Many elephant experiences are traumatic and abusive for elephants. In this guide, Wildlife SOS and The TreadRight Foundation present important tips to let you know what to watch out for and what to avoid to assure your elephant experience is rewarding for both you and the elephants.
ELEPHANT-FRIENDLY EXPERIENCES

ELEPHANTS ARE WILD ANIMALS

In the wild, elephants would never let you near them, let alone allow you to climb on top of them or perform tricks for you. In order to train an elephant to do these unnatural acts, they have to be broken. This means they’ve been beaten and starved for months on end until their spirit is crushed. Once broken into submission, they will perform out of fear of being tortured again. It’s important to remember, elephants are never willing participants in their captivity.
There are several tell-tale signs responsible travelers can look for on an elephant that indicate abuse:

- Are the elephant’s ribs protruding?
- Do you see scars or tears in its ears, results of beatings with bullhooks?
- Are its footpads swollen, or does it have overgrown and cracked toenails?
- Are there visible wounds on its legs, head, body and tail?
- Is the elephant swaying or bobbing its head?

There are also clear indications of abuse that responsible travelers can be on the lookout for within the elephant’s environment:

- Is the elephant standing in its own filth?
- Is it on concrete flooring or walking on paved roads?
- Is there water freely available?
- Are there heavy chains around?
- Is the elephant alone, and deprived of social company?
- Do you see any sharp tools, like bullhooks or spears?

If you see any of the above, do not participate in any activities with the elephants and/or leave the facility.
What you can do as a responsible traveler

If any of the physical or environmental evidence of abuse are present at an elephant attraction, then it’s best to avoid supporting it in any way. Responsible travelers should:

- never ride an elephant
- never paint an elephant
- never watch elephants perform
Elephants are amazing and being in their presence is an unbeatable experience. You can view elephants in the wild, on safari, and keep an appropriate distance. You can also visit or volunteer at the Wildlife SOS Elephant Conservation & Care Centre, to interact with and learn more about these amazing animals in a way that is fun for you, and safe for the elephant!

To arrange a visit, write to visit@wildlifesos.org.
You can make a difference

Sign-up for Wildlife SOS – India’s newsletter here and stay connected to find out how you can help save India’s abused elephants. You can learn more about The TreadRight Foundation by visiting treadright.org.

Wildlife SOS - India
A conservation nonprofit that protects and conserves wildlife in distress, and has established two elephant rehabilitation centres to prevent elephant trafficking and also rehabilitate elephants from circuses, temples, tourist attractions etc.

The TreadRight Foundation
An initiative supported by The Travel Corporation’s (TTC) family of brands, the TreadRight Foundation is a not-for-profit working to ensure the environment and communities we visit remain vibrant for generations to come.

About the Travel Corporation

The Travel Corporation (TTC) and its family of brands, as part of their continued sustainability journey and guided by The TreadRight Foundation, recognize the importance of continually adopting new best practices and policies in the interest of helping to drive the positive transformation of the travel industry.

In 2020, TTC unveiled its updated TreadRight Animal Welfare Policy, which guides TTC’s brands when selecting wildlife experiences for their itineraries to ensure that all experiences meet globally recognized animal welfare criteria. The policy is based on the Five Domains of Animal Welfare, the latest science-based framework for assessing animal welfare for animals under human control: Nutrition, Environment, Health, Behaviour, and Mental or Affective State. The updated policy, drafted in cooperation with World Animal Protection, was initially developed in 2015 in conjunction with TTC signing World Animal Protection’s Elephant-friendly Tourism Pledge, which committed TTC’s award-winning brands to not sell, offer, or promote venues or activities involving elephant rides and shows.

Wildlife SOS – India was named a TreadRight Wildlife Initiative project partner in 2016, with TreadRight providing financial support to Wildlife SOS – India's Captive Elephants Welfare Project, which specifically addresses the problem of injured or sick elephants made to work in stressful or oppressive conditions.
ELEPHANT-FRIENDLY EXPERIENCES

Volunteer, Learn, Make a Difference

Elephant Conservation & Care Center
Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India

Keep up with how we #MakeTravelMatter

TreadRight.org