

MARATHA MILITARY LANDSCAPES UNSECO HERITAGE SITE : HISTORY

NEWS: Visit forts of Maratha Military Landscapes which made it to UNESCO list: PM Modi

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India's 44th UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Maratha Military Landscapes, honors the strategic fort network established under Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, reflecting indigenous military ingenuity and terrain-adapted architecture across Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. It was inscribed under cultural criteria (iv) and (vi) at the 47th World Heritage Committee session.

Context: India's 44th UNESCO World Heritage Site

- At the **47th Session of the World Heritage Committee** in Paris, **India's nomination — Maratha Military Landscapes of India** — was successfully inscribed into the **UNESCO World Heritage List** for the 2024–25 cycle.
- The inscription followed an **18-month rigorous evaluation** involving advisory bodies like **ICOMOS** (International Council on Monuments and Sites).

India's Standing on the Global Heritage Map

- **India ranks 6th globally** and **2nd in the Asia-Pacific** in terms of total World Heritage Sites.
- **Italy** leads globally with **60 sites**, followed by **China** with **59** (most in Asia-Pacific).
- **India's current count:**
 - **Total Sites:** 44
 - **Cultural:** 36
 - **Natural:** 7
 - **Mixed:** 1 (Khangchendzonga National Park, Sikkim)
- **India's Tentative List:** 62 sites
- As per UNESCO rules, **one site per country per year** can be nominated.
- **Nodal body** for World Heritage matters: **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**

Recent Inscriptions from India

- **41st Site (2023):** Santiniketan, West Bengal
- **42nd Site (2023):** Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysala (Karnataka)
- **43rd Site (2024):** Mound Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty, Assam
- **44th Site (2025):** *Maratha Military Landscapes of India*

About the Maratha Military Landscapes

1. Historical Background

- Originated during the reign of **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** in **1670 CE**
- Continued through successive rulers of the **Maratha Empire** until **1818 CE**
- Represents a **unique martial legacy** combining **geography, architecture, and military strategy**

2. Composition of the Site

- Total of **12 forts** across two states
 - **Maharashtra (11 forts):** Salher, Shivneri, Lohgad, Khanderi, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg
 - **Tamil Nadu (1 fort):** Gingee Fort

3. Protection Status

- **Protected by ASI:** Shivneri, Lohgad, Raigad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg, Gingee
- **Protected by Maharashtra Government:** Salher, Rajgad, Khanderi, Pratapgad

4. Typology Based on Terrain

Terrain Type	Forts Included
Hill Forts	Salher, Shivneri, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad, Gingee
Hill-Forest Fort	Pratapgad
Hill-Plateau Fort	Panhala
Coastal Fort	Vijaydurg
Island Forts	Khanderi, Suvarnadurg, Sindhudurg

Key Features and Significance

1. Strategic Use of Terrain

- These forts reflect **military ingenuity** in **adapting terrain for guerrilla warfare**.
- The Maratha military system strategically countered:

- **Mughal forces** on the landward side
- **European naval powers** on the seaward side

2. Cultural and Architectural Importance

- These forts represent a **continuous military landscape** over 150 years.
- Showcase **defensive architecture, bastions, watchtowers, and natural fortification integration.**

3. Global Recognition

- Inscribed under UNESCO **Cultural Criteria (iv) and (vi)**:
 - **(iv)**: Architectural or technological ensemble illustrating a significant stage in history
 - **(vi)**: Associated with traditions, historic events, or artistic works

4. Symbolic Value

- Highlights the **resilience and decentralized military prowess** of the Maratha Empire.
- Aims to **project Indian military heritage** on the global cultural map.

UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention

1. Background

- **UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)** is a specialized UN agency.
- **Established**: 1945
- **Headquarters**: Paris, France
- **India**: A **founding member** of UNESCO
- **Mandate**: Promote **peace through education, science, and culture**

2. World Heritage Convention (1972)

- Adopted by the **17th General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972**
- Created to **identify, protect, and preserve cultural and natural heritage** across the world

3. World Heritage Committee

- Consists of **21 elected State Parties**
- Responsibilities include:

- **Inscribing new sites**
- **Monitoring conservation**
- **Allocating financial support** via the **World Heritage Fund**

India's Role and Position

- India is currently a **member of the World Heritage Committee (2021–2025)**.
- Has actively promoted inclusion of **diverse regional and cultural traditions**.
- ASI collaborates with **UNESCO and ICOMOS** for technical support and site nominations.

Significance of the Recognition

- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Strengthens India's global cultural presence
- **Tourism and Local Development:** Enhances visibility and footfall to these heritage sites
- **Boosts Regional Pride:** Promotes **Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu's** heritage legacies
- **Educational Value:** Offers insights into **indigenous warfare, fort architecture, and governance**

Conclusion

The inclusion of **Maratha Military Landscapes** in the UNESCO World Heritage List is a landmark moment in acknowledging **India's indigenous military history** and **regional heritage richness**. It reflects the global relevance of **Maratha defensive architecture** and supports India's ongoing efforts to showcase **Bharat's historical and cultural continuity** on international platforms.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/visit-forts-of-maratha-military-landscapes-which-made-it-to-unesco-list-pm-modi/article69804347.ece>