



A vision for whales and dolphins in tourism

What should a responsible future for whales and dolphins in tourism look like?



Our joint vision

We are a coalition of NGOs working together to protect whales and dolphins both in captivity and in the wild, and seeking to harness the potential of the global tourism industry to achieve this goal.

We invite you to share our vision of a world where whales and dolphins are no longer held in captivity for human entertainment and are only viewed responsibly and respectfully, in the wild or in genuine sanctuaries in the sea.



Scientific evidence strongly supports our concerns that whales and dolphins suffer mentally and physically in captivity and that confinement has a significant negative impact on their health, welfare and risk of early death.

We believe

- Keeping whales and dolphins in captivity for human entertainment is unacceptable and must be phased out by ending captive breeding and wild capture
- Whale and dolphin performances and tourist interactions with these animals in captivity must end
- Tourism can be a force for good that helps make this the last generation of whales and dolphins in captivity and supports responsible opportunities to see them in the wild

We are committed to

- Helping leaders within the travel industry to provide meaningful, responsible and ethical customer experiences
- Encouraging and advocating for travel companies to evolve their corporate social responsibility policies, specifically to end the promotion and sales of activities that feature whales and dolphins in captivity, and to focus on responsible, respectful excursions in the wild
- Encouraging and advocating for travel companies to ensure only responsible products or experiences are offered in relation to wild and free-living whales and dolphins and, in particular, providing responsible whale and dolphin watching experiences
- Calling for and helping to facilitate the retirement of captive whales and dolphins to sanctuaries in the sea where individuals can live the rest of their lives in a more natural environment or, where possible, be returned to the wild

As a member of the travel industry you can help.

We urge travel companies to

- Recognise that whales and dolphins in public display or interaction facilities are wild animals, and are forced to live in unsuitable conditions that cannot adequately simulate their vast natural ocean habitat or provide for their complex social, behavioural and intellectual needs
- Understand that whales and dolphins used for human entertainment purposes can suffer physically and psychologically and are made to act unnaturally
- Acknowledge that many tourists are passionate about wildlife and are becoming increasingly aware of the suffering inflicted upon captive whales and dolphins that are held in facilities promoted as part of holiday packages
- Recognise that the travel industry plays an integral part in strengthening or weakening the economic incentive for tourist attractions to breed whales and dolphins for a life in captivity, or to capture more from the wild
- Phase-out the sale or promotion of tickets for attractions involving captive whales and dolphins including, but not limited to, performances or swim-with encounters
- Encourage and promote ethical alternatives - only those wild whale and dolphin watching experiences that achieve high standards of responsible and sustainable practice
- Support the development of sanctuaries in the sea where captive whales and dolphins can retire for lifetime care in a more natural environment, or be returned responsibly to the wild
- Recognise the potential links between the global trade in wild animals and risks to public health through zoonotic diseases (diseases that pass from animals to humans)
- Acknowledge that as well as suffering in captivity, whales and dolphins face a further threat when tourism shuts down, as demonstrated during the coronavirus pandemic, their lives having been made dependent on the profitability of a commercial enterprise

AROUND
3,500 CAPTIVE WHALES AND DOLPHINS
are held in captivity for public display and interaction
with tourists around the world.



Every stage of the process of exhibiting these animals, from capture and transport to a lifelong existence in captivity, inflicts severe stress on captive whales and dolphins. Whales and dolphins, including those born in captivity, must endure the artificial, restricted and barren nature of the captive environment, which is extremely impoverished in relation to the complex environments they inhabit in the wild.

Even the largest captive facilities provide
JUST ONE-MILLIONTH OF A WHALE OR DOLPHIN'S NATURAL HABITAT RANGE.



Whales and dolphins are intelligent and self-aware, and severely impacted by a life in captivity.



Whales and dolphins live in complex societies, have cultures and sophisticated means of communication.



Captive whales and dolphins have been observed inflicting injuries and harm on themselves.



Captive whales and dolphins often live shorter lives than those in the wild.

Stress-related conditions such as ulcers, stereotypical behaviours including self-mutilation, and abnormal aggression frequently develop in wide-ranging predators denied the opportunity to forage and hunt. These problems are commonly observed in captive whales and dolphins.

The majority of whale and dolphin species held in captivity (including bottlenose dolphins - the species most commonly held in captivity for human entertainment) are neither threatened nor endangered, although captures still occur from populations subject to other threats in the wild and which are, in some cases, in decline. Breeding occurs primarily to supply facilities with new individuals for display and entertainment purposes.

Many facilities separate calves from their mothers causing stress and anxiety. Not only is this inhumane to animals where family is everything, but such breeding is undertaken with no value to conservation.



Image credit: WDC / Charlie Phillips

Many tricks performed by whales and dolphins in captive performances are unnatural and unrepresentative of their natural behaviour, and would never be seen in the wild.

Interactions with whales and dolphins in captivity are potentially harmful to both the whale or dolphin and the human participant. Direct interaction with dolphins has resulted in serious injury to participants. In addition, there is risk of disease transmission from dolphin to human and vice versa.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting social and economic chaos has shone a harsh spotlight on our relationship with wild animals. For the global tourism industry to now rebuild a more resilient and responsible sector, wildlife exploitation for entertainment must be phased out.

Above images credit: World Animal Protection, except second from left, WDC / Rob Lott.



Public opinion is changing

Tourists want to see wild animals like whales and dolphins, but are increasingly aware of the cruel reality of captivity.

In consumer research undertaken by World Animal Protection in 2019:

- 80% of actual and potential dolphin venue visitors would prefer to see dolphins in the wild – if they had the chance.
- The acceptability of swimming with dolphins in captivity specifically as an activity has been dropping, with 67% of people saying it was acceptable in a 2014 global survey to 58% in 2019.

Enjoying whales and dolphins in the wild must be responsibly managed with their welfare coming first

Responsible whale and dolphin watching tours can be incredibly rewarding for tourists and can provide a much more compelling opportunity for conveying conservation, protection, and sustainability messages than seeing and interacting with whales and dolphins in captivity.

In the wild, whales and dolphins are free to live in their natural habitat and undertake natural behaviours, such as hunting, foraging, resting, playing and travelling great distances.

Observing whales and dolphins in the wild responsibly can create strong economic value for local communities and can foster peaceful human-wildlife coexistence.

Irresponsible tour operations can cause significant stress or injuries to wild whales and dolphins by approaching too fast, crowding with too many boats, getting too close, or failing to inform customers about appropriate behaviour.

However, responsibly managed whale and dolphin watching can contribute to our understanding of these marine mammals by providing platforms for research and education. It can also aid their protection by offering an economic alternative to killing and capturing them for profit.

Image credits: World Animal Protection/Rachel Ceretto (front page) and WDC/Rob Lott (back page)

