



## Update 22

April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006

### **Bodhi's Ramblings**

Many of you may have been hearing about the recent political turmoil in Thailand. To summarize, the Prime Minister recently sold his company (including airlines, cellular service providers, satellites, and a vast media network) to a Singaporean firm, pulling in a whopping, and tax-free, \$2 billion USD in profit. Opposition parties, and a civilian group known as the People's Alliance for Democracy, have called for his resignation, citing the recent sale as only one in a long line of crony-capitalist power grabs. Far away from the protests...

As I see it, there are three main points of relevancy to NATR:

- ❖ The recent protests are nonviolent, and democratic in as much as they are against a legitimately elected politician, and are seeking to replace him through basically democratic processes. I do not sense the threat of mass instability.
- ❖ The protests are limited to mostly Bangkok, and the rest of the nation seems to either support Thaksin, fails to see a better alternative, or are more concerned with the affairs of daily life. The political atmosphere in Kuraburi seems to be unchanged.
- ❖ NATR as an organization has absolutely no opinion on the matter. Since it is not relevant to our work at this time, NATR's energy is better spent serving local communities. Personally, I am here as a guest of the Thai people, and I respect the choices they make politically. Perhaps a more universal respect for the internal politics of all nations would leave this world a safer place.

Here in Kuraburi, our hard work continues, as do our successes. I am very pleased to announce that we have completed our first major construction project – the Tung Dap Water Tower. At 40 feet tall, and with a 10,000 litre tank, it is a truly impressive structure. The design and construction process were all managed by the Water Tower Committee - a group of 15 villagers including the chief, municipal official, land owner, and other residents of Tung Dap. At over one million baht, the tower was NATR's biggest project to date, and was supported entirely by Rotary.

In fact, financial support from the Rotary Club of Koh Samui (ROCKS) has enabled many of NATR's long-term projects, including scholarships, free education at TREC, and of course, the Tung Dap Water Tower. Through the initial help of Patong Rotary, and ROCKS's subsequent hard work and dedication, NATR has worked with Rotary Clubs from Houston and Lake Tahoe to Tormohun, England and Kings Island, Australia.

As NATR continues with long-term community development, we would like to make sure that our sponsors receive the recognition they deserve. To that end, we will be happy to include mentions of ongoing project sponsors by request. Just as NATR was fortunate enough to have so many supporters in the months after the tsunami, we are very lucky to have partners that continue to raise funds for the communities we serve. This combination has allowed NATR to do highly successful tsunami relief, and then follow through with the community development so often forgotten in the aftermath of disaster.

**So, a big thank you to Rotary and all of our continuing sponsors.**

## Project Updates

### ACE Expert Interviews & Final Selection



ACE Expert Applicants

After having passed the first round of interviews and tests, forty individuals were called back for a second final interview process. The interviews took place over three days, making for an extremely rigorous schedule. The questions asked were chosen in order to highlight the skills and vision that are needed to succeed in the ACE Expert program. On March 31<sup>st</sup> the final selection of participants was made! Twenty-six individuals have been chosen to participate in our Adventure, Community-based, & Eco Tourism Training program. Training and classes are set to begin April 18<sup>th</sup>. Seeing the entire group of applicants gather together for the interviews truly emphasized the scope of this project. This program will help give them the tools and knowledge they need to better not only themselves but their communities as a whole. Only three weeks until the program begins!

### National Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Standards Workshop

In recognition of the important work carried out by NATR with tsunami-affected villages in developing tourism that is truly community-driven, the organizers of this groundbreaking workshop invited NATR to help develop a nationwide standard for CBT. Like many tourism buzz words that have gone before it, such as eco-tourism, agrotourism, homestay, and so on, there is much confusion about what CBT really means. Many communities and tourism businesses are ready to jump on the bandwagon of the next tourism trend, thus degenerating the term and creating confusion for tourists. In Thailand the growing popularity of CBT has led CBT communities to realize both the potential for their product, as well as the urgency to define its qualities and to set standards that allow consumers to make informed choices. Setting CBT standards creates an opportunity to engage communities in a process which ensures CBT reaches its core goals of cultural exchange, natural resource management and community development. The two-day workshop set in motion a six month process in which CBT communities, with the support of a panel of advisors (including NATR), set a standard that can be applied to all genuine CBT communities.



### The Growing Momentum of Community-Based Tourism



This month has heralded a renewed spirit of trust with the community of Pak Triam, a community seeking to develop CBT but initially reluctant to form links with yet another NGO. However, the village approached us requesting support in developing and promoting their CBT activities. NATR has welcomed this opportunity to support their program and to strengthen a regional collaboration of community-driven tourism initiatives. As a consequence, the NATR team was invited to participate in a night fishing tour, which we enthusiastically accepted.

Our first CBT “voluntourists” arrived this month; two GAP year students Julia Hussey and Sally Gantlett from the UK. They came to help develop the CBT program by doing the tough job of trialing activities and testing out the food (for which there was apparently little room for improvement). They also spent a week doing community work in Pak Triam; helping look after children in the daycare centre, making signs for a nature trail and digging the community vegetable plot. Although a lot of fun was had, the work has real importance to the villagers, who rely on their feedback to evolve high standards which will enable tourism to be a realistic option for the future.



Julia & Sally in Pak Triam doing Tye Die  
© Mike Naiman

*‘Ultimately, the experience of visiting and living in these villages has been the most amazing experience; touching and unforgettable. I will never forget the beautiful things we have seen and the truly inspirational people we have met.’*

- Julia Hussey, CBT participant

If you would like to read about Julia and Sally's visit, they have written accounts which will be posted on our website [www.northandamantsunamirelief.com](http://www.northandamantsunamirelief.com). If you would like to get involved in this type of volunteering and have fascinating insight into the lives of these traditional communities, please email us at [relieffund@inet.co.th](mailto:relieffund@inet.co.th).

Also on the CBT front, NATR has broadened its alliance with Crooked Trails, a US-based non-profit that offers CBT tours to Peru, Nepal, Africa, India, Vietnam, and Thailand. Crooked Trails helped recruit volunteers for NATR in the weeks after the tsunami; now they plan to include several of the tsunami-impacted coastal villages NATR works with as part of their CBT itinerary when they journey to Thailand in November. NATR and the communities are very excited to work with them! To learn more about Crooked Trails, visit their website at [www.crookedtrails.com](http://www.crookedtrails.com).

## Construction

### Tung Dap Water Tower

The Rotary Club of Koh Samui visited the island of Koh Phra Thong this month in order to view the progress of the Water Tower Project in Tung Dap. The date for the Grand Opening has been set for Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> of April. Much appreciation goes out to everyone who has been involved in this project. NATR cordially invites all interested parties to attend the Ceremony. Boats leave from Tung La Ong pier at 9:30am sharp! Please RSVP.



ROCKS

### Tung Nang Dam Bridge



Construction continues and the bridge gets steadily longer and wider. The difference this new bridge will make for the village is immense. Daily life and work will be much easier and even faster once construction is finished. The bridge is near completion and the maiden voyage will be enjoyed by all those who have braved the bridge in the past.



## Visitors and Volunteers

Erik Rogers returns to NATR! He is teaching English at TREC on weekends, and helping the English team design the curriculum for both the general and ACE Expert programs. He is also very busy with website improvements and updates. We are very pleased to have him back.



NATR also welcomes two new Thai staff members to the team. Suwanna Ananthakal (Su) brings her handicrafts skills, computer software knowledge, local network and enthusiastic smile to NATR. Sonthorn Thongprasert (Mustafah) is a leading member of our ACE curriculum design team and training staff. He brings extensive guide training & facilitation experience to our projects.

Raven Nielsen arrived at NATR on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March full of ideas and expertise for our handicrafts programs. She has a great deal of insight concerning international fair trade markets and how the handicraft groups can best move forward. She helped to set beautiful product lines for both the card and soap groups, define a marketing time line and also add many contacts and resources to our network database. She held extremely productive workshops and offered much sound sensitive advice.



Su & Raven



This month we say a sad goodbye to Phylippa, one of NATR's longest serving volunteers. She has seen the transformations, the ups and downs, and has served unconditionally with open arms and an open heart. She leaves behind many great memories, and we all wish her nothing but great things for the future.



Danai Thewphini & Surasak Hanjirayornyingwah from Bangkok visited Kuraburi for three days. They overhauled our computer network, installed the internet connection on our teaching computers and fixed every other existing IT problem they could find. Many thanks are in order for their hard work and patience!

