

We know that you care so let's look at the facts.

Hi my name is Jenny, I am a 28 year old English visitor to Chiang Mai and I love Tigers so much I have been coming here every day. (23rd June 2009). I have learnt a lot and understand your concerns as I had them myself. If I can I would like to help Tiger Kingdom and all its customers by looking at the worries that may concern people regarding the tigers and help to look at things a little closer.

I have seen how Tiger Kingdom has had to put up with a lot of negativity from people in the past.

As an independent, whom has had the great privileged of spending a good few full days here I have decided it is about time someone set the record straight. Below are **FACTS** about the tigers that may help you understand why they act the way they do in captivity and what the trainers here at tiger kingdom are doing to make everyones experiences (tigers and customers alike) safe and happy. I hope you can find it helpful.



What are the marks on the tigers skin/fur?

Tiger Kingdom does not agree with declawing. The scars and cuts you see on some of the tigers faces and body's are caused by play fighting amongst their brothers and sisters.

Tigers skin is quite thick and they sometimes don't realise how deep a cut is until a little while after it has happened.

Although the trainers strongly discourage any play activity with people they do encourage play with each other. It's important that the tigers are happy and can find an outlet for their energy so in the late evenings and sometimes during the day if its not too hot the trainers use coconuts, leaves and corn husks to stimulate play between the tigers.

Play is rough and usually all of the tigers get involved at once so cuts and scratches are nearly always inevitable.

The claws are clipped but never removed so minor injuries are treated with creams and sometimes sprays to help the healing process.

Why do you use sticks with the tigers?

Sticks are held by trainers at all times for safety. From a very early age the cubs are taught that biting and clawing are not permitted. This has to be instilled in them every day for the rest of their lives, it is the only way it can make it possible for a human to be in the same enclosure as a man eating animal.

The use of electric shock, whips, chains, declawing, drugging and food deprivation/reward are also methods that could be used on a tiger but Tiger Kingdom believes the method of "nose tapping" is the only method that reduces the harm to the tigers, and remains a successful way of preventing human and tiger injury.

If a tiger injures a human it usually calls for the animal to be put down. An uncontrollable tiger is just as much a danger to itself as it is to the customer. A human may survive a tiger bite but the tiger most certainly wouldn't be allowed to live after such an incident! Nobody wants to put a tiger down just because a customer wanted it to be free to play with them!

The sticks are not sharp and do not cause cuts.

As the tigers get older they learn that the stick is a warning. It is used when face to face eye contact or threatening behaviour is shown by the tiger, but as they mostly sleep during the busiest parts of the day a trainer will usually bang it on the fence or something nearby to let the tiger know they are approaching and that aggressive behaviour will be met with a hard knock to the nose. This technique is also used in training aggressive dogs and other biting animals except that for these animal using a finger or hand is the preferred method. Not something I would suggest with tiger with its size and power! If cats are to be handled, they must be trained not to play with people the same as they play with each other. If a cat struck or bit us the same as they would another cat in play, we would not last very long. They must be taught that our skin is like tissue paper compared to theirs.

Why do the trainers/photographers wake the tigers up from their sleep to have pictures taken?

Because without customers the tigers would starve.

What the customer wants they usually get! Its the same story in every business in every country! If all the customers wanted to do was to stand/sit next to a tiger while it was sleeping peacefully then it would make for a less tired tiger and probably a happier keeper too, but for the most part customers will not settle for just a touch. Provided it is safe to do

so the trainers will try and position the tiger so that the face can be seen and the customer can sit comfortably in shot.

Customers are important to the tigers lives. No government funding is provided and they rely on the income from the encounters to feed and pay for vets bills ect. Customers want to show their friends and family's wonderful pictures of them enjoying the intimacy of a one on one with a powerful and majestic animal. It is determined by the majority that dictates the need for the tigers to be woken so many time when they are trying to sleep. If you are happy to be passive and do not want these types of photos then please say so. It would make life a lot easier for tiger and keeper.

Why don't you let the cubs lick me they're not hurting me!?

If you have a domestic kitten you'll probably already know that the licking gesture is quite often followed by a bite and then the furious kicking of claw laden back legs. Its similar with baby tigers. Sometimes they are just licking but other times you may just find that they want a bite too, and when they have a hold they don't really want to let go. It is part of their training to discourage any behaviour that may lead to biting or clawing. Even if they are just licking you it has to be discouraged.

Why don't the tigers wake up when you are stroking them so roughly?

Every day they get plenty of pats, hugs and tummy rubs. So much so that they have almost become desensitised by it, its normal to them when someone new starts rubbing or heavily patting them. The tigers have been raised by human contact, are accustomed to handling and affection, so they want and expect it.

Some customers expect the tigers to be running around all the time. They want to see the tigers "performing" for them by playing around them and looking good for photos. The trainers try to make the most of the experience for the customers who want to see this by pushing the tiger into a better position for a photo or waking them up for a better shot. Customers want to see them awake even outside the tigers natural waking hours. Because of this the tigers seldom want to move, always being touched its not surprising that they just want to be left to sleep. As aggression is met with discipline and the unnecessary expenditure of energy the tigers have learnt it is far easier to ignore people.

The other large factor is the time of day. customers seldom visit the park in the early morning or late evening when the tigers actually want to be awake. Large crowds of people swarm to the park in the blistering heat of the day and expect to see these largely nocturnal animals running jumping and looking into the cameras for the perfect picture. its just not natural for the tiger to have so much activity at the peak times of our human day!

How can the tigers be safe to go in with?

The tigers have been raised by human contact, are accustomed to handling and affection, so they want and expect it. They spend their whole life with people and are trained from very small that biting and clawing are not permitted. Electric wires are placed around the perimeters of some of the enclosures to discourage fence climbing also.

Don't you think its wrong and unnatural to touch the tigers?

As long as the big cats depend on us for their food they will never be wild. Maybe not tame either, but we must not fool ourselves by thinking that if we do not touch them, if we do not let them develop affections for us and us for them, that they will be like wild cats.

If we cannot give them up to the wild because they would die, we must fill that void with something else they want. We think that something is affection. We know they want affection, and many want interaction with us. We will not deprive them of something they want that we can give to them.

These are just a few facts that may help to set your mind at ease, but you don't have to take my word for it.

Do your research, read up on tigers, spend more than just a few hours here in the park, turn up early in the morning (7am) or stay much later (8pm), be around for feeding and activity time. You can even volunteer, feeding, cleaning and observing tigers and trainers closely yourself!!

Its not hard to see how well these tigers live when you take a little more time to see.

All my best wishes for a pleasant and better educated experience

Jenny-Louise Wickett

28 years old from England

(You can find me on facebook. Ask me anything you like)