



Wish You Weren't Here

animal exploitation in unexpected places, by Syd Barnes

“Isn’t he cute, I love him, I want to take him home,” slurs yet another ‘four sheets to the wind’ tourist as she cuddles an adorable baby gibbon for the ‘must have’ selfie. Or the intrepid backpacker visualising himself as Indiana Jones as he poses atop a majestic elephant. This present-day explorer in his beige sunhat and dark shades is the superhero in his very own adventure. Does he feel ‘at one with the universe’ as he sits high up on the jumbo who is transporting him along the exotic steamy jungle trails? What about the holidaymakers who leap at the ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity to swim with the dolphins? They can’t wait to impress the folks back home as they boast about their close-up and personal encounter with these friendly intelligent mammals.

These off the beaten track vacationers with golden tropical tans and cheap t-shirts are living the dream. But believe me; it is no holiday in the sun for the animals! If you were Doctor Dolittle and could speak with them, they would sadly cry: **“We wish you weren’t here”**.

Now, I am willing to give most of these travellers the benefit of the doubt and accept that they are oblivious to the fact that they are unwittingly being exploited as tourists. These decent caring people wouldn’t be seen dead at a bullfight or a dog-fight, and if they had the slightest inkling that they were contributing to animal abuse they would be mortified. I once heard a tale concerning two backpackers who hopped aboard a truck for day of tiger spotting. Once an ambush of tigers had been located a terror-stricken cow was forced out from a cage,

bellowing in fear as she was attacked and eaten alive. The sightseers in the truck were laughing their heads off as they gleefully videoed the sickening spectacle on their smartphones, but the shocked backpackers (*mentioned at the beginning*) just closed their eyes, put their trembling fingers in their ears and sobbed.

As you all know there are some disgusting inhumane specimens of so called mankind who get a thrill out of witnessing revolting acts of cruelty such as this. Big-game hunters who pay thousands of dollars to shoot and exterminate innocent creatures such as the American dentist who paid to kill Cecil the lion.

This article is not for those callous cowards who find enjoyment in other animals suffering. It is for ordinary warm-hearted people who wish to have a wonderful holiday without impacting on the wildlife. Therefore, able to sit comfortably in the big fat silver aeroplane in the knowledge that the only effect you will have on the animals will be positive. Fasten your seat belt and smile because YOU will make a difference.

ELEPHANTS

These awesome pachyderms have suffered appalling abuse by man for centuries. Beaten into submission to be used for logging or to perform meaningless tricks for simpleminded giggling cretins who visit circuses with animals. Some elephants are forced to carry adventurers on their backs on elephant treks while others have been sentenced to life-imprisonment in some grotty

Godforsaken zoo. 'Nelly the elephant' had the right idea when she slipped her iron chains never to be seen again. But that is only a song and the sad truth is that countless numbers of these poor innocent creatures are still held captive and cruelly maltreated.

Many animal lovers who join an elephant trek are misled into believing the myth that these elephants are fortunate because they have been saved from the logging industry and now have an easy life. Elephants are wild animals that have been tied down and beaten with bull-hooks and other instruments of torture until they submit to their trainers' commands to avoid further pain. If you really want to have an ethical experience with these beautiful giants, then what should you do? Well you could go on a hike in the rainforests with an experienced wildlife guide in the hope of catching a glimpse of them in their natural habitat. Another option would be to visit elephants in a sanctuary. However, be careful because as people become aware of the cruelty involved in keeping captive elephants, unscrupulous owners now dupe tourists by adding words such as sanctuary, refuge, retirement centre. Alas, the same abuse continues as the elephants follow their trainers' commands allowing the tourists to ride, feed and bathe them. They are wild animals and would much prefer to be with their own kind. You could of course take it to the next level and volunteer for a time at an ethical sanctuary. It will be hard but rewarding work and remember elephants are huge animals so as well as the pleasure of preparing the massive meals there will be a fair bit of muck shovelling too!

DOLPHINS

If you love dolphins, then never ever pay to swim with them. You don't need more than two brain cells to realise that dolphins deserve the right to live freely in the ocean rather than be held captive in a concrete pool treated with chemicals. If you swim with imprisoned dolphins, then you are being heartless. If you want to see dolphins why not jump on a boat and view them in the wild. And make sure the boat company is ethical and doesn't go too close or over pods which can injure them. But you really want to swim with them? Well, there are a few responsible organisations that offer tours to parts of the ocean teeming with dolphins. You can jump in the sea and these gorgeous intelligent creatures are then free to choose whether they want to swim with you or not. Much better than swimming with a poor imprisoned dolphin isn't it? Maybe you could take a scuba-diving course and be lucky enough to meet one in the wild. I repeat; never swim with captive dolphins.

GIBBONS

You cuddle the gorgeous baby gibbon, 'ooing and aahing, as the keepsake selfie is taken. Do you picture yourself as a sincere animal lover? Are you having a laugh? Well, the thought of this piteous tiny baby being passed from stranger to stranger on beaches, in bustling markets and noisy nightspots for the souvenir snapshot is

certainly no laughing matter is it? You may be a bit of a party animal, but this helpless little creature isn't. For crying out loud; don't you think he would be happier living in the rainforest with his family? To get their greedy hands on their 'Money-making-Baby' an average of ten gibbons including the mother and father are killed as they 'fight to the death' to protect their young. Don't be an accomplice to this horrific crime. Never have a photograph with a baby primate. How about making a positive impact by visiting a responsible rehabilitation centre? Even better why not be a proper animal lover by volunteering to give these wonderful refuges a much-needed helping hand. No doubt, you will be heartbroken upon witnessing the appalling abuse that these innocent beings have suffered, but also overjoyed when some gibbons are eventually released back into protected forests. So, open your eyes and don't be blind to the fact that these babies deserve to live freely in the rainforest with their families.

DOGS AND CATS

On foreign soil you will be saddened to witness numerous stray cats and dogs scavenging for scraps. It will surely pull on your heartstrings, but the good news is that there are so many wonderful rescues and sanctuaries that are making a massive difference. And YOU can too! Visit these organisations, donate or buy a t-shirt or a bag. Let these rescued moggies and mutts understand that not all humans are cruel by volunteering. Show them love and affection as you cuddle and play with them. Soon they will learn to trust and be ready for the happy ending in their new forever home with a loving adoring family.

Hopefully, I have given you an insight on how to be a conscientious compassionate globetrotter. Avoid all activities with captured animals. A long time ago I witnessed bears and monkeys riding bicycles around a stadium running track. The crowd roared with laughter thinking it was hilarious, but I cried inside. I could see the cruel abuse these poor animals must have suffered as they were forced to perform senseless acts which were totally alien to their nature. Remember if people don't splash the cash on elephant treks, pictures with primates, swimming with dolphins, visits to SeaWorld, zoos and circuses with animals then these cruel practices would stop. These money-grabbers will soon shut-down if we cease lining their merciless pockets. They are only in it for the filthy lucre. But I not only talk the talk, I walk the walk too. Next year, I am relocating to Thailand to launch a vegan tour company to provide opportunities to participate in ethical adventures which will have a positive impact on the wildlife and their natural habitats. If you wish to volunteer at a responsible rescue centre, then I am your man. I will not charge you for this service because I will never make a profit from the voiceless. Finally, a major part of this operation will be the educating of travellers on how avoid contributing to animal exploitation. **There is no excuse for animal abuse.**