



Mission Programs

Center for Sustainable Destinations

Norway Becomes First European Country to Sign Geotourism Charter

OSLO (Aug. 31, 2005) — Norway became the first country in Europe to sign the National Geographic Geotourism Charter in a ceremony in Oslo on Aug. 31. Gunn Ovesen, CEO of Norway's state owned tourism and business development agency, Innovation Norway, co-signed the charter with Jonathan Tourtellot, director of National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations. Her Majesty Queen Sonya met with president and CEO of National Geographic Society, John M. Fahey, in Washington D.C., to mark the occasion on Sept. 20, 2005.

Norway, with six sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, follows Honduras as the second nation in the world to join the charter. Earlier this summer Norway's Geirangerfjord and Nærøysfjord areas were added to the World Heritage List.

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.

“I am delighted that Norway is the first in Europe to sign the Charter,” says National Geographic's Jonathan Tourtellot, who originated the geotourism concept. “The signing of the charter demonstrates that Norway is committed to being a leading geotourism travel destination.” Global experts empanelled by the National Geographic Society named the Norwegian fjords the world's best-managed destination one year ago. “That first-place rank shows that Norway is well along the geotourism road,” says Tourtellot. “My hope is that other countries will follow, and that Norway can demonstrate to the world how wisely managed tourism can sustain local culture as well as

natural surroundings.”

Geotourism is a principle that countries and destinations work by; it is not a fancy logo or an empty buzzword. Among several examples of geotourism-type programs already undertaken in Norway are an officially designated national scenic road and Norway’s initiative to promote traditional farm foods and local products and raw materials. Innovation Norway also plans to launch number of new geotourism projects in the near future. In the last quarter of 2005 the agency will spend more than a million Norwegian Kroner on developing and promoting geotourism products.

As an outcome of a conference with local stakeholders held in August in Norway, a pilot project is being started in the Geiranger and Nærøyfjord area, intended to serve as an example for other tourism destinations in Norway and around the world. The project will be designed to involve local community members and will be developed in cooperation with the National Geographic Society and UNESCO/Nordic World Heritage Foundation. It will be based on the geotourism platform, which is designed to protect and promote the cultural and natural assets of World Heritage sites, as well as other distinctive destinations in Norway and worldwide. An information package about geotourism will be made available to Innovation Norway’s offices and partners in Norway in the months to come.

The Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry, Børge Brende was present at the signing in Oslo. “It is essential for Norway to maintain the position as a premier tourist destination, uniting both nature and culture. The principles of geotourism will help our country attain that goal,” says Brende.

Of 115 destinations in the Geographic survey, reported in National Geographic Traveler magazine (http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/pdf/115_destinations_article.pdf), the fjords ranked best in the world in destination stewardship. “We will do our best to maintain that position,” says Brende.

National Geographic

Founded in 1888, the National Geographic Society is one of the largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations in the world. It reaches more than 300 million people worldwide each month through its official journal, National Geographic, and its four other magazines; the National Geographic Channel; television documentaries; radio programs; films; books; videos and 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 *nationalgeographic.com*.

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