



## Mexico's Secretary of Tourism Forges Unique Partnership With Expedia and United Nations Foundation to Protect World Heritage Sites

ACAPULCO, Mexico, March 28 /PRNewswire/ --

Today at a press conference at Tianguis Turistico, Mexico's largest international travel fair, the Secretary of Tourism for Mexico and the Mexico Tourism Board signed a letter of intent with the founding partners of the World Heritage Alliance, Expedia Inc. and the United Nations Foundation, to jointly promote and preserve World Heritage sites throughout Mexico. With this signing, the Mexico's Secretary of Tourism becomes the first national tourism secretary in the world to sign a letter of intent with the World Heritage Alliance.

Together, the partners will educate travelers and the travel industry about the importance of responsible tourism and World Heritage conservation; encourage community-based sustainable tourism development in and around World Heritage sites; and promote the beauty and significance of Mexico's cultural and natural World Heritage sites around the globe.

"With 25 sites, Mexico has more valuable historic, environmental and cultural treasures inscribed on the World Heritage list than any other country in the Western Hemisphere. The government of Mexico has invested resources to preserve these World Heritage sites, create tourism services and generate more jobs for local communities," said Mr. Rodolfo Elizondo Torres, Secretary of Tourism for Mexico. "These World Heritage sites provide a wide variety of unparalleled travel experiences for people coming from around the globe, but it is only through a public-private partnership like this that can we ensure that tourism in Mexico contributes directly to the conservation of our most cherished national icons."

"The Secretary of Tourism, the Mexico Tourism Board, and Expedia, Inc. are showing thoughtful leadership in their commitment to World Heritage and responsible travel to preserve Mexico's cultural and natural treasures for years to come," said Timothy E. Wirth, President of the UN Foundation. "This is a true partnership, which can serve as a model for how countries, companies, and the United Nations can work together in service of shared economic, cultural, and environmental goals."

"As a leading global travel company, Expedia, Inc. is thrilled to work together with the Secretary of Tourism for Mexico, the Mexico Tourism Board, and the UN Foundation to promote responsible tourism to Mexico's irreplaceable World Heritage sites," said Dara Khosrowshahi, CEO, Expedia, Inc. "We encourage our visiting travelers and travel industry partners in Mexico to join our efforts as we promote and protect Mexico's most beloved places."

Earlier this month at an event in Cancun, Mexico, Expedia and the UN Foundation introduced the World Heritage Alliance to industry, governmental, and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners from throughout the Yucatan region, presenting the vision for collaboration in the area and throughout Mexico. Since then, leading travel partners have been in discussions with the World Heritage Alliance about how they can promote and preserve World Heritage sites in the Mexican Caribbean through responsible tourism.

In addition to working with the travel industry, the World Heritage Alliance will also work on the following specific activities related to Mexico's World Heritage:

- World Heritage Trips to Mexico on Expedia.com: Expedia.com will launch a new World Heritage vacation package to the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, on the eastern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, later this spring. This trip will be added to the other Mexican World Heritage vacation packages currently available on Expedia.com: Fortified Town of Campeche, and Chichen Itza and Uxmal. As with all other featured World Heritage trips, profits from the Mexico destinations featured on <http://www.expedia.com/worldheritage> will be donated to the Friends of

World Heritage Fund at the United Nations Foundation.

- Training Programs on World Heritage and Responsible Tourism: Beginning later this spring, the World Heritage Alliance will offer training courses for staff at Expedia and its travel partners in Mexico to help employees at concierge desks, activity desks or in any customer service role to promote World Heritage and responsible tourism to travelers. The training program will feature interactive learning, booklets, and live seminars, and participating partners will be provided unique World Heritage Alliance marketing and promotional materials that will enhance travel experiences.
- Community Development Program in Sian Ka'an: The World Heritage Alliance will be working closely with local tourism businesses around Sian Ka'an to provide tools and resources to help them better prepare for increased tourism. Expedia, Inc. intends to send employees to Sian Ka'an later this spring as part of a knowledge-sharing program to aid with tourism planning. Additionally, Expedia.com's new Sian Ka'an World Heritage trip will feature sustainable tour opportunities provided by Community Tours Sian Ka'an, a local Mayan-owned sustainable tourism cooperative.

"We're proud of the rich history, nature, and traditions that Mexico and its people offer to visitors worldwide," said Magdalena Carral, CEO, Mexico Tourism Board. "This partnership with the World Heritage Alliance, along with the many governmental efforts already in place, will continue to help to build awareness and responsible travel to our many World Heritage sites."

"Tourism to World Heritage sites, if carried out responsibly, can provide valuable opportunities for local communities and for site conservation," said Francesco Bandarin, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "I am delighted to welcome Expedia into the circle of companies who are actively supporting World Heritage conservation. Such support -- from countries, companies, and individuals -- is vital to UNESCO in helping to build a broader base for heritage conservation."

#### About the World Heritage Alliance

The UN Foundation and Expedia, Inc. created the World Heritage Alliance in the fall of 2005. The World Heritage Alliance aims to:

- Inspire Travelers to Explore and Experience More  
Trips to World Heritage sites are currently available through Expedia.com(R), as well as the Expedia.co.uk, Expedia.fr, Expedia.it, and Expedia.de web sites. The profits from the designated World Heritage trips booked on the Expedia(R) web sites will be donated to the Friends of World Heritage -- an initiative with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre -- for investment in local community projects at World Heritage sites in need, like Sian Ka'an. Expedia.com is currently offering 11 trips -- accessible by visiting <http://www.expedia.com/worldheritage> .
- Promote Economic Development  
Expedia and the UN Foundation will donate combined resources, as well as Expedia employee time and talent to support locally owned tourism enterprises in Sian Ka'an, Mexico, a large, natural World Heritage site on the eastern coast of the Yucatan peninsula. These tourism enterprises will contribute to local community development and help conserve the site's natural environment. Sian Ka'an is the first to benefit from the World Heritage Alliance's economic development efforts -- with other sites to follow.
- Encourage Public Awareness and Involvement  
Through the Friends of World Heritage initiative and web site, individuals have the opportunity to learn more about and support World Heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and local development. To encourage individual donations, Expedia and the UN Foundation will match donations, up to US\$50,000 from each partner, made through the

Friends of World Heritage web site, [www.friendsofworldheritage.org](http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org). These resources will be directed, along with the designated World Heritage trip profits, into local economic development projects at key World Heritage sites.

-- Engage the Travel Industry

Together, Expedia and the UN Foundation want to engage the international travel industry to join the World Heritage Alliance. Broad industry participation is vital because new partners bring expertise, financial resources and other assets that can further the program's goals. More information on how the travel industry can get involved with the World Heritage Alliance is now available at [www.worldheritagealliance.org](http://www.worldheritagealliance.org).

About the UN Foundation:

The United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation) is a public charity created in 1998 with businessman and philanthropist Ted Turner's historic gift to support United Nations causes. The UN Foundation promotes a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world through the support of the UN. Through its grant-making and by building new and innovative public-private partnerships, the UN Foundation acts to meet the most pressing health, humanitarian, socioeconomic, and environmental challenges of the 21st century. In one of its largest projects, the UN Foundation works with UNESCO and other partners to preserve and support World Heritage sites by encouraging economic development that vest local residents in the preservation of the sites. For more information, visit <http://www.unfoundation.org>.

About Expedia, Inc.:

Expedia, Inc. is the world's leading online travel company, empowering business and leisure travelers with the tools and information they need to easily research, plan, book, and experience travel. Expedia, Inc. also provides wholesale travel to offline retail travel agents. Expedia, Inc.'s portfolio of brands include: Expedia.com(R), hotels.com(R), Hotwire(R), Expedia(R) Corporate Travel, TripAdvisor(TM) and Classic Vacations(R). Expedia, Inc.'s companies also operate internationally with sites in Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Australia, and China, through its investment in eLong(TM). For more information, visit <http://www.expediainc.com/> . (Nasdaq: EXPE).

About the Secretary of Tourism for Mexico:

The Secretary of Tourism leads the tourism development of Mexico through the planning and creation of new tourism services and promotion. It has two specialized agencies, the Mexico Tourism Board, and the National Fund for Tourism Development, that work to maximize the tourism offer. Additionally, it coordinates the activities of the Inter-Secretarial Commission for Tourism of the Federal Government, of the state and municipal governments, and of the private sector.

About the Mexico Tourism Board:

The Mexico Tourism Board (MTB) brings together the resources of federal and state governments, municipalities and private companies to promote Mexico's tourism attractions and destinations internationally. Created in 1999, the MTB is Mexico's tourism promotion agency, and its participants include members of both the private and public sectors. The MTB has offices throughout North America, Europe, Japan and Latin America.

For More Information:

- Tourism industry, please visit: [www.worldheritagealliance.org](http://www.worldheritagealliance.org)
- Individuals looking to get informed and involved, please visit: [www.friendsofworldheritage.org](http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org)
- Travelers looking for World Heritage trips to Mexico, please visit: [www.expedia.com/worldheritage](http://www.expedia.com/worldheritage)
- For a full listing of all 812 World Heritage sites, please visit: <http://whc.unesco.org/>

-- More about visiting Mexico can be found at: [www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com)

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Web site: <http://www.expedia.com>  
<http://www.expediainc.com>  
<http://www.unfoundation.org>  
<http://www.worldheritagealliance.org>  
<http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org>  
<http://whc.unesco.org>  
<http://www.visitmexico.com>

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209 - 215 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8NL  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7490 8111  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7490 1255  
E-mail: [info@prnewswire.co.uk](mailto:info@prnewswire.co.uk)

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