



Global Sustainable Tourism Council

Report on GSTC Roundtable for Animal Welfare in Tourism (R4AWT)

February 17, 2026

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

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Acknowledgements

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council would like to warmly thank all members of the GSTC Roundtable for Animal Welfare in Tourism for their valuable contributions. Through their expertise, thoughtful insights, and active participation, the members played a key role in shaping both the direction and the content of this initiative throughout the consultation process. Further details on the Roundtable members are presented in Table 1.

Their collective expertise, commitment, and collaborative spirit were instrumental in ensuring that the R4AWT became a meaningful, credible, and impactful initiative in advancing animal welfare within global tourism.

The GSTC also extends its deep appreciation to the GSTC Secretariat for their leadership, coordination, and technical support, in particular:

- Dr. Mihee Kang – GSTC Chief Assurance Officer
- Başak Bilgin – GSTC Assurance Coordinator
- Sara Baik – Former GSTC Staff Member

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Executive Summary

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) established the Roundtable for Animal Welfare in Tourism (R4AWT) in 2025 to address the growing ethical, environmental, and operational challenges posed by the global tourism sector to animals and their welfare. While tourism's awareness of animal welfare has grown significantly over the last decade, the industry lacks consistent interpretation and enforcement of animal welfare standards, as well as a coherent global approach to assessing compliance.

The R4AWT brought together a diverse group of international experts, practitioners, certification stakeholders, conservation organizations, industry associations, and GSTC representatives through a structured, science-based, and collaborative process. Between May and December 2025, six virtual roundtable meetings were held.

The Roundtable focused on:

- Strengthening animal welfare interpretation and implementation within GSTC standards
- Improving clarity, measurability, and global applicability of animal welfare criteria
- Supporting auditors and certification bodies through practical and consistent guidance
- Promoting ethical, science-based, and context-sensitive animal welfare practices across tourism

Key outcomes of the R4AWT process include:

- Clear and strengthened animal welfare provisions integrated into the revised GSTC Hotel Standard (2025) and GSTC Tour Operator Standard (2025)
- Improved alignment of animal welfare principles across the GSTC Attraction, Hotel, and Tour Operator standards, ensuring consistency in expectations and implementation
- Development of standardized terminology and a shared conceptual framework to reduce ambiguity and support consistent interpretation
- Practical guidance and audit-oriented recommendations to support certification bodies and auditors in assessing animal welfare performance
- The foundation for a dedicated GSTC Responsible Animal Welfare Practices training, aimed at strengthening competence, consistency, and credibility in certification outcomes

Rather than creating a separate certification scheme, the R4AWT strengthens existing GSTC standards by translating animal welfare principles into clearer, more enforceable, and more operational requirements. The process emphasized education, transparency, and continuous improvement, recognizing the diversity of cultural, legal, and operational contexts in which tourism operates globally.

This report documents the purpose, structure, methodology, key discussions, and outcomes of the R4AWT process. It also outlines how the Roundtable's outputs contribute to more credible certification, reduced risks of greenwashing, improved animal welfare outcomes, and stronger alignment between ethical responsibility and sustainable tourism practice.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Today's tourism industry plays a significant role in shaping human–animal interactions, both directly and indirectly. Animals are involved across a wide range of tourism contexts—attractions, displays, transportation, wildlife encounters, sanctuaries, conservation programs, and educational facilities. Despite the visibility of animals in tourism, engagement with credible animal welfare standards and accreditation frameworks remains inconsistent across the sector, with significant gaps in coverage, consistency, and implementation.

In many parts of the world, animal welfare regulations vary widely in scope, clarity, and enforcement, and in some contexts may be outdated or insufficient to address current tourism practices. In parallel, marketing terms such as “animal-friendly” or “welfare-approved” are sometimes used without clear or consistent definitions, which can make it difficult for consumers to assess the true welfare implications of animal-based experiences. In certain tourism contexts, economic and operational pressures may also influence decision-making, occasionally resulting in practices that pose risks to animal well-being, including stress, injury, behavioral disruption, or inappropriate use.

As a global standard-setting body, GSTC identified a critical need to:

- Address regulatory and certification gaps
- Improve clarity and consistency within its own standards
- Strengthen the implementation of science-based animal welfare principles
- Support auditors and tourism operators with practical, applicable guidance

Rather than developing isolated technical rules in silos, GSTC intentionally chose a multi-stakeholder roundtable model to ensure that the resulting guidance would be credible, practical, globally relevant, and ethically grounded.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the R4AWT

The primary purpose of the GSTC Roundtable for Animal Welfare in Tourism was to create a collaborative platform to advance responsible, ethical, and science-based animal welfare practices in tourism.

The specific objectives of the R4AWT were to:

- Explore the current state of animal welfare in tourism across different geographies and activity types
- Assess the level of integration of animal welfare principles into tourism operations and certification systems
- Identify key challenges, knowledge gaps, and implementation barriers
- Support the correct interpretation and effective implementation of animal welfare criteria within GSTC standards
- Strengthen alignment between:
 - GSTC Attraction Standard¹
 - GSTC Hotel Standard
 - GSTC Tour Operator Standard
- Provide clear, practical guidance for auditors and certification bodies
- Encourage education, transparency, and continuous improvement rather than purely punitive approaches
- Enable tour operators to embed robust animal welfare provisions through their supply chains

1.3 Defining Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to ensuring that animals involved in tourism activities experience good physical and psychological well-being, whether in human care or in wild environments. This includes ensuring that animals are:

- Receive proper nutrition, including a balanced and engaging diet that supports both physical health and positive experiences
- Live in environments that promote comfort, safety, and appropriate shelter
- Experience good physical health and are protected from injury and disease
- Are able to express choice and control over their interactions with the environment and other animals, and to engage in species-appropriate behaviors in ways that are meaningful and rewarding to the animal

¹ Note: The GSTC Attraction Standard has already been published, and it is not possible to modify its content until the next revision period.

- Experience positive mental states, with negative experiences such as fear, distress, or chronic stress minimized

In the tourism context, applying these animal welfare principles ensures that all care, housing, handling, training, transport, and interactions are designed and implemented to meet the animals' physical and psychological needs. Ensuring these conditions is essential for responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

Animal welfare has become an increasingly important consideration in tourism, given the wide range of contexts in which animals may be involved, including attractions, transport, wildlife encounters, and visitor experiences. Establishing robust animal welfare standards and ensuring they are compatible with and effective within tourism contexts is essential for improving the care and management of animals worldwide. When properly implemented, such standards help safeguard animal well-being, support biodiversity conservation, and underpin responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

1.4 Challenges and Barriers to Animal Welfare in Tourism

Identifying challenges and barriers to the effective application of animal welfare practices in tourism is essential for shaping practical, realistic, and globally applicable standards. The challenges outlined below are based on GSTC's preliminary desk research and literature review conducted at the early stage of the initiative, which helped inform the scope and focus of the Roundtable discussions. They do not represent formal positions or consensus decisions of the Roundtable members.

For the purpose of this report:

- **Challenges** refer to systemic or contextual issues that require improved understanding, awareness, or coordination.
- **Barriers** refer to practical or structural factors that may hinder implementation or progress in certain tourism contexts.

Based on the literature reviewed (e.g., von Essen et al., 2020²; Fennell, 2022³; Schweiggart, 2024⁴), the following challenges and barriers may affect animal welfare in tourism, depending on regional, legal, cultural, and operational contexts:

- **Variability in Frameworks**

National laws, enforcement mechanisms, and voluntary frameworks vary significantly across countries and sectors. In some contexts, this variability can make it difficult to ensure consistent animal welfare protection or to align tourism practices with internationally recognized principles.

- **Economic and Operational Pressures**

In some tourism contexts, market and profit motivations may deprioritise animal well-being when welfare improvements lack clear economic incentives, particularly when investments in animal care, training, or infrastructure are not immediately rewarded by market demand, regulatory requirements, or certification requirements.

- **Consumer Information and Decision-Making Gaps**

In some markets, tourists may lack the knowledge, tools, or context needed to accurately assess the animal welfare implications. Promotional materials do not always clearly communicate welfare considerations, which can limit informed decision-making. In addition, research highlights an attitude–behavior gap in tourism, whereby even well-intentioned or informed travelers may still choose experiences that compromise animal welfare due to convenience, social norms, or perceived value.

- **Knowledge and Capacity Gaps among Tourism Professionals**

Research highlights an animal welfare literacy gap among some tourism professionals, particularly those involved in planning, selling, or facilitating travel, hospitality, and tour operations rather than in the direct care of animals. In these contexts, limited access to training, guidance, or resources may constrain the effective implementation of animal welfare–oriented standards.

² von Essen, E., Lindsjö, J., & Berg, C. (2020). Instagranimal: Animal Welfare and Animal Ethics Challenges of Animal-Based Tourism. *Animals*, 10(10), 1830. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10101830>

³ Fennell, D. A. (2022). An animal welfare literacy framework for tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 96, Article 103461. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103461>

⁴ Schweiggart, N. (2024). Mapping the role of animal welfare in tourism: examining discourses in tourism research and beyond using a bibliometric co-occurrence analysis of author keywords. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 23(4), 740–767. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2024.2319221>

- **Cultural and Contextual Complexity**

Animal-related practices are often embedded in local traditions, livelihoods, and cultural values. Aligning these practices with global animal welfare expectations may require gradual, context-sensitive approaches rather than uniform solutions.

- **Data, Monitoring, and Capacity Constraints**

In some tourism contexts, limited monitoring systems, inconsistent data collection, and gaps in training or technical capacity can constrain tourism professionals' and supply chains' ability to interpret, apply, and continuously improve animal welfare standards in an evidence-based manner.

- **Risks Associated with Poorly Managed Wildlife and Voluntourism Activities**

In some contexts, wildlife interactions or volunteer tourism programs may unintentionally create welfare risks if not properly designed, supervised, and aligned with animal welfare principles.

- **Illegal Wildlife Trade and Exploitation Risks**

Tourism activity can, in certain regions, intersect with illegal or unsustainable wildlife trade, particularly where enforcement capacity is weak and visitor awareness is low.

- **Resistance to Change**

In some contexts, economic dependency, entrenched practices, limited enforcement capacity, and political or institutional inertia may slow the adoption of welfare-focused improvements within tourism systems.

These findings informed the R4AWT's emphasis on education, clarity, context-sensitive guidance, and continuous improvement, rather than prescriptive or punitive approaches. The Roundtable process sought to address these challenges by strengthening interpretation, consistency, and practical implementation within the GSTC standards.

2 Governance and Structure of the Roundtable

The R4AWT operates under the coordination of the GSTC Secretariat, with technical facilitation provided by the GSTC Assurance and Standards teams.

The structure of the Roundtable is based on:

- Expert-driven participation
- Science-based evaluation
- Consensus-oriented decision-making
- Cross-sector representation
- Global applicability

Between **May and December 2025**, six virtual meetings were held:

- Five technical working meetings
- One final validation and results presentation meeting

Each meeting built progressively on earlier discussions, allowing structured refinement of definitions, indicators, guidance tools, and alignment mechanisms.

2.1 Composition of the R4AWT

The R4AWT brings together a diverse group of experts and practitioners representing multiple stakeholder groups across the global tourism and animal welfare landscape. The core representation categories are as follows:

- Associations and non-governmental organizations specializing in animal welfare
- Veterinary associations, animal research institutions, zoos, and conservation organizations
- Other relevant organizations and independent animal welfare experts/scientists
- GSTC Accreditation Division staff

This broad and balanced composition ensures that scientific, operational, ethical, auditing, and certification perspectives are fully represented throughout the guideline development process, strengthening both the technical credibility and the practical applicability of the R4AWT's outcomes.

Table 1. R4AWT Members*

Name	Organization	Position	Country
Anna Blinkowski	IAAPA EMEA	Zoological Manager	Sweden
Ariana Hernández	Animal Wise	Founder & Director	Spain
Daniel Turner	ANIMONDIAL	Cofounder & Director	United Kingdom
Dawn Neo	Global Food Partners	Director, Corporate Engagement	Singapore
Guillaume Douay	Mandai Wildlife Group	Assistant Vice President, Veterinary Healthcare & Scientific Programmes (Animal Welfare)	Singapore
Jared G. Durrett	IAAPA NA	Senior Director of Husbandry	USA
Jill Nizan	Global Humane Society	Associate Vice President of Conservation	USA
Kelly Meister	Blue Lagoon Island	Director of Education and Sustainability	The Bahamas
May Woe Mah	Zoological Society of London	Country Director	Thailand
Nick Cooney	Lever Foundation	Director	USA
Paula Cerdán	WAZA	Head of Conservation and Animal Welfare	Spain
Rodolfo Raigoza Figueras	IAAPA LAC	Corporate Conservation Director	Mexico
Sara Torres Ortiz	Animal Wise	Founder & Scientific Director	Spain
Uzair Jaffer	-	Sustainability Leader	Canada
Ylva Linder	IAAPA	Global Sustainability Director	Sweden

*For detailed information about the organizations, please see Annex A.

Note: EMEA: Europe, Middle East and Africa
IAAPA: International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions
LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean
NA: North America
WAZA: World Association of Zoos and Aquariums



Figure 1. Logos of R4AWT Member Organizations

2.2 Methodology and Working Approach

The Roundtable followed a structured, iterative, and evidence-based methodology, including:

- Virtual expert meetings
- Review of international frameworks (e.g., WAZA, ABTA, CAPTA, IUCN, CITES)
- Use of established scientific models, such as the Five Domains of Animal Welfare
- Case-study-based discussions
- Progressive review of existing GSTC criteria and indicators
- Continuous written feedback loops

Rather than creating an entirely new certification scheme or guidelines, the R4AWT focused on:

- Strengthening existing GSTC Standards
- Improving interpretive clarity
- Supporting credible and consistent auditing

3 Roundtable Discussion

The GSTC Roundtable for Animal Welfare in Tourism (R4AWT) followed a structured, progressive, and evidence-based consultation process between **May and December 2025**. Across six virtual meetings, members systematically examined animal welfare challenges in tourism, reviewed existing GSTC criteria, assessed international best practices, and developed concrete recommendations to strengthen the clarity, consistency, and effectiveness of animal welfare implementation across GSTC standards.

Each meeting built upon the outcomes of the previous session, allowing the group to move from conceptual foundations toward technical indicator refinement, legal alignment, and implementation guidance.

3.1 Meetings Overview

3.1.1 First Meeting – Launching the Initiative and Establishing the Conceptual Framework (20 May 2025)

The first meeting formally launched R4AWT and established the initiative's shared vision, scope, and working principles. The primary objectives were to introduce the purpose and structure of the Roundtable, align expectations among participants, and set the direction for the guideline development process.

Members agreed that animal welfare in tourism must be approached as a science-based, ethical/responsible, and context-sensitive issue, rather than one driven purely by emotional or commercial considerations. A key early decision was the adoption of respectful and precise terminology, including the use of:

- “Animals in human care” instead of “captive animals”
- “Participation of animals in tourism” instead of “use of animals”

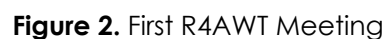
The group emphasized the importance of clearly distinguishing between:

- Animals kept under human care, where people are directly responsible for the animals' daily care, housing, health, and management; and
- Animals that are free-ranging in the wild, which may be encountered through tourism activities, but are not under direct human care.

This distinction was considered essential for developing fair, realistic, and enforceable guidance.

The meeting also clarified that GSTC does not intend to replace existing animal welfare certifications or industry standards or guidelines (e.g., the ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines), but rather to:

- The Roundtable confirmed its six-meeting structure for May to December 2025, with the goal of producing practical, globally applicable outputs.



3.1.2 Second Meeting – Defining Unacceptable Practices, Context, and Community Roles (19 June 2025)

The second meeting focused on identifying unacceptable and discouraged practices, examining stakeholder responsibilities across the tourism value chain, and highlighting the role of community involvement and education in animal welfare.

Members reached a strong consensus that animal welfare cannot be governed by a one-size-fits-all approach. What may be feasible or ethical/responsible in one location could be inappropriate or harmful in another. The group therefore emphasized the importance of a species-specific welfare vs. context-based evaluation, while maintaining clear non-negotiable welfare principles.

The discussion explored a range of practices widely considered problematic, including:

- Punishment and abusive training
- Breeding animals for entertainment purposes
- Contact with and feeding of wild animals
- Activities that require an animal to perform unnatural behavior
- Manipulative marketing claims related to animal welfare

The group also examined complex cases such as:

- Physical alteration of an animal's anatomy for tourist safety (e.g., stingray barb removal)
- Horseback riding in sensitive ecosystems
- Marine tourism activities

These examples reinforced the need for case-by-case evaluation rooted in animal impact rather than legality alone.

A central theme of the meeting was the role of education and improved standards over prohibition. Members emphasized that lasting behavioral change is more likely when tourists, guides, and operators are equipped with:

- Clear scientific explanations
- Ethical context
- Transparent information
- Sound conservation messaging

Rather than relying solely on bans, the group supported tools such as:

- Interpretive signage
- Pre-tour briefings
- Trained guides acting as animal welfare educators

The meeting also highlighted significant certification gaps, particularly in the marine tourism and wildlife interaction sectors. While organizations, such as the Global Humane Society and WAZA, provide certifications in some regions, vast areas remain unregulated, reinforcing the importance of a consistently applied global approach, as offered by GSTC.

Community empowerment emerged as a core principle. The group emphasized that meaningful participation, rather than token consultation, is essential to long-term success in animal welfare, particularly in community-based tourism and conservation initiatives.

3.1.3 Third Meeting – Wildlife Interactions and Indicator-Level Refinement (24 July 2025)

The third meeting shifted the focus to the technical refinement of wildlife interaction indicators, particularly those under D3.3: Interactions with Wild Animals.

Members conducted a detailed, indicator-by-indicator review and identified a number of structural weaknesses, inconsistencies in requirements, causing confusion and limited commitment to apply standards, and gaps in species-specific requirements, failing to recognize that different species have different needs:

- Vague language
- Over-reliance on legality rather than ethical/responsible or welfare outcomes
- Insufficient reference to recognized international guidelines
- Limited guidance for auditors on how to verify compliance

Strong agreement emerged that indicator language must reflect the animal's perspective, emphasizing:

- Stress levels
- Behavioral change
- Psychological impacts
- Loss of autonomy

The group also stressed that just because an activity is legal does not mean it is ethical/responsible. This led to proposals for:

- Outcome-based wording
- Clarification of “direct contact” versus “close proximity”
- Inclusion of photo-based and non-contact stressors
- Mandatory staff training in stress recognition, interpretation of other welfare indicators, and basic welfare assessment techniques relevant to tourism contexts

Members proposed the development of a formal glossary to clarify critical terms such as:

- Wild
- Captive
- Managed
- Interaction

The meeting also examined the distinction between animals in the wild versus animals in human care, recognizing that different welfare thresholds, monitoring systems, and responsibilities apply.

3.1.4 Fourth Meeting – Animal Welfare in Attractions and Technical Indicator Precision (16 September 2025)

The fourth meeting focused on a full technical review of D3.4 Animal Welfare within the GSTC Attraction Standard. This session addressed licensing, training, monitoring, performances, breeding, conservation contributions, and captivity-related practices.

Key challenges discussed included:

- Ambiguity in terms such as “attraction,” “captive,” and “appropriate qualifications”
- Insufficient specificity of some standards for particular activities highlighting the need for more concrete guidance
- Variation in national licensing and enforcement systems
- Practical constraints in monitoring small or group-held species
- Strong disagreements regarding animal performances and interactions

Members emphasized that:

- Auditor guidance is essential to prevent inconsistent certification outcomes

- Species-specific monitoring expectations must be realistic
- Individual records should apply mainly to large vertebrates, while group-level monitoring may be appropriate for fish and invertebrates

The most debated topic was the legitimacy of keeping wild animals in captivity for performance or display. While views differed sharply, there was broad recognition that:

- Public expectations are shifting away from entertainment-based models
- A step-by-step transition approach is more effective than immediate prohibition
- Conservation and education claims should be clearly defined, transparently communicated, and aligned with the stated mission and practices of the organization, rather than assumed based solely on the nature of the visitor interaction

The session also addressed:

- Breeding programs and the need to distinguish conservation breeding that is science-based and coordinated at the national or regional level from breeding conducted primarily for commercial or entertainment purposes
- Wild animal acquisition and the risks of misuse of “conservation purpose” or “scientific purpose” justifications

3.1.5 Fifth Meeting – Legal Compliance, Risk Management, and Wildlife Trade (14 October 2025)

The fifth meeting examined animal welfare through the lens of legal compliance, risk and crisis management, and wildlife harvesting and trade, ensuring alignment with international frameworks.

Members reviewed the GSTC Hotel Standard and the GSTC Tour Operator Standard, which were under revision:

- A2 Legal Compliance
- A15 Risk and Crisis Management
- D3.5 Wildlife Harvesting and Trade

The group emphasized that legal compliance must extend beyond domestic laws, particularly in jurisdictions with weak or incomplete regulations. International regulations, guidance, and resources, such as CITES, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines, and WAZA, were recognized as essential reference points.

Risk and crisis management discussions expanded beyond visitor safety to include:

- Zoonotic disease response
- Animal escapes
- Behavioral hazards
- Emergency veterinary coordination

The review of wildlife harvesting and trade placed strong emphasis on:

- Ethical sourcing
- Prohibition of trade driven purely by tourism demand
- Visitor education to prevent illegal souvenir purchases

The session also ensured cross-standard alignment, confirming that the same animal welfare principles should be consistently applied across the Attraction, Hotel, and Tour Operator Standards.

Additionally, the meeting confirmed the development of:

- Specialized auditor training on animal welfare
- Terminology harmonization across all GSTC standards

3.1.6 Sixth and Final Roundtable Meeting – Results Presentation

The sixth and final R4AWT meeting was held virtually to:

- Present the consolidated outcomes of the Roundtable
- Review the final guidance framework
- Validate cross-standard alignment
- Confirm next implementation steps

This meeting will formally transition the R4AWT from the development phase to the implementation phase.



Figure 3. Final R4AWT Meeting

3.2 Cross-Cutting Themes from the Roundtable Discussions

Across all six meetings, the following themes consistently emerged:

- Science- and outcome-based approach: Animal welfare in tourism should be assessed based on animals' physical, behavioral, and psychological well-being, not legal compliance alone, with the Five Domains Model as the common reference.
- Clarity and consistency in standards: Vague language, over-reliance on legality, and limited species-specific guidance were identified as key barriers to consistent implementation and auditing.
- Education and capacity building: Trained staff, informed guides, transparent communication with visitors, and meaningful community engagement were considered essential for achieving lasting improvements in animal welfare.

4 Outputs of the R4AWT

The R4AWT is not producing a stand-alone certification scheme. Instead, its outputs focus on strengthening implementation, consistency, and technical credibility across GSTC standards.

- **Auditor Guidance Notes on Animal Welfare and Specialized Animal Welfare Training for Auditors (In Progress)**

Practical guidance is being developed to support consistent interpretation and verification of animal welfare criteria by certification bodies and auditors.

GSTC is actively preparing a dedicated auditor training program focused specifically on animal welfare in tourism.

- **Terminology Glossary**

A standardized glossary is being developed to harmonize key terms such as:

- Animals in human care
- Captivity
- Interaction
- Management
- Appropriate qualifications

- **Cross-Standard Alignment Framework**

Ensuring consistency of animal welfare principles across:

- GSTC Attraction Standard
- GSTC Hotel Standard
- GSTC Tour Operator Standard

- **Formal Inputs to Revised GSTC Standards**

- GSTC Hotel Standard
- GSTC Tour Operator Standard

The GSTC Hotel Standard (2025) significantly strengthens how animal welfare is addressed compared to the 2016 criteria. Animal welfare is now explicitly embedded across multiple operational areas, including legal compliance, interactions with wild and domestic animals,

invasive species management, and wildlife trade, establishing it as a core responsibility for hotels. The 2025 revision moves beyond general principles and sets clear, enforceable expectations, such as prohibiting close contact with wild animals, requiring proper licensing and qualified staff for animal care, and mandating regular monitoring and record-keeping. Hotels are also expected to guide guest behavior and ensure that suppliers and tour providers follow responsible animal welfare practices.

Overall, the updated standard provides clearer guidance, reduces ambiguity, and establishes a stronger, more practical framework to protect animals while supporting responsible tourism operations.

The GSTC Tour Operator Standard (2025) replaces broad guidance with clear, practical expectations for wildlife interactions that align with existing best practices or guidelines developed by animal welfare professionals and organizations. Tour operators are now required to maintain safe viewing distances, avoid feeding or disturbing wildlife, manage group sizes and noise levels, and monitor the impacts of tours on animal well-being. Close or intrusive interactions are explicitly restricted, with greater emphasis on preventing stress and harm to animals. Responsibilities are also more clearly extended to suppliers, guides, drivers, and animal facilities. Tour operators must ensure that partners meet animal welfare standards, employ trained and knowledgeable staff, and avoid working with suppliers that keep or display wild animals without proper authorization and welfare safeguards.

In addition, the 2025 revision strengthens expectations around wildlife trade and harvesting, requiring tour operators to actively discourage illegal or unethical/irresponsible practices, avoid promoting hunting except under strictly regulated and conservation-justified conditions, and inform guests about avoiding illegal wildlife products.

Overall, the updated standard turns animal welfare into a clear, enforceable, and shared responsibility across the entire tour operator value chain, supporting more ethical wildlife experiences and more responsible tourism outcomes.

The tables outlining the changes introduced in the GSTC Hotel Standard and the GSTC Tour Operator Standard (formerly known as the GSTC Criteria) are provided in Annex B and Annex C, respectively. In addition, information regarding IAAPA's comments on the animal-relevant indicators of GSTC Attraction Standard criterion D3.4 is provided in Annex D.

5 Strategic Implementation Pathway

5.1 Importance of the R4AWT for Global Tourism

The GSTC Roundtable for Animal Welfare in Tourism (R4AWT) represents a strategically significant milestone in the global effort to embed animal welfare as a core pillar of sustainable tourism, rather than treating it as a secondary ethical concern. As tourism continues to influence human–animal relationships across attractions, destinations, transport systems, wildlife encounters, and hospitality operations, the need for credible, consistent, and science-based guidance has never been more urgent.

One of the most important contributions of the R4AWT lies in its ability to bridge the gap between public expectations, operational realities, and certification systems. While travelers are increasingly sensitive to animal welfare issues, they often lack the tools to distinguish ethical/responsible practices from exploitation. At the same time, tourism businesses operate within diverse legal, cultural, and economic contexts, where animal welfare regulations may be weak, inconsistent, or poorly enforced. The R4AWT directly addresses this disconnect by strengthening how animal welfare is interpreted and implemented within globally recognized GSTC standards.

From a certification perspective, the Roundtable significantly enhances the credibility, clarity, and consistency of auditing practices. By contributing to standardized terminology, technical guidance notes, and auditor training on animal welfare, the R4AWT supports:

- More consistent certification decisions across regions
- Reduced risks of greenwashing and misleading marketing
- Greater confidence among certification bodies, auditors, and tourism operators
- Clearer, consistent requirements for suppliers to adopt and follow

This directly reinforces the integrity of sustainability certification as a whole.

Strategically, the R4AWT also strengthens the alignment between species conservation objectives, ethical/responsible tourism, and community well-being. By emphasizing animal autonomy, science-based welfare assessment, education, and community participation, the Roundtable moves beyond simplistic “do and don’t” rules toward a more holistic and transformative model of tourism—one that recognizes animals as sentient beings rather than commodities.

The Roundtable further plays an important role in addressing systemic risks facing the tourism sector, including:

- Wildlife trafficking driven by tourism demand
- Unregulated wildlife interactions and nature-based tourism
- Poorly managed voluntourism programs
- Zoonotic disease risks and crisis management failures
- Reputational and legal risks for tourism businesses

By integrating animal welfare into legal compliance, risk management, and operational standards, the R4AWT strengthens tourism's overall resilience, responsibility, and long-term viability.

At the global level, the R4AWT reinforces GSTC's leadership role as a neutral, science-based, and multi-stakeholder standard setter. Rather than imposing a single prescriptive model, the Roundtable demonstrates how inclusive expert dialogue, contextual flexibility, and continuous improvement can drive meaningful system-wide change.

Ultimately, the strategic importance of the R4AWT lies in its ability to shift the narrative of animals in tourism—from one centered on utilization and entertainment toward one grounded in ethical responsibility, scientific credibility, transparency, and systemic respect for animal well-being. Through this shift, the Roundtable contributes not only to improved animal welfare outcomes but also to the long-term trust, legitimacy, and sustainability of the global tourism industry.

5.2 Next Steps

Following the completion of the R4AWT, the initiative will transition from the technical development phase to the implementation and capacity-building phase. The following steps focus on embedding the Roundtable's outcomes into GSTC standards, strengthening auditor competence, and supporting tourism stakeholders in applying animal welfare principles in practice.

A primary implementation action is the integration of the R4AWT outputs into the revised GSTC Hotel Standard, version 4 and GSTC Tour Operator Standard, version 4. This alignment will reinforce clear expectations for animal welfare across all certified tourism operations.

In parallel, GSTC is developing a dedicated GSTC Responsible Animal Welfare Practices Training, which will play a central role in strengthening implementation. This training will be:

- Mandatory for auditors, and

- Available for tourism businesses, certification bodies, destinations, educators, and policymakers as a voluntary participation option.

The course will support participants in:

- Understanding animal welfare concepts in the tourism context
- Interpreting relevant GSTC criteria and indicators
- Recognizing good practices across tourism sectors
- Strengthening assessment, verification, and operational decision-making

The training will serve as a critical tool to ensure consistent interpretation of animal welfare requirements across regions, cultures, and regulatory environments.

Additional implementation actions include:

- Finalization and publication of terminology glossaries
- Ongoing engagement with certification bodies and training providers
- Progressive monitoring of implementation challenges and good practices
- Continuous improvement of guidance based on field application and emerging science

Through these steps, the R4AWT will evolve from a consultative platform into a fully operational support mechanism for credible animal welfare implementation within global tourism certification systems.

#END#

Annex A. Overview of Organizations and Their Roles in Animal Welfare within Tourism and Related Sectors

Organization	What it is	Main scope (sector & geography)	Key guidelines/tools	Roles & responsibilities	Main leverage point	Website
Animondial	Specialist consultancy	Global travel and tourism, Nature Positive Tourism, animal attractions	Responsible animal- and nature-based tourism; standards development and auditing tools; animal welfare assessment; professional trainings	Advise operators/brands; assess animal-related risks; improve product design	Tour design & supplier selection	https://www.animondial.com
Animal Wise	NGO / advisory organization	Animal-related tourism (global outreach)	Education materials; best-practice guidance, research	Awareness raising; operator & traveler education	Behavior change	https://www.animal-wise.com/
Global Food Partners	Technical NGO	Food & hospitality supply chains (global)	Higher-welfare sourcing benchmarks (e.g., cage-free eggs)	Support transition to higher-welfare sourcing	Supply-chain transformation	https://www.globalfoodpartners.org/
Global Humane Society	NGO / certification body	Animal welfare (global) - including zoos & aquariums, ecotourism, farms, film & television, etc.	Global Humane Certified™; Humane Tourism™	Set welfare standards; audit & certify compliance; audit & certify compliance	Certification & accountability	https://globalhumane.org/
International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA)	Nonprofit/global association for the attractions industry	Attractions including amusement parks, water parks, zoos & aquariums, and more (global)	Industry expos and events, education, advocacy & connections	Convene members; share good practice; connect to expertise	Industry influence, scale & member operations	https://www.iaapa.org/
Lever Foundation	Nonprofit / grant-maker	Sustainable food systems (Asia & global)	Program funding; advocacy for reduced animal suffering	Fund/support welfare-positive initiatives	Strategic funding	https://www.leverfoundation.org/

Mandai Wildlife Group	Wildlife-park operator	Singapore	Science-based welfare policies, staff training and advocacy	Ensure daily animal care and welfare aligned with industry standards; deliver animal presentations aligned with welfare standards	Direct operations	https://www.mandai.com/
Blue Lagoon Island	Tourist excursion	The Bahamas	Sustainable and educational programs, Animal-care protocols; humane certification links, research	Educate guests; humane care of animals, manage visitor interactions responsibly and sustainably	Guide educational animal programs and guest experiences	https://www.dolphinencounters.com/
World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA)	Global alliance	Zoos, aquariums, national and regional zoo and aquarium associations, like-minded organizations worldwide	WAZA Animal Welfare Strategy, WAZA Code of Ethics; WAZA Animal - Visitor Interaction Guidelines	WAZA advances animal welfare in support of its mission as a global conservation organization, developing frameworks and guidance that support its members and the wider community in continuously improving standards and practice	Global norm-setting	https://www.waza.org/
Zoological Society of London (ZSL)	Conservation NGO & zoo operator	UK + international	Science-based welfare policies; research outputs	Advance welfare science; exemplar zoo operations	Research leadership	https://www.zsl.org/

Annex B. Changes between the GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels (2016) and the GSTC Hotel Standard (2025)

Criteria		Indicators	
GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels (2016)	GSTC Hotel Standard (2025)	GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels (2016)	GSTC Hotel Standard (2025)
A2 Legal compliance The organization is in compliance with all applicable local, national and international legislation and regulations including, among others, health, safety, labour and environmental aspects.	A2 Legal Compliance The hotel complies with all relevant laws and regulations concerning social, cultural, and environmental matters, including health and safety standards, labor rights, child protection, the prevention of human trafficking and modern slavery, and animal welfare.	a. An up to date list of all applicable legal requirements is maintained.	1. The hotel maintains an up-to-date register of all applicable local and national laws and regulations.
		b. Certificates or other documentary evidence show compliance with all applicable legal requirements.	2. The hotel develops, implements, and enforces internal policies and procedures to ensure compliance with all legal requirements.
D3.2 Invasive species The organization takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive species. Native species are used for landscaping and restoration wherever feasible, particularly in natural landscapes.	D10 Invasive Species The hotel takes measures to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, prioritizing native species wherever feasible	a. Sites are monitored for presence of any invasive species.	1. The hotel maintains a documented list of invasive plant and animal species relevant to its location and facilities.
		b. Action is taken to ensure invasive species are not introduced or spread.	2. The hotel works with local authorities or conservation groups to report and remove any detected invasive species promptly.
		c. A programme is in place to eradicate and control invasive species.	3. If the hotel has landscaped areas, gardens, or uses live plants for decoration, it follows landscaping and procurement practices that prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plant species.
		d. Landscaping of sites is reviewed to consider use of native species.	4. The hotel maintains an inventory of plants used in its landscaping, identifying those that are native or endemic, and prioritizing those species where feasible.

D3.4 Wildlife interactions Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse effects on the animals concerned and on the viability and behaviour of populations in the wild.	D11 Interactions with Animals The hotel implements responsible practices that prioritize animal welfare, protect nature, and prevent harm to ecosystems.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, existing local, national and international regulations and guidelines concerning wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing.	1. If the hotel offers wildlife tours and visits to natural areas, the hotel ensures that the tour service providers comply with local wildlife regulations and follow responsible practices that prioritize animal welfare, protect nature, and ensure public safety.
		b. The organization engages with the development and implementation of local codes and guidelines for wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing, as required, based on advice of wildlife experts.	2. The hotel establishes and implements safety protocols designed to protect both animals and people during any type of interaction within its directly managed environment.
		c. Direct interactions, in particular feeding, should not be permitted, unless specifically sanctioned by internationally accepted standards or, where standards are not available, guided by independent wildlife expert advice.	3. The hotel prohibits all close contact between its visitors and any wild animal within its directly managed environment. This includes feeding, swimming with, touching, holding, or taking close-up photographs.
		d. Measures are taken to minimize disturbance to wildlife.	4. For destinations where animal interactions are the main tourist activity, the hotel provides guests with clear and accessible information on wildlife conservation and responsible behavior during these activities, encouraging actions that protect animal welfare and natural habitats.
		e. Impacts on wildlife wellbeing are regularly monitored and addressed.	
D3.5 Animal welfare No species of wild animal is acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities in compliance with local and	D12 Animal Welfare The hotel ensures the highest standards of animal welfare for any animals it keeps, owns, or manages, in compliance with relevant laws and regulations and industry best practice	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning captive wildlife.	1. If the hotel owns or manages animals, it must obtain and maintain the necessary licenses or approvals from the relevant government authority or designated agency, where such mechanisms are applicable.

<p>international law. Housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare.</p>	<p>guidelines.</p>	<p>b. Existing guidelines for specific tourism activities involving captive wildlife are implemented.</p>	<p>2. Where animals are temporarily or permanently present at the hotel, their housing, care, and handling comply with local, national, and international regulations.</p>
		<p>c. Personnel responsible for captive wildlife have appropriate qualifications and experience and are fully licensed.</p>	<p>3. If the hotel keeps or manages animals, it must employ or contract personnel with appropriate qualifications where applicable.</p>
		<p>d. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning animal welfare.</p>	<p>4. The hotel regularly monitors and maintains records on the welfare and well-being of animals in its care.</p>
		<p>e. There is regular inspection of conditions of captive wildlife and their housing.</p>	<p>5. The hotel does not engage in any animal-based practices that compromise animal welfare or well-being, or that coerce animals into unnatural or stressful behaviors.</p>
		<p>f. There is regular inspection of conditions of domestic animals and their housing and handling.</p>	
<p>D3.6 Wildlife harvesting and trade Wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, sold, or traded, except as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable, and in compliance with local and international laws.</p>	<p>D13 Wildlife Harvesting and Trade The hotel commits to ensuring that wildlife species are never harvested, consumed, displayed, sold, or traded in any illegal or unsustainable manner.</p>	<p>a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.</p>	<p>1. The hotel maintains a list of nationally protected species, including threatened, endangered, and rare species.</p>
		<p>b. Visitors are informed of regulations concerning wildlife harvesting, consumption and trade and of the need to avoid buying illegal products/souvenirs derived from threatened species of wildlife notified by IUCN or CITES.</p>	<p>2. The hotel provides guidance to guests and staff not to buy, sell, accept, or use live wildlife, wildlife parts, or derivatives, as souvenirs or otherwise, particularly in destinations located in or near natural protected areas or where wildlife is involved in tourism activities.</p>

		<p>c. Where hunting activity is legal, it forms part of a scientifically based, properly managed and strictly enforced approach to conservation.</p>	<p>3. The hotel does not engage in or support the harvesting, consumption, display, sale, or trade of wildlife species, nor the acquisition or breeding of wild animals, except where such activities are strictly regulated, demonstrably sustainable, and have the explicit approval of the relevant competent authorities.</p>
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Annex C. Changes between the GSTC Industry Criteria for Tour Operators (2016) and the GSTC Tour Operator Standard (2025)

Criteria		Indicators	
GSTC Industry Criteria for Tour Operators (2016)	GSTC Tour Operator Standard (2025)	GSTC Industry Criteria for Tour Operators (2016)	GSTC Tour Operator Standard (2025)
A2 Legal compliance The organization is in compliance with all applicable local, national and international legislation and regulations including, among others, health, safety, labour and environmental aspects.	A2 Legal Compliance The tour operator complies with all relevant laws and regulations concerning social, cultural, and environmental matters in its operational scope, including health and safety standards, labor rights, child protection, the prevention of human trafficking and modern slavery, and animal welfare.	a. An up to date list of all applicable legal requirements is maintained.	1. The tour operator maintains an up-to-date register of all applicable legal requirements in all countries and supranational jurisdictions where it operates.
		b. Certificates or other documentary evidence show compliance with all applicable legal requirements.	2. The tour operator establishes and enforces internal policies and procedures to ensure compliance with all key legal requirements.
		c. Legal requirements in all countries of operation are understood and met.	
A9 Information and interpretation The organization provides information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage, as well as an explanation of appropriate behaviour while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites.	A5 Information Sharing and Guidance The tour operator provides information on the natural and cultural characteristics of the areas visited and explains appropriate behavior when visiting natural or cultural sites.	a. Information/interpretation material about the natural and cultural heritage of areas visited is available and provided to customers.	1. The tour operator provides staff with training on the natural environment, local culture, and heritage of the areas included in its tours, to ensure accurate and respectful communication with customers.
		b. Staff are informed and trained about the natural and cultural heritage of the areas visited.	2. The tour operator provides customers with accurate, respectful, and culturally appropriate information about the natural environment, cultural heritage, and local traditions of the areas visited.
		c. Information is provided to customers about appropriate behaviour in the areas visited.	3. The tour operator provides customers with clear guidance on appropriate behavior in the areas they visit.

			4. The tour operator provides staff who operate tours with guidance on appropriate behavior to avoid and minimize environmental and cultural impacts, ensures this information is communicated to customers, and includes considerations for child protection, nature protection, and animal welfare.
			5. The tour operator prioritizes environmentally responsible methods for sharing information, including the use of digital formats.
D3.4 Wildlife interactions Interactions with free roaming wildlife, taking into account cumulative impacts, are non-invasive and responsibly managed to avoid adverse effects on the animals concerned and on the viability and behaviour of populations in the wild.	D12 Close Proximity with Animals The tour operator ensures that all wildlife viewing activities and any permitted animal interactions are conducted responsibly and safeguarded from practices or conditions that could cause harm to animals and people.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, existing local, national and international regulations and guidelines concerning wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing.	1. The tour operator ensures that animal-based activities comply with relevant laws and regulations and internationally recognized standards.
		b. The organization engages with the development and implementation of local codes and guidelines for wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing, as required, based on advice of wildlife experts.	2. The tour operator monitors its operational impacts on animals in human care and managed environments, whether on land or below water, and takes appropriate measures to reduce them.
		c. The organization ensures that all service providers and sites visited comply with existing local, national and international regulations and guidelines concerning wildlife interactions, including wildlife viewing.	3. The tour operator maintains viewing distances, avoids feeding or disturbing wildlife, and prevents any chasing, touching, or manipulation of animals.
		d. Direct interactions, in particular feeding, should not be permitted, unless specifically sanctioned by	4. The tour operator manages tour group sizes, noise levels, and the duration of encounters to minimize stress

		internationally accepted standards or, where standards are not available, guided by independent wildlife expert advice.	and disruption to animals, ensuring that all experiences support their welfare and respect natural behaviors.
		e. Measures are taken to minimize disturbance to wildlife.	5. The tour operator gives preference to suppliers that engage field staff, such as guides and drivers, who are knowledgeable about the wildlife featured in the tour, can recognize if an animal is distressed, and follow guidelines on appropriate viewing and interaction practices.
		f. Impacts on wildlife wellbeing are regularly monitored and addressed.	6. The tour operator provides customers with guidelines for appropriate behavior and best practices for wildlife viewing practices.
D3.5 Animal welfare No species of wild animal is acquired, bred or held captive, except by authorized and suitably equipped persons and for properly regulated activities in compliance with local and international law. Housing, care and handling of all wild and domestic animals meets the highest standards of animal welfare.	D13 Animal Welfare The tour operator ensures the highest standards of animal welfare for all animals it keeps, owns, or manages. This commitment is in accordance with relevant laws, regulations, and industry best practice guidelines, ensuring that all suppliers and service providers adhere to the same standards.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning captive wildlife.	1. The tour operator follows national and international standards and regulations governing animals in managed environments, as applicable to its contracted suppliers and operations.
		b. Existing guidelines for specific tourism activities involving captive wildlife are implemented.	2. The tour operator does not contract with or promote any suppliers that keep or display wild animals under human care unless such activities are permitted, fully compliant with all required licenses.
		c. Personnel responsible for captive wildlife have appropriate qualifications and experience and are fully licensed.	3. The tour operator ensures that all contracted tour service providers and animal facilities comply with relevant local and international regulations, including adherence to species-specific animal welfare standards and

			the principles of the Five Domains of Animal Welfare.
		d. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning animal welfare.	4. The tour operator trains its staff, guides, and drivers, and ensures that its suppliers are also trained on animal welfare standards, evidence-based best-practice guidelines, and responsible wildlife viewing protocols.
		e. The organization ensures that all service providers and sites visited comply with relevant laws, regulations and guidelines concerning captive wildlife and animal welfare.	5. The tour operator provides information to customers on illegal wildlife products in line with IUCN and CITES listings and works to prevent their purchase.
		f. There is regular inspection of conditions of captive wildlife and their housing.	
		g. There is regular inspection of conditions of domestic animals and their housing and handling.	
D3.6 Wildlife harvesting and trade Wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, sold, or traded, except as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable, and in compliance with local and international laws.	D14 Wildlife Harvesting and Trade The tour operator commits to ensuring that wildlife species are not harvested, consumed, displayed, or traded in any illegal or unsustainable manner.	a. The organization is aware of, and complies with, relevant laws and regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	1. The tour operator does not contract with or promote suppliers that acquire, breed, or keep animals unless such activities are explicitly authorized by competent authorities, fully regulated, and conducted in accordance with international standards.
		b. The organization ensures that all service providers and sites visited comply with relevant laws and regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	2. The tour operator does not offer or promote hunting activities unless they are fully legal, strictly regulated, and demonstrably justified for legitimate conservation purposes. Any such activities must comply with international

		c. Visitors and guides are informed of regulations concerning wildlife harvesting, consumption and trade and of the need to avoid buying illegal products/souvenirs derived from threatened species of wildlife notified by IUCN or CITES.	standards and be conducted in a manner that gives preference to ecological sustainability, species protection, and the humane treatment of animals.
		d. Where hunting activity is legal, it forms part of a scientifically based, properly managed and strictly enforced approach to conservation.	

Annex D. IAAPA's Comments on the Animal-Relevant Indicators of GSTC Attraction Standard Criterion D3.4 (Animal Welfare)

IAAPA provided feedback on four indicators (D3.4.3, D3.4.4, D3.4.7, and D3.4.8) from the final draft of the Attraction Standard. IAAPA's suggestion for Indicator D3.4.4 was fully accepted. Additionally, there were unaddressed suggestions highlighted in blue. These will be reviewed again during the revision process for version 2 of the standard.

IAAPA's Suggestions	GSTC Attraction Standard
D3.4.3. Using on industry recognized tracting method , the attraction regularly monitors and maintains secure records of the health and welfare of the animals, including their dietary requirements, any preventive and curative healthcare, behavioral traits, and any abnormalities incurred, for each animal in their possession and care.	D3.4.3. The attraction regularly monitors and maintains records of the health and welfare of the animals, including their dietary requirements, any preventive and curative healthcare, behavioral traits, and any abnormalities incurred, for each animal in their possession and care.
D3.4.4. No wild animals are kept in captivity for the sole purpose of show, performance, display or public interaction. Instead, all animal-based activity must form part of a science-based approach to animal welfare, positively contribute to animal conservation and species survival, provide public education and be guided by recognized conservation expert advice.	D3.4.4. No wild animals are kept in captivity for the sole purpose of show, performance, display or public interaction. Instead, all animal-based activity must form part of a science-based approach to animal welfare, positively contribute to animal conservation and species survival, provide public education and be guided by recognized conservation expert advice.
D3.4.7. Animal-based activities and practices that compromise animal health and welfare or subject animals to inhumane handling or unnatural behavior are strictly prohibited. Examples include but are not limited to: shows and performances , handling and contact interactions with wild animals, walking or unsupervised contact interactions with categorized dangerous animals (including cetaceans) and the use of animals for begging or touting, except for those covered by point D3.4.4.	D3.4.7. Animal-based activities and practices that compromise animal health and welfare or subject animals to inhumane handling or unnatural behavior are strictly prohibited. Examples include but are not limited to: shows and performances, handling and contact interactions with wild animals, walking or contact interactions with categorized dangerous animals (including cetaceans) and the use of animals for begging or touting.
D3.4.8. The attraction does not participate in the acquisition or breeding of wild animals except by authorized and suitably qualified and equipped persons in compliance with local and/or international law. Captive breeding programs managed by captive facilities must be part of a science-based conservation management plan for the species, which contributes directly to improving populations in the wild.	D3.4.8. The attraction does not participate in the acquisition or breeding of wild animals except by authorized and suitably qualified and equipped persons in compliance with local and/or international law. Captive breeding programs managed by captive facilities must be part of a science-based conservation management plan for the species, which contributes directly to improving populations in the wild.