

Souvenirs, especially in developing nations, are often objects stripped from historical sites, stolen from tombs or from their legitimate owners. A country's heritage is not a renewable resource. Moving it to another country has effects on cultural awareness and identity. That's why travellers need to realise exactly what they are buying in Asia.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has created a global campaign against illegal trade with endangered species, especially directed towards Thailand and Vietnam where the demand is the highest.

**Below you will find a list of souvenirs not to take back home**

## **Thailand**

- Disrespectful images of Buddha

Thailand is a Buddhist country where Buddha images are held sacred. It is advised to avoid purchasing any t-shirts and jeans printed or embroidered with Buddha. Also avoid purchasing what the campaigners consider to be vulgar memorabilia such as Buddha plant pots or alarm clocks. Getting Tattoos of Buddha is considered disrespectful; therefore it is advised to refrain from doing so. Also, there is a total export ban on parts of Buddha images such as the head, hands or feet. This ruling was instituted to prevent looters from removing antique fragments from Buddhist monuments, and in an effort to protect the sanctity of the country's religious culture.

The small trinkets normally sold in tourist shops do not require prior permission and can be made of any substance such as gold, silver, bronze, marble, or wood, but there is a maximum of five images allowed per shipment/person.

- Endangered orchids/species

Many orchids grow abundantly in Thailand's tropical forests. Some orchid species are endangered and international trade in all orchids is regulated. You will need a permit to bring home cut orchid flowers or orchid seedlings in a flask and live orchid plants grown in nurseries.

Numbers of endangered species are sold as Tourist ornaments. Refrain from purchasing such ornaments, as this will directly threaten the survival of many species.

- Endangered animal skin/bones

Wildlife goods offered for sale may include products made of marine turtles, ivory carvings and crocodile skin, Tiger skin and bones many of which are either illegal or require a permit for international trade. Do not purchase belts, purses or wallets that are made from snake or crocodile skin they might be made from cobra. Be sceptical of vendors claiming the skin comes from farming. Purchasing such products will promote locals offering such products for tourists in the expense of wild animals being slaughtered in Asia and Africa.

According to a survey by WWF, Bangkok found significantly more retail shops and three times as much ivory on sale since 2013. This shows the tourist demand for such products have increased. This has resulted in demand driving the crime rate.

- Purchasing large corals

Humans are actively destroying the coral reef ecosystems on our earth. They are damaged by irresponsible tourism and are being severely stressed by the warming of the world's oceans. Some 58 percent of the world's reefs are reported as threatened by human activities

When people grab, kick, and walk on, or collect coral, they also contribute to coral reef destruction. As a tourist you can avoid buying curios made with the dead remains of marine creatures such as shells, dried seahorses or dead corals. Also tell people not to walk on corals - they often don't know corals are living animals or that they break them by walking on them. Therefore as a consumer you can choose to buy items with less packaging, generating less trash and recycle whenever possible.

## Indonesia

Refrain from buying souvenirs made from tiger skin, as the Sumatra-tiger is endangered with only 500 specimens left. Also avoid souvenirs made out of stuffed animals, snakeskins, coral decorations and sea turtles. You will require a permit for bringing home snakeskins and coral decorations.

Sulphur souvenirs, from jen crater in East Java

Each day several men collect yellow lumps of sulphur that solidify beside its acidic crater lake. Once processed, the sulphur is used to bleach sugar, make matches and fertiliser, and vulcanise rubber in factories at home and abroad.

Sulphur miners of East Java bear the scars of their labour - poisoned lungs and skin criss-crossed with burns and scars. The miners carry 90kg loads up 200 meters out of the crater and back down the volcano's outer slopes to a weighing station - a journey they make several times a day. The miners have little in the way of protective gear beyond a damp cloth to cover the nose and mouth. In the past 40 years, 74 miners have died after being overpowered by fumes that can suddenly swirl from fissures in the rock. The poisonous clouds are not steam, but hydrogen sulphide and sulphur dioxide gases so concentrated they burn the eyes and throat, and can eventually dissolve the miners' teeth.

From the above paragraphs, considering the poor working standards of the workers, it is recommended to avoid purchasing Sulphur souvenirs and instead raise awareness about their poor working conditions.

## Myanmar

- Ivory
- Wildlife products
- Antiques

## Vietnam

- Ivory
- Crocodile stuffed skin
- Endangered animal skin/bones

## Cambodia

- Stuffed Crocodile skin
- Endangered animal skin/bones

## Laos

You can find shops selling wild ungulate horns, heads, wild boar tusks, elephant teeth and tortoise shell bracelets. Purchasing of these products should be avoided as these are endangered animals and is considered unethical.

You can also find pictures of Buddha painted on the backs of possibly endangered turtles, and pangolin and bear paws and cobra and python skins and peacock feathers — a treasure trove of endangered species body parts. Refrain from buying any of the above.

## **Sri Lanka**

There are many souvenirs you can bring back from Sri Lanka, but refrain from buying anything that remotely looks like it is made from turtle shell or any other endangered species of Sri Lanka. Purchase and export without license of any wild animal, bird or reptile, dead or alive. Also the export of parts of animals, birds or reptiles, such as skins, horns, scales and feathers is prohibited

Also do not try to bring home any artefacts from the historical sites of Sri Lanka, It is illegal, and immoral.

## **All countries (7)**

Statues, necklaces, chess pieces, chopsticks and ornamental pieces made from tusks or horns from elephants and rhinos should definitely be avoided. Illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn is massive, with a soaring demand – particularly in Asia – fuelling poaching and pushing these species towards extinction.

Corals and seashells are often used in trinkets, jewellery and decorations. However, coral reefs are vulnerable to the impacts of tourism. Corals are living animals and an intrinsic part of a vibrant reef, providing food and foundation for homes and hangouts of other animals.