

Animal cruelty no longer flies at TripAdvisor

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Riding an elephant, swimming with dolphins, watching an orca jump from a pool. For many people, these experiences are the stuff of family vacations. If someone pondered the animal providing such entertainment — how it came to be in its current home, or became docile enough to carry a passenger or kiss its trainer — they may have rationalized that the animal is an educator, sacrificing freedom to turn tourists into conservationists.

TripAdvisor is embracing a different — and better — kind of education.

The giant travel website and its booking site, Viator, has already stopped selling tickets to attractions that feature wild animals held in captivity. In early 2017, the site will begin featuring an educational portal that highlights animal welfare issues in wildlife tourism. While attractions with captive wild animals still will be listed on TripAdvisor's review section, they will be marked with a paw icon. That icon will link to the educational portal.

Partners in that endeavor include People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Global Wildlife Conservation and Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, which recently found that between 2 million and 4 million tourists per year visit attractions that are considered harmful to animal welfare, and that most TripAdvisor reviews ignore those concerns.

The change came after months of consultations with these animal welfare groups.

Earlier this year, TripAdvisor was the target of a campaign by U.K.-based World Animal Protection, which accused TripAdvisor of profiting from animal cruelty. The animal welfare group launched a petition, signed by more than 250,000 people, demanding that "they stop promoting and selling tickets to cruel wildlife tourist attractions."

A similar petition by the group went to Thomas Cook Group, which ended the sale and promotion of elephant rides and shows.

Send your questions or tips to Travel Editor Kerri Westenberg at travel@startribune.com, and follow her on Twitter: @kerriwestenberg.

Kerri Westenberg is the Travel editor. She writes stories about destinations and consumer travel issues. She has globe-trotted for National Geographic and other magazines and now zips around the region, on the lookout for travel news you can use.

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TripAdvisor has stopped selling tickets to attractions that feature wild animals in captivity, such as elephant rides.

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