

On eve of Indian PM's visit, new poll shows Britons' overwhelming demands for action by Cameron and Modi to stop elephant abuse in India

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits the UK this week, with an effusive reception from politicians and the public alike. But behind the polished façade lie some hideous truths – including the fate of the dwindling population of Asian elephant in India – and a major new poll shows the British public's overwhelming demand for immediate action by Cameron and Modi to act.

Duncan McNair, CEO of Save The Asian Elephants ("STAE") www.stae.org explains: "Most Indians agree that elephants are of great cultural importance to their country and its standing in the world. Yet the treatment of captive Asian elephants in India is terrible, and their future as an ever more endangered species tragically bleak. Demand for elephants for tourism, festivals and temples is met by the illegal capture of young from the wild. This can involve extreme violence. The mother and other herd members are often killed as they try to defend their young. The captive babies are put through a violent "training" process called pajan. They are completely isolated, deprived of food, water and sleep and brutally beaten with iron rods, spikes and knives designed to break their spirits. Many die in great fear and pain during this process. The babies then face a life in captivity of daily abuse and torture, for human entertainment.

Every year numerous British holidaymakers travel to India. For many this is a perfect opportunity to get up close and personal with iconic Asian elephants. Some notice worrying signs such as wounds, sores on elephants' legs or backs from chains or seats, or elephant keepers using sticks with sharp metal hooks for control, but put these to the back of their mind as they would not want this to spoil their dream holiday. Many suppose UK travel companies would not offer elephant riding and shows if the welfare of the animals was in doubt.

STAE has presented its proposals for change to the British government and Indian authorities and is urging immediate action. And now STAE's mission to raise awareness is working.

A major new poll by leading research consultancy Populus shows that **85%** of those surveyed, including Asian and Hindu respondents, would avoid visiting a tourist experience involving elephants if they discovered that the elephants had been treated badly. McNair comments: "This confirms that, if the reality of what happens behind the scenes is exposed, British tourists will overwhelmingly reject these attractions. On the eve of Modi's visit, it is particularly important that the public is made aware that they are unwittingly contributing to such terrible abuse of these wondrous, ancient creatures. The Populus results show that **88%** of the public consider the process of pajan to be unjustified in training elephants for use in tourism and temples, yet it continues to this day. Britain has important commercial links with India so Modi's visit is a perfect opportunity for the British public and our elected politicians to remind him that we take such brutal and widespread abuse as outrageous. Mr Cameron made an election manifesto commitment to support India in protecting Asian elephants, and the Populus poll shows that **81%** of the public want this commitment honoured. This is the clearest call to action for Cameron to act now – before it's too late."

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