



UNESCO India

Complete Heritage Compendium (2026)

India is home to 45 World Heritage Sites, including 37 Cultural, 7 Natural and 1 Mixed site. There are 16 Intangible Cultural Heritage elements, and 13 Biosphere Reserves. Recent years have been particularly prolific, with the inscription of the **Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath** (2026) and **Maratha Military Landscapes** (2025) as World Heritage Sites, and the inclusion of **Deepavali** (2025) and Garba (2023) in the Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Furthermore, India's documentary heritage has received major recognition with **Ramcharitmanas**, **Panchatantra**, and the **Bhagavad Gita** entering the Memory of the World Register.

This document consists -

- UNESCO World Heritage Sites (45)
- UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (16)
- UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) Reserves (13)
- UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) (9)
- UNESCO Global Geoparks (0)
- UNESCO Memory of the World Register (14)

1. UNESCO World Heritage Sites

India is home to 45 World Heritage Sites, ranking it among the top countries globally.

Total Sites: 45

Breakdown: 37 Cultural, 7 Natural, 1 Mixed

Latest Addition: Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath (2026)

#	Site Name	Location	Year	Type	Key Significance
1.	Ajanta Caves	Maharashtra	1983	Cultural	- Masterpiece of Buddhist cave art (2nd century BCE – 650 CE) with frescoes and sculptures. - On the bank of Waghora river 29 caves (4 chaityas, 25 viharas)
2.	Ellora Caves	Maharashtra	1983	Cultural	- Total of 34 caves - 17 brahmanical, 12 buddhist and 5 jain digambara sect. - Most remarkable architecture here is Kailasha temple (cave 16) built by Rashtrakuta king Krishna-I.
3.	Agra Fort	UP	1983	Cultural	16th-century Mughal monument and red sandstone fortress near the Taj Mahal.
4.	Taj Mahal	UP	1983	Cultural	Immense white marble mausoleum built by Shah Jahan; jewel of Muslim art in India.
5.	Sun Temple, Konark	Odisha	1984	Cultural	13th-century chariot-shaped temple dedicated to the Sun God Surya, with 24 carved wheels. Also k/a Black pagoda. - Built by King Narsinghadeva I of the eastern ganga dynasty.
6.	Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram	Tamil Nadu	1984	Cultural	Pallava dynasty rock-cut temples (Rathas), Mandapas, and giant open-air reliefs. - Major monuments here include the Pancha Rathas, Shore Temple, Arjun's Penance etc.
7.	Kaziranga National Park	Assam	1985	Natural	Hosts the world's largest population of the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros.
8.	Manas Wildlife Sanctuary	Assam	1985	Natural	Project Tiger reserve and biosphere reserve; habitat for rare species like the pygmy hog .
9.	Keoladeo National Park	Rajasthan	1985	Natural	Famous wintering ground for Palearctic migratory waterfowl; formerly a duck-hunting reserve.

10.	Churches and Convents of Goa	Goa	1986	Cultural	Includes Basilica of Bom Jesus (St. Francis Xavier's tomb); illustrates evangelization of Asia.
11.	Khajuraho Group of Monuments	MP	1986	Cultural	• Chandela dynasty (9th-11th century A.D.) temples known for Nagara architecture and erotic sculptures. • Hindu and Jain temples
12.	Group of Monuments at Hampi	Karnataka	1986	Cultural	Ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire capital; Dravidian temples and palaces.
13.	Fatehpur Sikri	UP	1986	Cultural	"City of Victory" built by Akbar; Mughal capital for a decade with fusion architecture.
14.	Group of Monuments at Pattadakal	Karnataka	1987	Cultural	• Chalukya dynasty site blending Northern (Nagara) and Southern (Dravidian) architectural styles. • 9 Hindu temples and 1 Jain temple
15.	Elephanta Caves	Maharashtra	1987	Cultural	Rock-cut caves on Gharapuri Island dedicated to Lord Shiva (famous Maheshamurti sculpture- 20 ft high Trimurti Shiva).
16.	Great Living Chola Temples	Tamil Nadu	1987, 2004	Cultural	Brihadisvara (Thanjavur & Gangaikonda Cholapuram) and Airavatesvara temples; Chola architecture excellence.
17.	Sundarbans National Park	West Bengal	1987	Natural	Largest mangrove forest in the world; only mangrove habitat of the Royal Bengal Tiger.
18.	Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks	Uttarakhand	1988, 2005	Natural	High-altitude West Himalayan landscape; diverse flora and endangered species like the Snow Leopard.
19.	Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi	MP	1989	Cultural	Oldest stone structures in India (Mauryan period); Great Stupa commissioned by Emperor Ashoka.
20.	Humayun's Tomb	Delhi	1993	Cultural	First garden-tomb on the subcontinent; precursor to the Taj Mahal.
21.	Qutb Minar and its Monuments	Delhi	1993	Cultural	73m high red sandstone tower; includes Alai Darwaza and Iron Pillar.
22.	Mountain Railways of India	WB, TN, HP	1999, 2005, 2008	Cultural	Engineering marvels: Darjeeling Himalayan, Nilgiri Mountain, and Kalka Shimla Railways.
23.	Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya	Bihar	2002	Cultural	Holiest Buddhist pilgrimage site; location of Buddha's Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree.

24.	Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka	MP	2003	Cultural	30,000-year-old rock paintings in natural shelters; evidence of early human life in India.
25.	Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park	Gujarat	2004	Cultural	Unexcavated archaeological, historic and living cultural heritage properties; 16th-century capital.
26.	Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus	Maharashtra	2004	Cultural	Victorian Gothic Revival architecture in Mumbai; formerly Victoria Terminus.
27.	Red Fort Complex	Delhi	2007	Cultural	17th-century Mughal palace fort built by Shah Jahan; fusion of Timurid and Persian styles.
28.	Jantar Mantar, Jaipur	Rajasthan	2010	Cultural	Astronomical observatory with world's largest stone sundial; built by Sawai Jai Singh II.
29.	Western Ghats	Kerala, TN, KN, Goa, MH	2012	Natural	Biodiversity hotspot; older than the Himalayas; influences the Indian monsoon.
30.	Hill Forts of Rajasthan	Rajasthan	2013	Cultural	Six forts (Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh, Ranthambore, Gagron, Amber, Jaisalmer) utilizing natural defenses.
31.	Rani-ki-Vav (The Queen's Stepwell)	Gujarat	2014	Cultural	Inverted temple-style stepwell on Saraswati river banks; Maru-Gurjara architectural style.
32.	Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area	Himachal Pradesh	2014	Natural	Protects glacial and snow meltwater sources; biodiversity hotspot in Western Himalayas.
33.	Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara	Bihar	2016	Cultural	Ancient monastic university (stupa, shrines, viharas) and center of learning (5th–12th century).
34.	Khangchendzonga National Park	Sikkim	2016	Mixed	India's only Mixed site; sacred landscape and home to Mount Khangchendzonga.
35.	The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier	Chandigarh	2016	Cultural	Capitol Complex in Chandigarh; exceptional contribution to the Modern Movement.
36.	Historic City of Ahmadabad	Gujarat	2017	Cultural	First WHS city in India; noted for Sultanate architecture, pols, and peaceful coexistence.
37.	Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai	Maharashtra	2018	Cultural	19th-century Victorian Gothic and 20th-century Art Deco buildings around the Oval Maidan.

38.	Jaipur City, Rajasthan	Rajasthan	2019	Cultural	Planned city (1727) based on grid system and Vedic architecture; pink city facades.
39.	Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple	Telangana	2021	Cultural	13th-century Kakatiya temple famous for floating bricks and sandbox technology.
40.	Dholavira: A Harappan City	Gujarat	2021	Cultural	Harappan city with sophisticated water conservation system and unique funerary architecture.
41.	Santiniketan	West Bengal	2023	Cultural	University town founded by Tagore; embodies pan-Asian modernism and distinct educational philosophy.
42.	Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas	Karnataka	2023	Cultural	Three temples (Belur, Halebidu, Somanathapura) famed for intricate stellate plans and sculptures.
43.	Moidams – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty	Assam	2024	Cultural	Royal necropolis of the Ahom kings; earthen pyramids (burial mounds) in Charaideo.
44.	Maratha Military Landscapes of India	Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu	2025	Cultural	• 12 forts exemplifying Maratha military strategy and guerrilla warfare across the Deccan. • Gingee Fort is located in Tamilnadu, other 11 forts are in Maharashtra.
45.	Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath	Uttar Pradesh	2026	Cultural	Sarnath is a Cultural world heritage site universally revered as the sacred place of Buddha's first sermon and the birth of the Sangha (monastic order), featuring iconic architectural ruins like the Dhamekh and Chaukhandi Stupas , ancient monasteries, and the famous Ashokan Sandstone Pillar which yielded India's official National Emblem.

2. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

India currently has 16 recognized elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Year	Element	Origin/ community	Cultural Significance
2008	Ramlila	North India	The traditional performance of the Ramayana, enacting the life of Lord Rama through song, narration, and dialogue.
2008	Tradition of Vedic Chanting	Pan-India	The oral tradition of reciting the Vedas with precise pronunciation and intonation, preserved for thousands of years.
2008	Kutiyattam	Kerala	The oldest living Sanskrit theatre tradition, performed in specialized temple theatres (Kuttampalams); known for elaborate expressions.
2009	Ramman	Uttarakhand (Garhwal)	A religious festival and ritual theatre of the Bhumiya Devta temple in Saloor-Dungra village; involves mask dances.
2010	Mudiyettu	Kerala	A ritual dance drama enacting the mythological battle between Goddess Kali and the demon Darika; performed in Bhagavati temples.
2010	Kalbelia	Rajasthan	Folk songs and dances of the Kalbelia community (snake charmers); dancers wear black skirts and mimic snake movements.
2010	Chhau Dance	East India (WB, Jharkhand, Odisha)	A semi-classical dance form combining martial arts, tribal folk, and storytelling; performed with masks (except Mayurbhanj style).
2012	Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh	Ladakh	A sacred recitation of Buddhist texts by lamas in monasteries and villages to promote spiritual well-being.
2013	Sankirtana	Manipur	Ritual singing, drumming, and dancing performed by the Vaishnava community to mark religious occasions and stages of life.
2014	Traditional Brass & Copper Craft of Thatheras	Punjab (Jandiala Guru)	A traditional craft of manufacturing brass and copper utensils using a unique mud-forging technique; beneficial for health.
2016	Nawrouz	Parsi Community	The Persian New Year celebrated on the vernal equinox, marking the renewal of nature and family bonding.

2016	Yoga	Pan-India	An ancient Indian practice unifying mind and body through physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation.
2017	Kumbh Mela	Pan-India (Haridwar, Prayagraj, Nashik, Ujjain)	The largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, held every 12 years at four sacred river sites for ritual bathing.
2021	Durga Puja in Kolkata	West Bengal	The worship of Goddess Durga, celebrated with artisanal clay idols, inclusive community pandals, and immersion rituals.
2023	Garba of Gujarat	Gujarat	A ritualistic devotional dance performed during Navaratri around a perforated earthenware pot (garbo) symbolizing the womb and the universe.
2025	Deepavali	Pan-India	The Festival of Lights, celebrating the triumph of light over darkness; involves lighting oil lamps (diyas), rangoli, and community bonding

3. UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) Reserves

Out of 18 Biosphere Reserves in India, 13 are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR).

#	Name	State	Year	Ecological Importance & Key Species
1.	Nilgiri	TN, Kerala, Karnataka	2000	Part of Western Ghats; Shola forests; Nilgiri Tahr, Lion-tailed Macaque.
2.	Gulf of Mannar	Tamil Nadu	2001	Marine ecosystem with coral reefs; rich in sea grasses; Dugong (Sea Cow).
3.	Sunderban	West Bengal	2001	World's largest delta & mangrove system; Royal Bengal Tiger, Estuarine Crocodile.
4.	Nanda Devi	Uttarakhand	2004	Western Himalayas; alpine pastures; Snow Leopard, Himalayan Musk Deer.
5.	Nokrek	Meghalaya	2009	Garro Hills; Citrus gene pool sanctuary; Red Panda, Hoolock Gibbon.
6.	Pachmarhi	MP	2009	Satpura Range; Sal and Teak forests; Tiger, Gaur, Indian Giant Squirrel.
7.	Similipal	Odisha	2009	Tropical semi-evergreen forests; Royal Bengal Tiger, Asian Elephant.
8.	Achanakmar-Amarkanta	MP, Chhattisgarh	2012	Maikal Hills; source of Narmada river; moist deciduous forests; Tiger, Leopard.
9.	Great Nicobar	A&N Islands	2013	Tropical evergreen forest; Saltwater Crocodile, Nicobar Megapode, Giant Robber Crab.
10.	Agasthyamalai	Kerala, Tamil Nadu	2016	Southern Western Ghats; rich in medicinal plants (Arogyapacha); Asian Elephant.
11.	Khangchendzonga	Sikkim	2018	High altitude ecosystem (Himalayas); Snow Leopard, Red Panda, Musk Deer.
12.	Panna	MP	2020	Vindhyan hill range; Ken river catchment; successful Tiger reintroduction program.
13.	Cold Desert	Himachal Pradesh	2025	Encompassing Pin Valley National Park, Chandratal, Sarchu and Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary ; ecological importance: <u>India's first high-altitude cold desert biosphere reserve in the WNBR</u> , supporting snow leopard, Himalayan ibex, blue sheep, Himalayan wolf, golden eagle, Himalayan snowcock and rich alpine-cold desert flora.

4. UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

There are 9 Indian cities in the UCCN, recognized for leveraging creativity for sustainable urban development.

#	City	Category	Year	Significance
1.	Varanasi	Music	2015	Ancient city of music; Banaras Gharana (Tabla, Shehnai, Sarangi, Vocal); cultural capital.
2.	Jaipur	Crafts & Folk Art	2015	Known for Blue Pottery, Block Printing, Gem & Jewellery industries; historic trade hub.
3.	Chennai	Music	2017	Hub of Carnatic Music; hosts the annual Madras Music Season (December Season).
4.	Mumbai	Film	2019	Home to Bollywood; the financial and entertainment capital producing the highest number of films.
5.	Hyderabad	Gastronomy	2019	Famous for Hyderabadi Biryani and Haleem; historic culinary fusion of Nizami and Telugu traditions.
6.	Srinagar	Crafts & Folk Art	2021	Renowned for Pashmina shawls, Papier-mâché, wood carving, and carpet weaving.
7.	Kozhikode	Literature	2023	"City of Literature"; headquarters of Malayalam literature; numerous libraries and book festivals.
8.	Gwalior	Music	2023	"City of Music"; birthplace of Tansen; hosts the Tansen Sangeet Samaroh; rich Gharana tradition.
9.	Lucknow	Gastronomy	2025	Its rich Awadhi culinary heritage and strong street-royal food culture plus living skills of rakabdars and bawarchis.

5. UNESCO Global Geoparks

- Current Status: **0 (Zero) UNESCO Global Geoparks in India.**
- Significance: While India has immense geo-heritage (e.g., Lonar Crater, St. Mary's Island basalt column), none have yet achieved the official UNESCO Global Geopark tag.
- Potential Nominations: The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has identified several "National Geological Monuments" (e.g., Lonar Lake in Maharashtra, Fossil Wood Park in Tamil Nadu) which are potential candidates for future nomination.

6. UNESCO Memory of the World Register

Few entries in the UNESCO MoW International Register & 3 entries in the Asia-Pacific Regional Register.

International Register

Document/Archive	Year	Significance
IAS (Institute of Asian Studies) Tamil Medical Manuscripts	1997	Collection of 564 ancient palm-leaf manuscripts documenting traditional Siddha and Ayurveda medicine.
Dutch East India Company Archives	2003	Shared heritage (transnational); records of the VOC illustrating trade history.
Shaiva Manuscripts	2005	Collection of 11,000 manuscripts from the French Institute of Pondicherry; covers the Saiva Siddhanta tradition.
Rigveda	2007	One of the oldest extant texts in any Indo-European language (c. 1500 BCE); 30 manuscripts preserved at BORI, Pune.
Vimalaprabha	2011	A detailed commentary on the Kalachakra Tantra; vital text for Vajrayana Buddhism.
Tarikh-E-Khandan-E-Ti muriyah	2011	Richly illustrated manuscript history of Timur and his descendants (Mughals); commissioned by Akbar.
Shantinatha Charitra	2013	Illustrated Jain manuscript describing the life of Shantinatha, the 16th Tirthankara.
Maitreyavyakarana	2017	Palm-leaf manuscript about the prophecy of the future Buddha Maitreya.
Gilgit Manuscripts	2017	Oldest surviving manuscripts in India (5th–6th century CE); significant for Buddhist studies.
Abhinavagupta Manuscripts Collection	2023	Collection of 248 manuscripts (palm-leaf, birch bark, paper) preserving the works of Abhinavagupta, the 10th-century Kashmiri polymath; covers Kashmir Shaivism, Tantra, philosophy, and aesthetics.
First Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Archives	2023	Joint inscription by India, Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, and Serbia; textual files, photographs, and films documenting the 1961 Belgrade Summit that founded the Non-Aligned Movement.
Natyashastra	2025	Ancient Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts (theatre, dance, music) attributed to Sage Bharata.
Shrimad Bhagavad Gita	2025	Foundational Sanskrit scripture on ethics and philosophy; part of the Mahabharata.

Asia-Pacific Regional Register

#	Document/Archive	Year	Significance
1.	Sahṛdayāloka-Locana	2024	A seminal commentary by Abhinavagupta (10th-11th century) on Anandavardhana's Dhvanyaloka (Indian poetics)
2.	Panchatantra	2024	Ancient collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose; a treatise on neeti (policy/ethics)
3.	Ramcharitmanas	2024	16th-century epic poem by Goswami Tulsidas; made the Ramayana accessible to the masses in Awadhi.

■ ■ ■

More resources for your preparation

To help you put PYQs into practice, we've built two resources:

- **Explained Prelims** — PYQs with clear solutions, free, no sign-up. circularlearnings.com/explained-prelims
- **Mock Tests for PYQs**— unlimited attempts, real exam conditions. circularlearnings.com/mock-test