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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GLOBAL OFFICIALS PREDICT CONTINUED RELIGIOUS TOURISM RESILIENCE **Second World Religious Travel Expo Wraps with Positive Faith Tourism Outlook for 2010**

LEXINGTON, Ky. (Nov. 20, 2009) – The second annual World Religious Travel Expo and Educational Conference concluded this week with global leaders in the religious travel industry reporting better than expected figures and predicting continued resilience in faith-based tourism because of the commitment and purpose among religious travel consumers. Trade members also pledged to support, strengthen and sustain meaningful travel products and experiences for people of faith.

Positive updates and forecasts by WRTA Expo participants – including representatives from Switzerland, Cyprus, Turkey, Palestine, Israel, Germany, Greece and Jordan – confirm the findings of a recent report by the World Tourism Organization, which explained that religious tourism has proven resilient to the pressure of the global recession, because it is not seen as a “luxury” but rather travel with a purpose.

“Because of the nature of religious tourism, it has proven elastic and strong, even in the current economy” said Kevin J. Wright, president of the World Religious Travel Association (WRTA) and chairman of the Expo. “The primary goal of the WRTA Expo is to equip delegates with the organizations, products, services and education that will help them continue to develop and sustain meaningful travel experiences for people of faith. In fact, we have challenged our members to make 2010 their best year ever in faith tourism, and I am confident coming out of this expo that they can accomplish this.”

With more than 300 million people traveling annually for religious and pilgrimage reasons and with revenues that exceed \$18 billion every year, faith tourism has become a significant global industry. WRTA reports that faith tourism today is more than just pilgrimages, as it includes travelers on cruises; volunteer vacations; adventure trips; leisure vacations; conferences and events; and much more. In fact, religious travel is not necessarily focused on the destination, but on the **purpose of the travel: strengthening fellowship and faith.**

Highlights

- Keith Powell, author and “business revivalist,” reminded Expo delegates that they have the “awesome power and responsibility to change lives” through transformative travel experiences.
- Dr. Khoulood Daibes, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Palestine, participated in the WRTA Expo for the second year in a row. She reported an increase in travel to Palestine and declared her commitment to help travel suppliers build a sustainable and complementary Palestine religious travel portfolio.
- The Holy Land panel, a “signature event” of the WRTA Expo, once again featured updates from representatives of the Bible Lands. Mesut Ozbe of the Turkish Government Culture and Tourism Office reported that 10% of tourists to Turkey come for religious purposes. Eliezer Hod, Western Region Director of the Israel Ministry of Tourism, told the audience that he is “completely focused on Christian travel to Israel.” Nayef H. Al-Fayez, managing director of the Jordan Tourism Board, reported that Bethany beyond the Jordan – the traditional

location of the baptism of Jesus – attracts more Americans than any other nationality outside of Jordan’s neighboring countries. Officials from Greece and Cyprus reported a vigorous and growing religious cruise industry in the Mediterranean, and increasing popularity in monastery guest stays in both countries.

- Greg Stielstra, author of *Faith-Based Marketing* and *Pyromarketing*, shared with Expo delegates the importance of “*servicing*” the religious market, not “*selling*” to it.
- During his opening Keynote entitled “Make 2010 Your Best Year Ever” (the official theme of Expo 2009), WRTA President Wright shared plans of his upcoming trip to Armenia, one of the emerging faith-based travel destinations.
- The final night of the conference featured a well-attended optional “Tourism Rocks” event, a charitable dance party to benefit Tourism Cares (<http://www.tourismcares.org>), the tourism industry’s primary charitable organization for preservation, conservation, restoration and education, and the official philanthropy of WRTA.

2010 Religious Travel Outlook

- Tour operators expect 500,000 visitors for the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany, which only happens once a decade.
- Spain has declared 2010 a holy year because the feast of St. James, July 25, falls on a Sunday, which means that many will be traveling to Santiago de Compostela, whose cathedral has a relic of St. James the Apostle.
- The Year for Priests, in which many seminarians and priests are traveling to Ars, France, where St. John Vianney served his entire priestly life, continues through June, 2010.
- A rare exposition of the Shroud of Turin in Italy will open in 2010.

More than 550 participants – including 300 “sellers” and 200 “buyers” – attended the 2009 World Religious Travel Expo and Educational Conference, held Nov. 14-16 at the Atlantis Resort in Reno, Nevada (USA). Tourism representatives of 30-plus countries, from Armenia and Ethiopia to Tanzania and Turkey, participated. Despite the economic downturn that has contributed to a decline in overall attendance at trade conferences, the WRTA Expo turnout surpassed the attendance figures of its 2008 inaugural year. Wright considers this a testament to the strength of the religious travel industry.

The WRTA Expo was co-located with the Annual Convention of the National Tour Association (NTA). Currently, 35 percent of NTA operators offer religious tour products, and NTA and WRTA seek to expand the overall growth of faith tourism by bringing both memberships opportunities for education and professional development. Next year’s WRTA Expo will again be held in conjunction with the NTA Annual Convention (between Nov. 13-17) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. WRTA already has begun accepting exhibitor, attendee and sponsorship registrations for the 2010 World Religious Travel Expo.

The annual WRTA Expo is sponsored by the World Religious Travel Association, founded in 2007 by Wright, an award-winning author of several religious travel guidebooks. His latest book, “*The Christian Travel Planner*,” (released 2008 by Thomas Nelson) is the most comprehensive guidebook ever published on faith-based travel. An updated version of his popular “*Europe’s Monastery & Convent Guesthouses*” also was released in 2008 by Liguori Publications.

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About the World Religious Travel Association (WRTA):

WRTA is the leading global network for the \$18 billion faith tourism industry. WRTA’s primary purpose is to guide, enrich and expand religious travel and hospitality around the globe via the trade, consumer and media. WRTA membership includes travel agents, tour operators, tourism boards/DMOs, attractions, accommodations, suppliers, media and other key leaders in the tourism industry. **For more information, visit www.WRTAexpo.com and www.WRTAreligioustravel.com.**

PHOTOS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST