ABOUT WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE

Toward World Natural Heritage Registration

Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island of Kagoshima Prefecture, and the northern part of Okinawa Island and Iriomote Island of Okinawa Prefecture, have applied for registration as World Natural Heritage sites. These islands have one of Japan’s largest subtropical evergreen broadleaf forests. There are also a great number of endemic species and endangered species living here. These aspects exemplify the value they have and why they should be granted status as World Natural Heritage Sites.

1. What is World Heritage?

World Heritage sites are natural areas and cultural sites listed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) as irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration common to all human beings which we intend on passing on to future generations.

2. Category of World Heritage sites

World Heritage is divided into three categories: Natural Sites, Cultural Sites and Mixed Sites. As of 2016, there were 203 World Natural Heritage sites, 814 World Cultural Heritage sites and 35 Mixed Heritage sites.

- **Natural Heritage**
  - E.g.: Grand Canyon, Iguazu Falls
  - Natural Heritage Sites consist of geology, ecosystems and natural environment which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of conservation, aesthetics or the academy.

- **Cultural Heritage**
  - E.g.: The Pyramids, The Great Wall
  - Cultural Heritage Sites consist of monuments, groups of buildings and sites which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science.

- **Mixed Heritage**
  - E.g.: Machu Picchu, Tasmanian Wilderness
  - Mixed Heritage Sites satisfy the requirements of both Natural and Cultural Heritage.

3. There are three requirements to be registered as a World Natural Heritage site.

A. Sites must meet at least one out of four of the selection criteria listed below.

- **Natural beauty**
- A site must contain superb natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty such as the world’s deepest canyon or the largest waterfall.

- **Geology and geomorphology**
- A site must be an outstanding representative of the major stages of geology and geomorphology exhibiting earth’s history and the record of life.

- **Ecosystem**
- A site must be an outstanding representative of significant on-going biological processes.

- **Biodiversity**
- A site must contain the most important natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those endangered species of the world.

B. Sites must possess an adequate size as a World Heritage site and maintain the original natural status without any impact from development and other factors.

C. Sites must take full and appropriate measures for protection in order to maintain the value of the World Heritage site for future generations.

**World Natural Heritage Sites in Japan**

Four areas have been listed as World Natural Heritage sites in Japan.

- **Shiretoko**
  - (Hokkaido)
  - The life of a peninsula where the sea ice supports the integrated ecosystems of local ocean and forest.
  - Listed in 2005

- **Ogasawara Islands**
  - (Tokyo)
  - Oceanic islands that display the on-going evolutionary process.
  - Listed in 2011

- **Shirakami-Sanchi**
  - (Aomori Prefecture / Akita Prefecture)
  - The largest primate beech forest in East Asia.
  - Listed in 1993

- **Yakushima**
  - (Kagoshima Prefecture)
  - Natural forest of over 1,000-year-old Japanese cedars called “Yakusugi”
  - Listed in 1993