



# Elephants are not for rides; tigers are not for selfies

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Thailand has been marketed around the world as a place where couples and families can relax on golden beaches, explore lush jungle, and meet exotic animals on the way. Tourists return brandishing smartphone snaps of elephant rides, visits to a tiger temple and close-up encounters with curious monkeys and colourful sea life.

What the advertising videos do not show is that the booming tourist trade has had a serious impact on the welfare of Thailand's wildlife.

In January, when a Scottish tourist was killed in front of his daughter by a bull elephant, conservationists said that the tragedy could have been prevented if the elephant had been treated with sufficient care and respect.

On the occasion of World Wildlife Day, here are four activities animal conservationists advise against while travelling in Thailand:

**1. Do not ride elephants**  
Who wouldn't want to take a picture on top of an elephant? It would undoubtedly fetch a plethora of likes on Facebook and be the envy of friends and family.

But, increasingly, conservationists are warning tourists that taking part in elephant rides is encouraging a trade that is as dangerous as it is destructive.

Between June 2015 and February 2016 at least four people, including the Scottish tourist, were killed on elephant tours by out-of-control pachyderms.

"These events have only caught the public eye because a Scottish person was killed," said Sangduen Chalart, founder of the Save Elephant Foundation in Thailand.

"For people who are familiar with the elephants tours, these events happen regularly because the elephants get stressed out from overwork and poor

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A tourist poses for picture at the Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi province. — Reuters

working conditions."

Sangduen says that to fix the situation, better animal welfare laws are needed.

Edwin Wiek, founder of the Wildlife Friends Foundation of Thailand (WFFT), argues that male elephants should not be used at all for rides because when they are in musth — a periodic rise in aggression and testosterone — they can be uncontrollable.

Asian Elephants are an endangered species in Thailand with less than 5,000 left in the wild according to animal trade watchdog TRAFFIC.

"Wild elephants are being illegally captured to supply the lucrative tourism industry in Thailand and urgent changes

are needed to stop the trafficking," the organisation said in a statement.

**2. Do not take photos with or buy a slow loris**

With their giant eyes, their fuzzy exterior and quiet presence, people the world over have fallen in love with the slow loris. Even pop star Rihanna couldn't help but take a selfie with a loris while she was visiting Thailand.

But slow loris' are listed in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Appendix I, meaning they are threatened with extinction and their trade is prohibited. "You cannot have a loris without a

permit and you cannot use the animals to sell for tourist selfies and play dates," said Roger Lohanan, the head of the Thai Animal Guardians Association.

"Loris are nocturnal, they don't like humans and they are subdued because they are terrified," he said.

Learn from Rihanna's mistake. After she tweeted her loris selfie, the two men that gave it to her were arrested for animal trafficking.

**3. Don't touch coral reefs**

While Thailand attracts sea-loving visitors to its beaches and dive sites, scientists say that the country has lost 50 per cent of its coral reefs since 2000.

"Coral bleaching has been a problem in Thailand but it is made worse by tourism and human activity," said Suchana Chavanich, a Professor of Marine Biology at Chulalongkorn University.

When the divers stand on or touch the coral it puncture the animal's thin and fragile outer cover which in turn can lead to small infections.

"Divers need to be more conscientious about preserving what little coral we have left," she said.

**4. Do not go to the Tiger Temple**

The images of monks walking alongside unchained tigers may evoke a strong sense of curiosity and oriental mysticism but do not be fooled into visiting the Tiger Temple.

A National Geographic expose in January accused the temple in western Thailand of supplying the black market with tiger parts, echoing longstanding claims of local conservationists.

While the temple claims that it is helping conserve an endangered species, activists accuse the temple of profiteering and damaging its tiger population through unchecked breeding and in-breeding.

"Taking selfies with tigers does nothing to contribute to the conservation of wildlife," said Edwin Wiek of WFFT.

— dpa



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## Turn left or right? Always left with the fact that Jane is right

It was Edward's first trip in his car with his new GPS. He and his wife Jane were driving to their friend's farm house for the first time. He displayed his expertise in taking the location from a WhatsApp message from Jane's phone, sent it to the GPS and started following the instructions given by Fifi — the female voice assistant of the GPS.

"ROUNDAABOUT IN 100 METRES. TAKE THIRD EXIT," Edward obliged, turned right at the roundabout and gave Jane a self-satisfied smile. Jane, however, was clearly unimpressed.

"IN 100 METRES TAKE RIGHT EXIT." As Edward was about to change the lane, an order came from Jane. "Ignore that thing. I know this part of the way — keep going straight ahead. Don't turn right." This threw poor Edward into confusion but, making the immensely wise decision to listen to his wife, he proceeded to follow her directions, leaving the GPS to keep recalculating new route each time he disobeyed Fifi.

This had been going on for sometime when Fifi suddenly, and very unexpectedly, asked Edward a question, "I TOLD YOU TO TURN LEFT, ARE YOU DEAF OR WHAT?" This promptly degenerated into an argument between Edward and the GPS until a frustrated Fifi finally asked, "Who are you going to listen? Me or your wife?" So much for a GPS being 'smart' technology!

Finding directions has been a challenging task for travellers since ancient times. Sailors used mountains, wind direction, celestial objects, and even the taste of sand taken from the seabed to guide them in the right direction.

The navigational system used by ships and planes during World War II formed the basic idea for the Geo or Global Positioning System. The key principle used in such a system is called the 'Doppler effect', which is based on the fact that the frequency of a signal will vary due to relative position. In 1978, the US Navy used the Navstar system, a collection of nine satellites, for its navigational purposes.

From 1983, access to GPS was made available to the public and from 1996 vehicles had GPS installed. Today's GPS is more accurate, with a whole system of satellites being used, and is freely available through various gadgets. Next time you are looking for directions to a nearby convenience store in Google Maps, remember that you are guided by the thirty-one satellites zipping around the world.

Very few mobile apps come without location support, as most modern phones are equipped with sophisticated GPS sensors. Like messages, audios or videos, the precise location can be shared with anyone in real-time.

The GPS now has many uses beyond assisting with travel, such as:

- Preventing shark attacks by the tagging of sharks with GPS devices
- Tracking the logistics of prescription drugs by authorities
- Creating mobile performance art, where a GPS-enabled bike works with mapping software to draw images, according to the movement of the bike.
- Treasure hunting using a GPS enabled device to find a geocache
- Personalising a daily workout plan
- Helping people with dementia through the wearing of smart shoes equipped with GPS

Elsewhere, another Edward, Edvard I. Moser, along with his wife, May-Britt Moser, discovered a whole new GPS. This discovery fetched them the 2014 Nobel Prize — not in technology but in physiology. Yes, they found that our brains already come with an in-built GPS! They identified the presence of 'grid cells' that help us in determining position and path finding — similar to any modern coordinate system.

Since it took so many years for us to understand the presence of GPS in our own brain, no wonder we have not yet fully understood the navigational skills of many animals such as pigeons, desert ants and honeybees. It is really surprising how arctic birds, monarch butterflies and salmon fish can travel thousands of kilometres without losing track of their locations.

As there is no doubt that these animals don't have access to any modern sensors, they must use all possible natural cues; such as internal clocks, daily or seasonal rhythms, tilting of Earth, the position of the Sun and stars, the polarized pattern of skylight, and odours. There is even a theory proposing that some animals can 'see' Earth's magnetic and gravitational field.

After their maiden GPS-assisted, Jane-overridden, successful trip, Edward and Jane returned home. As they entered the house, a gurgled flushing sound was heard from the bathroom as their son appeared, asking, "Dad, does your phone happen to have GPS?"

### SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

## This coffee-to-go cup goes, and comes right back again

The advent of the plastic to-go cup for hot drinks and plastic shopping bags has put a heavy toll on the environment.

Designers were showing at the recent Ambiente consumer-goods fair in Frankfurt some ingenious solutions.

The sustainable alternatives to our throwaway lifestyle could be coming soon to a store near you.

Replacements for paper cups: The to-go coffee cup is part of many people's lifestyles, to be carried around like a fashionable handbag.

German ceramics manufacturer Kahla has come up with its reusable Coffee 2 Go cup, which bears an amazing resemblance to a paper cup.

It's made from polypropylene with silicone

overlays in the middle to provide better grip and protect fingers from the hot contents and you can even buy a top lid so you can carry it up streets.

Take it right back to the coffee shop again for the next day's fill-it-up-please.

The all-rounder bag: The Hong Kong Exporters' Association exhibited a smart reusable shopping bag called the Zipzip bag, which can do plenty more than hold your shopping.

It's also a cooler bag for picnics.

When fully opened it can be used as a cleanable mat for changing a baby's diapers on.

It even doubles as a sun reflector for car windows.

Replacements for paper wrapping: A hard-plastic sandwich box is, of course, an alternative to single-use grease proof sandwich paper.

But a sandwich box takes up more space in a bag.

British company Green Pioneer has a food wrap that resembles sandwich paper but is reusable.

Called Abeego, the wrap is made from hemp coated in bee's wax and jojoba oil.

When the time does come to finally throw the wrap away, it can be safely put on the compost heap.

Environmentally friendly cleaning: Efforts are also being made to design sustainable products when it comes to cleaning.

The firm Mono has designed a stainless steel mesh called the Mono-Softmesh for cleaning pots and pans.

It can even be dropped inside glass bottles and vases, and a shake is enough to remove grime from the interior, the manufacturer claims.

No chemicals needed.

Another clever device for the home is the instant Dish Soap Dispenser from Swedish company Bosign.

Dab it with a sponge and it delivers just the right amount of liquid soap for small cleaning jobs in the kitchen.

That avoids those wasteful squirts from a dispenser bottle which leave the stove-top covered in foam afterwards. — dpa

