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**Abstract.** The World Heritage Tour (WHTour) is a non-profit association dedicated to creating a documentary image bank of panoramic pictures and virtual reality films for all sites registered as World Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The WHTour has covered sites in China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam (in Asia), and Egypt (in Africa).



Asia > China > Leshan > Da Fo – 2002 © www.world-heritage-tour.org

## 1. Concept of the work **□mission and purpose**

### 1.1 Mission

- Creating a documentary image bank with panoramic pictures and interactive virtual reality films for all sites registered as World Heritage by the UNESCO.
- Dissemination of these virtual reality films to further promote the World Heritage.
- Use of multimedia techniques in an educational and entertaining manner that may raise awareness on the preservation of the World Heritage.
- Promoting the notion of sustainable tourism in the head of local administration, tourists and travelers.

### 1.2 Purpose

- Enhancing our knowledge of the world in order to improve tolerance amongst people, as well as promoting the values of peace and sharing the motto "Although not the same, we are all related".
- Raising attention on our planet, a small garden that belongs to all of us. The WHTour would like to offer a permanent window to this garden, stressing the need for its care and attention.

## 2. Project description **□words from the press and web visitors**

### 2.1 Pulse Magazine

In August 2001, Matthew Brown commented the WHTour for Pulse Magazine in the column "International panorama" **□□** "When the Taliban authorities destroyed hundreds of unique religious statues and temples in Afghanistan earlier this year, one filmmaker and photographer in Belgium was outraged.

Tito Dupret says he was shocked at the loss of the ancient sites which now exist only in memory - and **□** photographs. As a reaction to the destruction of part of the world's cultural heritage, Tito decided to record for posterity the vast riches that **□** remain.

Using the UNESCO list of designated World Heritage sites as a guide, he has embarked on a worldwide odyssey to photograph all sites, using a unique panoramic technique that captures the full character of each site.

It is a daunting task, but the young Brussels native, who has previously lived in Kenya and Paris, says the Taliban's actions have spurred him on" [1].

## 2.2 Maccentral.com

VRMAG <www.wrماغ.org> has already given exposure to Apple software and hardware, of course. Recently, the magazine published a feature story on Belgian photographer Tito Dupret and his experience shooting inside the decorated ancient tomb of Egyptian pharaoh Seti I. The tomb was recently opened for the first time in over a decade to Dupret, who spent two days inside the ancient tomb shooting photographs in the Valley of the Kings.

Although the tomb was closed to the public in 1991, Dupret was given access by the Egyptian government in order to support his mission of photographing world heritage sites around the world listed by the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Dupret has been traveling for two years photographing sites in 360-degree panorama.

Dupret's only equipment in the shooting of Seti I's tomb was a monopod, Nikon 4500 with wide lens and his Titanium PowerBook, to which he transfers his digital images to on the fly. For postproduction and dissemination online, he uses Realviz Stitcher 3.5, Adobe Photoshop 7.0, Adobe GoLive 6.0 and Apple QuickTime 6. Dupret's collection of Seti I panoramas may be viewed on his web site" [2].



Africa > Egypt > Pyramids > Sphinx – 2002 © www.world-heritage-tour.org

## 2.3 Comments from people through emails

- I very much appreciate what you are doing for the sake of both our history and our future !
- I have visited your site and find it to be superb. Your photographic quality is terrific.
- Most impressed with your project – a real triumph of the will and an extremely generous work for the benefit of all mankind. Thanks so much.
- Your project is extremely impressive not only in scope but also in photographic quality.
- Let me express my admiration for your courage and tenacity. A great project which deserves more attention and support.
- What a great source of inspiration your panoramic photographs have been to our family. Everybody here truly admires your work. We all sit in front of our computer and share the magic of looking at a new art form that had been unknown to us until recently. They had us believe that photography was about capturing the reality ; we now know it could be about recreating the reality! We love the way we could look straight up into the sun or look straight down and find no sign of our shoes (or yours for that matter!).

## 4. Technical description

### 4.1 Virtual reality (VR)

VR opens up the world to us in a way hitherto unknown, by allowing people to visit almost any place from practically any location without time constraints. It is a media drawing upon traditional photography and film industry. It depicts more

than a photo but without the time limits of a movie. It is an interactive media meaning that the audience is active. Without their participation, the film would be without animation ; in essence, the audience gives life to the film by viewing it from various angles, zooming in/out and clicking hyperlinks/icons. It is also a very "light" and practical media. One person with skills and a backpack is enough to cover any site in the world. For this reason, it is inexpensive to produce compared to other animated systems.

Moreover, it is a broad-ranging medium insofar as it can be supported on many different media systems, from a light web interface to heavy cinema productions or any printing support and at any quality level.

#### 4.2 The technique

Taking a selection of digital images, each VR film is made by stitching together 24 of these images. The computer creates the effect of being inside a sphere, giving the user the scope to view all around oneself at 360 x 180 degrees. Actually, this sphere is made with the six separate sides of a cube—the front, right, back, left, top, and bottom sides. The borders of each side connect to the others and the illusion is perfect.

For the WHTour, all VR films are produced on site with a laptop and then disseminated on the Internet through local connections. Each VR is a 1/2 to 2 days postproduction according to the complexity of stitching.

#### 4.3 Applications

Institutions, organizations and enterprises benefit a huge range of media and technologies in order to promote values of the WH convention.

Every film or picture is available for any purpose that remains within the ethos and philosophy of the WHTour—publications, exhibitions, projections, digital world, film and video documentaries, printed or interactive encyclopedias, etc.

As a digital media, images can be transferred on film, DVD, CD-Rom and any digital support—VR films can be animated on request for the cinema, television, DVD or any other video format.

Furthermore, digital binoculars can be used and enable people to pan and tilt VR films with the head or hand motion so that the immersion is complete. These binoculars are ideal for digital exhibitions.

All these applications are available for the WHTour's partners. As a philosophy and in order to ensure its mission, the WHTour is always encouraging the widest dissemination of images produced by sharing copyright with those who make things possible.



Asia > Thailand > Ayutthaya > Wat Chai Wattanaram – 2002 © www.world-heritage-tour.org

#### References

- [1] Brown, Matthew. August 2001. International Panorama. In Pulse Magazine, St Petersburg, Russia.
- [2] Sellers, Dennis, June 2003, VRMAG, IQTVRA team up to promote QuickTime VR, <http://maccentral.macworld.com/news/2003/06/09/iqtvra/>.