

news

CATCHING UP ON THE HEADLINES THAT AFFECT TRAVELLERS AROUND THE WORLD

Namibia's 'forbidden' zone opens to visitors

NEW CONSERVATION PARK IN FORMER DIAMOND-MINING AREA

After a long journey, Namibians have finally established Sperrgebiet Park as a conservation area – making it the second largest protected area in Africa. The region, previously inaccessible to the public to protect the rich diamond fields along the coast, is a pristine wilderness home to 1,000 plant species and attractions such as spectacular natural fountains and fossilised dunes.

At 26,000km², the Sperrgebiet National Park is hoped to eventually be part of a vast international conservation area involving

neighbouring states South Africa, Botswana and Angola.

"Namibia is leading the way in protecting vital ecosystems and in all the services they provide people as part of a strategy for local and regional development," said Frank Hawkins, the Conservation International vice president for Africa and Madagascar.

Ironically, it is the protection of the area's diamond fields that has led to this vast region remaining unharmed by inappropriate use, and as such home to 2,349 endemic plants, a rich variety of landscapes and being classified as one of the world's top 34 biodiversity hotspots.

"The world applauds our efforts to safeguard one of the world's two desert biodiversity hotspots," said environment and tourism minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah when she launched the park at the southern town of Kolmanskop (now a ghost town) on February 6.

As well as protecting and showcasing spectacular natural beauty, a variety of birds and animals and a rich mining history, the Ministry says the park will benefit disadvantaged people. "[Regional and Economic development] is what this park is going to give," said Nandi-Ndaitwah. www.namibiaturism.com.na

traveller details.

While the announcement of the new national park in Namibia is fantastic news for the protection of this unique African wilderness, it is not, as yet, open to the public. At the moment, visitors can view the Bogenfels Rock Arch on the coast and Pomona Ghost Town on a day excursion, though check with the Namibian tourist board to find out about any changes to accessibility before your visit.



pics © Linda Baker

Cars tell tales in Valencia

GOCAR TOURS LAUNCH IN SPANISH CITIES

Zippy, yellow story-telling cars are the latest city sightseeing trend, and after a successful launch in San Francisco, Miami and San Diego, the GoCar concept has spread its wings to Barcelona, Lisbon and now Valencia.

No need for a guidebook or a map, the three-wheeled, talking, yellow convertibles, feature a GPS-guided audio tour that takes a driver and one passenger on a tour providing clear directions and a running commentary, available in six different languages.

"This is such a refreshing way for tourists to see a city, and it has become a great talking point," said GoCar's European director, Damien Harris. "Drivers get such a buzz out of it, and are always on an adrenalin high after they've done the tour. Valencia is a buzzing city with so much to see and do, and lends itself



perfectly to the GoCar storytelling car experience. In Barcelona alone more than 10,000 people have been on a GoCar city tour since it launched in June 2008, and the feedback has been phenomenal."

Simple to operate and fun to drive, the vibrant GoCars are fully

equipped, and offer travellers true autonomy over where, what and when they want to see things. All that is required is a driving licence and a vehicle briefing. Cars cost €35 for the first hour, €25 for the second and then €20, or a full day for €99. www.gocartours.es

UK team conserves Maldives' whale sharks

ATOLL RESORT EXTENDS SUPPORT TO WHALE SHARK RESEARCH

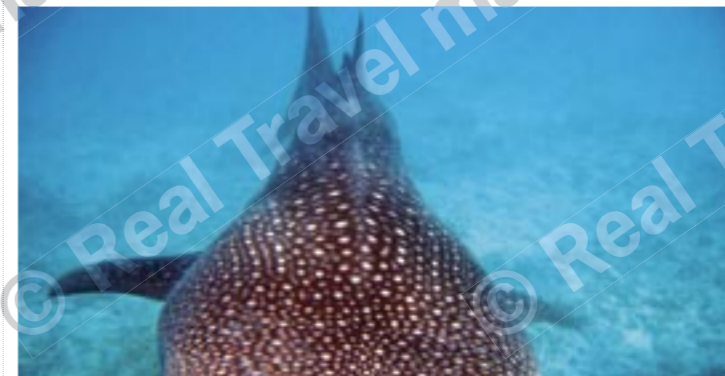
A team of three UK environmental experts have returned to the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island to continue their groundbreaking Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme until June 12.

The not-for-profit organisation has already paved the way in establishing new whale shark protection guidelines in the country, with the government requesting their direction to establish community and tourism industry guidelines.

The Conrad Maldives Rangali Island will once again provide sponsorship and equipment, including a research vessel, dive kit, food, fuel, maintenance and accommodation to support the team's efforts as part of their

ongoing commitment to protecting the fragile paradise of the resort. Visitors between April and June will also have the opportunity to learn more about the whale shark population from the team and to join the team on research trips

Various longer volunteer programmes are also available. Further information on the Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme MWSRIP is available at: www.maldiveswhalesharkresearch.org



news in brief.

HIGH-DE-HIGH CAMPERS

Londoners no longer have to worry about leaving the country to find the great outdoors. Instead, it's being brought to them by Bovril, with the launch of Britain's first Extreme Urban Campsite to help people make the most of their surroundings while money is tight.

Pitched 230 feet up on top of a building in Shoe Lane in Central London, this sky-high campsite is being trialled to support inner city folks who don't have the time to escape to the country this year. Bovril are keen to encourage the nation to enjoy all of Britain's outdoor spaces and views – urban or rural – and depending on feedback, more city campsites could be rolled out across the UK this summer.

Jon Dale, from the Camping and Caravanning Club, commented on the unique under-canvas experience: "Camping has always played a big part in the British outdoors and our latest figures only help demonstrate the fact that camping and caravanning is becoming all the more popular."

"Bovril's Extreme Urban Campsite will hopefully encourage inner city Brits to save their pennies and make the most of the outdoor spaces all around the UK!"

If you're keen to take a look at an Extreme Urban Campsite near you, email: Bovril@cakegroup.com



STAY IN SINGAPORE FOR £1

Encouraging travellers to stopover on the Southeast Asian island, Singapore Airlines, along with Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Changi Airport is offering all customers the Fabulous Singapore Stopover package for just £1 for the first night's stay.

As well as a night's accommodation for virtually nothing, the Stopover package covers exclusive deals on hotel accommodation, airport transfers and entry to some of Singapore's leading attractions, including Sentosa Island, Malay Heritage Centre, Singapore Zoo, National Orchid Garden, Peranakan Museum, Singapore River Bumboot Tour and Jurong Bird Park.

"We hope this £1 deal will entice travellers to stopover in Singapore and experience the buzz and unique attractions that this country has to offer," says Mr Huang Cheng Eng, Singapore Airlines' executive vice president.

The offer is available until September 30, 2009. Visit: www.singaporeair.com/ssh

AVIS CHARGE NO-SHOWS

Travellers booking hire cars on their trips should be aware of Avis Europe's new 'no-show' fee. The £40 charge will be applied to customers who fail to pick up their pre-booked rental car.

According to Wolfgang Neumann, Avis' group commercial director, the new flat fee will "improve vehicle availability for its customers." The £40 fee will only apply to those who fail to cancel before their allocated pick-up time or don't turn up within 24 hours. "Charges for cancelling a rental booking are 100 per cent avoidable if customers think ahead," Neumann said.