

# Backpacking turtle begins 5,000-km journey home

Tracking device on her back, Odysseus, a loggerhead turtle, is released to see if she will find her way back to birthplace Japan

By [Chang Ai-Lien](#)

THEY were born in Japan, but flew to Singapore at the tender age of one and have lived here ever since.

Now six years old, three of the 20 loggerhead turtles are being released into the sea and tracked to see if they will be able to find their way 5,000 km back home to the beaches of Nagoya, Japan.

'We hope so. That will prove what scientists have suspected all along, that no matter where they are, turtles can use special senses to return to where they were hatched to lay eggs,' said Underwater World International's curatorial director Bruce Mackay.

In a landmark project, [Underwater World in Sentosa](#) is releasing three of its fully-grown turtles over the next two weeks, and hopes to track their journeys for the next year.

Together with scientists from the Port of Nagoya Public born, they will be following the

Underwater World Singapore collaborating on scientific and years, and plans to widen their species.

Yesterday, 92-kg Odysseus, traveller and warrior, was the

It is believed that turtles return earth's magnetic fields, as well

Dr Itaru Uchida, director of the and one of the world's that the turtles will spend the South China Sea, but may turn

The aquarium, the only one in turtles in captivity successfully,

Asked if the box-like antenna attached to the efforts, he said: 'There may be and this is one way to find out.'

TURTLE FACTS
There are seven species of marine turtles, and they are among the world's most endangered species.
Although they breathe air, they can spend as long as three hours submerged.
Marine turtles eat vegetation as well as fish.
Turtles have a lifespan that is at least as long as humans. The oldest turtle is believed to have lived for 182 years.
Marine turtles have lived on earth for over 100 million years. Some early fossil records date back 230 million years.
Unlike dolphins, turtles born and bred in captivity are extremely adaptable and do well when released into the wild.

The 70-year-old scientist, who has been studying turtles since 1955, said that tracking projects have been carried out on these animals for 25 years, but that this was the first study where the turtles' place of birth was known.

In about two out of three cases, the tracking ends prematurely because, say, the device gets dislodged or the turtle is caught and killed.

Understanding the migration patterns of these highly-endangered animals helps in conservation efforts, Dr Uchida added, because if they really do return home to lay eggs, it would be crucial not to develop these beaches, which could hamper breeding.



Freedom at last for Odysseus as she takes off towards the open sea off Sentosa as part of a landmark project. -- WANG HUI FEN

Aquarium, where the turtles were turtles' movement via satellite.

and the aquarium have been conservation projects for eight turtle-tracking project to other

named after the legendary Greek first to begin her voyage.

to their birthplace aided by the as their sense of smell.

Port of Nagoya Public Aquarium foremost turtle experts, believes winter months in the warmer up in Japan in four to five months.

the world to breed hawksbill is sponsoring the \$70,000 project.

transmitter and the flexible turtle's back would hamper mating slight problems, but nobody knows

Loggerhead turtles can be found in the waters around Singapore, but are more common in the sea off Japan.

To tell the scientists exactly where Odysseus roams, a satellite-transmitter cemented onto her shell releases signals when she surfaces to breathe. The signals will be picked up by six satellites circling the globe.

Information such as location and water temperature is collected by Argos, an environmental-monitoring system developed by the French Space Agency Cnes, as well as Nasa and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the US.

Released on Sentosa's Siloso Beach yesterday, the well-fed turtle, which was carried onto the sandy stretch on a canvas stretcher by four Underwater World Singapore staff, attracted a crowd of excited onlookers.

'We may be watching history in the making,' exclaimed British tourist Daisy Hamwell.

Mr Mackay said: 'To see a captive-bred animal returned to the wild feels very good.'