

# DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS



## ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY



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# INTRODUCTION

To ensure the diverse and magnificent wildlife found in Asia is preserved and protected, so future generations can enjoy our natural world, we have developed our own animal welfare guidelines. This has been developed using the research and findings of organisations such as ABTA – The Travel Association, World Animal Protection, The Asia Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG), European Centre for Eco & Agro Tourism (ECEAT), Asian Captive Elephant Standards (ACES) and other specialists in the field.

As travelers become increasingly conscious of the impact their holiday can have on a destination, and suppliers in Asia seek to develop more responsible travel experiences, it is our responsibility to clearly communicate our position while providing insight into issues surrounding animal welfare and sharing best practices.

## DESTINATION ASIA COMMITMENT

At Destination Asia, we actively discourage customers to participate in activities that exploit or harm animals, whether they are wild, captive, or domesticated animals.

As a responsible destination management company, we understand it is in our long-term interests to view wild animals in their natural habitat, and under specific conditions (see section 3). However, as this is not always possible, we accept that at times an animal may be taken into captivity when it is in the animal's best interests and the highest possible standards of care are given as per the 'Five Domains' of Animal Welfare (see section 2).





# Not part of our Itineraries

## Animal Entertainment

- Animal shows, performances or tourist interactions involving animals where training involves punishment or food deprivation, causes the animal fear, injury or distress, or the tasks are not based on normal behaviour and the animals are forced to act unnaturally i.e., dolphin shows or orangutan boxing.

## Photographing & Video of Animals

- Venues that offer photo opportunities using wild animals as props, where the animals have been captured from the wild, forced to live in unsuitable conditions, undergo cruel physical and psychological conditioning to make them compliant and where the animal does not have the choice of terminating the interaction or moving away.

# Other Unacceptable Practices involving animals

In addition to the above, Destination Asia does not offer any of the following exploitative activities or encounters in any of their itineraries:

- Visiting or taking part in sport and cultural activities that cause animal suffering or death such as elephant polo, cock fighting or similar.
- Animals used for begging such as snake charmers.
- Trophy/game hunting of wildlife.
- Ritual animal slaughter as part of the tourism experience.
- Human-initiated contact with or feeding of animals in the wild.
- Restaurants or hotels that display captive wildlife.





# ANIMAL WELFARE GUIDELINES

## 1

### Purpose

These guidelines aim to provide direction for responsible activities involving animals in our product offering. The details contained within them are for use by Destination Asia staff, our suppliers, and customers.

Our staff are also committed to adherence of the following:

- Understanding the difference between wild, captive and working animals, and why the welfare of any animal is compromised when kept and used for tourist entertainment.
- The assessment of the health, safety and best management of wild, captive and working animals during Destination Asia tours and excursions.

## 2

### Animal Welfare Basics

Animal welfare concerns the health of the animal's body and mental state. Only if an animal is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is free of pain, fear, and distress, is it considered to be in a reasonable state of welfare. The global standards for animals in tourism are widely known as the 'Five Domains', each of which have been carefully considered while forming our own guidelines:

1. **Nutrition:** factors that involve the animal's access to sufficient, balanced, varied, and clean food and water.
2. **Environment:** factors that enable comfort through temperature, substrate, space, air, odor, noise, and predictability.
3. **Health:** factors that enable good health through the absence of disease, injury, impairment with a good fitness level.
4. **Behaviour:** factors that provide varied, novel, and engaging environmental challenges through sensory inputs, exploration, foraging, bonding, playing, retreating, and others.
5. **Mental State:** 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.



# 3

## Animals in the Wild: Land and Marine

Encounters with both land and marine animals in their natural habitats are unforgettable experiences that often form a highlight of a trip to Asia. While visits to national, marine, and geoparks are often made with the best intention, they can be damaging to an animal's habitat if not conducted with care.

Destination Asia 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.





### 3

#### Drivers/guides

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/25mph, 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.
- 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.
- 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.



# 4

## Animals in Captive Environment: Land and Marine

Destination Asia expects all our suppliers who care for animals to place the welfare of their animals as paramount priority and are requested to agree to basic commitments related to their welfare. We also hold the right to cancel a contract if there is clear evidence they are not respecting the welfare of animals.

All captive animal facilities, irrespective of the animal species involved, should address the 'Five Domains' of animal welfare. When under human care animals must have a good life by enjoying good physical and mental health. They should be provided with an environment and conditions that prevent suffering, and enables positive experiences, with the ability to make choices and express the widest possible range of natural behaviours.

### Basic Welfare Requirements

Any establishments offering the viewing of wild animals in captive environments should, at a minimum, adhere to the following basic welfare requirements:

#### Nutrition:

- All animals have unrestricted daily access to adequate and clean drinking water in line with their species-specific needs.
- All animals are provided access to food that is adequate in quality, amount and variety for the species, the captive environment and the individual animals' needs. Feeding routines should be species-specific, mentally stimulating and encourage natural behaviours.

#### Environment:

- In captivity, enclosures are environmentally complex, including natural substrate, structures, shelter and environmental enrichment, in order to encourage a normal and diverse behavioural repertoire. All animals should be able to access shelter and a climatic environment suitable for their species specific needs and seek privacy from view.
- In captivity, enclosures are clean, hygienic, free of excessive artificial noise such as visitor or speaker noise, and well maintained (for example, devoid of excessive faeces, urine or rotting food, litter, not waterlogged, not infested with vermin etc.).



**Health:**

- The facility has access to a vet, either employed or externally contracted, who is knowledgeable and experienced in the health and welfare of the relevant animals.
- There is a policy not to surgically modify the skin, tissues, teeth or bone structure of animals, and not to sedate animals, unless it is for the purpose of genuine medical treatment or improved welfare, and always under the guidance of an appropriately trained vet.
- Complete, accurate animal stocklists, veterinary records and any appropriate licences or permits should be up-to-date and available for inspection. The required paperwork should be in place for all animals.

**Behaviour:**

- Enclosures (including pools) or methods used to contain the animals for temporary periods, allow all the animals to move and exercise freely, and to maintain sufficient distance from other animals in case of conflict.
- Depending on their species-specific and seasonal needs, animals should have the opportunity to interact regularly with other members of their species. Animals should not be prematurely separated from their young.
- Any training of animals should never involve punishment or food deprivation.

**Mental State:**

- Enclosures (including pools) or methods used to contain the animals for temporary periods, allow all the animals to move and exercise freely, and to maintain sufficient distance from other animals in case of conflict.

**Unacceptable Practices:**

- Animal breeding or commercial trade in captive animal facilities (unless for a bona fide release program or species conservation).
- Euthanasia, unless carried out by a trained professional because welfare needs cannot be met, or because the animal cannot be released into the wild.





## 4 Elephants in Asia

At Destination Asia, we believe that without doubt elephants belong in the wild and viewing them in their natural habitat is a more enriching experience for travellers. However, through education and working closely with conservation groups, we have learned that visiting a reputable elephant camp and riding an elephant under the correct conditions can be done without causing harm.

In recent years, many countries have banned or reduced logging, a practice that historically involved a great numbers of elephants. This led to many of these working animals and their mahouts leaving the countryside to find alternative employment in the region's growing tourism industry. 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.

Certain areas in Southeast Asia rely heavily on elephant tourism for their livelihoods. Rather than to stop offering elephant experiences, which would be detrimental to both the elephants and these communities, we believe in addressing the issue in a practical manner that benefits all stakeholders.

Destination Asia will only work with reputable elephant camps that have been created as either a sanctuary, rescue centre or conservation camp, which ensure the provision of the 'Five Domains' of Animal Welfare and that provide a safe haven for displaced, formerly tortured elephants or calves whose mother has been killed or taken away.

We will give preference to elephant camps that have been certified or are currently undergoing certification by organizations such as ECEAT or Asian Captive Elephant Standards (ACES).





# 4

## The Captive Elephant Animal Welfare and Sustainability Standard

Together with other DMCs in Asia and ECEAT, Destination Asia assisted in developing a set of criteria and standards for elephant camps in Asia. The elephant camp welfare and sustainability standard is an initiative of the PATA tour operator sustainability working group and ECEAT, the aim of which is, among others, to develop common standards and tools in order to jointly evaluate suppliers. A final draft of the standard was reached in 2017 and includes more than 160 criteria divided over 7 themes and 24 subthemes with 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.

In a reputable camp, direct interactions such as feeding, bathing or riding can help support their conservation and protection. There are a variety of non-harmful opportunities for elephants in tourism facilities such as:

- Interactions with tourists
- Mahout experiences
- Viewing of elephants in a landscaped area
- Studying and offering education about elephants





## Elephant Riding

According to The Captive Elephant Animal Welfare and Sustainability Standard, elephant riding is not harmful to the elephant if done in an appropriate way. It is important to remember that it is mandatory and natural for elephants to have daily activity, so that they are stimulated physically and mentally. If riding is not performed and elephants are only used for feeding and bathing activities, there is a risk that they would not exercise enough and will suffer from obesity problems.

### Acceptable riding

- Will be for a reasonable distance (approx. limit of four kilometres per day), on natural ground, under natural shade, with a maximum of two individuals plus the Mahout, not during the hottest hours of the day and with access to food and water.
- Elephants must be fit for the ride, have no preeminent spine and have a calm character.
- The elephant should respond to the Mahout's verbal commands and no use of force should be needed to make the elephant walk.

### Unacceptable riding

- Would be on concrete, dirty roads surrounded by noisy cars and trucks, for many hours, in the sun with more than two individuals and with no access to food and water.
- Elephants would have scars on their flanks caused by the equipment.
- The Mahout may require force to make the elephant walk, such as beating with a hook.







## 5 Working Animals

Destination Asia believes domesticated working animals such as horses or oxes which may be used for transportation on our tours and excursions 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 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. The weight or load an animal carries or pulls must be significantly reduced in relation to the more physically strenuous conditions faced (i.e., 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.



# 6

## Animal Products

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, commonly known as CITES, is an international agreement between governments which aims to ensure international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. All countries in which Destination Asia operates are member parties.

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
- 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
- Tiger bone wine
- Civet coffee (Kopi Luwak)

## References

- Five Domains vs. Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare, World Animal Protection, David J. Mellor, 2021.
- ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines, Overview Manual, Basic Animal Welfare Requirements, ABTA, 2019.
- Animal Welfare Policy Toolkit, World Animal Protection & Intrepid Travel, 2020.
- Elephant Camp Animal Welfare and Sustainability Standards, The Elephant Friendly Initiative, ECEAT, 2018.
- Exploring Answers to the Elephant Camp Topic Support for Destination Management Companies and Tour Operators, EU Switch Asia, ACEWG, 2019.



A close-up photograph of a sloth's face, showing its eyes and fur. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The sloth's eyes are closed or looking down, and its fur is thick and textured.

# ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

For customers: if you have concerns about a supplier we use or an included activity, please advise your tour 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, use your Trip Report to 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 Destination Asia for further guidance: [responsibletravel@destination-asia.com](mailto:responsibletravel@destination-asia.com)