



# ANIMAL WELFARE GUIDELINES

---

## 1. TRAVEL DEPARTMENT WELFARE AND WILDLIFE POSITION

We actively discourage our customers to participate in activities that exploit or harm animals, whether they are wild or domesticated animals.

## 2. PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines aim to provide guidance for responsible activities involving animals on our trips. These guidelines are used by Travel Department staff, contractors and customers to assist with:

- Designing trips and managing requests for experiences which involve wild or domesticated animals.
- Understanding the difference between wild and domesticated animals and why as a result the welfare of wild animals is always compromised when kept and used for tourist entertainment.
- The assessment of the health, safety and best management of wild and domestic animals during Travel Department trips.

## 3. ANIMAL WELFARE BASICS

Animal welfare concerns the health of the animal's body and mental state. The following Five Domains of animal welfare model, the universally known principles for defining basic welfare needs, have been considered in forming these guidelines:

- **Nutrition** – factors that involve the animal's access to sufficient, balanced, varied, and clean food and water
- **Environment** – factors that enable comfort through temperature, substrate, space, air, odor, noise, and predictability
- **Health** – factors that enable good health through absence of disease, injury, impairment, and good fitness level
- **Behaviour** – factors that provide varied, novel and engaging environmental challenges through sensory inputs, exploration, foraging, bonding, playing, retreating and others
- **Mental State** – by presenting positive situations in the previous four functional domains, the mental state of the animal should benefit from predominantly positive states, such as pleasure, comfort, or vitality, while reducing negative states such as fear, frustration, hunger, pain or boredom



## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WILD AND DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Travel Department recognises that there is a difference between wild and domesticated animals. Domesticated animals are animals such as dogs or horses that have undergone selective breeding over many generations to be notably and genetically different to their wild ancestors. As a result, domesticated animals adapt more readily to captive conditions and are generally more easy to handle than their wild counterparts.

This domestication process has not happened for wild animals such as elephants, tigers, and monkeys, that nowadays are primarily kept for tourism and entertainment purposes and remain wild.

Travel Department accepts that the welfare of wild animals is compromised in captivity and captivity is only acceptable when it is in the animal's best interests and the highest possible standards of care are given. (see Section 6).

## 4. RIDING & USING ANIMALS FOR TRANSPORT

Travel Department believes domesticated working animals such as horses, donkeys/mules and camels which are used for transportation on our tours should have a decent life, where they are properly cared for and the positive aspects of their existence outweigh the negative.

Some general guidelines for domesticated working animals:

- The animals should look well fed and be given adequate shelter and exercise.
- Their coats should be in good condition without sores (check near the mouth, shoulders, spine and belly, these areas are typically in constant contact with harnessing equipment). Wounds may also be hidden under a saddle or harness.
- Injuries and illness must be treated promptly. Sick and injured animals should not work at all.
- The animals must not be overloaded or overworked, meaning maximum one rider or 20% of the animal's weight. The weight or load an animal carries or pulls must be significantly reduced in relation to the more physically strenuous conditions faced (eg; altitude, temperature, hours of work and age and condition of the animal).
- The animals should work for at most six hours a day and given one to two full days of rest from work each week. Mares should not be worked for three months both before and after foaling.
- The animal's eyes should be clear, bright and alert.
- Handlers should be trained and familiar with normal and abnormal behaviour and not use physical force (including hitting or beating with crops, sticks or hands) to control or manoeuvre the animal.
- "Hobbling" (the practice of tying any part of the animal's limbs) should not be used as it can lead to lesions, infection and swelling.

Please note that it is never acceptable to ride wild animals on our trips.



### **A. ELEPHANT RIDING**

As a staff member or leader, you are not expected to stop customers from doing what they insist on doing, however it is expected that you inform them as to why we do not recommend or endorse elephant rides (or rides on any wild animal).

Elephants are not, and never have been, domesticated. The methods involved in keeping elephants in captivity are very psychologically and physically harmful to the animals.

### **B. RIDING CAMELS AND DONKEYS/MULES**

Donkeys/mules and camels are considered domesticated animals. These are only offered in the itinerary where the wellbeing of animals has been previously established. Tour leaders have a right (and obligation) to refuse service if animals are in poor condition. General things to look out for:

- Riders should choose an animal that is appropriate to their size.
- Animals should not carry more than approximately half their body weight and less during extreme heat or on steep declines. If extreme temperatures are experienced animals should not be ridden.
- Animals should not be fed by customers.
- Are the animals healthy? Leaders are responsible for alerting the Operations Manager if there is risk that the animals are not being well cared for.

### **Some of the things to consider in your assessment are:**

#### **CAMELS:**

- Their coats should be in good condition without sores (check near the mouth, shoulders, spine and belly, these areas are typically in constant contact with harnessing equipment) Wounds may also be hidden under a saddle or harness.
- Handlers should not use physical force (including hitting with crops, sticks or hands) to control or manoeuvre the animal.
- There is a species of camel (the Wild Bactrian Camel – *Camelus Ferus*) which is not a domesticated species. This species should not be used for rides or close encounters with people. If you are not sure, best to alert the

#### **DONKEYS/MULES:**

- Check the donkey over to see that it hasn't been subjected to 'firing'. This means burning with red hot metal to various parts of a donkey's body, most often the legs. In some parts of the world, practitioners believe this 'traditional healing' method will make the animal 'strong'.
- Never overload a donkey drawn carriage – if in doubt, walk away.
- Never canter or gallop a donkey drawn carriage.
- Never ride with more than one person on the back of the donkey.
- Consider your own weight before riding and aim to choose an animal appropriate to your size and weight.
- If the owner is treating the animal badly, ie excessive whipping, stop and find an alternative driver.
- An appropriate weight for a standard size donkey to carry is on average 120kgs (260 pounds / 18 stone) – smaller donkeys should take on less.



### C. HORSE RIDING

#### **Before riding, consider the health of the horse and the following guidelines:**

- Riders should choose an animal that is appropriate to their size.
- Horses should not carry more than approximately half their body weight and less during extreme heat or on steep declines.
- If extreme temperatures are encountered, animals should not be ridden.
- Are the animals healthy? As with donkeys and camels, leaders are responsible for alerting your [Operations Manager] if you believe that the animals are not being well cared for.
- Is the horse obviously underweight? Horses which are underweight should not be ridden. An underweight horse can be identified by protruding or visible ribs, hip bones or spine.
- The horse's eyes should be clean, bright and alert.

### D. DOG AND REINDEER SLEDDING

Sled dogs are a group of dog breeds that were bred for pulling sleds as a form of transportation in Alaska, Greenland and northern Canada. Sled dogs today are still used for transport by some rural communities and for recreational purposes in some parts of the world. Reindeer have been used as a means of transportation by the Sami people for hundreds of years and continue to be used for this purpose.

#### **Before including dog or reindeer sledding as a form of transport or included/optional activity, the following requirements should be met by the sled operator:**

- The operator must have animal welfare policies and standards that they actively follow and require their staff to follow.
- Animals are physically fit and conditioned for the activity they are being asked to perform and of a breed that can tolerate cold weather.
- Animals should be given adequate periods of rest and not forced to work beyond their physical capabilities and willingness to work.
- Animals have access to clean water and receive a varied diet of nutritionally appropriate food (Tip: check to ensure food and water bowls are not empty or dirty).
- Animals are housed humanely, with space to turn around, clean and dry bedding, protection against heat and cold and the opportunity to socialize.
- If the animals must be chained or tied to a restricted area, they should have significant time every day to allow them to run, play and socialize.
- Teeth should not be cut to prevent injuries from fighting with other animals.
- Animals are trained using positive reinforcement (force-free, humane training techniques) vs aversive, punishment-based techniques.



- The welfare of the animals is safeguarded for the duration of their lives from breeding to when they are retired from this activity.
- They have an adequate number of workers to care for the animals, including during the summer months and regular veterinary assessments and care.
- They have a no culling policy. If animals need to be euthanized (put-down to relieve them from severe pain, an incurable disease or if they can't be adopted after retiring from sledding), this is done by a trained veterinarian.

## 5. VIEWING WILDLIFE IN THE WILD: LAND AND MARINE ENVIRONMENTS

As Travel Department believes wild animals should be viewed responsibly in the wild, the following guidelines have been prepared with the best interests of wildlife and the safety of our staff and customers when viewing wildlife:

- Respect the animals' personal space. A visitor/vehicle must keep a safe and respectful distance and never chase animals. If the animal alters its behaviour, then the visitor has invaded its space and influenced its natural behaviour.
- When swimming, diving or snorkelling, ensure that you keep your distance from marine life and respect their space as wild animals.
- Observe nature as it occurs naturally and not as to how it responds to your presence there. Do not chase or lure animals with food or in any other way.
- Speak quietly – do not call out, whistle or in other ways try and attract the attention of animals. Avoid sudden movements.
- Remember that all wild animals can be unpredictable. If an animal charges you, it may be feeling threatened because it doesn't have enough space.
- Do not feed animals, neither those on land or marine life or birds. Feeding animals attracts them to humans and to human food, which upsets their natural diet, can shorten their life, and causes trouble for other people later by making the animals unnaturally aggressive.
- Do not touch wild animals, as you can unwittingly pass on diseases to wildlife, as well as placing yourself at risk. This includes marine/sea life.
- When in a safari environment, always stay in your vehicle as predators may be present.
- Night viewing: Minimise usage of a flashlight and never deliberately shine your light into an animal's eyes. Do not illuminate prey as this gives the predator an unfair advantage.

### **Drivers/guides are instructed in the following (and customers must not ask them to do otherwise):**

- Keep below the maximum speed limit. In most National Parks this is 40kph/25 mph, maximum.
- Never drive off the road in National Parks. This can severely damage animal habitat or the animals themselves.
- In a reserve that allows off-road driving, the guide needs to be aware of and adhere to where they can and cannot drive. This depends on the type of soil and vegetation of the area.
- When viewing wildlife, keep a safe and respectful distance, this can be different depending on the species and the environment. Further distances are required when viewing cetaceans at sea.



- When viewing wildlife in a vehicle pull to the side of the road so that others can pass. The number of vehicles at a sighting should be controlled whenever possible; to be sensitive to other visitors' viewing and ensure you are not crowding an animal on the move.
- When a pride of lions or a leopard is hunting, and they stop to listen or to smell the air, switch off the vehicle and ensure guests are quiet.
- Never cut an animal off. Remember they have the right of way in their environment. If an animal needs to change direction because of your vehicle, you are interfering.
- Never use your vehicle to get an animal to move. Try to anticipate what the animal is going to do and position your vehicle accordingly.
- In some parks, night game driving is not allowed, and you must make camp or leave the park before dusk.

Travel Department itineraries should only include visits to facilities involving wild animals in captivity if the rationale for the sanctuary operation is in the best interests of the animals involved.

Genuine sanctuaries:

- Do not buy/sell wild animals.
- Do not use the animals for interactions with customers or in performances/shows.
- Do not breed wild animals – unless they are part of an official recognised breeding program in which the animals involved are being responsibly released back in to the wild (and may otherwise be extinct or endangered).
- Allow for appropriate veterinary care according to their specific needs.
- Do not keep animals without a good reason (i.e. they must have a defined conservation benefit to keeping the animals).

## 6. ANIMAL PRODUCTS

In most local markets, customers should avoid purchasing any wild animal products, especially anything from an endangered species, such as:

- Skins, including fur and reptile skins
- Horns e.g. rhino
- Spiders and butterflies
- Turtle shell
- Seashells, coral, starfish
- Ivory
- Traditional medicines made from endangered animal parts and products

Trades such as this are generally illegal but may not be enforced through relevant government agencies. It is important to discourage customers from purchasing such items as they are supporting an illegal trade. The wild animals used to produce these products often suffer significantly, and suffering is likely to occur regardless of if the animal has been bred in captivity or wild, or if the process is legal or illegal.



We would advise against customers purchasing food products & 'medicinal' products that are made from wild animal derivatives which can also fuel wildlife farming and illegal wildlife trade. Examples of such products include but are not limited to:

- Turtle Soup
- Shark Fin soup
- Snake whiskeys
- Bear bile
- Tiger or Lion bone wine
- Civet coffee (Kopi Luwak)



## 7. ANIMAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY

Customers should be advised not to visit venues that offer animal shows, 'selfies' or direct interaction with wild animals. The animals involved in these activities are sometimes taken from the wild, often bred in intensive conditions, usually taken prematurely from their mothers as babies, forced to live in inhumane and unnatural conditions, and undergo cruel physical and psychological conditioning to make them compliant and perform.

Visiting these venues supports a cycle of animal cruelty. If you are not sure, it's best to say no.

## NOT PART OF OUR ITINERARIES

### 8. OTHER UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICES INVOLVING ANIMALS

In addition to the above, Travel Department customers should not visit, support or engage in any of the following exploitative activities during their trip:

- Visiting or taking part in sport and cultural activities that cause animal suffering or death such as rodeo, bullfighting and running, elephant polo, ostrich riding and racing, cock fighting
- Animals used for begging such as dancing bears, snake charmers or buying bananas for elephants and monkeys etc.
- Trophy/game hunting of wildlife (e.g. lions)
- Any cage diving where baiting of any kind is used (e.g. shark or crocodile cage diving)
- Restaurants or hotels that display captive wildlife

### ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

For customers: if you have concerns about a supplier we use or an included activity, please advise your guide and provide details in the feedback survey sent to you at the end of your trip.

For operations staff: if you have concerns about a supplier we use or an included activity, alert your Operations Manager directly so the issue can be addressed. If you are still unsure whether the facility has an appropriate standard of care for its animals or have any other questions on animal welfare, please contact us at Travel Department for further guidance: [info@traveldepartment.ie](mailto:info@traveldepartment.ie).