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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.

* The official name is: Nominated World Natural Heritage sites in Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, the northern part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island.

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.

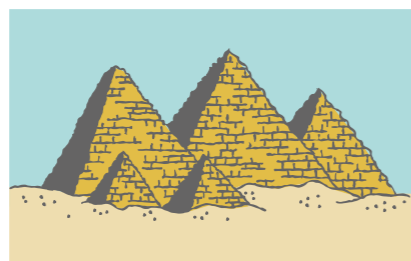
Natural Heritage



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.

Iriomote Island



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 primeval 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

Quiz 1
How many World Heritage Sites are there in the world?
① 10 ② approx.100 ③ approx.1,000
Find the answer at the bottom of page 3.

Quiz 2
Which feature is evaluated as a value of Yakushima's World Natural Heritage?
① Loggerhead Turtles ② Coral Reef ③ Forest of Yakusugi cedars
Find the answer at the bottom of page 4.

Quiz 3
How many World Natural Heritage sites are there?
① 2 ② approx.20 ③ approx.200
Find the answer at the bottom of page 4.

Kagoshima

Tanegashima Island

Yakushima Island

Amami-Oshima Island

Kikai Island

Tokunoshima Island

Okinoerabu Island

Yoron Island

Okinawa Island

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The value of Yakushima as a World Natural Heritage site

The mean annual temperature of Yakushima greatly differs from approximately 20 °C in the coastal area to 6°C at the summit of Mt. Miyanoura-dake, and other 2,000 meter high mountains on the island. The climate of the summit area is similar to that of Hokkaido, the northern part of Japan. On this single island, Yakushima, the natural vegetation of the entire Japanese archipelago, stretching from north to south, can be seen. **【Ecosystem】** So much rain falls on Yakushima that it has been described by novelist Fumiko Hayashi as a place where "It rains 35 days a month." However, because Yakushima is made up of granite, the topsoil is nutritionally poor. Therefore, "Yakusugi cedars" grow very slowly. For this reason, they have extremely precise annual rings and contain a great deal of resin, which makes them resistant to rotting. The enormous natural cedar trees, living more than 1,000 years, form a forest-scape which cannot be seen anywhere else in the world. **【Natural beauty】** These features of Yakushima contributed to its registration as a World Natural Heritage site.