

Viñales (Cuba)

No 840rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Viñales Valley
<i>Location</i>	Province of Pinar del Rio
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Cuba
<i>Date</i>	22 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The proposal for inscription on the World Heritage List is based on the definition of "cultural landscape" in Articles 36, 37, 38, and 39ii of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* as a "living landscape."

The Viñales Valley is a mixture of natural landscapes (small hills) and human activities (the cultivation of tobacco, fodder, and food crops). It has an exceptional aesthetic and socio-cultural value. The variations in the relief and the colour contrasts between the ochre soil, the green hues of the plants, and the dark limestone outcrops make this landscape an admirable sight, the beauty of which is due to the combination of the natural features of the site and the transformations made by human activities.

[**Note** The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers this property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List.]

Category of Property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Viñales Valley is a *site*. Taking into account the surroundings of the property, the Viñales Valley may also be considered to be a *cultural landscape*.

History and Description

History

The numerous caves scattered on the slopes of the hillocks in the Viñales Valley were inhabited for many centuries before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors.

The fertile soil and favourable climate were conducive to the development of stock-raising and the cultivation of

fodder and food crops, using slaves from Africa. The *cimarrones*, or escaped slaves, often found refuge in the caves of the Valley. The Pan de Azucar site contains the ruins of the biggest hacienda, where slaves were taught different trades.

Following the emergence and considerable expansion of tobacco cultivation, the village of Viñales was founded in 1875, along the road leading from Pinar del Rio, the capital of the province, to Puerto Esperanza, the main outlet to the sea. The Western Railroad (*Ferrocarril del Oeste*), of which only a few vestiges are left, was built in 1882.

The Viñales Valley was the scene of several military operations during the War of Independence, and also during the Cuban Revolution.

At present, the Valley is devoted to agriculture; its population of some 8000 people are engaged mainly in growing tobacco, a crop which gives the best yields.

Description

The Valley is surrounded by mountains. It is a plain of arable land, dotted by spectacular limestone outcrops rising to a height of up to 300m (*mogotes*). It has a series of very large caves containing ammonite fossils. The vegetation on the hills is characterized by local endemic species, particularly *Microcycas calocoma*, a living fossil of the Cretaceous phanerogamic flora. It is home to an interesting avian and molluscan fauna.

The entire plain is devoted to traditional agriculture. Recent experiments have revealed that mechanical methods lower the quality of tobacco, and this explains why old methods, such as animal traction, are still being used. The Valley changes as the seasons pass and the crops grow, and these variations are accentuated by its east–west orientation. As the sun moves across the sky, a unique spectacle is to be seen, with grey and green rock formations, red soil, white and grey houses, and cultivated plants in a wide palette of greens.

Most of the buildings scattered over the plain are simple; they are built using local and natural materials, and are used as homes or family farms. The village of Viñales, strung out along its main street, has retained its original layout, and there are many interesting examples of colonial architecture.

The Valley is home to an original culture, a synthesis of contributions from indigenous peoples, Spanish conquerors, and black slaves. An excellent illustration is the musical expression of the field worker (*veguero*), of which Benito Hernandez Cabrera (known as the Viñalero) was the main interpreter. Traditional crafts also flourish here.

Cubans identify themselves strongly with the Viñales Valley because of the beauty of the site and its historical and cultural importance. In the visual arts, the Viñales Valley has been transformed into a symbol of the Caribbean landscape by artists such as Domingo Ramos and Tiburcio Lorenzo.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Some 92% of the area proposed for inscription is in the hands of private owners, with 30% owned by individual

farmers and the rest by the National Association of Small Farmers.

The Viñales Valley is protected by provisions in the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba of February 1976 and by the Declaration of 27 March 1979 designating it as a National Monument, in application of two Laws of 4 August 1977, one on the protection of cultural property, and the other on national and local monuments.

Management

The high authority responsible for management is the National Council of Cultural and Natural Heritage of the State. Local supervision is ensured by the Provincial Centre for Cultural Heritage of Pinar del Rio, the Provincial Branch of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, and the Provincial Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The conservation of the natural and cultural values of the site is considered to be vital, and all the requisite statutory and administrative steps have been taken to this end. At the same time, the social needs of the local population and the imperatives to promote economic activities and improve living standards are also taken into account. Awareness campaigns directed at both the local population and visitors are designed to highlight the natural and cultural values of the site.

The first national tourist plan, based on environment-friendly principles, was launched in 1959 in the Viñales Valley. It was during this period that the first hotel, *Los Jazmines*, was built, and it still has its original features. According to information from the State Party, in 1997 the site was visited by over 30,000 foreign tourists. These visits are expected to increase. The authorities, therefore, plan to build the necessary infrastructure, roads, and new hotels, and to implement projects to develop ecotourism.

The authorities are at present working towards the creation of a National Park spread over 13,200ha, which would include the Viñales Valley, thus giving added protection to its environment.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The site has always been managed on traditional lines, whilst its regular maintenance is linked to agricultural practices. The importance of the site for Cubans led to conservation based on customary practices, until the legal and statutory measures of 1979 came into force.

Authenticity

The site proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List is a "living landscape" with a high degree of authenticity. It has been able to preserve its specific character, while adapting to modern conditions of life and receiving flows of visitors.

Risk prevention

The area is not in danger from natural catastrophes. The general measures for protection and management should make it possible to prevent anthropogenic damage.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in February 1999.

Qualities

The Viñales Valley is an outstanding example of the interaction between human activities and a natural setting of great beauty. Despite its active economic and social life, it has preserved the harmony and equilibrium created by generations of farmers, thus forming a melting pot for different cultural influences.

Comparative analysis

The impressive scenery of hills rising from the ground is unique in Cuba. Similar karstic formations can be seen in other regions of the world - the Dominican Republic, Thailand, Madagascar, Vietnam, and China. Ha Long Bay has the same geological composition and is included in the World Heritage List.

The unusual character of the Viñales Valley results from its sizeable settlement and the fact that it is a hub of human activity, particularly agriculture and the cultivation of tobacco based on traditional methods. This cultural aspect gives the site an exceptional value.

However, ICOMOS does not feel that this property does not possess the outstanding universal value that would justify its inscription on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

Although tourism is at present under control, its development is expected to threaten the integrity of the site. It is recommended that even greater attention should be paid to such developments in the relevant management plans. A programme to collect oral traditions and "intangible heritage" would be timely in order to preserve the memory of this remarkable human settlement, in the areas of music, crafts, and other forms of popular culture.

It would be appropriate to provide signposting that blends better with the site, and to lay out marked paths to encourage the development of ecotourism.

Cultural itineraries could be identified, based on different types of traditional agricultural products, such as sugar, tobacco, or coffee, so as to establish links with other Caribbean islands.

Recommendation

The Bureau recommended that this nomination should be *referred back* to the State Party, requesting additional information for review by ICOMOS, to be supplied by 1 October 1999. This information had not been received when this evaluation was prepared for printing. A second ICOMOS mission will be visiting the property in October 1999 and a revised presentation will be made orally to the Committee at its meeting in Marrakesh.

ICOMOS, September 1999