



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

I had a little contretemps with an American tourist the other day. I was sitting in a café in Reykjavík, Iceland, and he was immediately behind me. Everyone could hear his thunderous voice, boasting about eating whale meat in a nearby restaurant the night before. I couldn't help myself – I spun around and gave him a piece of my mind.

I'd heard his argument many times before: "What harm could it do? I tried it only once." But half a million tourists visit Iceland every year and a shocking number of them try whale meat 'only once'. It's not much of an exaggeration to say that Iceland's whales are being killed to feed them.

According to surveys carried out by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), only about 5 per cent of Icelanders eat whale meat regularly. The only Icelanders I have ever met who do – in exactly 70 visits – are the whalers themselves.

By no stretch of the imagination is it a traditional local dish. Yet demand has risen alarmingly in recent years, precisely because of my American friend and all the other inconsiderate tourists who are gobbling up no less than 40 per cent of the market.

How can people be so naïve? And how can they be so utterly, exasperatingly thoughtless? I've met people in Reykjavík who have walked off a whale-watch boat and straight into a restaurant to eat whale meat.

The solution is simple: if you want to try whales, try watching them instead of eating them – whale watching helps the economy and creates jobs, without causing harm. Then, while you're at it, avoid eating in any of the restaurants that serves whale meat – and encourage everyone else you meet on holiday to do exactly the same.

And, finally, use the same rationale and commonsense every time you travel. Don't try shark-fin soup or turtle soup, don't try tiger-bone wine, and don't try anything else that you instinctively know you shouldn't.

Otherwise, I guarantee it will do far worse than leave a bad taste in your mouth.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer and tv presenter.



Whales meat again: but not on some sunny day or even on a rainy one.

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