

Phuket Zoo

First Visit: 11th January 2016

Upon arrival, despite having a map, our researchers found it a challenge to find the tigers. However, two of them were found hidden in small concrete enclosures at the very back of the zoo. One male and one female. Each area was about 8x4 metres, and although it was outside there was nothing for the tigers to do though they both had a cave doubling as platform. The night/lock down rooms could be seen too, at about 2x3 metres in size. No enrichment, no natural environment, nothing to even see for these two tigers. The male was completely unresponsive, pacing constantly. However the female was much more interested and after a few chuffs did actually come over to say hello.

When heading out to exit the zoo, it discovered that there were in fact two other tigers. These two were in different areas of the park and on display for the photo opportunities with tourists. Both on incredibly short chains, so short it was an effort for them to even stand up and move. One of them also had a hunchback and bow legs which could be a result of inbreeding.

It is unclear where these two tigers reside at night as there were no obvious empty enclosures or cages.

Second Visit: 18th March 2017

There were no notable changes in the enclosures and cages of the tigers. The same two tigers were chained up for photos and appear to do so for the entire day.

The only addition was to find a number of other tigers in small cages in the very back of the zoo. This area was blocked off by a tarpaulin to prevent the public from entering, but the tigers could be seen behind this. These cages also had no enrichment and no places for the tigers to hide.

Third Visit: 27th April 2018

A third visit revealed more tigers living in the originally reported cement-floored enclosures - possible five. The area that contained hidden tigers on the second visit were now open. Previously the tigers had each been confined to small cages in this area, now each one had access to a 5x10m area that contained a dirt floor and plenty of natural vegetation. They were also able to take themselves off into their night rooms if they so desired, removing themselves from the presence of the public. These tigers seemed much more relaxed and curious with a number of them coming over to our researchers chuffing to say hello.

Whilst this was an improvement in living conditions, albeit for just three tigers, the same two tigers were out on the platforms for photos. More concerning, for the first time in years, there were also cubs. These looked to be between 4 to 6 months old and were being held in a brand new area complete with chain up spots, platforms and places for tourists to sit. The entire area was concreted and contained only potted plants to give a semblance of a natural area. This enclosure was also situated right next to the main road where buses and other large vehicles rumbled passed regularly. One cub was chained to a bench with the other cubs being kept in three 1x2 metre cages (each with a wooden platform). The cubs were lethargic and unresponsive and one cub looked to have a similar short back and hunched spine as one of the adult tigers on the platform.

Whilst some enclosures had improved, this was a definite step backward. In addition the admission price had tripled to include tiger photos leading our researchers to believe that Phuket Zoo maybe intending to start their own tiger photo programme to rival those already found on Phuket.

Fourth Visit: 28th March 2019

The situation was almost exactly the same as last year. The only real difference is that the cubs were bigger. Once of them was chained out on the bench that had been there last year. This was not the same cub as seen last year as this was had a lot of physical deformities and crossed-eyes.

The same two adult tigers were still in their usual photo positions. Limping was observed, but no injuries. Most of the tigers were seen pacing.

There is no enrichment provided. However all tigers did have access to clean water.

*In the months since visiting, other visitors complained about the tiger photos and it appears that this practice has ceased after the government paid a visit to the zoo.

