



Update 26

August 1st, 2006

Bodhi's Ramblings – Jumping In

Wow – I love vacation. Somewhere deep in the Grand Canyon, as I was jumping off a large cliff, it all fell into place – how and when NATR will settle into our long term programs. As of next year, our various programs will be managed by Thai staff, and work independently of each other. We have always been dedicated to turning NATR over to local control within two years.



Thai staff currently at NATR have expressed a strong interest in increasing their responsibility, and based on their strong performance in management and program design I believe they are ready for the job. The programs would likely continue to be housed under one roof, to save money and continue the strong inter-linkages and bonhomie that has developed. TREC is after all, and incredible facility; and the owner is a member of the local council.

So, we are currently planning the following programs for 2007:

- Long-term Scholarships
- Handicraft Sales and Development
- Youth Environmental Education and Waste Management
- Community Education (English and Computers)
- Community-based Tourism Development and Marketing
- Ban Talae Nok Community Center (Day Care, Handicrafts, and Social Programs)

For the time being, however, we have plenty of hard work in front of us until December. Our main task is doing a good job each day, but I thought I might take a moment to share some of the vision and forward thinking that we strive for at NATR.

Project Updates

ACE Expert Program – community trail finishes, business training begins

The ACE Experts have begun moving from training into implementation. After the trainees mapped and created a nature trail of their locale, the NATR staff were first to experience it. The Experts showed us in one day what would have taken us a year to discover. With the trails complete the Experts have new-found confidence in the beauty and importance of their villages and have begun participating in community-based tours and voluntourist home-stays.



Following the completion of the Community Trails, ACE training has now moved on to the business aspect of tourism. Professional trainers from ISMED (Institute for Small and Medium Enterprise Development) in Bangkok have agreed to lead the initial classes, training two days a week for five weeks. July 17th & 18th began the

program with Small Business & Entrepreneurship and Product Design With Marketing Concepts. NATR is confident that the ACE Experts will come out of this training with new ideas and concepts for their own budding tourism businesses.

Giving ACE Experts a voice

The ACE Experts have also been widening their horizons, attending various meetings regarding topics outside of NATR's curriculum. It's essential that villagers have representation at meetings and seminars organized in the region on the subject of the tsunami. ACE Expert Surasak Naumparn, from Ban Talae Nok, recently attended the "Approaches to Coastal Zone Management" seminar. Surasak represented ACE Experts and contributed to the lively discussions using examples from his village. The ACE Experts were also invited to make a presentation at a community-based tourism seminar, funded by the EU and organized by REST. The Experts spoke at some length about developing tourism in their villages, and summarized the skills they have been gaining in the ACE program. Other villagers were very interested in the process, as evidenced by the number of questions that were asked at the end of the presentation.

Andaman Discoveries



NATR's Community-Based Tourism project is now officially known as "Andaman Discoveries," a travel service offering customized Adventure, Community-based and Eco (ACE) tours in the tsunami-affected region of the North Andaman. Charlotte and Kelly's hard work is paying off as responsible tour operators have begun contacting us for trips into the villages that NATR has been working with.

Kelly represented Andaman Discoveries at the Tourism Authority of Thailand's recent opening ceremony in Phuket and networked with the major players in tourism in the region. Such contacts are vital for the future success of community-based tourism in the North Andaman, the ACE Experts, and Andaman Discoveries.

Ban Talae Nok – Massage course and senior entertainment

The massage course is now complete! Ten students participated and are now certified as masseuses. Fancy a community-based tour in Ban Talae Nok? You can now add a Thai massage to your itinerary. Ban Talae Nok has also started a Senior Entertainment project, led by Gaan (NATR's Ban Talae Nok Community Centre Manager). She is buying CDs and DVDs of traditional music and dance to keep the senior element entertained and untroubled by terrible Hollywood productions.

Community Based Tourism (CBT) – University of Birmingham volunteering

After months of hard work and preparation by Kelly and Chrlotte (NATR's marketing queens), 11 University of Birmingham students from the UK have finally arrived at NATR. The students, participating in the university's Intervol project, have spent time during the past year fundraising to assist NATR with its numerous projects. The students are "volountouring," helping out with the ACE Expert program, our CBT project and English program.



Students will be spending time in villages creating community information boards, painting village maps and piloting tours, all under the guidance of our ACE Experts, who have designed each activity. This picture is the final result of their Batik workshop during a Kuraburi CBT tour. The students will also be participating in the Naucrates Conservation Project, led by Monica and Claudio, assisting with some good-for-the-soul manual labour in mangrove restoration on Koh Phra Thong Island. The students have just returned from Tung Nang Dam where they helped homestay families improve their English, even teaching a variety of songs to aid pronunciation.

English – general class cycle 1 completes 6 months! New cycle to begin soon



We are proud to announce the completion of six months of English training at TREC. July 23rd was the marker. Congratulations to all students and teachers who have stuck through it all. It hasn't always been easy, with attendance up and down like a rollercoaster, mainly due to a long, hard monsoon season. A nerve-wracking (Erik: "Why am I more nervous than the students?") final exam comprising writing, speaking and listening was conducted and certificates are ready for all who attended, with at least four students receiving a *merit award*.

Computers – progress progress!

The general computer class has completed its section on Word. They took a test and certificates will be handed out to those with the required proficiency. The government section will sit the test in a week while the advanced course has already finished the PowerPoint section. They are still, unfortunately, having to crowd around computers like kids at the arcade, as we do not have enough for everyone – if anyone knows anyone who knows someone who wants to donate computers, please contact us! At the end of next month Dear, like the English teachers, will have the satisfaction of completing his first curriculum, at which time new classes will blossom and bloom, and we will all reflect on life's glorious perpetual cycle.



Jamie Jumps Ship

Where do I start? How can I sum this experience up? Definitely fun. Maybe spiritual. Certainly life-changing. Always challenging. Sometimes exhausting. Constantly exhilarating. And probably lots of other things that end in "ing".

You know you've done something worthwhile and personally fulfilling when you wake up one day to realize six months have flashed by. So much has happened on a personal as well as an organizational level in such a short amount of time. When I arrived at NATR back in February with my wife, Helen, it was all change. NATR was moving into a new space, both physically and spiritually. It was a difficult time to find one's feet. Especially when, like mine, they are so flat that walking on the stone floor gives you pain.

There was a new job to understand. New peers to flatter, make laugh and get to know. A different climate to grow accustomed to. A vastly different language to master (which, incidentally, I haven't). A melting pot of cultures to respect. And food to die for.

Looking back I'm proud of the way my wife and I acclimatized so quickly. Learning from our new Thai friends, we prioritized patience and understanding. We let time drift, made no rash judgments or decisions, and soaked up the ambience of our world, Thai-style. We've learned to accept fate. By refusing to get overwhelmed by a future you can't control, we understand now that the present is oh so more tangible. We will take it with us forever.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of our work here is its ongoing nature. There is no "end". We're dealing with people's lives, and the surprising idiosyncrasies and character that is entwined with them. So many of us are used to the 9-5. We expect closure. File this. Save that. The end. That isn't possible here. Our work is so enmeshed with how one lives one's life that there is no separation.



Ok, philosophical rant over. We know we now have a home in Thailand to return to. Many friends to keep in touch with. And a progressive organization to keep a watchful eye on. NATR may not exist in a year, certainly in its current form, but our dream is to return and visit the various villages on a

community-based tour, led by our intrepid ACE Experts. If this is possible, then our ongoing work will be, to create a paradox, complete.



Visitors and volunteers

Our TREC cleaner has had a baby girl! Congratulations P'Gaan. I think little Nattagan Pimargart wanted to go back into mummy where it was nice and warm, but I'm sure by now she's settled in nicely at home. Nicknamed June (presumably after the month that she was due...although she was late and only arrived in July!) the little one will have a good three months with her mum before we reclaim Gaan for ourselves. Have a good rest P'Gaan (if that's possible with a newborn).

Jamie and Helen have left to start a new life in New Zealand. They have both done an amazing job with English. Thanks so much guys for your six months of hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm. They both really got the program off the ground starting in February and although Jamie was only part time through most of it, his ideas and influence were invaluable. Helen headed up the program, becoming manager of all that involved English and did an incredible balancing act between ACE, General and CBT English, as well as outreach and communications for the program. Thank you a million times. We will miss you both dearly.



Our newest member of staff is Gordon Solway. He has come to NATR fresh from his English teaching course, and will be joining Erik and Meht on the English team. Coming from Scotland, he is here to replace outgoing Scots Jamie and Helen. Welcome Gordon! His wit and pool-hall skills have ensured a seamless slip into Kuraburi life! Here he is (left) on an ACE tour of Kuraburi and obviously enjoying his Thai food (although he did mention a craving for a deep-fried Mars bar!).



Bodhi's back! After a much needed six week holiday, involving rafting down the Grand Canyon and visiting friends and family in the US, Bodhi has returned to NATR rested and ready to resume his post as resident rap-artist/clown...I mean director. Big up yo' self, Bodhi!

Volunteer postings are now available on the [NATR website](#). We are still looking for TEFL/CELTA /TESOL trained English teachers. This is a great opportunity for new, or experienced, teachers to consolidate the work already done and take the program forward in exciting new directions. If you know anyone who is interested in volunteering for a few months, please contact us!