JAPAN’S NINeteen UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

In 1993, Horyu-ji, Himeji Castle, Shirakami Sanchi and Yakushima were registered as Japan’s first four UNESCO World Heritage sites—a list that has now expanded to include fifteen World Cultural Heritage sites and four World Natural Heritage sites.

Japan further boasts twenty-two items on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List, which aims to protect aspects of intangible culture such as traditional music, dance, theater and industrial arts.

BUDDHIST MONUMENTS IN THE HORYU-JI AREA ▶️ Nara Prefecture ★ 1993
Several of these forty-eight Buddhist monuments date from the late seventh to early eighth centuries, making them some of the oldest surviving wooden buildings in the world.

HIMEJI-JO ▶️ Hyogo Prefecture ★ 1993
The castle keep compound consists of a primary tower and three smaller towers linked by roofed passageways, forming Japan’s only remaining example of castle towers in the renritsu (unified) style.

YAKUSHIMA ▶️ Kagoshima Prefecture ★ 1993
A mountainous island blessed with heavy rains and lofty peaks, Yakushima is home to an abundance of exceedingly rare forest vegetation, with a wealth of native plants and animals.

SHIRAKAMI-SANCHI ▶️ Aomori Prefecture, Akita Prefecture ★ 1993
Hosting a diverse variety of flora and fauna, the area is exemplary of the forests of Siebold’s beech trees that flourished in East Asia immediately following the last ice age.

HISTORIC MONUMENTS OF ANCIENT KYOTO [KYOTO, UJI AND OHTSU CITIES] ▶️ Kyoto Prefecture, Shiga Prefecture ★ 1994
From its foundation by Emperor Kanmu in 794 AD, Kyoto flourished as the imperial capital of Japan for a thousand years. Kyoto overflows with shrines, temples and castles preserved to the modern day.

HISTORIC VILLAGES OF SHIRAKAWA-GO AND GOKAYAMA ▶️ Gifu Prefecture, Toyama Prefecture ★ 1995
Built in a heavy snow belt without the use of nails, gassho-style houses are marked by steeply pitched thatched roofs designed to withstand deep snow accumulations. The interiors are divided into multiple levels for the rearing of silkworms.

HIROSHIMA PEACE MEMORIAL [GENBAKU DOME] ▶️ Hiroshima Prefecture ★ 1996
The ruin of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall is preserved in the same destroyed state it had after the first atomic bomb detonated over the city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

ITSUKUSHIMA SHINTO SHRINE ▶️ Hiroshima Prefecture ★ 1996
Together with the surrounding sea and the primeval forests of nearby Mount Misen, the entire shrine complex has been registered as a World Heritage Site.

HISTORIC MONUMENTS OF ANCIENT NARA ▶️ Nara Prefecture ★ 1998
These monuments embody the cultural heritage of the Nara Period, during which the foundations of Japan as a nation were established. Architectural elements such as Todai-ji Temple and natural landscapes, including Kasugayama Primeval Forest, form a synergistic environment.

SHRINES AND TEMPLES OF NIKKO ▶️ Tochigi Prefecture ★ 1999
A grouping of majestic structures centered around Edo Period mausoleums, encompassed by Futarasan-jinja shrine, Toshogu shrine and Rinno-ji Temple, all located in the historic region of Mount Nikko.

GUSUKU SITES AND RELATED PROPERTIES OF THE KINGDOM OF RYUKYU ▶️ Okinawa Prefecture ★ 2000
This group of sites and monuments represents the unique distinctions of the Ryukyu region and culture, which prospered from the latter half of the fourteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century.
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

2008
Nogaku Theatre, Ningyo Johruri Bunraku Puppet Theatre, Kabuki Theatre

2009
Gagaku, Ojiya-châjîmi, Echigo-jo’fu: techniques of making ramie fabric in Uonuma region, Niigata Prefecture
Hitachi furyumono (Ibaraki Prefecture)
Yamahoko, the float ceremony of the Kyoto Gion festival (Kyoto Prefecture)
Koshikijima no toshidon (Kagoshima Prefecture)
Ojiya-châjîmi, Echigo-jo’fu: techniques of making ramie fabric in Uonuma region, Niigata Prefecture
Hitachi furyumono (Ibaraki Prefecture)
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Yamahoko, the float ceremony of the Kyoto Gion festival (Kyoto Prefecture)
Koshikijima no toshidon (Kagoshima Prefecture)

2010
Kumiodori, traditional Okinawan musical theatre
Yuki-tsumugi, silk fabric production technique

2011
Mibu no hana taue, ritual of transplanting rice in Mibu, Hiroshima
Sada Shin Noh, sacred dancing at Sada Shrine, Shimane

2012
Nachi no dengaku, a traditional dance performed in the town of Nachi-Katsuura, Wakayama Prefecture

2013
Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year

2014
Washi, craftsmanship of traditional Japanese handmade paper

THE KII MOUNTAIN RANGE

Various schools of religion have long shaped the holy sites of Koyasan, Kumano Sanzan, Yoshino and Omine in the Kii Mountain Range. Along with their associated pilgrim roads, these sites have been carefully preserved.

SHIRETOKO

Located on the Sea of Okhotsk, the sea’s topographical and geographical conditions make it the most southerly point in the world to see the seasonal formation of sea ice, making the Shiretoko Peninsula an outstanding example of an integrated ecosystem displaying the interrelationship between a terrestrial ecosystem and a contiguous marine ecosystem.

THE IWAMI GINZAN SILVER MINE AND ITS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The mine produced a vast amount of silver in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, triggering the mass production of gold and silver in Japan, strongly influencing the communications and exchange of goods between East and West.

OGASAWARA ISLANDS

Despite their small size, these islands are home to a large number of endemic species, providing precious evidence of evolutionary adaptive radiation, particularly in snails and vascular plants.

HIRAIZUMI TEMPLES, GARDENS AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES REPRESENTING THE BUDDHIST PURE LAND

Hiraizumi’s temples, gardens and remaining ruins were created with the aim of realizing the Buddhaksetra (Pure Land) in the real world, a concept based on the principles of Pure Land Buddhism, a school of thought that gained prominence among the Japanese schools of Buddhist belief.

FUJISAN, SACRED PLACE AND SOURCE OF ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

A sacred and solemn figure that is itself a subject of worship, Mount Fuji has been depicted in many works of art such as ukiyo-e paintings, its profound effect felt both domestically and abroad.

TOMIOKA SILK MILL AND RELATED SITES

This complex consists of four sites corresponding to the different stages in the production of raw silk: the first-ever silk mill in Japan (Tomioka Silk Mill), the prototype of modern sericulture farmhouses (Tajima Yahei Sericulture Farm), a sericulture educational facility (Takayama-sha Sericulture School), and a cold storage facility for silk-worm eggs (Arafune Cold Storage).

SITES OF JAPAN’S MEIJI INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: IRON AND STEEL, SHIPBUILDING AND COAL MINING

These sites bear testimony to the successful transfer of Western industrialization to a non-Western nation.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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