

# DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS



**WILDLIFE VIEWING & ANIMAL WELFARE**

THAILAND | VIETNAM | CHINA | JAPAN | HONG KONG | INDONESIA | SINGAPORE | CAMBODIA | MALAYSIA | MYANMAR | LAOS

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## WILDLIFE VIEWING & ANIMAL WELFARE



Animal attractions and experiences are a common part of holiday destinations and are generally very popular with holiday makers. Travelers in Asia, particularly from Western destinations are becoming increasingly aware of their negative impact on wild or captive animals and want to be provided with other, more animal friendly options; so it is important to deliberate these issues and develop less intrusive ways to enjoy wildlife in Asia.

We have developed these guidelines with the input and support of organisations such as Travelife, ABTA, WWF, ACEWG, Elephant Asia, and other specialists to inform travelers and our partners about the issues at stake.

The document is intended to provide a benchmark for best practice in animal welfare. At Destination we do not want to contribute to the extinction of our precious ecosystems in any form; we will refuse to work with suppliers, sites or involve ourselves in activities where animals are not being treated correctly.

As a responsible industry with strong commitments to sustainability, it's important that all tourism businesses take action to ensure that the welfare of animals is safeguarded. Doing so helps to ensure that collectively, the tourism industry:

- Will provide good, meaningful customer experiences.
- Contribute to the overall sustainability of tourism in destinations.
- Raise awareness of different species and conservation.
- Avoid the risk of NGO and media scrutiny.
- Protect strongly established commercial relationships.

## WHAT IS ANIMAL WELFARE?

Animal welfare refers to the state of an animal. An animal is in a reasonable state of welfare if it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior; and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress.

The global standards for animals in tourism can be classified as the five freedoms. These 'Five Freedoms' are:

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
2. Freedom from Discomfort
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease
4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress

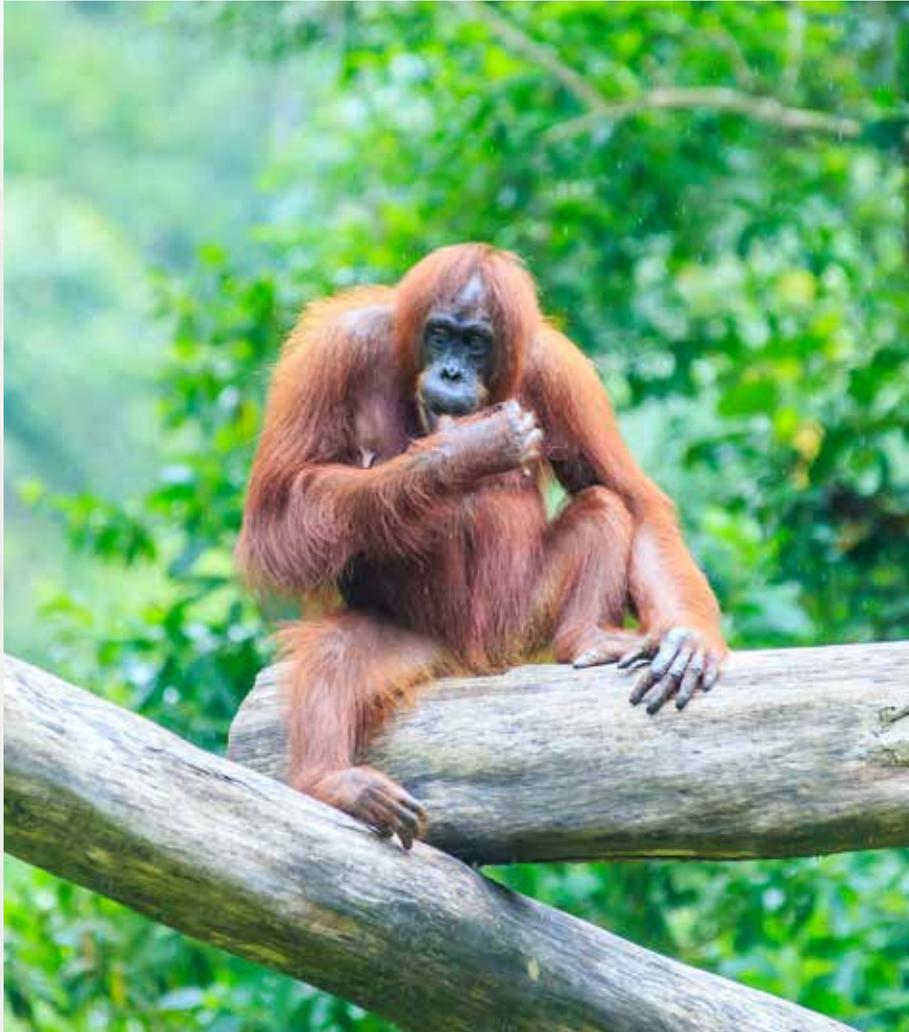
## INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Wildlife conservation aims to ensure those species of animal most endangered or at threat, are secured and able to recover in the wild. Unfortunately not all animal attractions and wildlife excursions operate legally or in accordance with local and national legal requirements. We will only work with those suppliers, animal attractions or wildlife related excursions that hold a valid license to operate. Animal attractions and wildlife excursions must comply with CITES requirements. CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. All eleven destinations that Destination Asia operates within are member parties. There are three levels of protection afforded to endangered animals depending on the circumstance of the species, although the following always applies:

- Trade of elephants whether alive or dead and elephant parts is illegal.
- Trade of tigers whether alive or dead and tiger parts is illegal.
- Trade of primates whether alive or dead and primate parts is illegal.
- Trade of marine animals whether alive or dead and marine animal parts is illegal.

CITES also state that elephants, tigers, primates and marine mammals should not be acquired from the wild for use as an attraction or any other reason (unless there is a conservation breeding program in place). We will always advise travelers to never purchase ivory or products made from animal bone, hide or hair. You do not know their origin and its purchase simply fuels the illegal trade in wildlife and encourages poachers to continue to hunt these animals.

## RESPONSIBLE WILDLIFE VIEWING IN ASIA



When not managed responsibly, wildlife tourism can harm the welfare and conservation of the wildlife being viewed.

Harmful impacts may include:

- Disrupting an animal's normal patterns of activity.
- Disturbing an animal's natural feeding behaviour and breeding success.
- Increasing vulnerability to predators and losing out to, or being killed, by competitor species.
- Disease transmission to and from human (zoonoses).
- Accidental injury and killing of animals.
- Degrading or changing wildlife habitats.

At Destination Asia we place preference on viewing animals in the wild than in captivity. It is important to us that animals are allowed to move freely in their natural habitat. This also provides visitors with a far more rewarding experience and ensures minimal disruption to the natural balance of our ecosystem.

## RESPONSIBLE VIEWING OF ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY

Destination Asia expects any animal attraction providers to place the welfare of their animals as paramount priority. All our suppliers whom care for animals are requested to agree to basic commitments to ensure the welfare of their animals.

We hold the right to cancel a contract if there is clear evidence they are not respecting the welfare of animals. Any establishments offering the viewing of animals in captivity must adhere to the following:

- The attraction has a valid license or permit to operate that is on public view or readily available.
- The attraction must maintain up-to-date records of all wild animals held including numbers of each species, births, deaths and animal acquisitions.
- All animals kept should have been acquired legally and in accordance with international and national legislation.
- Ongoing training is provided for animal keepers and / or require keeping staff to have a recognised animal management qualification.
- All animals are held in enclosures large enough for them to express normal behavior and they are not forced to perform any unnatural tricks or activities.
- All animals are regularly checked for signs of disease and have sufficient access to clean water and food.

## RESPONSIBLE VIEWING OF WILD ANIMALS

Encounters with wildlife 'in the wild' are far more rewarding and often form the 'highlight' of a visit to Asia. Visits to National Parks and rainforests are often made with best intention, but they can be damaging if not conducted properly.

Customers visiting wild places are encouraged to respect the environment and not to capture, collect or remove animals or plants or their derivatives. This includes shells, coral and sponges from marine environments, and flowers, plants, fruits and seeds from terrestrial habitats.

At Destination Asia we advise the following rules when viewing wild animals to ensure best responsible practice.

- Travelers do not initiate contact with wild animals or attempt to feed them. This can pose a danger to both the animal and traveler.
- Keep a safe distance from all wild animals; do not chase or restrict the space of a wild animal.
- Do not support any activity that involves animals fighting each other or the killing of wild animals for 'sport'.
- If viewing wildlife from a vehicle, keep your distance. Also stay on designated roads – do not drive off-road in search of wildlife.

At Destination Asia we strongly believe that animals in the wild should remain wild. Wherever Destination Asia operates in natural animal habitats, we have established a wildlife viewing protocol that minimises the risk to visitor safety and reduces negative impacts on the natural environment. Our guides do not lead travelers off-trail, seek to provoke or distress wildlife or unnecessarily damage the natural environment.

## RESPONSIBLE WILDLIFE VIEWING AT SEA



Responsible scuba diving, snorkelling and swimming in the sea offer wonderful opportunities to view marine wildlife. Reefs are a focus of many excursions and care must be taken to not interfere with these precious ecosystems. To ensure the continued protection of our marine wildlife, we have implemented the following code of conduct for wildlife viewing activities at sea.

- Diving activities offered by operators should have a valid operating licence issued by a recognised certification agency or relevant local authority.
- If marine wildlife is approached, do so slowly and cautiously.
- Let animals decide how close they want to be and remember that the likelihood of disturbance will be greater as the number of people watching increases.
- Travelers should not touch, pick up or feed marine animals or collect corals or shells.
- Take care to not cause damage to the environment with feet or fins. Some species, including coral reefs, are particularly sensitive to physical damage.

Destination Asia is encouraging providers of wildlife activities to gradually adjust their activities to include less human interaction. Many travelers are becoming increasingly aware of their negative impacts on wild or captive animals; as a result they are seeking other options, so it is important to us as a destination management company to consider these issues and develop more wildlife-friendly choices.

# ELEPHANTS IN ASIA

The relationship of elephants in Asia and tourism can be divided into two clear categories. The first is viewing wild elephants in their natural habitat (National Parks or remote rural regions), while the second is viewing and/or interacting with captive elephants in zoos, sanctuaries, elephant camps, festivals and elephant shows. At Destination Asia we promote viewing wild elephants following clear guidelines so not to disrupt their natural environment; and we are working with Travelife to define a widely accepted set of criteria and evaluation system for Elephant camps in Asia.

In recent years, many countries have banned or reduced logging, a practice that has historically involved great numbers of elephants. This led to a number of these working animals and their mahouts leaving the countryside to find alternative employment in the region's growing tourism industry. The stark reality for many mahouts is that if they can't generate money from their elephant, then they can't survive.

Therefore certain areas in Southeast Asia rely heavily on elephant tourism for their livelihoods. Rather than instantly stopping all elephant riding and elephant related experiences which would be detrimental to these communities, we believe in addressing the issue in a practical manner that benefits all stakeholders.

In a reputable camp, interaction with elephants should support their conservation and protection. An elephant camp should never be created for the sole purpose of tourism, but always as a rescue center or conservation camp, providing a safe haven for formerly tortured elephants or calves whose mother has been killed or taken away.

Responsible elephant tourism is rarely ideal. The ideal is that Asian elephants return to and live in the wild. The reality however, is that this would possibly result in species extinction across many parts of developing Asia. We hope there will be a point in time when captive elephants can be returned to the wild and live free from fear of harm by humans. Our backing of responsible elephant tourism is therefore a practical compromise solution, and one which we hope to be able to lift in the future when it becomes safe for elephants to return to their natural environments.

## INTERESTING ELEPHANT FACTS



- A healthy elephant will eat for up to 16 hours a day and has a constant need for water (up to 200 liters per day). Therefore supporting a rider for long hours will prevent them from feeding themselves properly. Please make clients aware of the following points when considering elephant riding in Asia.
- An elephant should not work more than four hours a day and requires a significant break every hour.
- An elephant can easily suffer from sunstroke and should not be exposed to direct sunlight. Riding an elephant in the middle of the day (12.00 to 2.30pm) is extremely exhausting for them and should be avoided.
- An elephant's maximum carrying capacity on his back must be limited to 150 kilos. Therefore an elephant should not carry more than two average weighted adults.

Any form of trick performance is cruel. Teaching elephants to balance on stumps or on their hind legs is unnatural. These elephants would have been trained to perform these through force and pain.

At Destination Asia we believe elephants are much better off in the wild and that viewing them in their natural habitat is also more rewarding for travelers. However, through education and working closely with conservation groups, we have learned that visiting a certified elephant camp and riding an elephant under the correct conditions can be done without causing harm.

## ELEPHANT RIDING



Elephants have long been integrated with local society in many parts of Asia and provide a source of income for numerous communities.

Alongside farming practices, there are hundreds of elephant camps in Asia, many offering elephant riding. There have been calls in Western media to close such elephant camps.

While elephant riding is not a natural activity for elephants, closing all elephant tourism camps is not a realistic option for a variety of reasons; including the lack of alternative livelihoods for both people and elephants. Releasing captive elephants back into the wild is currently not a realistic option for a large majority of captive elephants due to a lack of suitable habitat within elephant range countries.

In early 2017, Destination Asia became a member of the Elephant Camp Welfare and Sustainability Standard and Assessment Initiative to help assess elephant camps in Asia. There are a variety of opportunities or uses for elephants in tourism facilities including, but not limited to activities such as riding, bathing, interaction with tourists, mahout experiences and zoo style viewing of elephants in a landscaped area.

In addition, these facilities have the potential to provide favourable conditions for studying and offering education about elephants.

## THE ELEPHANT CAMP WELFARE & SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD & ASSESSMENT INITIATIVE



The elephant camp welfare and sustainability standard is an initiative of the PATA tour operator sustainability working group and Travelife for Tour operators (legally represented by ECEAT). The aim of the working group is, among others, to develop common standards and tools in order to jointly evaluate suppliers.

The Elephant camp standard and assessment is an answer to the growing concern of our clients and to address the critical issue of animal welfare. Destination Asia together with other DMCs in Asia and Travelife has developed a set of criteria and standard for elephant camps in Asia.



## THE STANDARD



The standard is based upon international animal welfare and sustainability principles including the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG) principles for captive Elephants. The standards have also been subject to consultation from individual elephant experts from various disciplines (e.g. vet's, mahouts, behavioural experts, biologist, animal learning experts). Based on a careful process a final draft of the standard was reached in 2017. The standard includes more than 160 criteria divided over 7 themes and 24 subthemes and provides detailed guidelines for the camps as well as the external assessor covering not only the elephants but also the staff, mahouts and business practices in the camps. Elephant camps that comply with the highest of standards treat their elephants in the best possible manner and are committed towards a process of permanent improvement.

Responsible camps have veterinarians on staff, and/or provide regular health checks. Elephants are not tied up with chains of lengths less than 2 metres for prolonged periods of time. Good camps work with local communities providing jobs, marketing local handicrafts and purchasing local supplies to ensure everyone benefits. Camps promoting best practices also actively support and engage in research and conservation projects protecting animals in the wild.

Any interactions between elephants and tourists are based on scientific standards and do not compromise the welfare of the elephants or endangering humans. Most importantly, all good camp's elephants are registered with the relevant government department, complete with DNA testing to ensure no wild stocks are being poached or added to the captive population.



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