



Romancing the hills

Abdul Khaliq, from India, won fourth place in the photography contest with this entry.



Going solar

Syrian Ebla Maleh took second place with this capture.



Beach trash

Catalin Marin, from Romania, gained third place with this image.

By FATMA SALEM
Staff Reporter



Dubai More than 281 entries from different talents around took part in the recent 'Go Green' photography competition from Canon Middle East.

The competition is a part of an ongoing programme to support photography in the region and is designed to raise environmental awareness through the power of images.

'My Green World' is a photographic work of Iranian Fanik Beret, which won best image. The photographer expressed her delight to *Gulf News*.

"When I came to Dubai three years ago I felt I was in the middle of a concrete jungle with so much construction and very little greenery around," the 27-year-old said.

"Little things like planting trees at home and arranging lovely potted plants on my kitchen window sill provides an immense relief to my eyes when I look out from my window, as there are only buildings under construction around. We all can start from our homes then extend it to the surroundings which will encourage the community to adopt the concept."

Regarding her personal responsibility towards nature, the winner added: "I

The many shades of green

ENVIRONMENTAL PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION ATTRACTS HUNDREDS OF ENTRANTS

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Photography as a medium is strong and is capable of conveying complex messages. The competition was apt to ... help people embrace a green lifestyle.”

Abdul Khaliq
Fourth-place winner

acts. In terms of genre, Dubai is a place where a mix of cultures is beautifully blended, which results in very different attitudes towards the environment.”

Catalin therefore suggests people should be educated on the need to 'Go green' by being considerate to the environment and picking up one's own trash. "We must all aim to reduce rubbish and also dispose of it sensibly," he said.

In fourth place was 'Romancing the Greens' from Indian photographer Abdul Khaliq, 39.

"Photography as a medium is strong and is capable of conveying complex messages. The competition was apt to keep the environment as a key priority and help people embrace a green lifestyle. "I have always been inspired by green initiatives and am amazed to see the efforts of the UAE government of transforming a desert into meadows."



My Green World

Iranian photographer Fanik Beret's work took first prize in Canon Middle East's Go Green photography competition.

would definitely cut the use of plastic bags to make UAE a greener place to live in." She said

'Go Green, Go Solar' got the second prize.

"The theme of the competition was perfect to inspire me to think and 'capture' green. I loved the whole

concept as it urged photography enthusiasts to think of a 'green' perspective at a point of time," Syrian winner Ebla Maleh, 28, said.

Igniting message

"People need to think 'green', as it's the need of the time and I think the im-

ages of all the participants have ignited this message at some level to adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle.

"My image portrays the solar energy. I enjoy capturing images of nature and landscapes. The 'Go Green' attitude is something which we must all

adopt, starting from home by incorporating it into our daily lifestyles. I think we must all explore ways to rationalise the way we are depleting our natural resources and be more conscious of the way in which water is consumed."

'Beach Trash' is the

theme of the third-place image from Romanian Catalin Marin. "The competition was a great opportunity to convey a serious message. I am an outdoors person and have always had an issue with rubbish being thrown onto beaches by careless people. The

amount of trash found at public places is atrocious."

The 31 year old criticised the irresponsibility of some people towards the environment.

"My image tries to convey the message that the scenic nature of this country is hampered by negligent

Balloon trip over desert is like a magic carpet flight

24 passengers enjoy the breathtaking view of the sunrise at approximately 915 metres in Al Ain as part of the Balloon Adventure

By NATHALIE FARAH
Staff Reporter

Abu Dhabi The desert cloaked in pre-dawn darkness is quiet, the only sounds come from the ground crew as they rush to prepare everything. The hot air balloons have to be in flight soon, at dawn to be exact.

Captain Peter Kollar, the Managing Director of Balloon Adventure Emirates LLC, gathers everyone around him, energetically explaining what is happening and what the procedures are before everyone climbs into the hot air balloon's basket.

"We have been in operation since 2004 [in Dubai] and we recently began extended our services to people in Abu Dhabi. We fly usually from October until May, however, this year Ramadan finished around the 20th of September so we began our tours earlier and will also probably do the same time next year. In the summer we don't [do tours] because it is simply too hot... but in the winter it's gorgeous, with a gorgeous landscape as well," Kollar said.

Soon, the balloon gently breaks through the clouds, just in time for all 24 passengers to enjoy a breathtaking view of the sunrise at approximately 915 metres, or 3,000 feet.

"I love a good, cloudy day. It's so much more interesting than a clear blue sky," Peter said, grinning. "Now, we will go on our version of a magic carpet ride and look for gazelles and camels. Hopefully, we will see some today," he added. But despite hovering the balloon just a few metres above the



All aboard

Passengers flying high over the desert during the hot air balloon adventures in Al Ain yesterday.

desert sands, the only visible clue that gazelles and camels were in the area was through the imprints they left behind.

"When we first arrived, there was no map of the area. We had to drive around the desert with nothing but our GPS and then use Google Earth to create a map," Kollar explained. "It took about four weeks and a lot of petrol, but we did it," he added, laughing.

Observing his enthusiasm, it is difficult to believe that all of this almost never happened. "Abdullah Rashad, our local partner and someone who I can now call a friend, was on a honeymoon in

New Zealand in 2001 or 2002. He went up on a flight with me and afterwards told me how much he enjoyed it and asked if I could set up something similar in the UAE. At that time, I told him that I wasn't sure I could because I already had a company at that time in Germany and New Zealand...and my wife would kill me if I started another business because I'm travelling all the time," Peter said.

"But he put a bug in my head... I surprised him by calling and saying that I would stop over in Dubai on my way to Germany, because I fly balloons there in the summer," he added.

Soon afterwards, Kollar researched the UAE's climate and went with Abdullah Rashad to meet various officials and meteorologists, and received their certificate from the General Civil Aviation Authority (Air Operator's Certificate AT024).

Convinced that it was possible, he contacted his existing business partner in New Zealand and the three of them agreed to invest, buying the three large and three small hot air balloons that make up the company.

"We are very happy that the Emiratis are very supportive of us. We try to make sure that they understand what we do, that we

take care of the environment and that we are careful about how we fly," Peter said.

"But we don't have many local passengers, which is a pity. I really expected more...we get a lot of expatriate and tourist passengers...but the numbers are improving now and we get a lot of passengers from the GCC, such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait," he added.

So don't miss out on this once in a lifetime adventure, even if you aren't really a morning person. Because no two rides are the same, you never know what to expect on your journey.

LEARN MORE +

Where the action takes place

The balloons are launched from an area just north of Al Ain, about an hour's drive from Abu Dhabi and Dubai. They are approved by the General Civil Aviation Authority and GHQ.

Ticket Prices

Dh950 per adult and **Dh800** for children aged from 5 to 12 years.

Prices are valid until May 31, 2010. (The price is subject to change without prior notification)

Contact

Telephone: +971 4 285 4949

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AHMED KUTTY/Gulf News



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Set, ready, go
Peter Kollar, Managing Director of Balloon Adventure Emirates LLC, prepares the balloon by blowing hot air, and energetically following the safety procedures before the passengers climb into the basket in Al Ain yesterday.

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Peter Kollar
Managing Director, Balloon Adventure

Have your say

Have you ever been on a hot air balloon ride? How was the experience? Tell us at

letter2editor@gulfnews.com