



### **Our Jungle House – Ethical Elephant Tourism Policy**

As Khao Sok's leading eco-resort with a real passion for conservation, we consider the best practices of all resort related aspects; from building materials and food sourcing to the quality of our local partners and the suppliers that help us to provide responsible activities for our guest's enjoyment.

This isn't only about the quality of the guest's experience, but the quality of the overall impact on employees, animals and the environment as well. One activity that proves consistently difficult is Elephant-related tourism: growing concerns about the welfare of elephants used for tourism has created much-needed motivation to shift towards ethical based elephant experiences, but the lack of an agreed set of standards, has made it difficult for guests and mahouts (elephant caretakers) alike to be sure that they are doing the right thing. If there is no sure way to prove an elephant's welfare, how can guests be sure they are supporting a worthy business, and how are mahouts to be sure they are properly caring for their elephants whilst informing their guests of best practices? New concerns have led to many improvements in elephant training and welfare, but also misconceptions among travelers looking for a unique and meaningful experience. By advising you about the history of elephants in Thailand and our opinion on the current state of affairs, you will be able to make a more informed decision.

Asian Elephants have long been domesticated for human use throughout the region, and Thailand was one of the first. This relationship is deeply engrained in Thai culture with a history dating back 3000 years for logging, farming, warfare, building, ceremonial use in many royal courts as well as in Buddhist and Hindu Temples. Elephants were used for transporting materials, mostly in the timber industry, and provided livelihoods for all the families and villages who owned them. When the Thai government banned logging in 1989, domestic elephants went from being the main source of income to being a huge

expense to keep, feed and shelter. There was no simple solution to address this change: domestic born elephants, sadly, cannot simply be released into the wild. Wild elephants are protected under international law and the IUCN, though domestic elephants still fall under the beast of burden laws to date.

Following the new laws Elephants and their caretakers were left with no choice but to find alternative means of support. Some were taken out of their natural environments and into cities and tourists spots for begging – a practice that has been outlawed in Thailand. Another solution involved setting up elephant camps that provided rides and trekking, as it was through tourism's ever increasing demand that these previously nontraditional activities became a way for mahouts to support their elephants and families. This has become increasingly problematic as concerns were rightfully raised about the conditions

at these camps. Many camps operate with little concern for the elephants, which can be carrying visitors all day with little rest, shade or food. Additionally, as unhappy and unhealthy elephants do not breed well in captivity, the growing needs of the tourist industry led to an increasing number of wild born elephants being poached and taken illegally.

The long-lasting and wide-ranging connection with the Elephant is a point of pride for many Thai people and mahouts. This makes it difficult to change practices and attitudes based on foreign opinions – most of which are not scientific or factual and often come from a place of compassion not knowledge - about the role of the elephant, especially when it seems like these concerns come from those with no connection with elephants and no understanding of the local culture.

It is our position that 1) the need for an increasing number of elephants to meet tourist demand, and 2) the treatment of elephants that are currently tamed, are interlinked, but actually separate issues.

Unfortunately, there are no realistic ways that we, as an eco-resort, can fix all the issues raised by an increasing demand for domesticated elephants without sacrificing the well-being of currently domesticated elephants. If we do not sell any elephant related activities, we may lessen the long-term demand but would also lessen the ability for caretakers to properly provide for their elephants. If the owners of the elephants cannot afford to care for them, the sad truth is, they may turn to other sources of profit such as the illegal wildlife trade for ivory, Chinese medicine and superstitious “magic” charms. It

is our hope that stricter laws regarding the ownership and treatment of domesticated elephants will be adopted in the near future, with more severe enforcement of existing protection laws for wild populations

Regarding the treatment of currently domesticated elephants, it's an issue that cannot be ignored and we feel that the best way to learn more about the good and bad aspects of the current situation is to experience it first hand, whilst supporting those who implement best elephant welfare and better working conditions for the mahouts. Because of this, it's paramount to offer experiences where the safety and wellbeing of guests, mahouts, and—most importantly—the elephants themselves, are the primary objective. **As a result, this means that Our Jungle House, only works with responsible elephant camps that provide ethical, quality experiences, that limit the amount of daily guests and avoid activities that demand unnatural elephant behavior** – for example painting, standing on hind legs and playing football. We try to find operators who provide the best, scientifically accurate information to guests, which makes the experience more meaningful and educational in the interest of supporting those with a passion for elephants, it means we also support less experienced operators that are developing in a promising direction with a focus on responsible, cruelty free practices. As long as the mahouts are keen to gain further experience whilst developing their knowledge and abilities in an effort to improve the care of elephants and visitors alike, we will support them and we hope that our guests will share our vision for change.

If you book an elephant activity with us, you can be assured, that we are working with the best local partners available and providing additional assistance to mahouts to improve their craft. In the case of further questions or inquiries, please let us know and we're happy to help.

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Enjoy your stay and activity arrangements at and with Our Jungle House in Khao Sok,  
The Our Jungle House Team