

Press Release

Benefits of Elephant Polo

Since its inception in 2001, the King's Cup Elephant Tournament has built up a reputation as a not-to-be-missed event that attracts people from around the world to enjoy a unique week of sport in the most breathtaking settings Thailand has to offer.

But there is a serious purpose too. This event is crucial in raising much-needed funds to help conserve Thailand's elephants and their heritage. This important work is carried out in association with the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre (TECC) and the National Elephant Institute (NEI) – two Government initiatives that have been endorsed by HM The King of Thailand.

Through the generosity of participants and spectators at the lively annual auction and during the tournament, Anantara Resorts has raised US\$250,000, much of which has been used to care for more than 60 elephants and their mahouts at the TECC in Lampang. Three pick-up trucks have also been donated for the transportation of elephant fodder and staff. And, in addition, individual polo teams hold fundraising events that help other elephant projects including the protection of Thailand's wild elephants.

In 2006, the proceeds from the tournament were used to custom-build an elephant-sized ambulance that has been donated to the NEI for use at their hospital providing free veterinary and in-patient care for any Thai elephant.

Minor International, owner of Anantara Resorts, has set up its own elephant charity – the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (www.helpingelephants.org) – that takes a unique holistic approach to rescuing elephants which otherwise face a bleak life scraping a living in the tourist areas of big cities.

When a contact is made to rescue an elephant, the “package” is extended to its mahout and his whole family. This approach ensures that rescuing one elephant does not put another in danger. To date eight otherwise street dependent elephants have been taken permanently from the streets and their mahouts given a chance at an alternative, more elephant-friendly, lifestyle.

In addition, the King's Cup Elephant Polo tournament gives 20 more street elephants the chance of a two-week ‘holiday’ in a calm, forested environment. It also ensures that they receive possibly their only sustained veterinary attention of the year as well as an abundance of high-energy food.

The welfare of the elephants used in the polo tournament is paramount with strict rules in place to ensure that the pachyderms are well cared for at all times. Thanks to Thailand's advanced micro-chipping programme for all legal domesticated elephants and research into DNA tagging we guarantee, by imposing our "No micro-chip, No game" rule, that all our elephants have been domestically bred and not wild caught or smuggled in from neighbouring countries.

The chosen elephants must be young, preferably under 20 and still at an age that they will thoroughly enjoy the sport – just watch baby elephants chasing soccer balls in the elephant camp at Anantara! – but big enough to carry a player with ease.

Each elephant is limited to a maximum of two games – that's less than half an hour – of play per day, with at least 90 minutes out in the forest, the river or eating a well balanced meal between each 14-minute game. Due to the nature of the game those 14 minutes of exercise are generally spread over a whole hour – even in a game with no stoppages there is a 15-minute break between halves.

By contrast, when not with us they find themselves walking less desirable districts of the big cities for 10 hours a night or if, in a tourist camp (often an alternative to the streets), they need to work for at least five hours a day to earn their keep and do not receive the high energy food and forested rest ground provided by the Thai Elephant Polo Association.

In short, Anantara Resorts will always ensure that the elephants are treated as well as our two-legged guests!

Editors Note:

For hundreds of years throughout Thailand, people would leave a jar of water outside their house to provide refreshment and extend a welcome to the passing traveler. Anantara is taken from an ancient Sanskrit word that means 'without end', symbolising this sharing of water and the heartfelt hospitality that lies at the core of every Anantara experience.

Anantara Resorts are currently located in the seaside town of Hua Hin and on Koh Samui in the Gulf of Thailand, and in the Golden Triangle in the country's north. In the world-renowned destination of the Maldives, Anantara Dhigu and Anantara Veli are a 30-minute boat ride from the capital Male. Anantara Seminyak debuted in April 2008 in the most fashionable district of Bali – the Island of the Gods. Late 2008 saw the opening of Anantara Phuket, situated in the serenity of Mai Khao Beach, Thailand, followed by Desert Islands Resort & Spa by Anantara on Sir Bani Yas Island off the coast of Abu Dhabi, and Anantara Si Kao which lies on the secluded Changlang Beach area south of Krabi, Thailand. Anantara Baan Rajprasong in Bangkok opened its doors in April 2009 to become the first serviced suites property for the Anantara group, while the newest member of the Anantara family, Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara, opened in October 2009 in the legendary Liwa desert near Abu Dhabi. www.anantara.com

Anantara is a member of Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), the world's largest alliance of independent hotel groups. GHA partner hotels are renowned for reflecting and respecting local traditions and culture through their products and services. www.globalhotelalliance.com

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Additional images are available upon request.