



by Kimberly Haley-Coleman



BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

ma•hout

/mə'hou/ noun mahout; plural

noun: mahouts

1. (in South and Southeast Asia) a person who works with, rides, and tends an elephant

elephants

Las Vegas doesn't need you. Disney World doesn't need you. After you've gotten your fill of attraction-based vacation, consider going someplace that needs you, and change your world perspective while you are at it.

Working with elephants is deeply integrated into many parts of Thailand. Yet no laws in Thailand offer protection to captive elephants, as they are classified as mere livestock. We feel it is important to raise awareness of elephant welfare and help provide them a quality life. Many elephant owners in Thailand struggle to make a living and hence shackle their elephants in the sun, and, sadly, resort to taking them to cities to beg.

Tremendous deforestation has decreased the logging industry which used to be a

major job source in the area, putting even more pressure on locals to engage in this type of elephant-begging.



Globe Aware offers an innovative program in northeast Thailand (the heartbeat of elephant husbandry in the country) that helps solve the challenges faced by over 300 Asian elephants and their handlers, which are known as "mahouts."

By participating in this project, volunteers provide sustainable revenue for nearly 200 mahouts while also providing a better standard of living for the elephants themselves.



Throughout the year, paying volunteers (tax deductible \$725 each) arrive for one week at a time to build shelters, plant and harvest food (grass, bamboo and sugarcane) for the elephants, help bathe them, walk alongside them, unchained for a few hours, and allow a way for elephants to interact naturally in open space, as opposed to being chained. Sound like hard physical labor? Yes. This is hard work.

It is also inspirational and life changing. There is no better way to raise your consciousness of the issue than taking an active part. There is down time: a truly immersive cultural experience. Life moves at a delightful, slower pace in the Thai community.

The program begins with a traditional Thai welcoming ceremony led by a village Shaman, an event the average tourist would never experience.

Every week there is a local evening market to attend, giving volunteers an opportunity to participate in life, Thai style and opportunities to spend time gaining knowledge with the village elders, which is a highlight of the trip. Cooking lessons with locals is also offered. But it's the time with the elephants that will change them . . . and you.

See more at GLOBAWARE.ORG

