

MARK CARWARDINE



RIDE A DOLPHIN? I HOPE YOU'D SAY NO

A storm is blowing in Cancún, Mexico, over plans to encourage hundreds of travel journalists to swim with captive dolphins.

A trade show for travel writers and bloggers, Travel Blog Exchange (TBEX), has got itself in hot water by offering participants a chance to ride on captive dolphins as part of the pre-convention entertainment.

Some writers have pulled out of the convention in protest, while others are battling it out with TBEX.

“We are not defending or promoting these programmes,” TBEX said in an official response. “We think our

audience is/should be sophisticated enough to make the decision of taking one of these tours and then writing objectively about their experience.”

They’ve washed their hands of any responsibility, in other words.

But just imagine how much damage a stream of articles and blogs could do in encouraging the rest of the world to try swimming with captive dolphins.

Thank goodness so many journalists have the common sense and integrity to boycott something so blatantly

unethical, even if the organisation purporting to represent them does not.

Sadly, TBEX isn’t alone in refusing to take a moral stand on dolphinariums. Travel agents, tour operators and governments around the world persist in promoting them. The government of Cyprus has just invited foreign investors to apply for permission to build a dolphinarium in the

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country, despite a 1997 decree prohibiting the use of whales and dolphins for commercial purposes.

No one should condone an industry that brutally captures dolphins in the wild, with many being killed or injured in the process, keeps them in small concrete tanks, forces them to repeat demeaning tricks several times every day, and causes them unimaginable mental, emotional and physical stress – all to make money out of uninformed tourists.

It’s plain wrong and TBEX should know better.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer, writer, conservationist and BBC TV presenter.