its reach and strengthen its impacts.

If you are interested in participating in the World Heritage Alliance please send an email to:

[worldheritagealliance@unfoundation.org](mailto:worldheritagealliance@unfoundation.org)