



Update 29

November 1st, 2006

Help NATR from the comfort of your own home:

Each of these is a part-time endeavor and would take at most a couple of hours a week. Please e-mail us at relieffund@inect.co.th for details. Also, volunteer and staff postings are available on the [NATR website](#).

- **Website marketing promotion**
- **Help generate Christmas Card sales for the Bak Jok Card Group**

Erik's Ramblings – There is a Season ...

The month of October will forever evoke in me the memory of walking under canopies of trees dressed in dramatic, blazing autumn colors; of crisp, frosty air permeated by the scent of a distant wood fire; the sight of pumpkins and apple cider for sale along roadside stands; and groves of sugar maples tapped to extract their sweet viscous syrup. In contrast to the diverse New England seasons of my childhood, there are approximately twelve hours of daylight whether it's June or December in southern Thailand; the trees that are tapped here ooze rubber, and the leaves remain a lush green all year round. But as the last puddles evaporate and we finally crawl out from under our rain ponchos, I can't help but notice that the seasons have a way of changing profoundly in Kuraburi as well.



This month marked perhaps the most significant milestone yet for the community-development phase of NATR's ongoing mission. TREC was a hive of activity for most of October as we entered the final chapter of our ACE Expert vocational training program, the climax of which was an extremely successful tourism conference. Now the twenty-two villagers who have essentially been the heart and soul of NATR for the past six months are ready to venture into the next phase of their journey, putting their new knowledge and skills to use in the community. As their primary English teacher for most of their training, I've observed firsthand the positive transformation we've affected in these resilient, dedicated human beings; it's hard to fathom that the confident community leaders we'll

say goodbye to soon are the same people who arrived here in April, painfully shy and unsure of themselves. Indeed, an incipient change of season is palpable at NATR, and as we transition into what's next, it's a time for us all to reflect on our work with pride.

On a final note, while the trees here may not be shedding their leaves, one snake has certainly shed its skin. Our housekeeper was greeted on a recent morning to the sight of a seven-foot-long discarded cobra skin in the bathroom of our community center. Even after nine months, life here is still full of surprises!

Project Updates

Sense of Place Book

As a key component of their vocational training, the ACE Expert team created a "Sense of Place" book, designed to showcase the culture and history of the local area from their perspective. After months of gathering pictures and describing what is important to them about their surroundings, the initial manuscript is nearly complete. Nat has been busy transforming stacks of information into a cohesive and engaging read, and we're eagerly anticipating the fruits of her labor. This project, now a year in the making and owing to generous funding from Rotary Club of Patong Beach, promises to be a fantastic one-hundred-plus page account about the local villages, life in Southern Thailand, and what makes this area special. The first version will be in Thai, hopefully followed by an English edition.

Community-Based Tourism



It's been a watershed month for CBT! After months of hard work, we successfully organized and hosted the first "Community-based Tourism in the North Andaman" conference on October 27th. The event took place at the town hall and was attended by over 160 people, including local government officials, community leaders, pioneers of community-based tourism, local businesses, regional handicraft cooperatives, and various members of the press. The conference was opened by the Head of District and included speeches from distinguished representatives of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the renowned Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association (TEATA).

The morning session was followed by an interactive group discussion workshop, creating a forum for communication between the different stakeholders involved in local planning and tourism. The conference was the first chance for many of the participants to discuss their needs and concerns in the area of tourism and future planning. The discussion groups demonstrated the possibility of a regional cooperative network between local government, businesses, and communities, with concrete economic, social, and environmental benefits for all.



Professional ACE Expert village displays, exhibits by local artisans, respected speakers and facilitators, and media coverage made for an enjoyable and well attended event, another NATR success that takes us one more step closer to our vision of creating a sustainable tourism network for the continued economic and social reconstruction of the region after the tsunami.



Following the conference, a team from Channel 11 Bangkok filmed homestay experiences in both Ban Talae Nok and Tung Nang Dam, while Channels 5 and 9 out of Phuket covered local tourism activities before heading out to Tung Nang Dam for a night. In addition to filming tourists engaged in local activities such as soap-making, rubber production, visiting fish farms, and helping cook regional dishes, the media also interviewed ACE Experts and village chiefs for their perspectives on community-based tourism in their villages. With good weather and great guides, all trips were successful. Channel 11 aired our coverage for four nights the following week.

ACE Expert Vocational Training

We practically had to hopscotch our way through the halls of TREC during the last weeks of October, as the ACE Experts appropriated almost every available nook and cranny of floor space as a staging area for assembling exhibits of their villages. In addition to preparing these professional displays, the students took a lead role in organizing the tourism conference this month, the culmination of their vocational training. The students gave presentations at the conference in which they described the highlights of their six-month training program at NATR, and outlined their proposals to help develop and assist their villages using their newly-acquired skills and experience.



With the conclusion of the tourism conference, the only remaining hurdles for the ACE Experts were final exams in English, computers, and a comprehensive written test. Mustafa, the lead ACE trainer, has been responsible for developing the final ACE exam, which will be given the first week of November. In addition, Mustafa has painstakingly compiled a comprehensive ACE reference manual, containing chapters on community-based tourism, community development, and a wealth of information about coastal eco-systems, coral reefs, and mangroves. Each student will receive a copy upon official completion of their training in November.

Handicrafts



A packaged BTN soap

The handicrafts team would like to thank our friends and supporters for visiting our new website and supporting our nascent online handicraft sales initiative—this month we received numerous domestic and international online orders! Based on customer feedback we’re continuing to optimize the website to improve functionality and streamline the ordering process. Furthermore, in response to increasing sales, we’re also busy working with the villagers to implement more efficient production methods, such as creating uniform packaging for soaps.

This month we also participated in the International Business Association of Phuket (IBAP) Business Fair. The endeavor was a great success, yielding even more orders (we sold out each day!), and free website promotion and radio air time on 95 Phuket FM to further our marketing efforts.

We encourage you to order holiday cards and help the Bak Jok card-making collective. You can order cards and other handicrafts produced by tsunami-affected artisans online at www.tsunamicrafts.com.

Tung Dap Waste Management Program

The waste management program in Tung Dap village—an initiative designed and implemented entirely by an ambitious young villager and funded through NATR—is up and running! Our friends from Rotary Club of Koh Samui (ROCKS) paid the village a visit on October 26th to assess the progress of the Tung Dap operation, and were thoroughly impressed by its effectiveness. ROCKS has been heavily involved in Tung Dap village since the tsunami, funding such projects as mangrove restoration, boat repair, a new water tower, and scholarships. This marked their final visit to Tung Dap as well as to NATR, as their funding commitment ends in December. NATR gratefully acknowledges ROCKS for their assistance and dedication to the villages of the north Andaman over the past two years.



A demonstration of Tung Dap's waste management operation

English

The six-month English component of ACE training finished on October 17th with two conversation-based review classes, including a homemade “community trail” board game that required students to speak on various topics covered throughout the course. The students then had two weeks in which to prepare for their final evaluation, which was carefully designed to gauge their speaking, listening, reading, and writing progress, as well as overall comprehension of most topics covered throughout the course. The final evaluation was administered on October 30th; nearly all of the students exceeded the minimum certification standards, and six passed with honors. English certificates will be presented along with other awards during a graduation ceremony to be held in November.



The final ACE English class

Computers



ACE Computer class.

October was a month of final examinations for the ACE Experts—in addition to English, the students were also assessed on the computer skills they've acquired over the past six months. The computer exam included both a written component as well as a lab practical to gauge their comprehension of major MS Office applications, e-mail, and the Internet. All students passed the final examination and will receive certificates.

October also saw the start of a new intensive general computer class, which got off to a rocky start due to mixed abilities and high Ramadan-related absences. However, the group is highly motivated and eager to learn, and the class is progressing nicely.

Trevor's Tales – Observations from a New Volunteer

I am a big believer in the power of human energy—whether it's the spark that creates a new friendship or the massive force that creates accomplishments amongst a group of colleagues ... I love it and focus on adding my energy to such momentum! I instantly recognized the positive vibes that not only create laughter but also stem the base of the positive outcomes of NATR's endeavors.

I knew the synergy amongst the people at NATR was special and that I wanted to be a part of it. My first three weeks surpassed expectations for both the productivity of the team and the enjoyment that comes along with producing such results. Our past successes have given us a great reputation amongst the community; I immediately received praise from various local residents just because I am now a part of this rolling goodness called NATR. While I am just beginning to add value to future successes, the team has come up with some milestone accomplishments this past month.



In addition to these achievements—some could argue a strong reason for them—is the team's consistency at pursuing fun adventures with each other. Most every day you will hear contagious laughing or be invited on a nearby adventure. It is our shared passion to enjoy life and create a better life for the people we are empowering that adds atoms to our already strong nucleus. 'The matter is a movin', folks.

Visitors and Volunteers:

Jason Terzis arrived earlier this month to cover critical needs in both the English and Handicrafts departments. Jason's extensive background in business has dovetailed nicely with handicraft marketing and sales. He also brings with him TESOL qualifications and a year of English teaching experience, and his lively teaching methodology immediately resonated with his students. Furthermore, with the intensity of preparing for the tourism conference and the conclusion of ACE training, Jason's spirited Aussie approach to life provided welcome relief and more than a few memorable stories during an otherwise manic time!



After exploring NATR's website and confirming his intrigue with a personal visit, Trevor Kostanich chose to make NATR a three-month stop on his year-long Thailand itinerary. A native son of Seattle, Washington, with a background in civil engineering, he decided to combine his love of adventure and passionate belief in the ethos of sustainable tourism to help develop Andaman Discoveries, NATR's CBT program. Already his methodical and detailed approach to research is paying dividends, yielding heaps of ideas to further our CBT marketing efforts. Like most who decide to plant stakes in Kuraburi and join the NATR team, Trevor

is no stranger to excitement, having worked as a ski instructor who recently spent several months ski-touring in northern India. And for those of us who consider ourselves "closet urban planners," he's also proven himself an endless source of lively discussions on the subject of mass transit systems.