

THREE NATIONS ADOPT NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S GEOTOURISM CHARTER

Honduras, Norway, Romania Commit to Be Sustainable Destinations

WASHINGTON (Oct. 5, 2005)--Romania has joined the small but growing community of countries that have formally committed to wisely manage tourism development by adhering to principles laid out in National Geographic's Geotourism Charter. 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.

Honduras was the first country to adopt National Geographic's Geotourism Charter in October 2004; Norway was the first European nation to sign on, in August 2005, and Romania celebrated World Tourism Day, Sept. 28, 2005, with a signing in Bucharest.

"Geotourism focuses on those attributes that make a place worth visiting. It's about what places are. It's about what makes one place different from the next," said Jonathan Tourtellot, director of National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations, who originated the concept. "We are thrilled to have these countries as our first signatories and hope they will demonstrate to the world how wisely managed tourism can sustain local culture as well as natural surroundings."

Geotourism includes not only flora and fauna, which are the focus of nature-based tourism, but also historic structures and archaeological sites, scenic landscapes, traditional architecture, and local music, cuisine, crafts, dances and other arts.

The first project for implementing the national geotourism strategy in Honduras is to work with tourism stakeholders and residents to create a Geotourism MapGuide of the country's north coast and Copán regions in conjunction with a new center for scientific, educational and volunteer travel, currently being developed. To help people understand the nature of geotourism and its advantages, the Center for Sustainable Destinations is completing a booklet in Spanish for Honduran community leaders, to be distributed shortly through the Honduran Tourism Institute.

Norway's tourism agency, Innovation Norway, is developing a comprehensive plan based on a "geotourism platform." Examples of geotourism programs already undertaken in Norway are an officially designated national scenic road and an initiative to promote traditional farm foods and products made from local raw materials. Last summer, the Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord areas became Norway's sixth World Heritage Site. A new geotourism pilot project at the site involves local community members and will be developed in cooperation with the National Geographic Society and UNESCO/Nordic World Heritage Foundation, in hopes of being replicated at other World

Heritage destinations in Norway and elsewhere. Last year, global experts empanelled by the National Geographic Society named the Norwegian fjords best-managed of 115 destinations around the world.

In Romania, the National Tourism Authority and the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism are collaborating with regional organizations and USAID on ways to involve local people in sustaining and enhancing their localities through geotourism. Research on developing geotourism routes is already under way in Transylvania. As with Honduras, National Geographic plans to help prepare community guides to geotourism for both Norway and Romania.

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