1. **Elephants in Captivity**

Over the past 25 years, the rapid increase in tourism in South East Asia has had a huge effect on the demand for elephant related tourism across the area. The treatment of these captive elephants has very much become a subject of ethical concern across the region and its tourism industry. This is due in part to the lack of proper government regulations resulting in poor treatment, unnecessary pain and suffering and exposure to harsh circumstances for these animals.

The relationship between captive elephants and humans goes back 3000 years and given the fact that there are over 10,000 captive elephants in Asia, it is important to ensure proper management and care guidelines whilst simultaneously respecting the local culture and customs. Our objective is to create solid foundations that ensure the health and welfare of captive elephants as well as their traditional keepers (named mahouts). Unfortunately the truth of the matter is that the majority of elephants born and raised in captivity cannot simply be returned to the wild, and will always require professional care throughout their long lives – a significant expense that must be met.

We believe that the best way of tackling this problem is by encouraging sustainable elephant experiences and promoting responsible tourism and practices of the highest standards. As these standards become widely-adopted, there will be greater momentum to engage stakeholders to protect captive elephants and ensure their wellbeing. We believe proactive, incremental changes, which have a tangible and positive effect upon the animals, are more effective than boycotts or pledges.

Khiri Travel seeks out and actively works together with independent auditing organizations, who provide training possibilities and support for more responsible elephant camp management:

PATA in partnership with Travelife for Tour Operators, Animondial and the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG) have all collaborated on a framework for a widely supported set of standards for elephant camps. The so-called Elephant Camp Animal Welfare and Sustainability Standard and Assessment Initiative will provide tour operators as well as their clients with an ethical choice when interacting with elephants.

Asian Captive Elephants Standards ([ACES](https://www.elephantstandards.com/)) has setup an extensive framework of standards for elephants engaged in tourism in the following areas: welfare, living, and working conditions. ACES works alongside camps, governments, mahouts, universities and local communities to ensure all captive elephants are provided with the best care possible that the utmost is done to promote conservation. Experts in the field provide support for elephant tourism providers in order to improve and to be able to monitor the welfare conditions of the animals.

These standards are made up of more than 160 assessment criteria divided into seven themes and 24 sub-themes. The framework provides detailed guidelines for the tourism providers – covering not only the elephants but also the staff, mahouts, and business practices.

These standards cover, but are not limited to:

* Health care benefits, fair wages, and annual leave should be part of the mahout and staff working conditions
* Mandatory training and first aid courses for mahouts and camp staff members
* Coordination of conservation efforts with local communities and stakeholders
* The clear stipulation of the types of interaction: rides, bathing, feeding etc.
* The working hours and times for elephants: the number of rides (if applicable). One regulation is that elephants should not be required to work or interact with tourists for more than 4 hours a day. Rides should not interfere with their normal rest and feeding times
* Rides and permitted terrain: elephants have very sensitive skin and they should not be expected to walk on hot concrete, jagged rocks, or gravel. Shade should be provided to protect the animals from the sun as they are prone to sunstroke.
* Access to quality food and clean drinking water: elephants eat around 200 kg per day. Due to their very sensitive digestive system, they need to have constant access to a wide variety of foods, this should not be limited to only bananas or sugar cane
* Access to veterinarian care
* Time for socializing and free roaming: elephants are extremely social animals, they should always be able to stay with their herds and have time to roam freely
* Day and night time enclosure dimensions: these must be adequately sized
* Animal training methods: promote the use of positive reinforcement techniques to get the animals accustomed to interacting with humans
* Health & safety guidelines should be clearly defined for both animals and humans
* The facilities must be well aware of their environmental footprint and have proper waste management systems in place

If you travel with a tour operators aligned with either initiative you can rest assured that any elephant experience is being held to the highest of international standards. This way, we believe we are contributing to the sustainable protection and conservation of elephants in Asia. We wish to support standard that can then be adopted by ASEAN and other regional governments: in hopes that eventually such policies are implemented as law and enforced – thus creating the first-ever regulations for captive elephants and their welfare in the region.

Any DMC and tour operator involved in this initiative will pledge no longer to work with any elephant camp that refuses to be audited or assessed. Complete transparency is required in all aspects of operations in order to ascertain and ensure responsible practices are in place. This way, funds are allocated to those working on improving and ensuring the long-term welfare of their captive elephants and staff. We do not support those operating unethically, or purely for profit under false pretenses.

Elephants in captivity are an ethical concern under the current circumstances, but by working together and using responsible tourism as a powerful tool in the right way, we can ensure the long-term survival of thousands of captive elephants throughout Asia and provide clients with an inspiring experience. These animal excursions will improve the lives of everyone involved while preserving local culture and heritage.