



NATURALLY FALKLANDS – AN ECO-FRIENDLY DESTINATION

The Falkland Islands is a clean, green destination and one of the few places in the world where nature still reigns supreme. The Falkland Islands Tourist Board (FITB) recognises the importance of the environment and is making every effort to be as sustainable as possible in an increasingly carbon-conscious society. By working closely with local businesses and the community, FITB aims to be ecologically sensitive and minimise its impact on the environment, while helping to generate income, employment and conservation of local eco-systems.

Pure Falklands

With a small population (around 3,000 people over an area half the size of Wales) and no heavy industry, human impact on the environment is very limited. Visitors to the Falklands can experience the stunning scenery and abundant wildlife away from the crowds – often there will only be penguins to keep you company on the miles of white sandy beaches. Or take a hike into Camp (the Falklands term for the countryside) to experience the wide open spaces, pure air and a wilderness untouched by man.

There are over 770 islands in the Falklands archipelago. While most cruise ship tourists only visit the capital Stanley and its surrounds, land-based or expedition ship tourists can explore West Falkland and the outer islands in peace, interrupted only by a pair of fighting elephant seals or a colony of king penguins.

Conservation of a Natural Environment

The Falklands tourism industry relies on the conservation and preservation of the environment and the wildlife that draw so many visitors. To ensure the impact of visitors on the environment is kept to a minimum, a number of measures have been put in place, including:

- In recent years paths, walkways and viewing platforms with interpretative signage have been laid out at Gypsy Cove, a popular day trip place for people to view penguins on the outskirts of Stanley. Visitors can learn about the natural history of the area without encroaching on the fragile burrows of the magellanic penguins that make their homes here.
- Wooden stakes or stones are often used to surround penguin colonies to create a “safe” area for the penguins without affecting the natural environment, for example at Bluff Cove, Murrell Farm and Volunteer Point.
- Wardens are stationed on beaches during the tourism season at popular destinations such as Gypsy Cove, Murrell Farm, Bluff Cove and Volunteer Point to protect the wildlife.
- Regular beach cleaning activities are organised by Falklands Conservation and other interested groups.

Preserve and Protect

Measures are in place to help monitor and protect the natural environment:

- The Falkland Islands Countryside Code, developed by Falklands Conservation, encourages visitors to minimise their impact on the environment to ensure it is protected for future tourists.
- Falklands Conservation has identified 22 sites in partnership with Birdlife International as “Important Bird Areas”; the Falklands are home to the largest black-browed albatross colony in the world with over 60% of the global population of this endangered species.
- The “Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels” (ACAP) has been ratified on behalf of the Falkland Islands and three species protected under this agreement breed on the Falklands – the black browed albatross, the southern giant petrel and the white chinned petrel.
- The Falklands have two classified Ramsar (an intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources) sites, Bertha’s Beach and Sea Lion Island.
- The Falkland Islands have also been party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) since 1973 so there are strict controls over biological exports.
- Pest eradication schemes are underway in some areas where introduced species have made an impact on the natural environment. Invasive species work ranges from ridding small islands of rats to the removal of plants including calafate and dock. The Falklands also have in place bio-security procedures to safeguard the Islands from introduced pests and disease.
- Some farmers set aside areas of land to be free from grazing animals. This allows the growth of native plants which in turn encourages birds, mammals and invertebrates to return to these areas of land. Elephant Beach Farm is a particularly good example of how tussac can be replanted and re-established in a sustainable manner with the assistance of Falklands Conservation volunteers.
- The introduction of tori-lines (a line with streamers attached towed as a scaring device) has significantly reduced the mortality of seabirds as a result of fishing.
- The Royal Holloway University, which has tested air samples from the Falkland Islands, reported that it is “the cleanest air they have ever seen”, with much lower levels of greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide and methane than in the rest of the world.

Research and Regulate

The Falkland Islands’ unique environmental conditions and endemic flora and fauna make it the ideal destination for scientific research. This research, carried out by scientists from around the world, is valuable to FITB when measuring changes in the environment, and has helped create guidelines for protecting the environment in future:

- Organisations such as Falklands Conservation and the New Island Trust carry out demographic research to monitor the populations of penguins and black browed albatross. Other recent research includes work to preserve and protect endemic species of plants, a Cobb’s Wren project is underway and work is in progress to sensitively eradicate some invasive species. The Shallow Marines Survey Group is carrying out similar inshore survey work to maintain marine biodiversity.
- Other external organisations are involved with bird and mammal electronic tracking programmes and behavioural studies.

Eco-Friendly Abodes

Tourist accommodation on the Islands also makes every effort to reduce human impact on the environment:

- Many of the tourist lodges, such as those on Pebble, Carcass and Sea Lion Island, have wind generators to provide renewable energy; 85% of eligible farms have 24-hour power from renewable sources and three wind turbines have been installed to provide power for Stanley.

Currently these contribute 26% of Stanley's power requirements. It is hoped with the addition of three more turbines in early 2010 that this will increase to 40%.

- The impact of tourism is necessarily limited on all the Outer Islands where accommodation provision determines the number of overnight guests such as Sea Lion Island and Pebble Island.
- The Malvina House Hotel in Stanley has recently installed a solar panel water heating system which exploits the high light intensities prevalent in the Falkland Islands, reducing the amount of energy required to heat water for all domestic and guest usage.
- Farms and tourist establishments all over the Islands, along with some Stanley residents, grow their own produce. Restaurants in Stanley also make use of local produce including seafood, lamb, mutton, beef as well as locally grown vegetables and salad. The Malvina House Restaurant is particularly renowned for locally caught trout and mullet, white fish and shellfish, while the Falklands Brasserie menu is designed around the concept of using home-grown ingredients. Bluff Cove Lagoon Tours make use of natural, local ingredients as much as possible, with home-baked cakes and biscuits served with jams made from local berries such as diddle dee and teaberry.

The Impact of History

- It is difficult to miss the signs in the Falklands that indicate minefields from the 1982 conflict. Rather than damaging the environment, these have in fact become wildlife havens as humans cannot enter them but penguins are not harmed and birds, insects and plants all thrive.

For further information on the Falklands Islands, please visit www.falklandislands.com and www.falklands.gov.fk. Media enquiries should be directed to Suzanne Holiday and Tryph Greenwood at Keene on 020 7839 2140 or falklandstourism@keenepa.co.uk.

Notes for Editors:

- The Falkland Islands have a raw, unspoilt quality that entices locals and tourists back time and again. Visitors to the Islands are spoilt for choice with more than 227 species of identified birds (including several of the world's largest endangered breeding colonies), as well as whales, dolphins, elephant seals, sea lions, delicate flora and rugged geographical formations.
- The best time to visit the Islands and experience the local culture and wildlife is October to April. The average summer temperature (December to March) is 15° Celsius (59° Fahrenheit) and the Falklands has more sunshine hours and less rainfall than the UK.
- There are over 40 international tour operators offering tailor-made packages and escorted tours to the Falkland Islands. See www.falklandislands.com for the latest list.
- Visitors can reach the Falklands on the weekly LAN Airways flight via Chile or the charter flight operated twice weekly from RAF Brize Norton in the UK by the Ministry of Defence.