



CASE STUDY – Wildlife. Not Entertainers

▶ WORLD ANIMAL PROTECTION



Intrepid Group, a global leader in sustainable experience-rich travel, and World Animal Protection are improving the lives of elephants trapped in the tourism industry and transforming the travel sector.

Today, approximately 3,000 elephants are held captive by the tourism industry - abused, forced to give rides to tourists and perform unnatural tricks. But attitudes toward elephant tourism are changing. 'Wildlife. Not Entertainers' improves animal welfare, enhances the livelihoods of people who depend on elephant tourism and promotes sustainable travel experiences.

World Animal Protection and Intrepid's partnership is creating value through: ground-breaking research to highlight the plight of captive elephants and traveller concerns about animal welfare issues; leading a coalition of travel companies to influence the business and social case for ethical tourism; lobbying governments on elephant friendly tourism; funding venues where visitors can learn about conservation and experience elephants roaming freely; and helping people who work in elephant friendly tourism to thrive.

Social Issue

Eradicating elephant riding

Business Opportunity

Increasing elephant welfare, while creating a more sustainable elephant tourism alternative.

Social Value Creation

- Improved conditions for elephants
- Improved wages and working conditions for mahouts
- Sustainable employment for local communities
- Increased elephant friendly venue capacity

Business Value Creation

- 26% growth in customer numbers from 2017
- 14% growth in new customers (Intrepid)
- Increased profile (Elephant conservationists/local businesses) resulting in greater brand awareness and bookings
- Increased animal protection funding (World Animal Protection)

Partnerships

Intrepid Travel and World Animal Protection



The Opportunity

This project addresses animal welfare, conservation and economic issues, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 15.

Asian elephants are listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species - a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity. A Thai ban on forestry in 1989 left many elephant owners and handlers without an income. As a result, they turned to elephant tourism - and a profitable but brutal industry was born. 77% of elephants used in tourism are kept in severely inadequate conditions, fed poor diets and given limited veterinary care, and 84% of elephants are chained up, unable to play or socialise (source: Taken for a Ride, 2017).

Traditionally, elephants were cared for by mahouts - a noble and revered profession - who have a genuine affection for these animals and pass on knowledge about elephant keeping. Today, many mahouts live and work in tourism venues and an increasing number of young elephant handlers do not have traditional mahout ancestry, skill or care. The mahout's role has been devalued. Mahouts in these venues generally experience unacceptable living and working conditions, and wages are low despite high ticket prices.

Why are these issues important to World Animal Protection and Intrepid? Ending animal cruelty and suffering is World Animal Protection's vision and purpose. How we treat animals is fundamental to the health of our environment and to us as a society. For Intrepid, addressing these issues is central to its strategy to "grow with purpose". This is achieved through offering sustainable experience-rich travel that increases business sustainability and enhances reputation, while also empowering the communities explored by its customers.

The Strategy

The partnership between World Animal Protection and Intrepid is a multi-year initiative which aims to find responsible solutions to elephant tourism.

The travel industry, elephant owners and handlers, communities, travellers and governments, are all part of the solution. However, we recognise it is critical the travel industry proves that there is consumer demand for higher welfare elephant venues. Transforming an industry like wildlife tourism doesn't happen overnight. We're involving leading travel operators in solutions; we're helping elephant owners to revolutionise their business model and profit from elephant-friendly tourism; we're educating travellers; and we're consulting with governments and agencies to deliver change.



The partnership between World Animal Protection and Intrepid entails:

- Research to highlight the plight of captive elephants, elephant conservation and changing traveller views about animal welfare to build the case for change;
- Devising a set of elephant-friendly welfare standards and animal-friendly tourism standards;
- Enabling and encouraging low-welfare elephant venues to transition to high-welfare standards;
- Founding the Coalition for Ethical Wildlife Tourism (CEWT) – an alliance of committed travel industry leaders from across the globe working to end cruel wildlife entertainment;
- Channelling tourist demand away from the cruelest activities, such as elephant shows and rides, to more humane alternatives such as high welfare elephant friendly venues. MandaLao now exemplifies this high welfare model after the Intrepid funding resulted in a secure night enclosure for elephants which allowed them to be a completely chain free venue, while allowing tourists to view elephants from a safe distance.
- Lobbying governments in Thailand, Nepal, Laos, India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Vietnam to create or change laws;
- Supporting World Animal Protection’s work to prove a strong demand and support for venues to become elephant friendly stop elephant poaching; limit captive breeding to facilities with genuine conservation value; and respect local cultures and address the needs of the mahouts and other elephant-dependent people by developing improved or alternative livelihoods with them.

By advocating for higher welfare elephant experiences, this project is moving towards sustainable and more humane outcomes that protect endangered elephants, increase elephant welfare standards, improve the lives of those who work with elephants and reduce demand for cruel wildlife entertainment.



Results

Social outcomes:

For elephants and their carers: MandaLao Elephant Conservation in Laos is a non-riding elephant venue that has benefited from the partnership, through funding from Intrepid’s not-for-profit arm, The Intrepid Foundation. MandaLao now provides comfortable housing, safe working conditions and decent wages for mahouts. MandaLao also created sustainable employment opportunities for the local community in sales, tour guides, office management, cropping and food service roles. They have made huge strides in ethical elephant care, influencing the growth of responsible elephant tourism in Laos and abroad. MandaLao’s approach and success has enabled them to provide sanctuary to more elephants which, in turn, has boosted its profile, reputation and income from tourists.

- Improved wages for mahouts
- Improved conditions for elephants
- Increased sanctuary capacity

The partnership has delivered the following economic value:

Business outcomes:

For Intrepid:

- Customer numbers grew 26%
- 14% growth in new customers

- Net Promoter Score of 74 in 2019 (up from 70 in 2017)
- Most popular blog post to date, on elephant tourism, reached over 250 million people
- This decision helped build the Intrepid brand and position as an opinion leader in responsible travel
- Media coverage based on elephant welfare and this position continues to this day
- Increased profile (Elephant conservationists/local businesses)
- Increased animal protection funding (World Animal Protection)

For World Animal Protection: the partnership has funded and facilitated a key component of our “Wildlife. Not Entertainers” campaign. Intrepid’s reach and influence in the travel industry is invaluable to us in helping to achieve campaign objectives. This support means we can use our donor funds to expand our reach and deliver more projects that protect animals from cruelty and suffering.



Lessons Learned, Challenges and Outlook

- A solution that retains cultural identity, does not inflict cruelty on animals, encourages socio-economic development, ensures better health and safety protection, and delivers business benefits can be achieved and can provide a model for lower welfare elephant venue operators. With over 3000 elephants in Asia involved in tourism this is an important step forward.
- The success of the elephant component of the ‘Wildlife. Not Entertainers’ campaign is being used as a model to prevent cruelty and suffering to animals caught in the wildlife entertainment industry, including not only elephants but otters, tigers, orangutans and dolphins. For example, within the past six months, TripAdvisor, United and Virgin Airlines have confirmed they will no longer promote captive dolphin venues.
- International tourism is rising rapidly from countries where animal welfare concerns are less established issues. For example, Chinese tourism is growing at 5% a year; Thailand is the destination of choice, making up almost 1 in 3 tourists, and driving persistent demand for low-welfare elephant attractions that offer hands-on and unnatural interactions with elephants.
- With Intrepid’s tourism industry reputation and World Animal Protection’s consultative status with the United Nations, Council of Europe and World Organisation for Animal Health, we hope to focus efforts on corporate engagement in China to bring the travel industry there on board with elephant-friendly tourism and educate travellers that animals belong in the wild. Additionally, there are opportunities we are jointly investigating to improve conditions for the elephants of Nepal.