

Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive
ABTA

Via e-mail: mtanzer@abta.co.uk

8 July 2021

Dear Mr Tanzer:

Like many others, I welcomed news in late 2019 that ABTA had updated its Animal Welfare Guidelines and labelled direct contact between tourists and elephants “unacceptable”. Indeed, it is. But while I applaud much of the work ABTA has done to elevate animal welfare standards, I am concerned that your guidelines on captive cetaceans exploited at marine parks fall short.

The evidence is clear: whales and dolphins, whether wild-born or captive-bred, do not – and cannot – thrive in captivity. Just consider the sheer size of an orca. Then consider the vast distance these animals swim in the open ocean – up to 140 miles a day – not just because they can, but because they must, to hunt, socialise, and exercise. It’s impossible to replicate these spaces in captivity.

Also consider that, in the wild, orcas live in tight-knit family groups that share a sophisticated, unique language and culture. Yet, in captivity, they’re housed with others from different social groups whom, in nature, they would never normally encounter. The stress of being placed in these incompatible groups is compounded by the fact that the animals cannot escape one another in cramped marine park tanks.

I hope you’ll agree that the more we learn about these complex and highly intelligent animals, the more abhorrent their captivity for human entertainment looks. ABTA must take a stand and urgently update its animal welfare guidelines to add visiting marine parks that keep whales and dolphins captive to the list of unacceptable and discouraged practices. Until you do, travel providers like TUI will continue to use your inadequate guidelines to profit off animals’ misery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah Meaden".

Deborah Meaden