

Taking Animal Selfie – Risky Business for All Parties

Selfies have become an important part of photography for tourists as people turn the camera on themselves to showcase their adventures and encounters. These snaps provide a quick method of capturing a moment and sharing it with the world through social media. For some travelers, this can also mean animal encounters. As more tourist attractions allow animal selfies and more travelers take ill-advised selfies with wild creatures, it is time to make sure that all tourists understand the dangers of such an activity. There are several questions people should ask before taking an animal selfie.



Is your selfie with a wild animal?

There are different types of animal selfies – the ones with captive animals in controlled environments and the spontaneous ones with wild subjects. Wild animals are unpredictable and unlikely to pose nicely for the camera, which could lead to all sorts of problems such as injury, to either you or the animal, and a lot of stress. To make matters worse, you are turning your back on this stressed-out animal leaving yourself blind. Wild animal selfies should be avoided but, if you must, there are other considerations to make.

Is your selfie likely to lead to injury?

You may think that a quick picture won't do you any harm, but you could easily be underestimating the danger posed by the animal you are getting close to. A domestic cat can scratch if it is forced into a selfie so imagine what a wild animal could do. Cute deer have antlers, cubs have claws and almost everything has teeth. In Yellowstone, tourists are often underestimating the power and lethal strength of bison while trying to take selfies. Also, what happens if the animal attacks, is caught by authorities and put to sleep?



Is your selfie likely to get you in trouble?

In the moment, a selfie with a rare or wild animal can seem like the perfect, once-in-lifetime opportunity and that nothing can stop you from sharing it with the world through your social media profile. The question to ask yourself, however, is whether you really should go ahead. Just because you think that a close up shot with a beached animal or a seemingly “tame” creature is a good idea doesn't mean that everyone else on social media will agree. Take the quokka incidents for example. This trend escalated so much that people started endangering and harming the animals. A good photo is not worth breaking animal cruelty laws and harming an innocent creature, which brings us to the next issue.

Is your selfie going to put the subject at risk of injury or stress?

While your own safety is an important consideration, you also need to think about the safety of the animal. You may think that a quick snapshot won't do any harm but it all depends on the circumstances. Moving an animal or handling it can cause stress and even the flash of a camera can be distressing – as has been witnessed with sea turtles. The natural reaction to a beached dolphin should be to put it back in the water, yet some see it as a chance for a photo opportunity. Getting too close to wild animals can have terrible consequences and even if they seem calm and “happy” to be photographed, these changes in behavior could have a knock-on effect on their reaction to humans, especially if they learn to rely on human contact for food.



Is your selfie being taken in an ethical place of business?

In order to avoid the issues of dealing with wild animals, you may decide that the only legitimate animal selfie with a creature at a tourist attraction. The problem here is that these tame animals can often be kept in cruel conditions and there is a side to the business that you are not seeing. If you have the chance to swim with dolphins and take photos, consider who is in charge of their welfare, how many times they have to pose unnaturally in a day and where the animals came from. Is there a pod missing a member, who themselves may be suffering from capture stress? Another popular option is the tiger or lion cub selfie, but what happens to those cubs when you leave, or when they get too old to be cute? Some are sold off for canned hunting.

Always consider the consequences of your animal selfie. There is a lot to think about when planning a selfie with an animal – either in a wildlife park or at a tourist attraction. Wild animals are great subjects for photography from a respectable distance, but they are terrible, dangerous selfie subjects, and these

tourist traps are often unethical. Respect the animals and avoid the selfies.

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