

NEWS

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£6.5M BOOST FOR ARK ROYAL WRECK PLAN

Ambitious plans to turn the Royal Navy's former flagship HMS Ark Royal into an artificial reef off Devon have received a significant boost, according to Torbay-based dive group Wreck the World, which announced that it had secured £6.5m to help buy, strip and then sink the 210-metre carrier.

Scrap metal firm GH Newbery and Son and engineering firm A&P Falmouth have agreed to pay the £3.5m purchase cost and act as £3m guarantor respectively. The Ark Royal was put up for sale after it was axed by the government in the Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010. Other proposals for it include a commercial heliport in London, a nightclub and school in China, and a casino in Hong Kong.

Wreck the World comprises of diving instructors Michael Byfield and James Doddrell. Michael said: "If the Ark Royal goes for scrap, especially to a foreign entity, there will be no social and economic benefit to this country, whereas with our project, once she is in the water she will keep on giving."

A 125-year lease for a site off the Devon coast has already been agreed in principle with the Crown Estate, subject to a winning bid and meeting environmental requirements, and Torbay Council has given its backing to the reef project, which estimates that while the wreck could cost in the region of £35,000 a year to maintain for visiting divers, it could also generate up to £30m over five years for the local economy. Peter Child, managing director of A&P Falmouth, said: "A&P Falmouth is pleased to have agreed in principal to act as parent company guarantor, which in turn would see us preparing the ship as an artificial reef for divers.

"This is a credible project and would be a positive outcome for the iconic ship, as well as both the South West tourism and ship repair industries."

The Ministry of Defence is expected to announce who it will sell the vessel to within the next few weeks.

CAMEL DIVE CLUB FEELS THE NEED FOR SPEED

The fast boat can get divers to the Tiran reefs in a matter of minutes



Now divers can reach the world-famous coral reefs of the Straits of Tiran in Sharm El Sheikh in less than 20 minutes via Camel Dive Club's express speedboat service.

Camel runs up to three dive trips and three separate snorkelling excursions every day by speedboat. The 'early bird' dive trip at 7am provides an ideal opportunity to explore the famous Tiran reefs, and a chance to spot the schooling hammerhead sharks near Jackson Reef at a time when most other divers will still be having breakfast. Camel also plans late-afternoon dives during the summer months.

All departures are made from the private jetty at Grand Rotana Resort and Spa, near Sharks Bay, which lies between Na'ama Bay and Nabq. Camel offers free air-conditioned transfers between all hotels in Sharm El Sheikh and the jetty.

At 8.5 metres long, the purpose-built speedboat accommodates comfortably six passengers with full diving equipment. A professional dive guide from the Camel team joins the captain and deckhand on all

trips. The speedboat's twin 175hp engines provide a rapid ride, at a cruising speed of 26 knots.

Clare Mucklow, marketing manager at Camel Dive Club, said: "We're really excited about the extra choice and flexibility the new speedboat gives our guests. As more and more divers come on holiday with family members or children who aren't divers yet, they can still do fantastic dives in Tiran, while leaving time for other activities. The speedboat is also proving popular with guests looking for a more-exclusive trip, since it can also be hired for private diving and snorkelling excursions."

One dive by speedboat costs a 15 Euro supplement in addition to the daily diving charge. Daily diving costs 40 Euros for one dive, including tanks and weights, or less when booked in advance as part of a diving package (see: www.cameldive.com for rates and special offers). Speedboat dives may be booked directly with Camel Dive Club after arrival in Sharm El Sheikh, by calling +20 693 600 700. Private rental of the speedboat for diving costs 275 Euros.


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