

Madagascar forest, S.Korean lava set for UN shelter

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A Madagascan rainforest, a South Korean lava system and an ancient European beech forest look set to join the list of international sites protected by the United Nations, a leading environmental agency said on Friday.

Spain's Teide national park on the island of Tenerife and a distinctive rock formation in southern China were also being recommended for inclusion by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the advisory body to the U.N. on protected sites.

The recommendations will be put to a UNESCO meeting June 23-July 2 in Christchurch, New Zealand, which will decide on new additions to the World Heritage List which currently has 186 mainly natural sites.

The beech forests, in the Carpathian mountains straddling the Slovakian-Ukrainian border, were an "outstanding example of undisturbed, complex, temperate forests," the IUCN said.

The rainforests of Atsinanana, Madagascar, were critical to the survival of the island's unique plants and animals, some of which date back to glacial periods, according to the Swiss-based conservation group.

The governments on whose territory world heritage sites -- both cultural and natural -- are located are obliged, under a 1972 U.N. convention, to ensure their long-term protection and prevent any development that could damage them.

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