



# Animal Lovers' Tourism as a Sustainable Development Strategy: Evidence from Crete

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Tourists interacting with rescued dogs at a welfare shelter in Crete — empirical evidence of animal lovers' tourism (Field Research, Crete, 2024)

## INTRODUCTION & AIM

Companion animal welfare is an overlooked dimension of sustainable tourism development. While research has focused on wildlife and farm animals, limited attention has been given to how stray and owned companion animals influence destination image and tourist satisfaction.

This study introduces **animal lovers' tourism** as a strategy integrating animal welfare improvement with sustainable destination branding, framed within the One Health framework. (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Fennell & de Grosbois, 2024; Winter, 2020).

## METHODS

- **Mixed-methods design:** structured questionnaires + semi-structured interviews + on-site observations
- **Sample:** 1,000 international tourists visiting Crete during 2024–2025
- **Analysis:** Regression models (SPSS), thematic coding (NVivo), descriptive statistics

## KEY FINDINGS

### 41%

#### Won't Return

Tourists witnessing suffering strays (CANDi int., 2024)

### 22%

#### Tourist Complaints

Origin: tourists. Ierapetra 2023 (Municipal Police)

### p < 0.01

#### Statistical Significance

Animal welfare → Destination Image (n = 1,000)

## RESULTS



- Visible cases of abuse or neglect negatively influenced tourists' emotional responses and overall destination image (p < 0.01)
- Municipal Police data confirms 22% of complaints originated from tourists
- Positive animal encounters enhanced satisfaction and increased revisit intentions
- Emerging demand identified for voluntourism experiences involving shelters and adoption networks

## CONCLUSIONS

Animal lovers' tourism constitutes a transformative model of sustainable development, aligning with the One Health framework by linking human well-being, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. Policy recommendations include municipal TNVR strategies, tourism-welfare partnerships, destination certification, and animal welfare literacy integration. For Mediterranean destinations, the question is not whether to act — but how.

## REFERENCES

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