

In 2016, I worked at Delphinus Xcaret in Quintana Roo, Mexico, as a photographer for its “swim with the dolphins” encounters. I left the company because I couldn’t stand watching how the dolphins were being treated, but I think about it every day. I am traumatized. I didn’t share my experience then out of fear over what the facility’s owners may do, as they have a lot of political power and a history of violence. Many employees are under the same circumstances, keeping silent because they feel like they can’t speak up. I’m ready to make an official report as an ex-employee of Delphinus in order to expose how it mistreats dolphins. However, for the safety of myself and my family, I’m choosing to remain anonymous.

During my employment at Delphinus, I noticed that the dolphins were not happy or healthy. They were kept in small tanks, up to five at a time in a swimming pool that was only up to 10 meters deep. They had no shade from the blazing sun, causing the animals to suffer from eye injuries and burns. The dolphins had to be nebulized up to twice a day because of the poor water quality and the bacteria from hundreds of tourists who paid to swim with them. Many of them were even drugged with questionable “vitamins,” presumably to reduce their immense distress.

Pregnant dolphins were kept in a tank so small that they could barely move around comfortably. All they could do was float listlessly. They were confined there for two months so they couldn’t hurt themselves. Once they gave birth, handlers would take the babies away before the mothers even had the opportunity to bond with them. I could hear them scream for their young—noises I’ll never forget. When two baby dolphins died in one week, staff simply threw their bodies away in the garbage. I believe that Delphinus subsequently covered up these deaths.

For me, this was one of the most (if not the most) horrible experiences I’ve ever had to live through. I think about it every day. There has not been one day that has gone by that I do not relive the high-pitched squeals that the mother dolphins made when they were separated from their young.

We were trained by management to give a spiel full of lies and ambiguous statements. For example, I was told by trainers and management that most of the dolphins there had been captured from the wild years prior, but we had to lie about their ages and say they were born there, they didn’t know the outside world, and they were happy there. Children and parents asked us if we opened the gates at night because they were so concerned over the small pools, but we had to lie and say, “Of course.” When they asked if the dolphins were happy, if they were being taken care of, and if this was the best option for them, we were told to say “yes” with a big smile.

Being forced to lie and spread misinformation was traumatizing for my mental health and was like putting the dolphins into another day of slave labor. These animals were working all day pushing, pulling, performing, and swimming in circles for tourists under the pretense of ecotourism and environmental education. When everyone went home to their families at the end of the day, the dolphins could only float there with nowhere to go, five at a time in a small pool without any room, shade, or mental stimulus.

This is not the only facility in the Riviera Maya where dolphins are suffering. One trainer I worked with had moved from Dolphinaris to Xcaret because the treatment of dolphins was so bad. Xcaret currently has over seven locations in the Riviera Maya—I visited most of them as an

employee, and conditions there are just as terrible. In the Xel-Há Park location, there have been multiple incidents of dolphins acting out violently against tourists because of their stressful conditions.

These animals are not being taken care of and they're treated as disposable. Every day is a day full of abuse for them. As an ex-employee who has seen the inside of this industry, I urge you not to take your children or families to these facilities. Your entry will only mean another day of pain and suffering for these dolphins.