

Elephants in Thailand – What tourists need to know

The elephant has been an important figure in Thai society and a significant symbol for many centuries. In Thai society elephants have played a substantial role in manual labor, war combatants, royal symbol, and the tourism industry. For thousands of years, elephants were captured and trained to be a form of transportation and heavy labor. When logging in Thailand was still legal, they hauled heavy logs through the terrains of the forest, which in turn gave many Thai people jobs.

Since the logging industry became illegal, elephants owners (mahouts) have to find other ways to feed their elephants and most of them have no other choice but turning towards tourism industry.

Sadly, quite often you will see camps that are heavily focused on tourism and the animals there are always tied with chains when not carrying around hundreds of tourists a day and in very bad camps these elephants sometimes will have to walk on hot tarmac roads. It is a fact, that especially (but not only) in southern regions of Thailand there are many of these truly bad elephant camps.

There are a few really good elephant conservation centers in Thailand to better the lives of the elephants generating revenue by letting people experience elephants as close to their natural state as possible and the Elephant Nature Park north of Chiang Mai is one of the best conservation centers in all of Thailand.

Meeting elephants during your trekking tour

You can visit a small elephant family still living with their owners (mahouts) in the jungles. The elephants there can roam freely most of the day and the night and will only be tied for a short time before we get there so we do not lose time bringing them from their jungle habitat to the small camp. You will see the elephants take a bath and maybe you want to join them and wash them - **it is a truly unforgettable experience to dabble with a pachyderm.**

We do have a close eye on how the elephants are treated by their owners as we also want the animals to be treated as good as possible.

We would not offer meeting the small elephant family if we had the feeling that the animals are not treated well and our guests have the choice to completely opt out of meeting the elephants during their tour by telling us in advance - we will then buy lots of bananas for the animals and our guests will instead do some more hiking.

Elephant riding – why you should not do it

A wild living elephant would not simply let you sit on its back and carry you around – the only way to get an elephant to do so, is by breaking its will and although the former labor elephants are used to mahouts sitting on their back: as long as tourists will pay a lot of money for riding on an elephant, oncoming generations of these majestic animals will also needlessly suffer.

You should not consider riding on a pachyderm.

Meet them. Feed them. Wash them. Love them. Do not ride them.

