

Oaxacan communities celebrate the launch of a tourist route from Cueva de las Manitas to Quiotepec, highlighting cultural and archaeological heritage, cave paintings, and rich biodiversity

- The project, led by The Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance and Fundación Reserva Biosfera Tehuacán-Cuicatlán, will directly and indirectly benefit 15,000 people and seven communities located within the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Biosphere Reserve, creating 129 fulltime and temporary jobs.
- As part of its commitment with communities, critical seed funding was provided by the American Express Foundation.

Ciudad de Mexico, July 28th, 2022, The Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance (CHiFA) announced the launch of its first project to demonstrate the role of heritage in community regeneration. The project is based in the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage site designated in 2018. The initial stage of the funding – a feasibility study and plan for a regional tourism route, has been supported by a grant from the American Express Foundation.

Bonnie Burnham, President of the Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance, said “CHiFA’s mission is to forge economically sustainable solutions for the conservation, preservation, and regeneration of cultural sites as a focal point of local development. This project will be a model for conserving and managing heritage sites that have strong tourism potential but are sensitive and require special care and attention.”

The grant is supporting the creation of a gateway into the area and Visitor Center that will offer excursions and help orient visitors to discover and explore the cultural and natural resources as well as provide a new livelihood for the communities that live there.

Jorge Guevara, American Express’ Corporate Affairs and Communications VP in Latin America commented that “American Express Foundation is committed to sustaining communities, in this case through preserving a thousand-year-old cultural asset such as Cueva de las Manitas bringing sustenance to the Mixtec and neighboring communities.”

The project is being developed in partnership with the Fundación Reserva Biosfera Tehuacán-Cuicatlán, an organization that has worked with the communities in the biosphere reserve for decades, developing sustainable agriculture and public awareness programs in Oaxaca and throughout the valley. Juan Jose Carrasco, on behalf of the Biosphere Reserve Foundation, stated: “these communities have always supported themselves through agriculture, but it is becoming more difficult to make a living, putting stress on the young people. They have always been interested in developing tourism and encouraging visitors. It’s very helpful to have international partners to help us promote this idea.”

The first phase of the project has been completed. It consisted of identifying sites throughout the region to create a visitor route with stops in communities throughout the Reserve. Key sites include the Cueva de las Manitas, the Guacamaya (Green Macaw) Sancturay, the pre-Columbian Fortress in Quiotepec, a colonial hacienda and sugar mill, former train stations vernacular architecture and scenic views of the giant cactus forest and succulent plant habitats. The Río Grande is the unifying theme of the route. Field studies have identified one-, two-, and three-day itineraries departing from Oaxaca, Puebla, Mexico City or Veracruz. A business plan prepared by tourism expert Irving Mayett Muciño has proposed the creation of “glamping” facilities operated by local communities as well as a visitor center as the hub of explorations into the region.

This initiative will bring an estimated 12,250 people after the first year to participate in its trips, providing direct and indirect benefits to the 15,000 people who live within the Reserve and create an estimated 129 permanent and temporary jobs in the first year of operation of the Visitor Center. It will also establish cohesion between the communities through the creation of local cultural commissions and contribute to the rescue and protection of the region's heritage.

Nelly Robles, Director of the Monumental Ensemble Project of Atzompa, mentioned that "This is a pioneering grant. It's the first time in Mexico that we have funding for studies and the development of a World Heritage Site. This feasibility study has been crucial to developing a program that can benefit all the communities, large and small, throughout the area. Our gatherings have been very stimulating. Some communities already have benefits from tourism. Others didn't know what they have. This will bring new life to the entire area."

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Contacto de prensa

Jorge Guevara

Vicepresidente de Asuntos Corporativos y Comunicación para México, Latinoamérica y el Caribe

American Express

Tel. (55) 7974-9067

jorge.guevara@aexp.com

Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance

The Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance (CHiFA) is a non-profit organization based in New York City. CHiFA promotes heritage-led community generation through collaborative and innovative financing. Heritage-led generation stimulates and strengthens communities.

Contact person:

Bonnie Burnham

President

Tel: +1 917 365-4554

bburnham@heritagefinance.org





The Rio Grande (Oaxaca) has been the center of the region's cultural development for millennia.



Looking out from the Cave of the Little Hands over the region's rich biodiversity.



The project team at the Cave of the Little Hands, a key cultural site of the region.