



For Immediate Release:

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**GUATEMALA GEOTOURISM PARTNERS MOVE TO IMPLEMENTATION OF
CHARTER
WITH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY**

Guatemala, July 24 2007: Agreement was reached by the partners of the National Geographic Geotourism Charter on how to advance the project in this Central American nation.

The charter, signed in May this year at the National Palace of Culture by representatives of the National Geographic Society, the Guatemalan Tourism Commission (INGUAT), Counterpart International, and the Guatemalan Coffee Association (ANACAFÉ), opens the doors to the promotion and management of Guatemalan tourism destinations under the framework of geotourism.

Welcoming the implementation plan adopted by the partners, Jonathan Tourtellot of National Geographic said the charter “will establish a geotourism strategy to promote Guatemalan tourism at the international level on the basis of the active involvement of communities and the local population, and on cultivating pride for the rich natural and cultural heritage of the country.” National Geographic’s August cover story on the Maya is likely to increase interest further.

The director of INGUAT, Daniel Mooney, pledging support for the initiative, said the Geotourism Charter will enhance his government’s efforts “to establish practices and policies designed to protect natural and cultural resources, while seeking to sustain and enhance the geographic nature of the destinations.”

Mooney said he was particularly pleased with the growing involvement of the Guatemalan private sector in the geotourism initiative which, he added, “also serves as a catalyst to generate wellbeing and employment among the population while preserving the natural and cultural heritage for future generations and providing a dynamic impulse for the economy and for tourism.”

The partners agreed on a timetable for the publication of a Geotourism MapGuide, which is planned for distribution Fall 2008 throughout Guatemala and published on the Internet in an interactive format.

William Hempstead, member of the Board of Directors at ANACAFE, said his organization – representing over 75,000 coffee producers – was delighted to move forward on the initiative as they had developed attractive touristic routes which will be incorporated into the national geotourism program.

“The implementation plan for the Guatemala Geotourism Charter outlines how government will work with the private sector and local residents to foster good destination stewardship,” said James Dion, of the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations. “That means more appealing experiences for desirable tourists, more benefit for nature conservation, more support for Guatemala’s great cultural sites, and an economic boost for rural communities throughout the country.”





“Counterpart International has worked as a strategic partner of National Geographic on various issues and in various countries around the world,” said its president, Lelei Lelaulu, “but we are particularly committed to this initiative because it points the way for similar initiatives in other Latin American and Caribbean countries. In addition to enlisting private sector support we are also moving ahead within a framework of the technical cooperation offered by USAID, which represents a new opportunity for Guatemala to attract important sectors of the United States tourism market.”

The President of the Republic, Oscar Berger, in May, called the signing of the agreement “a historic opportunity for Guatemala to progress towards the type of sustainable tourism development that will enable it to expose the world to cultural and natural assets that distinguishes Guatemala as the best destination of the region.”

Guatemala is the fifth country in the world to sign the National Geographic Geotourism Charter, joining Honduras, Norway, Cook Islands and Romania.

What is geotourism?

Geotourism is defined as “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 strategy highlights the relationship between tourism and the identity of the place, emphasizing sustainability and community participation. A geotourism strategy incorporates prominent sites and landscapes, but places particular emphasis on elements of the locale’s cultural heritage, such as music, dance, gastronomy, local legends and important personalities.

The economic potential of this type of tourism is very high. According to a study commissioned by National Geographic and carried out by the Travel Industry Association, 55 million American tourists are interested in geotouristic travel options, and in the near future, this segment could grow to 100 million tourists. More important still is the fact that this segment of tourists represents more than 75 percent of the economic power of the United States market as a source of international tourism.

The National Geographic Society is one of the largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations in the world. Founded in 1888 to “increase and diffuse geographic knowledge,” the Society works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 350 million people worldwide each month through its official journal, National Geographic, and its four other magazines; National Geographic Channel; television documentaries; radio programs; films; books; DVDs; maps; and interactive media. National Geographic has funded more than 8,000 scientific research projects and supports an education program combating geographic illiteracy. For more information, log on to www.nationalgeographic.com or visit the Web page for the Center for Sustainable Destinations, www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/.

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