

PRESS RELEASE

24 November 2009

Sylt – the natural beauty

Nature is Sylt's most important capital. Protecting and conserving it is a key task for the islanders.

Fine sandy beaches in the west, the broad expanse of the Wattenmeer tidal mudflats in the east, an idyll between dunes and dykes. Lush green meadows, heather blossom and breathtaking cliffs. Despite its relatively small size – Sylt is just under one hundred square kilometers – the island has a multitude of fascinating and diverse landscapes to offer. As early as 1923, individual areas were put under conservation; now, one in seven square metres of Sylt is a landscape conservation area and one in three is a nature preservation zone. In total, conservation areas account for a good 50 per cent of the entire island. The Wattenmeer tidal mudflats around Sylt were recently listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1985, the entire area between the northern tip of Sylt and the mouth of the river Elbe was designated as the National Park Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer which puts it in the very highest protection category; the nomination as a world heritage site gives this protection international recognition.

The natural elements not only unfold their full beauty to visitors – occasionally they can also unleash their terrifying power, as both islanders and visitors experienced during the last winter storms. To allow visitors to feel and understand the incredible strength and power of the elements and their impact on the maritime environment, a centre was built in List: the Erlebniszentrum Naturgewalten (The Centre of Experiencing the Elements). Located close to the harbour, this 3300m² exhibition centre presents the elements in an emotionally appealing and highly educational way, teaching visitors many fascinating facts about nature and the elements. The exhibition, which covers indoor and open-air areas, is divided into three main topics: “The Powers of the North Sea”, “Living with the Elements” and “Climate, Weather and Climate Research”. How fast do shifting dunes move? What is the secret of the tides? How do seabirds survive in a hurricane? Answers to these questions and more information about the Erlebniszentrum Naturgewalten can be found online at www.muez.de.

The sensitive coastline around Sylt requires particular protection. No other North Frisian island is so utterly exposed to the force of the North Sea as Sylt. Every time the “Blanke Hans” storm rages, it takes yet another piece of the coast back into the sea. To give the island better long-term protection, in summer 2007 the Sylt Coastal Protection Foundation was set up under the patronage of the prime minister of Schleswig-Holstein, Peter Harry Carstensen. “In this day and age of climate change, Sylt is taking responsibility both for itself and for others”, says the foundation's chairman, Helge Jansen. For more information about the various donation schemes set up by businesses in Sylt and for details of how much has been donated so far, visit the foundation website at www.stiftung-kuestenschutz-sylt.de.