

Tides of time



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A great diversity of fish
can be found at Pearl
and Hermes Atoll.

One of the newest World Heritage sites is Papahānaumokuākea, a vast island chain in the United States that has been recognized for both its natural and cultural values



SPOTLIGHT | Sea, land and spirit

Papahānaumokuākea: The first cultural seascape on the World Heritage List

One of the latest World Heritage marine sites, added this summer in Brasilia at Unesco's annual World Heritage Committee meeting, is a vast Pacific island chain in the United States, Papahānaumokuākea, which runs north-west from Kauai in the main string of the Hawaiian Islands. This scattering of 10 small islets, in a remote and pristine wedge of the Pacific, covers an expanse of 139,797 square miles (360,000 square kilometers) of the Pacific Ocean.

'These islands represent where we're from, and where we're going'

Papahānaumokuākea offers refuge to abundant and diverse marine life — more than 7,000 species — including sea turtles, sharks, whales and the endangered monk seal. Its location, 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometers) from any continental land mass, makes Papahānaumokuākea the world's most remote island group. More than 90 percent of it is underwater and in deep sea. Its total area is greater than Germany, bigger than 46 of the 50 U.S. states and larger than all other U.S. National Parks combined; if laid end-to-end across the United States, the site would stretch from Dallas to Las Vegas.

Papahānaumokuākea is full of life on its

limited land area as well. More than 14 million seabirds — including albatross and the world's most endangered duck, the Laysan duck — nest on 1,300 hectares (five square miles) of islands, reefs and shoals. Four species of birds are endemic here, which means they are found nowhere else.

The world's second-largest marine protected area, and one of the planet's last predator-dominated coral reef ecosystems, Papahānaumokuākea not only adds to the underrepresented number of Pacific sites on the World Heritage List, but is also the United States' first marine site and one of the few on the World Heritage List with cultural connections to the sea. Inscribed as a "mixed property," in recognition of both its cultural and natural values, Papahānaumokuākea is the List's first cultural seascape.

This cultural side is important because Papahānaumokuākea holds a special, sacred place in the history and cosmology of native Hawaiians. These waters were crossed by South Sea sailors at least 1,000 years before any other people. Reaching these shores demanded epic feats of seafaring without instruments, and Polynesians,

who roamed the Pacific from New Zealand to Easter Island to the Hawaiian Islands — a vast triangle of about 4,000 miles — made Papahānaumokuākea the northernmost extent of their settlements. Two of its islands have important archaeological remains, making the site the first World Heritage property that honors and perpetuates Polynesia's maritime society.

"The name represents the union of Papa, Earth Mother, and Wakea, Sky Father," says T. Aulani Wilhelm, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration superintendent. "They birthed the Hawaiian Islands." The name symbolizes both the origin and the continuation of life in Hawaiian myth and religion.

Adds Wilhelm: "They're the place we came from — spiritually, literally and physically. In our predominant belief system, when we die, we go west. These islands represent not only where we're from, but also where we're going. So from a natural and geological standpoint, but also from a cultural standpoint, this is our genealogy."

Part of its nomination criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List included its Polynesian ritual sites, but tourists can't see these sites without first learning about their

unique cultural aspects. All would-be visitors must first undergo a cultural briefing, which often occurs on Midway Atoll, the second northernmost island. An important air station and submarine base during World War II, Midway was attacked in 1941 and 1942. Remnants of this military presence, as well as numerous shipwrecks, can be seen by tourists today. Midway is how most visitors access Papahānaumokuākea.

Visitors to the site are few, however. There is a limit to the numbers of visitors and airplanes allowed into the atoll. Scientists are sometimes permitted entry into Papahānaumokuākea by sea on research vessels. But overall, access to the site is tightly controlled, keeping human impact to a minimum. Strict quarantines are enforced in most areas. Not only do all visitors need brand-new clothes, but they also must first freeze them for 72 hours before arriving. All their equipment must be cleaned. Says Wilhelm: "We don't want to

introduce any foreign plant, animal, seed or pathogen. We make sure that before people access Papahānaumokuākea, they understand the natural aspects and heritage, as well as the cultural."

Wilhelm understands the paradox of protecting a place where nearly everything is restricted. "People think, 'Well, there's nobody up there, people are not involved,'" she says. "But humans are part of the ecosystem. There is a long history of use of the area. It's where our ancestors are from. And it's important to have humans participate in the management and caring for the site because we are part of it across the archipelago. And that's what's great about World Heritage — we're able to honor the connections of these great places to human beings. We don't look at this place as a modern-day ocean museum that we want to put off-limits, but as places where we can celebrate the attributes that make these places special to people." JJ.

New World Heritage sites

The 34th session of the World Heritage Committee meeting, held in Brasilia from July 25 to Aug. 3, inscribed 21 new sites: 15 cultural and five natural sites, as well as one mixed property, Papahānaumokuākea. Three nations — Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and Tajikistan — added sites for the first time.

Among the new sites are the Australian Convict Sites; Pitons, Cirques and Remparts of Reunion Island (France); Sheikh Safi al-din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil (Iran); Phoenix Islands Protected Area (Kiribati); Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands); Putorana Plateau (Russian Federation); Central Highlands of Sri Lanka; and Proto-Urban site of Sarazm (Tajikistan). For more information, visit <http://whc.unesco.org> JJ.

EXPLORING | Midway Atoll

Reaching one of America's last great wildernesses

Americans tend to think of Alaska as their last great wilderness, but tundra can barely hold a candle to the far western reaches of Hawaii, in particular the new World Heritage site of Papahānaumokuākea, home to over 7,000 marine species and nearly 140,000 square miles (about 360,000 square kilometers) of pristine Pacific. The site's tropical island climate may be far more manageable than the Arctic, but not the challenge of reaching and exploring the vast terrain. The site's eastern boundary is only 200 miles (320 kilometers) from bustling Honolulu, but most of the site is strictly off-limits to anyone but sanctioned scientists and researchers.

Public visitation is restricted to just one island, Midway Atoll, where the remains of a U.S. military base and memories of the epic World War II sea battle stoke a small but growing tourism business. Midway is also "one of the most incredible wildlife spectacles in the world," says Dan Dennison, constituent outreach and partnerships coordinator for this marine national monument. "Similar to the Galápagos, much of the wildlife on Midway has remarkably little fear of humans, and it is one of the few places on earth that allows visitors such close access to seabirds."

Green sea turtles, the Hawaiian monk seal, spinner dolphins and the Laysan duck

count among the site's species. More than 14 million seabirds call the archipelago home at any given time. The checklist of local reef fishes runs 16 pages long, and these waters also attract manta rays, tiger sharks, dolphin fish, big-eye tuna and half a dozen whale species. The noted wildlife photographer Joe Van Os calls Papahānaumokuākea one of the top 10 nature photography spots in the world. "It's one of those spots where I can look around and literally find myself gasping at its splendor," Van Os said after a recent visit.

Midway is reached via a four-and-a-half-hour flight from Honolulu. And once on the atoll, there are strict guidelines about what a visitor can and cannot do. To safeguard the island's fragile ecosystems, visitors must stick to designated roads and trails. Most beaches are also off-limits (to protect the highly endangered monk seal), but visitors can swim or snorkel Midway's near-shore reefs and glimmering turquoise lagoon.

Scuba diving is not allowed, although that may change in the future. When it does, Papahānaumokuākea will become one of the world's top diving destinations. In addition to the incredible underwater life, the site's waters harbor the wrecks of about 60 vessels and a like number of submerged aircraft. Among the major sites are the USS Saginaw, a warship that ran aground on Kure Atoll in

1870, and several 19th-century whalers that wrecked at Pearl and Hermes Atoll.

People can also pitch in to conserve the island. "Visitors who want to contribute to the protection of the atoll," says Dennison, "can assist wildlife staff with habitat-restoration projects like out-planting native vegetation or helping collect marine debris from beaches."

History buffs can visit more than 40 historical sites on the atoll, some of them designated National Historic Landmarks. A self-guided walking tour includes the Inner Harbor (once home to U.S. Navy seaplane and submarine bases), the U.S. Marine barracks (1941), gun emplacements and pillboxes, as well as the house where President Richard Nixon held a secret meeting with South Vietnamese leader Nguyen Van Thieu in 1969. A number of Midway's military structures were designed during the war by the famed architect Albert Kahn.

Accommodation on Midway is limited to double-occupancy rooms with private baths in the old "Charlie Barracks." Meals are taken at the modern Clipper House dining hall. Several adventure and wildlife travel outfitters already offer guided visits to Papahānaumokuākea, and others have applied for permission; these include Wings Birding Tours, the Oceanic Society, Joseph Van Os Photo Safaris and WANT Expeditions. JJ.R.Y.

From enameling to gem-setting, the time-honored arts of a Swiss watchmaker

Jaeger-LeCoultre is one of the rare watchmakers today with, under its own roof, inspired artisans who can transform a timepiece into a work of art. Their virtuoso crafts include enameling, engraving and gem-setting. These time-honored arts unite beauty and precision, bringing to each piece a quality all its own.

This is a world where the working unit is a thousandth of a millimeter. With ultrafine tools, engravers create all manner of motifs, often suggested by the watch owners themselves. This is especially true for the legendary Reverso model. Traditional gem-setting is used to decorate the

watch with precious stones. The artist must first determine the exact number and placement of the jewels, then sculpt each one and finally adjust it individually.

Jaeger-LeCoultre has developed the snow-setting technique. This consists of setting a given surface with diamonds of varying diameters, in such a way as to entirely cover the metal and create an extraordinary sparkling effect. Craftspeople at Jaeger-LeCoultre have also mastered miniature enamel painting, the oldest and perhaps most delicate of all the decorative arts. Hand-painting a watch face, in this small a size, calls for

weeks of intense care, concentration, patience and dexterity. Making one dial can demand up to 150 hours of exceptionally close workmanship. Such detailed and meticulous labor naturally makes these watches exclusive and limited editions.

Attentive to trends, and with one eye on the future, Jaeger-LeCoultre remains faithful to long-established aesthetic traditions. For more than 175 years, it has been combining creative refinement with mechanical perfection. The quality found in its watches represents craftsmanship developed and perfected throughout the manufacture's history. JJ.

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