

Tourism



Group of tourists watching orcas on board a whale watching boat © Ørjan Bertelsen

The tourism industry in general contributes to other threats such as [climate change](#), [noise pollution](#), [ship strikes](#), and [habitat degradation](#). Tourism activities that specifically target marine mammals can additionally disturb the animals' natural behaviour, like their [nursing](#) and resting patterns, and cause them to avoid their preferred [habitats](#). This can lead to increased stress levels and support disease transmission. These negative impacts can be [mitigated](#) by clear [management](#) and enforced [regulations](#).

Easy to mitigate
Easy to quantify

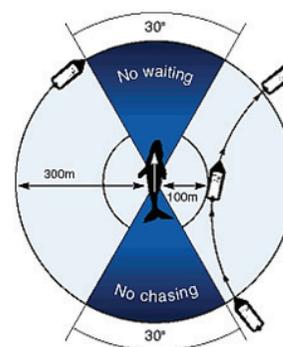
Difficult to mitigate
Difficult to quantify



Did you know that...

- In the last 15 years, ship-based tourism in the Arctic increased by almost 500%, and in the last 10 years, land-based tourism in the Arctic went up by close to 800% [1].
- Tourism and recreation threaten the conservation status of 21% of the marine mammal species recognised by the [IUCN](#) [2].
- The wide range of behavioural and physical disturbances by tourism observed in marine mammals worldwide makes it challenging to assess overall long-term impact of marine mammal tourism [3].
- Tourists and tourist operators should find best practices to be able to responsibly observe the animals.

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General guidelines for approaching whales while in a boat © rajaandthewhales.com

Managing and regulating tourism is important as it is a growing industry and it can have negative effects on the animals. Governments and environmental organisations often make rules and [guidelines](#) to balance the wishes of tourists with the well-being of marine mammals. These guidelines might say how close you can get to the animals, how many boats and people can be near the [wildlife](#), or how fast boats can go in a specific area. They also make sure that tour guides and tourists are informed on how to be respectful to the animals. Sometimes, tour operators need special permission to run their tours. Such rules help keep the animals safe and make sure that wildlife watching stays a good thing for everyone.

The direct impact from a [disturbance](#) might seem small, but the [cumulative impact](#) of multiple [disturbances](#) can have a significant impact on the survival of an animal. For example, when seals are approached too closely, they may flee into the sea, causing a chain reaction that can clear an entire [haul out](#) site. This disrupts their rest, depletes energy, and increases [stress](#). Frequent [disturbances](#) can interfere with [moulting](#) and [nursing](#), lowering [pup](#) survival rates and potentially leading seals to abandon certain areas, threatening their survival.



Seal watching, Iceland © Sandra Granquist



Discuss: What [regulations](#) or [guidelines](#) are in place in your country for wildlife watching? Do you think these are strict enough and would you suggest additional ones?

Read more about tourism on the NAMMCO website:

