



Beluga Whale Sanctuary

MEDIA TOOLKIT

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Q&A
3. Fact files
4. Spokespeople quotes
5. Links to download photography/ video footage
6. Social media
7. Key Contacts

1. INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2019, two beluga whales, Little Grey and Little White, will become residents of the world's first beluga whale sanctuary in a ground-breaking marine and animal welfare project led by the SEA LIFE TRUST in partnership with Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC).

This toolkit will provide background information on this pioneering marine welfare project, its significance regarding the end of whale and dolphin captivity shows and will share insight into the remarkable journey of Little Grey and Little White from China to Iceland.

Still imagery and moving video footage of Little Grey and Little White was captured by the Press Association, alongside images and aerial footage of the sanctuary location, as well as a series of infographics, which are available to download in the useful links section below.

2. Q&A

a) What is the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary*?

SEA LIFE TRUST is creating the world's first sanctuary for beluga whales in a ground-breaking marine mammal welfare project in partnership with WDC and supported by Merlin Entertainments and SEA LIFE. It is the first time in history that a sanctuary of this kind has been created to rehabilitate captive cetaceans such as whales and dolphins.

The sanctuary on the island of Heimaey, one of the Westman Islands, located off the southern coast of Iceland, will be created at Klettsvik Bay – a large natural sea inlet and beautifully secluded coastal area. Two female beluga whales, Little Grey and Little White, will travel to their new sanctuary home from Changfeng Ocean World aquarium in Shanghai, China, in Spring 2019. There they will be able to enjoy an enhanced quality of life in an environment closer to their natural Arctic habitat.

b) Why was Heimaey in Iceland chosen as the location for the sanctuary?

The search for a new home for Little Grey and Little White involved the team looking at sites in Russia, North America, Norway and Scotland before deciding on Iceland. After an extensive search in suitable waters in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, with the help of WDC, Klettsvik Bay on Heimaey was identified as the ideal location for the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* because the cool coastal waters around the Island provide a more natural sub-Arctic habitat for the belugas and include a rich variety of local flora and wildlife. The large bay area which measures nearly 32,000 sqm and up to 10m deep also delivers a great deal of space for the belugas to swim, explore and dive.

Klettsvik Bay, in particular, is relatively secluded and offers protection from the Icelandic weather. The location also enables the SEA LIFE TRUST to create necessary landside care facilities to monitor and assess the beluga whales on a regular basis. There will also be a visitor and education centre nearby that will include a puffin hospital for the public to learn more about the project and local wildlife.

c) Why were Little Grey and Little White identified to take part in this marine welfare project?

Merlin Entertainments has a long-standing philosophy against keeping cetaceans such as whales and dolphins in captivity for the use of public entertainment. After acquiring Changfeng Ocean World aquarium in 2012, Merlin began an extensive search to find the ideal new home for Little Grey and Little White culminating in Merlin making a substantial donation to SEA LIFE TRUST to cover the costs of building the sanctuary and relocating the belugas.

Merlin Entertainments has continued to work closely with partners the SEA LIFE TRUST, WDC, SEA LIFE and the team at Changfeng Ocean World to ensure Little Grey and Little White's relocation from China to Iceland is a success.

d) What impact will this sanctuary have on marine mammal welfare in the future?

The creation of the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* is a landmark moment in marine mammal welfare, as it is the first time in history that a sanctuary has been created to rehabilitate captive cetaceans such as whales and dolphins.

By demonstrating that captive belugas can be relocated from aquariums and brought into a more natural, wild environment where they can behave more naturally, the project team hope to inspire other facilities holding whales and dolphins to seek an alternative future for these amazing creatures.

e) 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 30 hours to complete - from the time Little Grey and Little White leave Changfeng Ocean World in Shanghai and arrive at the sanctuary on Heimaey Island.

- 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 loaded into two lorries
- Little Grey and Little White will then travel by road, from Changfeng Ocean World to Pu Dong International airport, where a specially chartered cargo plane, a Boeing 747-400ERF, will be waiting on the runway to fly them to Keflavik Airport in Iceland
- Following the flight, Little Grey and Little White will be transferred onto two individual lorries and then transported by ferry from the airport to Heimaey, a crossing that takes around 30 minutes
- Once the ferry has docked on Heimaey Island, the lorries will drive a short distance to the 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.

f) How will each belugas' mental and physical well-being be monitored during the relocation?

Little Grey and Little White's mental and physical well-being is the project team's top priority. The veterinary care of the whales is delivered by locally based experts in China who interact with the whales every day who are supported by world renowned specialists in animal welfare and behaviour.

Every day each whale's health and well-being is being assessed and monitored with regular checks to ensure they are in an excellent condition to travel. To ensure their safety during relocation the whales will be accompanied by a care team of vets and beluga whale experts who will stay by the whales' side throughout the journey. Their job will be to keep each individual whale wet during transport while also performing regular heart rate and respiration checks to ensure the whales are calm and as stress-free as possible.

g) What do you need to do to prepare the belugas for their relocation?

To ensure Little Grey and Little White are in excellent condition to be able to travel 6,000-miles and thrive in their new home, the whales are receiving a carefully designed training programme.

Little Grey and Little White will gradually be introduced to new experiences and learn to interact with new objects such as stretchers that will be used during their relocation. They're also learning new skills and behaviours to ensure they can easily be cared for by the welfare team on their journey, and in their new home.

h) How will you help Little Grey and Little White adapt to their new home?

Reintroducing Little Grey and Little White to a more natural environment will include helping the whales to acclimatise to their new surroundings. The winter temperatures of sub-Arctic water around Iceland are much colder than the belugas are used to which means ahead of being released into the open water, Little Grey and Little White's calorie intake will increase to help them put on extra blubber and keep them insulated against the colder conditions.

i) What will happen when Little Grey and Little White reach the sanctuary on Heimaey Island?

Following their journey from China to Heimaey Island, Little Grey and Little White will be carefully transferred to the sanctuary's landside care and quarantine pool. They will be tired after their journey and confused by their new surroundings at first which is why the team of vets and beluga care experts will continue to monitor their mental and physical well-being closely.

Before the whales can be released into the open water sanctuary, it's important that they are kept in the landside care pool in order for them to adapt to the water temperatures and get prepared for release into the bay. This will include taking part in a training programme to prime them for release into the bay, as well as putting on extra blubber and getting used to colder North Atlantic waters.

To help Little Grey and Little White gain confidence for interacting with the local fauna and wildlife in the bay, the project team will carefully introduce them to creatures such as crabs and other shellfish as well

plant life such as sea kelp found in the local area. They will also take part in training designed to increase their fitness and ability to hold their breath underwater for longer in the deeper waters.

j) When will the sanctuary be ready and how will it be managed in the future?

Work is already underway to create the sanctuary to ensure it's completed ahead of the arrival of Little Grey and Little White in spring 2019. It will be managed by SEA LIFE TRUST with an onsite care team of marine and beluga whale experts employed to look after Little Grey and Little White.

The local community on Heimaey Island are really supportive of the sanctuary which will include a visitor and education centre and a puffin hospital that will be open to the public for an entrance fee. Visitors will also have the opportunity to go out to the bay in small numbers on carefully managed boat trips to catch a glimpse of Little Grey and Little White in their bay. However, they will not be allowed too close or moor up to minimise disturbance.


As a registered charity, the SEA LIFE TRUST will be running the site on a not-for-profit basis so all income from visitors and donations will be used to ensure that the sanctuary is self-sustaining. The world's largest aquarium brand, SEA LIFE, will also encourage donations to the project through special educational experiences at nearly 50 SEA LIFE attractions around the world.

k) Will the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* become home to other beluga whales in the future?

While Klettsvik Bay will become home to Little Grey and Little White for the moment, there is space for additional belugas which we hope other aquariums will take advantage of in the future.

3. FACT FILES

a) Little Grey and Little White

<p>Little Grey Age: 12 years old Sex: Female Place of origin: Russia Weight: Around 900 kg Length: Around 4 metres long Diet: Herring and Capelin Personality: Little Grey is a very playful whale. She is always curious and willing to learn new things. She also has a mischievous side to her personality and likes to spit water at her care team.</p>	
<p>Little White Age: 12 years old Sex: Female</p>	

Place of origin: Russia
 Weight: Around 900 kg
 Length: Around 3.9 metres long
 Diet: Herring and Capelin
 Personality: Little White is a shy whale. She is much more reserved than Little Grey but still likes to play and forms close bonds with her carers.



b) Background on beluga whales

- Belugas' skin turns from grey to bright white after the age of eight years and live in the Arctic and sub-Arctic around Greenland, North America and Russia. There are estimated to be 200,000 belugas in the wild.
- The average life-span of a beluga is 40-60 years
- Early mariners named beluga whales 'sea canaries' because of the sounds they make including high-pitched whistles, clicks and even raspberry noises
- Belugas have a wide range of flexibility in their necks which allows them to move their heads in lots of directions compared to other marine mammals
- They are one of only a few whale species that don't have a dorsal fin on their back making it easier to swim under the surface of ice
- A beluga whale's diet in the wild includes:
 - fish (herring, salmon, cod)
 - squid
 - shrimps
 - crabs
 - octopus
 - mussels
 - snails
 - sandworms
- Natural predators include orca (killer whales) and polar bears. Little Grey and Little White will not be exposed to any predators in the sanctuary however, Belugas are also threatened by humans because of a depletion of natural food, pollution, oil and gas exploration and extraction, climate change, bycatch, hunting and live captures.

4. ADDITIONAL SPOKESPERSON QUOTES

Mark Todd, an independent marine mammal behaviour expert and consultant on the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary*, from San Diego in California, United States, said:

"I've studied and worked with beluga whales for most of my adult life. They are highly intelligent marine mammals, and each possesses unique character traits. They are a playful and curious species with an incredible ability to learn new things quickly and through their range of vocalisations will tell you what they like and don't like without hesitation.

"Little Grey and Little White are in excellent condition, but we need to prepare them for the trip by introducing unfamiliar equipment and new techniques into their daily routines to enable them to get used to how we plan to safely handle them on their journey.

"It's also important for us to help the whales to acclimatise to a much colder and natural environment where they will need to adapt to freezing temperatures, the local fauna, wildlife and much deeper waters. We have designed a special training programme using a variety of techniques to get them ready for the move. This will include stretcher and platform training, teaching the belugas to hold their breath underwater for longer, increasing their diet to help build up extra blubber, as well as gradually dropping the temperature of their pool to mimic the colder waters they will experience in the bay.

"I'm extremely proud to be able to share my experience and expertise on this pioneering project and believe the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* will help to create other opportunities for rehoming captive whales into more natural environments in the future."

Tim Wang, Senior Curator at Changfeng Ocean World in Shanghai, said:

"Little Grey and Little White are very special to our team at Changfeng Ocean World where they have been part of our family for seven years. The decision to move the whales to a sanctuary in Iceland is a significant decision that we support and we'll help to make a success working together with SEA LIFE TRUST.

"We are currently helping to prepare the belugas for relocation. As well as continuing to perform some medical checks we are starting to perform specific exercises for the move as well as helping to organise their transportation and adapting their diets to help them acclimatise to their new home under the guidance of the experts and vets."

Iker Wang, Head Trainer at Chengfeng Ocean World in Shanghai, said:

"I started working with Little Grey and Little White seven years ago after joining Changfeng Ocean World. I love my job because I enjoy the interaction and special bond that is formed between the whales and their carers. The belugas have individual personalities just like us. While Little White is quite cautious and quieter, Little Grey is the opposite. She is brave and craves attention.

"I love working with the belugas every day and of course have mixed feelings, like the rest of the team, about saying goodbye to Little Grey and Little White. We'll be sad to see them leave but we understand that

they come from nature, so this project is allowing them to go back home. We all feel happy for Little Grey and Little White and I'm proud to be involved in what is an unprecedented global project."

5. IMAGERY / VIDEO

a) Press Association content pool

A variety of still imagery and video footage of Little Grey and Little White at Changfeng Ocean World in Shanghai, China, is available to download via the Press Association content pool.

For video, please email requests to video@pressassociation.com

For images, please contact: images@pressassociation.com

b) SEA LIFE TRUST Press Office

Please visit the press office on the SEA LIFE TRUST website press area here press area: <https://belugasanctuary.sealifetrust.org/en/about-the-sanctuary/press/> to access the following content:

- Still images of Little Grey and Little White from Changfeng Ocean World
- Still images of Klettsvik Bay on Heimaey Island
- Drone footage of Klettsvik Bay
- CGI images of the Beluga Whale Sanctuary in Iceland
- Head shots of spokespeople
- Partner logos

6. SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow the journey of Little Grey and Little White to the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* on Twitter @belugasanctuary

7. KEY CONTACTS

Stripe Communications

For media enquiries or more information on the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary*, please contact Andrew Boocock or Chris Stevenson at Stripe Communications on +44 (0)20 7655 9952 or via email at belugasanctuary@stripecommunications.com.

Direct contact details:

Andrew Boocock

andrew.boocock@stripecommunications.com

+44 (0)7855795403

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC)

For any media requests relating to WDC, please contact Danny Groves, communications manager, on +44 (0)1249 449 534 / +44 (0)7834 498 277 or via email at danny.groves@whales.org