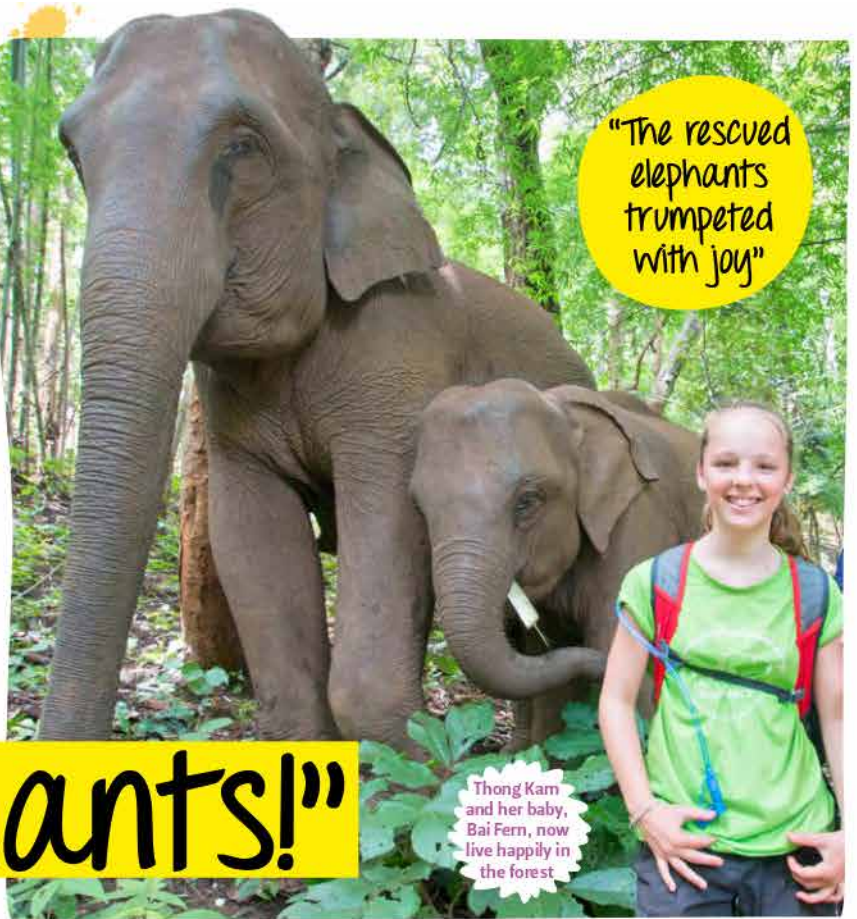


READER'S TRUE STORY

WHEN NATASHA, 12, SAW HER FAVOURITE ANIMALS BEING CRUELLY TREATED, SHE MADE IT HER MISSION TO GIVE THEM A BETTER LIFE

"I saved the elephants!"

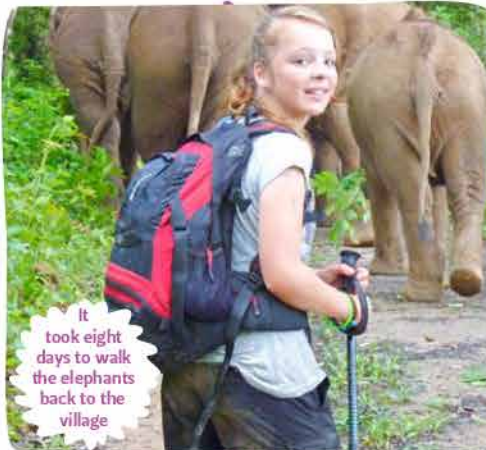


"The rescued elephants trumpeted with joy"

Thong Kam and her baby, Bai Fern, now live happily in the forest

"They're so adorable!" I exclaimed to my mum, as I looked up at a real live elephant for the first time.

I was on holiday with my family in Thailand, 3,000 miles away from our home in the UK, but as I looked at these magnificent creatures standing right in front of me in the elephant camp, something didn't feel right.



It took eight days to walk the elephants back to the village

Beastly behaviour

Holiday-makers were paying money to ride the elephants and watch them perform tricks. "That's so unnatural!" I thought. I felt really sad, especially when I found out how the elephants were treated. People in the camp control them by using sticks with hooks and nails attached.

They stab the elephants behind their ears, forcing them to dance to music or paint pictures for the tourists' amusement. Some of them are even made to sit back on their hind legs, which crushes their internal organs. And I discovered the elephants are kept tied up on really short chains for days at a time.

Unbelievably, this happens all over Thailand. People who live in remote villages own the elephants, but if they can't afford to provide food for them as well as their families,

they have to take their elephants to work in tourist camps to earn money.

I was so upset about it, I decided I had to do something to help. When I got home, my family and I set up a charity to help the

elephants and return them to their villages where they could live a more natural life. We spent a year doing everything we could to raise money – we even did a toast sale! We also raised awareness on social media, and the money came rolling in.

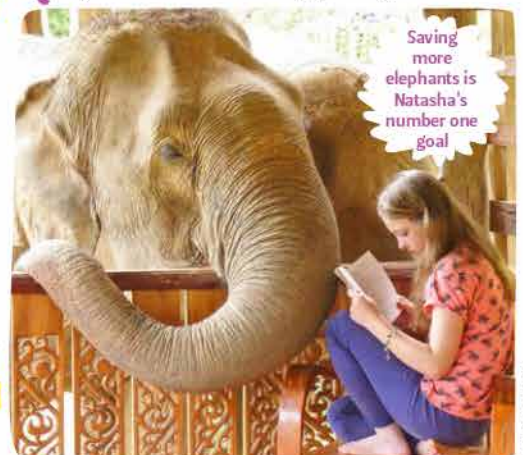
Jungle trek

A year later, after months of hard work and preparation to get as fit as we could, we went back to the camp in Thailand with a film crew from CBBC's My Life series to collect two elephants called Thong Kam and Bai Fern. Then, along with 13 other people, we set off on a tough trek to take the two elephants back to their village through 83 miles of Thai jungle.

We had to cross rivers, smash through undergrowth and climb over fallen trees. When we walked in the dark, we wore torches on our heads, shining them at the elephants' bums in front of us! Any time I felt I couldn't go on any more, I'd think back to those poor elephants staying in the camp.

Finally free

After a gruelling eight days, we finally reached the village. Our rescued elephants started trumpeting with joy and headed straight to the forest, where they splashed around in the river for hours. After spending years trapped in the camp, they were finally free! Now I want to save more elephants. In fact, my life's mission has only just begun.



Saving more elephants is Natasha's number one goal

TV DON'T MISS NATASHA'S STORY ON OUR BIG ELEPHANT ADVENTURE, PART OF CBBC'S MY LIFE SERIES, 23 MARCH ON CBBC OR CATCH UP ON CBBC IPLAYER AT WWW.BBC.CO.UK/IPLAYER/CBBC CHECK OUR HER WEBSITE AT WWW.MAHOOTS.ORG