

# Tiger Kingdom Phuket

## First Visit: 12th January 2016

On this initial visit, a first to any Tiger Kingdom venue, our researcher chose to see the smaller cubs and the biggest tigers in an effort to get an idea of what went on. The smaller cubs were first, about 5 months old. All asleep as can be expected as it was 11pm. All handlers carried little sticks, which they used to tap and poke the tigers into the desired position regardless of the tigers wants and needs. The younger tigers in particular took exception to this, the larger ones seemed resigned. Our researcher then visited the larger tigers while getting used to the factory-esque system in place that simply shunted tourists through. Whilst out in this large area, it seemed that these tigers were not encouraged to move at all. Each had their allocated area in which to pose and that was it. It was a shame as the enclosure was fairly decent.

Each enclosure was at least 20x20 metres complete with pond, platform, trees and grass. Upon closer inspection however, the pond was filled with chlorine to keep it clean, the ground was actually laid with bricks through which the grass poked through and the trees and fences were all ringed with electric wires to stop any scratching. There was no enrichment items or toys of any sort both in the inside and outside areas. Strangely, whilst there were enough enclosures for all the tigers, they were being used in a one on, one off system.

The tigers not posing for tourists were locked in small 5x5m cages, four to a cage. Each at least contained a wooden platform and a large water bowl though all had concrete flooring. The cages lined both sides of the walkway so that all of them can be viewed though it does feel more factory-like this way.

Most of the tigers were disinterested in the large numbers of tourists streaming passed preferring to play among themselves or to sleep. A few did interact and some out in the enclosures were playing, especially when encouraged to do with toys by the staff.

## **Second Visit: 18th March 2017**

The setup of enclosures and cages was exactly the same, however this time our researchers did not participate in any of the programmes but simply did the walk through option. There were a similar number of tigers though staff did report a tigress and just had three cubs that were just days old.

Cages and enclosures were clean and all held water with the exception of one cage. Tigers responded in varying ways to interaction ranging from disinterest through to curious and friendly. The large Amur male however, was very aggressive towards tourists that stopped to stare and constantly paced. Physically the tigers all appear to be in good health though there are a number with crossed eyes and one sub-adult that was suffering from cataracts in both eyes.

For the most part the staff interacted well with the tigers using the stick to position tigers only. However one staff member was witnessed repeatedly hitting a 3 month old cub across the face, though this does not appear to be the norm.

## **Third Visit: 27th April 2018**

Once again, no change in the setup, enclosures or general welfare. There were notably less tigers on this last visit and this was reflected both in the observed count and that reported by staff.

Staff and tigers both interacted well with the exception of one staff member who grabbed a tiger cub by the tail, dragging it across about 5m of cage floor. Generally though tigers were disinterested or friendly with human interaction and the staff were caring in both interactions with the tigers and the guests.

Overall, this is definitely operating with a higher level of welfare than most facilities but it has such a business-like atmosphere that makes it feel that the welfare isn't done to help the tigers.

## **Fourth Visit: 28<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

Overall this facility maintained the same level of welfare as last year, using the same setup as before. Tigers have barren cages, access to clean water and are rotated out into enclosures though they are with the tourists. No signs of pain or injury were observed and the body

condition is adequate for most tigers. Overall behaviour is in the intermediate range but some tigers were seen pacing. There is limited enrichment provided in the outside areas which are still covered with a brick flooring and have the trees wired to prevent the tigers touching them.

