

Reach for the 'Stars' in Myanmar



Khiri Reach, the charitable arm of Khiri Travel, offers new support to a project near Bagan to save the Burmese Star Tortoise; papier-mâché tortoises to be given out to travel trade at Khiri booth in WTM London

Khiri Reach, the charitable arm of Asia-based DMC Khiri Travel, is supporting a conservation effort to save the endangered Burmese Star Tortoise. Visitors to the Bagan area in central Myanmar can take a 90-minute visit to the breeding programme, wildlife sanctuary and information centre.

Khiri Reach is helping the programme by enhancing an information centre and creating factual presentation boards in English and Burmese to help educate local villagers as well as tourists. Visitors can purchase locally sourced handicrafts and mementoes. Funds raised will help sustain the tortoise breeding efforts.

Khiri Reach also provided a new generator for the centre to pump fresh water for the tortoises and other protected animals in the Minzontaung Wildlife Sanctuary, where the project is run.

Visitors can walk in the dry zone woodlands with rangers to track the tortoises that have been reintroduced to the wild. Tracking devices have been attached to the shells of some released tortoises.

The Burmese Star Tortoise teetered on the edge of extinction in the late 90s, due to mass illegal trafficking to China. Authorities have since clamped down on the trade.

"The ultimate objective is to restore viable populations of Burmese Star Tortoises in every protected area within the dry zone of central Myanmar," said Ms Kalyar Platt, the Director of Turtle Survival Alliance Myanmar Programme.

She said the tortoises are very important as seed dispersers and grazers in dry zone forests and play a key role in nutrient cycling.

"It is important that we gain a better understanding of star tortoises and restore them as natural members of the dry zone ecosystem," she said.

At the information and breeding centre the gorgeous creative designs of local Burmese artist Mr Htin Lynn Nyo have been printed on t-shirts and fabric bags. These are sold to visitors who want to contribute to the breeding and tortoise release programme.

Khiri Travel will have further information about the project - including giveaway souvenir papier-mâché tortoises - at the Khiri Travel booth (AS603) at WTM London, 6-8 November, 2017. Khiri Travel founder, Willem Niemeijer will address a panel on World Responsible Tourism Day, 8 November at WTM.

Further in-depth information about the Burmese Star Tortoise programme is available in a blog post by Ms Gili Back who is the Executive Director of Khiri Reach and Khiri Travel's Sustainability Manager, <https://khiri.com/2017/10/helping-to-save-myanmars-indigenous-tortoises-and-turtles/>

The Wildlife Conservation Society and the Turtle Survival Alliance support the tortoise conservation project.

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About Khiri Travel

Since 1993, Khiri Travel has won awards and earned a reputation as a destination management company dedicated to working with select tour operators to provide quality leisure travel experiences across Asia. With 16 offices in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Khiri Travel's entrepreneurial associates craft innovative itineraries that reflect their passion for authentic, local and sustainable experiences. Visit khiri.com.

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