

Elephants in Thailand Are Out of Work During Pandemic

The lack of tourists in Thailand has left many elephants without work. Many elephant camps are unable to feed them and have left operators with no way to take care of their charges. Elephants are an integral part of the tourist industry in Thailand, and 3,800 elephants in the country are working domesticated animals.

The tourism industry, 20% of Thailand's economy, has been devastated by the pandemic, and many organizations are struggling to pay for the food and handlers needed for their elephants. An elephant eats as much as 300 kg (660 lbs) of fruits and vegetables each day. Elephants, especially in the northern part of Thailand, have been left chained up as companies deal with the lack of work for them.

We saw the one camp [in Chiang Mai] that had closed and was basically holding all of their elephants parked on one-meter chains 24 hours a day. It's like battery farming of chickens. Basically, you throw food at them, you scrape the dung away and that's going to be their existence for the next three months."

John Roberts – Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation

There aren't many good options for out-of-work elephants. Some of them may end up working for illegal logging operations. It is also illegal to release the elephants into the wild, and national parks and sanctuaries don't have enough resources to handle the doubling of the elephant population. Some operators have been forced to bring their elephants back to rural villages where the elephants are more able to feed off the land.

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Sources

- *Thailand's working elephants, now unemployed due to coronavirus, trudge home to natural habitat – Abc.net.au*