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FACT SHEET

World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism:

What is World Heritage?

World Heritage sites are places around the world that have been internationally recognized for their outstanding value as natural and cultural treasures. Sites currently on the World Heritage list include Independence Hall, Stonehenge, the Galapagos Islands, the wildlife reserves of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the historic Centre of Prague, the Pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China.

There are currently 851 World Heritage sites (660 cultural, 166 natural and 25 mixed properties) in 141 countries. All sites are protected by the 1972 World Heritage Convention, signed to date by 184 countries and administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

What is the World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism?

Created in 2005 by the United Nations Foundation and Expedia, Inc., the World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism is an industry-leading initiative that works to support World Heritage conservation, sustainable tourism, and local economic development for communities in and around UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism works with the travel industry to educate travelers about responsible tourism and to establish a tourism infrastructure that promotes the physical conservation of these revered sites and ensures the sustainable economic development of surrounding communities.

What is Sustainable Tourism?

The World Heritage Alliance Principles, which are based off of National Geographic's Geotourism Charter, define sustainable tourism as *tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents*. The World Heritage Alliance seeks to promote tourism that helps preserve both the environmental integrity of World Heritage sites as well as the cultural heritage of surrounding communities. Sustainable tourism also contributes to the sustainability of local economies where livelihoods are often based on the cultivation of their natural environment and income from the tourist industry.

Where is the World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism implementing its programs?

The WHA is currently involved in the conservation of 20 World Heritage sites found in 7 different countries including Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize, Jordan, Dominica, Ecuador, and the United States. While these projects are being carried out, education and awareness building of World Heritage conservation and sustainable tourism continues to take place world-wide.