



Update 21

March 1st, 2006

Kelly's Rambling's

Kelly who? Indeed, you are quite right to question who this random person is. I'm the newbie, and as everyone knows, when you're the newbie, you get to do all the odd jobs that other people do not have time for or would rather not do, like write the Update Ramblings. Cool with me. After arriving in Kellyburi at 5am on Monday February 20th, it was into the office at 7.30am for my first mission, to help contact all the locals who had applied to study for the soon-to-be-starting weekend English and computer classes. Never mind the fact that the forms were in Thai and I couldn't read them, never mind that most of the villages have no phone signal and couldn't be contacted, or even the fact that most of the people I spoke to didn't know what I was talking about.

The 30 available places were soon filled yet still people continued to apply throughout the week, bringing the total number of applicants to an amazing 200. Everyone from the *roti* (Pancake) lady to the token Bob Marley look-a-like was interested in joining the classes. The overwhelming response was a clear indication of the enthusiasm of the locals to learn and of NATR's respect within the community. Whatever. I had other things on my mind. As application forms piled up I could see nothing but chaos ahead for the start of the classes that very weekend. Expectations were high, the question was could we deliver?

After spending the whole week on the phone telling people whether they had a place or not and constructing a complicated registration form that would allow us to locate each student's details, Saturday finally arrived. Do you think the people I had called and confirmed with showed up on the day? No. Do you think that the people who didn't have a confirmed place, showed up? Yes? Did 50 per cent of the people who showed up on the day bring along their aunt, uncle, sister, brother, daughter, son and their hairdresser in hope of a place? Of course they did! Did we have another 40 walk-in applicants on the day. Oh yes indeed! The result? Utter confusion!

The only question that we have to concern ourselves with is, did everything work out perfectly in the end? Of course it did, but only because of hard work, dedication and excellent riot control skills of the staff on that day.

In one of Bodhi's previous ramblings, he mentioned "surfing the chaos." After only one week at NATR, I now appreciate what this really means.

Project Updates

Training Resource & Education Centre - Grand Opening

On February 9th the vision of a Training Resource & Education Centre in Kuraburi became a reality. Over 150 people, a combination of community members, relief organizations, government officials and others, joined together for the Grand Opening. The day began with inspirational words of support from



the District Governor, followed by an overview of how TREC came to be, the road from disaster relief to the creation of real opportunities and empowerment. Other organizations had the chance to speak of what the future holds for their programs and the event was capped off with song and dance provided by the children of Tapa Yoi, and a feast of amazing food and drink. A round table meeting was conducted in the afternoon in order to discuss the potential for inter organizational cooperation and coordination. This provided a good arena for discussions of lessons learned and future projects in the Phang Nga Region.



English & Computer Lessons at TREC

In addition to continuing English lessons in the villages, we have just started a new English programme based in our purpose built bamboo classroom at TREC. We hope that a relaxed atmosphere and some fun activities will provide a contrast to the school-days experience of language learning; building confidence and motivating students to complete the 6 month course. Our Computer lessons have also begun with huge success. The community response to the offer of free English and Computer lessons has been extremely positive (and overwhelming), proving that NATR is continuing to meet the needs of villagers and people living in Kuraburi.



Although English and Computer training for the ACE experts has not yet begun, curriculum development is well underway. The English & Computer ACE expert curriculums will provide trainees with the language and computer skills necessary to fully embrace their new role as ACE experts and will include field trips to see how and when those skills are put to use in the eco-tourism industry.

ACE Expert Outreach

Initially, the thought of training 20-25 individuals to become ACE Experts was a dream that NATR had. We were unsure of the number of applicants we would receive due to the distance some people may have to travel and the time commitment involved. Thus far we have received over 100 applications! This is more interest than we ever hoped for and we look forward to the interview, testing and screening sessions in order to identify individuals who are truly motivated to follow the course through to the end, in order to benefit not only themselves but the future of their communities.



Community-based Tourism Journalist trip

The communities of Pak Trium and Tung Nang Dam hosted a 'fam' trip for international journalists from Singapore, Canada and Thailand. The journalists were given a warm introduction to village life by participating in daily activities such as, fishing, making tie dye and preparing handmade rice cakes. They took a boat trip in the mangroves, snorkeled off a coral island and watched the sunset over the distant Surins. However, it was the people, the spirit of hospitality and the spectacular setting which seemed to impress them the most. To follow is an extract from an article by Jared Young, a journalist on the trip:



"On this particular trip, our homestay patron is a man named Somporn. We will be staying in his home, a two-story Thai-style house surrounded by a lush garden and roving goats. Like everyone we have so far met, Somporn is eager to share with us the details of his life; he waxes philosophical on topics ranging from politics to economics to the genetics of his family tree. What we learn about the culture and history of the area, we learn from Somporn. And then some (for a seventy year-old man, he is inexhaustible).



*Our dinner is prepared by Somporn's family, and we eat together, cross-legged on the floor. Southern curry and chili paste and fried squid (the quality of which you might find in a gourmet restaurant). In the evening, after we chat with some of the villagers over coffee and tea, we retire to bed: we have been given the largest room in the house, bedecked with mosquito nets and overlooking the garden. In every minor detail of our accommodation, the Thai virtue of **jai-gwaang** (giving heart) is evident: we are not paying customers; we are guests of honor."*

Tourism Survey

In response to communities' strong commitment to developing Community-based Tourism (CBT), NATR has been conducting a tourism survey on behalf of the CBT villages. These villages see the potential for tourism presented by the steady flow of tourists to the Surin Islands. Currently the majority of tourists that pass through Kuraburi seldom stop for longer than a night and have very little awareness of the opportunity for visiting local villages and participating in Community-based tourism. The survey seeks to build a profile of current visitors to the area; exploring their interests and the potential for marketing Adventure, Community-based and Eco (ACE) Tourism. The survey has presented a valuable opportunity for spreading the word about CBT and many people in the survey have been keen to learn more. Some have even changed their plans to stay longer and take part in village tours.



Construction Projects

The **Tung Dap Water Tower** is moving onwards and upwards, much to the delight of the villagers. It now stands over 15 feet tall and offers an amazing view of the island. The Water Tower committee, engineer and construction workers are confident that the tower will be completed within in a month.



The **Tung Nang Dam Bridge** construction has begun. As can be seen in the photo to the left, the existing bridge is narrow and unsteady. Only wide enough for one person to pass at a time, the acts of transporting fish, laundry and families through the mangroves to the village is a daily challenge. The construction process is being overseen by the Tung Nang Dam Bridge committee which will ensure that the villager's wants and needs are taken into consideration. The community waits in anticipation for completion of the new bridge.



Visitors and Volunteers



Jamie and Helen arrived at the beginning of the month, they immediately integrated themselves into NATR during a time of planning, change and opportunity. They have become an indispensable part of our English Training program as certified teachers. They are the brains behind our English curriculum design.



Kelly May has already taken on a variety of different roles at NATR. She brings her marketing, public relations and networking skills as well as her ability to speak fluent Thai. Her warm personality and enthusiasm have been a great addition to the team.