

## Book Review

# **UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit**

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By UNESCO. Paris: UNESCO, 2018.  
(Available online: <http://whc.unesco.org/sustainabletourismtoolkit>).

In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, archaeologist Indiana Jones, played by actor Harrison Ford, sets off to an ancient temple in the Middle East to find the Holy Grail, which is said to be the cup that Jesus Christ drank from at the Last Supper. After passing through a long ravine enclosed by red cliffs that extends over one kilometer, Jones beholds Al-Khazneh in awe.

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Al-Khazneh, which means “The Treasury” in Bedouin Arabic, is a representative structure in Petra that was carved out of the cliff and rock face. It shows the traces of the now-disappeared Nabatean Kingdom that existed between 4th century BC and AD 1st century. It had been hidden and forgotten for over 1,500 years until 1812, when it was discovered by a 27-year-old Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhart. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985.

In Jordan, where 80 percent of the land is desert, tourism is a main industry that accounts for 50 percent of the country’s entire industry. The ruins of Petra are considered as one of the key areas of Jordan’s tourism industry, along with Aqaba and Wadi Rum. Tourism industry centered on cultural heritage sites, which is the fastest growing industry in the world, takes up 40 percent of the world’s entire tourism industry. Countries all over the world are striving to create jobs through culture and tourism industry, develop local communities and improve their environment, and protect heritage sites.

For many countries, the purpose of including their heritage sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List is to protect and conserve World Heritage properties through their inscription. However, it is more often the case that their true intention is to strengthen the national image, develop tourism infrastructure of heritage sites, and revitalize local economy by attracting more tourists.

Yet, efforts to develop heritage properties as tourism resources sometimes lead to serious deterioration of the original source, that is, the heritage itself, or degrade the quality of life of residents near the heritage site. In addition, these efforts may only benefit external investors or companies rather than local residents.

The Ajanta Caves, which were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983, are rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments dating from the second century BC to AD seventh century. They contain a wide range of beautiful Buddhist murals that had been well-preserved for a long period. Since they were opened to the public, however, a great number tourists have come to visit and some murals have been damaged to the point where they cannot even be restored.

With the entire city being an architectural masterpiece, Italian city of Venice, which was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987, was regarded as one of the main heritage sites with issues of over-tourism before the Covid-19 pandemic. While the actual resident population of Venice was about 55,000, an average of 20 million tourists visited the city annually and even the daily average reached 120,000, more than twice the resident population. This situation made it difficult for Venetians to lead a normal life. Constant traffic jam caused by tourists, garbage dumped on the streets, restaurants and services tailored to tourists, and excessive concentration of jobs in the tourism sector pushed those who wanted a normal life in Venice to leave the city.

Built during the height of the Inca Empire, Machu Picchu in Peru is an evidence of an incredible civilization that brings a constant stream of tourists from all over the world. Despite UNESCO's recommendation to limit the number of average visitors to 2,500 per day for an appropriate management of the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu, average daily visitors reached

over 5,600 before the Covid-19 pandemic, which was more than twice the recommended number and far exceeded the limit. The more serious issue is that an airport is currently being built at about 3,700 meters above sea level in the mountains, in order to expand the tourism industry that generated income. It is questionable whether sustainable management and protection of the heritage will be possible under such condition.

Developing world heritage sites into tourism resources can certainly result in having positive effects on social, economic, and cultural areas. However, as seen in above cases, it can also have a negative effect when the sites are not properly managed. Considering these issues, UNESCO has been operating the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme since 2011. This programme encourages diverse actors in heritage sites to plan and manage sustainable tourism together and to share both the responsibility and the benefits.

*UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit*, published by UNESCO in 2018, explains step-by-step considerations for planning, operating, and managing sustainable tourism programme at a community level. More specifically, this Toolkit introduces in detail the aspects that need to be considered and implemented in 10 steps, which include basic understanding of heritage sites, understanding of the aspirations of each relevant actor, development of a strategy for progressive change, development of governance, engagement, communication, building of infrastructure, awareness-raising and sharing of value, improvement of behavior, securing of investment, and monitoring. This is very useful, because rather than providing immediate solutions to the problem, it offers ideas or practices to refer to when planning, operating and managing sustainable tourism. Also, it shares all the important lessons of success and failure that various world heritage sites have learned from their past experiences.

For example, the Toolkit includes cases such as Cambodia's Angkor Wat that showed how the local community has to be a key consideration for planning, management and operation of sustainable tourism. There is also the case of Avebury in England that emphasized the importance of dialogue and communication between diverse interest groups.

Overall, this education material conveys the following key messages

to us: that efforts need to be made to continue the dialogue among many actors with different ideas; that opinions and participation from the local community in decision-making processes is essential; that awareness-raising of all parties involved is necessary for the development of high-quality tourism industry, or capacity-building and information sharing are important; and that the responsibilities, benefits and profits of tourism industry need to be shared.

In recent days, the discussion surrounding the issue of protection and development of world heritage sites has been actively taking place in Korea. Therefore, I hope this guidebook can help diverse stakeholders to build cooperative relationships and find reasonable solutions.

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*This Toolkit was translated into Korean in 2020. The Korean version is available on the website of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.or.kr/data/report/>*