



Recommendations for responsible primate-watching in Central and South America

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Introduction

Most primates of Central and South America are small to medium-sized and inhabit forests in remote areas. Tourism can exert pressure to habituate primates and modify habitats. A few species are found in or around cities, and these may be very interactive and approachable, which can provide opportunities for inappropriate interactions. However, if conducted conscientiously, primate-watching can bring valuable revenue to communities, while serving as an educational and conservation promoting tool. Tourism activities can engage local communities in conservation through sharing of economic benefits and participation in other conservation activities that preserve habitats, for example. Primate tourism in cities can contribute to preserving city forests, some of which are large such as the Tijuca forest in Rio de Janeiro, and some which serve as corridors to forests outside cities. Conservation projects in rural or remote rainforest areas can use primate tourism as a source of immediate revenue and long-term support. The key to successful and ethical primate tourism is avoiding negative outcomes of exposure of primates to human visitors.

Below, we outline some general recommendations for responsible primate-watching in Central and South America.

Recommendations

- Choose a tourism operator or agency that uses primate specialists who will not place financial profit over primate wellbeing.
- Ensure vaccinations and tests are up to date for problematic diseases (yellow fever, influenza and COVID), especially if proximity is expected. The risk of disease transmission increases as you get closer to the monkeys.

- Avoid visiting primates if you feel unwell or show any sign of illness, to reduce the risk of disease transmission.
- Small groups of tourists are much better than larger groups (avoid groups over 15).
- Ensure children under 14 years of age are accompanied by an adult.
- Ensure your tourism provider supports local human communities and employs local staff and promotes conservation efforts.
- Manage your expectations according to the species in the area and their behaviour. Opportunities to watch secretive primates such as titi or night monkeys or small primates may be brief. Larger species may be watched from afar for longer periods.
- Foster an experience based on nature appreciation, observing natural behaviours, and learning. Habitat watching (or forest bathing) is also part of the experience.
- Bring a pair of binoculars to watch the primates and other wildlife from a distance.
- Avoid behaviours that encourage interactions and proximity. Keep at least 7 metres (23 feet) away from animals.
- Avoid feeding the monkeys or shaking tree branches to encourage them to move.
- Avoid touching the animals or surroundings you encounter for their safety and yours.
- Keep noise to a minimum. There should be no talking if possible, and then limit it to whispering only.
- Turn off your cell phone or put it on silent.
- Do not smoke or eat around the animals. Refrain from drinking alcohol.
- Do not leave any litter or bodily waste in the forest.
- Flash photography in general is not harmful to animals during daytime. Flash use at night may be. Single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras have noisy shutters and flash. Mobile phones are not noisy and seldom need flash in forest environments. (See [nocturnal primate watching guidelines](#) for more information).

Further Reading

Lappan, S., Malaivijitnond, S., *et al.* 2020. The human-primate interface in the New Normal: challenges and opportunities for primatologists in the COVID-19 era and beyond. *Am. J. Primatol.* 82: 8 e23176.

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Ruiz-Miranda, C. R., Talebi, M., McKinney, T. 2023. Recommendations for responsible primate-watching in Central and South America. In: Waters, S., Hansen, M. F., *et al.* *Responsible Primate-Watching for Tourists*. IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Section on Human-Primate Interactions.