

READER'S QUESTION:

Comments: my question while you doing so great job , honestly I cant do it what you do for the animals. respectfully I wonder how can you ride an elephant knowing that the training of elephant is so hard en their intrinsic value is not to serve the human being

regards,
Reader

BETSY'S REPLY:

Thank you for writing and asking an important question. The elephants at Lampang where the Thai Elephant Conservation is located are rescued elephants who are well cared for and considering where they came from, and the limited choices for their continued survival, it's a place that gives them a second chance. The human who cares for Kaew is intended to be a lifelong partner. I check in with the facility throughout each year to see how Kaew is doing. The young man in charge of the Conservation loves the elephants and his job. It's not the perfect solution for these lovely and spectacular animals, but given a bad situation, it's a place that cares for them without abuse and continues to get funding to support that care. I won't go to a circus where animals are trained to perform. I won't go pay to ride elephants just to ride. I did an investigation into the first elephant riding business I came across in Bali. I interviewed the owner and photographed behind the scenes where the elephants are chained 24/7. It was heartbreaking. I was interested in how animals were treated at this conservation and am pleased to report I witnessed no abuse. Of course, I'd rather see elephants roam in their natural habitat - no question. That's where they belong.

READER'S QUESTION TO BETSY'S REPLY:

Hi Betsy

Thank you for your quick reaction. Once again I admire you very much and we need lot of more people like you.

About my concerns riding on an elephant I 'm very glad to hear that you agree with me and that these elephants are save for their lives.
Yet only to see the picture of you on the top of the elephant seems like that's OK to ride on an elephant.

Ofcourse I understand your investigation but surely lot of people who just starting to learn that isn't OK they will be confused after seeing you on these picture.
We rather see no more tourist riding on an elephant. But people will see you as their example .Not one of our best ideas as humans to cage creatures.

While I'm for conservation for endangered animals, the idea of detaining, training and locking up animals for tourist just does not sit right with me at all.

Lets face it the majority of the general public wont even know nor do they know about all the other other horrors that are happening to animals in their names for example in Thailand and India the poor elephants going through a religious process called Phajaan.

During that process 5 or 6 days depends on the elephant how quick he surrender, no water is allowed, food or sleep during this time. During the silent nights, evenings and mornings that fall upon the village, the only sounds that can be heard are from the tortured elephant. It bellows in agony, desperately trumpets for help after he was beating so many times.

More people ought to find out what's really going on and don't rely on what the industry that makes billions from it wants us to believe. A cynical ploy, at the expense of a creature meant to be wild.

Betsy, that is why I am disturbed by the photo of you.

regards,

Reader

BETSY'S REPLY TO READER'S 2ND QUESTION:

You make valid points, and I see your viewpoint about how riding Kaew could give the wrong impression or even be counter-productive to helping the elephants. My hope is that there exists a distinction between animals held captive for human entertainment and profit, and animals that have been rescued and must find ways to be supported. The conservation camp where Kaew lives could be seen as exploitation of the animals. Perhaps there are better ways to run rescues. The David Sheldrick Trust in Africa is one of my favorite organizations and they are brilliant in rescuing elephants and other animals. I think that the place in Thailand (where Kaew lives) does a decent job over all, and for operating in Asia, does an excellent job. They do little advertising and only want to have enough business to support the operation and seem to steer away from just using elephants for profit.

Enjoying a wild animal that has been domesticated due to poor circumstances does not in itself seem wrong if the animal(s) are not abused or unloved, or exploited. I realize it's a fine line between profit and exploitation though. I know that the people I met at the Conservation Camp with the elephants will be forever champions of keeping elephants wild and free, and will do their part to help educate and protect elephants in whatever ways they have means, time, and funds. Elephants are amazingly emotional creatures and to witness their bonding with one another and with other humans was a gift that will be with me always.

I was riding Kaew out of the jungle one early morning and it was steep. I was sliding forward and struggling to stay on when Kaew took his ears to gently pin me; to hold me on by using them to secure me against his shoulders. It was remarkable. It's hard to see how something so beautiful and something that was such an incredible experience should be viewed as disturbing, especially once they fully understand the circumstances. I may change my opinion down the road.

Thank you for caring and caring enough to engage in a discussion on an important issue.

Betsy