



Recommendations for Responsible Nocturnal Primate-Watching

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Introduction

Nocturnal primates occur throughout the world, with night monkeys in the Americas, pottos, angwantibos and galagos in Africa, lemurs in Madagascar, and lorises and tarsiers in Asia. The increase in primate tourism has also meant increasing tourist activity in relation to these nocturnal primates. This activity includes guided night-walks through nocturnal primates' habitats. Nocturnal primate tourism may also include the animals being displayed in semi-captive environments, encouraged to come to feeding platforms at hotels, or displayed in daylight for tourists to interact with which can affect [primate welfare](#).

Nocturnal primates generally have highly developed senses, such as sight, with many having large eyes in comparison to their body size, and large corneas relative to eye size to compensate for the lower light levels at night. They are, therefore, very sensitive to artificial light (e.g., bright white light, LED light sources and camera flashes), and being subjected to daylight conditions can negatively affect their health. Nocturnal primates also have sensitive hearing, and excessive noise can be harmful and disruptive, in that noise can cause stress and health issues, and reduce their reproductive success. When choosing a tour operator/tour guide, make sure they follow the recommendations below.

Recommendations

Before Your Visit

- Ensure your vaccinations and tests are up to date for diseases that you could transmit to local people or primates.
- Avoid visiting primates if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

- Smaller tourist groups are best, up to a maximum of six people. This makes it easier for the guide(s) to ensure everyone is safe at night. A smaller group will disturb primates less and allow more opportunity to see more primates and other wildlife.
- To avoid disturbing the primates, refrain from using perfumes and if possible, repellents that contain DET.
- Make sure participants bring or are provided with a red-and-white flashlight, not a regular white light, to avoid disturbing nocturnal primates. These animals cannot detect red light, but white light sources will likely blind them. It takes a while for the human eye to get used to seeing under the red light but your eyes will eventually adjust to it. However, if one group member uses a white light at the same time this will not work.
- Many of the nocturnal primates have a reflective layer in their eye, making them easy to spot with the use of a light. However, remember that even the faintest of light will reflect eye shine, so strong headlamps are not required.
- Ensure you have sufficient time for briefing before the night walks.

On arrival

- Turn off your cell phone.
- Review, along with your group, how to properly use headlamps and make sure everyone has used one before.
- Remind your group that many headlamps allow you to change the direction and colour of the light.
- Remember that you can only see eye shine reflections if your light source is near your eyes, so if using a handheld torch, hold it at eye level.
- Bear in mind that not all nocturnal animals have eye shine (tarsiers do not).

During your visit

- Walk slowly and quietly to avoid disturbing primates and other wildlife, giving participants the opportunity to see more animal species in their natural habitat.
- Use white-light sources only while walking on hilly and difficult areas, for safety. Remember to use a red light once you spot a primate or any other animal.
- Limit the time spent with each animal and the time you shine light on each animal to reduce disturbance. We suggest a maximum of 5 minutes.

- If you take photos, refrain from using flash.
- Avoid touching the animals you encounter or their surroundings, for their safety and yours.
- Stay at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from any animal that you encounter.
- Refrain from destroying vegetation to watch primates.
- Do not leave any litter or body waste in the forest.
- Do not smoke near primates.
- Avoid participating in activities that exploit primates as photo props.



Nancy Ma's night monkey (*Aotus nancymae*).
Photo credit B. Wittemann Entropica.

Further Reading

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