



The Azores' bid for the first Whale Heritage Site title

BY DAVID EZRA | DEC 16, 2015 | PRESS RELEASES

The Portuguese archipelago of the Azores is on a mission to be crowned the world's first *Whale Heritage Site* following the launch of the first accreditation scheme of its kind.

Introduced by the World Cetacean Alliance this year to recognise centres of excellence in responsible cetacean (whale and dolphin) watching, the first Summit for the scheme will take place in Faial Island in the Azores on Friday, 30 October 2015.

Already one of the world's most responsible whale watching destinations, the Azores has made significant strides in the areas of responsible cetacean watching practices and conservation, and the University of the Azores now leads three important studies into the welfare of cetacean species in its waters.

Studies based in the Azores include **MAPCET**, which assesses the effects of human activities (such as whale watching) on cetacean habitats in Azorean waters; **CETPESCA**, which studies interactions between cetacean species; and **MONICET**, a collaborative project between the Azorean government and three Azorean whale watching companies to build a database on cetacean

behaviour. The University of the Azores has also produced recent papers for the International Whale Commission (IWC) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

“The Azores has a unique whale history and has long been at the heart of world efforts towards conservation and responsible whale watching, making it the ideal destination for the first Whale Heritage Summit and a strong contender for the first Whale Heritage Site,” said Francisco Gil. Ata, President for the Azores Promotion Board.

The Azores embraces the 25 resident and migratory species which roam its waters – with conservation, preservation and responsible trips to spot whales in their natural habitat key to its tourism strategy. Whale watching is the oldest tourism activity in the archipelago and every whale watching operator is bound by strict regulations which protect the animals from stress. Each operator also has at least one marine biologist who studies the behaviour and wellbeing of the cetaceans.

The archipelago is also gearing up for 2016, which marks the 30th anniversary since the International Whaling Commission's world ban on whaling. Once a vital part of the Azores' economy bringing in much of the local revenue, nearly every family on the islands once had a connection to the whaling industry. Over 30 years on, whale watching boats have replaced fishermen's barges and the fate of these beautiful creatures in Azorean waters has dramatically changed for the better.

The whaling heritage can be explored on Pico Island at *Museu dos Baleeiros*, an old whaling boat house-turned whaling museum or *Museu da Industria Baleeira de Sao Roque do Pico*, an old whaling factory. Faial Island is home to *Fabrica da Baleia de Porto Pim*, a museum which houses traditional whaling equipment, and Peter's *Café* in Horta Marina, a colourful sailing establishment which was once a local haunt for whalers.

Keen whale watchers are advised to travel during the spring and summer when species such as sperm, pilot, beaked, and false-killer whales are more

common. The Blue Whale typically migrates through the Azores' waters in the spring.

November 2015

-ends-

Editor's Notes:

For more information, high resolution images or details of press trips please contact:

Claire Ranganathan or David Ezra at KBC PR &

Marketing: claire.ranganathan@kbc-pr.com / david.ezra@kbc-pr.com / 01825 763636

About the Azores:

The nine islands of the Azores are in the middle of the North Atlantic and are an autonomous region of Portugal. They can be reached by direct flight with Ryanair or SATA Azores Airlines from the UK in less than four hours from April – October, or via Lisbon year round. These volcanic islands are renowned for their craters, beautiful lakes, stunning sea, thermal pools and mountain vistas, their impressive flora and fauna and marine life. The islands have played a hugely important part in European maritime history, due to their strategically significant position as the westernmost point of Europe. How to get there: Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) has weekly flights from London Stansted to Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel Island which depart every Saturday. SATA International (www.sata.pt) has weekly direct flights from London Gatwick to Ponta Delgada until October.

About the World Cetacean Alliance:

The World Cetacean Alliance is the world's largest Partnership working to protect whales, dolphins and porpoises (cetaceans), representing 70 partners in 23 countries worldwide. Through cooperation, the WCA aims to conserve and protect cetaceans and their habitats in the world's oceans, seas and

rivers to ensure their continued health and survival. To find out more about the WCA, please visit our website at www.worldcetaceanalliance.org

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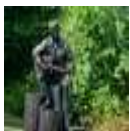
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