

ANIMAL WELFARE IN TOURISM

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Abstract

The welfare of domestic animals in tourism is of essential importance for ensuring ethical and sustainable practices. Animals, such as horses, donkeys, dogs, camels, and elephants, play integral roles in providing memorable experiences for tourists worldwide. However, prioritizing their welfare is crucial to mitigate potential risks and ensure their physical and psychological well-being. Proper accommodation, care, training, and regular supervision are essential components of promoting animal welfare in tourism. By adhering to industry guidelines, implementing responsible management practices, and raising awareness among stakeholders, including tourists, governments, and tour operators, we can create tourism experiences that not only delight visitors but also respect and protect the welfare of domestic animals. Ultimately, fostering a culture of ethical treatment and care for animals in tourism contributes to the sustainability of the industry and enhances its reputation as a responsible and compassionate endeavour.

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Introduction

Animal welfare in tourism represents a complex and multifaceted issue that involves ensuring the ethical treatment and well-being of animals involved in

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various tourist activities (Ghimire et al., 2024). This includes a wide range of considerations, such as the treatment of animals used in attractions such as horse, elephant or camel rides, dolphin shows, and wildlife encounters. Furthermore, to promote animal welfare in tourism, several key points must be considered. Education and awareness are essential in raising awareness about the importance of animal welfare and responsible interactions with animals. Tourists must be informed about the negative impacts of certain tourist activities on animals and encouraged to choose alternatives that prioritize animal well-being. Also, regulation and enforcement play a crucial role in protecting animals involved in tourism. Therefore, governments and regulatory bodies must establish and enforce laws and regulations that aim to protect animals from harm. These regulations may include standards for animal care, guidelines for interactions with wildlife, and penalties for non-compliance. Furthermore, accreditation and certification programs can help tourists identify tour operators and attractions that adhere to high standards of animal welfare. Organizations such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) provide certification for businesses and facilities that meet specific criteria related to animal welfare and conservation. Also, it is important to promote alternatives to exploitative or harmful tourist activities as it is essential for fostering sustainable tourism practices. This may include activities such as eco-tours, cultural experiences, and outdoor adventures that prioritize environmental conservation and respect for wildlife. Finally, collaboration among governments, tour operators, conservation organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders is crucial for addressing animal welfare issues in tourism effectively. By working together, stakeholders can develop and implement strategies to minimize negative impacts on animals while maximizing the benefits of tourism for local communities and conservation efforts. Overall, promoting animal welfare in tourism requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that includes education, regulation, collaboration, and the promotion of responsible and ethical practices among tourists and tourism industry stakeholders.

The goal of this paper on animal welfare in tourism is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the various aspects related to the usage and welfare of domestic animals involved in tourism activities.

The utilization of domestic animals in tourism

The use of domestic animals in tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years, with many travellers seeking unique and authentic

experiences that connect them with local cultures and environments. A variety of activities are available, ranging from horseback riding and dog sledding to camel treks and elephant encounters. Horseback riding, for example, allows visitors to explore natural landscapes on horseback, providing a slow-paced and immersive experience that highlights the beauty of local flora and fauna (Anderson et al., 2015). This activity is particularly popular in regions with scenic trails or picturesque countryside (Picture 1).

Picture 1: *Croatia, Split - Krka Trail Ride*



Source: *Horse explore (2024)*

Picture 2: *Croatia, International Donkey Race 2023*



Source: *Rove.me (2023)*

Dog sledding experiences, on the other hand, are often sought after by adventurous travellers who are looking for a thrilling and unique experience with domesticated sled dogs (Ali et al., 2022). This activity is especially popular in colder regions, where dog sledding is a traditional mode of transportation and a way of life for many locals. In desert regions, camel treks are a popular tourist activity that allows visitors to explore the landscape while riding camels (Iglesias Pastrana et al., 2020). This activity is often accompanied by cultural experiences, such as Bedouin-style camping and traditional meals, providing travellers with a deeper understanding of local customs and traditions. Elephant encounters, such as elephant rides and elephant bathing experiences, are common in some Asian countries (Flower et al. 2021). This activity allows visitors to interact with domesticated elephants and experience these gentle giants up close. However, it is important to note that there are ethical concerns surrounding elephant tourism, and travellers should research carefully before participating. Donkey rides are another popular activity offered in various tourist destinations, particularly in coastal or hilly areas (Camillo, et al., 2018). These leisurely rides provide visitors with a unique way to explore local landscapes and take in scenic views (Picture 2).

Ensuring the welfare of domestic animals in tourism

Maintaining ethical and sustainable practices represents a critical aspect of ensuring domestic animal welfare in tourism. To achieve this, several important considerations must be considered. One such consideration is the provision of appropriate accommodation and care for domestic animals used in tourism, such as horses, donkeys, dogs, and camels. These animals should have access to clean water, nutritious food, and regular veterinary care (Fennell, 2015). Proper shelter and living conditions are also crucial for their well-being.

Picture 3: *The 5 freedoms of animal welfare*

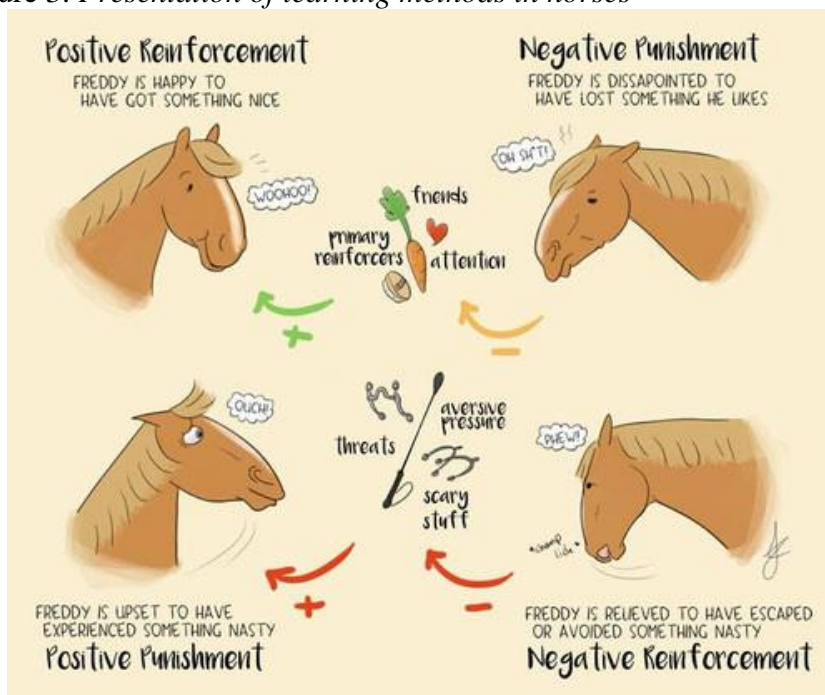


Source: *Stockyard Beef (2024)*

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) has adopted a set of global animal welfare principles that are based on the „Five Freedoms“ concept (Picture 3). These freedoms include freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury, or disease, freedom to express normal behaviour, and freedom from fear and distress. These freedoms are essential for the well-being and welfare of animals, and they should be upheld and respected by all individuals and organizations involved in animal care and management.

Furthermore, training and handling are other crucial factors that must be considered when it comes to animal welfare in tourism. Animals involved in tourism activities should be trained using positive reinforcement methods to ensure their safety and the safety of tourists (Picture 4). Handlers should also be trained to understand animal behaviour and communicate effectively with the animals (Leon et al., 2020).

Picture 3: *Presentation of learning methods in horses*



Source: *Fairhorsemanship* (2022)

The establishment of regulations and standards for the treatment and use of domestic animals in tourism is another important consideration. Governments and tourism authorities should be responsible for implementing

and enforcing these regulations. Regular inspections and enforcement mechanisms are necessary to ensure compliance, according to Ghimire et al. (2024). Finally, public awareness and education are crucial in promoting responsible interactions with domestic animals in tourism settings. Tourists should be educated about the animals' needs, respecting their boundaries, and avoiding activities that may cause them distress (Moorhouse et al., 2015). By addressing these considerations and implementing appropriate measures, domestic animal welfare in tourism can be safeguarded. This, in turn, will contribute to more responsible and compassionate tourism practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of domestic animals in tourism is complex and requires careful consideration of ethical concerns. While animals such as horses, dogs, camels, and elephants provide unique and memorable experiences for tourists, their welfare must always be a top priority. Factors that influence animal welfare in tourism include accommodations, care, training, and regular supervision. Proper management practices, staff training, and adherence to animal welfare standards are crucial for ensuring the well-being of domestic animals involved in tourism activities.

There is a growing recognition of the need for responsible and sustainable tourism practices that prioritize animal welfare. This involves balancing the desire for engaging experiences with the need to protect the physical and psychological welfare of the animals. Regulatory frameworks, industry guidelines, and public awareness initiatives are essential for promoting responsible animal tourism. By collaborating across stakeholders, including governments, tour operators, animal welfare organizations, and tourists themselves, we can establish and uphold ethical standards that protect domestic animals in tourism settings.

Ultimately, the goal should be to create tourism experiences that are enjoyable for visitors while respecting and benefiting the animals involved. By prioritizing their welfare, we can work towards a more ethical and sustainable future for animal tourism.

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