



THE SURIN PROJECT





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You are about to begin the adventure of a lifetime, an experience worlds apart from standard treks or tour packages.

The Surin Project is new and developing, so you must be prepared to accept and deal with the unexpected. This is an exciting time for this new project, as the work we do now will have a life-changing impact on these elephants.

Join us with an open mind and a flexible attitude, and you will leave Thailand with some extremely unique, special and unforgettable memories.

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BACKGROUND OF THE ORGANIZATION



The **Elephant Nature Foundation** (ENF) is a world famous conservation organization, established in 2006 by award winning conservationist, Sangduen Lek Chailert, Time Magazine's Hero of Asia 2005. ENF is a Thai focused organization, striving to work without politics and in co-operation with local and international elephant and government organizations to protect elephants and their environment.

The foundation funds a safe home for rescued elephants; it provides support, advice, office based resources and funding to the projects under the foundation's umbrella. Through education, public awareness and preserving elephant habitat, it is ENF's mission to *save the Asian elephant from extinction and give captive elephants a life worth living*, free from abuse.~



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Surin project is a huge opportunity to change the fate of elephants in Thailand. We are building bridges with mahouts who use elephants for street begging and circus shows, with plans to provide an alternative for their elephants that is more natural, less stressful, and is sustainable. With provincial and local level support, we can build a new home and bring hope for a future to these elephants.

BACKGROUND

There are over 300 elephants registered in Surin province, and the vast majority of them are trapped in the unfortunate trade of street begging. This is a terrible life for elephants who require literally hundreds of kilos of fresh vegetables and clean water daily. Street begging reduces an elephant's life expectancy by at least 50%.

Despite differences in opinion on other matters, *all* elephant conservation organizations agree that *street begging is wrong*.

The Surin government has approached Elephant Nature Foundation to help develop sustainable elephant-based tourism in Surin and build an elephant sanctuary. With their support, our goal is to establish sustainably managed elephant tourism as an alternative to both street begging, and to other forms of tourism such as circuses, and elephant rides. We want to have families of elephants freely roaming in natural habitat, and their mahouts will be provided with a steady income. This income will hopefully replace some of the money that the mahouts made street begging, thereby encouraging them to stay at the park.

The impact that this project will have for elephant conservation is huge. The Surin government has already set aside over 2000 acres of land, enough to maintain a breeding population of 300 elephants, which is approximately 10% of the existing population of Asian elephants in captivity in Thailand. In Surin, we have a chance to change history – to save the Asian elephant from extinction and give them a life worth living for generations to come.



CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

The Surin mahouts are elephant owners, and they are free to leave the project at any time. In order to prevent this, we must provide rewarding, financially stable, and sustainable employment for the mahouts and their elephants. This can be supported with both tourism, and with steady donations.

We must also demonstrate that our style of free ranging, natural elephant tourism is the BEST alternative to street begging and other forms of elephant tourism.

Currently at Surin, there is a daily elephant show, and there are plans to develop elephant riding. We must effectively provide an option that is more enjoyable for visitors, more financially appealing to mahouts, and is in the long-term best interests to the elephants. Most importantly, our project must make money. The Surin government is already interested in what we have to offer. Our job is to show them how sustainable elephant tourism can attract tourism, and bring money into the region.

OUR FOCUS

A typical street begging mahout can make up to 30,000 THB in a month. We cannot compete with this salary. What we can do is provide a community-based approach as an incentive to come back to live and work in Baan Tha Klang Village. Revenue from the volunteer program will be invested directly into the local community, and will supplement the mahout fees. By doing this, we will show the mahouts that by bringing their elephants home to Surin, they are not only finding secure jobs for themselves, they are also helping their entire community.

Volunteers will stay in home-stays and the payment will go directly to the families involved. Teachers at the village school will supervise volunteers to help with English classes for their students. Home-stay families will be asked to provide packed lunches of local food wrapped in biodegradable packaging for volunteers to bring with them to eat at the work site.

At the outset, we will establish a daily routine for the volunteers that will involve walking to the work site with freed elephants. During volunteer work, elephants will be allowed to freely interact socially. During lunch the elephants can bathe in the river, with volunteers participating in basic elephant care. Mahouts will clearly be paid for this elephant time, and not for any other elephant



activities. This has been clearly defined in written agreements and will be reinforced during the project so as not to confuse expectations. There will be no question as to what exactly ENF is marketing to visitors and what we expect to have provided for them.

IN SHORT:

- Street begging is wrong; it shortens the lives of elephants and places them in an unacceptable living environment.
- Mainstream elephant tourism: riding and circus shows, do not allow for adequate socializing, breeding or calf-raising.
- We want to see families of elephants, free to socialize and roam their natural habitat.
- Our priority is local community involvement and economic benefit for mahouts, their families and their neighbours.
- We will build ecological sustainability; reforesting habitat to give the elephants a home.

SURIN: OUR LOCAL PARTNERS



center. We will be working in close contact with local community leaders. It is important that our volunteer groups build strong and lasting ties with this local community, to maintain on-the-ground support for the project.

This project was conceived by the Surin Provincial Government in cooperation with local officials and the Surin Elephant Institute. Our team will be working under the direct authority of the Chief Executive of the Surin Provincial Administrative Organization. This governing body has committed 6000 Rai (over 2000 acres) of land to be used by the elephants. ENF has been asked to help build a sanctuary, and to generate an interest for visitors to come see elephants living freely in their natural environment.

For decades the Surin government has been trying to develop an interest in elephant tourism in the area, and stimulate economic growth from a tourism economy. As a result, there is now an elephant center, complete with offices, education center, elephant shelters, mahout houses, shops, and a circus area (which we are trying to provide an alternative for). At this time there are approximately 180 elephants living at the center.

The elephant center is located next to Baan Tha Klang Village, where our volunteer group will live in home-stays within the



THE GWI PEOPLE



The Gwi people are traditionally known for working with elephants. Centuries ago, they were employed by the kings of Siam to capture and train elephants, care for them, and keep them in the royal stables. This relationship between humans and elephants stretches back for generations, and thus the Gwi people share a lot of traditional knowledge relating to elephant care, herbal medicines, etc.

This unique ethnic culture has evolved from the retraction of the mighty Khmer Empire, one thousand years ago, famous for creating the temple complex of Angkor Wat. Although there are now Khmer speaking people also living in Surin province, the Gwi speak a distinctly different dialect.

In many Gwi communities the ancient practices of spirit worship

and Animism can still be found, and there is an entire series of rituals reserved for elephant related activities. During our volunteer stay with the Gwi, we will take steps to honour these beliefs, and show respect to their revered elders, the elephant Shamen.

FUNDING

ENF is a non-profit organization, engaged in managing a social entrepreneurship venture, ENP. The Elephant Nature Park does generate revenue, and must do so to present an effective business model. Excess funds are cycled back into the ENF, and go towards more habitat protection, and operational costs for the Jumbo Express project. The ENF receives no government financial support, has no corporate sponsorships, and does not receive regular funding from any organization. All funds come from park revenue, and donations from charities and concerned individuals.

Volunteer fees for the Surin project go directly towards operating costs, elephant food, and into the local economy whenever possible. The Surin government provides a base salary for mahouts, and we will enhance this by paying them to participate in our project.

YOUR ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER

ENF has a *work at your own pace* policy, and does not expect volunteers to over exert themselves. If at any point you feel overworked or overheated, please, take a break. For those not accustomed to working in a tropical climate, a cold shower in the early afternoon is recommended. We have a full week of work and activities planned, and it is up to you to make the most of it.

PROJECTS

ENF is bringing volunteers to Surin to help build a new elephant sanctuary. Our groups are reforesting habitat that has been deforested by over-logging, and also planting grass and other elephant foods. During this project work, please dress for the hot climate: loose light





clothing that covers your skin, and bring clothes that can get dirty. We will also likely be cutting grass and preparing other elephant foods. All volunteers are expected to help with morning chores: cleaning our home-stay area and the elephant stables.

You will also be asked to take on some community development, aimed at increasing capacity for a tourism economy. We hope to strengthen ties with the local community, and also learn from them in the process.

TOURISM

Our focus is elephant care and preparing for their sustainable future. Part of our strategy to provide for this future is a mix of tourism activities to strengthen the local economy and provide a livelihood for people involved with the elephants. As Surin volunteers, you will be asked to help us explore ecologically sustainable and elephant-friendly tourism options.

Your volunteer week should above all else be fun and rewarding. Please be mindful as well of the large impact you will have on tourism development in the region. ENF is counting on you to show our local partners that volunteers bring a valuable contribution to the project.

We need your help to open up a new kind of elephant experience in Surin, focusing on families of elephants living freely in natural habitat. During your week in Surin you will be exposed to many unsustainable elephant management practices, and forms of elephant tourism that ENF does NOT support. We expect you to make educated decisions about which of these activities you show an interest in, and to be mindful of the influence you have. ENF in return accepts the responsibility to keep you informed of the impacts that various activities have on the survival of this highly endangered species.



VOLUNTEER BEHAVIOR

All volunteers are required to be courteous to each other, our staff and any locals or tribal people they meet. ENF encourages volunteers to interact with Thai staff, but asks that no romantic relationships be formed. In extreme circumstances (and only in extreme circumstances) a volunteer may be asked to leave the project if they cannot get along with others.

Feet are considered the dirtiest part of the body in Thai culture and it is deemed extremely rude to touch anyone else with your feet or walk over anyone, any animal, a plate of food or a book. Although most Thai people are very understanding of different cultures and do not get too upset, it is always nice to be able to honour local customs.

DRESS CODE

Polite dress in Thailand is very different from Western nations and it is quite easy to cause the locals offence. During your stay, please do not wear string tops, short shorts or any other revealing clothing. Shorts are acceptable when swimming but not considered polite in most other circumstances. This is particularly so when visiting village and mahout homes, and rules regarding dress code will be strictly enforced. While visiting the temple and in the presence of monks, it is unacceptable to expose shoulders and thighs. Please be sure to pack pants and long-sleeved shirts. Consult our staff if you have any questions.

PROJECT DETAILS



For the entire volunteer week, we will be guests at Baan Tha Klang Village, Surin Province. This village is next to the Surin Elephant Center, and also the new sanctuary where much of our work will take place. "Project Work" will relate mostly to the building of elephant shelters and reforestation for 2010. Village development work will vary from week to week, and volunteers will often have a chance to contribute ideas for this.

GEOGRAPHY

Surin City is located an approximate 7 hours drive North-East of Bangkok.

This is part of the Isaan Region of North-Eastern Thailand, known for its' spicy and delicious food, farming traditions, and rural culture. Most people of Isaan speak one of several dialects of the Laos language, as well as Standard Thai, and often a local tribal language.

Surin province was once covered with forests teeming with wild elephants, but deforestation throughout the 20th century has left most of the countryside dry and barren or converted to rice paddies..

Baan Tha Klang Village is approximately 1 hour's drive North-West of Surin City, located on the Moon River, which flows into the Mekong River.

TRANSPORTATION

Our group will meet at the assigned meeting place in Buriram early Monday morning (you will receive this information by email). There, we will be greeted by project staff and taken by air-conditioned minivan another 50 minutes to the project site in Baan Tha Klang Village.



Upon project completion on Saturday evening, we will return to Buriram from which point volunteers can either return straight to Bangkok or can also travel together with the staff to Chiang Mai (via overnight first class bus).

ACCOMMODATION

Volunteers are housed in pairs in home-stay accommodation within the center. Shared bathrooms with western style flush toilets are available. Western showers as well as Thai style bucket showers are available, but no hot water.

Volunteers will share 2 to a room or have their own room depending on availability, but each room is equipped with mosquito nets and a fan.

Accommodation is basic by most western standards, but we expect volunteers to be open-minded and adapt as much as possible to village life.



MEALS

Three meals per day will be provided by our staff and vegetarian or any special diets are always accommodated for. Drinking water is provided, and soft drinks and snacks are available for purchase at shops in the village. Any special dietary needs should be made clear to project staff as early as possible.

BANKS, STORES AND COMMUNICATION

Volunteers must bring Thai Baht with them to the project if they intend to make purchases. Banks are readily available in Bangkok, and you should find time to make exchanges or withdraws from ATMs before setting out the first day.

There are shops in the village that sell the basics. This part of Thailand receives extremely few foreign visitors, so shops may not carry goods you are used to finding.

Telephone: There is a phone available at the project site for emergency calls only. There is cell phone reception in Baan Tha Klang Village. If you plan on making frequent phone calls, it is recommended to purchase a Thai phone and/or SIM card in Bangkok before the project starts.

Email: There are limited email facilities available.

Mail: Mail can be sent to the ENP office in Chiang Mai if you plan on journeying with the group to Chiang Mai after project completion.

* Please advise friends and family members at home that 'no news is good news' as you will not have frequent access to outside communications, only except for emergencies and free time if you travel into Chiang Mai.



HEALTH AND SAFETY



Volunteers will be given a detailed safety briefing on arrival in Surin. During the volunteer week, a first aid kit will always be on hand. The nearest full service hospital is located in Surin City and transport is available. There is also a well-equipped clinic in Baan Tha Klang Village.

While working, volunteers are expected to exercise caution at all times. Please do not use a tool or participate in an activity if you have not been given instruction. You may be exposed to: shovels, barbwire, hammers, nails, etc.

Excessive heat is also an issue and has been mentioned in previous sections.

You may encounter snakes and poisonous centipedes during your stay: please treat these with extreme caution. You will not be entering a high-risk area for malaria.

Volunteers or other visitors are not permitted to wander off or get close to elephants on their own. This is for your own safety. Elephants all have different personalities and can be dangerous if they think they are being confronted by strangers.

Elephants are generally very gently creatures who return love in abundance.

They are, however, animals, and their behavior can be unpredictable. They live to approximately the same age as humans and you should note that the youngsters are similar to those of our species, in that they love to play.

Obviously, they are very strong and they may become boisterous if annoyed. The same applies to elephants of all ages. You must be careful when around them and follow the instructions of our full time staff at all times.

Please bring your travel insurance documentation with you in the unlikely event that a hospital visit is necessary. In addition, participants are encouraged to consult a travel clinic and/or their personal physician to discuss recommended immunizations for Thailand. Though ENF does not have any specific requirements for vaccinations, all participants are encouraged to be up to date on his/her tetanus shots in addition to Hepatitis A and B.



We strongly recommend that you bring basic medicine for headaches, diarrhea, stomachaches, and mosquito bites (a strong anti-itch cream). Remember to bring any prescription medications you will need, and carry them in your hand luggage when traveling by plane. Ensure they are clearly labeled. In addition, bring over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, Tylenol, etc. which you would normally take. Note: Volunteers with asthma or those that experience severe allergic reactions must carry their medication with them at all times

PLEASE INFORM ENF IMMEDIATELY OF ANY ALERGIES / MEDICAL CONDITIONS BY EMAILING:

Surin@elephantnaturefoundation.org

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
06:30	Travelling to Buriram	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
07:00		Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time
08:00		Arrive in Buriram	Visit the Elephant Study Center and Museum, the Paper Factory & Elephant Graveyard	Project Work	Project Work	Project Work
09:00						
10:00	Shopping at Big C	Bathe the Elephants at the lake	Free Time	Bathe the Elephants at the lake	Free Time	Free Time
11:00	Go to Baan Tha Klang					
12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
13:00	Free Time	Free Time	Q&A with the Village Elders	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time
14:00	Checking into Homestay and meeting the mahouts and elephants	Project Work	Bathing and feeding the elephants at the River	Project Work	Bathing and feeding the elephants at the River	Pack up belongings
15:00						Walk in the Forest with the Elephants
16:00	Orientation	Free Time	Go to the Local Market	Free Time	Free Time	Shower and get ready to leave
17:00	Welcome Ceremony					Leave BTK to go to Buriram
18:00	Free Time	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
19:00	Dinner					Discussion with the Mahouts
19:30	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time



PACKING LIST

Travel as lightly as possible. Neat backpacks are usually better than suitcases and a good rule is that if you can't lift it you have too much stuff!

-Basic First Aid kit (treatments for insect bites, sunburn, blisters, minor cuts, stomach-ache, diarrhea, and personal medication, etc.)

-Towel (light or quick-dry)

-Biodegradable soap & shampoo

-Hand sanitizer

-SPF 30+ sunscreen

-Insect repellent & a strong anti-itch cream

-Other personal essentials

-Sandals or flip flops (for free time and for showering)

-Closed shoes: sand shoes/ runners – these will get wet and dirty

-T-shirts

-Lightweight conservative clothing; quick dry long-sleeve shirts that can get dirty and for at night to protect against mosquitoes

-Quick-drying (nylon) long pants that can get dirty and for at night to protect against mosquitoes Wide brimmed hat

-Extra socks

-Sarong or cover for showering

-Flashlight and spare batteries, rechargeable batteries

-Alarm clock/watch

-Multi-tool such as Swiss Army Knife or Leatherman tool

Recommended but not essential

-Lots of reading material, cards, travel games, etc.;

-Camera and extra film/memory.

-Small daypack

ENF discourages participants from bringing expensive jewelry or designer clothing. Think carefully before packing valuable possessions. You will be traveling with the public, living in shared accommodation and you are responsible for your belongings at all times.