



DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

PRESS RELEASE

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Infrastructure works inaugurated at two more archaeological sites

Two of Belize's popular archaeological sites – Nohoch Che'en (Caves Branch) in Belmopan and Lamanai in Orange Walk are the latest locations to benefit from infrastructure upgrades under the EU supported project - **Making Tourism Benefit Communities Adjacent to Archaeological Sites (MTBCAAS)**. The improvements were officially inaugurated and toured by Head of Delegation of the European Union to Belize, Ambassador Paola Amadei at ceremonies held on Wednesday, July 29 and Friday, July 31 respectively.

Lamanai and Caves Branch are part of a comprehensive portfolio of nine archaeological locations which have benefitted from physical improvements including walking trails, bathroom facilities and signage, modernized information centres and craft markets. The sites have also benefitted from health equipment and training for community residents adjacent to the sites in areas of artisanship, emergency response and certification as park rangers and tour guides to further enhance visitor's experience. The project has also introduced a Visitor Satisfaction Survey to get feedback on services offered at the sites and launched a line of certified Belizean crafts under the Unique Belize brand.

The objective of MTBCAAS is to improve the overall service and quality of experience offered to tourists and local visitors at the sites as well as increase employment opportunities to the communities around these sites. As a result of the project 64 persons have been trained in Small Business Product Development, 42 in Cave Rescue and 94 in Site Specific Guide Training; a total of 200 persons, 87 women and 113 men. Already the results are bearing fruits as the Ministry of Tourism has recorded an increase in visits to most of the sites, a spinoff of the country's overall improved tourism figures since 2014. The MTBCAAS project which started in March 2013 ended in June and was funded under the Belize Rural Development Programme (BRDP) with an EU grant of BZ\$2.75million, with counterpart funding from the government through the Ministry of Tourism and was implemented by the Belize Tourism Board and the National Institute of Culture and History. The other sites upgraded under the project are Xunantunich, Nim Li Punit, Barton Creek, Lubaantun, Actun Tunichil Muknal, Altun Ha and Blue Creek.

Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Belize, Ambassador Paola Amadei lauded the achievements of the project and commended residents adjacent to the sites for their cooperation and support. *"I have been impressed with what I saw at Lamanai and Caves Branch. This project goes to the core of what the EU aims to do; offer and support which ensures long term benefits for residents of the countries with which we partner. Without you, the project and the sustainability of all it has achieved would be impossible. Now that our objectives under the project have been achieved it is up to you to preserve and build on what we have started and by extension preserve your culture and history and the quality of service offered to those who come to know it."*

For more information Contact
EU Technical Support Office
3358 Floral Park Street
Belmopan
Office number: (011-501)-822-0868
Fax number: (011-501)-822-2863