

UNESCO-Backed Heritage Management Programme Strengthens Climate Resilience Skills Across Pacific Islands

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Heritage professionals from six Pacific island nations have completed an international training programme designed to strengthen the management, resilience and long-term protection of some of the region's most significant cultural and natural heritage sites.

Supported by UNESCO and delivered in partnership with ICCROM, the **International Course on Managing World Heritage: People Nature Culture (PNC)** brought together 34 participants from around the world in Suzhou, China, from 26 May to 4 June 2026.

The programme forms part of the **Sustainable Islands: Building Heritage Disaster and Climate Resilience of Small Island Developing States in the Pacific Region** initiative, funded through the UNESCO/Republic of Korea Funds-in-Trust.

For project leaders involved in heritage, climate adaptation and resilience programmes, the course highlights the growing emphasis on integrated project management approaches that connect cultural preservation, environmental sustainability and community engagement.

Building Capacity for Complex Heritage Challenges

Representatives from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga participated in the ten-day programme, which focused on strengthening practical skills for managing World Heritage sites in increasingly complex environmental conditions.

Participants worked on real-world case studies drawn from the Pacific region, including **Levuka Historical Port Town in Fiji** and the **Kuk Early Agricultural Site in Papua New Guinea**.

Using the latest *Managing World Heritage Resource Manual* and the *Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit 2.0*, attendees assessed site values, identified risks, evaluated management systems and explored strategies for climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and stakeholder engagement.

The training combined technical instruction with collaborative learning, reflecting the increasingly multidisciplinary nature of heritage management projects.

A People-Centred Approach to Project Delivery

A central theme throughout the programme was the importance of placing communities at the heart of heritage management decisions.

Participants examined how heritage sites can be managed not only as cultural assets but as living environments that support social, economic and environmental resilience.

“The course helped me better understand place-based approaches to heritage management, focusing on the conservation and enhancement of the multiple values of heritage places within their broader social, environmental, cultural and economic contexts,” said Forrest Time, Assistant Chief Executive Officer at Samoa’s Ministry of Education and Culture.

The programme encouraged project professionals to consider how community engagement, stakeholder alignment and local knowledge can strengthen project outcomes and long-term sustainability.

“What I found most valuable was learning from other participants and reflecting on the importance of communities and traditional landowners,” said Vaciseva Kuli, Acting Executive Officer of Fiji’s World Heritage Unit. “Rather than telling people what to do, we need to build trust and work together to support the protection of heritage places.”

Managing Heritage in an Era of Climate Risk

For many Pacific Small Island Developing States, climate change presents an increasing threat to both natural and cultural heritage assets.

Rising sea levels, extreme weather events and environmental degradation are creating new challenges for project teams responsible for protecting sites of international significance.

The course therefore placed particular emphasis on disaster preparedness, climate resilience and adaptive management planning.

Participants explored practical tools that can be applied directly to heritage conservation projects while balancing community needs and environmental pressures.

“These approaches will be particularly useful for the management of the Kuk Early Agricultural Site and

other heritage places we are working on,” said Jim Onga, Manager of World Heritage Programs at Papua New Guinea’s Conservation and Environment Protection Authority. “They will help us better manage community expectations, and I intend to use the tools introduced during the course as a practical checklist to strengthen our management planning.”

Supporting Long-Term Programme Delivery

Beyond the immediate training outcomes, the initiative represents a broader capacity-building programme aimed at strengthening institutional resilience across the Pacific region.

For project management professionals, it demonstrates how international development programmes increasingly focus on knowledge transfer, capability building and stakeholder networks alongside physical investments.

The training has established a foundation for the next phase of the Sustainable Islands project, with participants expected to apply the tools, methodologies and professional networks developed during the programme to heritage projects in their respective countries.

UNESCO said the knowledge gained through the course will support participating nations as they strengthen disaster preparedness, climate adaptation and sustainable heritage management practices across the Pacific.

The programme also highlights the role of international partnerships in delivering long-term resilience outcomes, bringing together governments, heritage specialists, development organisations and local communities around shared conservation goals.

As climate risks continue to intensify across the Pacific, initiatives such as the People Nature Culture course demonstrate how effective project planning, stakeholder collaboration and capacity development are becoming essential components of heritage preservation and resilience strategies.