

Animal Welfare

Our policy for ensuring ethical encounters with wildlife



www.vetsetters.com

Taking an *evidence-*
based approach to
supporting animal
welfare



The *foundations* of Animal Welfare

The foundation of effective animal welfare is ensuring the protection of the **Five Freedoms** – an internationally-recognised standard for animal care. These principles underpin and inform our entire approach to animal welfare.

1

Nutrition

Ensuring the animal's access to sufficient, balanced, varied and clean food and water

2

Environment

Factors that enable comfort and support natural behaviour, such as temperature, noise, space, and predictability of routine

3

Health

Enabling and supporting good health through disease/injury prevention and treatment, plenty of exercise and a good level of fitness

4

Behaviour

Providing novel, varied and stimulating situations through sensory inputs, exploration, foraging, bonding and playing

5

Mental state

Supporting mental wellbeing and positive mental states such as pleasure, comfort and vitality while minimising negative states such as fear, frustration and hunger





Domestic and wild animals

What this means for engaging with them

It's important to recognise that there is a difference between wild and domesticated animals. Domesticated animals are animals such as dogs or horses that have undergone selective breeding over many generations to be notably and genetically different to their wild ancestors.

As a result domesticated animals adapt more readily to captive conditions and are more receptive to contact with humans.

A further subset of domesticated animals are working animals, which again have different, more specialised requirements for ethical engagement (see subsequent section).

This domestication process has not happened for wild animals that are typically encountered on trips abroad such as elephants, tigers and monkeys.

We strongly assert that the welfare of wild animals is compromised in captivity, that any degree of captivity should be avoided where at all possible and that captivity is only acceptable when it is in the animal's best interests and the highest possible standards of care are given.



Working animals

Using animals for transport

As in the case of domesticated animals, there are certain species that have co-existed with humans and worked in harmony with them for generations. Particularly found across indigenous cultures, these animals have been bred to perform crucial activities as part of the community, including transportation.

Domesticated working animals that are used for transport – such as horses, donkeys/mules and camels – must be properly cared for and have a high standard of wellbeing. Where they are properly cared for and the positive aspects of their existence outweigh the negative.

Our conditions for engaging with any domesticated working animals include:

- The animals should look well fed and be given adequate shelter and exercise.
- Their coats should be in good condition without sores (check near the mouth, shoulders, spine and belly, these areas are typically in constant contact with harnessing equipment). Wounds may also be hidden under a saddle or harness.
- Injuries and illness must be treated promptly. Sick and injured animals should not work at all.
- The animals must not be overloaded or overworked, meaning maximum one rider or 20% of the animal's weight. The weight or load an animal carries or pulls must be significantly reduced in relation to the more physically strenuous conditions faced (e.g. altitude, temperature, hours of work and age and condition of the animal).
- The animals should work for at most six hours a day and given one to two full days of rest from work each week. Mares should not be worked for three months both before and after foaling.
- The animal's eyes should be clear, bright and alert.
- Handlers should be trained and familiar with normal and abnormal behaviour and not use physical force (including hitting or beating

Working animals

Wild Animal Riding (including elephant rides)

Elephants and other wild animals are not, and never have been, domesticated. The methods involved in keeping elephants in captivity are very psychologically and physically harmful to them.

Therefore, VetSetters will not sell or suggest any activities or sites where elephant riding is featured, and we strongly encourage all of our customers to avoid anywhere that this practice is present.

Riding camels & donkeys/mules

Donkeys/mules and camels are domesticated working animals. Despite this, rides on these animals are still used in our itineraries incredibly sparingly. We only include these in instances where it's integral to the experience of a local destination/culture and where the wellbeing of the animals has been confirmed through the use of trusted supplier partners.

VetSetters customers are strongly urged to provide feedback if they ever notice any signs of mistreatment, which will be immediately investigated.





Tips for Customers: What to Look Out For

Camels

- Handlers should be trained and familiar with normal and abnormal behaviour and not use physical force (including hitting or beating with crops, sticks or hands) to control or manoeuvre the animal.
- Their coats should be in good condition without sores (check near the mouth, shoulders, spine and belly, these areas are typically in constant contact with harnessing equipment). Wounds may also be hidden under a saddle or harness.
- There is a species of camel (the Wild Bactrian Camel – *Camelus Ferus*) which is not domesticated. This species should not be used for any close encounters with people.

Donkeys/mules

- Check the donkey over to see that it hasn't been subjected to 'firing'. This – egregiously – means applying hot metal to the donkey's legs. In some parts of the world, practitioners believe that this 'traditional healing' method will make the animal 'strong'.
- As distressing as this will be to see, we do not advise confronting the donkey owner directly. If they appear to be part of an organisation, please report the organisation to us as soon as possible for us to investigate.
- Never overload a donkey-drawn carriage – if in doubt, walk away.
- Never canter or gallop a donkey-drawn carriage.
- Never ride with more than one person on the back of the animal.
- Consider your own weight before riding and aim to choose an animal appropriate to your size and weight.
- An appropriate weight for a standard-sized donkey to carry is on average 50.8kg, assuming that the animal is healthy and has good conformation. Smaller donkeys should of course take on a lighter load.
- If the owner is treating the animal badly (for example, whipping), stop and walk away.

Tips for Customers: What to Look Out For

Horse Riding

Before riding, consider the health of the horse and the following guidelines:

- Riders should choose a horse that is appropriate to their size
- Horses should not carry more than approximately half of their body weight, with lighter requirements in conditions involving extreme heat and/or steep incline/declines.
- If extreme temperatures are encountered, animals should not be ridden.
- Are the animals healthy? As with donkeys and camels, please alert both us and your Tour Operator if you have any reason to believe that the animals are not being well cared for.
- Is the horse underweight? Horses which are underweight should not be ridden. An underweight horse can be identified by protruding or visible ribs, hip bones or spine.
- The horse's eyes should be clean, bright and alert.



Tips for Customers: What to Look Out For

Dog & Reindeer Sledding

Sled dogs are a group of dog breeds that were bred for pulling sleds as a form of transportation in Alaska, Greenland, across northern Scandinavia and in northern Canada.

Sled dogs today are still used as a means of transport by some rural communities and for recreational purposes. Reindeer have been used as a means of transport by the Sami people for hundreds of years and continue to be used for this purpose today.

We are committed to ensuring the following requirements are met before we include any form of sled dog or reindeer activity as part of itinerary:

- The animals are physically fit and conditioned for the activity they are being asked to perform, including being of a breed that is suited to the cold weather
- Animals must be given adequate periods of rest and not forced to work beyond their physical capabilities or willingness to work
- Animals must have ready access to clean water and receive a varied diet of nutritionally-appropriate food
- Animals are housed humanely, with space to move around, clean and dry bedding, protection against heat and cold and the opportunity to socialise
- If the animals must be chained or tied to a restricted area, they should have significant time every day to allow them to run, play and socialise





Viewing Wildlife in the Wild

Land and marine environments

There are few things more spectacular and awe-inspiring than seeing wildlife thriving in their natural habitat. However, it is absolutely essential that this is done responsibly. In order to ensure that wildlife are not unnecessarily disturbed, we suggest the following guidelines:

- Respect the animals' personal space. A visitor/vehicle must be kept at a safe and respectful distance and never chase animals. If the animal alters what it's doing, then the visitor has invaded its space and influenced its behaviour.
- When swimming, diving or snorkelling, ensure that you keep your distance from marine life and respect their space as wild animals.
- Observe nature as it occurs naturally and not as to how it responds to your presence. Do not chase or lure animals, or attempt to modify/influence their behaviour in any way.
- Speak quietly. Do not call out, shout, whistle or in other ways try to attract the attention of animals. Avoid sudden movements.
- Remember that all wild animals can be unpredictable. If an animal charges, it may be feeling threatened because it doesn't have enough space.
- Do not feed animals – neither those on land, marine life or birds. Feeding animals attracts them to humans and to human food, upsetting their natural diet, shortening their lives and making them unnaturally aggressive in the presence of people.
- Do not touch wild animals. You can unwittingly pass on disease to wildlife, as well as placing yourself at risk. This includes marine life.
- When in a safari environment, always stay in your vehicle.
- Night viewing: Minimise use of a flashlight and never deliberately shine your light into an animal's eyes. Do not illuminate prey as this gives the predator an unfair advantage.

Wildlife

Sanctuaries for wildlife

Our itineraries will only include visits to facilities involving wild animals in captivity if the rationale for the sanctuary operation is in the best interests of the animals involved.

Genuine sanctuaries:

- Do not buy/sell wild animals.
- Do not use the animals for interactions with customers or in performances/shows.
- Do not breed wild animals – unless they are part of an officially-recognised breeding programme in which the animals involved are either at risk of becoming extinct and/or are being responsibly released back into the wild.
- Allow for appropriate veterinary care according to their specific needs.
- Do not keep animals without a good reason (i.e. they must have a defined conservation benefit in keeping the animals).



Animal Products

Animal Products

We would advise against any purchase of products that are made from wild animal derivatives, which can fuel the illegal wildlife trade.

Examples include:

- Turtle soup
- Shark fin soup
- Snake whiskeys
- Bear bile
- Tiger or lion bone wine
- Civet coffee (Kopi Luwak)

In most local markets, customers should avoid purchasing any wild animal products – especially anything from an endangered species, such as:

- Skins, including fur and reptile skins
- Horns e.g. rhino
- Spiders and butterflies
- Turtle shell
- Seashells, coral and starfish
- Ivory
- Traditional medicines made from endangered animal parts and products

Trades such as this are generally illegal but may not be enforced effectively through the relevant local government agencies. Therefore, it's particularly important not to support this illegal trade through the purchase of its products. The wild animals used to produce these products often suffer significantly, and suffering is likely to occur regardless of if the animal has been bred in captivity or wild, or if the process is legal or illegal.



Wild Animal Interaction



Customers are asked not to visit venues that offer animal shows, 'selfies' or direct interaction with wild animals.

The animals involved in these activities are sometimes taken prematurely from their mothers in the wild, forced to live in poor conditions and undergo cruel physical and psychological conditioning to make them compliant and perform.

Visiting these venues supports a cycle of animal cruelty. If you're not sure, it's best to say no.



The following
activities will *never*
form part of a
VetSetters itinerary...

Elephant Entertainment

Elephants are not, and never have been, domesticated. They are wild animals in captivity that need to be cruelly trained in order to make them submissive enough to be used for performing, riding, bathing and other close tourist interactions.

The methods involved in the training and keeping of elephants in captivity for the purposes of tourist entertainment are very psychologically and physically harmful to the elephants. These are some of the reasons that **we at VetSetters do not offer elephant rides** and other close-contact activities such as elephant washing and bathing on our trips:

- All elephants undergo a cruel, painful and intense training process that forces them to accept human control.
- Elephants need to be constantly restrained often using bull hooks to maintain control of the elephant. These can cause serious injuries to the elephants, including sores and cuts that are likely to become infected.
- Elephants may display sudden outbursts of human-targeted aggression, leading to injuries and fatalities.
- Captivity can cause significant health and behavioural problems to the elephants.



Marine Entertainment Parks

Dolphins and other marine mammals used for human entertainment purposes suffer physically and psychologically, and are made to act unnaturally.

We strongly encourage all of our customers to avoid marine parks that keep mammals such as dolphins and whales captive. These mammals are often captured from the wild and forced to live in inhumane conditions that cannot adequately simulate their ocean home, or provide for their complex social, behavioural and intellectual needs.



**Visiting these venues supports a cycle of animal cruelty.
If you're not sure, it's best to say no.**

Lion Walks

In southern Africa excursions are offered in which you can walk with lions. These animals have been taken from their mothers prematurely and in most cases have first been used for petting and as photographic props. Once these young animals have become too dangerous for direct handling by tourists, they are used for lion walks.

Many of the places that offer walking with wild cats claim that once matured, animals will be placed back into the wild. However, as a result of being hand-reared through their youth, they can *never* be effectively and safely released. It is also highly irresponsible to release a dangerous, large predator that's familiar with humans into an area where local people live.

Additionally, the release of predators is restricted to certain areas. It doesn't take long for the delicate balance of predator/prey to be upset, causing huge damage to the entire ecosystem.

When a lion has become too dangerous for walking with tourists, they may be sent to canned hunting camps to be shot by trophy hunters in an enclosed environment. Cubs and adult lions may also be sold to zoos or to wealthy collectors of exotic animals. All egregious and entirely preventable.

Therefore, it goes without saying that at VetSetters we are entirely opposed to 'lion walking' activities, and will not work with or sell any destination that provides it.





Other unacceptable animal practices

We ask our customers not to support the following activities:

There are few things more spectacular and awe-inspiring than seeing wildlife thriving in their natural habitat. However, it is absolutely essential that this is done responsibly. In order to ensure that wildlife are not unnecessarily disturbed, we suggest the following guidelines:

- Visiting or taking part in sport and cultural activities that cause animal suffering or death such as bullfighting, elephant polo, ostrich riding, cock fighting and more
- Animals used for begging such as dancing bears, snake charmers or buying bananas for elephants and monkeys etc
- Trophy/game hunting of any kind
- Any cage diving where baiting is used
- Visiting restaurants or hotels that display captive wildlife

*Thank you
for your efforts to help us
protect our precious wildlife*



VetSetters
The Veterinary Travel People!