

Sites to see and save

The recent collapse of a 2,000-year-old building in Pompeii is a reminder of the need to protect our historical and cultural sites. The building had survived the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, when the ancient city and its 13,000 inhabitants were destroyed. However, exposure and heavy rain led to its collapse in November 2010.

Pompeii, visited by 2.5 million tourists a year, is unique because it holds a historic moment in time: people were going about their daily lives when the volcano erupted and the town was buried under six metres of hot ash. In this way, the Roman town provides an amazingly clear picture of life 2,000 years ago.

The collapsed building was a 'clubhouse' where the gladiators trained and where they waited before fighting. It also housed the men's armour and weapons for fighting. The walls were decorated with rich, ancient pictures showing military events.

What is remarkable about this incident is that it happened in such a well-known, established site and in such a wealthy country. However, the Global Heritage Fund reports that archaeologists and historians in all corners of the globe feel frustrated at the lack of attention and money given to protect such places.

According to the report there are sites on every continent in need of protection. Mirador, the Mayan pyramid site in Guatemala, is one example, hidden for centuries from the outside world by the jungle. Now the site is threatened by people cutting down the surrounding trees, as well as by looters.

The 1,000-year-old Kenyan town of Lamu, an ancient trading centre, is threatened by modern developments. Construction is also a danger in Chersonesos, an ancient Greek city in the Ukraine founded 2,500 years ago. In addition, the site suffers from natural and human destruction: tourists sometimes damage or remove parts of the buildings.

Angkor Wat, Cambodia now attracts the same number of tourists as Pompeii does and ironically, it is this huge amount of tourist traffic which is threatening the temple complex. In contrast, there are a number of ancient cultural sites in Iraq, which receive relatively few visitors. Here, the authorities are concerned that thousands of precious articles have been stolen by looters, taken from their context and sold into private hands abroad.

It is true that history repeats itself, but history once lost is lost forever.

1 Before you read, decide in what way the following can be a threat to ancient historical sites around the world.

- tourism
- theft
- new developments
- farming with heavy machinery
- exposure to the elements

2 Read the text quickly and circle all the place names.

3 Read the text again and decide on an alternative heading which best matches the text, choosing one from the choice below.

- a How to protect our history _____
- b Pompeii, past and present _____
- c The importance of historical sites _____
- d The dangers facing ancient sites _____

4 Read the first half of the text and answer these questions about Pompeii.

- 1 When did the eruption of Vesuvius happen? _____
- 2 What makes Pompeii special? _____
- 3 What was the collapsed building used for? _____
- 4 What was the cause of its collapse? _____

5 Note the main problems which threaten the different sites, according to the text.

Site	Problems
Pompeii, Italy	
Mirador, Guatemala	
Lamu, Kenya	
Chernosesos, Ukraine	
Angkor Wat, Cambodia	
Different sites in Iraq	

6 Look at the underlined words in the sentences below and find out what exact words they substitute from earlier in the text.

- 1 The building had survived the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, when the ancient city and its 13,000 inhabitants were destroyed.
- 2 People were going about their daily lives when the volcano erupted.
- 3 In this way, the Roman town provides an amazingly clear picture of life 2000 years ago.
- 4 It also housed the men's armour and weapons for fighting.
- 5 Now the site is threatened by people cutting down the surrounding trees.
- 6 Construction is also a danger in Chersonesos, an ancient Greek city in the Ukraine founded 2,500 years ago.

7 Think of a historical site that you have visited or would like to visit. Discuss the following with your partner.

- what you know about this place
- what is special about this particular place, in your opinion
- if you know of any threats to this place
- how you would feel if this place was lost to humanity
- what should be done to save places of historical importance

Glossary

ash (*noun*) - the grey powder that remains after something has been burned

archaeologist (*noun*) - someone who studies archaeology **archaeology** - the study of ancient societies, done by looking at tools, bones, buildings, etc.

collapse (*noun*) - an occasion when a building or other structure falls down (*verb*) **collapse**

construction (*noun*) - the process of building something large or complicated, such as a bridge or road

eruption (*noun*) - when something such as a volcano explodes: *flames and rocks flew out of the volcano*

gladiator (*noun*) - in ancient Rome, someone who fought against wild animals and other men as a form of public entertainment

loot (*verb*) - to steal things from houses, shops or other places during a war or after a disaster such as a fire or flood: *after the hurricane, the shops were looted* **looter** (*noun*) - the person who loots a place

maintenance (*noun*) - work that is done to keep something such as a building or machine repaired and in good condition: *the maintenance of the building is very important.*

site (*noun*) - a place where something happened, especially something interesting, or where there is an important building or group of buildings

temple (*noun*) - a building used for worship in some religions, eg a Buddhist temple; an ancient Egyptian temple