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I always wanted to volunteer with elephants and came across Elephantstay on facebook. I haven't been to Thailand before and jumped on the opportunity. Living & working in an Elephant Village, a dream come true!

I hadn't worked with animals before but had office & admin experience. I wanted to use my professional skills to make a difference while learning about elephants & elephant care – so the volunteer position of Program Development Officer was ideal. I applied for the role and was offered a 12-week placement.

Office duties included general office admin, dealing with the bookings, replying to emails, taking photographs, updating social media – and of course helping with the guests and the elephants.

It's not a holiday, as a volunteer you are here to help & do a job, you have to be self-sufficient, multi-task, organize your time and fit in with the team. It can be busy and stressful at times, it's not always easy, there were good and bad moments. But the rewards are huge! Where else do you wake up to elephants walking past your house? Or get to play with baby elephants before you start work? Or hear someone knocking on your door in the middle of the night shouting: 'We have a new baby, come quick, bring your camera'. Or Ewa saying: 'Soi is doing some painting today. Can you help?'

Every day was different and there was always something going on. Elephant training, ceremonies, painting, scrubbing, riding, playtime in the river, babies – yes lots of babies, there were 3 births during my time at Elephantstay. I will never forget the special moment when Ozzy did his first steps in the middle of the night or Bua Sawan putting her tiny trunk around my neck. So beautiful!

These 12-weeks flew by. I learned so much during my time at Elephantstay – about elephants, Thai elephant culture, the strong bond between humans and elephants, the challenges of creating a sustainable future for Asian elephants. I loved the atmosphere in the Village and have met so many amazing people here. I feel extremely lucky to be part of the Elephantstay family and the elephants will always be a part of me.

