

Natural Heritage: Bridging Local to Global Connections

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Natural heritage serves as a foundation for shared connections through identity, history, ecology and geography. In the first quarter of 2025, the WII Category 2 Centre (WII-C2C) for Natural Heritage organized a series of programmes aimed at fostering a deeper appreciation of these values among diverse stakeholders. Local communities living adjacent to Indian Natural World Heritage Sites were introduced to the significance of such prestigious designations. Academics deliberated on the complex issues that heritage needs to navigate, and trainees from 17 countries explored the concepts of heritage through India as a vibrant and dynamic living classroom.

Exposure Visit of GHNP Ambassadors and Ecozone Stakeholders, 6-10 January, 2025 — Bringing World Heritage Knowledge to the Grassroots

WII-C2C, in collaboration with the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department, organized this 5-day programme aimed at extending the understanding of why sites are designated as World Heritage Sites beyond heritage practitioners and senior officials involved in the process. This initiative sought to engage a broader audience, including local communities and stakeholders. The programme brought together 25 participants — a diverse group comprising community representatives, tourism operators and forest department staff — hailing from the vicinity of the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area, a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site.



Adopting a structured approach, the programme began with an exploration of the breadth of heritage across nature (ç—fr), imaat (bekjr) and traditions (çFkk)—referred to as PIP—before delving into in-depth discussions about World Heritage. Conducting these sessions on-site at iconic World Heritage Sites such as Keoladeo National Park and the Taj Mahal further reinforced the importance of pride, ownership and collective responsibility required to preserve heritage.

Negotiating Heritage, Identity & Citizenship in the Himalayas, 6-7 January, 2025 — Aiding Academic Discourse on Heritage

The multi-disciplinary nature of heritage calls for engagement with many schools of thought and academic disciplines. WII-C2C, in collaboration with the Centre for Himalayan Studies, School of Civilization, Somaiya Vidyavihar University and Humanities Himalaya Society, convened a gathering of scholars from different states and communities to focus on the heritage of Himalayan communities. The conference, attended by 25 participants, highlighted inspiring narratives of resilience, community-led conservation, and harmonious living with nature. These discussions explored potential frameworks and actionable directions for preserving the region's remarkable heritage. The workshop also had a heritage walk to Guru Ram Rai Darbar, a historically significant landmark in Dehradun and integral to the city's identity and culture.

MEA-ITEC 1st Training Course on Natural Heritage (TCNH) & 2nd Certificate Course on Natural Heritage Management (CCNHM)—Advancing International Capacity-Building in Natural Heritage

As a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, WII-C2C stands out globally for its exclusive focus on Natural World Heritage.

In line with its mandate, the Centre hosted two courses for international participants on Natural Heritage funded by the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs under the India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme. Building on the first programme in 2024, these two capacity-building for natural

heritage courses were advertised through Indian embassies, consulates and high commissions worldwide. Out of numerous qualified applicants, a total of 25 participants from 17 countries across four continents were selected to attend. The two-week 1st Training Course on Natural Heritage (TCNH), held from 20-31 January, 2025, and the four-week 2nd Certificate Course on Natural Heritage Management (CCNHM), from 17 February - 13 March, 2025, comprised diverse cohorts. Participants from Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Ghana, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Palestine, Tajikistan, Bulgaria, Russia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Vietnam attended these courses. Participants, ranging from professionals in wildlife management, agriculture, tourism, urban planning, and academia, benefited from expert-led sessions and valuable cross-learning experiences. Classes themed on Natural Heritage & Conservation, Concepts and Conventions, Heritage Management, Heritage Interpretation, and Socio-Economic Aspects of Heritage enabled a holistic understanding of heritage applications. Sessions on biodiversity, international conservation designations, World Heritage management, the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) framework, and the nomination process deepened their insight into pursuing World Heritage Site recognition. Field tours to Rajaji National Park, Keoladeo National Park, Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, and Qutb Minar provided hands-on exposure to the intricacies of managing World Heritage Sites, fostering shared experiences and creating lasting memories. Interactions with experts at the Archaeological Survey of India and the National Museum in New Delhi enriched participants' understanding of heritage and its many dimensions.



Conclusion

In summary, the first quarter of 2025 marked significant progress for WII-C2C in advancing its expertise in the domain of Natural Heritage. By organizing these programmes and drawing from the rich knowledge and diverse experiences of the trainees, the Centre has both shaped and been enriched by the array of values explored. Recognizing the intricate nature-culture linkages that transcend global cultures, these events have propelled the discourse on natural heritage forward and will serve as a guiding framework for the Centre's future initiatives.

