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VACATIONERS CAN HELP PREVENT DAMAGE TO CORALS THIS SUMMER

Washington, D.C.—As millions of summer vacationers prepare for their annual trek to a beach or favorite vacation spot, a coalition of conservationists, scientists and fashion and jewelry designers is encouraging travelers to consider bringing home coral-inspired souvenirs instead of real coral this year. Scientists estimate that 20 percent of the world's coral reefs have already been lost. Those that remain are threatened by climate change, pollution, destructive fishing methods, overfishing and other human-induced damage, including activities related to tourism, such as harvesting for jewelry and other decorative items.

Leaving real coral where it belongs is one of the most immediate and tangible steps vacationers can take to prevent damage to corals and reefs. SeaWeb's *Too Precious to Wear* campaign is working with those in the jewelry industry, including Tiffany & Co., in addition to coral scientists and policymakers to encourage a demand for coral conservation by highlighting other alternatives available to consumers who love the look and feel of ocean-inspired accessories.

"The Tiffany & Co. Foundation has been active in coral conservation since its inception and we applaud the work of SeaWeb," said Fernanda Kellogg, President of The Tiffany & Co. Foundation. "The Foundation's programs reflect the values of Tiffany & Co.—which has refused to use real coral in jewelry designs since 2002—and we believe that coral should not be harvested for jewelry or home décor."

The Trade Environment Database (TED) calculates that 3.3 million pounds (1.5 million kilograms) of corals and pieces of reef are removed from the ocean each year. This has resulted in an international trade of coral that is often unregulated and illegal, driving some species toward extinction. According to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the United States is the largest importer of live coral, bringing in more than 80 percent of the live coral in trade, or roughly 400,000 pieces per year.

"The unregulated trade in coral and coral reef species puts unnecessary pressure on fragile ecosystems that are already under threat from a poisonous cocktail of global climate change, overfishing, habitat destruction and pollution," said Andrew Baker, assistant professor of marine biology and fisheries at University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science.

The United States is also the largest importer of red and pink coral, or *Corallium*, bringing in more than 26 million pieces from 2001 to 2006. *Corallium* species, highly prized for their rarity and beauty, are classified as 'precious' corals, and are typically used in jewelry and décor items. Precious corals include some of the oldest creatures on the planet. Scientists recently discovered that a community of precious black and gold coral off the coast of Hawaii is approximately 4,000 years old.

“Souvenir seekers who purchase actual coral products as mementos from their summer travels are unknowingly contributing to the loss of one of our ocean’s most important ecosystems,” said SeaWeb President Dawn M. Martin. “We urge consumers to purchase coral-inspired products instead of the real animals in order to help coral communities stay intact and build their resilience to the impacts of ocean acidification, climate change and overfishing. Corals are literally too precious to wear as jewelry or even to display as home décor items.”

Ocean-conscious designers are going to great lengths to ensure that their products do not use real coral. Monique Péan is a New York-based designer who recently created a coral-inspired, but not coral-derived, necklace for *Too Precious to Wear’s* Coral Reinterpreted collection.

“While traveling, snorkeling and exploring the ocean’s vast diversity are some of my favorite activities, it is the beauty of the reefs and the species they support that make being underwater so inspiring,” said Péan. “Much of this collective damage to our world’s corals can be slowed when individuals make a conscious decision to stop buying coral products and choose alternatives instead, leaving corals in their natural habitat for generations to come.”

Coral-saving tips include:

- Avoid purchases of products made from real coral. Instead, choose jewelry or decorative items that are made of alternative materials. For products that are coral-inspired, not coral-derived, please visit www.tooprecioustowear.org.
- When snorkeling or diving, refrain from collecting pieces of coral or other reef creatures as souvenirs or from even touching them. Corals are slow-growing animals and can take decades to recover from impacts, sometimes never recuperating from the damage.
- Choose hotels and recreation vendors that are committed to reducing their carbon footprint and make the same commitment for your own home. Carbon dioxide emissions are warming the ocean and making it increasingly acidic, negatively affecting the health of reef corals and other marine organisms.
- Do your homework. Visit beach resorts that receive a high green rating, particularly for their pollution control and conservation policies. Do your part at home by refraining from putting chemicals and other toxic wastes into your sewer system. All treated sewage can eventually end up in the ocean and other important water systems.
- Whether you are going on vacation or staying at home this summer, make a pledge and take action to help preserve corals by signing *Too Precious to Wear’s* coral pledge at <http://www.seaweb.org/TPTW/pledge.php>.

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Too Precious to Wear is a SeaWeb campaign to create a demand for coral conservation. *Too Precious to Wear* is made possible with support from The Tiffany & Co. Foundation, Kingfisher Foundation, National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and The Ocean Foundation. www.tooprecioustowear.org.

SeaWeb, founded in 1996 to raise awareness of the growing threats to the ocean and its living resources, is a communications-based nonprofit organization that utilizes social marketing techniques to advance ocean conservation. By increasing public awareness, advancing science-based solutions and mobilizing decision-makers around ocean conservation, SeaWeb has brought together multiple, diverse and powerful voices for a healthy ocean. www.seaweb.org

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