



Unplanned or Incidental Primate Tourism

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K.T. Hanson

Department of Anthropology, University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA

Unplanned, opportunistic or incidental primate tourism refers to encounters between tourists and primates that occur while visiting cultural sites or landscape features, birdwatching, or hiking. Incidental primate tourism has been documented in a variety of contexts across the globe. For example, at Lamanai Archaeological Reserve in Belize, tourists visiting the Maya cultural heritage site may also encounter black howler monkeys and other wildlife that inhabit the protected area; in Silver Springs State Park, Florida, kayakers and boaters enjoying the Silver River may observe introduced rhesus macaques foraging on the riverbank; and tourists exploring the waterfalls and cave features in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, might look up to find moor macaques travelling across the canopy.

Incidental primate tourism poses distinct challenges for risk mitigation and management. Unlike established primate tourism sites, incidental primate tourism is typically informal, decentralised, and unmanaged. Sites where incidental primate tourism occurs often lack educational material to inform tourists about local wildlife and conservation and to adequately prepare them for possible encounters with local wildlife. Moreover, tourists' recreational goals at incidental sites usually eclipse any interest in learning about primates and how to responsibly observe them. These factors result in high rates of provisioning, heightened primate disturbance, and increased risk of harmful human-primate interactions. For example, primates that spend time at roadsides may suffer injury and/or death from moving vehicles.

Provisioning is common at incidental sites and often occurs despite signs prohibiting it. It is helpful to remind yourself and those in your group that provisioning is discouraged because primates can suffer increased rates of obesity, and aggressive interactions with humans can increase. However, bear in mind that many incidental primate tourism sites have a long history of provisioning due to cultural practices or religious beliefs. It may therefore be impractical—and in some cases, insensitive—to attempt to eliminate provisioning at such sites.

There may not be information indicating primate presence or how to behave when primates are encountered. It is helpful to familiarise yourself with the following recommendations before you arrive at any attraction so you may experience more informed and responsible encounters with primates where tourist sites and primate habitats overlap.

Recommendations

Before your visit

- Avoid bringing food to the area when possible; keep food contained and out of sight.
- Seek tour operators that adhere to local rules and regulations and attempt to minimise disturbance to local wildlife. This includes features such as limiting group numbers, and modelling appropriate behaviour (see below) when wildlife is encountered.

If you are in a vehicle

- If safe to do so, slow down and put hazard lights on to alert other drivers.
- Allow primates to cross or move away from the road before continuing.
- Close car windows to reduce potential contact with primates who may be used to jumping on cars.
- Move any food or plastic bags out of sight.
- Remember to:
 - Adhere to local regulations.
 - Observe from a distance.
 - Be a model for others.

During your visit

- Tour guides and tourists alike can play an essential role in promoting both human and primate wellbeing at the site by modelling responsible encounters with primates.
- Practice and encourage distanced and quiet observation.
- Always remain at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from primates.

- Discourage direct physical contact with primates.
- Discourage harassment of primates, including whistling, shouting, etc., to elicit a response from them.
- If a primate group or individual moves away from the encounter site, do not follow them.

Further Reading

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