

# White sharks to lure Italians to Mossel Bay

Mossel Bay plans to make shark cage diving more accessible and educational for Italian visitors.

"We've got the world's only Italian-speaking white shark researcher working in Mossel Bay and the town boasts one of Africa's best white shark cage dive operators, so it would be silly to miss the opportunity of combining the two to enhance our visitors' experience," said Mossel Bay Tourism's Marcia Holm.

She explained that a recent 5-city road show in Italy resulted in at least one booking for a group of 50 Italian travel agents, who will visit Mossel Bay in May of the coming year and that this is expected to lead to further bookings in the near future.

"The idea for the collaboration between Oceans Research and White Shark Africa came from Oceans Research's scientist in residence and laboratory director Enrico Gennari," said Ms Holm.

She said that Oceans Research facilitates and is directly involved in innovative and meaningful research that's relevant to the management and conservation of Southern Africa's marine life (particularly sharks; rays; marine mammals and turtles) and that the company strives to make its knowledge easily accessible to the public.

"In addition to in-house research, the institute provides facilities for visiting marine scientists who conduct a variety of biological- and oceanographic projects in major marine biomes throughout Southern Africa - all of which is coordinated from our head office in Mossel Bay," said Mr Gennari.

"Through the Oceans Aware Foundation (which is dedicated to the exploration; discovery; understanding and conservation of marine life in Africa) and our Shark Lab

Aquarium and research facility (which is open to the public and where we conduct studies on small captive species like pyjama sharks and puff adder and leopard shy sharks).

Our aim is to create environmental ambassadors for important, endangered species."

"During the road show it became clear that potential visitors from Italy are as fascinated by our marine life as they are by the Big Five and as a native Italian speaker, Enrico is in a unique position to share his passion and knowledge with them - especially since Mossel Bay is also the home of the White Shark Africa," said Ms Holm.

She said that great white sharks hold a particular fascination and that Mossel Bay is one of the finest places for experiencing them in their natural environment.

"There is almost no interaction between sharks and bathers in Mossel Bay, because the shark cage diving area is well removed from the bathing- and surfing areas.

"As the National Geographic documentary Sharkville famously demonstrated, people and sharks can and do coexist peacefully and side-by-side in Mossel Bay.

"White Shark Africa has an above-average record for great white sightings on its regular, four-hour-long trips in the Bay and these trips are suitable for scuba divers as much as for people with no diving experience at all. So it's easy to see how the partnership between the researchers and their tourist-friendly aquarium on the one hand and the tour operators and their specially equipped boat on the other, can work to deliver both a superior tourism product and an important conservation message," she said.



White shark cage diving in Mossel Bay.

Photo courtesy: Jason Fleast