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World's Innovative Travel Entrepreneurs to Gather at National Geographic to Share Geotourism Success

January 26, 2010

WASHINGTON (Jan. 26, 2010)—The second annual Geotourism Change Summit will take place at National Geographic headquarters Tuesday, Feb. 2, as travel leaders whose businesses range from eco-tours in rural villages to top-line resorts in major cities gather to share how to best cultivate destination stewardship and sustainable development.

The nearly 200 attendees will participate in how-to panels and networking opportunities and share tools for practitioners engaged in the growing field of geotourism: tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.

“The Geotourism Summit participants from around the globe are a galvanizing force in changing the heavy footprint of mass tourism. They currently offer — or are committed to begin offering — tourism that takes care of the place, and benefits the local residents, too,” said Jonathan Tourtellot, director of National Geographic’s Center for Sustainable Destinations. “That is exactly what an increasing number of enlightened consumers are demanding.”

Tourtellot noted that despite terrorist threats, a shaky world economy and the increasing inconvenience of air travel, people are still traveling, and the number will likely top 1 billion international trips within very few years.

The Summit will showcase the three winners and seven runners-up of the 2009 Geotourism Challenge, all making presentations Feb. 2 on their success stories. The Challenge is a global competition of tourism-related projects that promote natural and cultural heritage while improving the well-being of the local people. The 10 finalists are the best of 610 entries from 81 countries, nearly double the entries of the inaugural competition in 2008.

“The Geotourism Change Summit offers an opportunity to showcase the true nature of tourism. These 10 innovators demonstrate not only that tourism needs a major rethinking, but also that these pioneers have already done it and are now leading initiatives to help alleviate poverty, conserve natural and cultural assets, and provide enriching experiences for visitors.

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If we want to know what the future of travel looks like, this is it," said Charlie Brown, executive director of Ashoka's Changemakers.

James Gilmore, coauthor of the books "Authenticity: What Customers Really Want" and "The Experience Economy," will provide the keynote address on "The Experience Economy and Its Impact on Geotourism's Potential." He is currently a Batten Fellow and Visiting Lecturer at the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia. Gilmore recently accepted a three-year appointment as "Chief Experience Architect" for the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau.

National Geographic also will unveil at the Summit its Geotourism Impact Map Concept, to be integrated into the Center for Sustainable Destinations Web site. It will be a huge aggregate for geotourism practices around the world, available to both businesses and travelers, while also identifying regions where geotourism activities are unknown.

The three Geotourism Challenge winners — Nature Air (Costa Rica), PEPY (Cambodia), and Wikiloc Community Maps (Spain) — were selected by online voting. Each will receive a \$5,000 award at the Summit. The competition was carried out by Ashoka's Changemakers and the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations. Details on the winners:

- Nature Air, the 100 percent carbon-neutral airline in Costa Rica, offsets 100 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions to encourage reforestation of tropical forests in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula.
- PEPY ("Protect the Earth, Protect Yourself") is Cambodia's Educational Volunteer Tourism Program, providing adventure bike tours and on-site volunteer projects, like building rainwater collection units.
- Wikiloc Community Maps in Girona, Spain, created by a software engineer with a passion for travel, is built on maps, photos and video submitted to offer honest impressions about destinations.

The seven Geotourism Challenge runners-up:

- Ger to Ger Foundation, Mongolia, links visitors with genuine nomadic families.
- Evergreen Brick Works of Toronto, Canada, is an adaptive re-use of the heritage structures at the Don Valley Brick Works.
- Virgin Islands Youth Heritage Exchange Farm Excursions, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, focuses on food as the basis of youth identity and education.
- Context Travel, based in Philadelphia, offers walking seminars in major European cities, encouraging sustainable ways to visit urban destinations.
- RiverIndia.com's Bamboo Eco-Lodge River Trips, Arunachal Pradesh, India, help protect India's Siang River through locally guided expeditions.
- Trout Point Lodge, Nova Scotia, a Five Green Key-designated nature retreat in Canada, has revitalized backwoods and Acadian French cultural tourism.
- Reality Tour Viagens e Turismo Ltda's Route of Freedom, Rua Bom Jesus, Brazil, commemorates the African Diaspora in Brazil.

For more details about the innovative work of all 10 finalists, go to www.changemakers.net/geotourismchallenge.

The 2010 Geotourism Challenge is "Places on the Edge: Saving Coastal Destinations."

Taking advantage of the Geotourism Challenge success and scope, the Multilateral Investment Fund (FOMIN) joined forces with the National Geographic Society and Ashoka through the Changemakers Geotourism Challenge 2009 "Power of Place" competition. The goal was to capture regional creativity and demand as well as provide co-financing opportunities for small geotourism initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean that benefit local communities by improving the competitiveness, social use and sustainability of the tourism sector. The FOMIN received 319 proposals from 24 countries, selecting seven projects for co-financing.

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About Ashoka's Changemakers

Changemakers is an initiative of Ashoka, an organization with over three decades of finding, funding and expanding the work of social entrepreneurs across the globe. It is a global online community of action that connects people to share ideas, inspire and mentor each other, and find and support the best ideas in social innovation. The Changemakers online community builds on this history and expands the Ashoka vision by creating an "Everyone a Changemaker" world through networking, relationship-building and the sourcing of funding opportunities.

Through its collaborative competitions and open-source process, Changemakers has created one of the world's most robust laboratories for launching, refining and scaling ideas for solving the world's most pressing social problems.

About National Geographic

The National Geographic Society is one of the world's largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," the Society works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 375 million people worldwide each month through its official journal, National Geographic, and other magazines; National Geographic Channel; television documentaries; music; radio; films; books; DVDs; maps; exhibitions; live events; school publishing programs; interactive media; and merchandise. National Geographic has funded more than 9,200 scientific research, conservation and exploration projects and supports an education program promoting geographic literacy. For more information, visit nationalgeographic.com. To learn more about the mission and work of the Center for Sustainable Destinations, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/.

About the Multilateral Investment Fund

The Multilateral Investment Fund (FOMIN) is an autonomous fund composed of 38 member countries that is administered by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the main source of multilateral financing for development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 1993, the FOMIN has been providing grants, loans and equity investments for innovative projects that promote economic growth and poverty reduction through private sector development, focusing primarily on micro, small and medium enterprises. It is the largest private sector-focused development donor in the region, with an extensive network of over 650 local executing agency partners. (www.iadb.org/mif)

Created in 2004, the FOMIN's sustainable tourism cluster is a group of 27 projects in 19 countries aiming to increase the competitiveness of locally owned micro, small and medium enterprises by mainstreaming sustainability in the tourism sector.

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