



Update 23

May 3rd, 2006

Jamie's Jabbering

Resistance is futile...Water is life

Wow ... things are moving fast here in Kuraburi. Our long-term projects, in pre-production for some time now, are in full swing. Our TREC centre is alive with students, staff, and visiting speakers. And if you know Mr. Bodhi Garrett, then you also know he can't help himself when it comes to welcoming new people.

With three new members of staff in recent weeks and our 25 ACE Expert trainees arriving, Bodhi is positively beside himself, busy as a beaver, and *wa?*ing like his life depended on it. So... fortunately or unfortunately for all you eager readers, I have been charged with warbling and writing. Below is a description of our recent adventures for the Thai New Year, followed by the regularly scheduled update.

NATR staff was all too aware this explosion of activity was coming. Our daily diet of meetings, planning, flow charts, phone-calls and Lipton tea was soon to be a distant memory. Yet, just before the working maelstrom descended, there was Songkran – four whole days of holiday across the country to ring in the Thai New Year.

For New Year back home, in Scotland, you kiss anyone you can get your mitts on. Don't worry, before five of us packed up into the pickup truck and headed for Krabi, I learned that in *this* country there was a traditional water blessing associated with the celebrations. I was informed of a relatively sedate tradition: some water over your feet, that sort of thing.

In Krabi we got up early and went for breakfast. All was well, and reasonably quiet. Upon leaving however, and turning the corner, we were accosted by one middle-aged woman and her young son. They fired water at us with small water pistols. No words. No explanation. Just water in yer face. We were unarmed, disarmed but pleasantly cooler.

A brief stop later and we had two water guns (not surprisingly, there were two Californians within our party). After some brief skirmishes, we decided to take to the truck. Bad idea. We were now one driver – locked safely in the cab – and four ... well ... victims. We had one working water pistol between us. It was a massacre. Every passing truck had at least a 50 gallon bucket in the back, often chilled with a massive block of ice.

Our gallant crew looked pathetically bedraggled. We were desperate to buy a bucket. Hallelujah! We actually found an entire store filled with buckets, and we knew this was a special day. We spent the next six hours amongst the now heaving mass of traffic and foot soldiers. We could return fire. We could ambush. We could laugh. We were the mobile farang target, and we were loved for it. Hooray for Songkran! Hooray for Thailand!

We returned to Kuraburi, to the exciting hands-on phase of our projects, with new cat-like reflexes, an appetite for meeting new people and, thankfully, with the rainy season approaching, a whole new resistance to water.

Project Updates

Start of ACE Expert Training Program

We have welcomed the 25 ACE Expert students into TREC and the centre is now buzzing with energy during their three days of training per week. As well as NATR-led workshops, the trainees will also have visiting speakers offering their expertise and experience. Khao – from John Gray’s Sea Canoe in Phuket – was the first, giving insights into hospitality and safety. The eager students also receive English and Computing lessons. Later this month, we will attend a training hosted by REST – Thailand’s leaders in community-based tourism. Anyone wishing to see full profiles of our ACE Experts, or sponsor one of them, is welcome to contact us.



ACE Expert Koh Surin Marine National Park Trip

Our first field training was held on Koh Surin – this enabled NATR staff to focus guiding and language lessons on the premier tourism destination in the area ... and also to try and get a tan.

ACE trainees and trainers took part in a snorkeling expedition and visited the Moken village on the island. As well as English lessons on the beach and lectures on tourism, ACE trainees were given the opportunity to interview tourists staying on Koh Surin and they gave group presentations on their own experiences as tourists on the island. Trainees were then invited to interview the chief of the Moken village about the impact of tourism on his community. We thank Song, who runs Cultural Rediscovery programs, for his workshops.



Bracing themselves against seasickness and pelting rain, the ACE trainees nevertheless gained invaluable experience during the 3-day visit which will continue to be revisited throughout their six-month training programme. The entire team is now preparing for, and looking forward to, their next field trip to Khao Sok National Park this month.

Art Therapy Workshops

During the first week of April, Jannine Pickwell from LELA Art Therapy came to work with NATR. Over a three day period we conducted three fun and interactive workshops with children from three villages. Luckily, there were more than three children in attendance – 60 in all.

Part of this process was to train facilitators, teachers, nannies and other motivated community members to conduct art in the future. The workshops proved to be extremely popular – TREC’s classroom walls will soon be adorned with the children’s work – and the aim is to integrate this kind of youth development program into our ACE Expert training.



Laem Naew and Ban Talae Nok Sports Day

On April 12th, led by the effervescent Jess and brilliantly inventive Tuch, Ban Talae Nok hosted a sports day with NATR for Laem Naew.



Participants split into different age groups and activities and the day was started with Tuch's ingenuous relay game for the youngsters. After retrieving coins from a plate full of talcum powder the kids devoured a bunch of bananas, and then had to thread a needle and finally finish by blowing up a balloon until it burst.

After the participants and spectators had come down from the giddy heights generated by Tuch's game, activities became a little more conventional but no less entertaining: Tug-O-War, badminton, dacraw, volleyball and football.

The big event was the football showdown between Laem Naew and Ban Talae Nok. With large vocal support, the home side ran out 3-1 winners.

The day ended with lunch and entertainment from the Ban Talae Nok youngsters who performed a series of dance routines that had the crowd entranced. It was the perfect morning with which to launch into the spirit of the four-day Songkran festival.



Raderstof CBT Group

Our Community-based Tourism villages successfully hosted their first 'family,' the delightful Raderstofs. Daddy Scott, Mummy Juellen, Bodacious Ben, Mad Max and Crazy Quin visited in April all the way from America. They visited our three main villages, staying in homestays with host families throughout their trip. With boundless energy, enthusiasm, and a 'try anything' attitude, the whole family embodied the spirit of CBT and really bonded with the families and communities they met. The family also took an emotional trip back to Koh Phra Thong, where they were staying when the tsunami hit. Despite their traumatic ordeal, the family was an example of how strength, optimism and unity have the power to overcome any adversity. Everyone fell instantly in love with the cheeky, but charming Crazy Quin, whose laughter was as infectious as his smile. Come back soon!

Website Update

With an Internet connection and a crack team of web development experts in-house, NATR is now well positioned to drastically update the content of its website. We recently added an 'acknowledgements' section and updated our mission statement to reflect our evolution from direct, post-tsunami aid to community training and development. In that same spirit, we're now ready to add information about our current programs, including Community-Based Tourism (CBT); Adventure, Community, and Eco (ACE) guiding; community English; and Tsunami Handicrafts. The fruits of our labor should start to bloom later this month, so stop by www.northandamantsunamirelief.com when you're surfing the web and see what's new.

Ban Talae Nok One Day Foot Massage Course

To determine growing interest in Thai massage training, Ban Talae Nok hosted a one day foot massage course. Simon Gall and a Thai instructor from the London School of Thai Massage came and trained five people. They have now been certified by the school and are eager for more. P. Gaan, the Ban Talae Nok community centre manager, is hoping to conduct a full massage course in the village soon.

Scholarship Interviews



With our ACE Expert students present, TREC has never been busier. But the community feeling at NATR just kept growing this month as the local children on scholarships began their scheduled visits with their families.

Part of the ongoing scholarship process is to have interviews to discuss the child's last term, their marks and progress. Each child also brings a personal letter or drawing, some way of expressing how they feel about their own development both in school and at home.



With 125 scholarships the interview process will be continuing for a while. No one at NATR will mind. The chance to play games and draw with the children while they are at TREC is a perfect distraction from the resident mosquitoes and ice crusher next door.

We would like to thank the following for their continual support of the scholarships: Tanglin Trust, Whatever, Ander Memorial Fund, Annika Linden Foundation, A Simple Act of Love, Rotary Club of Koh Samui, Ann Daniels, Courtney Purchon, Lucy Needham, Mark Raderstorff, Helen Porter, Helen Doron and Math Jogs.



Construction: Tung Dap Water Tower and Tung Nang Dam Bridge Opening

April saw the completion of two large-scale construction projects. First up, the Tung Dap water tower. Started in November 2005, the giant structure was officially unveiled with a ceremony and the usual array of to-die-for gourmet food in the village.



The Rotary Clubs of Tahoe City in California and Koh Samui funded the project and some members were present. They also provided NATR with t-shirts, almost doubling our wardrobes. Thanks guys!

In tandem with the water tower construction is a deep well project. This project will provide Tung Dap with water throughout the dry season and is being supported by the rotary clubs of Tormuhon in Devon and, again, our friends Koh Samui.



The other project that reached completion was the Tung Nang Dam bridge. With the threat of disappearing between the gaps in the rickety planks gone, NATR went to investigate, and jumped around on the bridge a bit. It's good!

Replaced by smooth concrete that enables even motorbike access through the mangroves, the vastly improved pier access means so much to the villagers who can now transport goods and people safely and quickly.



A big thank you to the British Women's Group and Lichtblick fuer Katastrophenopfer e.V who have supported this project since construction began in December 2005.

Handicraft Road Trip and Design Workshop

This month Khun Deang and her all-Thai team from the Industrial Design initiative came to Kuraburi. The ID team donated their time to do workshops with the paper, soap, boat, and tie-dye groups, helping them widen their creative perspective and give solid advice for developing new products. On behalf of all the groups we would like to thank everyone involved and we look forward to their follow up visit in six months time.



Soon after, we ventured forth on a marketing trip – the first for our handicraft groups. With this month's Thai Craft sale (www.thaicraft.org) dedicated to the 'Exotic South', the twice yearly 'OTOP to the World' happening in Bangkok, and with 'Bangkok International Gift Exhibitions' on at the Impact Arena, it was the perfect time to start.



The highlights included a meeting with the sales manager for the OTOPTOP Shop Bangkok where we agreed to be a part of their in-store Tsunami Crafts line. And at Thai Craft there was some much needed sales generated for all the handicraft groups and plenty of product feedback. At the Impact Arena the groups undertook some product research and were exposed to the handicraft market first hand. Each team took advantage of the shows, networking with other producers and checking out the latest trends. The groups are continually developing new designs and we have a full catalogue available via email.

Visitors and Volunteers

During Charlotte Johnston's six months at NATR, Community Based Tourism (CBT) jumped from being a concept to a fully-investigated, piloted, and developed practice in the villages NATR serves. Charlotte, in a close working partnership with Responsible Ecological Social Tours (REST), ensured NATR led the way with quintessential standardisation of what CBT is, could be, and should be. CBT is fast becoming the alternative method of tourism in Thailand and is already a buzzword worth Googling. Thanks to Charlotte and REST, NATR has helped bring this non-intrusive, politically and religiously sensitive, and culturally stimulating form of tourism to the Andaman coast. On a personal note, the NATR staffs mourning her exodus back to sunny Britain. No more delicious ratatouille. No more perfect diction. Charlotte, we miss you n' that!



There has been a lot of searching going on in recent weeks at NATR. No, nothing spiritual, we needed a computer teacher. Finally, Dear has just joined us from Bangkok. Armed with some lessons he sent ahead, it was all hands on deck until his arrival. Kelly 'is this thing on?' May led the initial lessons with help from Sonthorn 'I'm no good with computers' Thongprasert in Dear's absence. The dynamic duo is now considering an alternative career in IT.

Andaman Discoveries

Isn't it time you had a holiday?

There's never been a better time to visit our delightful part of the world as our North Andaman community-based tourism programme is gaining momentum. Being some of the first people to visit the local villages, you'll experience genuine warmth and an authenticity that can't be replicated in a regular hotel or guesthouse. Everyone can do "their bit" to help rebuild communities and villages that were left devastated by the tsunami of 2004, just come, visit and enjoy!



© Craig Lovell



© Craig Lovell

Villagers are opening up their homes and lives to visitors, allowing them to experience their fascinating cultures and communities, in an authentic and non-intrusive way, something which NATR is helping to promote.

Stay with a friendly host family in a cozy homestay, during which you'll learn about their traditional lives and livelihoods. During your stay you'll eat with the family and dine on a culinary feast of mouth-watering Southern curries, freshly caught seafood and locally grown vegetables all expertly prepared by the family.

As guests of the villagers you'll get the chance to join in many traditional activities including fishing, rubber tapping and harvesting cashew nuts. There's also the chance to explore the diverse untouched eco-systems via long-tail boat trips through dense mangrove forests, take treks through virgin forests teeming with exotic wildlife and snorkel in the crystal-clear waters of the Andaman. The region also boasts long stretches of palm-fringed deserted beaches, the perfect place to chill out while watching a stunning sunset.



© Mike Naiman



© Craig Lovell

Throughout your entire trip you'll be accompanied by an English-speaking guide to ensure that you'll be able to fully engage with the locals that you meet.

Activities include:

- ❖ Exploring dense mangrove forests in traditional long-tail fishing boat or canoe with local expert followed by a mouthwatering lunch on a floating fish-farm.
- ❖ Trekking through lush forests to stunning viewpoints to learn about the local eco-system.
- ❖ Hands-on traditional fishing with a friendly group of local fishermen (optional night-fishing available).
- ❖ Snorkeling in warm tropical waters teeming with colorful fish and vibrant corals around uninhabited islands.
- ❖ Harvesting and roasting cashew nuts over an open fire with locals.
- ❖ Wandering through peaceful rubber plantations and seeing how natural rubber is made.
- ❖ Visiting villages to meet with local people and experiencing first hand the warmth of Thai hospitality.
- ❖ Watching handicraft-collective demonstrations and joining in the messy fun to create everything from sticky-rice cakes to natural handmade soaps and beautiful tie-dyed cloth.
- ❖ Visiting tsunami memorial sites and hearing about the inspiring stories of strength, determination and hope for a better future.



© Craig Lovell

The usual length of tour is three to five days but it is possible to arrange shorter or longer visits. Prices vary according to group size and activities, however, a typical three day and two night tour including food, accommodation, activities and transfers, for a group of four people, costs on average USD38 (1,500 baht) per person, per day and includes an English speaking guide.