Good practices and recommendations to promote positive interactions between people and biodiversity in tourism activities.

Costa Rica is a megadiverse country and a pioneer in the conservation of biodiversity, hosting more than 5% of the known species on the planet. Given that wildlife is part of the natural treasure of all Costa Ricans, it is important to promote tourism as a force for positive change, since activities that include a biodiversity component have the potential to better position visitor experiences, if they are developed ethically and technically. On the other hand, tourism contributes about 8.2% of the Gross Domestic Product, according to the Central Bank of Costa Rica. The tourism industry includes accommodation services, food and beverage services, road transportation, rental of cars and medical services, among others, being an important source of employment for Costa Ricans, directly or indirectly.

Why are tourism activities important for Biodiversity?

The observation of fauna can support conservation and protection of species when it is done in a respectful way, admiring nature and its species, its particularities and respecting its natural behaviors. Inadequate practices such as feeding fauna, seeking experiences of direct contact, handling or disrespect for the space of the wildlife, may pose a risk to the health and safety of tourists and/or a possible risk to the well-being of the animals. An ethical, responsible, and safe tourism can contribute to the economy and the generation of employment at the national level. In addition, it is necessary to keep this valuable attraction healthy that distinguishes Costa Rica worldwide.

Wildlife in Costa Rica is a public domain asset protected by the State, so its proper management, use and conservation is of interest, and it is a shared responsibility of all the people who enjoy its beauty. We have the opportunity to understand the dynamics of these interactions and put into practice all the recommendations to help foster coexistence with the other creatures that inhabit this planet.

Good practices that we can adopt and recommend to tourists, guides, collaborators and visitors:

1. Reject practices that allow you to approach, hug, touch or hold a wild animal, this promotes its exploitation, suffering and inappropriate management. Plus, it's dangerous for you, your family, and wildlife.
2. Observe wildlife in a calm, respectful manner and at a safe distance. Animals should be free in the wild, never chase them.
3. In the presence of wild animals, silent behavior must be maintained. If they show obvious signs of alarm or stress, stop moving. Always speak quietly and keep very still. Loud noises and sudden movements scare them, and they will walk away.
4. Respect the freedom of wildlife, never catch, handle or remove them from their habitat. This can be dangerous for you, it compromises the life of the animals, and it is a crime.
5. Respect the natural behavior and protect the health of wildlife, never feed them, attract them with food or sounds. Attractions that involve the presence of wild animals must aim to comply with the best practices in terms of animal welfare and Costa Rican regulations.
6. If for any reason wild animals are in captivity, do not enter their enclosures, do not touch, hug, feed or handle them, these practices will protect you from illnesses or accidents such as attacks, bites or scratches.
7. In Costa Rica, admission to Wildlife Rescue Centers is not allowed, therefore, paying for experiences in centers of rescuing recovering animals, eliminates their chances of returning to the wild, and promotes illicit activity. Zoos (commercial, sanctuaries, and restricted-management breeding artisanal farms) are the only places authorized in Costa Rica to receive tourists.
8. When you travel to a tourist destination, maintain responsible driving that respects the speeds stipulated on the roads, this reduces the amount of wildlife run over.

9. Respect the appropriate boat driving guidelines and maintain the distance and speed established by the Law and Regulations for responsible observation of cetaceans or in the presence of wild animals such as dolphins, manatees, otters, sea turtles, among others, to avoid collisions , injuries, or even death, caused by the propellers of the engines.

10. Properly dispose of the solid waste generated by the tourist activity in accordance with current legislation and municipal regulations. Many wild animals access waste and can eat, get sick, be poisoned, mutilate themselves or get trapped in improperly disposed solid waste.

11. Choose the most sustainable alternatives to the use of single-use plastic to prevent marine and terrestrial fauna from consuming them and getting sick or dying. Remember that in Costa Rica, single-use plastics are prohibited within the Protected Wilderness Areas of the State.

12. Be careful not to engage in activities that have a negative impact on critical habitats such as people walking on coral reefs, wetlands, peat bogs, or unsustainable use of shared resources such as water sources.

13. The trade in “curiosities” or souvenirs has increased the collection of wild plants, corals and shells, as well as the illegal capture and killing of wild animals to obtain skins, feathers, teeth, bones, eggs, among others. Check if the handicrafts or souvenirs you will buy come from people or companies authorized by SINAC.

14. Do not extract flora and fauna (parts and derivatives) when visiting protected areas and natural areas.

15. Pay attention to the recommendations of the authorities in turtle nesting areas for responsible observation of them, such as the use of adequate light, location of people, so as not to affect the trajectory of the animals, among others.

16. Avoid direct contact between your pets and wildlife. Keep your dogs on a leash during walks, especially when visiting wooded areas. Remember that it is not allowed to bring pets to protected wilderness areas.

17. Book wildlife viewing experiences with a responsible, certified tour operator.

18. Reserve experiencias de observación de vida silvestre con un operador de viajes responsable y certificado.

19. Express your appreciation to guides who do their work ethically and responsibly with wildlife. This will motivate them to improve every day.

20. In Costa Rica, the Stop Animal Selfies campaign has been developed, which seeks to promote ethical, responsible and safe tourism for visitors with our wildlife. Support us with this campaign. Visit www.stopanimalselfies.org to learn more!

Avoid the following inappropriate wildlife practices:

- Extract animals (parts or derivatives) and plants from nature.
- Causing physical interactions by humans with whales and dolphins.
- Trade and sale of endangered wildlife products.
- Trophy hunting.
- Consumption of wild meat such as frog legs, sea turtle meat, shark fin soup, dolphin and whale meat, iguana meat, iguanas, low-land pacas, among others.
- Live animals sold as pets.
- Traveling zoos, circuses with fauna and encounters with marine mammals in captivity.
- Swim or dive with cetaceans.
- Feeding or attempting to feed any marine mammal found in the water or on land.

References and Resources:

- https://stopanimalselfies.org
- https://www.abta.com/industry-zone/abta-shop/abta-animal-welfare-guidelines
- https://www.seeturtles.org/too-rare-to-wear
- https://www.hsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/dont_buy_wild_hand_card.pdf
- https://humanprimateinteractions.wpcomstaging.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HPI-Imagery-Guidelines-Spanish.pdf

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