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CONTACT: Barbara Fallon  
National Geographic  
(703) 489-0880  
[BFallon.nationalgeographic@gmail.com](mailto:BFallon.nationalgeographic@gmail.com)

Delyse Sylvester  
Ashoka's Changemakers  
(250) 352-0616  
[dsylvester@ashoka.org](mailto:dsylvester@ashoka.org)

**AWARD-WINNING TRAVEL ENTREPRENEURS SHARE BEST PRACTICES  
TO PRESERVE AUTHENTICITY OF PLACE, LOCAL CHARACTER**

WASHINGTON (Feb. 5, 2010)—The second annual Geotourism Change Summit at National Geographic headquarters showcased travel entrepreneurs from around the globe presenting success stories from both major cities and countrysides, all with the purpose of preserving the character of the world's special places and furthering sustainable travel.

The 200 attendees on Tuesday, Feb. 2, heard inspiring presentations by the winners and runners-up of the 2009 Geotourism Challenge, sponsored by National Geographic and Ashoka's Changemakers, as well as speakers discussing advances in geotourism and other new trends in sustainable travel.

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 forces of globalization are making one destination look much like the next one. The Summit honored those who have not bowed to cookie-cutter mass tourism — in fact, they are offering the most authentic experiences possible," said Jonathan Tourtellot, director of National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations (CSD).

The 10 Geotourism Challenge finalists ranged from River.India.com, the world's first outfitter on the challenging Siang River, that has trained locals to be river guides, to Evergreen Brick Works in Toronto, that took an abandoned brick factory and turned it into a vital part of the city, with farmers markets, summer camps and an ice skating rink. "We integrated nature into our own backyard," said Geoff Cape, executive director of Evergreen Brick Works.

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 a few years.

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Other news from the Geotourism Summit:

- In his keynote address, economist James Gilmore, coauthor of the books “Authenticity: What Customers Really Want” and “The Experience Economy,” said the world is moving out of the “service economy” into what he calls an “experience economy” — a desire by consumers for authenticity and memorability. His message to travel entrepreneurs at the Summit: Consumers now desire a combination of the “four E’s”: entertainment, education, esthetics and escapism.
- National Geographic unveiled its Geotourism Impact Map, now integrated into the CSD’s Web site ([www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/)). The map “is a testament to the proliferation of geotourism projects and opportunities around the world,” said Ann Nygard, CSD associate director. She demonstrated how the map also displays annual Destination Stewardship survey results from National Geographic Traveler magazine. It also will aggregate existing and future Geotourism MapGuides, available to both businesses and travelers.
- Details of the 2010 Geotourism Challenge were announced. The theme will be “Places on the Edge: Saving Coastal Destinations”; entries open April 28. Tourtellot noted the world’s coastlines, more than any other geographical feature, are under pressure from tourism.
- Vanessa Healey, vice president, global brand marketing, InterContinental Hotel Group, was a member of the panel devoted to destination stewardship strategies. She shared how the hotel group has fully embraced geotourism, including training its 60,000 employees how to help visitors “go local.” Information cards on local activities and history are often left at night on guests’ pillows. Other comments from panelists: “We must move from Joe Tourist to Joe Citizen; “follow the locals’ lead”; “travel is a life value.”
- Alex Khajan, CEO of Nature Air in Costa Rica, one of the three Geotourism Challenge winners, conveyed the passion of Summit attendees to preserve the world’s special places. “We are rebels by nature and want to be catalysts for change,” he said when accepting his award.

The Geotourism 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 honored at the Summit are the best of 610 entries from 81 countries.

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

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The three Geotourism Challenge winners — Nature Air (Costa Rica), PEPY (Cambodia), and Wikiloc Community Maps (Spain) — were selected by online voting. Each received a \$5,000 award at the Summit.

- **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, based 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 numerous destinations.

The seven 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 with Ph.D.s 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 habitats 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](http://www.changemakers.net/geotourismchallenge).

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-business 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](http://nationalgeographic.com). To learn more about the mission and work of the Center for Sustainable Destinations, visit [www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/](http://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](http://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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**NOTE:** To download images from the second annual Geotourism Change Summit, please visit the following FTP site.

[http://ftp.nationalgeographic.com/pressroom/geotourism\\_challenge/geotourism\\_summit\\_winners/](http://ftp.nationalgeographic.com/pressroom/geotourism_challenge/geotourism_summit_winners/)

username: press | password: press

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