



**WORLD MONUMENTS FUND, AMERICAN EXPRESS & CONAF
CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF
SUSTAINABLE VISITOR RECEPTION CENTER
ON EASTER ISLAND, CHILE**

US\$200,000 GRANT PART OF AMERICAN EXPRESS-WMF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INITIATIVE

For Immediate Release—Santiago, Chile, May 13, 2011... World Monuments Fund (WMF), American Express, and the Corporación Nacional Forestal de Chile (CONAF) celebrated today the completion of a sustainable visitor reception center on Easter Island in Chile.

The new visitor center, the *Centro de Recepción de Visitantes de la Aldea Ceremonial de Orongo*, is located at the entrance to the Orongo Ceremonial Village, one of the most significant archaeological sites in Rapa Nui National Park and the most visited place on Easter Island. Severely impacted by increasing numbers of tourists each year, Orongo has been the focus of an intensive conservation and interpretive program supported by WMF and American Express since 2001. The visitor center is the last component of this program and serves as an introduction to the national park, providing information and educational materials for visitors as well as helping to monitor and manage visitation to the site.

“We are happy to be working with our longtime partners American Express and CONAF to complete the work at Orongo,” said **Bonnie Burnham, President of World Monuments Fund**. “This new visitor center demonstrates how preservation work goes hand in hand with educating tourists and helping local communities to develop long-term strategies to manage sensitive sites such as Orongo.”

“American Express has a long history in the tourism industry, and we know that these iconic sites, like Easter Island, can be the lifeblood of communities around the world,” said **Timothy J. McClimon, President of the American Express Foundation**. “We have seen the impact of our earlier work at Orongo, and know this new visitor center will be an important addition to the site and will be critical to enabling future generations to understand and appreciate this important culture.”

“This type of initiative leverages both cultural preservation and ecosystem protection in very fragile places like this one,” said **Eduardo Vial Ruiz-Tagle, Executive Director of CONAF**. “Easter Island is a landmark in the tourism world, and that is why we need to work hard to preserve its resources, as well as offer all kinds of information and education to its visitors, both national and international. This is the only way to preserve an area, by all of us knowing well what it has. Another important thing I would like to underline is the partnership in this project made by the Government of Chile, represented here by CONAF, with international entities such as the World Monuments Fund and American Express. It

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is in uniting our efforts that we can progress in the conservation of our own heritage for future generations.”

Easter Island

A volcanic island in the Pacific Ocean, at the southeastern-most point of the Polynesian triangle, Easter Island is a special territory of Chile that was annexed in 1888 and is now a national monument. It is most famous for the hundreds of large carved monolithic statues, known as *moai*, that were created to represent ancestors by the Rapa Nui people from approximately the ninth to the seventeenth centuries A.D. Easter Island is also renowned for its great variety of archaeological sites that offer evidence of a highly developed culture whose descendents still inhabit the island. A significant part of the island is protected within the Rapa Nui National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site managed by CONAF, the organization responsible for the management, administration, and conservation of Chile’s national parks and wildlife.

The design of the visitor reception center at Orongo integrates the existing facilities: The core of the new building is the old warden station, and much of the original structure has been retained, with construction materials recycled and incorporated into the new building. Solar and wind energy power the structure. New restrooms utilize state-of-the-art composting toilets and a rainwater recycling system. The new center provides a heritage interpretation and information program for visitors, regulates and manages visitation to enhance visitors’ experiences at the site, and minimizes negative impacts on the site’s fragile archaeological resources.

World Monuments Fund on Easter Island

World Monuments Fund has worked on Easter Island since the late 1960s and has been particularly active since the mid-1980s. Together with CONAF, WMF has organized training courses for park rangers, conducted climate studies, collected meteorological data, carried out site protection and interpretation studies, installed monitoring systems, developed a conservation database of the Orongo petroglyphs, and more. Planning for the conservation and redevelopment of the Orongo Ceremonial Village began in 2001 in close consultation with community leaders, organizations, and local stakeholders. Since then, World Monuments Fund has held a series of workshops focused on redevelopment, interpretation, conservation, and management plans for the site, and local craftsmen played a major role in the construction of the visitor reception facility.

Sustainable Tourism Initiative

The support of American Express and World Monuments Fund for the new visitor center is part of the organizations’ joint Sustainable Tourism Initiative, which in turn is part of the American Express

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Historic Preservation & Conservation corporate grant-making platform. With a long history of philanthropy, American Express is deeply committed to increasing public awareness of the importance of historic and environmental conservation, preserving global historic and cultural landmarks and strengthening local communities through preservation efforts.

American Express

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World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world's most treasured places. For over 45 years, working in more than 90 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through partnerships with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF inspires an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York, WMF has offices and affiliates worldwide. www.wmf.org, www.twitter.com/worldmonuments, and www.facebook.com/worldmonuments.

Corporación Nacional Forestal de Chile (CONAF)

CONAF's objective is to contribute to the preservation, management, and conservation of Chile's natural resources. CONAF has offices and agencies across the country and manages 95 sites, among them the National Reserves, National Parks, and Natural Monuments that in total are 14.3 million ha., with more than 1,800 employees. www.conaf.cl.

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Press Contacts

Ben Haley, World Monuments Fund, +1 646-424-9594, bhaley@wmf.org

Lisbeth Mark, Jeanne Collins & Associates, LLC, +1 646-486-7050, info@jcollinsassociates.com

Caitlin Lowie, American Express, +1 212-640-2921, caitlin.m.lowie@aexp.com

Ernesto Lagos Tapia, Corporación Nacional Forestal de Chile, +56 2-663-02-60, ernesto.lagos@conaf.cl