

# Bonaire World Heritage Nomination Project

The Bonaire National Marine Park (BNMP) has received a number of international recognitions due to the outstanding biodiversity that it protects and its innovative management of resources. The marine park includes all the waters surrounding Bonaire and Klein Bonaire, from the high-tide mark to 60 meters of depth, and encompasses Lac Bay and Lagun and the uninhabited island of Klein Bonaire. Both Lac Bay and Klein Bonaire have been designated as RAMSAR sites (Ramsar sites no. 199 and 201) and are therefore internationally recognized as uniquely valuable wetlands and benefit from special protection. The BNMP was selected as a UNEP/ICRAN Demonstration site by the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Coral Reef Action Network due to its pioneering work on sustainable financing and private sector participation by hoteliers and dive operators. Additionally, the coral reefs of the marine park are included in the United Nations Environment Programme's list of coral reefs of international significance. And now, the Island Territory of Bonaire, with the assistance of the consulting firm Wolfs Company, is investing whether a submission of the BNMP as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is feasible.

There are currently 1,073 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the world, of which 203 are

natural areas (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2017). A World Heritage Site is a landmark or area (natural or man-made site, area, or structure) which has been officially recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as being of outstanding international importance. There are many benefits to an area being selected as a World Heritage Site. The state parties of the World Heritage Site Convention share a commitment to the protection of the sites, and the designation often makes them a magnet for financial assistance from a variety of sources, including the World Heritage Fund itself (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2017). Not only that, but the local management team of a chosen site is offered expert management and technical training. World Heritage Sites also typically attract large numbers of visitors due to the increase awareness of their presence and outstanding value, meaning that local economies typically benefit greatly (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2017). The Netherlands currently has one natural UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Wadden Sea which was designated in 2009. The Wadden Sea is "one of the largest unbroken system of intertidal sand and mud flats in the world, and one of last remaining large-scale, intertidal ecosystems where natural processes continue to function largely undisturbed" (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2017).



## World Heritage in Numbers

- 1052** Total sites
- 814** Cultural sites
- 203** Natural sites
- 49** Marine Parks
- 35** Mixed cultural/natural



## First Healthy Marine Site on World Heritage List

Of the 203 natural sites there are 49 marine parks and only one marine site on the list is located in the Caribbean; the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, although in danger. The Bonaire National Marine Park would be the first healthy Marine Site in the Caribbean on the World Heritage List.

**Table 1:** Selection criteria for World Heritage Sites (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2017). To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria .

(i)	to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius
(ii)	to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design
(iii)	to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared
(iv)	to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history
(v)	to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change
(vi)	to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria)
(vii)	to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance
(viii)	to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features
(ix)	to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals
(x)	to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation

World Heritage Sites are nominated and designated by the World Heritage Convention (an organization of UNESCO). Only countries which have signed the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972) and have therefore pledged to protect their natural and cultural heritage can submit nomination proposals for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2017). The Kingdom of the Netherlands ratified the World Heritage convention in 1992. In 2010, the Netherlands selected 10 sites to be considered for World Heritage nomination, one of which was the BNMP (Wolfs Company, 2016), the only natural site within the list. The BNMP's outstanding universal value stems from its well-conserved ecosystems, notably its reefs and mangroves, that are exceptionally high in biodiversity. The park's reefs are considered to be some of the least degraded in the entire Caribbean Sea with high coral cover and over 50 varieties of stony coral, low macro algae cover and high coral recruitment.

The Directorate of Spatial Planning and Development started planning for a BNMP nomination in 2002. In 2009 the BNMP has been placed on the tentative nomination list for the Dutch Kingdom. Preparations for the actual submission of the BNMP for consideration as a World Heritage Site has however not been possible until 2014 due to a lack of funding (Van der Mortel,

2012). Thanks to the Nature Fund, the park's application process is currently being brought up to date and ready for assessment of the feasibility for submission in December 2017- ensuring that the documentation for the nomination file is of the best quality possible and meets all the World Heritage Committee's criteria and requirements. The park is submitting its nomination based on criterion (vii), (ix) and (x) (Table 1). The BNMP's flora and fauna are extremely varied and well conserved, with more reef fish than anywhere else in the Caribbean, and its ecosystems have a major significance for the entire region, supporting endangered species such as sea turtles as well as being a source of coral larvae to other islands. Potentially other marine ecosystems that interact with the BNMP could be included for consideration as a transboundary World Heritage Site, notably the marine ecosystems East of Curacao, Klein Curacao, Los Roques and Las Aves Archipelago, but this is still in an early discussion phase (Wolfs Company, 2016). The BNMP nomination process is being led by a steering group represented by the Island governor, the director of the Department of Spatial Planning and Development of the Public Entity Bonaire, the executive director of STINAPA, the executive director of Tourism Corporation Bonaire and the senior policy advisor of Ministry of Economic Affairs Caribbean Netherlands.

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