



## Elephant Steps

Friday 9th to Sunday 25th November 2012

### Introduction:

Get the inside track on elephants in Thailand in this once-in-a-lifetime trip which has 4 different types of elephant experiences!

The itinerary takes in two different elephant conservation centres (Elephant Stay and Elephant Nature Park) where you will get up close and personal to these magnificent creatures, explore a vast nature reserve for the chance to see some of the last remaining herds of wild elephants and other wildlife and watch elephants take part in their own version of the Olympics at the Surin Elephant Festival which takes place in November. In between your elephant experience, you'll also do some classic Thailand sightseeing, meet local people, taste the best food Thailand has to offer and have some well-deserved relaxation by the pool. *Welcome to Elephant Steps!*

### Overview:

Elephants have a rich history in Thailand. Many years ago, they roamed the vast jungles that sprawled across the country, then they played an active part in wars to protect the homeland, then they worked for many years, in large and small enterprises, often as a valued member of the family. These days, with a major employer, the logging industry, hardly existent, elephants have less sources of income, but no place in the wild to return to. Thailand has many tourist 'camps' where elephants are used for rides or 'circus tricks' but *if you'd rather bathe an elephant rather than ride one, this is the holiday for you!*

### Style:

As all Tell Tale holidays, this trip is a soft adventure, this means it is very different from mainstream tourism but not as demanding as a typical adventure holiday. This trip does pack a lot in but you won't spend too much time on the road and you will fit in experiencing authentic Thailand and some relaxation. However, the itinerary is more active than a typical Tell Tale trip as you will be caring for elephants and it is not a private tour but a group trip. Also, the accommodation at the elephant conservation centres though fairly comfortable is rustic (although the sound of elephants snoring around you is a luxurious lullaby!). We have balanced this out with our accommodation choices elsewhere.

**There is no single supplement though you will get your own room when possible (everywhere except elephant sanctuaries). The maximum group size will be 12 travellers. Most will be travelling solo, we have max 4 places made up of couples or pairs of friends..**

As our small group trips are for people who don't know each other, we feel that unlike our private tours, they do need to be escorted. Some tour operators would just outsource to a ground agent who would allocate you a tour leader who is a guide from Bangkok and act as your guide throughout. At Tell Tale Travel, we prefer you discover everything from a variety of local people, it's the best experience. It will also benefit local economies more. So the Tell Tale 'escort', a member of staff or one of our friends, is simply there to see that things run smoothly, everyone gets on and be the contact person for our network of local people and our local office.

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9am – 9pm, 7 days a week

### Day 1 –Friday

Overnight direct flight from London Heathrow to Bangkok with Eva Air or Thai Airways.

### Day 2 - Saturday

Welcome to Thailand! You will be met at Bangkok airport and whisked away in an air-conditioned minibus to a centrally-located boutique inn. This inn only has enough rooms to accommodate our maximum group size so you will have the whole or most of it to yourselves. You will have a little time to unpack and get settled in and have a dip in the small pool. Later on, you will be taken on a stroll through the local area for a special welcome dinner, in line with the theme, this will be at the world-famous Blue Elephant.



### Day 3 – Sunday



You can have a lie in this morning, before a late breakfast.

Then it's time for an afternoon of sightseeing with one of our expert Bangkok-based guides. He will pick you up and take you to the Chao Praya river which snakes through the city and take you on a boat - you'll cruise past Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), which is covered in pieces of porcelain, stop off to see the glittering royal barges, and your excursion with a guided visit to the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

This evening, your private minibus will take those who want to go to the lively Suan Lum night market. It is a perfect place to pick up lightweight clothes for your trip or haggle for handicrafts and have an array of choices for dinner. Afterwards, you will be driven to Vertigo, a 'sky bar' perched at the top of the Banyan Tree hotel, where you can enjoy the amazing views of the sprawling city and the Chao Praya river. **Tell Tale Tip** *We have worked out the evening that there is some flexibility for those who want either an early or late night, your driver will drop you at the hotel separately.*

### Day 4 – Monday

This morning, it's time to start your elephant adventures!

First, you'll be taken on a 1-1.5. hour drive north to Ayutthaya, a capital of ancient Siam. Near the UNESCO-rated heritage site is the Elephant Kraal. Kraal is originally an Afrikaans word for enclosure - historically this was where wild elephants captured in the north and herded hundreds of miles through Thailand were entrapped before a display in front of the ruling monarch, this has not happened since 1906. These days, the kraal is home to more than 100 elephants, run by the Prakochaban centre which you can visit as 'Elephant Stay'.



Many of the elephants here are rescued from previously-hard lives, although there are also some baby elephants who were born here. This centre's belief is that by supporting the traditional role of elephants in Thai culture as working animals, elephants will have a sustainable future. Whilst the older elephants live a life of leisure, those of working age have appeared in historic scenes on television programmes and films such as Oliver Stone's *Alexander*.

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Some of the elephants also have a regular 9-5 job, at the nearby historical site of Ayutthaya where they give visitors a (very short) ride around the temples and monuments. They certainly look the part, draped in the traditional magnificent royal insignia of red and yellow. For the next three days, you will live and work with the conservation staff, the mahouts and their families, using the trusty handbook you will be given containing tips on how to care for and communicate with 'your' very own elephant.



Not only will you have an amazing experience of truly getting hands-on with elephants but you will get a great grounding for the rest of your elephant adventure around Thailand. You will be expected to muck in, so bring old clothes!



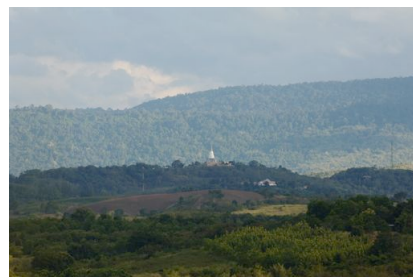
Whilst evenings can be quite magical here, and dinners certainly delicious if any in the group would like to visit Ayutthaya in the evening, your tour escort will arrange local transport.

*Please note that due to the limited accommodation here, whilst you will have a comfortable air-conditioned 'chalet' with a private bathroom, you will have to share with another member of the group for two nights (you will be moving onto other accommodation at the end of the last day with the elephants).*

### Day 6 – Wednesday

At the end of the day, it's time to pack up and say goodbye to your elephant and the friends you would have made at the kraal. You will be picked up and taken on a 2-3 hour drive will be taken on a drive east.

You are heading towards Khao Yai. Spanning an area of over 2,000 square kilometers, Khao Yai National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Sites with a wide range of altitudes going up to 1000m above sea level and a range of terrains from mountains to tropical jungle. It contains over 67 types of mammals, 320 types of birds and 3,000 species of plants and is one of the few remaining areas containing wild elephants.



Time for dinner, then relax in your individual air-conditioned bungalow, or you can have a drink together in the lodge's open-air restaurant.

### Day 7 – Thursday



You will have most of this day to relax. Have breakfast at leisure, then spend the rest of the morning and early afternoon by the large pool. You can have lunch when you like.

In the late afternoon, you will be taken for your visit to Khao Yai, you will be taken to the 'Bat Cave' where you'll see the bats at rest before the unforgettable sight of over two million bats swarm into the darkening sky, in search of their night's feed.

Afterwards, you will stop for dinner at one of the local restaurants.

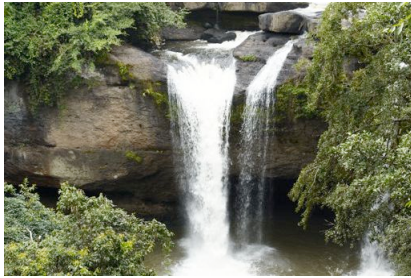
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### ***Day 8 – Friday***

An early start this morning, you'll arrive in the national park at 7am when the animals are their most active. Khao Yai is home to much tropical birdlife and wildlife such as deer, gibbons, clouded leopards and herds of elephants. There are supposedly still tigers here, although it's highly unlikely you will see one! You'll start the morning with a trek through the park with your guide - this can be taken at your own pace, you can swing through the trees or have a more sedate walk – it's up to you!



Then it's time to visit spectacular waterfalls, featured in the film *The Beach* where you can swim and have your picnic lunch. You'll then spend the afternoon driving in an open-topped vehicle, your guide will keep a look out and be equipped with binoculars for animals further away and going to the mineral salt lick which is likely to give you elephant viewings. You can also visit the top of the mountain which is used as a radar station for aircraft – make sure to take a jumper, it can get quite chilly up here!

### ***Day 9 – Saturday***

Time to see the playful side of elephants, you're heading to the once-a-year Surin festival! You will have to leave early as the drive from Khao Yai will take a while, although the roads should be relatively quiet as most people travel to the festival from Bangkok (making very crowded roads and trains).

When you arrive at the Surin festival, you are free to get comfortable in your pre-booked 'VIP' seats or wander around as you wish. There will be over 250 elephants at the festival, from all over Thailand taking part in everything from shows on their traditional life to 'Olympic games' such as tug of war and football. Our friends from the Elephant Nature Park usually visit Surin to provide a 'first aid tent' and to look for other elephants who could do with sanctuary.

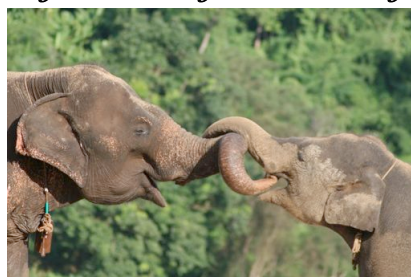
Evening drive back to your lodge.

### ***Day 10 – Sunday***

Time to pack up this morning before a 2-hour drive to Bangkok airport. You'll take a short flight to Chiang Mai, the 'rose of the north'. One of our drivers will be waiting for you at the airport and you will be taken to a boutique hotel in the town.

A little bit of time to settle in before dinner and a stroll around Chiang Mai's famous night bazaar.

### ***Days 11 to Day 15 – Monday to Friday***



Time to head off for your next elephant adventure! You'll be driven to the Elephant Nature Park, a sanctuary for elephants, many of whom have previously been ill-treated, but now have a safe home. The elephants here are encouraged to live as natural a life as possible. When you arrive, you'll meet the conservation staff and learn more about elephants in Thailand, as well as the work the foundation is undertaking to improve elephant lives both at the park and the wider world.

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Then, it's time to meet the elephants and learn from their 'mahouts' who communicate and care for them in a deeply personal way. You'll get up close to the elephants and after some training, scrub them down in the river. Some of the elephants at the park have got some sad stories indeed but when you see the dignity of elephants like Jokia, who was blinded and forced to work in her previous life or Mae Boon Ma, the gentle lady who is an 'almost' white elephant (white elephants are considered 'auspicious'), you will be glad that you are helping provide a home for many more elephants.



Your days at the sanctuary will be varied, helping with whatever needs doing, that could be helping build something, caring for elephants or joining in with the *Jumbo Express*, the park's mobile medical service for elephants who aren't lucky enough to live at the sanctuary.

Your sleeping quarters are rustic but comfortable bungalows (to be shared with another member of the group), surrounded by sleeping elephants.

### ***Day 15 – Friday***

After your last day caring for elephants, you will be picked up and taken on an hour's drive to unwind before your flight home and the chance to stay in a real residential area in the countryside outside Chiang Mai. Arrive at luxury private home and a welcome dinner with your gracious hostess, Khun Thamon.

### ***Day 16 – Saturday***

Wake up at your leisure and enjoy the swimming pool set in beautiful gardens. Spend the morning relaxing as you wish. We are also arranging 2-hour traditional Thai massages in the garden for each of you today.

You'll have lunch with your hostess, Khun Kaek, a delicious authentic Lanna meal. Lanna is the name for the ancient kingdom of 'a million ricefields' which is now northern Thailand and the food has Burmese, Lao and Chinese influences in its modern-day Thai cooking. As well as the rice, herbs and vegetables grown by Thai people who are traditionally lowland farmers, Chiang Mai is surrounded by hills inhabited by tribes from other countries who now grow crops as exotic as asparagus and strawberries.



After lunch, Khun Kaek will take you for a look around the local area. This evening, you will have a special farewell dinner.

### ***Day 17 - Sunday***

This morning, you will be taken on a 45-minute drive to Chiang Mai airport to take a short internal flight to Bangkok to connect to your international flight. You will get back to London Heathrow at approximately 7pm UK time (same day). *If you need to be back earlier, you can fly back the night before and return to the UK by 7am.*

***Please note that your itinerary may change before you leave or on the ground (improvements or unforeseeable circumstances), we will endeavour to keep you informed.***

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**Dates:**

9 to 25 November 2012

8 to 24 November 2013

**Inclusions:**

Direct flights between London Heathrow and Bangkok with Eva Air or Thai Airways

Internal flights with Thai Airways or Bangkok Airways

Accommodation

Activities and excursions

Most meals

Transfers in private air-conditioned minibuses

Local transport

**Exclusions:**

Entrance fees for temples, museums and Khao Yai National Park

Some meals

Expenses of a personal nature such as laundry, internet access and drinks

Tips for guides and drivers

**The price for this trip is £2,100**

Spending money guideline to cover exclusions above and light shopping is approximately £200 (we monitor this recommendation via customer feedback).

If you are from outside the UK, you can join the tour in Bangkok for £1,500. However, please note that you must arrange your own flights to/fro Thailand and the internal flights in Thailand (which you can do via your flight agent, or the Thai Airways website or you can purchase them separately from us – ask us for details). If your flights arrive/depart at different times from the group, we will provide complimentary private transfers. If you are in the USA, you also have the option of booking this tour inclusive of all flights with our USA booking office.

**Secure your place today with a 20% deposit £420 inclusive flights, £300 excluding flights.**

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