



# Associated with cruelty

How travel trade associations  
are ignoring wild animal abuse





#### About the cover:

Elephants and their passengers in southern Africa where elephant rides are available to tourists.

#### This page:

Three captive dolphins performing with a trainer at an aquatic theme park.

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## Moving the world for wildlife

World Animal Protection moves the world to protect animals. During 2017 we gave 321 million animals better lives through our campaigns that focus on animals in the wild, animals in disasters, animals in communities and animals in farming. Through our 'Wildlife. Not Entertainers' campaign we work to end the exploitation of wild animals used for entertainment across the globe. We bring people, industry and governments together to drive the sustainable changes needed to keep wild animals in the wild where they belong.





# Introduction

More than 550,000 captive wild animals worldwide, including elephants, sloths, tigers and dolphins, are enduring appalling cruelty for tourist entertainment<sup>i</sup>. Depending on the species, the cruelty can involve snatching from the wild; 'training' with beatings, isolation and chaining, severely inadequate living conditions and forced contact with people.

Moved by World Animal Protection's 'Wildlife. Not Entertainers' campaign, an ever-growing number of travellers and travel companies are responding to this unacceptable suffering and demanding animal-friendly attractions.

Over 200 leading travel companies, including well-known brands such as: TUI, Intrepid, Thomas Cook and China's CAISSA Tourism Group, have committed to end the sale and promotion of elephant rides and shows<sup>ii</sup>. Over 1.6 million people have taken action to protect wild animals in tourism and called for a phase out of wildlife entertainment. And, social media giant Instagram is working with us to encourage their 800 million users to protect wildlife from cruel selfies<sup>iii</sup>.

But this is not enough. Despite more tourists and travel companies moving away from some of the cruellest wildlife attractions, in a time when tourism is growing, much more is needed.

This report is underpinned by research commissioned by World Animal Protection from Prof Xavier Font, Professor of Sustainability Marketing at the University of Surrey, that shows the world's travel associations are lagging when they should be leading, with a majority doing nothing to prevent wildlife exploitation and cruelty<sup>iv</sup>.

The Coalition for Ethical Wildlife Tourism (CEWT)<sup>v</sup>, of which World Animal Protection is a member, is united to drive industry standards and legislation to phase out the exploitation of wild animals for tourism entertainment.

World Animal Protection is calling on travel trade associations to do better. They must take the lead by offering stronger guidance and monitoring to help promote and develop animal-friendly tourism.

**Only three out of the 62 surveyed travel trade associations\* have any animal welfare guidelines or criteria as part of their sustainability programmes**, and only one do some monitoring of their members' implementation of its animal welfare guidelines.

Our Associated with Cruelty report has taken the key findings from the University of Surrey and makes recommendations to travel trade associations on how they can lead their members towards responsible wildlife tourism. Crucial to this is changing demand: away from attractions that cause suffering to animals and that threaten the survival of animals in the wild.

Around 110 million people annually visit cruel wildlife attractions, either independently or through tour operators or travel agents.

Travel association members urgently need guidance to help them and their customers make the right choices, travel responsibly and to help stop wild animal suffering.

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**\*For the purpose of this report the term travel trade associations also includes international bodies that set standards /guidelines for the industry.**

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<sup>i</sup> Moorhouse, T.P.; Dahlsjö, C.A.; Baker, S.E.; D'Cruze, N.C.; Macdonald, D.W. (2015) The customer isn't always right: conservation and animal welfare implications of the increasing demand for wildlife tourism, PLoS One 10: e0138939

<sup>ii</sup> World Animal Protection (2018) Elephant-friendly travel companies. World Animal Protection. Available: [www.worldanimalprotection.org/elephant-friendly-travel-companies](http://www.worldanimalprotection.org/elephant-friendly-travel-companies)

<sup>iii</sup> Natasha Daly (2017) Exclusive: Instagram fights animal abuse with new alert system, National Geographic. Available: <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/12/wildlife-watch-instagram-selfie-tourism-animal-welfare-crime/>

<sup>iv</sup> Font, X., Bonilla-Priego, M.J. and Kantenbacher, J. (2018) Trade associations as corporate social responsibility actors: An institutional theory analysis of animal welfare in tourism, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, doi 10.1080/09669582.2018.1538231

<sup>v</sup> World Animal Protection (2018) Coalition for Ethical Wildlife Tourism, World Animal Protection. Available [www.worldanimalprotection.org/CEWT](http://www.worldanimalprotection.org/CEWT)

## Opposite page:

We are working with Happy Elephant Valley to transition their current camp to a high welfare, elephant friendly, venue where elephants will have the freedom to be elephants instead of entertainers.



# Key findings

Researchers found an overall lack of knowledge and outward concern among the travel trade associations for the ways wild animals are suffering within the wildlife entertainment travel industry.

- **21 of the 62 travel trade associations** surveyed had a public webpage on sustainable tourism.
- **Out of these 21 only six travel trade associations** had some public information on the importance of animal welfare and how to implement it.
- **Only two out of the surveyed travel trade associations and only one tourism standard setting body** have any animal welfare guidelines or criteria as part of their sustainability programmes. These include; ABTA (UK), ANVR (Dutch Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators) and GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council).
- **Only one of the travel trade associations** (ANVR) is doing some monitoring of member's implementations of its sustainability and animal welfare guidelines.
- Alarming, **16 associations** in both their literature and on their websites featured promotional pictures of wild animals being used as tourist attractions, often interacting with tourists.

## Methodology

The University of Surrey researched 62 national and international travel trade associations\*. They represented:

- the largest outbound tourist markets in the world – 30 countries including China and the USA
- inbound tourism countries such as Thailand, India and South Africa, known for their wildlife and offering captive wildlife attractions
- regional associations including the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and international standard setters such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

To gather the information, 62 surveys and 24 follow up interviews were conducted. The travel associations' published materials and websites were analysed for wildlife-based activities, ethical policies and codes, guidelines and standards.

Questions covered: the size of the trade associations, their types of members; trade association networks and the awareness and responsiveness of associations towards animal welfare standards and guidelines.

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\*a full list of all surveyed travel associations can be found in Appendix



### Left to right:

Captive tigers are chained so tourists can pose for photos with them at Phuket Zoo, Thailand; Sloths are taken from the wild and used for harmful selfies with tourists, in Manaus, Brazil.



# Limited knowledge

Most of the associations surveyed did say that it's either 'important' or 'very important' to keep captive wild animals in 'good conditions'. But there was little indication of their understanding of what good or bad conditions for specific species might be.

As well as the lack of animal welfare knowledge and guidelines, most travel trade associations knew little of captive wild animal activities and entertainments offered by their members.

One responding association stated that "few of our members engage in captive wild animal activities". This is despite substantial evidence from that association's members' websites to the contrary.

Another association returned a mostly blank survey with only one field filled in, stating; "Animal welfare is not a focus issue of our association." Wild animals are, however, a key source of tourist revenue in their country.

Few took responsibility to issue their members with any animal welfare guidelines and information. ABTA, ANVR and GSTC were identified as the only organisations taking steps to protect the welfare of captive wild animals by setting some form of guidelines or standards. But even among these three there is room for improvement, particularly for ABTA's guidelines as these are considered the de facto industry standards.

## **Below:**

A venue in Thailand where elephants are used for tourist rides.





# Being guided by ABTA?

Since 2013, ABTA's Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism have generated awareness on animal welfare amongst travel suppliers and other trade associations. As a result, many have come to see ABTA's guidance as the de facto travel industry standard.

Numerous stakeholders, including several international tour operators, wildlife experts and auditors interviewed for this study want the guidance manuals to be updated to address inconsistencies and vague language. They are concerned that the guidelines legitimise practices now widely understood to be cruel.

The interviewees stated that inconsistencies and vague language in the ABTA guidance manuals still allow members to support attractions that offer performance with wild animals where these are showing the animals 'natural behaviours'. Such vague, undefined terms can lead to travel suppliers deliberately or inadvertently supporting cruelty to wildlife, and it allows the majority of ABTA members to not act to protect captive wildlife. The reality is that all performances and visitor contact with captive wild animals are clearly unnatural; these entertainments do not happen in the wild.

An example of inconsistency concerns elephants and what has been classified as either an 'unacceptable' or 'discouraged' practice. Elephant polo is categorised as unacceptable yet riding an elephant bareback is highlighted as best practice, while contact with and feeding of elephants is categorised as 'discouraged'. This is clearly inconsistent as the argument underpinning elephant polo being unacceptable is the same for all activities involving direct tourist-elephant interaction, including any form of elephant riding.

**Removing the category 'discouraged' practices and instead having clearer 'do's and don'ts' or an 'acceptable and unacceptable' list** will give further clarity to improve travel supplier's understanding and use of ABTA's guidance. This can be used to increase the uptake of the guidelines by ABTA members, which is currently low.

A revised guidance should further consider the latest thinking and evidence, as well as changes in both public and industry attitudes and behaviours. We know from our work with the travel industry that some of the largest global travel providers are going above and beyond ABTA's guidelines, such as ABTA members DER Touristik, G Adventures, Thomas Cook and TUI ending the promotion and sales of elephant rides.



**Left:**

When not used for tourist activities most elephants at tourist attractions are restrained by short chains.



# Why wildlife entertainment is unacceptable

**All wildlife entertainment practices that involve close contact with, or performances for, visitors have a detrimental effect on the wild animals that are used.** Suffering starts from the moment they are captured from the wild or bred in captivity. In most cases animals are separated from their mothers at an early age, solely for commercial exploitation. Harsh training causing physical and psychological damage follows, and the ongoing treatment and living conditions associated with the activities at these commercial entertainment venues result in continuous harm, stress and discomfort.

Elephants are among the wild animals often used for tourist attractions. World Animal Protection's 2017 Taken for a Ride report found; **77% of the 3,000 elephants used at tourist venues across Asia were living in 'severely inadequate conditions'**, with a clear correlation between those conditions and the activity being offered to tourists. Essentially, almost all the elephants living in severely inadequate conditions were found at venues offering elephant rides.

Severely inadequate conditions include:

- elephants typically being chained day and night when not used for tourist activities, and allowed only the bare minimum of social interaction if any
- inadequate diets, with very little variation
- no access to appropriate veterinary care
- frequently kept on concrete floors in stressful locations near loud music, roads or groups of visitors

## Right:

A tourist poses for a photo with an elephant after it performed in a show in Thailand.

These conditions don't consider the elephants' intelligence, behaviours and needs and follow severe trauma endured by elephants in their early years. Trauma such as the separation from their mothers and the harsh training process to break their spirits and make them submissive enough to give rides and perform.

## Training

There is no robust evidence you can train elephants humanely and safely for activities that allow tourists to be in direct contact with elephants. Therefore all activities that do allow for this should be categorised as an 'unacceptable' practice.

Recent initiatives in experimenting with 'softer' training methods are in very early stages with limited transparency as to how elephants will be controllable under stressful situations and whether it can be applied to all (e.g. bull) elephants. Elephant handlers receiving training in using 'softer' training methods will often revert to current cruel practices in handling elephants once they are at the venues. Exploring such training has its value but only in combination with eliminating the primary stressor to elephants: the direct interaction with tourists that requires constant control and obedience by elephants to ensure safety of visitors.





# Conclusion and recommendations

The tides are changing for tourism as it becomes ever more unacceptable to promote and sell tourist activities that cause pain and suffering to animals, such as elephant rides, dolphin shows or tiger selfies.

Despite this, our research shows a global picture of inactivity among travel trade associations, with almost all lagging. They are not offering their members the leadership and guidance needed to transform the travel industry towards responsible wildlife tourism.

Lack of animal welfare guidelines by travel trade associations is a systematic problem that needs to be addressed to ensure no animals are cruelly used for tourist entertainment. **For significant change to come, we need travel trade associations worldwide to step up, take action and commit to protecting wildlife.**

As a member of the Coalition for Ethical Wildlife Tourism (CEWT), World Animal Protection is calling on all travel trade associations to become leaders for wildlife.

## Below:

A captive tiger at a tourist facility in Thailand. World Animal Protection believes that wild animals belong in the wild and should not be used for our entertainment.



## We are calling for:

- **Travel trade association to set strong animal welfare guidelines** and monitor their implementation by members.
- **Associations like ABTA and ANVR**, are commended for already having guidelines. But, particularly for ABTA, with their guidelines being seen as the de facto industry standards, they must take responsibility and continue to lead by making sure their guidelines are as robust as possible.
- **Guidelines based on latest research and evidence** which highlights the serious animal welfare and conservation concerns around many wildlife tourist attractions, of which many will never meet wild animals' basic welfare needs.
- **As a minimum, elephant riding and other direct visitor interaction and forced performances with wild animal must be classed as unacceptable.** It is important that travel associations and their members understand that the suffering of wild animals used for tourism starts the minute they are captured from the wild or bred in captivity.
- **Recognition within the guidelines that tourists and local people face serious health and safety risks** from wild animal entertainment. For example, 17 fatalities and 21 serious injuries were reported as being caused by captive elephants in Thailand alone between 2010 and 2016.
- **Guidelines that reflect the changing attitudes and behaviours.** A vastly growing number of travel companies and tourists find harmful and exploitative wildlife entertainments unacceptable and want to visit ethical and humane alternatives.
- **Vague language – such as 'good conditions' and 'natural behaviour' – be avoided** within the guidelines. Travel companies and tourists benefit from clear and simple guidance. Categorising animal related activities, as ANVR has done, in best (do's) and unacceptable practices (don'ts) can be one example of doing so.



# Join our movement towards a wildlife-friendly future

Travel trade associations have a critical role in reducing demand for wildlife entertainment. Sustaining demand perpetuates a never-ending cycle of cruelty. Making practices like elephant riding, tiger selfies and dolphin performance 'unacceptable', while at the same time providing guidance on how to recognise best practices, is key to moving the industry to a wildlife-friendly future.

Through our demand reduction work with elephant-friendly travel companies we have witnessed the effect of travel companies pulling out of elephant riding. It has created the space for elephant camps in Thailand and elsewhere wanting to transition their business model to become elephant-friendly (observation only). This economic incentive is essential to drive real change by suppliers, who ultimately respond to demand.

Without this demand reduction, wildlife entertainment attractions can at best be persuaded to make incremental changes. For example, by making the chain that restrains an elephant from moving a little longer or reducing the number of people a dolphin has to 'swim-with' or an elephant has to carry around. This isn't enough. Also, in captivity, wild animals should be allowed to live as naturally as possible. Not forced to display behaviours such as giving rides, being made to dance, jumping through hoops, or posing for photos with people. All of this is unnatural, done for the tourists' benefit, not the animal.

**Together we can end the suffering of captive wild animals in tourism. Wild animals belong in the wild – not in entertainment.**

[www.worldanimalprotection.org/wildlife-not-entertainers](http://www.worldanimalprotection.org/wildlife-not-entertainers)



**Left:**

Mandalao Elephant Conservation in Laos is an example of a non-riding elephant venue. World Animal Protection funded the building of its day time socialisation area and night time enclosure.



# Appendix

## Inbound associations

Geographic coverage	Association acronym	Responded/ valid first survey	Sustainability page on website	Animal welfare information on website	Wild animal pictures on website
Asia Pacific	PATA	Yes/Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Australia	TTF	No	Yes	No	Yes
Botswana	HATAB	No	No	No	Yes
Brazil	Braztoa	No	Yes	No	No
Cambodia	CATA	No	No	No	No
China	CTA	No	No	No	No
Costa Rica	ACOT	No	Yes	No	Yes
Dominican Republic	ASONAHORES	No	No	No	Yes
Ecuador	OPTUR	Yes/Yes	No	No	Yes
Greece	HATTA	No	No	No	Yes
India	IATO	No	No	No	Yes
Indonesia	ASITA	No	No	No	No
Japan	JATA	No	Yes	No	No
Kenya	KATO	No	Yes	No	Yes
Laos	LATA	No	No	No	No
Malaysia	MITA	No	No	No	No
Myanmar	UMTA	Yes/No	No	No	No
Namibia	FENATA	No	No	No	No
Nepal	NTB	No	No	No	No
New Zealand	TIA	Yes/No	Yes	No	No
Portugal	APAVT	Yes/Yes	No	No	No
Russia	RATA	No	No	No	Yes
Rwanda	RTTA	No	Yes	No	Yes
South Africa	SATSA	Yes/Yes	No	No	Yes
Sri Lanka	SLAITO	No	No	No	No
Tanzania	TATO	No	No	No	Yes
Thailand	ATTA	No	No	No	Yes
Turkey	TURSAB	No	No	No	No
Uganda	AUTO	No	No	No	Yes
UK	UK Inbound	No	No	No	No
USA	USTA	No	No	No	No
Zimbabwe	AZTA	No	No	No	No



## Outbound associations

Geographic coverage	Association acronym	Responded/ valid first survey	Sustainability page on website	Animal welfare information on website	Wild animal pictures on website
Australia	CATO	No	No	No	No
Austria	ORV	No	Yes	No	No
Belgium	ABTO	No	No	No	No
Brazil	Braztoa	No	Yes	No	No
Canada	CATO	No	Yes	No	No
China	CATS	Yes/Yes	Yes	No	No
Denmark	DRF	Yes/Yes	No	No	No
Europe	ECTAA	Yes/No	No	No	No
France	SETO	Yes/No	No	No	No
Germany	DRV	No	Yes	Yes	No
Global	WTTC	Yes/No	Yes	No	No
Global	GSTC	Yes/Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Global	ATTA	Yes/Yes	Yes	No	No
Global	CLIA	No	Yes	No	No
Hong Kong	OTOA	No	No	No	No
India	OTOAI	No	No	No	No
Italy	ASTOI	No	No	No	No
Japan	OTOA	No	No	No	No
Kuwait	KTAA	No	No	No	No
Malaysia	MATTA	No	No	No	No
Mexico	AMAV	No	No	No	No
Netherlands	ANVR	Yes/Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Norway	Virke	Yes/Yes	No	No	No
Russia	ATOR	No	No	No	No
Singapore	SOTAA	No	No	No	No
South Korea	KATA	No	No	No	No
Spain	ACAve	Yes/Yes	No	No	No
Sweden	SRF	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	SRV	Yes/No	Yes	No	No
UK	ABTA	Yes/Yes	Yes	Yes	No
USA	USTOA	No	No	No	Yes



**Below:**

Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary (BLES) in Thailand rescues elephants which have been used in the entertainment industry. World Animal Protection supported BLES in 2017 to fund two night-time habitats.







**We are** World Animal Protection.

**We end** the needless suffering of animals.

**We influence** decision makers to put animals on the global agenda.

**We help** the world see how important animals are to all of us.

**We inspire** people to change animals' lives for the better.

**We move** the world to protect animals.

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