



## **Welfare Implications of the use of working equines animals (horses, donkeys and mules) in the tourism industry**

### **I. Background to working equines animals and the need for best practice**

Around the world 100 million horses, donkeys and mules labour on roads, tracks, fields and farms, beside river banks, in factories, city centres and at historical landmarks. They transport everything from people, produce and building materials to food, water and fuel. The majority of these animals are owned by individuals who use them as their sole means of income to sustain often large and extended families. In developing countries these animals are used by virtually all ages, including by women and children, bringing substantial social and economic benefits. The recent worldwide surge in food and fuel prices has hit poor people especially hard and often animals are being worked harder and longer to compensate. This is also true of people who work their animals in the tourism industry.



**The animals themselves will never realise the significance of their work, but their owners do. This horse contends with traffic and hot temperatures as it carries people on scenic tours of Luxor, Egypt. The money earned is the sole means in which this owner can meet the needs of his family and ultimately the needs of his animal.**

Millions of these horses and donkeys are used specifically in the tourist trade – mainly for different types of rides. In countries like Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and India the animals pull carriages and carry tourists. In other countries including Guatemala horses are raced in religious and cultural festivals that attract tourists.

The Brooke and other charities working to help equine animals are often contacted by people who have been upset by the suffering of the animals they have witnessed on holiday overseas. By promoting good equine health, welfare and working practices the tourism industry will help ensure that tourists enjoy a holiday unmarred by the sight of animal suffering, while also contributing to the livelihoods of local people.



**A Brooke veterinarian in Jordan (left) offers advice to tourist animal owners. Tourism companies can also promote good equine health, welfare and working practices thus contributing towards the appropriate use of animals in tourism and ensuring a happy holiday for tourists.**

Those promoting the use of equines for tourism should consider:

- **WHAT** the problems facing working equines in tourism are
- **WHY** they might be occurring
- **HOW** tourism companies can play a role in preventing poor welfare and
- **WHERE** a tourist can gain further information on helping these animals, either immediately or on returning home

## II. Poor welfare states of animals used in tourism

Animals experience poor welfare when they suffer hunger, thirst, discomfort (thermal or physical), pain, injury, disease, fear or distress and are denied the opportunity to express normal behaviour such as social behaviour, grooming and rolling.

### Horses, donkeys and mules carrying or pulling tourists commonly suffer from:

- Lameness, sore feet, hoof deterioration and/or overgrown hooves
- Heat stress and dehydration
- Serious injuries
- Loss of body condition and general body weakness
- Body lesions along withers (top of shoulders), spine, belly, shoulders, breast, knees, hocks and base of tail
- Secondary conditions and injuries: tetanus, parasites, fractures, exhaustion
- Lip and mouth wounds, and sores
- Eye abnormalities
- Depressed or apathetic behaviour states induced by pain, fear, distress and exhaustion

## III. What influences Animal Welfare

The suffering experienced by working equines in tourism is influenced by many factors relating to the environment in which the animal lives and works, human attitudes and practices, and the resources available.

### Problems suffered by horses and donkeys in the tourism industry result from:



- Overweight or very tall tourists riding little donkeys
- Horses pulling overloaded carriages
- People assuming that animals are trained or accustomed to the work and habituated to a harsh life
- Insufficient rest time



- Lack of understanding of the needs and feelings of equine species - a particular problem when children are in charge of working animals
- Extreme climates where animals may experience inadequate shelter ventilation and lack thermal protection from temperature extremes caused by rain, sun and wind
- Animals being worked too young in relation to bone strength and joint development
- Ill-fitting, dirty and/or unsafe equipment

- Difficult terrain such as stones, hard and dusty surfaces, steep hills and winding steps
- Lack of available, affordable and accessible veterinary care





- Poor driving styles and animal handling practices including jerking of reins, harsh stops and direction changes, operating at high speeds, whipping and racing
- Traffic accidents in busy urban areas where equines compete for road space with vehicles

Animal owners and users who are not aware of the needs and feelings of horses, mules and donkeys will fail to provide a proper diet, sufficient water, rest, health care and a safe thermal, physical and social environment.

### III. Identifying animal indicators of poor welfare

Animals give indications of their welfare state through their physical appearance and their behaviour. It is important to highlight that an animal's welfare state depends on both physical and mental (emotional) components. Areas of concern from the **animal's point of view** are:



**Apathetic and depressed states:** these states are expressed by horses, donkeys or mules whose head is lowered or level with their back (when not eating) and by animals with eyes half closed that are not showing an active interest in either their surroundings or other animals.

**Eyes:** animals with painful eye conditions may have closed or watering eyes, be unable to see clearly and may be fearful in new situations or whilst working on busy roads.

**Heat stress & dehydration:** these medical conditions result when an animal's body is unable to function normally or regulate under times of increased temperatures. Animals need ways to cool down from the heat gained by being in the sun and from their muscles working. Heat stress can manifest as a combination of head nodding, increase in the speed and depth of breathing, flared nostrils and apathetic behaviour. This indicates thermal discomfort and distress that can be alleviated or prevented by appropriate water intake, ensuring enough time to drink, resting the animal and providing it with shade.

**Poor body condition:** animals with prominent hip bones, backbones, pelvis or ribs do not have well-covered skeletons and are vulnerable to wounds or injuries. This may be caused by inadequate access to, and intake of, nutritionally balanced foods but may be caused by other human, animal, environmental or resource factors.



**Sores or wounds:** wounds and sores (especially in areas where equipment might rub) have the potential to become aggravated whilst the animal works, causing discomfort and pain.

**Limbs:** animals who do not evenly distribute their weight amongst all four limbs may be suffering from pain or an injury. Indicators of a welfare problem may include swelling, frequently shifting weight, pointing or resting a foreleg, and/or any observable cracked or misshaped hooves.



**Movement:** animals seen stretching, straining, stumbling or staggering during movement are exerting considerable effort – an indication of a potential or existing welfare problem. Similarly, if a cart runs into an animal when it stops, there is a problem.

#### IV. Tackling the problem

Tourism companies with an understanding of animal welfare and the potential human, animal, environmental and resource factors that contribute to poor welfare will be in a better position to recognise or anticipate a welfare problem, and to plan accordingly.



**Working donkeys conquer difficult terrain in Petra, Jordan in order to carry tourists up 900 steps to reach the historical Monastery monument**

Tourists who are not aware of an animal's needs and feelings will not be able to make responsible decisions. Key areas of concern include:

**Knowledge and understanding of animals and their limits:** few people would put their own holiday enjoyment before the welfare of an animal, but many may be unaware that there are limits to what an animal can do - even animals accustomed to the work type and life. People need to be aware of what weight is fair to ask an animal to pull or carry, and what distances and speed are reasonable for an individual animal to travel.

**Riders size, weight and riding style:** though it may be difficult to choose an individual animal suitable for the rider on all occasions, the rider's weight, temperament and ability to ride (beginner vs. experienced) can contribute towards an animal's welfare state. People need to ensure the animal is fit and accustomed to being ridden in the manner chosen. People expecting too much work from an animal should be reminded that animal welfare comes first.

**Level and nature of care practices:** owners and tourists alike may not be able to recognize or handle a problem with their equines nor know where to access help. Early support is vital as prevention is better than cure.

#### V. Preventative Measures to ensure responsible tourism for animals



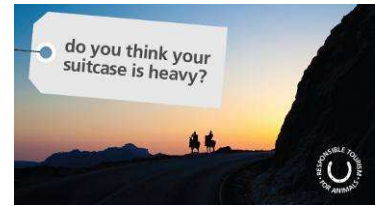
It is often inappropriate to set universal standards for working hours or maximum load weights for working animals. This is because the size and strength of individual horses and donkeys, the distances and type of terrain they cross and the various types and standards of equipment and health care available differ greatly between countries.

Tourists however are increasingly looking to tour operators for information on how they can ensure the welfare of animals during their holiday experience and make informed decisions.

It is for this reason that The Brooke has devised a distributable Happy Horse Code to help tourists assess whether a working horse or donkey is suitable for recreational use. The Brooke hopes this code will be distributed by the tourism industry.

## VI. Brooke's Happy Horse Code – guidance for resorts and tourists

**Match sizes** – horses and donkeys in developing countries are not always as strong as you might think, so always match your size to that of the animal and ensure that your weight is evenly balanced when riding.



**Pay a fair price for the ride** - encouraging owners to undercut each other only devalues the work of the horse or donkey – and means both owner and animal must work even harder to earn a living wage

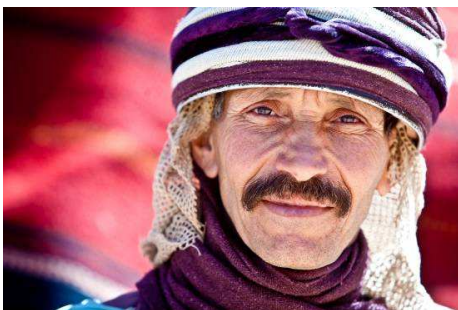
**One person per animal** – no horse or donkey should carry more than one rider. The animal must accept your weight without discomfort and be able to start, stop and move easily. If it stumbles, staggers or appears to be struggling in any way, please get off



**One wheel per person when riding in a carriage** - two people in a two-wheeled cart and so on. Carriages should be driven at a walking pace only or it can run into the animal when it stops



**Take a closer look** – it is important to look past the decoration or carriage and choose an animal that is fit and healthy - with a good covering of flesh, rather than prominent hip bones, backbones or pelvis



**Offer praise** - if an animal seems well looked after, please praise the owner and tell him why you have chosen to give him your trade

**Speak out** - if you see an owner mistreating his animal, by riding it hard or whipping it, we urge you not to use their services - and explain why

**Report mistreatment** - if you see an animal being mistreated, consider making a formal complaint to your tour operator, tourist police or the local authorities

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Kimberly works full time for the Brooke's Animal Welfare team based in London. She earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Animal Bioscience from the Pennsylvania State University, USA, and a Master of Science degree in Applied Animal Behaviour & Animal Welfare from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Kimberly has applied the knowledge gained with these degrees together with her experience as a certified Veterinary Nurse to support Brooke's overseas programmes in the principles and practice of working equine behaviour and welfare.

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