



PRESS RELEASE

February 18, 2009

Surama Eco-Lodge Selected as ETC 2009 Responsible Tourism Showcase Honoree

New Orleans, Louisiana – Surama’s Eco-Lodge and community tourism programs are being recognized and honored at the U.S. Educational Travel Conference (ETC), taking place in New Orleans, Louisiana from February 18-21. As the Responsible Tourism Showcase Honoree for 2009, Surama will receive recognition at the Opening Plenary session as well as press and visibility in front of the tour operators from museums, schools, alumni associations, and other US-based institutions with international travel programs. Surama Eco-lodge will also receive a monetary award and year-round recognition on the ETC website.

Surama Eco-Lodge will be featured during the conference itself and in other outreach programs throughout 2009. The exposure will result in international recognition for Surama’s community tourism programs and should serve to increase awareness of the ecological and cultural preservation efforts underway throughout Guyana.

On the selection of Surama as the award winner, Sherry Schwarz of the ETC said, “There were some outstanding applications this year and the selection process was quite difficult, which speaks even more highly to the merit of Surama Eco-lodge’s responsible tourism programming. Many of us didn’t know about this Guyana community and were fascinated to learn about its commitment to preserving its indigenous traditions and its environment. It’s really a perfect match for the Responsible Tourism Showcase Award.”

The California-based Geographic Expeditions played a leading role in Surama’s success. Geographic Expeditions worked with the Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI) – a joint project of the Guyana Tourism Authority and the United States Agency for International Development/Guyana Trade and Investment Support (USAID/GTIS) project – to complete the Responsible Tourism Showcase application and nominate Surama Eco-Lodge for Showcase Honoree. Geographic Expeditions first learned of Surama on a GSTI tourism familiarization trip in 2008.

Jim Sano, Geographic Expeditions CEO, said, “Our clients are looking for opportunities to visit places where their tourism dollars contribute to local communities’ own efforts to preserve their culture, land, and traditional way of life. One can support local economies and conservation efforts by choosing to visit communities like Surama in Guyana where every dollar spent contributes to local educational, conservation, and economic development programs. Given the pressing need to develop new conservation models for the world’s remaining rainforests, it is vital for communities like Surama to thrive. Surama is a perfect example of this ideal, which is why we were so delighted to nominate them for this award.”

Upon hearing of their award, Sydney Allicock spoke on behalf of Surama: “We all feel very honored to be granted such an award! We are very happy and are now aware that we are at the crossroads with community-based ecotourism, which means getting to the next level in the business. For us it also means more jobs, new young blood, training, planning and executing of the relevant activities that will continue to benefit the entire community. The award means a lot to the Eco-Lodge: more publicity, more clients, and a greater sense of ownership by management and the people of Surama. The years of continued dedication by workers are slowly paying off as a community business.”

Mr. Allicock also said the community has already decided how the award money will be used. “There has always been a problem for lights and charging batteries for clients,” he reported. “Plans are already afoot to use the funds to support a proper power source for lights, charging batteries and use of computers.” True to Surama’s conservation beliefs, the community will be investing in a solar system for the Eco-Lodge.

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About Surama:

Home to roughly 300 Makushi Amerindians, Surama is a serene village set amongst five square miles of the Rupununi Savanna that is surrounded by the jungle covered Pakaraima Mountains. This idyllic setting – complete with the meandering Burro Burro River and a dense collection of flora and fauna – has proved an ideal location for community-based ecotourism in Guyana. Surama has done so well developing their tourism products – village tours, birdwatching trips, mountain treks, jungle walks, dugout canoe trips, wildlife spotting – that the village has long been the role model for community tourism in Guyana.

The Surama Eco-lodge and all tours in and around Surama are managed and operated solely by the local Makushi Amerindians. More than 70 people in the village are employed either directly as hospitality staff, guides, cooks, artisans and drivers, or indirectly as farmers, hunters, fishermen, tailors, and construction and maintenance workers. Roughly 60% of the community's income is now sustainably generated through tourism-related activities, with 75% of village households reporting tourism as a source of income.

Surama is in the process of developing a website and it will be launched soon, so check back for more information at www.suramaecolodge.com.

About Geographic Expeditions:

A pioneer of travel to remote and challenging destinations since 1982, Geographic Expeditions offers a varied portfolio of overland tours, treks, walks, and expeditionary voyages to the world's most astonishing places. The company's passion for eyes-open travel to out-of-the-way places is reflected in their expert leadership, excellent accommodations, intimate group sizes, hand-crafted private itineraries, and deep in-country savvy. To learn more about Geographic Expeditions, and the Guyana trip they recently added to their programs, visit www.geoex.com.

About the Responsible Tourism Showcase:

The ETC Responsible Tourism Showcase recognizes tourism providers for their efforts and accomplishments in exercising Responsible Tourism. For more information on the ETC and the Showcase, visit www.travelearning.com.

About the GSTI:

The Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI) is receiving support from Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS), a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). More information on the GSTI and tourism in Guyana can be found at www.guyanabirding.com.

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