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**THREE WINNERS NAMED IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S
GEOTOURISM CHALLENGE 2009**
Global Online Community Picks Leaders in Sustainable Tourism

WASHINGTON (Sept. 9, 2009)—A “carbon neutral” airline in Costa Rica, a “voluntourism” program in rural Cambodia supporting local education, and a free community-mapping Web site in Spain have taken top honors in the second Geotourism Challenge, sponsored by the National Geographic Society and Ashoka’s Changemakers.

The winners practice and advance the growing trend 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. They were selected from 10 finalists out of 611 original entries from 81 countries. Entries for “Geotourism Challenge 2009: Power of Place” almost doubled over the first Geotourism Challenge in 2008.

All three cutting-edge, innovative winners provide visitors with the opportunity to participate in sustainable travel; each winner will receive a \$5,000 prize:

- **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. To date, Nature Air has compensated for nearly 20,000 tons of carbon dioxide through the protection of more than 500 acres. In addition, Nature Air recently helped develop Costa Rica’s first alternative fueling station through its wholly owned fueling company, Aerotica. Nature Air fuels all ground equipment and vehicles with bio-diesel (a mix of recycled vegetable and cooking oils) collected from employees and restaurants.
- **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. All participants make donations to enhance education in impoverished rural Cambodia, where PEPY is based. It supports education for more than 1,700 families in 12 villages and six schools in rural Siem Reap Province, about 40 miles (65 km) from the city of Siem Reap, site of the Angkor temples.

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- **Wikiloc Community Maps in Girona, Spain**, created by a software engineer with a passion for travel, is built on information — including maps, photos and video — submitted to offer honest impressions about destinations. Wikiloc is a great source of outdoor activities, from mountain biking to ballooning. The site also promotes thematic activities like gastronomic routes, sightseeing urban trails and walks in archaeological areas. Created in 2006, the site is already translated in 14 languages, and more than 65,000 trails are included.

“We’re excited to support three new innovators stretching the possibilities of geotourism,” said Charlie Brown, Changemakers' executive director. “These winners are pushing us closer to realizing and sustaining a kind of travel that will enrich cultures and environments across the globe.”

Jonathan B. Tourtellot, director of National Geographic’s Center for Sustainable Destinations, said, “The winners are outstanding examples of geotourism practices that extend to good destination stewardship. They are committed to conserving and enhancing the quality of their locales while benefiting local people and providing visitors with authentic experiences. Geotourism is no flash in the pan: Travelers around the globe are seeking it out in both rural and urban settings. We’re delighted to showcase the winners and runners-up who are leading the way.”

The seven Geotourism Challenge runners-up:

- **Mongolia’s Ger to Ger Foundation** links visitors with genuine nomadic families and guides as a way to stimulate cultural understanding through noncommercial outdoor activities and to provide alternative incomes for these Mongolian people.
- **Evergreen Brick Works of Toronto, Canada**, is an adaptive re-use of the heritage structures at the Don Valley Brick Works, converting the city’s abandoned ravines into a much-respected public park and nature exploratory center.
- **Virgin Islands Youth Heritage Exchange Farm Excursions, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands**, focuses on food as the basis of youth identity and education, with visitors contributing to local mentoring through hands-on workshops and nature-based lifestyle-skill building.
- **Context Travel, based in Philadelphia, United States**, offers walking seminars in major European cities. It encourages sustainable ways to visit urban destinations and contributes funds to cultural preservation projects in each of the cities where it operates.
- **RiverIndia.com’s Bamboo Eco-Lodge River Trips, Arunachal Pradesh, India**, help protect India's Siang River through increased conservation and locally guided rafting, kayaking and fishing expeditions.

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- **Trout Point Lodge, Nova Scotia**, a Five Green Key-designated nature retreat in Canada, has revitalized backwoods and Acadian French cultural tourism through its Nova Scotia Seafood Cooking School and staff naturalists providing guided access to the Tobetic Wilderness Area.
- **Reality Tour Viagens e Turismo Ltda's Route of Freedom, Rua Bom Jesus, Brazil**, commemorates the "Memory of the African Diaspora in Brazil" with seven interpretive trails winding through 15 cities of the Paraiba Valley.

For more details about the innovative work of all 10 finalists, go to

www.changemakers.net/geotourismchallenge.

A panel of expert judges selected the 10 finalists in July, while the public chose the top three winners through online voting during a four-week period this summer, ending Aug. 12. The expert judges were Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement; Keith Bellows, a vice president of the National Geographic Society and editor of National Geographic Traveler magazine; Erika Harms, executive director of Sustainable Development, United Nations Foundation; Tony Wheeler, founder of Lonely Planet; Ben Keene, founder of Tribewanted; and Dr. Yang Yuming, vice president of Southwest Forestry University, China.

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 9,000 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/.

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For images of the three 2009 Geotourism Challenge winners, visit http://ftp.nationalgeographic.com/pressroom/geotourism_challenge/
username: press
password: press