

Jessica Rose – Elephant Nature Park Program, Thailand in 2009

In early January 18 CSU students (mostly animal scientists with an aggie and an equine student just to mix things up a bit!) went on a trip to the Elephant Nature Park in Thailand. The park is known for rescuing and providing a sanctuary for elephants and other animals. The experience was mainly to experience how another country is acting on conserving their wildlife and how animals were generally treated in the country.

Thanks to your support (at trivia night, and other fund raisers such as krispy kreme doughnuts), CSU global helping us organise the trip, as well as Rose's IGA Plus Liquor in Hillston who was our only corporate sponsor for the excursion, without your donations the elephant nature park would not have had the joy of having 18 hard working CSU students and 3 enthusiastic lecturers!

The trip wasn't just to help out and to experience first hand how gentle the Asian elephants are towards people. But learn and discover how the Asian elephant is treated by Thailand and surrounding countries. The experience was a huge eye opener for everyone involved one which will affect our view on animal conservation and treatment worldwide.

While at the Elephant nature park we were sent to work, with preparing food (bananas, pumpkin hacking (with a machete), washing all the food, husking loads and loads of corn!), washing the elephants, shovelling elephant poo (and yes there was a lot!), making elephant slings and bedding, cleaning the mud pit... which ended in a mud fight....



The group was also offered an experience to go visit a school at the local village. While it seemed that we were all thrown straight into the class rooms, the children were friendly (maybe a tad too friendly, with the kindies asking for rides and to be swung in circles) and wanted to interact with western visitors. We were able to go back the following week and got to meet up with our newly made friends at the school and danced, played games or sung with them.

The group also got to do other activities which would not be ever done in Australia, apart from washing elephants and scratching their backs and trunks, having only cold showers, travelling on the back of trucks and up steep hills and had to walk across busy roads with no pedestrian crossings. All were very daunting to us, yet it seemed to be a normal event to the locals.

After all the adventures at the elephant nature park the group spent a few days in Chiang Mai to get a more cultural experience, some students visited the temples, the zoo, tiger temple and of course the markets. Since our enlightenment at the park all the animal orientated tourist places seemed to be not as what they should be. With the zoo showing a lack of knowledge of how to care for the animals and the tiger temple showing signs of horrific training with wooden sticks. However this is to be expected from a third world country which has little knowledge of animal conservation and welfare or is still naïve about these factors.



The markets were also an eye opener with students learning how to barter quickly with the locals and enjoying rare oddities such as fish foot spas and massages! However while exploring the markets some of our group saw the street elephant that was still a baby that look horrified and distressed by the noise and vibrations from traffic and the people. The students saw some tourists getting interested with the elephant, so they took it in their hands to tell the tourists the real story behind the street elephant and its fight against hunger and stress from the street life.

By going on this Thailand adventure to the Elephant Nature Park we have all learnt about the culture and the hidden truth about their sacred elephant. By using this knowledge we will try our hardest to increase the awareness of the elephants fight for survival as a working tourist elephant.