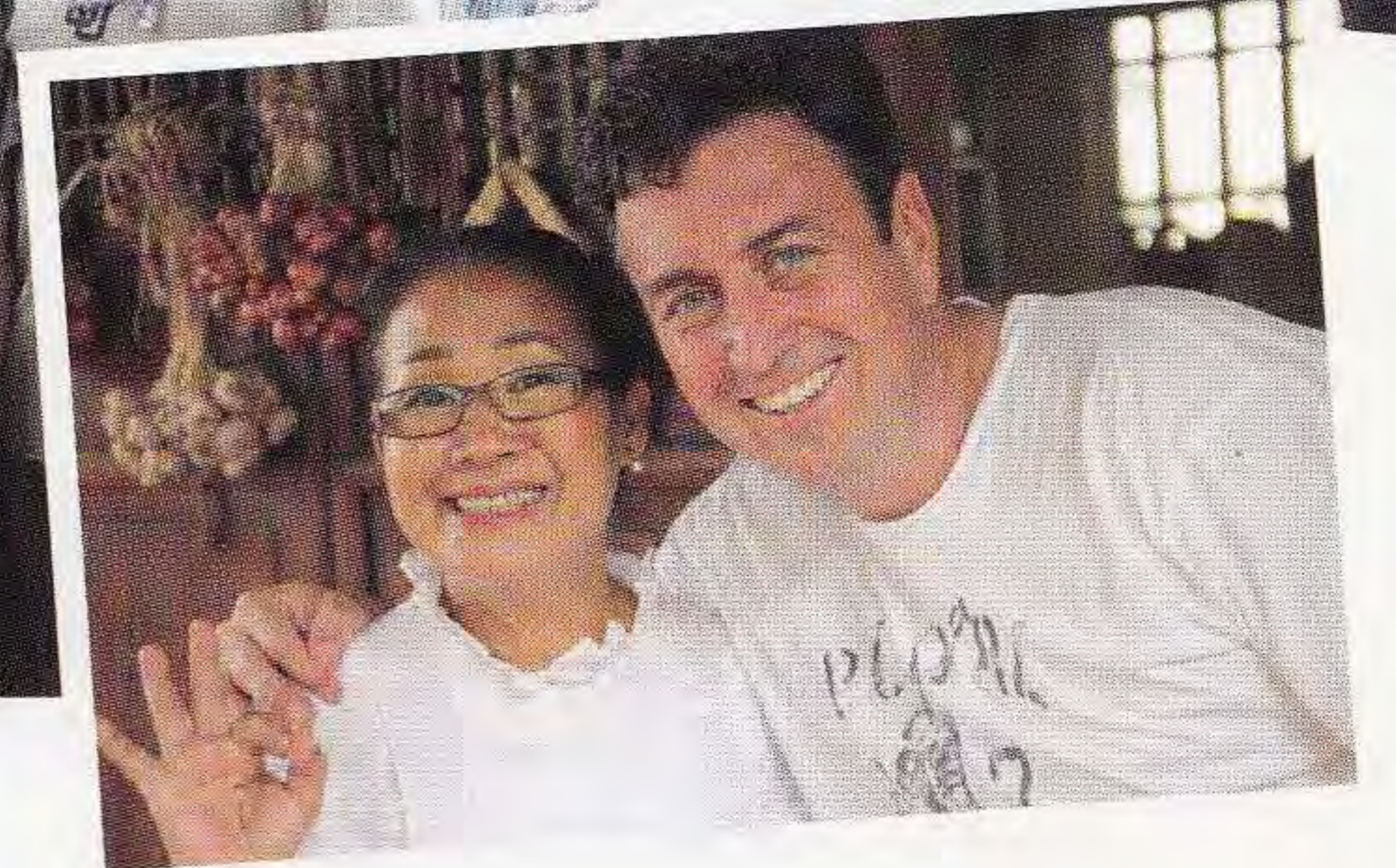
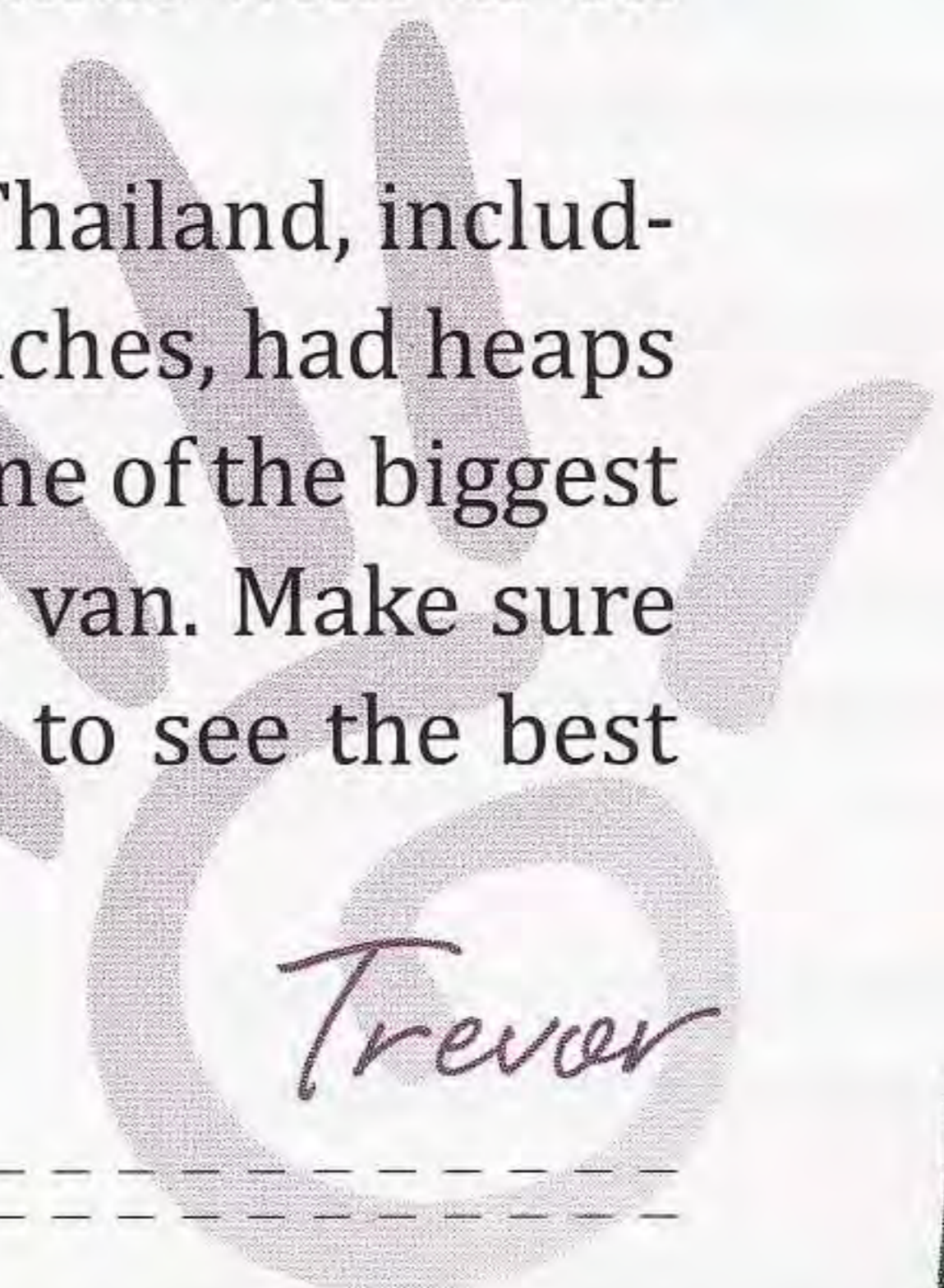


# On Location

**T**he *Explore* team filmed in amazing Thailand in June 2015. They started off the trip at Elephant Hills, in Surat Thani, a luxury camp set in a lush rainforest. At Elephant Hills, the team got up close and personal with the elephants at the elephant sanctuary, learning about their close relationship with the mahouts, and washing and feeding the gentle giants. Afterwards, the team was treated to a unique experience at the Rainforest Camp on the floating luxury tents – away from technology for a peaceful, relaxing stay on the Cheow Lan Lake, surrounded by the oldest rainforest in the world.

We have a competition coming up to allow two lucky people to travel to Thailand with Thai Airways and stay at Elephant Hills Rainforest Camp and Elephant Sanctuary. Make sure you are friends with us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/exploretv](http://www.facebook.com/exploretv) to enter.

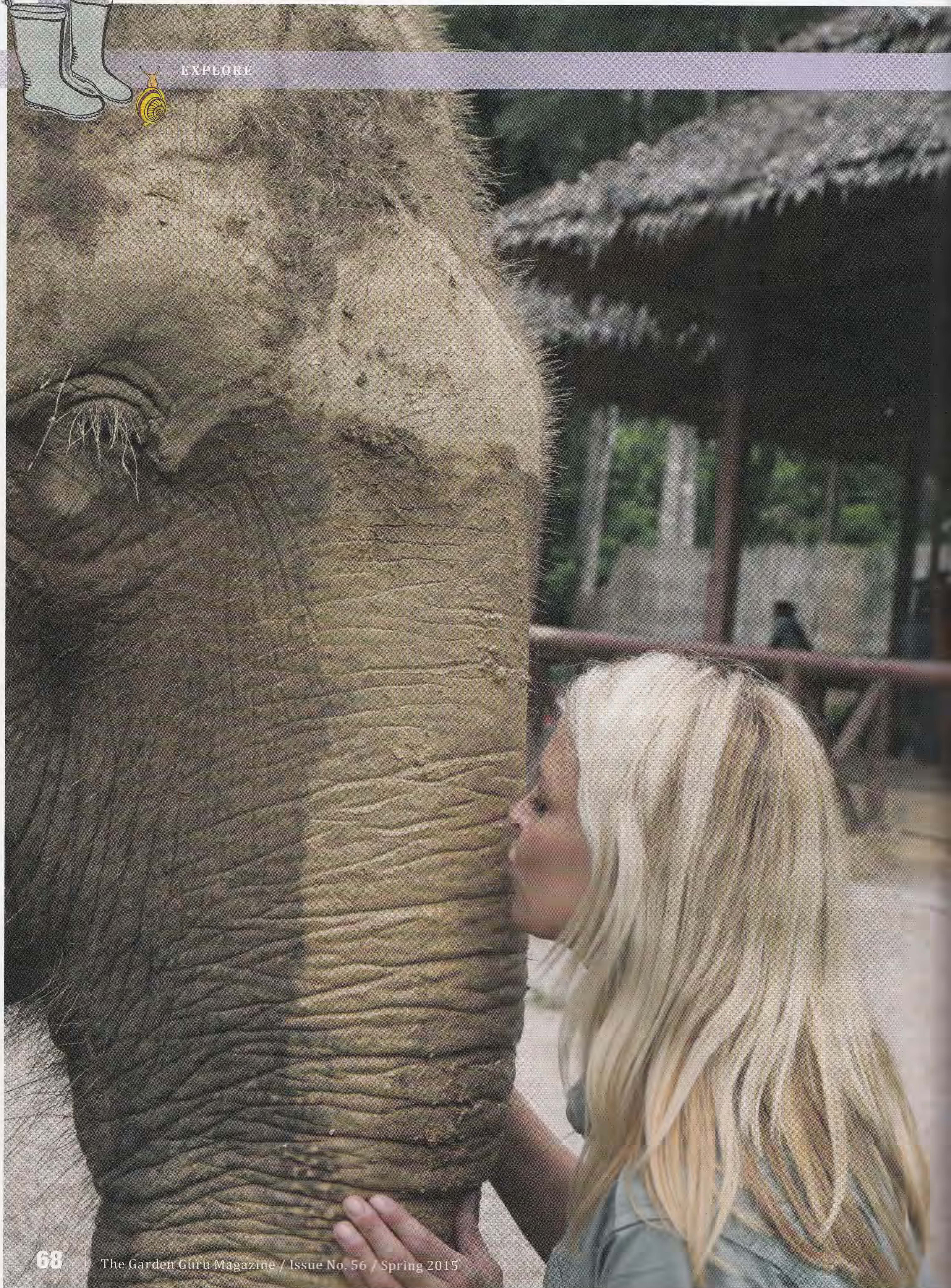
The team also explored hidden, unknown spots in Thailand, including Chumphon, soon to be famous for its beautiful beaches, had heaps of fun at Vana Nava Waterpark in Hua Hin, home to some of the biggest waterslides, and drove through Thailand in a camper van. Make sure you watch *Explore* later in the year on Channel Nine to see the best places to visit in Thailand.







EXPLORE





# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Get to know some gentle giants in an incredible, lesser-known part of our amazing planet with *Trevor Cochrane* and the *Explore* team.

IMAGES **Guru Productions**

Thailand may not seem exactly off the beaten track. After all, we all know what to expect with this country; Buddhist temples, coconut palms swaying on pure white sandy beaches and delicious spicy treats, right?

We've just completed a journey shooting an assignment for our *Explore TV* series that will go to air in January 2016 and I'll say up front, it's nothing like the image most of us believe to be true of this stunning country.

Our journey saw us fly with Thai Airways through Bangkok and down to Phuket Island before jumping in an Elephant Hills air-conditioned van and heading north of the island to a place



TREVOR COCHRANE

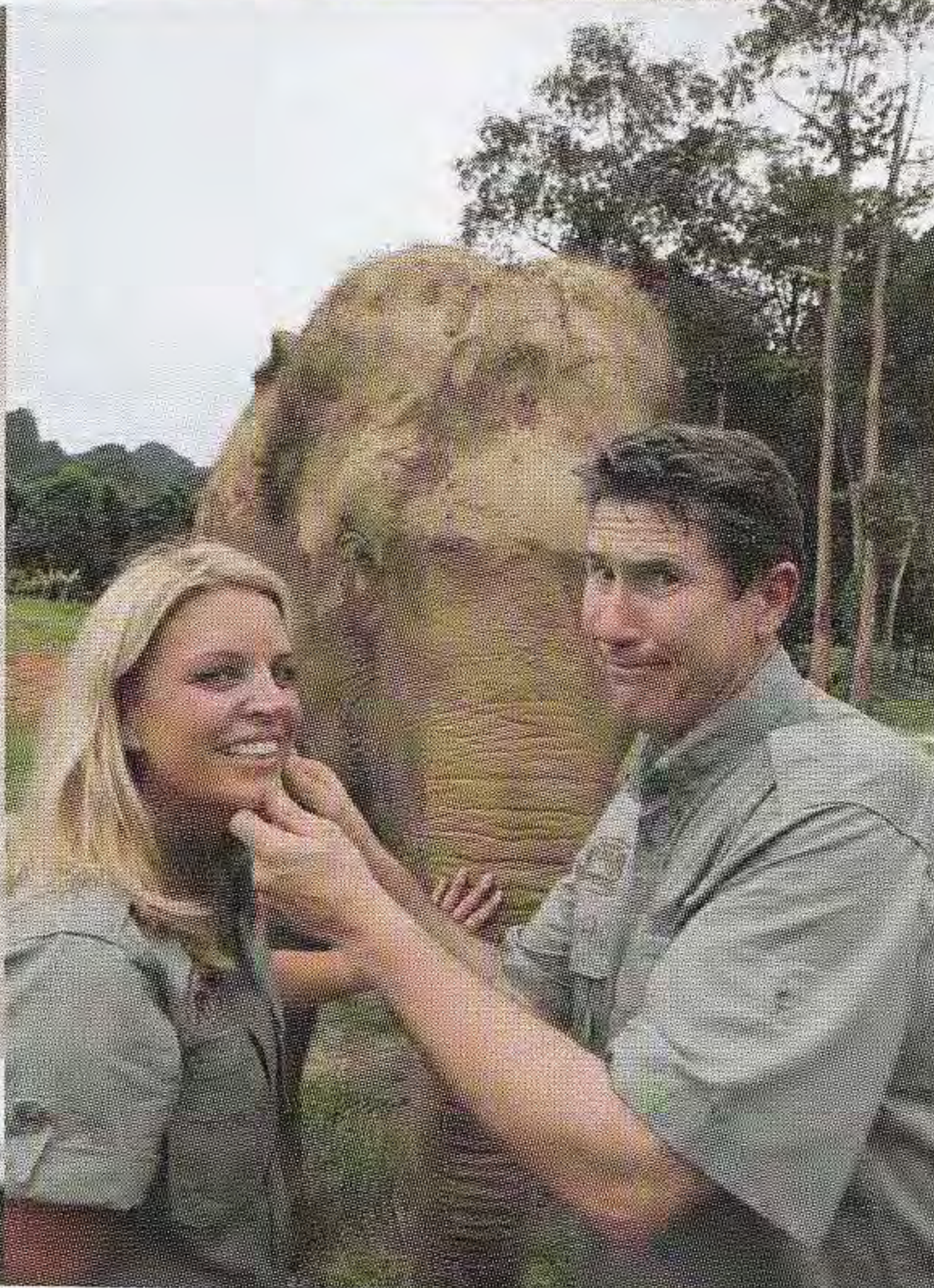
known as Khao Sok. It's probably not that remarkable a Thai town, except that its boundary is the stunning rainforests surrounding the Cheow Lan Lake. There is also a unique opportunity to learn about the conservation of Asian elephants.

The first destination as part of a typical holiday experience in this part of the world (with a difference) is Elephant Hills luxury tented camp. It's a two-part journey, with your first stop allowing you to acclimatise in comfort whilst learning about elephants up close. The tents are situated in a rainforest that is home to a great biodiversity of flora and fauna, making this an experience unlike anything else. >>

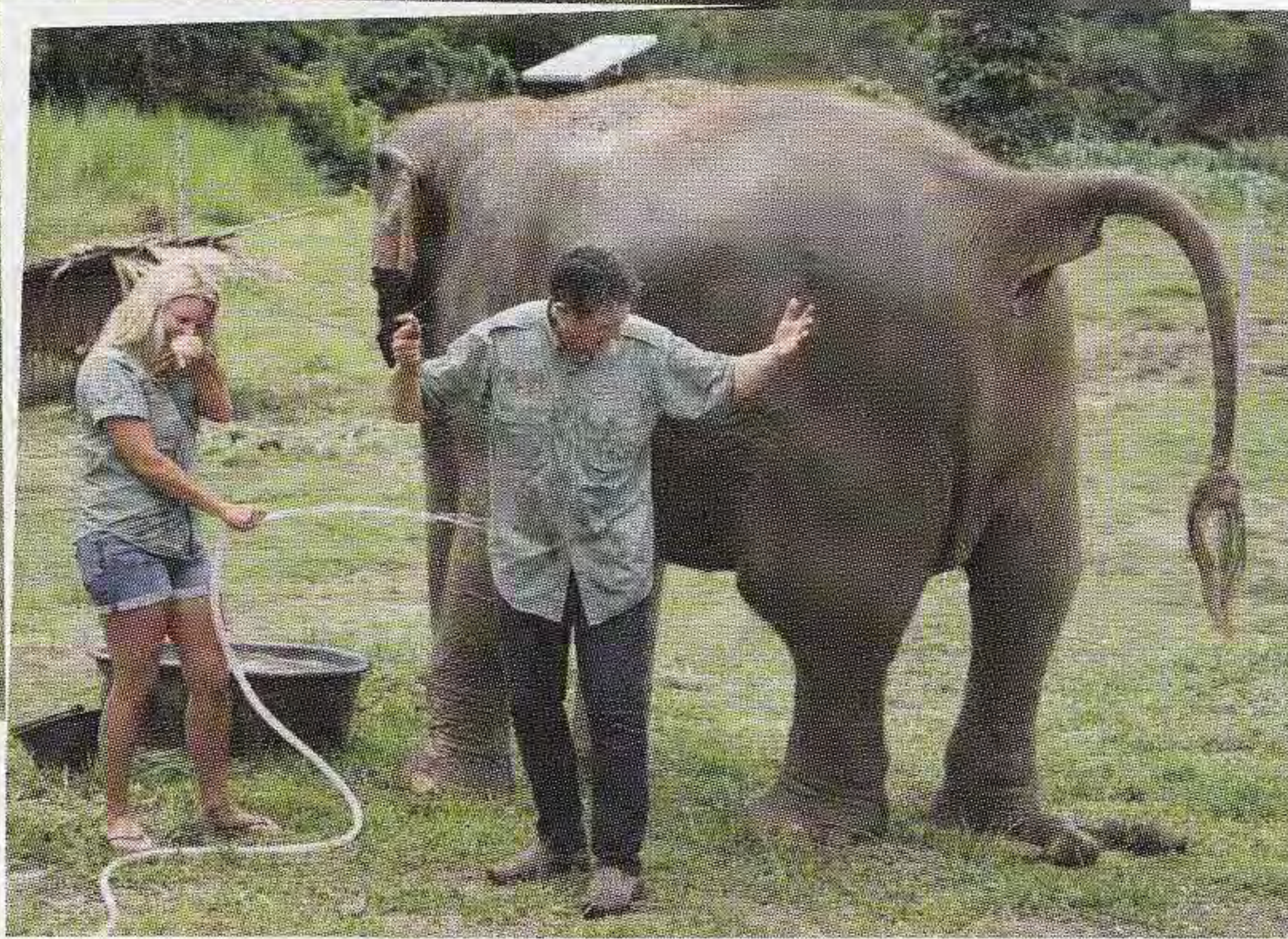




EXPLORE



Explore presenters Kim Syrus and Caty Price scrubbing their elephant clean at Elephant Hills.



seem contradictory. The experience allows you to watch them bathe in the huge pond, meet the mahouts that love and care for these gentle giants, and understand the extraordinary problem that faces the world with the rapid decline of their populations. In Thailand at the turn of the last century, a census reported there were 100,000 Asian elephants living in the jungles in Thailand. Today there are less than 3,000 as 97 per cent have died out, and much of that is due to the loss of habitat.

At Elephant Hills you get really close to these creatures as you shower your own elephant, scrubbing its tough skin, removing mud and leaving it clean and leathery (let's be honest, you cannot change a tough hide). Once your elephant is bathed and clean, it's time for a feed. Your guide instructs you on the technique involved in preparing a meal for an elephant - needless to say it involves a lot of food, as an elephant can consume 250kg of food every day. Chopping sugar cane, making a salt bomb (salt is very important in the right amount in their diet), adding sweet treats such as chopped fruit and some essential green roughage is all important before hand-feeding your giant friend; a task that is exhilarating and gooey all at the same time.

After a day with the elephants it's time to head back to the Elephant Hills camp. The night is spent eating amazing Thai food and sharing a few drinks and experiences with the other guests. The team at Elephant Hills pop on a video each night about elephants and they encourage better understanding of Thai culture by inviting local school girls to dance for the audience. Elephant Hills and their guests donate money towards supporting local schools with the essentials to help local villages.

After a good night's sleep in your luxury tent, you will wake early for the next stage of your experience that will blow your mind. It's a short drive to your next destination, the Cheow Lan Lake, and then a boat ride to the floating Elephant Hills Rainforest Camp. You round a bend

*"Asian elephants up close reveal a wisdom you don't see on television. Their wise, gentle eyes and enormous bodies almost seem contradictory."*

Every part of this experience is fun and enjoyable. The tents are extremely comfortable and have hot and cold running water, big comfy beds and great covered veranda with big cane chairs, where you can sit back and absorb the stunning environment that surrounds your private sanctuary. I've got to say, there's no better way to forget the hustle and bustle of the modern world and settle into the most natural setting to relax.

Here, you can wake to enjoy breakfast overlooking the swimming pool and forest towards the towering limestone cliff

mountains swathed in mist that gradually lifts to reveal the rainforest. You could then head off on a trek with your guide into the jungle, or a leisurely canoe trip down the river discovering the incredible biodiversity, before heading to lunch to recharge the batteries for an afternoon experience you will never forget.

The afternoon involves joining a group of guests and meeting the elephants with one of the guides. Asian elephants up close reveal a wisdom you don't see on television. Their wise, gentle eyes and enormous bodies almost





**A.** Preparing a meal for the elephants. **B.** Spectacular limestone mountains.  
**C.** You will have plenty of opportunities to meet wildlife at Elephant Hills.  
**D.** The *Explore* team on a guided hike into the jungle.  
**E.** Elephant Hills Rainforest Camp - floating luxury tents in a magical place.

in the lake as you sink deeper into the jungle, with its spectacular limestone mountains surrounding you, to discover a series of pontoons with more luxury tents floating on the emerald green, pristine waters of the largest lake in Thailand.

The lake is surrounded by the world's oldest rainforest, even older than the Amazon. The thick jungle is home to a wide diversity of wildlife, including wild elephants, boar, Asian ox, Asian golden cats, gibbons and langurs. The trees are alive with birds and this is where you may spot one of the oldest surviving birds on the planet — the hornbills. The rainforest is home to seven species of hornbill, a bird that even looks prehistoric, with the giant hornbill particularly spectacular. These birds flew the planet 50 million years ago, before the Himalayas

formed. They survive here because this land mass never moved, so it remained warm when the various ice ages caused mass extinctions of other animals.

Your luxury tent has a special vehicle moored along side it, a canoe, and that's your mode of transport to explore the many *klongs* (tributaries running into the jungle). By day you can swim, canoe or sit back on your private deck and read or play chess or jenga with the friendly team. There are guided hikes into the jungle and canoe safaris showing the wildlife that is at every turn, with the guides sharing their amazing knowledge with guests.

The team from Elephant Hills is working hard to conserve this special part of the world and their night vision camera traps have recorded many incredible animals not known to be there. The floating camp is completely eco-friendly, captur-

ing and storing away waste and using sun and wind to generate power, but at the same time maintaining an amazing luxury experience.

We've just completed our second major expedition to Elephant Hills and couldn't recommend it more highly. The cost per night is extremely low, considering everything is provided while you are there, including transfers from major nearby towns like Krabi, Koh Samui and Phuket. In fact, fly into Phuket airport and they pick you up and take you away from there. For a holiday you will never forget, check out website [www.elephanthills.com](http://www.elephanthills.com) - when booking say Trevor from The Gurus sent you.

Make sure you look out for our coming series *Explore TV Thailand* in January 2016 when we showcase this stunning part of the world. ☺