

TourismConcern

research briefing

Animals in Tourism

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In many tourism destinations opportunities to view or interact with wildlife are readily available and are very popular with a large number of consumers. These vary from country to country, with each destination having its own legal and cultural attitudes to animal welfare. Animals can be part of festivals, used as street entertainment, in captivity or viewed in the wild. Animals are often linked to the livelihoods of local communities – whether directly, such as mahouts or snake charmers or indirectly, such as safaris hosted on indigenous people's land.

Even well managed animal tourism such as gorilla trekking, have some negative impacts on the animals. These have to be weighed against the income generated from tourism, without which many of these conservation projects would fail. That is why tourists need the information to make informed and better choices when engaging with animals via tourism.



Wild animal tourism in numbers

75%

Of wildlife tourist attractions have a negative impact on wild animals

80%

Of tourists cannot see the negative impact a Wildlife Tourists Attraction has on animal welfare.

16,000

Is the number of elephants in captivity worldwide – a quarter of the total number on the planet.

5,000

Is the number of captive tigers in the US alone. In the wild there are just 3,200.

1,600

Is the estimated number of bottlenose dolphins being used for entertainment worldwide.

4 million

Number of visitors to SeaWorld San Diego in 2012.

8,000

Is the approximate number of lions kept and bred in captivity in South Africa – double the number of those in the wild or natural reserves.

Source: World Animal Protection

Introduction

Although there is an increasing awareness of animal welfare issues, many tourists are unaware of how their daily decisions impact both animals and local residents in tourist destinations. These include human rights issues, as well as animal welfare concerns.

Local communities have differing attitudes to animal welfare – for some animals are simply economic resources to be used. Conservation and animal rights are often not the top concern for local people in many developing countries, who are often extremely poor and are simply trying to make a living. Tourists have a responsibility to ensure that, if they are paying and supporting an activity, they are not encouraging and sustaining the mistreatment of animals. With this in mind, tourists should seek activities that will support local people and prevent harm.

However, we need to be clear that not all wildlife attractions are negatively impacting animals, and there are some very good practices that contribute to a greater understanding of the issues within the industry. A number of tour operators have already committed to meeting the ABTA Global Animal Welfare Standards and are working with attractions to improve conditions, or stopping selling attractions if they do not meet the necessary improvements. Tourists are also looking for better alternatives when engaging with wildlife; so this report not only highlights some of the most popular wildlife attractions and the animal welfare issues involved, but also some best practice in wildlife attractions.

Animals in Tourism

Wildlife tourism accounts for between 20% and 40% of all global tourism with 3.6 million visitors

Echidna walkabout – best practice

Echidna Walkabout is a Social Enterprise with a mission to preserve Australian wildlife in the wild. All the animals the tourists see are wild, living in their natural habitat. All their tours contribute to preserving their environment, through habitat creation, ghost net removal and research. Since 1993 the Echidna Walkabout has provided exceptional wildlife experiences in the biodiversity hotspots of Australia. They aim to help tourists to see the natural behaviour of wild animals by approaching slowly and quietly without disturbing them.

They adhere to a wildlife no-touch policy on all their tours and believe that by valuing animals in the wild they most effectively conserve their wild habitat.



around the world; a figure that is set to increase. Yet, many of these visits have negative consequences for the animals involved. This report presents findings from desk-based research, which sought to address the following questions:

- What are wildlife attractions?
- What are the ethics of wildlife attractions?
- Is it possible to identify best practice in wildlife attractions?

Wildlife attractions are very diverse, although they can broadly be grouped into five distinct categories.

1. Interactions with captive animals (zoos, elephant trekking);
2. Sanctuaries (whose main purpose is to protect wild animals);

3. Wildlife farms where tourists observe animals bred for another purpose (such as crocodile farms);
4. Street performances (such as snake charming);
5. Wild attractions such as gorilla trekking.

We have excluded consumptive wildlife tourism, such as hunting and fishing, from this report as tourists undertaking these activities will be aware of their direct impacts on the wildlife. Whilst some claim the lucrative business of big game or trophy hunting can help conservation; Tourism Concern, as a principle, does not believe that the killing or harming of animals for either fun or sport can ever be ethical or justified.

Wildlife Attractions

In 2016, Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit analysed 24 types of wildlife attractions across the world, considering both animal welfare and conservation.

Here, animal welfare is scored on the five freedoms:

- *freedom from hunger and thirst;*
- *freedom from discomfort;*
- *freedom from pain, injury and disease;*
- *freedom to behave normally;*
- *freedom from fear and distress.*

The conservation scores were collated using information about where the animals were sourced from (e.g. domesticated vs wild), together with any other beneficial efforts that were used (e.g. education or habitat protection).

Sanctuaries came out of the analysis with broadly positive scores in both welfare and conservations; while captive interactions came out as the worst. Of the 24 attractions investigated, only five had positives for both conservation and welfare (all of

which were sanctuaries). Of the remaining 19, only a further five attractions had positive scores for conservation (including gorilla trekking, lion encounters, sea turtle farms, crocodile farms and gibbon watching). Although, four out of these five had negative welfare scores (gorilla trekking, sea turtle farms, crocodile farms and lion encounters).

The researchers estimate that between 230,000 and 550,000 animals are being held in attractions that have a detrimental affect on their welfare. In contrast, only 1,500 to 13,000 animals are held in attractions that were likely to have beneficial effects on welfare and conservation. When investigating the comments from tourists and visitors about these attractions on TripAdvisor, 80% of visitors did not recognise or respond to the welfare status of the animals.

The classes with the highest numbers of animals (more than 500,000 individual animals) were elephant trekking, bear sanctuaries, sea turtle farms, crocodile farms, bear bile farms, and shark cage diving.

The best and worst wildlife animal attractions

Scores from the Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit research in 2016.

	Conservation score	Welfare score	Overall score
Captive Interactions			
Dolphin Interactions (captive)	-1	-2	-3
Tiger interactions	-1	-3	-4
Lion encounters	1	-1	0
Bear parks	-1	-3	-4
Elephant trekking	-2	-2	-4
Wild attractions			
Dolphin Interactions (wild)	-2	-2	-4
Gorilla Trekking	+3	-1	2
Gibbon watching	+3	0	3
Shark cave diving	-2	-2	-4
Polar bear sightseeing	-1	-2	-3
Sanctuary attractions			
Bear sanctuary	+1	+2	3
Elephant sanctuary	+1	+2	3
Lion sanctuary	+1	+2	3
Orang-utan sanctuary	3	+2	5
Dolphin sanctuary	+1	+2	3
Street performance			
Bear dancing	-2	-3	-5
Snake charming	-2	-3	-5
Hyena men (Nigeria)	-1	-2	-3
Street dancing macaques	-1	-2	-3
Wildlife Farms			
Civet Farm	-1	-3	-4
Sea Turtle farm	+1	-3	-2
Tiger Farms	+1	-3	-2
Crocodile farm	+1	-2	-1
Bear bile farm	-2	-3	-5



Interactions with captive animals

Wildlife tourism that involves interactions with captive animals includes:

- **Marine Mammal parks**
- **Swimming with captive dolphins**
- **Zoos**
- **Tiger Interactions**
- **Walking with lions**
- **Bear parks**
- **Elephant parks / trekking**
- **Working animals**

Marine Mammal parks

Around 3,000 whales and dolphins are held in aquariums, zoos and marine parks globally. This is part of a lucrative industry that has attracted significant negative media coverage in recent years.

Wild orcas and dolphins live in large, complex social groups, and swim vast distances every day in the open ocean. In captivity, these animals are confined to small tanks and therefore may not engage in their natural behaviour.

Whales and dolphins are social animals. In captivity the mental, emotional and physical stresses that they experience can weaken their immune systems and make them prone to disease. Despite captivity being an environment free from predators, pollution and other threats, whales and dolphins have a low life expectancy in captivity. To add to this, the mortality rate for infant whales and dolphins is much higher in captivity.

The captive environment bears little resemblance to the original habitats, and the social groups for species such as the orca whales are often foreign to those nurtured in the wild. The tanks that orca whales are kept in are small, and the water is chemically altered, which causes additional stress. Orcas and other dolphins

navigate by echolocation, which, in artificial environments, can cause disorientation for the animals. The destruction of teeth, from chewing on metal cage bars, as well as collapsed dorsal fins, are both effects that rarely occurs in wild orcas. Captive orca whales have been observed acting aggressively toward other killer whales, themselves, or humans as a result of stress. The only human fatalities from Orcas have occurred with captive whales.

Swimming with captive dolphins

Tourists are increasingly aware that interacting and swimming with captive dolphins at a marine park or aquarium is not ethical, however, many places

still offer this. Many species have been captured and taken from their natural environments. Methods used to capture and transport dolphins are often very dangerous, and can result in the death of the animals. Very often, dolphins are captured from populations that are already under threat from other human activities. Dolphins are wild creatures and unpredictable, even when well trained. Swimmers can incur bruises, scratches, abrasions, bites and even broken bones while interacting with dolphins. Disease transmission is another serious concern, as dolphins carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans; this works both ways. Both land-based pools and sea pens close to shore may contain only very shallow water, which can get too hot in the sun and harm dolphins. Medication is used to dampen the stress levels of dolphins when interacting with swimmers. Furthermore, dolphins are at risk of collisions with swimmers and other dolphins, and small objects such as jewellery and fingernails often damage their skin.



Zoos

Many are aware of the ethical issues around zoos, and while it is true that some institutions breed endangered species and help in conservation (either to protect the gene pool or for reintroduction), it is also true that around 90% of animals in zoos are not endangered. While some animals do better in captivity than in the wild (captive tigers generally do quite well and there are now 15,000 to 20,000 worldwide, outnumbering their wild relatives five to one) and some, like the South China tiger now only exist in zoos. The majority of zoos however, simply keep animals for our entertainment – which isn't ethical.

Tiger Selfies

According to the *World Animal Protection* the 'tiger-selfie' is a fast-growing industry, driving over 33% more tigers into captivity in Thailand in five years. In 2015 there were 830 tigers in the country's entertainment venues. This compares to 623 in 2010. Tiger entertainment venues are increasing in popularity, as tourists want to encounter a wild tiger in captivity at close range. After being separated from their wild families, and handled by numerous captors, the tigers live in confined spaces, are chained, and often endure harsh training programmes to prepare for entertainment activities. Thailand is a hotspot for tiger tourism with many attractions and activities being widely promoted by travel companies and travel websites.

Investigations by several organisations into the Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi province have been a particular



focus for the media. The illegal practices were initially exposed in 2009, and in June 2016 Thai authorities seized all of its 147 tigers and the temple was closed. However, there remain a number of major tiger entertainment venues in Thailand such as Sriracha Tiger Zoo in Pattaya, which has the highest number of tigers in captivity. According to *World Animal Protection*, Sriracha Tiger Zoo is also the venue with the poorest conditions.

Walking with lions

Lion cubs are bred and taken from their natural habitats within a month of birth in order to supply the growing lion tourism industry, mostly located in Southern Africa. Tourists handle the cubs for long durations when posing for photos with them. Hitting the cubs is encouraged when displaying signs of aggression. As the cubs grow, they are used for the 'walking with lions' tours. The lions are trained

to 'safely' walk with tourists, sometimes on leads. These lions remain in captivity for the entirety of their life, as they cannot be released into the wild.

Visiting bear parks

Bears are kept in sterile 'pits'. These pits are often overcrowded. As bears are mainly solitary in the wild, overcrowding can also lead to infighting and injuries. The stress associated with these captive conditions can increase the susceptibility of animals to diseases. Circus-style entertainment is still a prevalent feature of tourist attractions involving bears.

Elephant Trekking

The Asian elephant is now an endangered species with an estimated population of approximately 50,000 alive, of which 50% are held in captivity. Tourism could play an important role in their conservation. The *Elephant Asia Rescue and Survival*

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Foundation states: “*responsible elephant tourism can help to save the elephants throughout Asia but only if camps maintain the highest level of elephant care, food requirements, hygiene and environmental enrichment.*” It is important the tourists and tour operators understand the issues, as long-term elephant welfare will depend on ensuring best practice guidelines are in place, that these are enforced and that tourists are engaged and understand the issues.

The tradition of using elephants in industry has mostly ended, mainly due to irresponsible over-logging. The collapse of the industry creates huge problems for the mahouts (elephant keepers) who have to find a way to pay for the care and upkeep of their elephants, which can consume up to 200 kilograms of food a day. Mahouts have to find other ways to support their financial responsibilities, which is why many have begun begging in the streets or have turned to tourism via trekking, rides and entertainment.

Elephant rides are popular tourist activities, especially in Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal and other parts of Asia (although in Nepal elephants are only ridden for wildlife safaris). They are also becoming popular in some regions of Africa. The elephant is the largest land mammal; it is intelligent, social and emotional. Riding elephants is, in many ways, the land-based equivalent of swimming with dolphins. However, like dolphins, elephants are essentially wild animals and often subjected to various stresses induced by their artificial environments and maltreatment. There is now a popular belief among tourists that elephant trekking should be avoided and many tour operators now refuse to offer any holidays with elephants. However we also need evidence

based policies that would help tour operators to identify responsible elephant tourism and ensure that agents on the ground are handling and managing elephants in accord with best practice.

Some countries refer to captive elephants as domestic elephants. However, elephants have never been truly domesticated (being tamed is not the same as being selectively bred to be tame) and it is difficult to provide appropriate conditions for them in captivity.

Like humans, elephants socialise, have families, form friendship groups, feel pain, and have a full spectrum of emotions. When at trekking camps, elephants are often not with other elephants and some end up living solitary lives. Elephants need stimulation, enrichment and the freedom to behave naturally, which they are not capable of when in captivity. Equally, elephants are not designed to endure extended physical activity. Unnatural social grouping, lack of space and stimulation can lead to a host of issues ranging from skin and foot

ailments, increased susceptibility to infectious diseases, arthritis and circulatory problems. It can also lead to stereotypic behaviours, such as repetitive swaying from side to side and pacing, which is a sign that the elephant is, or has been, distressed. Most of the money from elephant trekking goes to businesses that make the arrangements for the tours, such as the hotels, travel agents and guides, rather than to the person who owns and cares for the elephant.

Every captive elephant must have some training to allow it to understand common verbal commands and to accept veterinary treatment. In the days of wild capture, the elephant was often tamed using very harsh techniques which included using small confines, bull hooks, bamboo sticks spiked with nails, starvation tactics, and sleep deprivation in order that the elephants become submissive to humans. There are some extreme videos labelled as “Phajaan training” on the Internet that



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show these cruel training methods designed to 'break the elephants spirit'. However these methods are much less common today. In Northern Thailand, "Phajaan" is in fact not a training method at all, but a spiritual ceremony associated with the training. This ceremony is an important cultural tradition and is performed before most elephants are trained no matter what training technique is used. Thankfully attitudes are changing and more owners are now recognising the benefits of using more humane and ethical training methods. Tourists should ask camps how they train their baby elephants and only pick camps that understand positive reinforcement and use it from an early age.

Despite the process of training elephants being controversial, an outright ban would also introduce complications, including mahouts being unemployed and deteriorating prospects for the elephants made redundant. Ensuring that the alternatives to trekking are not more harmful to the elephants is essential; as is the continuation of any practices in elephant trekking that help to conserve even more endangered animals such as tigers and rhinos.

In Thailand, there are both responsible and irresponsible examples of tourism involving

elephants. In parts of northern Thailand, there are multiple elephant camps that allow for elephant viewing, bathing and feeding in an open-range environment, which is considered responsible elephant tourism. In the same parts of northern Thailand there are also elephant camps that offer elephant treks to tourists without the 'softer' interactions with elephants, which is not regarded as responsible, as there are viable, similar alternatives which are far better for elephant welfare.

The situation in south Laos (which borders Thailand) is different, as the existing options for elephant-orientated tourism are more limited. The south of Laos is less developed than most areas of Thailand and poaching is prevalent. In this part of Asia there are some elephant treks offered to tourists, which may provide a better existence for the animals until the alternatives can be improved.

Equally there are examples, such as the Chitwan National Park in Nepal, where elephant rides are being used as a positive force for conservation. The park and its buffer zone protect some of the last remaining Bengal tigers and Indian rhinoceroses, as well as wild elephants and leopards. Elephant safaris are one of the

most popular, and safe, ways to discover these exceptionally rare species in Chitwan. Revenue from these safaris contributes greatly to the upkeep of the park and surrounding area, and the protection of its wildlife.

Ethical travellers should take some time and find out about the options before taking part in elephant tourism. All good tour operators will have a policy on elephant tourism and should be able to justify the options they offer. Elephant camps should ensure that elephants are in their natural environment as much as possible even when performing activities, not forced to work in extreme heat and given a chance to socialise in such a manner that they can also avoid unwanted attention from unfriendly herd members. The *Association of Southeast Asian Nations Captive Elephant Working Group* suggests the following trekking guidelines:

- A single adult human of average weight (approximately 80-90 kilos for males and 65-75 kilos for females) plus a lightweight howdah (elephant chair), as well as a mahout trainer sitting on the neck. This would be a ride of up to about one hour;
- Two adult humans of average weight plus a lightweight howdah (as well as a mahout trainer on the neck). This would be a ride of up to about 45 minutes;
- More than the above weight? Please do not ride for any duration, as elephant will experience discomfort early on in the trek;
- There are some good elephant camps that provide guests the opportunity to interact with these majestic animals, thereby providing income and enrichment for these already captive elephants, while improving the welfare their mahouts could otherwise provide.



Working Animals

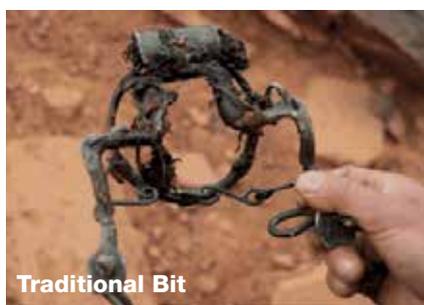
In addition to elephants, there are a number of other working animals around the world, many of whom are largely unnoticed by the tourism industry. One example of this is the use of pack mules that work in Morocco's mountain tourism industry. The social status of mules and mule-owners is relatively low; they can be easily exploited and blamed for the poor conditions of their mules. No training is offered to improve their knowledge and understanding of best practice for rearing mules. Neither is their sufficient guidance on the best possible equipment available for their mules and few have any social security or health care for either themselves or their mules.

So choosing a mule and muleteer is not entirely straightforward, however all trekkers and visitors to places such as the Atlas mountains in Morocco have a duty of care and should empower themselves to make well-informed, responsible choices. Most tourists will not want to unwittingly contribute to the exploitation of muleteers or be responsible for animal neglect, abuse and cruelty.

A failure to understand good muleteering practice means that many pack mules are worked using the traditional "bit", where head collars would suffice. A good understanding of mule behaviour and of a mule's needs recognise that these are grazing animals who can feed on the move and, in doing so, meet some of their essential behavioural and nutritional needs. Traditional bits, especially those that have been produced locally and poorly made cause acute pain and suffering to the animal and make it difficult for them to feed. When they break they are often fixed with wire and the bits can cause raw open wounds in the mule's mouth, many of which can go unseen as they are under the tongue. The mule will be

in constant pain, which can also cause her to struggle to eat. If the mule can't eat, she loses condition and gets weaker. The injuries can be even worse if the muleteer is inexperienced or rough handed.

Make sure that the muleteers are not using traditional bits – tourists should refuse to employ or travel with anyone working their mule in a traditional bit, so it is important to recognise the difference between a traditional bit and the more human stainless steel bits.



Traditional Bit



Humane Bit

The average lifespan of mules in developed countries is 27 years, and some live into their forties or even more. Sadly, the average lifespan of donkeys and mules in developing countries is considerably less. Meagre food, scarce or absent veterinary care, and heavy workloads contribute to the shortened lifespan. Some of this is a result of the industry not offering sufficient help to the communities that buy mules to work, and which look after these animals.

Overloading of the mules is the most obvious problem that the industry is responsible for – and could address quite easily. This causes problems as mules suffer chronic damage to their joints and tendons. It can also lead

to mules falling and suffering fractures. Riding a loaded mule is detrimental to the mule's welfare, and is storing up problems (including dehydration, fatigue, exhaustion and injury) for later. It is recommended that mules are not loaded with more than 80kgs. Unfortunately most companies do not have a clear policy to ensure mules are not overloaded and that owners do not ride them when loaded; however tourists can help by asking for such policies and being aware of the issues.

Other common welfare abuses that are currently the norm in the industry include:

- Failing to water mules at the start of the day leading to dehydration.
- Tethering mules with thin nylon ropes that cause rope burns.
- Failure to repair and maintain equipment leading to injury.
- Failure to provide good foot care that respects the natural function of the hoof.

Questions to ask of a tour operator include:

- Do you pay a fair wage and how is this calculated? For example, in Morocco a minimum of 150 dirhams per day is needed.
- Do you ensure pack mules are not ridden or overloaded?
- Do you guarantee that mules will never be worked in traditional bits?
- Do you insist on mules being worked when loaded in head collars?
- Do you provide a budget for the mules' food to be purchased?
- Do you provide training for your muleteers?
- Do you provide first aid kits and grooming kits for your mule team?

Wild Attractions

Wild attractions include:

- **Dolphin interactions (wild)**
- **Gorilla Trekking**
- **Gibbon watching**
- **Shark cave diving**
- **Polar bear sightseeing**

Wild attractions can provide opportunities and livelihoods for the local community, which in turn gives the local people an incentive to protect wildlife, thus helping long-term conservation efforts. Conversely, improperly managed attractions can have an array of negative impacts on both the conservation and welfare status of animals and individuals. These impacts include short- and long-term animal behavioural changes including stress and aberrant physiological responses, altered feeding and reproductive behaviour and habitat alteration/loss. While, viewing animals in their own habitat can be positive in terms of conservation efforts, even well managed viewings can have negative impacts on the animals. If considering a safari, tourists should also take into account whether local people are involved and benefit from the activity and ensure that wildlife viewing is not taking place at the detriment of local communities or indigenous people.

Dolphin interactions (wild)

In many countries, feeding and/or harassing dolphins in the wild is illegal. While many people love the idea of swimming with wild dolphins, it is very difficult to ensure that it is not an intrusive or stressful experience for the dolphins involved. In some locations, dolphins are repeatedly disturbed by boats that drop swimmers into the water next to them, and it has been documented that dolphins will leave their usual homes in favour of quieter areas. Disruption to feeding, resting, nursing and other behaviour may have a long-term impact on the health and wellbeing of individual dolphins and populations. There are also safety concerns, for both swimmers and dolphins, risk of injury to dolphins by boat propellers and a risk that dolphins will become dependent on humans for food, as some boat operators entice them towards the swimmers that use food.

Gorilla Trekking

Mountain gorillas are critically endangered, which makes the life-changing experience of visiting them in their natural habitat even more extraordinary. There are said to be less than 900 African mountain gorillas left in the wild, although exact estimates vary. Although gorilla trekking is a well-regulated,

closely guided activity there are still issues with humans getting close to wild animals. The trekking of gorillas does cause some discomfort among the gorillas through photographing and filming them and they are susceptible to human-borne infectious diseases.

On the whole, the gorilla trekking tourism industry is having a positive impact on the communities in and around the national parks. Contributing to community uplift in poverty-stricken areas, tourism offers employment and economic benefits that create positive spin-offs for gorilla conservation. As local people benefit from gorilla tourism and learn more about these primates their relationship with the great apes shifts. Human-wildlife conflict is reduced when people understand gorillas better and have a vested interest in the well-being of the species. The gorillas are increasingly seen as income-generating resources that are valuable as long-term tourist attractions. In some cases, poachers have turned into game rangers, now working on anti-poaching patrols that play an indispensable role in keeping the gorillas alive.



Gibbon watching

According to Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit gibbon watching is one of the best wild attractions to undertake – scoring high for conservation with no negative animal welfare issues when executed correctly. Gibbon watching trips are available in Thailand Cambodia and Laos, and by providing an income for local people help protect the rainforests from illegal logging.

Shark diving

Another animal attraction is diving with sharks, most often through the use of cage diving. Here, divers are lowered into the water encased in a metal cage and large sharks are attracted to the area through the use of chum: a mixture of sardines, fish blood and other fish. The sharks follow the oil and blood trail and are enticed to the area where tourists are. The ethical issues here surround the use of chum to attract the sharks in the first place, as many people believe that feeding wildlife can alter animal behaviour. It is for this reason that the US state of Florida outlawed feeding wild sharks in 2001. Additionally, feeding sharks may lead to an increase in human shark attacks, as these magnificent predators may associate human activity with being fed, and therefore seek out areas with high human activity such as beaches.

However, the ethics around diving with sharks is not as clear-cut as some of the other wildlife attractions. Cage diving operators insist there is no association with chumming and human attacks, and they suggest that the educational experience of learning more about shark behaviour improves the visibility

Gibbon Spotting Cambodia

Gibbon Spotting Cambodia allows wildlife enthusiasts and those concerned with the conservation of these primates to experience the incredibly rare Northern Yellow-Cheeked Gibbons' in their natural surroundings.

In order to boost efforts to protect this newly discovered species as well as their environment, Gibbon Spotting Cambodia provide small groups of tourists to travel to Ban Lung, Ratanakiri, where it is possible to track and follow a habituated family of Gibbons. By limiting the amount of people to 6 per trek, they have kept the human impact on the environment at a level that is not only sustainable but has the minimum impact on the gibbons.

The Northern Yellow Cheeked Gibbons, based in Ratanakiri were discovered only in 2010. They have since discovered that an estimated 500 Gibbons reside there making them the largest population of this type of Gibbon in the world. Profits from the tours are re-invested in the local communities and protecting the Gibbon's natural environment. Local people are employed in positions such as trackers, guides and wildlife enforcement, which in turn ensures the long-term and sustainable benefit to both Gibbons and local people. The project has already supported the construction of a new bridge, three new schools and zero-interest businesses loans to support local entrepreneurs. Additionally, by providing an income to local people, the project has reduced illegal logging in the rainforest, which protects the entire ecosystem.

of these endangered species. Tour operators also insist that the use of chum only attracts sharks, which are already in the area, rather than luring in sharks from long distances away. The Shark Trust, a UK-based charity suggests, *"Sharks are opportunistic and learn quickly, but there is little documented evidence that feeding sharks causes them to depend on hand-outs from humans, or increases their aggressiveness or likelihood of attacking people."*

Polar bear sightseeing

There is a paradoxical issue surrounding long-distance tourism to view polar bears, a form of tourism, which is disproportionately (on a per capita basis) responsible for greenhouse gases emissions that are negatively affecting survival chances of the species. Equally polar bear sightseeing

Before cage diving we suggest that you:

- Investigate the dive operators before hand – some charter boats have been reported as toying with sharks, encouraging mouth gaping and publicising the 'sharks as man-eaters' myth.
- Avoid those operators, which catch other shark species to use as chum.
- Choose wisely. Some shark cage diving operations are better than others—including better safety records, better practices, and better cages. Before you pick a boat, ask lots of questions, for example, "How long will I actually get to be in the water with the sharks?"

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has increased over the last few years as the phenomenon of “last chance tourism” is influencing more tourists to view polar bears before climate change renders them extinct. They are few conservation benefits associated with polar bear sightseeing and a number of negative animal welfare issues with some trips, although most of these could be addressed through better education, regulation and enforcement.

Many visitors are hobby photographers who crave

the trophy shot to validate the experience and justify the expense. In the bid for satisfied customers, the rules and ethics of polar bear watching is easily compromised. Bears have been fed from the back of tour boats to attract them, and the prescribed distance of 27 metres that keeps bears from getting stressed and tourists from getting injured or even killed are often breached. There is strong pressure from tourists to get closer, and reportedly a few have forsaken boat captains who refuse to do

this, traveling instead with those who will. Any interaction with the bears, such as harassment or attempting to draw their attention, is discouraged to keep them from getting habituated. Still, some people ask their guide to make a bear stand up, hoping for that prize-winning photo.

It is important that tourists are better educated on the issues so that they don't put pressure on the guides – equally tourists can have a real role in enforcement, by reporting poor practice where it occurs.



Sanctuary attractions

Ideally a wildlife sanctuary should be a place of security for the animals, without fear of harm, and there are many examples of responsible sanctuaries providing excellent care for animals. However, some wildlife attractions have started marketing themselves as ‘sanctuaries’ – a rather different experience altogether. With this change in marketing practice, the clear lines between wildlife attraction and sanctuary are becoming increasingly blurred.

According to the *World Animal Protection* Charity: “If you can ride it, hug it, or have a selfie with the wild animal, the chances are it is a cruel venue. Do not go.”

Walking with lions

A wildlife attraction that has gained a lot of publicity recently is walking with lions. Here, tourists are offered the chance to walk with the ‘king of beasts’, as well as petting lion cubs and interacting with juvenile animals. Habitat destruction has led to a dramatic decline in wild lion numbers, from around 50,000 in the 1950s to around 21,000 currently. As a result of the scarcity of wild lions, a tourism-driven industry has sprung up to allow tourists interactions with these splendid animals. This involves the use of captive-bred animals, which are often separated from their mothers at a very young age (typically within a month). These animals are then hand-reared for the tourism industry, for ‘hands-on’ tourism.

Questions to ask before you visit a sanctuary:

- What animals does the sanctuary hold? Are they endangered? If yes, can they guarantee that the animals have been obtained legally?
- Does the sanctuary actively promote educational and informational activities relating to the species held? Most genuine sanctuaries provide plenty of information and education.
- Does the sanctuary promote close contact with wild animals? Most responsible sanctuaries do not support these activities.
- Does the sanctuary make the animals perform tricks? Responsible organisations do not condone such behaviours, preferring visitors the opportunity to observe normal animal behaviour instead.
- Does the sanctuary support conservation programmes, and can it provide evidence for such support? Many sanctuaries financially support conservation areas relating to the species of interest – look for such support on their website.
- Is the sanctuary regularly inspected by governmental organisations, or other monitoring activities? Most recognised sanctuaries are regularly inspected for signs of good animal health and that the animals are appropriately housed.

The main ethical problem with this revolves around the fate of these ‘surplus’ captive animals. While some attractions indicate

that once the lions have reached a certain age, these animals will be re-introduced to the wild. In practise this may prove



difficult, as the animals have become accustomed to humans. As they were removed from their mothers at such an early stage of their development, the necessary skills for hunting and survival in the wild have not yet been learnt, and in many cases these captive animals are kept alive for 'canned hunting'. This is where wealthy individuals pay to hunt older lions, which are kept in an enclosure.

In summary, it is unlikely that walking with lion attractions provides real benefits to the species as a whole, and is more akin to raising animals for slaughter than real conservation. However, there are a number of sanctuaries, which do not permit interaction and there is no breeding

- www.shamwariconservationexperience.com
- Global White Lion Conservation Trust – <http://whitelions.org/volunteer/>

Questions to ask before you volunteer with lions (or other big cats):

- Do you allow interaction between lions and the volunteers?
True sanctuaries do not allow any kind of interaction between lions and volunteers.
- Do you breed lions, and if yes, are the cubs reared by the pride, or by humans?
Beware of attractions suggesting that the mother has abandoned her cubs; this is not normally the case. Cubs raised by lionesses normally remain with the pride for up to a year; well beyond the date where cubs are used for walking 'experiences'. If cubs are reared by humans, this results in the lionesses coming back into oestrus, allowing further cubs to be born.
- Do you release animals back into the wild?
It is not possible to release hand-reared animals back into the wild.
- Do you sell or trade lions?
After 12 months, the cubs become too large and potentially dangerous for walking with; many attractions will suggest they send surplus animals to zoos or other sanctuaries – ask to see documentation.
- How does your work contribute to education and conservation?
Breeding for research is not an acceptable answer – the behaviours exhibited by captive lions are unlikely to be similar to those in the wild. Is a proportion of the profits of this attraction going to educate local people in the requirements for habitat preservation?

Bear Sanctuary – Animals Asia Foundation

UK ex-pat Jill Robinson MBE (pictured) founded the *Animals Asia Foundation* when she discovered how thousands of Asiatic black bears were being raised in factory farm conditions on Chinese bear bile farms (the bile is sold for use in traditional medicines). After years of tireless campaigning, the rescue centre was established in 2000 following an unprecedented agreement with the Chinese authorities to release 500 farmed bears. The sanctuary is open to the public and visitors travel for miles to see the bears experience freedom after spending decades in tiny crush cages.



Street Performance

- **Bear dancing**
- **Snake charming**
- **Hyena men in Nigeria**
- **Street dancing macaques**

Animals are transported across the country in cramped boxcars or semi-truck trailers; chained or caged in enclosures; and are separated from their natural environments. Encouraging street performances and paying vendors fuels the demand for animals, which are either cruelly captured from the wild or bred in poor conditions.

Posing with animals is a lucrative business, and tourists are encouraged to pay to have their photos taken with a variety of captive wild animals.

- The stress of repeatedly handling wild animals often has a detrimental effect on their health and welfare.
- Young animals such as lion and tiger cubs are often removed from their mothers at a very early age and used as photographic props until they are too large to handle, at which time they may be old or killed and replaced with a new cub.
- Wild animals used as photographic props are frequently drugged, which has serious implications for their health.
- Many potentially dangerous animals reportedly have their mouths wired shut or are chained so tightly that they are barely able to move for many hours at a time.
- Many animals, particularly big cats, are declawed in order to protect human participants, which is a painful surgical procedure.
- The canine teeth of some animals may also be removed for the safety of handlers and participants.

Bear dancing

Bear dancing takes place when bears are taken from the wild as cubs, and are forced to 'dance' on the streets, mainly used as a form of begging. Passers-by, including young children and families, pay to watch a bear be decorated with ribbons and bells. Sadly, the bears are trained using inhumane methods and live their lives in distress.

Snake charming

Snake charming is the practice of pretending to hypnotize a snake by playing an instrument called pungi or bansuri. A

typical performance may also include handling the snakes or performing other seemingly dangerous acts, as well as other street performance staples, like juggling and sleight of hand. The practice is most common in India, though other Asian nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Malaysia are also home to performers, as are the North African countries of Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. The snakes are captured and transported from their natural habitats. Their teeth are removed, often without anaesthetic; their mouths are often sewn partly shut; and their venom ducts are disabled with techniques using hot needles. A snake's life expectancy in this environment is much lower than the average life expectancy. The "dance" these snakes perform is actually a reactive sway to the snake charmer's movements as a means of self-defence from attack. Snake charming has been banned through the introduction of the Indian Wildlife Act of 1972.



Hyena men in Nigeria

The Hyena men or (Hyena Boyz) as they are commonly known throughout most of Nigeria and Niger, West Africa, are renowned for their animal street entertainment. This involves the “taming” of wild Spotted Hyenas”. The Hyena Boyz group targets young and naive tourists who travel to Nigeria via Southern and Central Africa or from overseas. The Spotted Hyena is the main attraction, due to its fierceness, reputation, and unusual looks. Tourists and locals that give money to the Hyena Boyz are feeding an illegal trade. Hyenas are carnivorous mammals, and do not make kind, loyal and loving pets. Which is why the animals are mostly subdued, secured with strong motorcycle chains, which they are muzzled with. The muzzles only come off when the men feed the animals.



Street dancing macaques

Trained endangered macaque monkeys known as “topeng monyet” can still be seen performing on the streets of Indonesia. The street performances usually involve the monkeys wearing masks, such as dolls’ heads or attire to mimic humans,

with the monkeys trained to act out human activities such as shopping, riding bicycles or other simulations of human behaviour. Poverty drives the handlers to exploit the monkeys in the hope of earning small change. The monkeys are kept chained in “monkey villages,” where they are trained to perform to stand on two feet, jump through rings, pull carts, and other activities. The most popular method poachers use to catch them is to shoot the mother and then prise the clinging baby off her. Baby macaques are preferable as they have a longer life as performers. The poachers are paid £2 for each monkey by dealers, who sell them on to street “entertainers” in Jakarta for £5 each.

The monkeys are kept upside down so they learn how to walk upright and chains and clamps are used to ensure the monkeys remain standing. Starvation techniques are used to gain obedience from the animals. These highly social primates are forced to live inside cramped wooden crates and can’t interact with each other, causing them further distress.



Wildlife farms

- Civet farm
- Sea turtle farm
- Tiger farm
- Crocodile / Alligator farms
- Bear bile farms

Wildlife farms are establishments for breeding and raising wild animals in order to either harvest products from the animals or in some cases to produce whole animals to aid conservation efforts. While many domestic farming practices are far from ethical, farming wild animals has some specific issues. Many places supplement their income by allowing tourists to visit the farms where tourists can view the animals and in some cases buy the products or engage with the animals. Although some farms, such as crocodile or sea turtle farms, can help in conservation projects in nearly all cases animal welfare is poor. Further, by creating a market in animal parts, especially for endangered species such as tigers, farms can undermine conservation efforts.

Civet Farms

The Asian palm civet is a small, nocturnal mammal that lives in the trees and forests of South and Southeast Asia. Asian palm civets are believed to be one of the most common species of civet, however, growing demand for civet coffee, or *Kopi Luwak* as it is also known in Indonesia, has led to an increase in civets being captured from the wild and fed coffee beans to produce this unusual beverage.

Civet coffee is produced across the island of Bali by civet 'cats' kept in cages to produce gourmet coffee for visiting tourists. There are now more than 16 different civet coffee plantations on one popular tourist highway of Gianyar and Bangli in Bali all the plantations are intended for international tourists visiting Bali.

In the wild, civets climb trees to reach the ripe fruit, but in captivity, they are fed many coffee berries leading to nutrient deficiencies. Civets can be kept caged for at least three years before they are released back

into the wild, and that the lack of nutrition and the stress from confinement causes them to lose their fur, and also lowers their life expectancy through debilitation.

The cramped cages in which civets are kept have wire floors that cut into their feet causing them physical and mental distress. They do not have shelter to hide. Many of the civet coffee farmers are uneducated on how to care for their animals, and the civets often become ill or die to produce the coffee.

Sea Turtle Farms

As solitary swimmers, sea turtles cover thousands of miles, traversing the world's oceans and diving depths of up to 135 metres. Across the world, facilities from the Cayman Islands to Sri Lanka offer tourists the opportunity to get up close with these endangered animals, often under the guise of promoting conservation aims. However, there is only one sea turtle farm, the Cayman Turtle Farm. The Farm claims it decreases sea turtle poaching by offering a source of turtle meat, however there is no humane way of farming sea turtles; a reality underlined by the fact that the Cayman Turtle Farm is the last facility of its kind left in the world.

The Farm is home to over 9,500 turtles, hosted in overcrowded tanks, which is a leading cause for illness, stress, and in some cases cannibalism. Some are designated for the production of food, while other are released in the name of 'conservation'. These releases potentially threaten wild turtle populations by spreading diseases known to be prevalent in the Cayman Turtle Farm's tanks.



With other facilities there are some simple questions you can research to try to make sure your holiday money is not funding illegal and unethical practices. Firstly, find out the purpose of the place you are going to. Across the world different facilities working with sea turtles have different reasons for existence, and getting to the bottom of what the purpose of the place you want to visit is will give you an indication on whether or not it is good for turtles.

Are turtles being bred for release? This process is often called “head-starting” and is quite dated. While those rearing turtles in captivity for eventual release into the wild may have good intentions, many scientists believe that captive bred turtles miss out on a key part of their natural development, which equips them for life in the wild. Additionally, turtles are known to return to the beaches they were born to lay their own eggs. This could be dangerous for captive bred animals.

Some places release rehabilitated turtles that have been injured, whereas meaningful conservation programmes do not just focus on releasing turtles into the sea, but also on keeping tabs on the animals to gauge survival rates.

Look out for evidence of the chance to handle turtles. On the surface, this activity seems a brilliant photo opportunity, but in reality, turtles find being handled extremely stressful. As well as the obvious hazards of stress and the potential of being dropped or roughly gripped, there are less obvious risks too. Sea turtles have extremely sensitive skin, and chemicals in things like sun cream or insect repellent on your hands can

hurt them. What is more, sea turtles can spread diseases like salmonella or E.coli to you when you handle them. In order to protect both turtles and people, turtles should be handled as infrequently as possible, by staff wearing gloves.

By asking a few simple questions you will discover whether or not the place you want to visit is turtle friendly. Do not be fooled by a shiny website and lofty claims to be contributing to conservation aims.

Tiger Farms

There are 200 estimated tiger farms across Asia, many of which are likely to be involved in the illegal trade of the big cats. The farms are captive facilities breeding tigers for the commercial trade in tiger products and parts, with many masquerading as tourist attractions. Tourists who visit these farms are usually unaware how the establishments' practices are fuelling the illegal wildlife trade and jeopardising the recovery of wild tigers.

Big Cat Rescue's 12 Reasons Why Tiger Farms Are Bad For Tigers

1. Tiger farms raise tigers for their biological components. They are killed for their bones, meat, and pelts.
2. Tiger farming promotes the illegal trade. Farming tigers for trade increases market demand for their parts and fuels poaching of wild tigers throughout Asia. It will always be cheaper to kill a tiger in the wild than raise one in captivity.
3. Tigers on tiger farms tend to be obese and malnourished due to inappropriate diets and inadequate opportunities for natural behaviour and exercise.
4. Tigers on tiger farms are kept in unnatural groups, often based on gender and age. In the wild, tigers are naturally solitary creatures.
5. Tigers on farms are not humanely euthanized. Rather, they are starved to death.
6. The tiger farming industry has absolutely no value for conservation. Tigers on tiger farms are inbred and crossbred from captive-born tigers. They cannot be released in the wild.
7. Tiger range countries with tiger farms are using funds to promote tiger farming instead of funding true and effective conservation programs that would benefit wild tiger populations.
8. Tiger farms serve as tourist attractions, where visitors are misled to believe that the cats are tame or domesticated and bred for conservation purposes.
9. Tiger farms also profit from cub petting pay-to-play schemes, where young cubs are taken from their mothers to be used as photos props.
10. Adult tigers are often de-clawed or de-fanged and made to perform in shows where trainers use abuse and intimidation to force the cats to act out unnatural behaviours and tricks.
11. Tiger farms are not just horrible for tigers they also breed other big cats for their parts, such as jaguars and lions. Livestock fair no better. As part of the attraction, tourists pay for the cheap thrill of throwing live chickens, lambs, cows, and other animals into the tiger pits to be torn apart. Because captive-born tigers do not know how to properly kill prey, these animals suffer long agonizing deaths.
12. Tigers may be housed in group pits or small metal and concrete cages, where they often stand in their own filth.

Crocodilian farms

A crocodile (or alligator) farm is an establishment for breeding and rearing of crocodilians in order to produce crocodile and alligator meat, leather, and other goods. Many species of both alligators and crocodiles are farmed internationally, mostly for their skins, which can fetch hundreds of pounds each, but also for meat. To offset overhead costs and have a regular source of income, crocodilian facilities often add tourism; in this way alligator farming can assist native species and provide people with work. Alligator farming has minimal adverse effects on the environment, and has at least two positive direct effects on alligator conservation. Because the luxury goods industry has a reliable stream of product,

illegal poaching is reduced. Juvenile crocodilians can also be released into the wild to support a steady population. However there are welfare concerns, which include the threat of crocodilian diseases such as caiman pox, adenoviral hepatitis, mycoplasmosis, and chlamydiosis. Crocodiles also suffer from stress in confined spaces such as farms, leading to disease outbreaks. On farms, their body temperature can get also too high, which affects the animals' immune system, and puts them at risk of various illnesses. Another concern is for the cleanliness of the water in enclosures.

So although crocodile and alligator farms have some benefits in terms on conservation, they score low in terms of animal welfare.



Bear Bile Farms

According to Animals Asia, more than 10,000 bears are kept on bile farms in China, and official figures put the number in Vietnam at about 1,200. The bears have their bile extracted on a regular basis, which is not only used in traditional medicine but also in many ordinary household products. Bile is extracted using various painful, invasive techniques, all of which can cause infection in the bears. This cruel practice continues despite the availability of a large number of effective and affordable herbal and synthetic alternatives. Most farmed bears are kept permanently in small cages. Some bears are caged as cubs and never released, with many kept caged for up to 30 years. Most farmed bears are starved and dehydrated, and suffer from multiple diseases and malignant tumours that can cause fatalities.



Conclusions and recommendations

As tourists we have a responsibility to ensure that our holidays do not cause more harm than good. Tourists should always try to ensure that their holiday benefits local people, protects the environment, and does not negatively impact animal welfare or conservation efforts.

1. Do your research!

Most people do not set out to do harm but often unwittingly do so because they are unaware of their impacts. Tourists will happily ride elephants in Thailand as they think it is part of the experience, but once people realise the suffering this can cause, most change their minds and seek out more ethical options. There are clearly some very negative wildlife attractions, which should be avoided, such as wildlife farms or street performances. However, there are some very good projects that not only aid in conservations but also provide a legitimate and ethical living to local people. Tourists have a responsibility for the impacts they have, and can lower their impact by undertaking a little research.

2. Wild animals are not pets

Most people visit wildlife tourism attractions because they love wild animals and want an authentic wildlife experience. An authentic wildlife tourism experience will not allow contact and interactions between wild animals and tourists. Authentic experiences mean:

- Never riding a wild animal;
- Never swimming with a captive wild animal;
- Never petting, holding, or hugging a wild animal;

- Never washing a wild animal;
- Never keeping a wild animal on a chain or leash;
- Never watching a wild animal dance, play sport, perform tricks, give massages, or paint pictures.

3. Culture is not an excuse for animal cruelty

There are some celebrations and practices, such as bullfighting, the Ukwehwama festival or the routine slaughter of dolphins near Taiji, which should have no more place in a cultural history than slavery, female genital mutilation, or foot binding. Being part of a cultural tradition is not an excuse for animal cruelty.

4. Consider your own safety

Wild animals, even those that have been 'trained' can still be very dangerous, and places that have poor animal welfare are likely to have poor safety practices as well. If you are going to interact with large or potentially dangerous animals then choose ethical and well-managed establishments.



5. Don't support the use of animals as photographic props

Almost all the animals used as photographic props have been taken from the wild as babies; often their mothers have suffered fatalities in the process. Those that grow too large to be handled will be killed, and in most cases have their teeth or claws painfully removed so that tourists are not in danger.

6. Remember that viewing animals in the wild is not guaranteed

Viewing animals in the wild is never guaranteed, and an ethical guide will explain this at the start. Tourists often leave poor reviews for operators if they have failed to see the expected animals. This puts enormous pressure on guides to deliver a 'view', which can mean guides trying to influence natural behaviours with food. Do not pressurise guides to get closer, make animals do something for a photo, or be critical if you do not get to see any animals.



7. Humanised behaviour is never right

Avoid any attraction that involves animals made to perform 'stunts', or those that embody 'humanised' behaviours that are completely against their nature. Parrots riding bicycles, elephants standing on their heads or walking a tightrope, chimpanzees smoking cigarettes, and tigers jumping through hoops of fire are just some of the examples. The training of wild animals often relies heavily on physical domination and fear, in an attempt to ensure the constant attention and compliance of the animal in front of an audience or camera. There have been numerous undercover investigations and reports from ex-trainers revealing evidence of systematic mistreatment and animal abuse.

8. Don't support hotels, bars or venues that display captive animals

Avoid staying at hotels or eating at restaurants that display captive wild animals or serve exotic or endangered animals on the menu.

9. Don't buy a wildlife souvenir

If you suspect that a memento might be real, it probably is. It is also illegal to import wildlife products such as ivory, animal skins and coral without a permit.



10. Use a trusted, Ethical Tour Operator

If you are using a tour operator make sure that they understand animal welfare issues. Ask them what wildlife attractions they offer and what animal welfare policies they have. Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operators Group highlights how tourism can be a force for good by collaborating with the socially responsible tour operators who are passionate about minimising negative impacts within the industry.



Further reading / organisations

- ABTA (Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism)
- Animals Asia Foundation
- Asian Captive Elephant Working Group
- Big Cat Rescue
- Born Free Foundation
- Elephant Conservation Centre, Laos
- Global White Lion Conservation Trust
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals – Foundation
- Save The Asian Elephants
- Shark Trust
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- World Animal Protection

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