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**VOTING OPENS TO SELECT BEST IDEAS AROUND GLOBE  
FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

*Online Community to Choose 3 World Winners from Field of 10*

WASHINGTON (July 15, 2009)—Ten of the most innovative, sustainable travel programs around the world have been named finalists in the second annual Geotourism Challenge sponsored by the National Geographic Society and Ashoka's Changemakers. From now through Wednesday, Aug. 12, the public can vote online at [www.changemakers.net/geotourismchallenge](http://www.changemakers.net/geotourismchallenge) for the three finalists they consider most cutting-edge in providing visitors with authentic travel experiences, whether in a big city or a remote spot. The three winners will be announced Wednesday, Sept. 9, and each will receive a \$5,000 prize.

All the finalists practice and advance 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 611 entries from 81 countries. Entries almost doubled this year over the first Geotourism Challenge in 2008.

A panel of expert judges — Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement; Keith Bellows, 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 — selected the finalists based on their innovation, social impact and sustainability/viability.

Said Maathai, "The entries really address community needs, teach, entertain and are accompanied by a lot of passion. I admire the finalists' enthusiasm and wish them much success."

The 10 finalists are:

- **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.

<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/fr/node/23438>

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- Mongolia's **Ger to Ger Foundation** links visitors with genuine nomadic families and guides as a way to stimulate cultural understanding through non-commercial outdoor activities and to provide alternative incomes for these Mongolian people.  
(<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/23485>)
- **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 southern Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. (<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/20613>)
- **Virgin Islands Youth Heritage Exchange Farm Excursions** 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.  
(<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/24143>)
- **Context Travel**, based in Philadelphia, offers walking seminars in major European cities. It encourages sustainable ways to visit urban destinations and contributes funds to cultural preservation projects — such as an artist apprenticeship — to benefit local residents.  
(<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/21933>)
- **RiverIndia.com's Bamboo Eco-Lodge River Trips** help protect India's Siang River through increased conservation and locally guided rafting, kayaking and fishing expeditions.  
(<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/19044>)
- **Trout Point Lodge**, 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 Tobecoic Wilderness Area.  
(<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/21375>)
- **PEPY, Cambodia's Educational Volunteer Tourism Program**, is where on-site learning projects combine with donations to personally invest visitors in sustaining and enhancing education in Cambodia. (<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/node/21931>)
- **Wikiloc Community Maps**, created by a company in Girona, Spain, are built on information provided by visitors and hosts to offer honest and authentic impressions about destinations.
- **Reality Tour Viagens e Turismo Ltda's Route of Freedom** commemorates the "Memory of the African Diaspora in Brazil" with seven interpretive trails winding through 15 cities of the Paraiba Valley. (<http://geotourism.changemakers.com/en-us/node/24996>)

"This year's entrants truly demonstrate how tourism is transforming the world at the global and local level," said Charlie Brown, Ashoka's Changemaker's executive director and facilitator of the judging process. "Not only do they provide insights and practical lessons for an effective tourism operation, but they also highlight some of the most important destinations for travelers to visit now."

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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. The Changemakers online community builds on this history and expands the Ashoka vision by creating an "Everyone a Changemaker" world through networking, online competitions and relationship-building. Changemakers creates opportunities for those who want to be at the center of social change by offering competitions that are supported by philanthropic organizations. The competitions and the community connect those who are passionate about change and make ideas come to life. For more information, visit [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org) or [www.changemakers.net](http://www.changemakers.net).

### **About National Geographic Society**

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 370 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](http://nationalgeographic.com). To learn more about the mission and work of the Center for Sustainable Destinations, visit <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/>.

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