



Partners working to preserve Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and promote Sustainable Tourism

Honolulu, HI (July 23, 2008) — The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (WHA; a membership-based initiative launched in 2005 by the United Nations Foundation and Expedia, Inc.), the U.S. National Park Service and the Big Island Visitors Bureau announced today a three city training event starting on July 23, 2008 at the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, an internationally recognized UNESCO World Heritage site, to create a dialogue with the travel industry about the importance of protecting World Heritage sites and promoting sustainable tourism.

"World Heritage sites are places around the world that have been internationally recognized for their outstanding value as natural and cultural treasures," said Erika Harms, executive director of sustainable development at the UN Foundation. "Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is one of over 800 World Heritage sites around the world. We must all be committed to protecting these destinations and promoting sustainable tourism practices that preserve the sites for future generations to experience and enjoy."

The events which kick off on Wednesday, July 23, 2008 at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, will gather volunteers representing the tourism industry and local governments for a discussion about sustainable tourism and World Heritage preservation; in addition, the volunteers will participate in direct conservation efforts by helping to remove invasive species which threaten the park's biodiversity. Similar events will be held in Kona on July 24 and Honolulu on Friday, July 25.

"Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is made up of more than 330 thousand acres and has seven ecological zones; including coastal lava plains, lush rainforests and alpine desert, as well as two of the world's most active volcanoes, Kilauea and Mauna Loa," said Park Superintendent Cindy Orlando. "And the park attracts more than 1.5 million visitors each year. That is why this event is so crucial; we must create a collaborative effort with the tourism industry to protect these natural wonders and support local communities."

At the end of 2007, the WHA and the National Park Service teamed up with the Big Island Visitors Bureau and the tour operator Hawaii Forest & Trail to focus on catalyzing a collective commitment to promote and preserve Hawaii's only World Heritage site, the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. Other partners working to support the volunteer trainings during the event week include Classic Vacations, Fairmont Orchid, and Outrigger Hotels.

"The World Heritage Event is more than just a great way to educate people about sustainable tourism, it is an event that can revolutionize how our travel industry can actively protect our destinations and inspire visitors to think about how their responsible travel habits can benefit World Heritage sites," said George Applegate, Executive Director of BIVB. "And it is this change in perception that will preserve the sites in the long run, while sustaining local communities."

BIVB will soon launch "Green Hawaii," a new microsite highlighting sustainable tourism on the Island of Hawaii, www.BigIsland.org/ecotourism. Hawaii Island is the only island in Hawaii with a website dedicated to sustainable tourism.

The World Heritage Alliance invites tourism companies, governments, media and local organizations involved in sustainable tourism to join their efforts in protecting World Heritage sites through sustainable tourism. To date the World Heritage Alliance works in seven countries to aid the conservation of 20 World Heritage sites with the support of about 50 members and partners. For more information, visit www.WorldHeritageAlliance.org.

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About the World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism

The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism is a membership-based initiative that works to support World Heritage conservation, sustainable tourism, and local economic development for communities in and around UNESCO World Heritage sites. The UN Foundation and Expedia, Inc. created the World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism in the Fall of 2005. For more information, including a list of other WHA members and partners, visit:

<http://www.worldheritagealliance.org>

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park was established in 1916 and became Hawaii's only World Heritage Site in 1987. The park has seven ecological zones with an extensive range of unique biodiversity. The park is made up of over 300 thousand acres and has two of the world's most active volcanoes, Kilauea and Mauna Loa. In addition, the park is rich with Native Hawaiian culture and has significant archeological sites. For more information on Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, visit:

<http://www.nps.gov/havo/>

Big Island Visitors Bureau

BIVB helps promote the visitor industry on the Island of Hawaii by providing visitors and potential visitors with updated information regarding attractions, events and accommodations in Hawaii. The Bureau is also involved in promoting Ecotourism and has been dedicated to working with the National Park Service and the World Heritage Allegiance for Sustainable Tourism to promote the long term sustainability, promotion and protection of the World Heritage Site, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. For more information about the Bureau and Eco-Tourism please visit:

<http://www.bigisland.org/>

About the UN Foundation

The United Nations Foundation is an advocate for the UN and a platform for connecting people, ideas, and capital to help the United Nations solve global problems. We build partnerships, grow constituencies, mobilize resources and advocate policy changes to support the UN's work for individual and global progress. The UN Foundation's work - focused on select global problems - is decreasing child mortality, improving disaster relief, protecting diverse cultures and environments, creating a clean energy future, empowering women and girls, and improving U.S.-UN relations. For more information, visit www.UNFoundation.org.

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