

TRAVEL INTEL • HEALTH

TripAdvisor Bans Bookings for Endangered, Wild Animal Attractions

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Not as serene as it looks.

No more tickets for elephant rides or tiger petting.

One of the first things you learn when getting your PADI diving license is that when you are 40 feet underwater you are a visitor in a world that is not your own and should act as such: No stepping on coral; watch, don't touch; by all means, stare wide-eyed at the green turtle floating by but do not grab on and try to hitch a ride. Still, those rules don't apply in attractions like [elephant rides](#), [lion and tiger petting zoos](#), and swimming with dolphins. Now TripAdvisor, the largest travel review site in the world, is heeding [the call of conservation groups](#) and has announced a new booking policy in which it will not sell tickets to any attraction that involves touching captive, wild, or endangered animals.

Along with a shutdown of bookings to the animal-focused attractions that will be instituted between now and early 2017, TripAdvisor also will be launching an educational portal where users will be able to learn from experts about responsible interactions with wild, captive, and endangered species and the relationships between [tourism and conservation](#). Any animal-related listing that does remain on the site—safaris, petting zoos, national parks—will include a "paw icon," which users will be able to click and read information from activist groups like PETA as well as academics exploring all sides of the issue at stake, plus guidelines for how to be responsible while visiting. The move comes amid growing campaigns to stop the use of animals as a source of entertainment around the world—from [bans on swimming with dolphins in Hawaii](#) to [the long-overdue retirement of elephants from the Ringling Brothers Circus](#). "TripAdvisor's new booking policy and education effort is designed as a means to do our part in helping improve the health and safety standards of animals, especially in markets with limited regulatory protections," said Stephen Kaufer, president and CEO of TripAdvisor in [a press release](#).

Certain animal attractions will, however, continue to be offered through the site, including activities such as horseback riding and aquarium touch-pools where guests can pet wildlife under the supervision of experts. Notably, SeaWorld is not mentioned and a quick search shows day-passes currently available for purchase. Conservation groups have noticed this omission and hope that the new policy is just the first step towards an even larger initiative. SteveMcIvor of [World Animal Protection](#), one of TripAdvisor's educational partners, [told the Guardian](#) "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 has been offering bookings to its listed attractions since it acquired Viator in 2014, who will be adopting the same guidelines on its own standalone site. It's not the first travel booking site to ban ticket sales for attractions that involve interacting with endangered animals: Student-focused site STA Travel does not offer reservations for SeaWorld, and both STA and adventure travel site Intrepid have held bans on elephant rides since 2014.

Earlier this year we were reminded just how fragile our co-habitation arrangement on this planet is and how oblivious we can be about it, when [a tragic story of a baby dolphin dying](#) while being passed around for selfies went viral. We have much to gain from observing wildlife and nature—from a safe distance. But as long as there is demand for getting up close and personal with animals, those experiences will continue to be available, so in the end it's all about education. While TripAdvisor is perhaps not going to be considered a major leader in the field of conservation because of this decision, it is an encouraging first step. As Wes Sechrest of Global Wildlife Conservation said in the press release, "We want people to connect with wildlife and feel inspired by wild places, and this will help provide a guide for how to do so without further endangering our planet's biodiversity."