Humane Solutions for Elephants in Entertainment

Guidelines for categorising elephant tourist venues for the purpose of transitioning these to better welfare conditions

Introduction

World Animal Protection’s *Wildlife – Not Entertainers* campaign aims to phase out the exploitation and suffering of wild animals in tourist entertainment. The use of wild animals for tourist entertainment is one of the key drivers of the global wildlife trade which endangers species, causes immense animal suffering and fosters a wide range of social ills including organised crime and failed economies.

The use of captive elephants in tourist attractions involves unnecessary suffering for the entertainment of tourists. World Animal Protection acknowledges the need to facilitate the transitioning of elephant venues from worst husbandry to best possible captive conditions and seeks to work collaboratively with venue owners, mahouts, the travel industry and communities to achieve this.

By shifting the demand away from attractions that use elephants for entertainment purposes, towards facilities that hold elephants with their best interests at heart, travel companies and elephant camps can play a vital role in the phaseout of elephant exploitation and pay respect to these majestic, endangered animals.

Elephant camps taking steps to transition from conventional elephant tourism towards ‘Elephant friendly’ will be spear-heading a movement that is bound to increase, with more and more travel companies increasing demand for such venues. Through ‘Elephant friendly’ venues, animal welfare for existing captive elephants can be respected in the best possible way, while by reducing demand for conventional elephant-entertainment further exploitation of elephants will end.

In this document we outline World Animal Protection’s criteria for elephant-friendly tourist venues that ensure the most feasible option to achieve best possible welfare for captive elephants.

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Three categories are defined, taking into account various criteria regarding the provided conditions for the captive elephants, the activities offered to visitors, the sustainability of the venue, and whether a demand for new captive elephants is maintained or not.

These categories include:

**Elephant Friendly**: These criteria meet welfare standards that are accepted by World Animal Protection as a feasible, best possible permanent solution for captive elephants who cannot be returned to the wild or as temporary solution for captive elephants eligible for reintroduction.

**Transitional**: These criteria represent improved welfare standards yet that are not as comprehensive as for elephant-friendly. Transitional standards could theoretically be achieved by most venues without significant investment. Meeting those criteria will ensure contributing to a sustainable solution as per this campaign, yet further improvements / transition to achieve ‘Elephant Friendly’ standards are recommended where feasible.

**Red line**: Unacceptable conditions for captive elephants that sustain a demand for captive elephants, while perpetuating the practice of cruel training processes to use elephants safely in direct contact with people. Better husbandry conditions at red line venues is strongly encouraged, but not the aim of this document.

A venue can be considered Elephant-friendly if more than half of the following 12 criteria meet ‘elephant-friendly’ quality, while the rest meets ‘transitional’ quality. A venue can be considered Transitional if all 12 criteria meet at least ‘transitional’ quality.
1. Criteria for Categorising Venues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>ELEPHANT FRIENDLY</th>
<th>TRANSITIONAL</th>
<th>RED LINE</th>
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</table>
| ELEPHANT ACQUIREMENT      | Buying, selling or renting elephants by venues bears high risks of sustaining exploitation of elephants.  
Venues must have measures in place that ensure transactions of new elephants to or from the venue do not encourage the continuation of elephant ownership for tourism purposes, e.g. confiscations, donations, alternative livelihood provision considering the complexity of elephant ownership. Any cash payments are only provided as part of an alternative livelihood initiative with the aim of preventing the procurement of a replacement elephant by the previous owner.* | Same as 'Elephant Friendly'                                                  | Elephants are either purchased and selling of elephants is permitted/practiced, or elephants are rented and no procedures are in place to ensure transition of the owner into an alternative livelihood not depending on elephants. |
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency of Origin of Elephant</th>
<th>Captive Breeding</th>
<th>Economic Model</th>
<th>Handling of Elephants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency of origin, tamperproof ID for each elephant and records available to give proof of this.*</td>
<td>No captive breeding: Gender separation or contraception used.</td>
<td>Not sustaining demand for captive elephants. Not-for-profit model of operation is recommended. Self-sufficient or finances secured for at least one year with business plan in place projecting financial security for at least three years.</td>
<td>Elephants are handled humanely in all situations. No aversive conditioning of elephants is used. The use of potential pain-inflicting tools, such as bull-hooks, is reserved only for</td>
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<tr>
<td>Same as ‘Elephant Friendly’</td>
<td>No captive breeding for commercial purposes or captive breeding generally discouraged by policy. Captive bred elephants may remain at the venue or are used for reintroduction purposes.</td>
<td>For profit model clearly sustaining a demand for captive elephants for commercial purposes. Heavy reliance on income from tourist entertainment for operation and care of animals. Generated profits are motivating the venue to contradict efforts to phase out elephant entertainment.</td>
<td>Elephants are handled humanely in all situations. No aversive conditioning of elephants is used. The use of potential pain-inflicting tools, such as bull-hooks, is reserved only for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transparency of origin, unreliable or inadequate ID method, or inadequate record keeping.</td>
<td>Breeding of captive elephants for commercial purposes is practiced, e.g. offspring are sold to other venues or owners. There are no links to scientifically managed conservation programs or reintroduction efforts.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aversive conditioning of elephants is used and there is acceptance of a need to break elephants at young age for use. Potential pain-inflicting tools, such as bull-hooks, are being used</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>ELEPHANT ENTERTAINMENT</th>
<th>VISITORELEPHANT INTERACTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No exploitive use of elephants for human entertainment</strong> such as shows, rides or inappropriate public displays.*</td>
<td><strong>No direct interaction between visitors and elephants.</strong> This therefore excludes activities such as elephant riding, washing or be-a-mahout courses.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*To adhere with these guidelines, direct interactions between nonvisitors and elephants are only permitted for individuals with appropriate training or expertise that will emergencies and if in the best interest of the animals. <strong>Positive reinforcement is used</strong> wherever possible to manage elephants while ensuring health and safety of workers and animals. <strong>Access to skill development</strong> opportunities of mahouts to develop understanding of such methods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Elephant handlers are provided with training in positive reinforcement techniques but full implementation is not yet achieved.</td>
<td><strong>Direct visitor-elephant interaction only if voluntary by the elephant and ensuring safety of visitors and elephant.</strong> This therefore excludes activities such as elephant riding, washing or be-a-mahout courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequented and in situations that could be managed without their use.</td>
<td><strong>Direct visitor-elephant interaction occurs without elephants being able to avoid these (nonvoluntary), e.g. riding, washing, be-a-mahout courses.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates guidelines that are expected to be implemented by 2022.
| MOBILITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION | Wild or semi-wild conditions for elephants during the day & night, e.g. chain-free enclosures with naturalistic characteristics; supervised, chain-free access to natural habitat; or well-monitored release program into the wild, allowing for:  
• Social interaction in natural social groupings.  
• Foraging from a range of natural vegetation.  
• Space for adequate movement.  
• Adequate stimulation of elephants through naturally occurring or artificially created environmental enrichment | Chain-free environment or enclosure in a natural habitat (or with naturalistic characteristics) for elephants during the day (at least 10 hours).  
If restraining of elephants is absolutely necessary at night, only chains > 10m long are used, and elephants are kept in an undisturbed, hygienic and natural environment.  
Strong efforts are made for a fully enriched environment through either access to semi-wild conditions or provision of environmental enrichment that stimulates natural behaviour.  
Ability for socialisation between elephants in natural social groupings. | Elephants are restrained by use of chains or ropes during some or all of the day and the night.  
Elephants are unable to socialise in natural social groupings with other elephants.  
No or insufficient provision of environmental enrichment. |
| LONG-TERM OUTLOOK | The venue agrees to serve as exemplary model for other venues to learn from and to be inspired, as well as to be a potential placement for further elephants in need of – as long as sufficient capacity is available and as in line with the guiding points of these | Venue willing to gradually improve and to transition to ‘Elephant Friendly’ standards in the future. | No intention to improve the conditions for the elephants. |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUSBANDRY STANDARDS</th>
<th>Meet acknowledged international husbandry standards for Asian or African elephants(^1) for husbandry factors not addressed by this document and if not contradicting any of the above criteria. ‘Protected contact’ facilities are recommended. Adequate diet, clear and appropriate management protocols and reliable access to high quality veterinary care are essential.</th>
<th>Meets at least national husbandry standards for Asian or African elephants if available and otherwise national zoo standards as long as not contradicting with the above other criteria.</th>
<th>Does not meet any applicable national or international husbandry standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>Where there are visitors, <strong>accurate education is provided</strong> on the animal welfare concerns of captive elephants, conservation issues, and traditional uses of elephants.*</td>
<td>Same as ‘Elephant Friendly’</td>
<td>No or only basic education provided, messages about captive elephants are inaccurate or misleading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER WILD SPECIES</td>
<td><strong>No exploitative use of any other species for entertainment</strong>, such as shows, rides or inappropriate public displays. All other animals are kept in adequate conditions.*</td>
<td>Same as ‘Elephant Friendly’</td>
<td>Other species are exploited for entertainment and / or are suffering in inadequate conditions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Minimum goals in order to become ‘Elephant Friendly’.*

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\(^1\) E.g. Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS)
2. Appendix: Further Description of Criteria

2.1. Elephant Acquisition

In both elephant-friendly and transitional venues, measures are in place that ensure transactions of elephants to or from the venue do not encourage the continuation of elephant ownership for tourism entertainment purposes. Any cash payments are only provided under assurance that previous owners will not use the funds to acquire a new elephant, or as part of an alternative livelihood initiative with the aim of preventing the procurement of a replacement elephant by the previous owner.

Alternative livelihood models that could be explored include enabling an elephant owner to engage in income generation that does not depend on the use of elephants, or reimbursement through community-based organisations, set up in ways that ensure no demand for further captive elephants is maintained. Donations of elephants may also be acceptable, however the receiving venues should encourage the donating person or facility to not replace the elephant with a new one. Similarly, venues that rent their elephants should put sufficient safeguards in place that ensure that the elephant remains at the venue and should encourage and enable the elephant owner to plan for a future livelihood not depending on an elephant. This obviously includes ensuring that the rental payment does not lead to the owner buying another elephant.

2.2. Transparency of Origin of Elephant

In both elephant-friendly as well as transitional venues the origin of each elephant and the way it was acquired must be transparent and documented. Also, the venues must ensure a tamperproof identification of each elephant even if national legislation does not call for that. Microchipping or DNA sampling would be recommended methods to be implemented by default to ensure elephants do not ‘disappear’ back into the trade. At the same time, venues must keep accurate records of the identification of each of their elephants.
2.3. Captive Breeding

In elephant friendly venues captive breeding will be prevented, either through separating sexually active males and females – something that would mostly resemble natural herd structures– or through contraception. This does not apply to elephants that are being reintroduced into their natural habitat. Many welfare oriented venues argue that breeding should be permitted to produce offspring, allowing for a more natural and enriched family life for the herd. While this argument must be acknowledged, it does in our opinion not weigh up the loss of capacity to take in other adult captive elephants in need, the challenges to raise new offspring in an adequate way without aversive conditioning, as well as the ethical argument of exposing another elephant to a life in captivity that even in best conditions will be a compromise to a life in the wild.

In transitional venues captive breeding will not be carried out for commercial purposes or will generally be discouraged by venue policy, but is not adequately prevented.

2.4. Economic Model

Elephant friendly venues are recommended to adopt a not-for-profit model wherever feasible. In case of forprofit models, a significant percent of the income after covering all expenses of the venue will be used to support other welfare or conservation projects protecting elephants. In transitional venues profits may be made if all other aspects of the venue ensure that these profits do not conflict with the intention to end exploitation of captive elephants. Forprofit models contain the risk of incentivising the rescues of elephants without putting safe-guards in place that will lead to a phase-out, e.g. by ensuring these elephants are removed sustainably from the industry.

Both elephant friendly as well as transitional venues need to be economically self-sufficient. This does not necessarily mean purely by income generated through visitors, but may also include clear and transparent budget plans or reserves for at least the next 3 years, depending on government subsidies, grant money or donations. Venues that are not economically sustainable pose the risk that all elephants will end up back in the tourism industry in case of bankruptcy.
2.5. Handling of Elephants

In elephant-friendly venues, elephants should only be handled humanely, e.g., ideally through positive-reinforcement methods, disqualifying the use of bull hooks, or other tools that may lead to injury and inflicting of pain if used inappropriately, unless for emergency situations. Where skills are lacking to implement humane methods, training opportunities for staff need to be introduced to build capacity. When relying on positive-reinforcement, security for elephant caretakers must be ensured through the design of the enclosure, making any unsafe interaction with the elephant unnecessary. Only in special situations, e.g., medical treatments, transport, relocations or emergencies, may the use of other methods be required but should be applied in the most humane way to still ensure safe and successful handling of the elephant in that particular situation. Transition venues may still need to rely on frequent direct interactions between caretakers and elephants and thus may need to retain the use of common controlling tools. However, their use must be limited to the bare minimum and not cause any harm to the elephant. Elephants should not be averisively conditioned through these tools or any other way.

2.6. Elephant Entertainment

In both elephant-friendly as well as transitional venues, elephants are not used for exploitative entertainment, such as shows, rides or inappropriate displays of unnatural behaviour for visitors. Interactions with elephants must follow the guidelines given in the previous point 3.5.

2.7. Visitor-Elephant Interaction

Best practice venues do not permit any direct or close interaction between elephants and visitors. The key attraction value at these venues is observation of elephants in semi-wild conditions in a non-intrusive way. In transitional venues, limited direct interaction is offered but only if elephants are participating voluntarily, e.g., approaching visitors on their own and being free to remove themselves from such interaction at any time. Common activities such as washing by visitors or beaconahout courses are mostly not voluntary by the elephant and thus should not be included. Activities such as touching an elephant, feeding or following an elephant may be acceptable for transitional venues if the elephant at all times can decide to retreat. This criteria is primarily limited to visitor interaction. Elephants that have been used for years in captivity may benefit from their mahout’s daily presence or guidance of the elephant for relocations or examinations. Efforts should be made to monitor the impact of the mahout’s presence on the elephant’s wellbeing.

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2.8. Elephant restraint and Social interaction

The goal is to have sanctuary-type solutions with available large areas of land, offering semi-wild conditions or enclosures with characteristics that resemble natural habitat and ability for social interaction with other elephants; or reintroduction into the natural, wild habitat while ensuring mitigation of human-elephant conflict situations or poaching. It is acknowledged that these solutions are either very expensive to build and maintain or not feasible for large numbers of elephants. Thus the transitional category compromises on this point and only recommends chain-free or enclosure environments during the day, allowing for social interaction in a natural habitat. Adequate supervision of elephants by staff is essential to ensure free-roaming elephants don’t damage property or cause injury. At night, elephants should be kept in ways that prevent them from roaming outside determined boundaries but still give a maximum of freedom and ability to interact socially, such as pens or, if absolutely necessary, long ropes/chains with more than 10m length. Further, the elephants must be kept on clean, dry, natural ground at night. Short chains or concrete ground are not accepted.

In elephant friendly venues elephants will be kept in semiwild or wild conditions with free social interaction with other elephants which should provide a fully enriched environment. In transitional venues that do not have such semi-wild facilities available, adequate environmental enrichment protocols must be employed to provide sufficient stimuli to the elephant required for a high welfare standard. Social interaction between elephants will be essential for this.

2.9. Long-term Outlook

Elephant friendly venues agree to continue providing lifelong care to the elephants at the venue and to accept further elephants from the existing captive population if capacity allows – and if in line with the guiding principles of acquiring elephants sustainably. Elephant-friendly venues will also serve as exemplary models to showcase such systems to other venues or elephant stakeholders, offering learning opportunities and inspire elephant caretakers and owners to replicate similar models. Transitional venues may not have such an exit strategy but should be willing to continue improving, aiming at becoming an elephant friendly venue in time.
2.10. **Husbandry Standards**

Whenever not in contradiction to these criteria, it is essential that the venue fulfills best available husbandry standards for elephants, e.g. standards provided by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS). Elephant-friendly venues should meet such standards wherever the criteria in this document do not provide guidance. Transitional venues are required to at least fulfill national guidelines applicable to elephants – where existing. If these do not exist, then national zoo guidelines should be met and ideally exceeded.

2.11. **Education**

In both elephant friendly as well as transitional venues any visitors will be educated engagingly and comprehensively on elephant welfare, elephant conservation, cultural heritage of elephant use, and the impact of the use of captive elephants for entertainment has on both conservation and welfare.

Red line venues often include inaccurate messaging to visitors about the care and training of the elephants or the lives of captive elephants in general, such as using the term 'domesticated elephant'. This can be detrimental as visitors then believe that the elephants are well cared for and may continue to support this kind of venue.

2.12. **Other Wild Species**

In both elephant friendly as well as transitional venues no other wild species are used for exploitative entertainment for humans or are held in conditions causing suffering to the animal.