

Contact: Kelly McCandless
Billings Chamber/CVB
Phone: (406) 869-3732
(406) 861-2981
kelly@BillingsChamber.com
www.BillingsChamber.com

P.O. Box 31177
815 S. 27th St.
Billings, MT 59107
Fax: (406) 245-7333
www.VisitBillings.com
www.BrandBillings.com

Billings Chamber of Commerce
Convention and Visitors Bureau



Media Release

Tourism Exchange Brings Namibian Delegation to Billings

For Immediate Release

Billings, MT, August 31, 2012: The Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Tourism Business Improvement District is pleased to help welcome fourteen Namibian tourism industry representatives to Billings and Southeast Montana. This cross-cultural “no borders” exchange between US-based land owners, Native American tribal leaders, government representatives and park conservationists and their counterparts from Namibia will gather next week in Montana to share ideas on how tourism fits into their respective ideologies and onto their lands. The Billings Chamber/CVB is thrilled to partner with Austin-Lehman Adventures and the World Wildlife Foundation for the Billings and Southeast Montana leg of the Namibians tour.

Upon their September 6th arrival, Cross-cultural exchanges between the Namibians and Native American tribal leaders from southeast Montana will delve into how to establish and operate indigenous tourism experiences, while Montana state officials will discuss how to establish and manage a dedicated fund to support small and medium tourism enterprises.

Delegates will meet with property owners, managers and government officials to explore how they manage wide open spaces and incorporate sustainable adventure tourism activities such as biking, rafting, wildlife viewing and horseback riding. In turn, the international guests will discuss how their land conservancy model works in Namibia and how it might work on reservations, public and private lands. The 10-day tour will wrap up in Bozeman with an American football game as guests of Montana State University.

Facilitating the Sept. 6-16 exchange with the World Wildlife Fund and others is Billings, MT-based Austin-Lehman Adventures (ALA - <http://www.austinlehman.com/>), the active travel company setting [adventure vacations](#) standards on five continents, including Africa.

The Namibian tourism industry representatives, including four conservancy representatives (some of whom are members of the Himba and Herrera tribes), will experience a tour of southeastern Montana and Yellowstone National Park.

Participants include ALA, Conservancy Development Support Services (CDSS), Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations (NACSO), including members of the Himba and Herrera tribes, World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), and award-winning safari operator Wilderness Safaris.

The foreign visitors will learn about adventure tourism, inclusive of such issues as client safety, security and liability, and sustainability as practiced by ALA, an established adventure tour operator conducting business worldwide. Along the way they will be exposed to the guiding practices and interpretation techniques that comprise a significant part of the visitor experience while on an adventure travel tour.

In Yellowstone National Park they will learn from park officials as well as representatives of Xanterra Corporation, the largest US National Park concessionaire, about how they manage their environmental footprint, including management of such issues as clean water, sewage, solid waste, energy and wildlife.

“Namibia exemplifies,” says ALA’s founder/owner, Dan Austin, “a true education into how private and public sectors collaborate with host communities.” Namibia may be the greatest African wildlife recovery story ever told, thanks in great part to the fact that 42% of the land area of the country is under some form of conservation management represented by 71 communal conservancies in Namibia working closely with private reserves and national parks.

“In the process, not only are communities benefitting in ways previously unimaginable, but the national tourism product is being redefined in more equitable and sustainable ways,” notes Austin, pointing out that nearly half of the country’s registered conservancies are adjacent to national parks or in key corridors between protected areas. Wildlife-friendly land uses adjacent to and between parks are enhancing the viability of Namibia’s protected area network. The recovery of prey species, combined with an increased tolerance of community, is facilitating the recovery of high-level predators on a landscape level in north-western Namibia.

Namibia is the only country in Africa where black rhinos are being translocated out of a national park to communal conservancy land areas, in stark and dramatic contrast to the poaching taking place in other African countries. Its free-roaming lion population is expanding thanks to a dramatic decrease in poaching.

As this country repeatedly undertakes the largest road-based wildlife count in the world, its conservation success stories stand out in sharp contrast to most African countries where wildlife populations and habitats are rapidly declining.

NOTE TO EDITORS / WRITERS: Please contact Widness & Wiggins PR (below) if you are interested in covering the entire tour or just the opening night in Billings on Sept 6.

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Contact Widness & Wiggins PR for photos, interviews and more information:

Sara Widness / 802-234-6704 / sara@widnesspr.com

Dave Wiggins / 303-554-8821 / dave@travelnewssource.com

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