

## Caitlin Shaw, Canada

I applied for a volunteer position at elephantstay for 3 months, never having been there or even to Thailand. I was luckily accepted and began preparing myself for 12 weeks working with elephants. But of course nothing could have prepared me for what was to come. I knew from the Facebook group that people loved going to elephantstay but you can never really be sure of something till you have tried it yourself. I went in hoping to gain elephant experience (towards future veterinary goals) and just learn more about these animals that have always interested me. I ended up leaving what I felt like was a second home. I fell in love with this place, the program, the elephants and the entire village. I couldn't have asked for a better experience and I learned so much more than I thought was possible. It is so rewarding to see not only your own growth, developing a relationship with an elephant and gaining respect for what this program does but as a volunteer I could directly participate in the growth and education of all the guests coming through. I got to witness magical, unforgettable moments in peoples lives as they bonded and fell in love with their elephants. I got to wake up and open my door every morning to see elephants walk by. I went to sleep every night listening to the sounds of the village and every day I got to see unforgettable relationships between mahout and elephant take place. I am so lucky to have been a part of this program. Even on hard days, sweating much more than you could ever really give and tired, I considered my time there so incredibly valuable. As a volunteer you are there to work but you are also supported and given the tools you need to learn and grow. You end up gaining I hope everyone has a chance to visit elephantstay. Its so worthwhile, and the accommodation and food are fantastic ;) You will learn about elephants but also about Thai culture, their view on elephants, village life and most importantly you learn about yourself. It has and will forever have a piece of my heart.

