Sixty-eighth session

Item 19 of the provisional agenda[*]

Implementation of UNGA Resolution 66/196 *Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America*

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/196 entitled, "Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America" adopted by the UN General Assembly at its 66th session, which "Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-eight session on developments related to the implementation of the present resolution, taking into account the reports prepared by the World Tourism Organization in this field". To this effect, UNWTO has sought inputs on the above- mentioned issues, both from UNWTO State Members and UN Members from the Central American region, on what has been achieved in the region in the last five years.

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[*] A/68/100

In preparing the present report, the secretariat of the World Tourism Organization sought and used input from the tourism authorities of the Central American Integration System (SICA) and each of the seven member countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize), as well as from the chambers of tourism, other private sector entities, and non-governmental organizations in each country.

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. It applies to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism subsectors, including ecotourism. The Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA) and the tourism authorities of the seven member countries have adopted the principles of sustainable tourism, as defined by UNWTO and the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria as a framework for tourism development in their strategic planning. SITCA has also adopted the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, which the chambers of tourism of some of the countries are requiring their members to adhere to, especially with respect to eliminating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

The countries of Central America have emphasized poverty alleviation through tourism (Millennium Development Goal 1) as a key objective in their strategic planning. They are focusing on ecotourism, community-based

rural tourism, and micro and small businesses in the tourism supply chain as key areas to strengthen, particularly in financing, marketing, and quality. Two of the countries have emphasized social tourism and recreation as a societal good. Community-based cultural tourism is seen as a way of strengthening indigenous communities, while historical and archeological tourism is seen as a tool for restoration and conservation of these resources. All of the countries propose major investment in conventional tourism and infrastructure, but following the principles of sustainability.

Adaptation to climate change and the associated risks has become a growing focus of regional tourism strategies, along with mitigating tourism-related greenhouse gas emissions. Ecotourism to protect natural habitats and biodiversity is one component of these strategies, as well as a competitive advantage for the region.

Key lessons learned are that regional integration in tourism in Central America has been successful in those areas where individual initiatives in each country are not cost-effective, especially climate change and security. Similarly, the joint marketing efforts of the region have been successful where nearby countries have complementary attractions. However in those areas where the countries are competing for market segments with similar offerings, integration and joint marketing has been ineffective.

The present report provides the recommendations that (a) the joint and individual activities of Central America have relevance for many other countries and sub-regions, especially those with similar natural and cultural attractions, risks, and socioeconomic conditions, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean; (b) that there should increased cooperation to replicate successful cases within and outside the region; and (c) that the policy recommendations of the UN International Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development should be considered in the policy framework for Central American integration in tourism.

I.   INTRODUCTION

1. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the specialized agency of the United Nations system vested with a central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. In General Assembly resolution 66/196, UNWTO was requested to take the lead in the preparation of the report on the regional overview "Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America".

2. The Central American region and its institutional structures:

(a) Central America consists of seven small countries[1], Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize, with a total land area of 522,700 km^2 and a population of about 42.7 million inhabitants. Central America's location, as a land bridge between North and South America and as a barrier between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, has given it extraordinary, but vulnerable, natural and cultural resources and attractions. It is here that the flora and fauna of two continents first met and continue to blend, and the rising of Central America out of the ocean floor changed the world's climate dramatically; as one author stated, "the formation of the Central American isthmus was the pivotal event of the last 10 million years of earth history"[2]. As a result, Central America is home to approximately 8% of the world's

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[1] All Central American Countries are full members of the UNWTO as of May 2013, except Belize.

[2] Jackson, J.B.C and Luis D'Croz (1997), *The Ocean Divided*, in *Central America: A Natural and Cultural History*, Yale University Press.

biodiversity. However this is threatened by the agricultural frontier and other unsustainable practices. Modern ecotourism was born in Central America in the early 1980's as a tool to conserve this biodiversity by enlisting the poor rural population in conservation efforts, using employment in tourism as a source of family income[3].

(b) In Central America the cultures of Mesoamerica and of South America met and exchanged ideas and goods; it is here that maize and many other crops were domesticated; and here was the heart of Mayan civilization. Today there are extraordinary archeological sites, dating back to 12,000 years ago, as well as a multitude of living cultures. These cultures include several Mesoamerican peoples, including a large and diverse Mayan population; Chibchan peoples related to South America; as well as Afro-Caribbeans and the dominant culture in each of the seven countries of the region. Unfortunately, many of these people live in poverty and are culturally vulnerable. The national estimates of poverty levels range from 24% to 60%., with a regional average of 46% or 19.8 million people[4]. Archeological and historical tourism has existed in the region since the 1960's or earlier, but only recently has it taken into account local indigenous populations as beneficiaries. Community-based tourism has developed since the 1990's to contribute to the reduction of poverty in these vulnerable communities.

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[3] Honey, Martha (2008), *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development*, Island Press.

[4] Index Mundi, Population below poverty line (Central America and the Caribbean), available:
http://www.indexmundi.com/map/?v=69&r=ca&l=en

(c) Politically, Central America was traditionally divided into the five original members of the Central American Federal Republic (1824-1838), Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, which have made sporadic efforts over the course of 150 years to establish some form of common political organization. These efforts culminated with the formation of the Central American Integration System (SICA) together with Panama in 1991, upon the signing the Tegucigalpa Protocol to the Charter of the Organization of Central American States (OCAS). The creation of SICA was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in its Resolution A/48 L December 10, 1993, allowing the regional bodies and institutions of SICA to interact with the UN system. Belize joined SICA as a full member in 2000.

(d) The institutional structure of SICA consists of ten secretariats, of which the most relevant to sustainable tourism are the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA) and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD). SITCA is governed by the Central American Council of Tourism (CCT), consisting of the ministers of tourism of the seven member states. SITCA is associated with the Central American Federation of Tourism Chambers (FEDECATUR), whose members are the national tourism chambers of commerce in each country. The members of CCT and FEDECATUR also constitute the members of the Central American Tourism Agency (CATA), based in Madrid.

3. Sustainable tourism is defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. It applies to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism subsectors, including ecotourism." The 12 aims of sustainability in tourism have been defined by the UNWTO as: economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community wellbeing, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency, and environmental purity.[5] In order to make these aims operational, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), hosted since 2013 by UNWTO, has developed the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, which consist of 40 criteria for hotels and tour operators, as well for destinations, divided into four main areas: sustainable management, and socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental impacts. In each case, the emphasis is on promoting positive impacts, while minimizing negative ones. These principles have been adopted by SITCA as the sustainable tourism principles for Central America, in its "basis for the creation of a tourism policy for integration and sustainable development in Central America". They are expressed in the Strategic Plans for Sustainable Tourism Development 2003-2009 and 2009-2013.[6]

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[5] World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environment Programme (2005), *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*, UNWTO, UNEP, Madrid, Paris.
[6] CCT and SITCA, *Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo Turístico Sostenible de Centro América PEDTS 2009- 2013*, available: http://www.sica.int/busqueda/busqueda_archivo.aspx?Archivo=regl_49058_1_11052010.pdf

4. Further international programs in sustainable tourism include the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism (GPST), launched in 2011 with the participation of UNWTO, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Members include the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), as well as national governments, non-governmental organization, and businesses. The goal of the GPST is to make sustainability principles part of the mainstream of tourism policies, development, and operations. In Central America, regional members include SITCA, the Costa Rican Tourist Board (ICT), the National Cleaner Production Centre of Nicaragua (NCPC), Península Papagayo (Costa Rica), and Rainforest Alliance. One of the principal activities of the GPST is to replicate and scale up successful projects from one region into other similar places where they could be successful. Costa Rica exercised the vice-chair of the GPST from 2011-2013. Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) is listed as a GPST project and is in the process of being replicated in the rest of Central America through SITCA.

5. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also known as Rio+20, was held in Brazil in June 2012. Among the principle outcomes was emphasis on sustainable tourism's importance for creating decent jobs and generating trade opportunities. To accomplish this, the outcome document

recognizes "the need to support sustainable tourism activities and relevant capacity building that promote environmental awareness, conserve and protect the environment, respect wildlife, flora, biodiversity and ecosystems and cultural diversity, and improve the welfare and livelihoods of local communities", particularly in developing countries. The document also encourages "investment in sustainable tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism, which may include creating small- and medium-sized enterprises and facilitating access to finance, including through microcredit initiatives for the poor, indigenous peoples and local communities[7]. There are no voluntary national commitments for UNCSD listed from Central America, but there is one Green Economy initiative to "empower 500 women entrepreneurs in green economy businesses in Guatemala" (partners CXCatalysts, CEMACO, BPW, Greif).[8]

6. Of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations in 2000[9], sustainable tourism has had demonstrable direct impacts on goals 1 (poverty), 3 (gender), 7 (environment), and 8 (partnerships), as well as indirect impacts on goal 6 (HIV/AIDS).[10] SITCA's tourism policy framework for Central America emphasizes reducing poverty through tourism, promoting small and micro

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[7] UNCSD (2012), *The Future We Want*, Sustainable Tourism: paragraphs 130 and 131, available: www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf

[8] UNCSD (2012), Rio+20 Voluntary Commitments, available: http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&type=1006&menu=153&nr=451

[9] UNDP (2000), The Millennium Development Goals, available: www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview. The Millennium Development Goals are: MDG-1 Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; MDG-2 Achieving universal primary education; MDG-3 Promoting gender equality and empowering women; MDG-4 Reducing child mortality rates; MDG-5 Improving maternal health; MDG-6 Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; MDG-7 Ensuring environmental sustainability; and MDG-8 Developing a global partnership for development.

[10] Evidence cited in United Nation Environment Programme (2011), *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, UNEP, Nairobi, available: www.unep.org/greeneconomy and case studies in World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environment Programme (2012), *Tourism in the Green Economy – Background Report,* UNWTO, UNEP, Madrid, Nairobi.

businesses, ensuring environmental sustainability, and combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents consider MDG-1, 6, 7, and 8. The adoption of the GSTC Criteria for the region by SITCA reinforces these and adds MDG-3. UNWTO has collaborated in the region through its Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) program in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in the framework of MDG-1. SITCA's policies and programs are largely concordant with the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, particularly with respect to combatting the exploitation of human beings, particularly children.[11]

7. The seven countries of Central America, together in regional entities such as SITCA and independently, have converged on sustainable tourism as a fundamental pillar of regional integration and social and economic development. Inbound tourism provided $8.7 billion in foreign exchange and 5.2% of the region's GDP in 2011[12], and it largely depends on natural and cultural attractions. This was reinforced by the Declaration of 2012 as the Year of Sustainable Tourism in Central America, proposed by the ministers of tourism and ratified by the heads of state of the seven countries, [13]as well as by the Outcome Document of the First Workshop on Sustainable Tourism in Central America, held with the participation of ministers of tourism and UNWTO.[14] The resulting regional tourism strategy is based on conserving the region's biodiversity and natural and cultural attractions, reducing poverty through

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[11] World Tourism Organization (1999), *UNWTO Global Code of Ethics*, available: http://ethics.unwto.org/en/content/global-code-ethics-tourism

[12] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid. Inbound tourism over GDP ranges from 17.5% in Belize to 2.9% in Guatemala.

[13] CCT (2012), *Declaración de 2012: Año del Turismo Sostenible Centroamericano*, available: www.canaturh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/DECLARACION-2012.pdf

[14] CCT (2012), Conclusions and Recommendations of the Workshop on Sustainable Tourism (23-24 June 2011), available: www.uncsd2012.org/rio20//index.php?page=view&nr=5&type=510&menu=20&template=529&str=Biodiversity

employment and entrepreneurial tourism development (emphasizing the small, micro, and medium enterprises that dominate the industry), addressing climate change impacts (emissions and adaptation), and using tourism as tool to increase the quality of life of the region's inhabitants. Originally, Costa Rica and Belize positioned themselves as major ecotourism destinations in the 1980s, while Guatemala emphasized cultural tourism to iconic sites. Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama, entered these markets later, after political problems were laid to rest. Now all seven countries have moved towards a mix of tourism products strongly emphasizing nature and culture, while including other sectors, such as business travel, adventure tourism, and medical tourism. The details of the regional strategies can be found in section III of this document.

II. Overview of existing sustainable tourism programs by countries in the region

A. Belize

8. The key tourism institutions of Belize are the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the Belize Tourist Board (BTB), the Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA), and the Belize Hotel Association (BHA). The ministry focuses on the enabling environment and policy development, BTB on implementation, and BTIA and BHA represent the private sector. Belize derived 17.5% of its GDP from tourism in 2011, by far the highest percentage of the other countries in the region. Belize reports 13,200 persons employed in tourism or 4% of the total population.[15] The institutions are acutely aware of both the importance of tourism for the country's economy and

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[15] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

the vulnerabilities of its key attractions: the coral reef and other marine attractions, tropical rainforest and other terrestrial ecosystems, Mayan archeological sites, and the varied living cultures. The tourism institutions and actors, in broad consensus, developed the *National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan for Belize 2030* (NSTMP).[16] The four strategic goals are to (1) support Belizean stakeholders in taking leadership over sustainable tourism development, (2) optimize socio-economic benefits from tourism, (3) undertake a sustainable and planned tourism development, and (4) achieve competitiveness as a world-class destination. The plan designates areas for development and protection, sets density limits and special requirements for cruise tourism, and proposes a framework for quality and sustainability of all sectors, particularly hotels, tour operators, and tour guides.

9. To make the overall plan operational, three-year action plans have been established for 2010-2012 and 2013-2015. These have established carrying capacity limits and limits of acceptable change for some coral reef and other marine sites, cruise tourism (66% of passenger arrivals), and archeological sites. A coastal zone development plan (undertaken by the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute – CZMAI) is currently under review. Research is being conducted on the ecosystems of southern Belize as a component of the master plan. Turneffe Atoll has been set aside as a key protected area and funds obtained for its management. Training of service providers, especially tour operators is being conducted by BTB

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[16] Belize Sustainable Tourism Program (STP), *National Sustainable Master Plan for Belize 2030, Project Implementation Manual* (June 2011), available:
http://www.sustainabletourismbz.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=61&Itemid=57

to reduce the ecological footprint of tourist in and near protected areas, and the BTB in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism, and also the Ministry of Fisheries, Forestry, and Sustainable Development are looking to develop a low carbon and climate change policy.

10. A hotel classification system is being implemented for 750 properties throughout the country. For hotels and tour operators outside of any certification system, a sustainability checklist has been established. Under the Belize Rural Development Project II – Benefitting Communities Adjacent to Archaeological Sites (funded by the EU in conjunction with NICH, BTB, and MOT) nine archaeological sites are targeted for improvement of infrastructure, health and safety standards, improved quality of local artisans products, and development of community guides.

11. With respect to emergency preparedness and response to natural disasters, BTB, BTIA and the Belize Hotel Association have established emergency protocols and a systematic training program in safety and security. BTB, together with the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) have established close coordination and information exchange. This includes an emergency communication system to all hotels, an inventory of guests, and tracking of emergency responses and guest locations. Tourist security is being enhanced through the tourism police, a section of the national police, with implementation under the Destination Planning department of the BTB. Security Training is coordinated with SICA initiatives, most recently with Noski Consulting to develop a regional security plan.

12. Visa facilitation remains problematic in some respects. Tourists from the European Union, The United States of America, Canada, nearly all members of the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), and most Commonwealth countries do not require a visa. For nearby countries, Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Chile, Honduras and Guatemala are exempted[17]. Although increasing numbers of tourists are arriving from newly emerging economies, visa requirements are still too high. However, the recent introduction of a visa waiver programme for Brazil and Argentina shows that the issue of visa facilitation for tourist is being addressed.

B. Costa Rica

13. The key tourism institutions in Costa Rica are the Costa Rican Tourist Board (ICT), whose president is ex officio the Minister of Tourism, the National Chamber of Tourism (CANATUR), and the National Chamber of Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism (CANAECO). There are numerous other chambers, representing tour operators, hotels, car rental agencies, airlines and local regions, all of whom are represented in CANATUR, the national member of FEDECATUR. Many NGOs work in the field of sustainable tourism, and Rainforest Alliance's sustainable tourism program is headquartered in Costa Rica. Tourism in Costa Rica provided 5.8% of GDP in 2011 and reportedly employed 1.8% of the total population.[18]

14. Costa Rica exercises the chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for the Americas and a representative of the Ministry of Tourism of Costa Rica has a seat in

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[17] For further information, please refer to the study of the World Tourism Organization on *Visa facilitation: Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism* (revised edition April 2013), UNWTO, Madrid, available: http://dtxtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/visa_facilitation_stimulating_economic_growth_and_development_through_tourism.pdf

[18] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

the World Committee on Tourism Ethics, and was formerly a member and a chair of the Executive Council and chaired the Sustainable Development of Tourism Committee. Costa Rica very actively promotes in these different functions the issues of sustainable tourism, cultural values, quality, and tourism education. Costa Rica currently occupies the rotating chair of CCT.

15. The National Sustainable Tourism Plan for Costa Rica 2010-2016 "will promote and encourage tourism development that encourages the sustainable use of resources (natural and human) and the equitable distribution of benefits, ensuring that the projected growth phase for 2016 adheres to the positioning already achieved and even more, to the human development to which we aspire as a nation". As a principle objective, "tourism will be a vehicle of choice for the country's sustainable development, human welfare and will promote opportunities for direct local participation." The clear focus of the strategic objectives is to maintain Costa Rica's world leadership in quality nature-oriented tourism, blended with beach, adventure, rural community tourism, and other sectors, to offer a variety of tourism offerings within a thematic context of sustainability and authenticity.

16. Costa Rica established one of the earliest certification systems in 1997, Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) for accommodations, which has served as a model worldwide and was recognized in 2011 by the GSTC as aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. The second version of CST for hotels, including aspects related to golf, archeology, indigenous peoples, and cultural resources, was released in 2013. Currently there are 213 certified hotels. CST for

tour operators (2005) has 67 certificate holders. CST for rental cars (2010) has 5, and for theme parks (2011) there are 3. The 287 certified companies represent nearly 30% of the duly registered businesses in each sector. Two more standards are currently under development, for coastal and marine tour operations and for restaurants.

17. Costa Rica's Ecological Blue Flag (BAE) program certifies water quality, community organization, and sustainability in over 90 beaches (since 1996), as well as in communities, schools, natural protected areas (public or private), small watersheds, carbon-neutral communities and organizations, and sustainable homes. Except for the beach certification component, which has similarities to the International Blue Flag program, the program appears to be unique in its scope in the world, and is being proposed for implementation in Panama and Ecuador.

18. Costa Rica has developed several initiatives for mitigating climate change in the tourist industry. The country has set the goal of being carbon- neutral by 2021, and has an active National Strategy for Climate Change. It was the first country to institute a carbon tax (1995) and payment for environmental services (1996) through the National Forestry Financing Fund (FONAFIFO), based on avoiding emissions from deforestation and establishing sinks from reforestation and forest regeneration. These strategies have been used to establish the first carbon neutral domestic airlines and automobile rental agencies that mitigate 100% of their emissions. CANAECO and FONAFIFO have developed the "Climate Conscious Traveler" (VCC) program to offset emissions from air travel through avoided deforestation and reforestation

with native species in areas with poor social development indicators, indigenous territories, rural communities and high biological diversity. On a regional basis, Costa Rica is closely coordinating its climate change strategy with SICA and CCAD.

19. The association ACTUAR and the COOPRENA cooperative are the leading organizations for promoting rural community tourism Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), especially those run by women and indigenous peoples. Both organizations provide training in quality and sustainability, as well as effective marketing.

20. Emergency preparedness and the response to natural disasters are coordinated among the ICT, the National Meteorological Institute (IMN), the National Seismological Network, and the National Emergency Commission (CNE). A strong seismic construction code is enforced for all buildings, hurricane warnings are issued in timely fashion, and a tsunami warning system is being tested by the CNE along the principal tourist areas on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Tourist security is being coordinated with SITCA, but the regional strategy has confronted legal and bureaucratic barriers in implementing a streamlined system for recording crime reports from tourists.

21. Visa facilitation in Costa Rica has been eased by allowing free entry of anyone with a passport or visa for the United States, Japan, South Korea, Canada, or the Schengen region of Europe. All Central American countries except Nicaragua are exempt from visas, and only Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Cuba, and Jamaica require visas from South America and the Caribbean.

C. El Salvador

22. The Salvadoran government body that is responsible for national tourism policy and ensures compliance is the Ministry of Tourism of El Salvador (MITUR). Associated with it is the Salvadoran Tourism Corporation (CORSATUR), an autonomous institution with legal personality charged with managing tourism development and coordinating among sectors. Also associated with MITUR is the Salvadoran Institute of Tourism (ISTU) whose function is to stimulate family recreation and tourism for Salvadorans, especially in recreational parks. The private sector is represented by the Salvadoran Chamber of Tourism (CASATUR), which represents the country in FEDECATUR. There are at least 13 other industry associations. The Ministry of Tourism is designing a sectoral policy, which includes the issues of quality and sustainable tourism, and the themes of quality and sustainability are embodied in the design of the new tourism law, currently in the consultation stage.[19] Tourism in El Salvador provided 3.2% of GDP in 2011 and reportedly employed 0.7% of the total population.[20]

23. The National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) of El Salvador has established a national quality standard for tourist services and facilities in small and medium hotels, hostels and aparthotels, as well as standards for restaurants, tour guides, tour operators, adventure tourism (canopy ziplines, tree climbing, and

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[19] Grupo GDT, *Plan Nacional de Turismo 2020 El Salvador*, available: http://www.umoar.edu.sv/tesis/turismo/Plan%20Nacional%20de%20Turismo%202020%20El%20Salvador.pdf
[20] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

canoeing).[21] A number of hotels and restaurants have now been certified and are promoted by CORSATUR. MITUR has also supported Salvanatura Ecological Foundation, which is offering sustainable tourism certification with Smart Voyager and Green Globe, as well as its own diagnostic tool "Salvacert".

24. MITUR has organized a series of ten tourism roundtables with the private sector, universities, local governments, and other ministries to arrive at a consensus around strategic proposals and policies for government and the tourist industry. The ninth roundtable, in February 2012, dealt with sustainable tourism. There are training activities in promotion and product development in tourism destinations, in order to strengthen the entrepreneurial tourist sector in the principal destinations. The Ministry of Tourism, through CORSATUR, launched the First Forum of Cooperation and Funding Opportunities for Sustainable Development of Sustainable Tourism in 2012, to discuss financing options for the development of tourism MSMEs, and training to help them become more competitive in the marketplace. CASATUR, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has implemented a project to sensitize the private sector in preventing the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

25. El Salvador has a program of the Ministry of Interior, through the General Directorate of Civil Protection, for the safety, security, and health of tourists that includes the tourism police (POLITUR), a program to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, consumer protection, and food hygiene. In some of the

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[21] CONACYT, Normas de calidad Turística de El Salvador, available: http://www.elsalvador.travel/category/nct/

destinations, there is cooperation with MITUR, the Ministry of the Environment, and committees representing the private sector. The National Plan for Health and Tourism addresses health services for tourism, food hygiene, water, solid waste management, emergency preparedness, and tourism security.

26. The "Regional agreement on immigration procedures CA-4 for extending the unified Central American visa" of July 2005[22] establishes free movement of citizens of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (CA-4) with no requirement for passports. Citizens of other countries are divided into 2 groups: A (no visa required), and B (visa required). Most countries of the Americas, the Schengen region of Europe, and most other developed countries are in Group A. The following countries from the Americas although in Group B, can be exempted from soliciting a visa, if bearer of the passport has already a valid visa issued by Canada, the United States of America or a Schengen Member State: Bolivia, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Granada, Guyana, Jamaica, Peru, and Surinam. Cuba falls in Group B.[23]

D. Guatemala

27. The principle institutions for tourism in Guatemala are the Guatemalan Tourist Board (INGUAT) and the private sector Chamber of Tourism (CAMTUR). The National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) has been active in promoting ecotourism as part of its conservation strategy and has produced information,

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[22] SICA (2005), *Acuerdo Regional de Procedimientos Migratorios para la Extensión de la Visa Única Centroamericana, Alcances del Tratado Marco y la Movilidad de Personas en la Región* (2005), available: http://www.turibiz.com/turibiz/tur_adm_paises.php?accion=dsc&pais=004&numero=2&idioma=ES
[23] For further information, please refer to the study of the World Tourism Organization on *Visa facilitation: Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism* (revised edition April 2013), UNWTO, Madrid, available: http://dtxtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/docpdf/visafacilitationrevisedweb.pdf

brochures, and books about ecotourism on protected areas. The Universidad del Valle offers a graduate program in sustainable tourism administration, with about 30 graduates in the last five years. Tourism in Guatemala provided 2.9% of GDP in 2011.[24]

28. The National Policy of Sustainable Tourism Development of Guatemala 2012 – 2022 has among its principle strategic areas sustainable tourism, social and accessible tourism, and diversifying Guatemala's portfolio of tourism offerings. In sustainable tourism, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are considered the fundamental framework, along with classification and certification. With respect to diversification, the policy focuses on five areas: living and millenary Mayan culture; congresses and conventions; Pacific and Caribbean cruise ports; and community tourism. INGUAT, with the support of the National Roundtable of Community Tourism (MNTC), developed the National Strategy of Community Tourism 2011-2015.

29. INGUAT's sustainable tourism activities include the creation of the Tourist Development Program for Protected Areas between INGUAT and CONAP and the Technical Council Tourism in Protected Areas (COTURAP). It promoted the voluntary accession by tourism businesses to the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and conducted a program for tourism operators, communities and tourists based on the project "Maya Peoples". CAMTUR issued a code of ethics for its

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[24] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

members, that includes many of the aspects of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

30. Numerous organizations, local and international, have implemented sustainable tourism projects throughout Guatemala. The Association of Private Nature Reserves of Guatemala (ARNPG) promotes the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity through nearly 100 privately owned nature reserves. It provides technical assistance and training to its members in a variety of projects, including rural, nature, and agro-tourism. Many other local organizations, such as the Foundation for the Development of Guatemala (FUNDESA), Ak'tenamit, the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), Aj Quen Association, Viva Atitlan, and Foundation for Ecodevelopment and Conservation (FUNDAECO) have supported community-based tourism activities in local and indigenous communities.[25] Rainforest Alliance provided technical and financial support for best management practices and certification of 140 tourism MSMEs and community-based organizations; it signed marketing agreements with inbound tour operators and outbound operators in Europe, the US, and Latin America that agreed to use the verified and certified businesses. Counterpart International implemented the

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[25] FUNDESA, Fundación para el Desarrollo de Guatemala (www.fundesa.org.gt, "a private, non-profit organization, formed by entrepreneurs in their personal capacity"), Ak'tenamit (www.aktenamit.org, "non-profit international development organization working to reduce poverty among Q'eqchi' Maya in Eastern Guatemala"), ACOFOP, Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (www.acofop.org, "community-based association, made up of 23 campesino and indigenous organizations that through community forestry management guarantees its perpetuity"), Aj Quen Association (www.globalgoodspartners.org/template/producer.cfm?cbo=6079, "an association of artisan groups that specialize in handmade woven products"), Viva Atitlan (www.vivaatitlan.com, "community tour operator in Guatemala of nine ethnic community organizations Kakchiquel K'iché and Tz'utujil, forming the Community Tourism Network Solola"), and FUNDAECO, Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación (www.fundaeco.org.gt, "private, non-political and not-for-profit organization dedicated to Nature Conservation and Sustainable Community Development").

"Guatemala Community Tourism Alliance" from 2007-2012, in which it generated over $6 million dollars of additional sales, created 6,692 new jobs and strengthened 1,245 small and medium private and community enterprises. It worked with INGUAT to support communities and an association of women handicraft producers. Counterpart supported INGUAT, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and the 2012 Committee, in promoting and maximizing the potential of Guatemala as the epicenter of the 2012 Maya commemoration.

31. Great Green Deal is a Guatemalan sustainable tourism certification program that is largely aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and has certified hotels and tour operators. A comprehensive quality certification program, "Q Quality" was released by INGUAT in 2013 as a standard for internal management and service delivery in the tourism industry.

32. The National Coordinator for the Reduction of Disasters (CONRED) coordinates emergency preparedness and response among all relevant institutions at a national and local level, including INGUAT. It has a national response plan, as well as established procedures for coordination during emergencies.

33. INGUAT has strengthened the Tourist Assistance Program, PROATUR, which assists domestic and foreign tourists during their stay in Guatemala; created the Tourism Safety Division, for the protection of tourist destinations and the Tourism Security Technical Committee, a multi-sectoral inter-agency body to resolve the problems of tourism security; and established a Tourist Assistance call center. The Safe Taxi Program trained 204 taxi drivers to provide better service to tourists and

improve their safety in Antigua Guatemala, Puerto San Jose, Puerto Barrios and Guatemala City. The Safe Routes program with the Ministry of Interior, the INGUAT - Ministry of National Defense agreement and the Hunapuh Volcan (Volcano de Agua) Project (including safe trails, training of the Municipal Tourism Police) eliminated or greatly reduced criminal incidents against tourists in the Rio Dulce basin, Volcano de Agua zone, and the borders with El Salvador and southern Mexico.

34. Visa requirements are the same for the countries of CA-4 (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua). See the corresponding section on El Salvador for details.

E. Honduras

35. The principal national entities in tourism in Honduras are the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR, Secretary of State in the Office of Tourism), the Honduran Tourism Institute (IHT), and for the private sector, the National Chamber of Tourism of Honduras (CANATURH, member of FEDECATUR). Tourism in Honduras provided 4.0% of GDP in 2011 and reportedly employed 2.2% of the total population.[26]

36. The National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism (ENTS) was developed by the Ministry of Tourism (SETUR) and the Honduran Institute of Tourism (IHT). "The strategy, rather than a simple tourism plan, establishes a model of sustainable tourism development with a philosophical and conceptual model that impacts all levels of society in different regions of the territory." It aims at "strengthening

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[26] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

tourism to Honduras at the regional level, as well as developing and diversifying its products and destinations." In a competitive advantage analysis, the strategy concludes that only Honduras, of the seven Central American countries, has world-class attractions in nature, living cultures, beaches, diving, archaeology, and colonial cities.[27] Unlike many tourism plans, the strategy has strong baseline diagnostic and monitoring components, which allow objective measurement of compliance with the objectives.

37. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded the Honduran Government with US$35 million from 2005-2012 to implement aspects of ENTS. The completed projects include a) Contribution to the rehabilitation, maintenance and development of the rich cultural and tourism heritage of Copan Archaeological Park, b) Research and enhancement of the Río Amarillo Archaeological Site, with the establishment of basic infrastructure for the surrounding community of La Castellona; c) Rehabilitation of the San Fernando de Omoa Fortress, d) Establishment of the Fortress Museum and restoration of historical heritage objects, e) In Tela a design plan to improve and manage the beach area f) Installing the Visitor Center in the Lancetilla Botanical Garden and a plan and design to improve protected areas neighboring Tela Bay; g) Establishment of basic infrastructure and utilities in the Complejo Los Micos and neighboring communities Tornabé and Miami, and, h) 77 projects were funded and implemented to support small tourism businesses.[28]

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[27] IHT (2010), *Estrategia Nacional de Turismo Sostenible (ENTS)*, available: http://www.iht.hn/?q=node/28

[28] IDB (2012), *Programa Nacional de Turismo Sostenible (PNTS), Informe de Terminación de Proyecto HO0195*, available: http://www.iadb.org/es/proyectos/project-information-page,1303.html?id=ho0195

38. In April 2013, UNWTO signed a memorandum of intentions with SECTUR, CANATURH, and the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) to establish the first member of the Global Observatory of Sustainable Tourism (GOST) network in the Americas. The observatory will be based in La Ceiba and will initially focus on data collection in La Ceiba and the Bay Islands. SECTUR will provide financial, human, and administrative resources. UNAH will provide researchers, international academic contacts, and training, in conjunction with CANATURH, for the private sector, especially MSMEs. CANATURH will provide other necessary resources. UNWTO will provide its expertise in the use of sustainable tourism indicators in establishing and improving policies. This pilot project may serve as a model for the rest of Honduras, Central America, and the Americas in general.

39. The Honduras Tourism Communities Network (RECOTURH) "is a community-based organization that promotes sustainable tourism principles among its communities to assure the development and well-being of each one of its members."[29] The organization has implemented a series of projects since 2009 to strengthen communities and the biodiversity on which their tourism activities depend.

40. USAID Proparque project has funded the *Economic Growth of Micro, Small and Medium Rural Tourism Enterprises* "to improve the competitiveness of the tourism sector in the national parks of Honduras, […] through technical assistance through

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[29] Red de Comunidades Turísticas de Honduras (RECOTURH): http://www.recoturh.com/?lang=en

local NGOs and other service providers to increase productivity, particularly in the increase in the MSME's access to financial services."[30]

41. The Inter-American Development Bank's Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) funded a project (Development of Sustainable Tourism Model in the Northeast Coast of Honduras) with CARE International and support from the Honduran Social Investment Fund (FHIS) to provide technical assistance or microcredit to 500 tourism businesses owned by Maya Chorti, Afro-Caribbean and Garifuna entrepreneurs.

42. Honduran Permanent Contingency Committee's (COPECO) was established to provide early warning and relief in case of natural disasters. It is organized within the National Risk Management System of Honduras, which in turn is affiliated with the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC) of SICA.

43. Visa requirements are the same for the countries of CA-4 (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua). See the corresponding section on El Salvador for details.

F. Nicaragua

44. The Nicaraguan Tourist Board (INTUR, Instituto Nicaragüense de Turismo) is the principle government actor in tourism, although the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) plays an important role in tourism policy and actions. The private sector is represented by the National Chamber of Tourism of

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[30] USAID ProParque: http://www.usaid-proparque.org/comp1

Nicaragua (CANATUR), which is the national member of FEDECATUR. There is also a very active network of small hotels, HOPEN, which has worked in the area of sustainable tourism training for its members and evaluating and promoting sustainable tourism certification systems. The Network of Private Wildlife Reserves of Nicaragua (Red-RSP), with 62 private nature reserves, has undertaken training its members in voluntary conservation and sustainable tourism. Tourism in Nicaragua provided 5.2% of GDP in 2011.[31]

45. Nicaragua has implemented at least 24 projects related to sustainable tourism under the auspices of INTUR within the scope of the National Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development 2010-2020 and its development strategy, as well as the National Plan for Human Development. The projects include several tourism routes that incorporate natural, historical, or agricultural landscapes, with components of interpretation of natural history, ethnography, and history; historical restoration; and training in transverse themes of environmental protection, climate change, and gender equity. A number of projects focus on strengthening the competitiveness of MSMEs and training in environmental responsibility and adaptation to climate change. Another project of INTUR focuses on combatting the abuse, sexual exploitation, and trafficking of children and adolescents. A strategic plan has been developed for sustainable tourism on the Caribbean coast, including reinforcing cultural identity.

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[31] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

46. MARENA has taken a leading role in the response to natural disasters, adaptation to climate change, and response to emergencies. Particular emphasis has been given to risks and vulnerability to floods and droughts, increasing water capture and forest cover in 75 ecotourism circuits, and protecting infrastructure from extreme climate events.

47. Visa requirements are the same for the countries of CA-4 (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua). See the corresponding section on El Salvador for details.

G. Panama

48. The governmental authority in tourism resides in the Panamanian Tourism Authority (ATP), which substituted the former Panamanian Institute of Tourism (IPAT) in 2008. It is governed by the nine-member National Tourism Council, five of whom are from the government and four from the private sector Chamber of Tourism (CAMTUR). CAMTUR resigned as Panama's representative in FEDECATUR in late 2012. The National Environmental Authority (ANAM) has been active in regulating the sustainable use of Panama's natural resources for tourism. Tourism in Panama provided 9.5% of GDP in 2011.[32]

49. The Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development 2007-2020 – an extraordinarily thorough, well-designed, and researched document – emphasizes poverty alleviation as one of its principal objectives. Twelve out of the 26 tourism destinations in the country have been prioritized. In 2011, it identified the

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[32] World Tourism Organization (2013), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2007 – 2011,* UNWTO, Madrid.

implementation of one project for sustainable rural development in the Ngäbe Bugle Comarca and poor neighboring districts, and another in Kuna Yala in Destino de la Miel, Puerto Obaldía. Also in Kuna Yala, a project is underway to determine tourism carrying capacity. Additionally in 2010, the Joint Program for Private Sector and Development (Government of Panama and the UN system) developed the Business Opportunities Network for Poor Families, in order to "improve the distribution of income by supporting action to increase labor income, improve the quality of employment and reduce child labor." APT is implementing, together with ANAM, an ecotourism program to strengthen nine protected areas, with funds from GEF. Projects and capacity building with community organizations have been implemented in Bocas del Toro and are underway in several other destinations, such as Golfo de Montijo. Activities include strengthening the local organizations and promoting MSMEs for craftsmen and others. Projects with municipal governments include installing sanitary landfills and solid waste management programs, restoring the historic city centers, and promoting crafts and gastronomy. Coastal ecotourism projects for observing marine mammals and turtle nesting are underway, along with the development of codes of conduct for these activities.

50. CAMTUR implements the Service Best program, donated by the Government of Canada to the Central America Tourism Chambers, for training tourism personnel in quality service. Panama Best is a program developed by CAMTUR for the operational and managerial personnel of small and medium tourism enterprises.

51. Panamanian Association for Sustainable Tourism (APTSO) "is a non-profit association directed by a group of pioneers in the fields of tourism, science and development that intends to spread sustainable tourism across both the private and public sectors." The Fundación Chagres has implemented a number of programs to conserve the Chagres National Park while fomenting sustainable tourism projects in poor surrounding communities.

52. ANT is developing a Manual for Tourism Security with support from UNWTO and UNDP's MDG Fund. The Department of Tourism Security is developing protocols for beach monitoring and safety, as well as for the protection of tourism activities in Panamanian destinations.

53. With respect to visas, Central Americans and most of South American countries can enter Panama without visa or tourist card. Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic and Surinam require visa. The Schengen area of Europe and a number of developed countries can enter without visa[33]. Panama and Costa Rica initiated discussions allowing their citizens to travel with only their national identity cards.

III.   **Overview of regional initiatives on sustainable tourism**

54. As mentioned above in section I, most regional initiatives on sustainable tourism are centered in the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA) and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), both of which are secretariats of the Central American Integration System (SICA). SITCA

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[33] For further information, please refer to the study of the World Tourism Organization on *Visa facilitation: Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism* (revised edition April 2013), UNWTO, Madrid, available: http://dtxtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/docpdf/visafacilitationrevisedweb.pdf

coordinates closely with FEDECATUR, the regional federation of tour operators, and CATA, the Central American Tourism Agency.

55. The Spanish Fund-SICA (FES) has offered financial and technical support to SITCA since 2004, in order to promote the development of sustainable tourism in Central America in five areas: institutional support, developing a regional tourism strategy, improving the promotion and marketing of tourism, capacity building, developing new tourism products, and rural tourism. Among the many projects implemented are the Colonial and Volcano Route; strengthening CATA, FEDECATUR, and the national chambers of tourism; developing the Central American web portal and geographic information system; supporting rural tourism initiatives; and capacity building to integrate local communities in the economic benefits of tourism,. Current programs include tourism security and support for MSMEs.

56. SITCA has developed two successive Strategic Plans for Sustainable Tourism Development (PEDTS) 2003-2009 and 2009-2013.[34] The strategy has been updated several times since it was first authorized by the heads of state of Central America in 2002 in the Declaration of San José. The current plan serves as the conceptual framework and work program for the region as a whole and for the seven member countries individually. The vision for the region within the strategic plan is of Central America as an integrated, sustainable multi-destination of high quality. In 2011, the heads of state reaffirmed their commitment to "support sustainable tourism

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[34] *Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo Turístico Sostenible de Centroamérica 2009-2013*, available: http://www.sica.int/busqueda/busqueda_archivo.aspx?Archivo=regl_49058_1_11052010.pdf

as policies that contribute to responsible and inclusive tourism, which strengthens regional identity and that protects the natural and cultural heritage, especially the Mayan World and colonial cities, while promoting the development of micro, small and medium tourism enterprises, especially in rural communities" and to "instruct the Central American Tourism Council (CCT) to implement programs to promote sustainable tourism in the region, to coordinate measures to jointly promote Central America internationally, and to implement mechanisms and actions to improve competitiveness, connectivity and the investment climate in the tourism sector, as well as to promote initiatives to facilitate visas and air travel and tourism security, in coordination with SICA."

57. Within this current strategic framework, some of SITCA's key activities during the last five years include:

(a) Starting in 2008 through the present, SITCA has been developing the "program to promote an action plan for tourism and climate change", as a component within the Regional Strategy on Climate Change, with support from the Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD). The actions contemplated to reduce vulnerability in the tourism sector and promote adaptation to climate change include methodologies and information systems to measure vulnerability levels, diversification of tourism products, development of tourism in areas not vulnerable to climate change, increasing capacity to respond to emergency situations, and improving natural resource use, especially of water. At the same time, measures are being promoted to

establish emissions baselines and monitoring in the tourism sector, reduce energy use, develop projects that reduce or eliminate emissions, and create awareness and social responsibility on climate change among tourism related actors. The working plan is expected to be completed in 2013, when implementation will begin.

(b) The Programme of Quality in Tourism Services for Central America (PROCAPCA), financed by the Spanish Fund-SICA (FES) served from 2007-2009 as the basis for an action plan to be implemented by the national tourism administrations and FEDECATUR on a national level. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria were adopted as the regional structure for sustainable tourism. Within that framework, the Regional Committee on Quality and Sustainable Tourism (CCASTUR) has proceeded to develop the Regional Model of Quality and Sustainable Tourism towards Certification, based on successful initiatives in the region, the Certification of Sustainable Tourism (CST) program of Costa Rica (formally recognized as aligned with the GSTC) and the Panamanian standard for tourism quality (DGNTI-COPANIT 387-2011). Five standards will be developed: lodging MSMEs, restaurants, terrestrial tourism transport, tour operators, and thematic activities.

(c) SITCA, with support from UNICEF, completed its Program for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, with a focus on Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism, by sensitizing

stakeholders in tourism from Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama in 23 workshops with 698 participants.

(d) To support rural tourism MSMEs, SITCA, with support from UNWTO's ST-EP program, developed electronic marketing tools, through an agreement signed with the Federation of Tourism Chambers of Central America (FEDECATUR).

(e) In health and tourism, SITCA established a memorandum of understanding between the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), CCT, and SITCA to support the implementation of a permanent regional forum, which will include the UNWTO, other UN agencies, Organization of American States, and the private sector. Among the objectives are to establish epidemiological vigilance systems, evaluate risks, and establish an emergency response system for health emergencies related to the tourism sector. In parallel, SITCA developed a regional implementation manual on health and tourism, and used it to train 80 trainers in workshops in El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

(f) Progress was made in the consolidation of the Research and Development (SID), which seeks to be a center of information and thought, by hiring SITCA technical assistance and conducting nine reports and investigations related to Central American tourism strategic issues.

(g) In cooperation with the Central American Energy and Environmental Alliance, Austrian development cooperation, and FEDECATUR, organic

waste biodigestors were installed in rural inns in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala.[35]

(h) In the area of security, a consulting firm was hired to implement a system for processing, monitoring and tracking of complaints and crime reports. One hundred tourist police were trained in a new approach to skills development based on tourism culture, safety, and security. Four thousand copies were distributed of a Regional Handbook on Best Practices in Tourism Security. Additionally, UNWTO carried out a seminar aimed at media and tourism authorities focusing on the importance of tourism as an engine of sustainable development, crisis and risk management including the management of risk perceptions for tourism destinations in the region.

(i) "Conserving our Treasures for Tomorrow - Heritage-based Tourism: Tools for Central America"– an interactive DVD to teach Central American cultural and natural heritage managers techniques for sustainable tourism, was developed with support from UNWTO, UNESCO, and UNEP in 2009.

58. The Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) leads a number of projects relevant to tourism. Of particular importance is the Regional Strategy on Climate Change of the Countries of SICA, described above in section 57(a). Other relevant projects include the tourism impacts on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, strengthening national parks, Mesoamerican Coral Reef, and the integrated ecosystem management in indigenous communities.

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[35] Consejo Centroamericano de Turismo (CCT) y Secretaría de Integración Turística (SICTA), *Memoria de Labores 2010 y 2011*.

59. CCAD, together with International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), developed a methodology for streamlining the environmental and social impact assessment of low to medium impact tourism development in 2008-2009, entitled "Guide for Tourism: An environmental and social management instrument".[36] These manuals, based in large part on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, are designed to replace traditional impact assessment tools with faster, less expensive, but more precise ones oriented towards mitigating the specific impacts of tourism construction and infrastructure (hotels, golf courses, swimming pools, etc.).

60. USAID has funded the Water Resource Management and Economic Alternatives (MAREA) project to reduce unsustainable fishing practices and coastal development, and strengthen the management of marine and coastal biodiversity in Central America, while improving the standard of living of the communities that make use of these resources.[37] The project has a sustainable tourism component for Gulf of Honduras, Bocas del Toro and the Miskito Coast.

61. The Trifinio region, at the headwaters of the Rio Lempa, consists of eight municipalities in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, as well as the Montecristo Trifinio National Park in Honduras, the Montecristo National Park in El Salvador, and the Guatemalan Trifinio biosphere reserve. SICA's Trifinio Plan includes numerous projects for the sustainable development of the region, with a community-based tourism component.

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[36] Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza (UICN) y Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo (CCAD)/Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA), 2009, *Guía de Turismo, Instrumento de Gestión Ambiental y Social*, UICN, San José, Costa Rica, available: https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/turismo_1.pdf

[37] USAID (2011), *Programa Regional para el Manejo de Recursos Acuáticos y Alternativas Económicas* (MAREA), Resumen de la Propuesta del Programa, available: http://www.scribd.com/doc/52028502/Resumen-de-la-Propuesta-del-Programa-MAREA

62. FEDECATUR is undertaking projects in training MSMES in quality of service, best practices, project management and financial tools.

63. Rainforest Alliance has conducted sustainable tourism training and verification throughout Central America to bring hundreds of tourism SMEs up to best practice standards of quality and sustainability. Most enterprises that have passed through the verification process are eligible for third-party certification. In addition, Rainforest Alliance has established the "TOPS" alliance of Tour Operators Promoting Sustainability. "TOPS serves as a platform to position businesses and destinations as sustainable in the international marketplace, and will continue to coordinate and oversee joint marketing and communications efforts, such as familiarization trips and participation in trade shows."[38]

64. The Central American Markets for Biodiversity Project (CAMBio) of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE), with support from UNDP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was designed to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity by MSMEs in Central America from 2006 through 2013. The project was originally conceived to support, among others, ecotourism and community-based tourism projects with potential to conserve biodiversity. However nearly all resources were used for agriculture and forestry-related projects.[39]

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[38] Rainforest Alliance (2013), *International Alliance for the Marketing and Commercialization of Sustainable Tourism Services, Executive Summary*, available:
http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/alliance-marketing-sustainable-tourism-summary_0.pdf
[39] Mercados Centroamericanos para la Biodiversidad (CAMBio): http://www.proyectocambio.org

IV.   **Conclusions and recommendations**

65. In general, the policies and activities of SITCA and the other regional integration organizations of SICA are working well, with numerous successful projects towards sustainable tourism development in the region. Increasing regional emphasis is being placed on climate change adaptation and the related response systems for natural disasters. Tourism safety and security, as well as travellers' health have become priority areas of regional cooperation.

66. Advances are uneven among the seven countries, each of which has emphasized different approaches to tourism development. All have emphasized poverty alleviation through tourism and rural tourism development in their strategic planning and have implemented projects to assist community development, but in practice some countries are investing far more in cruise ports and convention centers. Social tourism for local citizens is being emphasized in El Salvador and Nicaragua. In some cases – such as preparedness and mitigation of the effect of natural disasters, as well as the most successful examples of biodiversity conservation, rural and indigenous community tourism, and cultural enhancement – SITCA could consider establishing an inventory of these projects and enhancing cooperation in replicating these in the other countries.

67. Although Central America shares a joint marketing program, through SITCA and CATA, there are several sub-regional marketing efforts. All the Central American countries share similar biodiversity attractions, while Belize,

Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador share Mayan cultural attractions. Belize, because of its more recent cultural history, works not only with Central America, but also with the Caribbean Tourism Organization. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, which have living colonial cities, have formed the CA-4 group, with open borders and free movement of their citizens, as well as integrating some tourism routes. Panama and Costa Rica have increased links with each other, and there is increasing tourism between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Panama, because of the canal and its history as a center of international commerce, has commercial attractions not found in the other countries. Costa Rica, because of its longstanding positioning as a nature destination, tends to market independently of the rest of the region.

68. Quality and sustainability training and certification, within the framework of SITCA and through independent verification and certification programs, are growing rapidly in uptake, as international tour operators increasingly require environmental, social, and cultural sustainability in their entire commercialization chain.

69. The sustainable tourism observatory that is being established between UNWTO and Honduras may well serve as a model for the rest of the region and the Americas, in using data on sustainable tourism for improving policies and offering capacity building to enhance the sustainability of destinations. SITCA should support this effort and consider participating further in UNWTO's Global Observatory of Sustainable Tourism (GOST) network.

70. Central America has extraordinary natural and cultural resources, which it has learned to manage sustainably for tourism in many cases. Well-managed tourism attractions include the Mesoamerican coral reef, rainforests, cloud forests, active volcanoes, national parks, private nature reserves, historical cities, ancient cities, and vibrant, but very poor, rural, traditional, and indigenous communities. The lessons learned from the best-managed of each of these cases are being transferred among the seven countries, but are also applicable to similar communities and habitats around the world, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean. These best-management case studies could be used as the basis of GPST projects for replication under the coordination of UNWTO. The benefits of regional cooperation in Central America should be considered a successful example for other regions that share cultural and natural attractions.

71. A series of policy recommendations were developed by the International Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development, the predecessor of the GPST.[40] These policy recommendations could be taken into consideration by SITCA in the course of the development of its tourism policies.

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[40] Policy recommendations approved by ITF-STD (Marrakech, 21st April 2009), available: http://www.unep.org/resourceefficiency/Portals/24147/scp/tourism/activities/taskforce/pdf/Policy_Recommendations_Sep09.pdf