

Wanderlust



Introducing... Thailand's Green Excellence Awards

Saving. Protecting. Helping. Meet the people who've made a real difference to Thailand

From rescuing elephants from the crowded streets of Bangkok to enriching the lives of children with autism - the awards, created by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) six years ago to recognise dedication to sustainable and responsible travel, went this year to some very worthy winners... Back in September we asked you, our Wanderlust readers, to nominate the organisations that you felt deserved recognition for their work, from animal welfare groups to volunteer group organisations, community based projects and nature, marine and heritage tour operators. The competition was tough, with

so many worthy winners. But after much deliberation the judges, at the World Travel Market in London, announced the winners, who were presented with their awards by Her Royal Highness Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Barnavadi. The Princess, who is known for her charitable work, is a keen supporter of the Awards, and told Wanderlust's Lyn Hughes and chair of the judging panel: "It is

important that we protect and recognise those things that make Thailand so special and unique, including our heritage and nature. By doing this we can give visitors to our country a fantastic experience while also giving our country's people, and especially our young people, a future." Lyn commented: "We were delighted at the standard of entries and were inspired by many of the nominations. We hope between us to visit the winners over the coming months, and to report back on them in more detail." Nominations are now open again for next year's awards... so, if you know some worthy candidates, nominate them at www.thailandgreenawards.com



And the winners are...



VOLUNTEERING AWARD WINNER: PLAN MY GAP YEAR (PMGY)

Plan My Gap Year (PMGY) runs a Teach English Abroad programme that places volunteer assistants in schools throughout Chiang Mai and the Nong Khai district. Having been there and done it all, PMGY recognise the importance of matching the right person to the right destination. Volunteers are interviewed before they are placed, and if they don't think you can cut it, you won't be going. Ensuring that their volunteers are only sent to destinations with a real need, PMGY have established a system that's not only sustainable, but provides

an annually beneficial experience for both volunteers and locals. **What the judges said:** "They have got off to an impressive start. PMGY regularly visit the schools and learning centres and have committed to a consistent flow of volunteers through the year. They have the interests of both Thailand's schools and its volunteers at heart. They ensure that volunteers are travelling to Thailand for the right reasons and can actually make a difference."



NATURE, MARINE AND HERITAGE: ALL POINTS EAST

Providing knowledgeable tours of well-known landmarks and off-the-beaten track adventures to unusual destinations, All Points East diversifies travellers away from the local business-threatening chain hotels, enabling you to experience some of Thailand's best kept secrets. The company's dedication to locally sourced produce is compelling. They educate visitors about how to travel through Thailand more sustainably and

offer homestays in Chantaburi and the Sol Dao National Park. They even recommend Thai-owned airlines, believing that the experience begins at the airport. All Points East has a demonstrable passion for the local community and also contribute to under-funded schools around the area. **What the judges said:** "This company isn't just paying lip-service to the idea of sustainable travel, they live and breathe it."

AN ASIAN ELEPHANT FOUNDATION

Horried by the exploitation of elephants in the streets of Bangkok, the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation was founded in 2006 to provide a better environment in which the mahouts and their elephants could work. They employ two specialist vets, one of which is constantly on call to help any elephant in the country. The foundation also provides funding for the Chiang Mai University to research theories that suggest

that elephant interaction could assist children with autism. Dedicated to the reintroduction and conservation of elephants in the wild, they hope that the research they support will eventually lead to a higher level of understanding and protection. **What the judges said:** "Not only is this Foundation working in a hands-on way with elephants, it also sees the big picture and so is supporting and influencing the future of all Thailand's elephants, both captive and wild."



COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM: THE SAROJIN

Following 2004's tsunami, the Sarojin Hotel formed the Khao Lak Community Fund. Eight years on, the hotel now support a range of sustainable community projects in the Phang Nga province - from working with Thailand's Red Cross to providing orphanages with prosthetic limbs, to building new schools and road repairs - while also offering travellers the chance to participate in educational Glimpses of Local Life tours. Meanwhile, 'Street Food, Cook for

Kids' has been acclaimed as a unique, fulfilling experience. Using locally sourced produce to create Thai cuisine, the programme engages with the children of the Camillian Social Centre - the only centre in Phang Nga to provide care for children with Down's Syndrome. **What the judges said:** "The hotel goes above and beyond in its continuing support of local communities. It has made a significant difference to the area."

THE JUDGES ALSO AWARDED SPECIAL COMMENDATIONS TO Projects Abroad AND Tacomepai Organic Farm