

Protecting threatened Mediterranean Monk Seals: Launch of new TUI Sea the Change programme in Turkey

- *TUI Care Foundation launches project to protect the Mediterranean monk seal in the southwest of Turkey*
- *Initiative works with local tour operators, hotels and schools to raise awareness about protecting threatened species and trains more than 700 local people in marine conservation*
- *Project launch is part of TUI Care Foundation's Marine May, which emphasises the importance of marine conservation*

Berlin, 30 May 2024. *The Mediterranean is often described as the most overused sea in the world, experiencing pressure from a variety of human activities. More than 1700 species in the Mediterranean Basin are listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. The Red List assesses the conservation status of species and determines the risks of extinction. Only around 100 Mediterranean monk seals live on the coasts of Turkey - according to the Red List, this unique mammal is considered as 'threatened'. Therefore, the TUI Care Foundation and the Mediterranean Conservation Society has launched the TUI Sea the Change Programme in Turkey.*

The project focuses on monitoring activities and data collection in the Sarigerme region, through an improved coastal cave monitoring system. As part of the project, a dry platform will be established in a coastal cave to increase the available dry ground for monk seals, which is essential to them when resting and during the pupping season. In addition, the project works with related government agencies to establish protection zones around breeding caves where there is data confirming seal activity or pupping.

TUI Sea the Change Turkey also focuses on awareness raising activities amongst locals, tourists and businesses in tourism hotspots in south-western Turkey. These will encourage conservation-friendly behaviour in the project's study area of the Fethiye and Göcek region. The project will train 700 people in marine conservation, including local boat tour operators and hotels. School children will receive information on the conservation status of the monk seal and its habitats through an educational workshop designed for young children, including a game focusing on endemic endangered species.

The project was officially launched at an event in Göcek by Helen Caron, Member of the Board of Trustees of the TUI Care Foundation: "Our partnership with the Mediterranean Conservation Society demonstrates our commitment to safeguarding this vital marine habitat. Through the TUI Sea the Change Programme, we're protecting monk seals and putting sustainable practices in place that benefit both the environment and local communities. By raising awareness among locals, tourists and businesses in key holiday destinations like Fethiye and Göcek, we're aiming to secure the continued existence of the monk seal population and to promote responsible tourism"

Zafer Kızılkaya, Chairman of the Mediterranean Conservation Society: "The Mediterranean Conservation Society works directly with local communities living whose livelihood depends on the sea, including small-scale fishers and the tourism industry. This project aims to make use of local knowledge and citizen science to gather monk seal

sighting data and also to share scientific findings from long-term monitoring studies with local communities to increase awareness of local ecosystems like the Mediterranean seagrass (*Posidonia oceanica*) and endangered species such as the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*)”.

TUI Sea the Change Turkey is part of the international TUI Sea the Change programme which protects and preserves the marine environment in tourism destinations such as Mallorca, Mozambique and Indonesia.

The TUI Care Foundation's 'Marine May' is a month of activities dedicated to ocean preservation. Through a series of project launches and educational activities, it emphasises the importance of sustainable practices to safeguard marine ecosystems for local communities and generations to come.

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About the TUI Care Foundation

Building on the potential of tourism as a force for good, the TUI Care Foundation supports and initiates projects which create new opportunities and contribute to thriving communities in tourism destinations all over the world. Connecting holidaymakers to good causes, it supports education and training opportunities for young people; drives the protection of natural habitats and the marine environment; and helps local communities to thrive sustainably and benefit from tourism. The TUI Care Foundation builds on strong partnerships with local and international organisations to create meaningful and long-lasting impact. The independent charitable organisation was founded by TUI, one of the world's leading tourism businesses, and is based in the Netherlands.

About The Mediterranean Conservation Society (Akdeniz Koruma Derneği - AKD)

The Mediterranean Conservation Society - MCS (Akdeniz Koruma Derneği - AKD) was established in İzmir, Türkiye, in 2012 as a national non-profit organization. MCS focuses on endangered species such as the Mediterranean monk seal and the Sandbar Shark, the monitoring and restoration of the marine ecosystems in which they live and supporting coastal communities in developing sustainable livelihoods through projects that are locally appropriate, based on good science and tradition. As a non-profit, we conduct projects to address several key challenges facing the Turkish coastline, including developing No-Fishing Zones (NFZs) and systems of community rangers, protecting endangered species and their habitat, tackling the issue of invasive species, developing sustainable alternatives to fishing through eco-tourism projects and organizing marine clean-up activities.

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