# Visitors’ coins are causing significant damage to the Giant’s Causeway’s basalt columns



Visitors to the iconic Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland are inadvertently contributing to the deterioration of this exquisite World Heritage Site by embedding coins into its distinctive basalt columns. The practice, perceived by some as a harmless token of their visit, is proving to be harmful. Authorities have reported that the rusting and expansion of these coins—up to three times their original size—results in significant physical and aesthetic damage to the columns, which form the striking natural landscape of Count Antrim.

Cliff Henry, a National Trust nature engagement officer, warned of the detrimental effects as he explained that the coins, which come from various countries around the world, create unsightly stains through the oxidation of metals like copper, nickel, and iron, leading to the crumbling of the rock formations. With 648,000 visitors recorded last year, the pressure on this natural wonder is palpable. The National Trust and Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust have initiated measures to tackle this issue, including hiring conservation specialists to safely remove coins from ten test locations. The estimated cost for this removal project is around £30,000.

The Giant’s Causeway’s unique geological features were formed 50 to 60 million years ago when volcanic activity led to molten basalt cooling and contracting to create these now-famous hexagonal columns. Given its history and significance, the recent trend of damaging the site with coins is particularly troubling. Authorities are responding by erecting signs that urge visitors to keep coins in their pockets, emphasising the desire to preserve the causeway for future generations. As Henry noted, “We protect and care for places so people and nature can thrive,” highlighting the need for responsible tourism.

This situation has parallels in other tourist hotspots. In Paris, similar actions were taken following the damage caused by visitors attaching padlocks to the Pont des Arts, which resulted in a partial collapse in 2014. Such incidents raise vital questions about the impact of mass tourism on cultural and natural heritage sites.

In response to growing concerns about the environmental repercussions of tourism at the Giant’s Causeway, the National Trust has commissioned a year-long study to evaluate how over one million annual visitors affect both the landscape and the local community. This marks a pioneering effort to assess the extensive influence of tourism on a World Heritage Site, an undertaking that could set a precedent for other regions.

Despite facing challenges, the Giant’s Causeway is currently viewed more favourably than in the past. The International Union for Conservation of Nature has stated that the site is no longer of 'significant concern' in terms of its conservation outlook, having benefitted from measures aimed at alleviating some of the pressures associated with tourism and development. However, shadows still loom over the area due to growing worries about possible future projects that might clash with the site’s protected status.

As discussions surrounding the preservation of the Giant’s Causeway evolve, it is clear that a delicate balance must be maintained between welcoming visitors and safeguarding this cherished natural wonder for generations to come.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins), [[4]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/environment/giants-causeway-takes-giant-steps-to-improve-heritage-status/39819700.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-47951098), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/apr/12/scientists-solve-mystery-of-how-giants-causeway-was-formed)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/environment/giants-causeway-takes-giant-steps-to-improve-heritage-status/39819700.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/15/national-trust-accused-misleading-tourists-paying-free-giants/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/28/giant-causeway-damage-coins> - Visitors to Northern Ireland's Giant's Causeway are damaging the site by wedging coins into the basalt columns, causing rusting and expansion that leads to staining and crumbling. The National Trust has appealed to the public to cease this practice to preserve the World Heritage Site for future generations. The causeway's 40,000 hexagonal columns attracted 648,000 visitors last year, making it one of Northern Ireland's most popular attractions. Coins from various countries are corroding the basalt rock, leading to aesthetic and physical damage, according to a British Geological Survey report.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-47951098> - A year-long study commissioned by the National Trust will assess the impact of over one million tourists annually on the Antrim coast, including the Giant's Causeway. The study aims to examine the effects of tourism on the environment, visitor experience, and community relations, marking the first time a World Heritage Site has undertaken such research.
4. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/environment/giants-causeway-takes-giant-steps-to-improve-heritage-status/39819700.html> - The Giant's Causeway is no longer a World Heritage Site of 'significant concern' according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The site's conservation outlook has improved due to reduced pressures from tourism and development, though concerns remain about potential future development projects in the surrounding area.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/15/national-trust-accused-misleading-tourists-paying-free-giants/> - The National Trust has been accused of misleading tourists into paying for access to the Giant's Causeway, despite the site being free to visit. Misleading signs erected by the Trust have led visitors to believe they must pay to see the landmark, prompting local council intervention to protect public access rights.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/apr/12/scientists-solve-mystery-of-how-giants-causeway-was-formed> - Scientists have solved the mystery of how the Giant's Causeway was formed, revealing that the hexagonal columns were created by the cooling and contraction of molten basalt lava. The study provides insights into the geological processes that led to the formation of this natural wonder.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-19175369> - The National Trust has defended its visitor charge at the Giant's Causeway, stating that the £8.50 fee is competitive compared to other UK attractions. The Trust has also addressed public concerns about signage, ensuring that visitors are aware of free access to the stones.