



## Tourism and primate welfare

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Outside zoos and sanctuaries, primates may be kept in captivity expressly to entertain or engage tourists. These primates are usually taken from the wild as infants. Primate mothers, and sometimes other adults, are often killed to take their offspring. Confiscated primates that have been kept or traded illegally are sometimes sent to captive facilities where visiting tourists can feed and handle them, and take photographs with them (pseudo-sanctuaries). Close encounters with primates are understandably valued by tourists, who are unaware of the harm that these activities can cause to the animals involved.

Some primates may have been bred in captivity for commercial trade as pets or for captive collections. However, *all* primates exploited for tourist entertainment will have been removed from their mothers as infants and deprived of the opportunity to live with others of their kind. Primates deprived of their mothers suffer psychological and physical harm.

Performing primates and those used for interactions are treated cruelly. For example, as part of their training, the performing monkeys used for Topeng Monyet (“monkey mask” shows) in Indonesia are restrained in a manner that forces them to stand bipedally for long periods of time. Primates used as photo props may have their teeth clipped or removed without anaesthesia, often resulting in painful infections. Photo prop Barbary macaques in Morocco are often beaten if their owner perceives that they have misbehaved. Even if not abused, captive primates used for tourism are usually housed in very poor conditions. When kept in bars, shops, or hotels, they may be chained, or confined to small cages with inadequate protection from the sun or rain, and maintained on a poor diet.

Interaction-focused primate tourism can also have indirect negative consequences for primates. Images of people interacting with primates, or of primates in “human” environments, can lead people to assume that such interactions are positive, safe, and harmless, increasing the likelihood that they will take part in such activities themselves.

Tourists often share photos, videos, and stories of their close encounters with primates with others on social media, helping to shape the attitudes, and potentially behaviour, of their families, friends and followers towards primates. In addition, international and national tourists may purchase young primates offered for sale believing they are saving the primate. However, purchasing it only encourages vendors to obtain more young primates from the wild to satisfy demand.

**Do not support activities that exploit or harm animals.** We can vote with our wallets. By spending our money on responsible enterprises, and avoiding harmful ones, we can change the demand for the above activities. Responsible tourists are those who:

- Support and enjoy tourist activities and venues that do not involve or keep captive primates in inadequate conditions or as entertainers.
- Avoid primate performances, e.g., orangutan boxing matches, circuses featuring performing primates, and “monkey rodeos”.
- Avoid hotels, bars, and other tourist venues that display primates.
- Be aware that terms like “rescue” and “sanctuary” can be abused and learn how to spot a pseudo-sanctuary. Visit <https://www.sanctuaryfederation.org/truth-about-sanctuaries>.
- When confronted by primates being kept in poor conditions, do not purchase one because you will be contributing to the primate trade. Report to the local authorities and/or complain to your tour guide and operator.
- Refrain from taking part in tourist activities that involve the capture, hunting or consumption of primates.

## Further Reading

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Aldrich, B. C. 2023. Tourism and primate welfare. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al.* *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.