

**International Conference on Religious Tourism:
*Fostering sustainable socio-economic development in host communities***

Bethlehem, State of Palestine, 15-16 June 2015

**Session 4: Inclusive socio-economic development of local communities –
promoting partnerships that work**

Ms. Maru Acevedo, Vice-Minister of Tourism, Guatemala



Bio:

Maru Acevedo is a Guatemalan professional graduated from the University Francisco Marroquín of Guatemala as International and Political Science specialist. She has more than 25 years of experience holding positions in the private and public tourism sectors as well as in strategic projects promoted by both sectors.

Since January 2012 she has held the position of Deputy Director of the Guatemalan Tourism Board (INGUAT by its acronym in Spanish), the tourism regulator entity of the country. Likewise, she served as Executive Director of the Chamber of Tourism of Guatemala for five years. Among other positions, she twice served as Marketing Director at INGUAT; she was the Executive Director of the first edition of CATM- Central America Travel Market- the official tourism fair in Central America; she was a delegate of Tourism of Guatemala in Spain and she also served as In-flight Service Manager in TACA group..

Furthermore, during her administration as Deputy Director at INGUAT, she's been appointed as Pro-tempore President of the Central American Tourism Council, the Governing Council of the Agency for the Tourism Promotion of Central America, the Committee on Sustainable Tourism of the Association of Caribbean States and representation before the Mundo Maya Organization.

Abstract:

Guatemala has many expressions of religious tourism that attracts millions of local and foreign visitors to live out their spirituality and devotion; it can be highlighted in the worship to the Black Christ of Esquipulas and Holy Week, which is lived in a special way in the country, but with greater emphasis in La Antigua Guatemala.

The Black Christ of Esquipulas: it is an image of the crucified Christ that has become black in color and is located in the Basilica of Esquipulas, in the Eastern region of Guatemala, known as the Trifinio (Tripoint) because the countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador converge.

Every year, Esquipulas is the pilgrimage destination of more than 3 million people, who come as penance, thanksgiving or as a family tradition to venerate the Black Christ. They come from different geographical locations of Guatemala, as well as from Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and South of Mexico.

Holy Week in La Antigua Guatemala: for more than 400 years, Holy Week has been a real spiritual feast in our country. Faith and tradition of Catholic people mix and perform impressive processions that are received in the cobbled streets of this World Heritage Site declared by UNESCO; our streets get dressed in colorful carpets of sawdust and flowers for processions organized by brotherhoods and parishioners.

More than one million local and foreign visitors gather together every year to experience one of the most recognizable traditions in Guatemala and abroad.