

BELUGA WHALES SAFELY LAND IN ICELAND

CARGOLUX DELIVERS LITTLE GREY AND LITTLE WHITE SAFELY TO ICELAND ON THEIR WAY TO THE WORLD'S FIRST BELUGA WHALE SANCTUARY

SEA LIFE Trust are happy to confirm the safe arrival of two beluga whales, Little Grey and Little White, after a 6,000 mile journey from China to Iceland

- *Little Grey and Little White are in good health after their Cargolux Airlines flight and will now continue their epic relocation from captivity to the world's first open water sanctuary for beluga whales*
- *Following severe weather conditions in April, the re-location was re-scheduled to June.*
- *The move heralds one of the biggest developments in captive whale and dolphin care and protection in decades and the first of its kind to be created for cetaceans.*

Wednesday 19th June: Two former captive whales, Little Grey and Little White, have safely touched down in Iceland following a 6,000 mile flight from China. The pair now face the final stage of their journey by truck and ferry to the world's first open water sanctuary for beluga whales.

The SEA LIFE Trust has today confirmed that Little Grey and Little White have arrived at Keflavik Airport (Iceland's International Airport) after having successfully completed the first leg of their landmark journey. The flight, sponsored by Cargolux Airlines Intl, landed locally this afternoon. The whales will now continue onto their new home, a large sanctuary in a natural bay on Heimaey, one of the Westman Islands, located off the southern coast of Iceland.

The two belugas were transported in custom-made slings designed to their exact physical requirements, and were then placed in tailored containers. After a lorry trip from Changfeng Ocean World to Shanghai Pu Dong airport, the whales were loaded onto a specially branded Cargolux freighter. The procedure was successful and the aircraft departed Shanghai.

Little Grey and Little White were monitored by their care teams to ensure they remained safe and comfortable throughout the 11.30-12-hour flight. A Cargolux engineer and a team of global veterinary experts with experience in transporting marine mammals were

also on board, to guarantee the whale's welfare, whilst ensuring flight safety requirements were upheld.

Andy Bool, Head of SEA LIFE Trust, said: *"We're absolutely delighted Little Grey and Little White have safely touched down in Iceland. This is a complex but inspiring project and we've been working with the whales for months helping to prepare them for travelling to their new home."*

We'll continue to carefully monitor the whales but we're pleased with their overall progress and welfare checks, which have been taking place throughout the relocation. The co-ordination of this project has been down to so many people and we're extremely grateful for all their hard work, and are thrilled this epic journey has gone as planned."

The 747-400ERF freighter plane was welcomed onto the tarmac with a ceremonial water salute from two fire trucks firing a water arc over the plane, in celebration of Iceland's newest residents' safe arrival.

Little Grey and Little White will now be transferred on board two lorries from Keflavik Airport before catching a ferry to Heimaey – off the south coast of Iceland. Once they arrive on the island, they will be placed in their dedicated sanctuary quarantine care pool for monitoring and resting after their epic journey. They will then move to their new home in the secluded open-water bay.

Richard Forson, Cargolux President and Chief Executive Officer, added: *"We are delighted that Little Grey and Little White enjoyed a seamless journey onboard our Cargolux aircraft. The success of this undertaking is the reflection of the dedication and commitment of teams across all of our organisations who worked tirelessly to make this happen."*

This epic relocation required complex logistical efforts, and we are proud to have been part of this incredible journey. We hope that Little Grey and Little White rapidly adapt to their new home and that their story will serve as a precedent for other cetaceans held in captivity."

Created in partnership with global marine wildlife charity, Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* is one of the biggest developments in captive whale and dolphin care and protection in decades and the first of its kind to be created for cetaceans.

Cathy Williamson, Whale and Dolphin Conservation's End Captivity Programme Policy Manager concluded: *"Having been originally involved in discussions about a sanctuary with SEA LIFE 20 years ago, and having helped with this beluga whale project from the beginning, WDC is naturally very excited to be part of the welcoming committee for Little White and Little Grey as they touch down in Iceland."*

The world's first whale sanctuary represents a pathway to the end of the keeping of whales and dolphins confined for entertainment. We are proud to be a partner of this important project that will improve welfare for these belugas, and show the world that there is an alternative to whale and dolphin captivity."

The sheltered bay will be the world's first open water sanctuary for beluga whales in what is a ground-breaking global marine welfare project. The bay, which measures

approximately 32,000 sqm with a depth of up to 10m has been chosen to provide a more natural sub-Arctic environment and wilder habitat for these amazing whales to call home.

For more information about the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary*, visit www.sealifetrust.org.

-ENDS-

For further information please contact at Chris Stevenson at Stripe Communications on 07787 556 513 or email: belugasanctuary@stripecommunications.com

Follow the plane and where it's spotted by following the hashtags: #WhaleHelloPlane #BelugaFlight

Notes to Editors:

Travel fact file: (Infographic included)

How will Little Grey and Little White travel from China to Iceland?

The complex logistical challenge of transporting two beluga whales by air, land and sea is being carefully planned by a team of global experts with experience in transporting marine mammals. The 6,000-miles journey will take around 24 hours to complete - from the time Little Grey and Little White leave Changfeng Ocean World in Shanghai until they arrive at the sanctuary on Heimaey Island.

- 1. The journey will begin at Changfeng Ocean World in Shanghai. Each beluga will be individually lifted onto specially designed stretchers measured to their physical requirements and carefully placed into specially built transportation boxes before they are lifted out of the aquarium by crane and placed carefully into two lorries**
- 2. Little Grey and Little White will then travel by road, from Changfeng Ocean World to Pu Dong International airport, where a specially chartered Cargolux cargo plane will be waiting on the runway to fly them to Keflavik Airport (the main International airport) in Iceland.**
- 3. Little Grey and Little White will then be transferred on board two lorries from Keflavik Airport before catching a ferry to Heimaey – off the south of Iceland.**
- 4. Once they arrive in Vestmannaeyjar via ferry, two lorries will drive a short distance to the main town of Vestmannaeyjar where Little Grey and Little White will be transferred to the beluga sanctuary landside facility and placed into a special care pool so they can be assessed following their journey.**
- 5. They will spend a minimum of 40 days in the sanctuary quarantine care pool for monitoring and resting after their epic journey before moving to their new home in the open-water bay in the summer.**

About SEA LIFE TRUST

SEA LIFE TRUST is a registered charity (no. 1175859) working globally to protect the world's oceans and the amazing marine life that lives within them. Our vision is of a world

where our seas are healthy, protected and full of diverse life. We own and operate marine wildlife sanctuaries, run inspiring conservation campaigns and fund projects and education programmes that champion the need for plastic-free oceans, sustainable fishing, effective Marine Protected Areas and an end to over-exploitation of marine life. www.sealifetrust.org

About Cargolux

Cargolux Airlines International, based in Luxembourg, is Europe's leading all-cargo airline with a modern and efficient fleet composed of 14 Boeing 747-8 freighters and 16 Boeing 747-400 freighters. The Cargolux worldwide network covers over 75 destinations on scheduled all-cargo flights. The company has more than 85 offices in over 50 countries, and operates an extensive global trucking network to more than 250 destinations as well as full and part-charter services. Cargolux also offers third-party maintenance at its modern two-bay maintenance hangar in Luxembourg. The company is specialized in B747 line and hangar maintenance up to and including C-Checks. It offers a range of specialized maintenance services and holds line maintenance approval for 777 aircraft. The Cargolux Group employs close to 2,000 staff worldwide.

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About WDC

WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation is the leading charity dedicated to the protection of whales and dolphins, working globally through campaigns, lobbying, advising governments, conservation projects, field research, rescue, education and much more. WDC operates through offices in the UK, North America, Germany and Australia. Our vision is a world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free. www.whales.org

About SEA LIFE

SEA LIFE is the world's largest family of aquariums. From its origins in 1979 in Oban, Scotland, SEA LIFE now provides immersive marine experiences in nearly 50 locations in 17 countries around the world. We aim to share our passion for the creatures of the oceans and to make our guests fall in love with them. www.visitsealife.com

About Merlin Entertainments plc

Merlin Entertainments plc is a global leader in location-based, family entertainment. As Europe's Number 1 and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin now operates over 130 attractions, 20 hotels and 6 holiday villages in 25 countries and across 4 continents. Merlin's purpose is to deliver memorable experiences to its 67 million guests around the world, through its iconic brands and multiple attraction formats, and the commitment and passion of its c.28,000 employees (peak season).

www.merlinentertainments.biz



