

ANIMAL TOURISM: SCANDALOUS TORTURE JUST FOR A SELFIE



A new hype to be seen on the internet: take a photo with wild animals. However, for an exciting selfie, social networks today put on shows which are incompatible with animal welfare.

Taking a photo in front of the Eiffel Tower is no longer enough. Travelers now choose their destinations based on their landscapes and wildlife to ensure a selfie that no one has done, if possible with an exotic animal. **With koalas in Australia, on an elephant's back in Thailand, in the midst of snow macaques in Japan or with polar foxes in Iceland...** All these photos are highly sought after and ensure a certain success for their authors on social networks. The tourism sector, therefore, specializes in giving tourists what they expect. But this is often done to the detriment of nature or animals.

Just because your friend posted a photo with a tiger doesn't mean it is normal to get that close to a tiger. It is actually very likely that the animal was chained and abused. But you don't see that in the picture... To bring them closer to tourists, wild animals are violently forced to perform certain tasks. In general, they have been captured, bred or tamed for the purpose of being subjected to tourists.

According to the NGO World Animal Protection (WAP), wildlife tourism represents a global market of around 225 million euros and constitutes a significant source of income for developing countries.

National Geographic wildlife journalist Natasha Daly specializes in photographing animal abuse and exploitation and spotting fake animal sanctuaries. Some are very much like real reserves and emphasize their five stars on travel sites like TripAdvisor, but they almost all offer visitors who wish to splash around with elephants, in rivers or in mud baths. These swimming sessions are often repeated throughout the day and only trained elephants are suitable for this type of activity.

Daly shares her recommendations of how not to get tricked, by trying to decipher the signs of animal suffering. Captive elephants wave their tails as if they are dancing, sloths seem to enjoy hugs, dolphins give the impression of smiling... But, in reality, all these signs are only their reflexes, which in no way demonstrate that animals appreciate visitors!

To protect animals' well-being, here are four tips:

- Keep your distance: choose experiences that offer to observe animals engaging in natural activities in their natural environment
- Do your research: beware of the TripAdvisor notes because they do not guarantee the best practices of the "sanctuary". Comments can help you better identify truly animal-friendly places
- **Pay attention to the places described as "donated to conservation," "sanctuary," and "refuge": these descriptions are fashionable and may not correspond to the nature of the place**
- And, above all, beware of the massive offers that promise to get you very close to animals. The animals will be disturbed and unhappy with your presence.

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