Holiday firms promote Thai resort where abused elephant killed Briton

Tripadvisor, Expedia and other booking giants advertised Nong Nooch despite allegations of animal cruelty and warnings that visitors rema

NEW

Ben Cooke, Environment Correspondent

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More than 100 travel companies are advertising a Thai resort where an abused elephant killed a British tourist, The Times can reveal.

Tripadvisor, Expedia, Marriott Bonvoy and Booking.com have taken down advertisements for Nong Nooch Pattaya Garden, a 500-acre res elephants are coerced into performing tricks by having hooks driven into their necks, after a charity found they were among 113 companie advertising the resort.

All four companies removed their adverts after being contacted by The Times.

Having collected the adverts, the charity Save the Asian Elephants (STAE) called on the government to use powers it has had since 2023 to travel companies from promoting foreign resorts where the abuse of animals is known to have taken place.

Elephants are made to ride tricycles

BRONEK KAMINSKI/BARCROFT MEDIA

Visitors to Nong Nooch are invited to shows in which as many as two dozen of “the cutest elephants” play football, dance with hula hoops tricycles.

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What they are not told is that the elephants’ riders spur them on by driving metal hooks and nails into their necks. Attending a show in 20 Duncan McNair, chief executive of STAE, heard a baby elephant scream in pain and others run for their mothers.

The venue has been dogged with safety concerns since 2000, when the 20-year-old British trainee nurse Andrea Taylor was killed by a ber elephant.

Andrea Taylor

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Video from earlier this year shows tourists being invited into the ring to pet the elephants and be carried in their trunks. Later in the perfo they were invited to lie down and wait for the elephants to step over them, or press their feet to their chests.

Taylor's sister Helen Costigan, who was injured by the same elephant, said it appeared the venue had done nothing to improve safety sinc "It's highly likely the same fate is going to happen again," she said.

"Tourists go to Nong Nooch believing they are having a once-in-a-lifetime experience, not understanding that these are wild animals and c trained and should not be trained."

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More than 800 people, mostly tourists, have been killed by captive elephants around the world, according to STAE. The charity has identif travel companies advertising 305 venues, mostly in India and Thailand, where tourists are invited to ride the animals or watch them perfo It was common practice at these venues to "break the elephants' spirits" by beating them into submission, McNair said.

An elephant show at Nong Nooch

He added that lions, tigers, chimps and other animals were being abused in similar venues.

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The government has had the power to stop travel companies advertising such venues since the passage of the 2023 Animals Act, but is yet secondary legislation to do so.

Last week it told animal charities that elephants would be the first species protected by the act. But it did not say which activities the adve ban would cover: whether, for instance, it would include elephant riding, which McNair said could harm the creature's spine. Nor did it say other animals would be protected.

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"Why the three-year delay in implementation of this crucial legislation, so important for vulnerable animals and tourists?" McNair said. "T government needs simply to list the horrific activities to be banned from advertising and use its parliamentary majority to implement it."

Couples ride elephants during a Valentine's Day event at Nong Nooch

ATHIT PERAWONGMETHA/REUTERS

He alleged that travel companies had tried to "thwart" the implementation of the act in closed-door meetings revealed by freedom of infor requests.

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The Association of British Travel Agents (Abta) said: "We are supportive of government action on the sale of tickets in the UK to attraction involve activities like riding or bathing with elephants — Abta's own guidelines say these activities are unacceptable."

Nong Nooch and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were approached for comment.

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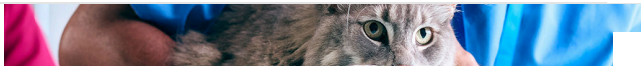

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