

Cultural Exchange

As India's rapid development continues, greater emphasis will need to be placed on the preservation of its cultural heritage. Australia will be a key partner in ensuring India's considerable cultural assets are effectively managed, writes AusHeritage Chairman Vinod Daniel.

India is a cultural paradise. No visit is complete without a trip to the Taj Mahal or a tour of Rajasthan. A dinner at a restaurant is often complemented by some soothing Carnatic music from the deep South or a sitar recital by one of India's maestros. This tangible and intangible cultural aura, intrinsic in the food, sights, smells and sheer vibrancy of India, is what has made the country special and fascinated many international visitors.

The cultural industry

With the Indian economy booming and the growing international interest in India as a business destination, it is important that the Indian cultural industry continues as an important aspect of 'Incredible India'. This includes both the tangible assets, such as monuments and museum collections, and the intangible, such as music, stories and practices.

The cultural industry is one of the major employers in India and contributes significantly to the nation's economy. With India making such rapid progress in key new industry sectors such as information technology, a vibrant cultural industry is important in nurturing creativity. India's current rapid pace of development is producing benefits for many aspects of Indian life. However, if not adequately managed, this could constitute a threat to some aspects of cultural heritage.

Australian collaboration

For over 15 years, Australian cultural organisations have been working very

closely with India on cultural heritage initiatives, especially under the umbrella of AusHeritage (Australia's international network for cultural heritage services).

The core AusHeritage organisation represents 40 members comprising universities, national and state collecting institutions, private architectural firms, and private and government conservation services. The network represents highly skilled specialists in conservation practice, including: building conservation, cultural tourism and heritage promotion, education, collections conservation, heritage identification for urban planning



India's cultural industry is one of its major employers



Vinod Daniel, Chairman, AusHeritage

"If not adequately managed, India's rapid pace of development could constitute a threat to some aspects of the country's cultural heritage."



Australian museums and galleries regularly borrow Indian artefacts for major exhibitions

purposes, specialised design for art storage museums and laboratories associated with conserving moveable heritage, exhibition development, archaeology, historical research, and conservation management.

AusHeritage has been instrumental in building people-to-people links between heritage practitioners in the two countries as well as developing frameworks to assist in implementing specific projects. AusHeritage signed a Memorandum of Understanding concerning cultural heritage collaboration with the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in April 2007, in the presence of the then Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer.

Mutual benefit

AusHeritage is becoming a major force in presenting and sharing the skills and achievements gained in Australia with other communities. Valuable experience is also being brought back for implementation in Australia.

Many capacity-building workshops have been conducted on collections conservation, disaster preparedness, architectural conservation, site management and collections management with many key Indian heritage organisations, including the Archaeological Survey of India, INTACH and most major museums and University heritage programs. AusHeritage members have also provided technical assistance in designing an international gallery for the Prince of Wales Museum in India, and have worked with INTACH in developing a conservation management plan.

AusHeritage is currently implementing a capacity-building initiative for the North-east Indian states. Australian Museums and Galleries are regularly borrowing Indian artefacts for major exhibitions and plans are currently underway for an Australian indigenous exhibition to travel to Delhi and Jaipur. Following a request from Indian officials, the Australian Museum in Sydney had also repatriated 31 objects back to the Government Museum in Chennai.

Over the past 12 years more than 25 senior Australian heritage practitioners from over 20 major Australian heritage organisations have had close interaction with heritage counterparts in India. This has included both visits by Australian professionals to India and Indian professionals to Australia. The relationships established and the appreciation of mutual needs are currently being translated into a number of broader projects including the possible development of a heritage centre in India, implementation of a cultural mapping program and continued assistance for a number of key collecting institutions in India.

For further information

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AusHeritage experts are pictured here with heritage professionals from museums in India, during a capacity-building initiative that provided Indian conservation professionals with training in the development of disaster-preparedness plans and recovery techniques to minimise

damage to valuable collections after disasters (especially fire and floods). The course included strategies for participants to become trainers and has led to over 15 training workshops for smaller regional museums in different parts of India (taught by the workshop participants).