

Update 25

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006

### Laura Sees the Light – A month with NATR



June is a wet and wonderful experience in Kuraburi. During “green season” many of the staff share their modest accommodations with all sorts of uninvited guests. In true NATR fashion, most are welcomed as warmly as I was upon arrival; this wonderful little frog is a common house guest of English teachers Jamie & Helen.

And welcomed warmly I was. Despite the dark rain clouds overhead, a light was shining from an open door at the end of the main road in Kuraburi. What I discovered inside TREC was a team of bright and motivated people, working together for a common goal, and blessed with the inspiring leadership of a young man with a big heart. I was instantly put at ease by the friendly staff, and then promptly put to work.

The bright light seems to attract all who pass by - more interesting and less bulgy-eyed than Mr. Froggie were Alex, Martin and Max, who pulled in mid-month in a fully-kitted LandRover traveling overland from the UK to New Zealand. These “dangerously inspiring” (mused Erik) adventurers are collecting donations for CARE International along the way.



The sun broke through the clouds for one day – June 9<sup>th</sup>, to be exact - for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the King’s ascension to the throne. One day without rain was all we needed for our Staff Retreat. Sixteen of us headed to Phuket for go-karting, lunch and a movie.

Prize for most entertaining went to our Office Manager, Jo, who but for an unfortunate bang-up would have kicked butt on the track. Runner-up was Meht, a resident English teacher, who, never having driven in his life, gracefully smashed through the tire barrier and flattened the grass only to enter the track on the opposite side. Stick to your bicycle Meht!

Although with NATR for only one short month, this experience has given me a renewed sense of hope. The current, previous and future volunteers at NATR create a more prosperous future for others, people who were affected by a natural disaster over which they had no control, and in so doing, have found work that is meaningful.

I wish each of you – our kind and generous supporters - could bear witness to the extraordinary things that are happening in these small villages in Southern Thailand. If you do make it to Thailand, be sure to stop by; you’ll surely receive an unforgettable welcome.

### Project Updates

#### Marketing training proves successful as handicrafts sold to Phuket hotels

Four hotels in the Phuket area have agreed to sell soaps produced in Ban Talae Nok.

The Holiday Inn and Aspasia will provide the soaps in each of their rooms. Two others will sell them on-consignment in their gift shops.



After their classroom marketing training (pictured) the sales trip provided the real-life learning experience to “soap ladies” needed.

In other Handicraft news, Florida-based [Living Wage](#) has agreed to sell the handmade cards produced by the Bak Jok Paper Cooperative. New promotional materials for the cards, soaps and boats have also been produced. If you know of any local shops who may be interested in distributing any of our products, or for copies of the promotional materials, please contact [relieffund@inet.co.th](mailto:relieffund@inet.co.th).

### ACE Experts gain practical experience

Practical experience was the name of the game for the ACE Experts this month.



A three-day Study Tour was held in Le-Led, where all twenty-six of the ACE Experts were shown the mangrove conservation and canal cleaning efforts of the local community. They heard about the history of the area, including its strong Buddhist roots, during a visit to Wat Suanmoke. They also learned the classical Thai dance *Likepa*

(pictured). The study tour was part of their Community-based tourism training.



On June 9<sup>th</sup> the group donned their yellow t-shirts for some positive exposure in Kuraburi at the King’s Parade. The day ended with a candlelight procession, after which fireworks lit the night sky.

### Community-based Tourism (CBT)

Training the ACE Experts to be tourist guides has allowed natural linkages to form with the Community-based Tourism Programme. By providing tours to visitors, members of the ACE team have had the opportunity to put their English and guiding skills to the test.



Five ACE Experts took Carmen and Phillip, two American voluntourists, on a tour through the Muslim community of Ban Talae Nok, stopping to visit the gibbon sanctuary. After a boat trip through the mangrove forest, the group went fishing and was lucky enough to see a pod of dolphins.

Carmen & Phillip, who heard about NATR through the Rotary Club, spent two days with NATR translating marketing materials for the CBT programme into Spanish.

Two ACE Experts, Darunee and Somdej, took another visitor, Jason Rolan, on a world wind tour of Tung Nang Dam, old Pak Triam and Ban Talae Nok to learn about our

CBT activities. Jason works with the tour operator *North by North East*. He was in the area researching activities to incorporate into future tours.

Finally, the highlight of the month was the “Community Trails” day in which all the ACE Experts had the opportunity to lead tours to their villages. Below is one staff member’s experience.

### *Erik's "Community Trails" Experience: Teachers Are Making a Difference*

This is my first assignment as an English teacher, and I've discovered that results aren't always readily apparent in this line of work - I constantly second-guess my pace, methodology, and the logic of my lessons. So it was with great anticipation that we recently embarked on the "community trail" project with our class of ACE Experts; a unique opportunity for the English team to assess the student's new language skills in a real-life setting.

We donned our raingear early last Wednesday morning, foregoing our myriad office duties for the day to instead play tourists. Even the most torrential of monsoon rains couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of the ACE Experts, who were eager to show off the cultural and ecological features of their villages. It was the trial run, the culmination of weeks of intense preparation - they'd designed maps of their villages, identified the main highlights, and diligently practiced their new English skills. We broke into groups of roughly five guides each and set off for Ban Talae Nok, Koh Phratong, Tung Nang Dam, Pak Triam, and the village where I would spend the day, Kuraburi. After brief introductions in English we set off for the day's adventure.

The itinerary was impressive - over the course of six hours I was enlightened to the meaning of some Buddhist symbols and imagery at the local temple; learned about the art of making batik; harvested a medley of locally-grown fruits, including mangosteen, rambutan, durian, jackfruit, banana, and longan; toured rubber and oil palm plantations; visited a primary school; dug for beads at the site of a sunken Indonesian trade ship; and finally, met the local shaman. Who knew all this adventure could be found right here in Kuraburi? My guides used every available opportunity to communicate directly with me in English, whether to describe the local flora and fauna, quote crop yields, explain their culture and traditions, or inquire about my well being. The rest of the NATR staff had similar experiences with their guides.



The English team amassed both practical feedback about our work so far, as well as a bevy of future lesson plan ideas. Witnessing the students in action, and how much their confidence has grown since their training began a few months ago, I now view my work at NATR with a renewed sense of invigoration. We are making a difference.

### **NATR assists at English Camp for Youth Tourist Guides**

Thirty junior tour-guides from Wittaya School in Koh Yao Noi participated in an English camp this month organized by [REST \(Responsible Ecological Social Tours\)](#). NATR provided one of six volunteers who lead English lessons aimed at preparing students to tell tourists about their way of life.



The English camp was funded by Coastal Habitats & Resource Management (CHARM) - an EU/Royal Thai fisheries project working in partnership with REST.

### **To Die For...Chinese Noodles with Meht**

We went to Pak Triam class and had some to die for Chinese noodles with my students. It seemed a good day for all the ladies to put their noses to the grindstone with their big order of various types of tie dye products placed by the Princess Foundation in Bangkok. I saw a big bunch of tie dye with different patterns



on each of it. Consequently, I asked them how to explain to foreigners who want to be furnished with information about the tie dye. They said that they are all at sea as to how to explain. As a result, I have my every intention of providing this knowledge to them in my ESP program.

Having a great sympathy and help from my beloved Helen, the class run smoothly but not that perfectly. I sometimes lack the self-confidence to drill my students for the accuracy of their phonology. However, nothing can deflect me from trying to be close to the native speaker to be a good model. Realistically speaking, today's class is my training because our English crew had reached an agreement for peer teaching observation and above all Helen and Jamie, two pioneers will leave me behind for their being world trotters. I do not want to think of that tearful day for the farewell party to the two best friends and gifted teachers ever in my life.



I was very happy today because my students completed their tasks correctly one hundred percent and I had more little girls participating in the learning activities. In fact, Pak Triam students are so smart for their self-confidence to speak with all foreign people paying them a visit. So, I think that these children will be a powerful factor for the community development in the future. We were all happy and filled up to the brim with a big bunch of the Chinese noodles with traditional Muslim sauce and also with encouragement to continue our mission to teach these people to be practical enough for the upcoming tourism opportunity.

### Visitors and Volunteers

Bodhi's eternal glow is missed by all this month as he heads down the Grand Canyon on a well-deserved vacation. He's expected back at the end of July with new muscles.



Despite being at NATR for only a month, Laura Wesley (Communications Manager, pictured left) will have a lasting effect on all NATR programs. She has done invaluable work on our CBT website, and taught us all how to manipulate the web more effectively to share and promote our resources. She returns to bug-free Canada.



Pi Gaan has left on maternity leave and Pi Tim joins us as TREC housekeeper (pictured right).

Volunteer postings are now available on the [NATR website](#).