

Tiger Kingdom Chiang Mai

First Visit: 5th March 2017

Chiang Mai Tiger Kingdom was setup in a very similar way to the facility in Phuket though it did not have quite the factory-like feel and had more natural vegetation lining the paths. The cages were 4x4m with roughly 3 to 4 of them opening out onto a medium sized enclosure (these varied in size and also the number of tigers out in one). The cages were cement or brick floored, with no enrichment bar a high wooden platform - great for encouraging the tigers to use their hind leg muscles. Clean water was also provided.

The enclosures had grass, trees (ringed with electricity) and large ponds, though again there was no enrichment save what the staff brought in with them. Bizarrely, one enclosure was lined with fake grass. It seems that the tigers do rotate in and out of these enclosures, which will provide some extra enrichment. Shade is available in the enclosures but there is nowhere for the tigers to hide completely from public view.

Our researchers could go everywhere bar one section that was blocked off. Many more tigers could be seen through the gates.

Tigers appeared friendly, calm, playful and alert with only one tiger displaying any stress and aggression. A few of the tigers were seen to be pacing. A number of the tigers were cross eyed and some had joint swellings, which seem to occur when sitting on cold, wet concrete for too long. Overall body condition was good.

Staff reported that a new sanctuary, just 20 minutes away from the Chiang Mai facility was being built to house the retired tigers and other big cats (there are lions at Chiang Mai as well). Apparently already 60 big cats had been moved here where they will have no interaction with the public. The facility is planned to hold 300 animals when it is completed.

Second Visit: 22nd April 2018

A repeat visit showed no change in the setup and general living conditions of the tigers. Different tigers resided in the cages on public display, there were more tiger cubs and the same blocked off section was still off limits.

However, there was an improvement in the introduction of a new programme, Tiger Trails, which was a 45 minute session detailing day-to-day care of tigers and their plight in the wild. Guests participating could brush and shower a tiger and then prepare food and toy enrichment for the tigers. Whilst still not completely hands free, this is a positive step in the right direction. The helpful and friendly staff also informed our researchers of an upcoming programme - Tiger Keeper for a Day, to be held at the soon-to-be-open Mae Taeng Tiger Kingdom Education Centre. This programme will be completely hands free, a hugely positive step if the Tiger Kingdom franchise can continue in this vein. There was also a new show called The Thunder Show, where the white tiger - Thunder, was encouraged to jump and leap after toys used by the staff.

Tigers still had a calm, friendly demeanour though the younger cubs were clearly a little more stressed in the interaction situation. One older tiger was notably deformed with short back syndrome usually associated with inbreeding. There are also a number of white, snow and golden tigers, which are generally gained by inbreeding. There was a lot of informative signage on this, also the new Education centre and on the 41 tigers currently residing in the facility - the latter was a nice touch.

The tigers are clearly well cared for as there were two vet students on the premises. Also each of the cages has a plaque with details of the tiger residing inside, including their body condition.

Third Visit: 22nd April 2019

There was no notable difference in the setup or welfare of the tigers. There was limited enrichment provided in the outside areas but the cages still remain barren, with only a platform. Clean water is provided to all tigers and generally behaviour is classed as intermediate – there is some pacing observed.

There appear to be fewer tigers here, with many having been moved to the Mae Taeng Learning Centre.

