



Animal Protection Policy 2022

Explore Worldwide

Our stance on animal protection

Explore will never knowingly compromise the welfare of any animal for the purpose of our trips. We want to protect animals and their natural environments, or otherwise contribute towards the best welfare standards in the tourism industry for those in captivity.

We want wildlife to be wild and nature to be natural

Explore wants to offer authentic, enriching experiences which benefit our customers, the local communities, the natural environment and the wildlife within. Animal interactions sit at the heart of many of our trips, providing sustainable livelihoods, conservation funds, rehabilitation and rewilding programmes to be sustainable. It is our responsibility to have an animal protection policy that is robust, clear and well communicated to ensure that all experiences are ethical and there is zero exploitation of animals, nature or local communities.

Our Animal Protection Policy was created in 2021 by the Head of Sustainability and sustainability team, alongside charity partners Born Free, FOUR PAWS and responsible animal tourism consultants ANIMONDIAL.

For 2022 we are proud to be working alongside Wild Welfare and ANIMONDIAL on our continued commitment to providing enriching holidays.

The guidelines herein are to help staff, leaders, suppliers and customers to design trips, understand our stance, help monitor the protection of animals overseas and enable us to responsibly operate our trips alongside some of our greatest natural resources in this world.

Animal Welfare and Protection

Animal welfare refers to the physical and mental state of the animal. We are responsible for an animal if we use, interact, supply, own or are in charge of it. Explore follows the internationally recognised Five Domains model for good animal welfare. This includes thorough analysis of nutrition, environment, physical health and behaviour which together form the mental health of the animal.

Explore understands that the welfare of a captive animal is paramount, but also believes that welfare alone does not always encompass the protection of animals in the wild and the human impact we can have on their natural environment. For this reason we have an Animal Protection Policy that considers the welfare of captive animals but also our influence in the natural world, on flora and fauna alike.

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Protection Procedures

We are responsible for an animal if we use, interact, supply, own or are in charge of it. We actively encourage customers and all staff to report any instance of animal welfare or protection that has been compromised.

We will investigate the complaint immediately, both internally with our supply chain and seeking advice from experts Wild Welfare.

We will work with our suppliers to make the necessary changes, educating and learning from each other about what has happened and how we can make improvements.

If there is not significant improvement, or if improvement isn't possible, we will change suppliers for that interaction or remove it altogether. Everyone must be given a chance to improve so that collectively, across the industry, we can improve welfare, protection and understanding.

We will continually review our criteria as and when new evidence comes to light and each year we will independently audit all captive animal interactions. Effective animal protection is a journey and we will always endeavour to act quickly and make balanced decisions.

Definitions

Animal: Explore will use "animal" to refer to any living creature; vertebrate or invertebrate, land or sea dwelling. The only exception here are humans.

Animal welfare: When referring to good animal welfare, Explore follows the internationally recognised Five Domains model. This includes thorough analysis of animal specific nutrition, environment, physical health and behaviour which together form the mental health of the animal. Examples include access to clean water, appropriate nutritious food, opportunities to carry out natural behaviours in a naturalist environment, and provided with veterinary care.

Bushmeat: Refers to any wild animal meat. We do not classify fish or livestock as bushmeat.

Community Animals: Feral/stray animals and pets. Many countries don't have pets confined in homes or gardens and they are free to roam.

Facility: Refers to an included or optional activity in our itinerary where an animal is fully or partially enclosed and where they rely on humans to be able to meet their five domains of welfare. Examples include anywhere which calls themselves a sanctuary, orphanage, camp, shelter, rescue centre etc.

Interaction: Refers to any planned activity or observation, where the animal was the sole purpose of visit. It does not imply physical contact with an animal, and does not differentiate between wild or domesticized animals.

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Live Animal Markets: This has been separated from wildlife market and refers to markets where there might be livestock trading (farmers markets) or fish markets.

Natural environment: We use the term natural environment to refer to natural landscapes, specifically including all of its non-human characteristics and processes. It is used as a broad term to talk about the interrelationships between different animal and plant species (their habitats and ecosystems) and our want to cause as little disruption as possible to these natural systems.

Sanctuary: Refers to captive facilities that provide animals that are injured, confiscated, orphaned or abandoned with temporary or lifetime shelter, care and rehabilitation. A genuine sanctuary will not breed animals, allow public contact, or engage them in commercial activity.

Wild: Refers to an animal or plant, living or growing in a natural environment; not domesticated or cultivated. A wild animal may not always be in the wild, but instead in a facility as defined separately.

Wildlife: Refers to undomesticated animal species, including all organisms that usually grow or live wild in an area without interacting with humans on a frequent or planned basis.

Wildlife markets: Refers to markets selling wild animals for meat or as pets. The markets themselves may be legal, but will sometimes offer illegal species alongside permitted ones. We do not visit wildlife markets.

Working animals: Explore recognises that various animals *can* be used as working animals (such as elephants), however we will only refer to domesticated equine (horses, donkeys, mules), camelids (camels, llamas, alpacas and vicuna), dogs (sled and sheep) and reindeer as those acceptable to be used within a tourist facility or interaction.

Wild, Domestic and Tame Animals

Domesticated animals have been selectively bred and genetically adapted over generations to live alongside humans. They are genetically distinct from their wild ancestors or cousins.

Animal domestication falls into three main groupings: domestication for companionship (dogs and cats), animals farmed for food (livestock such as sheep, cows, pigs etc), and working or draft animals (horses, donkeys, camels).

In contrast a tame animal was once wild, or has been born in captivity, and their behaviour is conditioned so that they become tolerant of humans. They are not truly domesticated and remain genetically wild.

Any wild animal which allows you to hold it, have a photo taken with it, ride it or simply stroke it, will have been conditioned to do so. This process will always jeopardise the animal's welfare and is against our animal protection policy.

This is not always the same for domestic animals, they can often be handled more easily, although their welfare and protection is of equal importance.

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No Contact Policy

Explore does not believe that humans should be in direct contact with any wildlife, be that in a natural environment or in an enclosed interaction. We should not be picking plants, removing seeds or touching coral. We should not be feeding wild or feral animals.

Why? Because we believe the experiences on our trips are more authentic for allowing wildlife to be wild, and nature to be natural. But more importantly we want to protect the world around us by not jeopardising any animal's physiological wellbeing by interrupting their natural behaviours and surroundings. Often the impacts we have are not visible, so whilst handling an animal, for example, seems harmless – in reality we may be reducing its survivability incrementally.

Our no contact policy includes community animals (stray and feral) which can risk the health and safety of customers and staff. If domesticated pets are handled it must be with permission of the owners.

We should not be in contact with tame wild animals, which are different from domesticated animals (such as a wild animal or bird which has been raised as a pet).

We understand that animals will initiate contact on occasion, and this is acceptable provided they are not encouraged by enticing them with food or objects, and have freedom of choice and are able to move away.

Our policy does not include working animals (equines, camelids, sled dogs and reindeer) which are part of the itinerary (included or optional activities).

Working Animals

Explore believes domesticated working animals such as horses, donkeys/mules and camels should have a decent life, where their welfare is properly cared for and considered. Reports of cruelty or neglect will always be investigated and improvements continually sought before changing suppliers.

Riding animals: We will only offer horses and camels for riding as part of our included or optional activities. It will never be acceptable to ride wild animals in any of our trips.

Draught animals: We do use draught animals on some trips; animals which use a harness attached to a cart or sled. The animals we can use include horses, donkeys/mules, camels, sled dogs and reindeer.

Pack animals: Animals carry weight on their back, but excludes humans. Examples include the transportation of luggage or equipment to support treks. The animals we can use include horses, donkeys/mules and camels.

Sanctuaries

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A genuine sanctuary provides animals that are injured, confiscated, orphaned or abandoned with temporary or lifetime shelter, care and rehabilitation. A genuine sanctuary will not breed animals, allow public contact, or engage them in commercial activity.

Explore wants wildlife to be wild and nature to be natural, and only where this is not possible or where a particular interaction is deemed particularly inspiring, will we offer alternative interactions such as animal sanctuaries or desert camel rides, only where the animal's welfare is met.

We also know that the word "sanctuary" can be misused, it implies good welfare and this isn't always the case. The same can be said for "rehabilitation centres" or "shelters". We work alongside Wild Welfare to ensure we are happy with our chosen facilities, but if you are worried about the welfare of animals on your trips please let us know and you can also raise a welfare concern report here; <https://wildwelfare.org/report-a-concern>

Animal Interaction Database

All animal interactions, both wild and captive, on Explore trips will be included in one database and reviewed annually by our charity partners. We can refer to this database for both future product development and understanding past decisions. This database is comprehensively audited by Wild Welfare to independently assess the impact we have on our holidays.

Explore Traffic Light System

	Conditions Attached?	Conditions	Examples
Green Animal Interaction	No	Provided we adhere to strict guidelines* surrounding proximity to animals, length of stay and the means by which to access them, we will presume they are an ethical interaction *ABTA Wildlife Viewing Guidelines 2019	Animal viewing by vehicle, boat, on foot or snorkelling/scuba whereby the animals are not enclosed or limited in their behaviour National Parks Game Reserves Natural Wilderness

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Amber Animal Interaction	Yes	<p>Annual independent audit of all captive animal interactions.</p> <p>Annual check with suppliers about our use of working animals.</p> <p>If standards are not met the suppliers will be asked to improve through training and collaboration. If we are not satisfied changes have been sufficient, we will change suppliers or remove the interaction</p>	<p>Captive wild animal facilities; sanctuaries, rescue centres, shelters.</p> <p>Working animals; riding, draught and pack</p> <p>Animal markets; farmers markets, fish markets (NB: not wildlife markets)</p> <p>Controlled animal feeding</p> <p>Direct contact with animals; not human initiated</p> <p>Bird of Prey demonstrations</p> <p>Turtle Hatcheries</p> <p>Fishing</p>
Red Animal Interaction	No	<p>Explore does not support any activity we feel could endanger, disrespect or in any way harm animals and biodiversity</p>	<p>Do not feed, hold, ride or hunt any wild animal in captivity or in the wild.</p> <p>Do not visit wildlife performances, wildlife markets, buy bushmeat or wild animal part souvenirs.</p>

ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

For customers: if you have concerns about a supplier we use or an included activity, please advise your leader and provide details in the feedback survey sent to you at the end of your trip. Alternatively email sustainability@explore.co.uk

For leaders and ground agents: if you have concerns about a supplier we use or an included activity, please speak to your operations manager or email sustainability@explore.co.uk

For staff: if you would like to know more about specific interactions, facilities or decisions in these guidelines, please speak to the Head of Sustainability or RB Forum. Alternatively email sustainability@explore.co.uk.

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We work alongside Wild Welfare to ensure we are happy with our chosen facilities, but if you are worried about the welfare of animals on your trips please let us know. Wild Welfare also run a welfare concerns page and your concerns can be raised here also; <https://wildwelfare.org/report-a-concern/>