

# GENERAL ARCHIVE OF THE INDIES AND UNESCO

## WORLD HERITAGE

The declaration of World Heritage status is a distinction granted by UNESCO to those properties with outstanding value that make them distinctly unique in the world. Spain, with a total of 49 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, is the country with the fourth highest number of declared properties.

The inclusion of properties on the World Heritage List highlights our rich heritage, while at the same time demonstrating the commitment by the government and citizens to its conservation. We must bear in mind that World Heritage designation is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a path of responsibilities and commitments aimed at maintaining the Outstanding Universal Value of these declarations for future generations.

The [Cathedral, Alcazar and Archive of the Indies](#) constitute a monumental complex in the centre of Seville, declared a World Heritage Site in 1987. They are examples of the remarkable Spanish Golden Age, and in addition to the vestiges of Islamic culture, this complex represents centuries of ecclesiastical power, royal sovereignty and the commercial power of the Hispanic Monarchy and the New World.

### Cathedral

Erected in 1403 on the site of a former mosque in a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance styles, the Seville Cathedral has seven centuries of history. Its five naves make it the largest Gothic building in Europe. Its bell tower, the Giralda, was the old minaret of the mosque, a masterpiece of Almohad architecture, and is now an important example of cultural syncretism, since the upper part of the building perfectly combines the Islamic elements with the part that was designed during the Renaissance period by Hernán Ruiz. Its chapter house is the earliest known example of the use of an elliptical floor plan in the West. Since its construction, the Cathedral has been used for religious purposes without interruption.

### Alcazar

The original core of the Alcazar was built in the 10th century as the palace of the Muslim governor and is used even today as the residence of the Spanish royal family in Seville, thus maintaining the original use for which the building was constructed: residence of monarchs and heads of state. It has a series of palatial buildings and extensive gardens that were been built and have been renovated since the Middle Ages.

### Archive of the Indies

The construction of the Archive of the Indies building began in 1585 to house the Casa Lonja (Market House) or Consulado de Mercaderes (Merchant Guild) of Seville. It became an archive in 1785 and since then has become the seat of the most outstanding institution for the custody of documents related to the discovery of and relations with the New World. The Archive of the Indies, designed by the architect responsible for completing El Escorial, Juan de Herrera, is one of the clearest examples of Spanish Renaissance architecture. Heavily influenced by Andalusian Baroque and Spanish Neoclassical architecture, it symbolises the link between the Old and the New World.

## MEMORY OF THE WORLD

UNESCO launched the Memory of the World Programme in 1992 to increase awareness of the importance and fragility of the world's documentary heritage, to ensure its preservation and to make it universally and permanently accessible. The most visible manifestation of this programme is the Memory of the World Register, a list that recognises those documents, collections or documentary holdings that are considered to be of greatest relevance and significance to humanity and whose loss would be irreparable, and which must therefore be preserved for future generations.

The General Archive of the Indies holds and preserves 6 sets of documents which form part of the [Memory of the World Register](#).

- [Treaty of Tordesillas, 1494. Declared in 2007.](#)
- [Capitulations of Admiral Christopher Columbus, 1492. Declared in 2009.](#)
- [Spanish and Japanese documents related to the Keicho-Tsunegaga embassy, 1613-1620. Declared in 2013.](#)
- [Fifteen vocabularies of indigenous languages of America, Asia and Oceania, late 18th century. Declared in 2015.](#)
- [Collection on the first voyage of circumnavigation by Magellan and Elcano \(1519-1522\): the Spice Expedition. Declared in 2023.](#)
- [Collection on The Royal Philanthropic Expedition of the Smallpox Vaccine in Spain \(1800-1820\). Declared in 2023.](#)