

# *Elephant Exposé*

- Catering to changing demands ethically
- How to know what to sell to clients
- Thailand venues that are making changes
- Why elephant bathing is the new riding
- The value of (literally) taking a step back
- How one agent can make a difference



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**TRAVEL  
TODAY**  
Incorporating Tabs On Travel



TABS ON  
**TRAVEL TODAY**  
 Wed 07 Aug 19 pB

# Changing The Tourism Industry

World Animal Protection, in conjunction with *Travel Today*, is working to change the travel industry's perspective on wildlife and its relationship with tourism.

This follows WAP's official launch of its new trade site which is designed to help travel agents sell wildlife friendly travel.

According to WAP, more than 550,000 captive wild animals worldwide, including elephants, sloths, tigers and dolphins endure cruelty for the sake of entertainment, whether that be being snatched from the wild, being beaten and 'trained', inadequate living conditions and forced interaction with tourists.

So how are we trying to help make a difference?

*Travel Today* recently explored Thailand's animal entertainment industry with WAP, with a focus on elephants. Over the coming days we will be highlighting what agents themselves can do to prevent cruelty in regards to elephants, and where they can send clients who want to experience these majestic animals without any guilt.

### ... Safari Time?

*Travel Today* will also be focusing on changing perspectives when it comes to animal experiences in Asia, with WAP's communications manager Fran Kearey (pictured) hoping to get clients asking for more of a 'safari' type experience.

"Travellers who go on safari in South Africa or Kenya expect to see elephants in the wild and don't expect to ride or directly interact with them," says Fran.

"We want to show that this can be done in Thailand as well."

She adds that for this to work, WAP needs agents' help.

"Travel companies and tour operators are key to helping educate their



customers in elephant-friendly experiences available in Thailand."

### ... Challenges

While WAP is highlighting that there are ethical options available for tourists who want to see elephants, it acknowledge there are challenges.

Somsak Soonthornnawaphat, WAP's head of campaigns, Thailand says he understands that it is difficult for agents, who don't want to lose sales by not selling elephant rides or shows. However he says he is working to inform agents that 'the trend of the animal lover is increasing'. Somsak says WAP has found many tourists want animal experiences but don't want to support cruelty. "They come to Thailand but do not know the venue is not a friendly venue," he says.

Fran backs up Somsak's statement. "Most travellers (around 80%) don't realise their once in a lifetime encounter with a wild animal can mean a lifetime of misery for that animal," says Fran. Global polling by WAP shows most tourists take part in wildlife tourism because they love wild animals—that is why Fran says education and awareness are so important.

"Whether bred in captivity or taken from the wild, elephants are forced to endure cruel and intensive training to make them safe to interact with tourists."

### Putting Safety First

Aside from elephant welfare, a venue that allows the elephants to move freely on their own, away from tourists, is also safer. World Animal Protection says being wild animals, captive elephants can be unpredictable and dangerous, especially if they're being crowded. Many tourists and mahouts are injured and killed each year. Even in elephant-friendly venues, clients will often see mahouts accompanying elephants at a distance, to keep everyone safe. Example of safe practise include the feeding tubes at ChangChill, pictured below.



### Take The Pledge



Between 2014 and 2016, World Animal Protection investigated 220 elephant tourist attractions across Asia. It found that there were more than 3000 captive elephants in tourism, with 96% of venues offering rides keeping their elephants in cruel and unacceptable living conditions. Agents wanting to make a difference can contact WAP to take the pledge to phase-out elephant rides and shows from their offerings [HERE](#).



### Are you an elephant-friendly traveller?

If you can get close enough to ride, bath or touch an elephant, it's been cruelly trained.  
 See elephants in the wild, where they belong.



[worldanimalprotection.org.nz/elephantfriendly](http://worldanimalprotection.org.nz/elephantfriendly)



TABS ON  
**TRAVEL TODAY**  
 Thu 08 Aug 19 pC

# The Changing Face Of ChangChill



WAP / Nick Axelrod

**Thailand's ChangChill has seen a few changes lately thanks to some of the leading travel companies and World Animal Protection (WAP), and it's not just its name.**

Formerly known as Happy Elephant Care Valley, the sanctuary has transformed itself into an elephant-friendly venue, with the days of elephant rides and bathing now long gone.

Visitors can now admire the elephants expressing their natural behaviour from the new observation deck overlooking the venue's valley' allowing the elephants choose what they want to do at their own pace and in their own time.

Spearheading the transformation is WAP's elephant project manager Dee Kenyon, who hopes that this transformation project will lead the way for other non-friendly operators. "They [ChangChill] joined us because they want to future proof their camp...it is very important World Animal Protection keeps steering them in the direction we want them to go," says Dee, who highlights that while some operators are moving away from elephant rides due to heightened public awareness of its cruelty, many still offer elephant bathing.

## ...Why ChangChill

ChangChill offers more than three hectares of land and jungle, which

the elephants can freely forage through and there is also mud pits and feeding tubes, which allow tourists to indirectly interact with the elephants, something that is very important to WAP.

It wasn't just transforming the elephants' environment, WAP is also working on educating the local mahouts on ethics and conservation. "We can't leave the human behind," says Dee. "It has to go hand in hand, so we work closely with them, we have to empower mahouts."

Owner of ChangChill, SupaKorn Tanaset, says the sanctuary ensures the elephants are well cared for, and that they always come first.

"We try to ensure that our work and our visitors don't affect the elephants, make them unhappy or affect their personal life," says SupaKorn. "The elephants come first, our visitors have to adapt."

## ... Getting There

Agents with clients interested in meeting the venue's six female elephants (including an adorable mother-daughter) can contact the sanctuary at [changchill.com](http://changchill.com) and arrange a transfer from their Chiang Mai hotel. A full-day at the sanctuary is priced from THB2,500 and includes an elephant walk, lectures on conservation, lunch, elephant cooking classes and more.



## Battles Over Bathing; The 'New' Riding

While most tourists have moved away from riding, bathing is still seen as an 'ethical alternative', an idea that has been slammed by both World Animal Protection and elephant-friendly sanctuaries.

"Every place is marketing themselves as elephant-friendly but elephant bathing is the new elephant riding," says Dee Kenyon, WAP's elephant project manager, pictured above.

The bathing trend is something that riles up Jack Highwood, founder of Elephant Valley Thailand as well, who says elephants suffer from the projection of human feelings, also known as anthropomorphism.

"What happens is people go 'oh the elephant likes having a mud bath' and you end up doing weird [things]," he says. "Can we have teenagers stop giving them mud baths please, and let them be elephants."



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# Elephant Exposé

TABS ON  
**TRAVEL TODAY**  
 Fri 09 Aug 19 pD

## Taking A Step Back For Welfare



“Would you ride a panda?” That’s the question Jack Highwood, founder of Elephant Valley Thailand encourages travel agents to ask their clients who are looking at elephant riding experiences as part of their Thai holiday.

“It’s a ridiculous idea,” says Jack of riding a panda. And riding an elephant, which also happens to be an endangered animal, he says is even more ridiculous.

Instead, agents are being encouraged to sell clients elephant-friendly

venues such as Jack’s Elephant Valley Thailand Park in Chiang Rai. “The idea is that they observe elephants, not disturb them...when people are travelling they want to do best by these animals, but how do you do that? We’re trying to develop a model by which we get people to take one step back,” says Jack. “We fully understand you love this animal, but if you want to be nice to an elephant are you sitting on the elephant or watching it from up here [on a viewing platform]?”

### ... Call To Agents

Jack is encouraging agents to think about how they want play their part in the ethical elephant experience dilemma. “The company has to make a clear decision on what kind of company they are and how they represent that,” he says. “We live in an interesting time when more and more the mirror is being turned on us whether we like it or not.”

### ... The Details

Elephant Valley Thailand is home to six elephants, five females and a male. A range of tours is available, from the 90-minute Elephant Express tour (THB1000) to the Elephant Lovers and Volunteer Experience, a full-day visit priced from THB2000. Full and half day options include transfers from Chiang Rai. See [elephantvalleythailand.com](http://elephantvalleythailand.com)

### Recommended Venues

Clients looking for elephant-friendly venues in Thailand are recommended ChangChill and Elephant Valley Thailand, as well as Boon Lott’s Elephant Sanctuary, (who’s resident elephants Nwon and Lom are pictured below), Burm and Emily’s Elephant Sanctuary, Global Vision International and Mahouts Elephant Foundation. Also recognised as ethical is Cambodia’s Elephant Valley Project and Nepal’s Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge. More information on elephant friendly venues can be found at [worldanimalprotection.org.nz/elephantfriendly](http://worldanimalprotection.org.nz/elephantfriendly)



### Working Together



Key to making a difference for animal welfare and driving change in the industry is working together, says World Animal Protection head of campaigns New Zealand Elaine McNee, pictured. WAP encourages agents to find out more on the Coalition for Ethical Wildlife Tourism (CEWT). CEWT is an alliance of committed travel industry leaders from across the globe working to end cruel wildlife entertainment through driving industry standards and government legislations that better protect wild animals and prove strong demand for friendly venues. See [worldanimalprotection.org/cewt](http://worldanimalprotection.org/cewt)

### Sell Safe Venues



For agents who are unsure whether they are selling ethical venues, World Animal Protection has put together a list of questions, designed to help agents, and clients, identify whether a venue is ethical or not. Questions to ask include does the animal have food and water? Is there rest and shelter for the animal? Is this animal in pain and suffering? Is this natural behaviour, or is it cruelty? And will I see animals in distress?



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