

# Three animal tourist attractions you should never do

By [Elaine Clara Mah](#)

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As travellers on a quest for new experiences, we are constantly attracted to the unique and adventurous. We crave for a different experience, look to pushing boundaries and find the need to live our lives to the fullest, and why shouldn't we? However, our travels should be responsible, and our actions should always be ethical.

While there is nothing wrong with trying to live the best lives that we can, sometimes in doing that, whether consciously or unconsciously, we cause harm to others. Travelling to Africa in search of its wildlife may sometimes result in us harming the environment by leaving one too many carbon footprints. Wanting to be in close proximity to an elephant, may lead us to want to experience riding it even though they are not meant to be sat on.

There is a balance to everything of course, and the pursuit of travel can be done responsibly, with an awareness of the environment and its inhabitants. We can reduce our use of plastic on our travels to reduce our carbon footprint, and we can say no to elephant rides, however, the harm that is caused to our wildlife goes beyond this.

To help you make conscious and responsible choices on your next travel to witness magnificent wildlife, we've highlighted the top three animal tourist attractions that you shouldn't do and show you what you should do in its place.

## Riding elephants

Riding elephants, as harmless as it may seem, may probably be the most harmful act you can do to an elephant. Elephants are not meant for riding, and as such, have had to go through a cruel and inhumane process to force them to submit to giving rides. Baby elephants go through a training crush, a cruel method used to crush an elephant's spirit by taking it away from its mother, confining it in small spaces with limited ability to move and then beaten into submission. The baby elephant is also pierced with hooks as well as starved and deprived of sleep for days on end.



The elephant's plight does not end there. Once its spirit is crushed, it spends its days giving rides to tourist while being prodded with hooks by its handlers as a way to control it. Keeping in mind that elephants have an excellent memory, capable of remembering an event for years, means that this agony is embedded in its memory for a very long time. Elephant rides are very common in Southeast Asia and particularly in Thailand where captive Asian elephants are trained to carry tourists.

### **What you should do instead**

Instead of riding elephants, encounter them in the wild on a safari. There, you can witness these gentle giant's true nature in their habitat. You can find Asian elephants in small elephant sanctuaries in Southeast Asia and African elephants in many parks in Africa. Keep in mind that wild elephants are not meant to be touched either, so enjoy them from afar or if you'd like a nice picture, take along a good camera!

### **Watch dolphin shows**

Watching dolphin performing tricks and getting up close and personal with them may be a dream come true for many, but it isn't for the dolphin. One only needs to remember the sad story of Tilikum, the captive orca who was involved in the death of three people. Large sea mammals are not meant to be caged in a tank.



Wild dolphins swim up to 100 miles a day, a great distance that cannot be recreated within a small tank. The constant shows and training that these intelligent creatures undergo as well as the stress of living in a small tank have shortened a captive dolphin's lifespan by half. Dolphins are social animals with complicated social structure; reducing them to living in a tank prevents them from communicating and socialising with one another, missing out on important connections that they would have made in the wild.

### **What you should do instead**

Dolphins are extremely friendly, so chances of encountering them in the wild are high. Instead of paying to watch dolphins perform tricks, invest on a dolphin-watching tour where boats will take you out to the sea in search of dolphins and allow you the chance to watch them in their habitat. If you're lucky, they might even interact with you!

### **Taking selfies with tigers**

There is no doubt about the attractiveness of a tiger. Its beautiful stripes and mesmerising eyes, coupled with its somewhat mysterious presence has long made it a tourist attraction all over the world. So valuable is a tiger, that many so-called tiger sanctuaries have popped up in countries like India and Thailand where tigers are bred for the purpose of tourist enjoyment and will never see the wild in their lifetime.



Tigers in tiger sanctuaries are usually sedated to allow tourists to come up close to take a picture with them. For an extra fee, you are even allowed to sit or lie on the tigers while they are chained so close to the ground that they have difficulty standing up. To ensure the safety of tourists, it has been said that some operators remove the tiger's claws and teeth.

### **What you should do instead**

Instead of visiting questionable tiger sanctuaries, opt to go to reserves and national parks. The Kanha National Park in India is an example of a park that you can visit to potentially get a close encounter with tigers. As tigers are solitary and elusive animals, your trip to the park may not garner you an audience with a tiger, but you may still be able to witness great wildlife in the form of leopards and sloth bears!

As animal enthusiasts, we must always remember that wild animals should always be in the wild and not made to do our bidding. Instead, it is our responsibility to protect them. While there is nothing wrong with wanting to see these animals, it is important that we do so responsibly and ethically.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Elaine is a contributing writer for [BookAllSafaris.com](https://www.BookAllSafaris.com)