



Getting to interact with wild animals is dream come true for many people. We grow up watching elephants on TV and dragging around stuffed animal lions, hoping that one day we'll get to befriend one of these majestic animals and ride off into the distance together ... or at least those were our dreams. Well, it turns out, thanks to the tourism industry, this dream is a palpable reality as entire businesses have been founded to allow paying customers to [ride elephants](#), swim with dolphins, and even take candid photos with tigers. Sounds awesome, right? For people, sure. For the animals, not at all.

What many tour companies won't tell you about the "fabulous" opportunities they offer is that it takes a whole lot of cruelty to make them possible. [Elephants in the trekking industry](#) are typically [ripped from their mothers at an early age](#), beaten and starved into submission, and then trained to be docile and obey their owners by

way of [painful whips and even nails](#). [Dolphins used for “swim with” attractions](#) are typically kept in extremely small penned off areas – if they are even [allowed to be in the open ocean](#) – trained to perform [tricks and behaviors by way of starvation](#), and deprived of the fulfilling life they would have in the wild. In the case of tigers, many tourist facilities [breed these animals in captivity](#), remove the cubs from their mothers at a young age and train the animals to fear pain, thereby forcing them into submission – but if the fear tactics don’t work, companies have been known to [drug the big cats](#) so they can be readily moved and prodded for photos (that cost tourists a pretty penny to take). And this is barely scratching the surface of the cruelty rife in animal tourism.

Given this knowledge, we are incredibly happy to share the news that [TripAdvisor](#), one of the world’s largest travel websites and [Viator](#), it’s booking service, will no longer sell tickets to attractions where people come into contact with wild animals or endangered species held in captivity. This decision comes after six months of research and consultation with [PETA](#), [World Animal Protection](#), [Association of Zoos and Aquariums \(A.Z.A.\)](#), [Global Wildlife Conservation \(G.W.C.\)](#), as well as others, and will end the sale of tickets to elephant rides, swim with dolphins, big cat petting, and other [attractions that allow tourists to interact directly with animals](#).

In addition, [TripAdvisor also plans to launch a wildlife tourism education portal](#), in partnership with many animal protection organizations, that will help inform visitors about the welfare concerns associated with animal attractions. The travel site will continue to show the pages of attractions that they are not selling tickets for so consumers can read the reviews and any that features animals will have a “PAW” icon that will link to the education portal where people can [learn about the truth behind these attractions](#).

While this is remarkable progress, Steve McIvor, CEO at World Animal Protection says, “We hope it will only be a matter of time before

TripAdvisor will also come to realize that it has to end sales to all cruel wildlife attractions such as SeaWorld where the animals endure a lifetime of abuse and highly stressful training to perform. Until then we will provide the best education we can on TripAdvisor's website to steer people away from cruel venues like these."

TripAdvisor reaches around [350 million people](#) a month so there is a huge opportunity for change here. We can only hope that this will inspire other travel sites to enact similar measure as well.

Ending animal cruelty starts with education and the more people are able to know and [learn about their vacation destinations](#) can be the difference between perpetuating gross animal abuse or fostering the creation of more beneficial, humane ecotourism attractions.

The bottom line is no animal should suffer for the sake of our entertainment. If you agree, share this post and encourage others to learn more about their vacation choices!

Image source: [Avatar_023/Shutterstock](#)