



Exploitation of Elephants Within the Tourism Industry in Thailand

Issue

Elephant tourism is a huge issue in countries across Asia, with 77% of elephants being treated appallingly, most notably within Thailand. According to WAP (2017), Thailand uses the most amount of elephants in tourism industries.

Many reports state that elephants are being held in cruel conditions and are subjected to:

- Poor diets.
- Torture and abuse.
- Being bound by chains.
- Breaking-in or crushing rituals.
- Limited veterinary care.
- Confined and unnatural living conditions.

However, research shows that tourists appear to be unaware of the mistreatment that elephants can be subjected to (WAP, 2017).

Outcome

Campaigning, and the shift in advertising towards more ethical tourism surrounding the 'elephant experience' has likely had an impact on tourist behaviour and the number of donations sanctuaries receive. As a result, these centres will have more access to resources that could aid the elephants' recovery and improve their quality of life.



Reports such as the one created by World Animal Protection have caught global attention from news outlets. This global attention will encourage visitors to think more carefully about their tourism practices when travelling and lead to more ethical choices.

How can Degrees of Change students help improve tourism?

Sources

WAP, 2017. *Taken For A Ride: Thousands of elephants exploited for tourism.* (www.worldanimalprotection.org)
Marshall, C., 2017. *Elephant tourism is 'fuelling cruelty'.* BBC News. (www.bbc.co.uk/news)
Samuels, Z., 2022. *How to Stop Abuse in the Elephant Tourism Industry (2022).* (www.thebrokebackpacker.com)
PETA, n.d. *Animals Abused for Tourists' Cheap Photos and Entertainment* (www.investigations.peta.org)
Figures from Canva and Flickr Creative Commons.

Actions

Petitions and Pressure

Petitions against the mistreatment of elephants in Thailand and Asia include one by Daniel Correa from the U.S.A. to "Set Elephants Free From Tourism Exploitation." It has over 3700 signatures.

Several tourists and professionals have directly addressed tour companies, governments and individuals, urging them to make more ethical decisions and provide elephants with better care and protection.

Some tourism companies and travel bloggers have also spoken about the mistreatment of elephants within Thailand, and news reports of the abuse have also been publicised (Marshall, 2017).

Rescue Centres and Sanctuaries

In order to combat the exploitation of elephants, many sanctuaries have been set up across Asia to shelter elephants who have been rescued from cruel environments or have retired from the tourism industry. These sanctuaries' missions are typically centred around caring for the elephants and providing them with food, comfort, and veterinary care.



Tourist Advertisements

Advertisements on travel sites have shifted towards more ethical elephant 'experiences', recommending volunteering at or visiting a sanctuary instead of participating in elephant rides and street shows.

Government Action

Thailand has assisted this effort by setting up an elephant database in 2016 and increasing policing around the Myanmar border, in order to stop the unethical trade of elephants. PETA Asia has also been in contact with Thai Police.