ENEL GREEN POWER AND RONDÓ FOUNDATION COLLABORATE TO TRAIN MARÍA ELENA TOURIST GUIDES

- *Members of the María Elena Association of Tourist Guides have been trained and certified with the National Tourism Service's "Q" seal of quality.*
- *The "Q" Seal certifications will be awarded to local Association of Tourist Guides members during a ceremony held at the María Elena Theater.*

María Elena, Thursday, August 4, 2022 - The María Elena Tourist Guides Association, in collaboration with Enel Green Power Chile and Fundación Rondó, is to revisit the glory days of Chile's saltpeter mines. The local community may now have a better historical understanding of Chile's northern golden period.

The six-month project saw seven tourist guides trained and certified with the National Tourism Service's "Q" seal of quality, thus providing them with more tools and skills to develop tourism in the Maria Elena area. Visitors will be able to learn about the only fully operational saltpeter office in the world, which still preserves in its buildings, streets, and the surrounding area, the memory of the splendor of the Saltpeter Epoch in the north of the country.

"Our idea is to work closely with the communities, listen to their needs and create a value proposition that makes the most sense to them. Working in María Elena was a rewarding experience. We were able to develop an entire project, from designing the visitor circuits to teaching first aid courses, carrying out heritage valuation, and implementing governance within the association," said **Macarena González**, from Fundación Rondó.

"María Elena has enormous tourist potential. Its cultural heritage and historical connection to the saltpeter industry is very interesting and not widely publicized," said **Víctor Loyola**, a member of the María Elena Association of Tourist Guides who participated in the training program.

The María Elena Association of Tourist Guides designed two tourist circuits that recreate the town's history and saltpeter post through this initiative. One of the routes consists of visiting the banks of the Loa River and observing local flora and fauna, particularly the diverse bird species in the area. The tour then continues by bicycle to the former Francisco Vergara Saltpeter Office and then passes through the historical center of María Elena to the Saltpeter Museum. Visitors tour an old railroad car in the middle of the Pampas desert considered a unique place for stargazing.

"Enel is developing two photovoltaic plant projects near María Elena, making us neighbors of this community. That is how we learned about this tourist project and decided to help by providing the guides with the necessary skills to add value to the area. We met with the guides and the Rondó Foundation to find out what they needed. They were quite clear about what that was: "to professionalize what they were doing," said **Carmen Gloria de la Barra**, senior community relations specialist for Enel's northern division.

"I had previously participated in informal tours of the old school and Pedro de Valdivia Saltpeter Office. As an Association, this was the opportunity we had been waiting for all along. We were very keen to do tours by ourselves, so when we got the opportunity to obtain this certification, it was an important step forward. We never hesitated and became fully involved in the whole process. They gave us ideas and listened to us, and along with Rondó, we improved the routes," said **Carla Araya Sánchez**. She was born in the former Salitrera Victoria office in the Tarapacá region.

The circuits highlight the historical significance of northern Chile and commemorate the sacrifice made by men and women and the extraordinary splendor that resulted from the saltpeter boom. These newly certified tour guides want to tell the stories and anecdotes of that period: Victor Loyola, Brayhan Milla, Abigail Ferreira, Christian Morales, Carla Araya, Songel Aracena, and Gustavo Araya.