

PROMOTING HERITAGE-BASED TOURISM: PRESERVING TODAY'S TREASURES FOR TOMORROW'S GENERATIONS

BACKGROUND

Central America is rich in natural and cultural heritage and hosts 411 formally declared protected areas, 15 of which are World Heritage Sites; an additional of 391 has been proposed. Apart from their cultural and natural value, these areas play an important role in the region's sustainable development. They serve as a mechanism to conserve and protect water and biological resources and provide meaningful economic opportunities to local communities.

These natural and cultural heritage sites are considered to be the region's main tourism attractions and countries such as Guatemala and Costa Rica have been featuring their cultural and natural sites as one of their main tourism products.

Considering the various regional benefits these areas yield, it is important to protect their vitality by promoting sustainability in tourism. Tourism operations should be based on strategies that protect and strengthen both natural and cultural diversities and ensure that tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation.

The complexity involved in reconciling natural and cultural heritage conservation with competing interests makes it very difficult to manage protected areas and the resources they contain. To address this in a systemic manner, there is a need to improve the capacity building of key tourism actors in developing sustainable tourism policies and strategies.

To this end, UNEP jointly with Rainforest Alliance, and the Central American Integration System (SICA) is developing the project "Promoting Heritage-Based Tourism: Preserving Today's Treasures for Tomorrow's Generations". This project aims to identify the capacity building needs of the key tourism stakeholders in Central America and further develop a capacity building seminar (training of trainers) that will focus on innovative approaches to promote sustainable tourism in natural and cultural heritage sites.

ACTIVITIES

- SICA is assessing the level of national and local capacity assets to promote sustainable tourism in natural and cultural heritage sites and the responses to the determined capacity needs. It is also identifying key stakeholders in the sector to be trained (e.g. tourism guides associations, tourism boards, park managers, tourism organizations, etc.) and involved in the project.



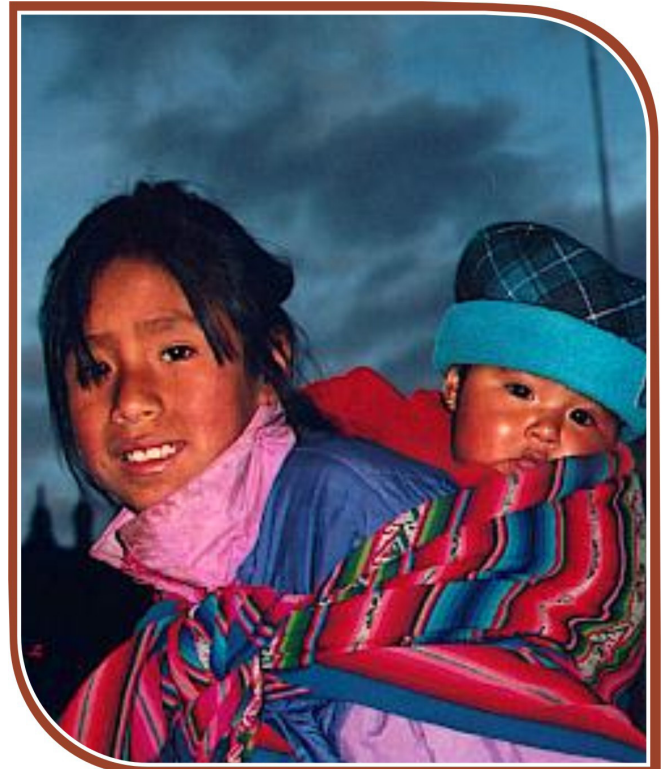
Cocos Island National Park Costa Rica, the only island in the tropical eastern Pacific with a tropical rainforest, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997

- Building on lessons learned in the assessment phase, tourism experts will explore the requirements, needs, and capacities of specific decision-makers to develop the training materials for promoting cultural and natural heritage as an asset for sustainable tourism.
- An advisory group will be established to support the development of a capacity building seminar and training materials.

Based on this evaluation, Rainforest Alliance in cooperation with UNEP, UNESCO, Convention of Biological Diversity, and UN Foundation is developing a user-friendly resources toolkit to support the capacity building seminar. This toolkit will be based on participatory techniques to ensure that future trainers will be able to disseminate the knowledge and further enhance uptake of sustainable tourism development in Central America. These initiatives will facilitate harmonization of the region's tourism activities with the goals and objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Heritage Convention. It is anticipated that a range of tools and supporting materials, and innovative exercises will complement the toolkit, together with case studies that can inspire governments, development agencies, businesses, and non-governmental organizations to implement sustainable tourism good practices.



Sustainable tourism in the Central American natural and cultural heritage sites aims to preserve areas rich in biodiversity...



... and provides economic opportunities to local communities

PARTNERSHIP

The project 'PROMOTING HERITAGE-BASED TOURISM: PRESERVING TODAY'S TREASURES FOR TOMORROW'S GENERATIONS' is being developed by UNEP in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism in Costa Rica, the Central American Integration System (SICA) through the Tourism Direction of the General Secretariat (DITUR). The project has received the financial support of the French Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Town and Country Planning, and United Nations Foundation. This project is supported by the decisions of the International Marrakech Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development (ITF-SD) and also addresses the resolution of the CCT and the Council of Ministers of Culture of Central America, to integrate three routes as regional sustainable development models in cultural tourism. Rainforest Alliance is the implementing partner and has established a participatory process with

key tourism organizations in the tourism field. UNESCO, CDB, UNEP, SICA, Costa Rica Ministry of Tourism and UN Foundation are part of the Advisory Board of the project and provide guidance on the development of the capacity building seminar and materials.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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