

Travel

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UNESCO sites to be saved and savored

By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

A pristine section of land stretching from northern Montana into British Columbia, Canada, contains stunning mountain ranges, prairies, tundra, and lakes. It has endangered trout, the highest concentration of grizzly bears in the United States, and water quality that ranks among the best in the world. Gold exploration, coal-bed methane drilling, or construction of a coal mine might have irreversibly damaged this fragile environment.

This land, known as the Waterton Glacier International Peace Park, is on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage List, a designation currently held by 890 natural and cultural sites worldwide because of their "outstanding universal value." In February, British Columbia and Montana signed an agreement stating that no mining will be allowed in the region.

"All of the values that make this park of international significance would have been threatened," says Stephen Morris, chief of the Office of International Affairs at the US National Park Service. "The World Heritage designation of Waterton Glacier definitely played a role

HERITAGE, Page M3



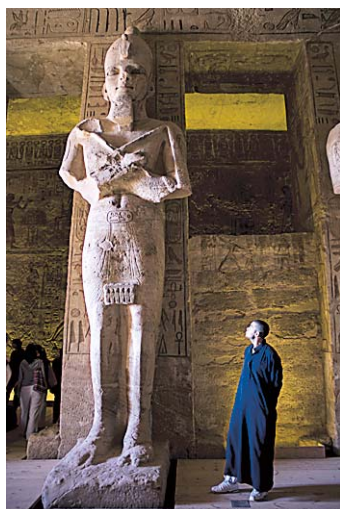
The Serengeti plains in Tanzania.



Darien National Park in Panama.



Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, Canada-US border; Abu Simbel temple, Egypt.



KARI BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (PHOTOS 1, 2, 4); JANET MENDELSON/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



SCOTT E. BARBOUR/GETTY IMAGES

"Abra," or water taxis, will ferry people across Dubai Creek, which separates the historic settlements of Bur Dubai and Deira, with its spice and gold souks.

Where modern meets ancient

For millennia a crossroads and trade center, the Arabian Peninsula barter its deep black gold for soaring ambitions

BY CLAUDIA CAPOS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

DUBAI — As the desert sun burns through the morning haze, Peter and Alysha St. Germain admire the lofty 360-degree view of Dubai from the 124th-floor observation deck of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper. "This is really impressive," says Peter, formerly of Westhampton, now working in nearby Abu Dhabi. "Dubai has done so many amazing projects to attract world attention." Adds Alysha, "The view is awesome."

Piercing the heavens like a silver rocket, the half-mile-high tower, visible from 60 miles away, was formally dedicated in January, following six challenging years of construction. At 2,717 feet (and 162 stories), it easily topped its closest rival, the nondescript Tapei 101 Tower (1,670 feet). The Armani Hotel, which opened last month, is the first of many well-heeled tenants that will occupy space in this "vertical city." Little wonder the Burj Khalifa has quickly become the new emblem of this dynamic city on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Far below the tower, Susan Ceukar stands on the outer edge of the Palm-Jumeirah, a manmade, palm-shaped island extending into the Persian Gulf. The 12-square-mile isle of artificial turf, built with sand and quarried rock, is the first and the smallest of three palm islands under development in what has been billed as the largest-ever land-reclamation project. Nearby, another ambitious island grouping is being constructed in the shape of the world.

Ceukar, from Melrose, marvels at Palm-Jumeirah's luxury condominiums and hotels. "The

DUBAI, Page M4



CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The desert is a recreational resource south of the city of Dubai.

Fast glimpses of the past

MARGHAM DESERT — "Are you all buckled up?" says our driver, Marwan, an ex-military tough guy turned desert guide. A second later, he stomps on the gas of our souped-up Chevy Tahoe and charges up the side of a towering red sand dune.

In the front seat, Marion Eickmann, from Berlin, shrieks and grabs for the dashboard to brace herself. With sand flying in all directions, Marwan jerks the steering wheel to keep the four-wheel-drive SUV on course. At the top of the dune, he accelerates sharply to tip the car over the crest. Then he guns the engine and sends us hurtling forward in a nosedive down the other side. The car bucks and slides. More screams, this time from Eick-

mann's husband, Andrea Tomasini, who is riding in back.

At the bottom of the dune, the car slows briefly and we sigh in relief. But Marwan puts the pedal to the metal and we assault an even higher dune. The roller-coaster ride continues for what seems an eternity. "It's a little like driving in snow," Eickmann gasps, as we narrowly miss another careening Tahoe in our caravan.

This is our first adventure in the golden dunes of the Margham Desert. Marwan assures us that dune-bashing is a relatively safe weekend pastime among the Emiratis. "When we are with friends and family, we do what we call a 'dangle berry,'" he says. "That is when you

CARAVAN, Page M4

World's heritage protected one site at a time

► HERITAGE

Continued from Page M1

in helping to protect the park from this mining development.”

Sites like China's Great Wall, Australia's Great Barrier Reef, Venice, Peru's Machu Picchu, and Indonesia's Borobudur, the largest Buddhist monument in the world, have earned World Heritage status for their enduring uniqueness and value as natural or cultural treasures. Achieving such status helps countries preserve, protect, and promote these legacies of global importance.

“We have expanded the concept of heritage in modern times,” says Francesco Bandarin, director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre in Paris. “It originally included the monuments of Greece, Egypt, Rome, and other ancient civilizations. Now it includes cities, institutions, itineraries, and essentially anything that communities value.”

Even important routes are recognized as legacies, such as the ancient Spice Route and the Silk Road, networks of land and maritime trade routes that linked Europe and the Far East for thousands of years. Towns, ports, churches, and monuments with connections to these routes have secured places on the list.

To get on the list, a site must meet at least one of 10 criteria. It might be “a masterpiece of human creative genius,” such as Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's neoclassical home in Virginia, which he designed himself, or an example of an architectural style that illustrates a significant stage in human history, like the Acropolis in Athens. Or it might be an outstanding example of a stage in the planet's history, such as Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland and Labrador, which also meets the World Heritage criterion for containing “superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional beauty and aesthetic importance.”

“The thing that's quite remarkable in Gros Morne is that those features of the park that contribute to the amazing and dramatic beauty, whether it's a mountain or deeply carved gla-



KARI BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland and Labrador is a World Heritage site.

cial valley, are the same ones that have great scientific significance,” says Anne Marceau, an interpretive specialist at the park. “They're each a product of this incredible theory of plate tectonics, the idea that continents exist on different plates that intersect and overlap.”

“There have been development issues,” says Marceau, referring to the threat of installing power lines in the park, “but because it's a World Heritage site, people rallied and were more likely to say, Hey, no, that's not appropriate.”

The event that sparked strong international interest in protecting a cultural heritage site dates to the 1950s, when floodwaters from the proposed Aswan High Dam in Egypt would have engulfed the magnificent Abu Simbel temples on the banks of the Nile. The Egyptian government and more than 50 countries banded together to save the ancient treasures, donating \$80 million to survey the site and to move the temples, one block of stone at a time, to higher ground.

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contain ancient wall carvings and hieroglyphics celebrating one of Egypt's greatest pharaohs, Ramses II. All would have disappeared underwater without such global conservation efforts.

“The idea of conserving vast areas of wild land originated in the United States, going back to the great John Muir in the late 19th century and continuing with the efforts of Roosevelt in the early 1900s,” says Bandarin. But it took off in the mid-1960s, he adds, when the United States proposed a World Heritage Trust to encourage countries to protect their outstanding natural and scenic areas.

The two conservation movements came together in 1972 with the establishment of the World Heritage Convention (officially called the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage), an international treaty that is currently ratified by 187 countries. The Bahamas became the final country in the Americas to join when it signed the treaty last month.

Since its inception, “the World

Heritage List has expanded galactically,” says Bandarin, who will become UNESCO's assistant director-general for culture in July. “The originators of the treaty hoped the list would eventually include 100 sites, but today there are 890: Six hundred eighty-nine cultural, 176 natural, and 25 mixed.”

The first 12 sites that made the list in 1978 included Yellowstone National Park, located in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, which has the world's largest number of geysers (over 300) and more than half the planet's known geothermal features (over 10,000); Ecuador's Galápagos Islands, where unique animals contributed to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution; and Poland's Wieliczka Salt Mine, which chronicles mining practices from the 13th to 20th centuries, and has underground lakes and more than 186 miles of art, altars, and statues carved into the rock salt.

Each year, the 21-member World Heritage Committee selects new sites for the list. The committee also reviews the List of World Heritage in Danger.

“The point of the danger list is to draw attention to sites that are threatened and thereby bring in needed support, resources, and

UNESCO

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US sites

Mesa Verde National Park

Yellowstone N.P.

Everglades N.P.

Grand Canyon N.P.

Independence Hall

Kluane/Wrangell-St. Elias/
Glacier Bay/Tatshenshini-Alsek

Redwood N.P.

Mammoth Cave N.P.

Olympic N.P.

Cahokia Mounds
State Historic Site

La Fortaleza and San Juan
National Historic Site

Great Smoky Mountains N.P.

Statue of Liberty

Chaco Culture
National Historic Park

Hawaii Volcanoes N.P.

Monticello and the University
of Virginia in Charlottesville

Taos Pueblo

Carlsbad Caverns N.P.

Waterton Glacier

International Peace Park

Yosemite N.P.

expertise,” says Gina Doubleday, spokeswoman for the World Heritage Centre. “Many threatened sites, such as those in Democratic Republic of Congo [which has five, more than any country] are areas of armed conflict. In these situations, the countries are in no position to protect their heritage.

“It's not punishment,” adds Bandarin, “but it indicates that there is a problem. We recommend ways to fix problems, and offer technical and financial assistance.”

Thirty-one sites hold a spot on the danger list, including the Galápagos, the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, and Virunga National Park in the Congo, which has a chain of active volcanoes, endangered mountain gorillas,

and “the greatest diversity of habitats of any park in Africa,” according to UNESCO.

To date, only two sites have been taken off the World Heritage list: the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman and the Dresden Elbe Valley in Germany.

“The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was a vast site of desert land — 25,000 square kilometers [15,500 square miles] — that hosted endangered species, including a gazelle-like animal, and one day the government decided to reduce 90 percent of the size of the park,” explains Bandarin. “They found oil somewhere.”

“In the Dresden case, they decided to build a highway bridge through the city, even after we told them to build a tunnel, instead,” adds Bandarin. “But these are extreme cases.”

The United States has 20 World Heritage sites and 14 others have been nominated, including the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona, a group of Franciscan missions in Texas, and three Baptist churches in Alabama that would collectively be considered one site.

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