



Update 24

June 1st, 2006

Bodhi's Ramblings – One and a half years later

Time flows like a river across the landscape of our lives – predictably, the water makes its way to sea, following the inevitable laws of gravity. On the journey, though, its pace varies from narrow channel to swirling eddy to calm pool. And then there are the seasons, think of them like monsoons, when this orderly procession is overwhelmed, and the days and months rush by with reckless abandon.

These monsoons are the progenitors of new ideas, new ways of living, new ways of seeing the world – we can't control the flow, but we can certainly learn from it. Ironically, the most important times in our lives are those that we have the least time to appreciate.

Within a year after the tsunami, life for most affected villagers had settled into a pattern again. Here at NATR, it has taken another half year of hard work and incredible effort to set up long-term programs that truly meet local needs. So, it seems our monsoon, the raging torrent of time that has been the last 18 months of our lives, may finally be coming to an end. NATR is becoming, dare I say, a well organized community development outfit. This is a blessing in two respects – time to appreciate the work we have done, and time to plan for the future.

We have recently found long-term support for our vocational training and community education programs. This adds a certain financial weight to the oft-stated claim that NATR's "disaster to development" model is viable. Anyhow, it seems very clear that the following programs will continue beyond NATR's originally planned two-year lifespan – community-based tourism development, scholarships, English and computer education, and ACE Expert training. Our work will focus not only on making these programs successful locally, but also making them replicable in other locations. Already, our in-village English lessons have been copied by a number of other groups, and the Ministry of Tourism is studying our vocational training methods.

This triumph is not the work of a rambling director, but the focused efforts of NATR's talented staff – now at 17 people. They, like so many of you that read this message, have found a way to meet their own needs while helping others. So, as we rush through the busy days that fill our lives, let us pause to recognize the compassion and wisdom that surrounds us – and ask ourselves, in the words of Kurt Vonnegut, "If this isn't nice, what is?"

Project Updates

Tung Dap Deep Well – It's well deep

After last month's *The Two Water Towers* comes: *The Return of the Well* – both currently running in Tung Dap.

With the completion of our final construction project, the village will soon enjoy water of higher quality and, finally, all year round. Until now, the dry season had left many families with irregular access to water. Furthermore, SDC (the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency) is utilizing the well to provide water to the local school.



ACE Program - Koh Yao Noi with Responsible Ecological Social Tours

'Give us a **REST**' have been the whippers from our ACE Experts after a busy month of May beyond the confines of our non-Elephant proof bamboo classroom walls. One moment the trainees were shielding their ears from the screeching cicadas in the deep dark jungle of Khao Sok, the next, strolling with mouths agape along the resort-gone-mad beach of Patong. We finished them off with an 'evening of entertainment' in Phuket.



Squeezed into the cab of our pickup there have also been visits to Naka National Park and a day of hospitality (training) while paddling the caves in Phang-Nga bay with John Gray's Sea Canoe. And no more than a stone's throw from there, the island of Koh Yao Noi, a place considered the model for Community Based Tourism (CBT) in Thailand after ten years experience.

It's a community that came together to decide its future and then saw those ambitions fulfilled through a mixture of resource conservation and supplementary income from tourism. NATR put on the old socks under the sandals and asked questions for five days.

Facilitated by (give us a) REST, our trainees were given assignments to explore the benefits and drawbacks of CBT on Koh Yao Noi and how these would affect their own communities' consideration of CBT. The trainees concluded a deep cultural exchange with the Koh Yao Noi community by presenting to them a series of inspiring examinations of their own villages.

Sense of Place

Our ACE Experts want to tell people all about their particular corner of the world. P Lak has been helping them achieve this with an ongoing project, 'Sense of Place,' that involved handing them all disposable cameras this month. They've been nagging elders for forgotten details, gathering local histories and studiously replacing phrases like 'the spiky red one that smells like cat' with the correct scientific terminology. To conclude, with their roll of film they will tell a personal story.

Youth Development – Soccer (FOOTBALL!) Day Camps



The glorious game really is the universal language. My Thai is terrible, so trust me on this. But let's be clear on one thing. It's not 'Soccer' ok. It's 'football'.

With World Cup fever descending (yes, a cup that actually involves the entire world) a local Kuraburi club offered to run camps.

Day one at Ban Talae Nok was interrupted by illness and injury to the leading staff so the kids had to make do with a day at the waterfall. Success was had the next week at Chaipattana, where the wee ruffians were taken through their paces ... or was that us being taken through our paces? Plans are afoot for intercommunity competitions to stretch off all those tired legs after eight hours a day of World Cup TV watching (I wish).

Handicrafts

OTOP a.k.a. One Tambon One Product (or to non-Thai speakers, 'one village one product', or the village formerly known as *aarrrrrgggghb...*) have a nationwide network of craft producers. The Soap, Card, Tie-Dye and Moken collectives are in a process of registering their wares with them as we speak. This holds the promise of access to a long-term sustainable market.

The Moken boats had the added bonus of receiving a 4-star rating. Please remember, you can order any of these products by contacting us: relieffund@inet.co.th



English

Meht's Meanderings: a personal account from Somchai Umsri



It is said that the early bird catches good worms. To the best of my knowledge this expression always tell me to be on time for my in-village class. The most challenging thing is that how can I print out and prepare my lesson plan to be ready on time during this hard rain and blackout. But good for me the electricity came back on later and I can print my teaching materials out.

My class was so fun and rowdy with a weeping baby who wants her mum to breastfeed her. The more attentive the mother is, the louder the baby yelps!!!! That's fine I had gone through this hardship for months since I started the in-village teaching. The greatest thing I have learnt is scrutinizing the needs of learners to find practical ways to convey the language they want to learn.

One of my students she asked me, "How can I speak in English if I want to put more rice on to the plate of my foreign guest? Last time, I just pulled and tugged their plate away from them. They looked very surprised, and I think that they did not know my intention, so I had to find someone who

can tell them that all I want to do is give them more rice."

I told my student that we do not have enough time to go over a hundred lessons to make them be perfect – just practice as much as possible, and you will be communicative within a short period of time.

Ban Talae Nok Community Centre



Day Care

Sshh. Sshh. Aww, look at the wee whipper-snappers. The current temporary school in the village is understaffed and too small to house the kindergarten group. NATR will now host the wee kiddies at our community centre and support the hiring of an assistant for the nanny, Saroh.

Senior Entertainment

The elderly of the community have been through more than most can expect in four lifetimes. Insomnia and general unrest have led the villagers to ask for support to provide distraction for them through CDs and videos. Obviously with one eye trained on Hollywood, they asked for traditional Thai entertainment. We are only too happy to oblige. Did anyone see X-Men III?

Visitors and Volunteers

Arrival of Chofah

Sshh. Sshh. Aww, will you just look at her? Hang on, what's that little girl? What did you say? 'NATR?' Aw.

P Tuch and P Iang had their hospital room invaded by curious NATR staff almost two months ago when their daughter Chofah arrived. She screamed at our interruption then. So we're sorry Chofah, but we've taken your mum back.



Website

Erik loves his job so much that this week he spent a large portion of it crashed out on the office floor. By day: a fearless English teacher. By night: a mad scientist designing complex HTML arrangements into beautiful websites. By 5am: crashed out on the office floor.

We had to coax him back to life with promises of imminent fame and fortune. So please check out the NEW AND IMPROVED NATR WEBSITE: www.northandamantsunamirelief.com

NATR is also looking for volunteers/specialists who can provide feedback on content and/or support with promotion for our upcoming Community Based Tourism and Handicraft websites.

Danai joins NATR team

Sometimes one can feel a little lost. Like Dustin Hoffman when's he's underwater in The Graduate. Well, this is Danai (right), computer and electronics expert, arrived to sort out our IT woes, during his first day with NATR.



Jessica Boucher leaves

Our resident rainbow Jes left this month, taking with her an Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life youthful energy that could fire up even a strawbale-plastering workshop. With a thesis to write, she has had to patrol the mangrove swamps, researching the effects of shrimp farms. Bon Voyage Jes! We'll miss you, you're irreplaceable...

So, ah, we are now looking for a new communications officer. Sorry Jes. A job description is available for anyone upon request.

Leo, from The Natural Guide

The Natural Guide offers an alternative to your Rough Guide and Lonely Planet by providing travelers with an ethical appraisal, and environmentally aware critique of tour operators, activities and businesses. Leo spent some time with us while exploring the Kuraburi region. We will be in the book coming out next year.