



LIFE Volunteering - Trip Information

	Cold season	Dry season	Wet season
When to visit	November - February	March - May	May - October
Type of forest	Cloud forest	Cloud forest	Cloud forest
Average temperature	18-35 degrees Celsius	21-37 degrees Celsius	23-36 degrees Celsius
Must have items	Extra warm clothing Beanie / Woollen hat	Sun protection Light weight clothing	Raincoat Dry bag/ thick plastic bags

*** Please note average temperatures are based off reports in Mae Sot Township not the actual village and show minimum to maximum temperature range. The village is located at a much higher elevation so temperatures will vary but may still fluctuate considerably.

Your trip will begin in Mae Sot where you will be met at your hotel or chosen destination by one of our team. From here you will drive for around 2 hours along the Myanmar border and up into the clouds to the village.

Karen Hill tribe

On arrival to the village you will be taken to your accommodation and introduced to your host family.

Please remember this is not a manufactured tourist experience. You are being welcomed into a Karen hill tribe community and this is their home. Life here is both beautiful and tough. They are largely removed from the modern world and this is very much part of the charm here. Karen culture is rich in traditions and Karen people thrive off living and working together as a community.

Traditional dress is worn throughout the village and you will have the opportunity to buy some of these beautiful fabrics handwoven by the women. During your stay you will also have the opportunity to learn skills such as bamboo basket and fabric weaving. We really encourage taking part in these activities as the families love to share their culture and it is a chance to sit and be immersed in village life.

The language spoken in the village is Karen (also known as Pakinyaw), some people will speak Thai as well. Little English is spoken, but you will have an English guide with you at all times.

Karen people are extremely modest and conservative; we ask that whilst you are with us that you dress appropriately, keeping your shoulders and knees covered at all times.

Community-based tourism

We operate under the system of community-based tourism; this means the whole village benefits from our presence and your stay. We strongly encourage an immersion into their culture and also an exchange of cultures, remember your home is a long way from theirs and they love to see photos of where you live.

If you wish to bring a present for your host family then small gifts from your home are welcome, perhaps something traditional to the region where you live. We do not advise giving money to individual families without discussion with us first, as this can create tension in the community.

Accommodation

Your accommodation with a host family is both comfortable and welcoming, and provides you with a real sense of community living. Your host family will provide you with covers, blankets and a mosquito net. The Karen sleep on thin mattresses on the floor and this is what is also provided for you, it is surprisingly comfortable!

Bathrooms are clean and accessible, with asian style squat toilets and all have traditional bucket showers – which are either refreshing or bracing depending on the time of year.

Please refer to the information provided and pack accordingly, temperatures and weather conditions vary throughout the year, as do the items you will be required to bring with you.

Community Development Projects

There are many projects that the villagers need assistance with throughout the year, these projects change with the seasons. You could be involved with helping villagers plant and harvest rice or coffee, or help to collect and plant seeds for the tree nursery – which assists with our reforestation project.

These projects are likely to require physical labour and may mean spending long hours outdoors exposed to the elements. A medium to high level of fitness is advised.

The Elephants

You are of course here to visit our beautiful elephants. They are living deep in the forest, which is our intention for the rest of their lives. They are safe here and have plenty of food. The elephants wander freely foraging and enjoying life.

The elephants are captive however PLEASE remember although being captive they are essentially a wild animal and so need to ALWAYS be treated with respect and this philosophy is at the very core of our mission and project.

We ask that you ALWAYS keep a safe distance and listen to the mahouts at all times, they know their elephants very well and will keep you safe. We encourage sitting back and watching them be elephants in THEIR natural habitat.

We DO NOT routinely bring food for them into the forest, as their diet should be the foliage around them, if the mahouts are giving them a treat then this is fine and they may offer you bananas to give to them.

The elephants tend to crash through the forest, knocking down small trees, pulling down vines and other edible foliage, so it is really important to watch your heads!!

Some times during the year and depending on which area of the forest they are in, the elephants will have a loose ankle chain known as a drag chain. This is NOT attached to anything and actually provides them with the freedom they have. They literally pull this behind them and having watched them for many hours it is very apparent that this causes them no issues at all; it certainly does not slow them down as we have trouble keeping up with them!

As the elephants are free roaming in a HUGE forest this makes it easier for the mahouts to track them, as it leaves a clear trail on the forest floor. It also means if they roam onto farmland the farmer knows they are owned by a nearby village and can secure them and alert their owner.

*We are incredibly proud of the life our elephants are living here in the forest.
Free from work and provided with the autonomy to make decisions again.
Our mahouts have a lifetime of experience having grown up with these gentle giants,
so please ask them LOTS of questions.*

Be fit for this adventure!!

The trek out to see the elephants can be up to 4 hours through the forest, it is magical and when you find the elephants after tracking them through the forest, it just takes your breath away.

The terrain is mountainous and at times quite steep, we recommend hill walking for training. You will be able to take your time throughout the trek and have plenty of rest stops along the way.

Please be aware of what season you are visiting and refer to the gear list so that you can pack accordingly to the advised temperatures and weather conditions. Be mindful to pack culturally appropriate clothing – keeping your shoulders, knees and cleavage covered at all times.

—

We are VERY happy to answer any questions you may have and would welcome feedback on the project.

Lastly our prices have been built around what the village feels they need to host you primarily and then the fee for Mahouts Elephants LTD Partnership, our partners in Thailand. We are a not for profit organisation and as such take a very small amount to help us pay the monthly sponsorship and mahouts wages.

We welcome donations to our foundation to help us continue with the project and grow into the future so we can help many more mahouts and elephants return home to the forest that is their birth right.