



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **“EL SALVADOR ECO-EXPERIENCES TOURIST WEB PORTAL LAUNCHED”**

**SAN SALVADOR-** The Ministry of Tourism and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) launched today El Salvador EcoExperiences web portal <http://www.elsalvadorexperience.com>, and at the same time announced the beginning of the tours and vacation activities in Sonsonate and Ahuachapán. These departments were selected for having watersheds which conservation is key for USAID and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources.

El Salvador Eco-Experiences will start an international campaign to position the country as an ecological and emerging destination, where the person works to show their identity to the world. In relation to this, Lawrence Rubey, USAID Economic Growth Office Director, said that El Salvador has many natural resources attractive for foreign and regional tourists, hence marketing them is key to stimulate tourism.

Through its support to communities, farm workers cooperatives, Non-Governmental Organizations and private land owners, El Salvador Eco-Experiences web portal assists the western region of the country to create special and sustainable experiences that highlight the unique cultural, natural and geographical features of that area, such as its flora and fauna, archeological sites, picturesque landscapes, meeting with the natives, handcrafts and delicious typical mountain-style and sea food. The Caluco, Sonsonate municipality Mayor, Blanca Orellana, thanked USAID because this initiative has increased the local income, and also has positioned them as one of the major eco-tourism promises in the area.

The web portal has four main sections: Volcanoes Region, Forests and Mangrove Swamps Region, Flowers' Route Region and the Western pacific. Each of them has detailed information on the diverse tourism destinations and high resolution maps. Also, the portal provides an updated cultural/environmental events calendar to be held in Sonsonate and Ahuachapán.

This innovative web portal promotes tourism sites offered by local tour operators, such as: Caiman hike, that takes place in one of El Salvador's most representative and exotic coast plains ecosystem (Santa Rita and Sanjon El Chino protected natural area, San Francisco Menéndez, Ahuachapán); Jardin de Tatalpa Tour, located 10 minutes away from Nahuizalcos's downtown; and “Sheriff Gone” sunken boat snorkeling, in the Los Cóbanos protected natural area, Sonsonate, where tourists can watch different types of fishes, sea stars, sea urchins, winkles and other marine species.

From 2006, the USAID Promoting Economic Opportunities Program has invested 7.9 million dollars for the implementation of a project to improve the conservation of the El Imposible-Barra de Santiago and Rio Grande-Banderas watersheds.

El Salvador EcoExperiences web portal is part of that project and aims to increase: business opportunities for the project site residents, knowledge of the different tourism options in Sonsonate and Ahuachapan, and at the same time, rise awareness in the visitors of the need to conserve its biodiversity.

USAID was congratulated by Mrs. Michelle Gallardo de Gutierrez, Vice-Minister of Tourism, for the efforts made, for the creation of EcoExperiences El Salvador portal web and for joining the national effort of stimulating national tourism.

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