



## Update 30

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

### **A message for you (yes, you)**

So, you may be surprised to know that you, the reader of this update, are the secret to NATR's success. You may find yourself on any of the seven continents. You may be having a morning cup of coffee, or just heading off to bed. Wherever you are, it is you who have helped NATR in our last two years of work – through your friendship and support, your time as a volunteer, your concerned emails, your willingness to participate in our endeavors.

Nearly two years ago, NATR pledged to help communities rebuild, to rise from the ashes of despair. As we said in one of our first updates, we would “emphasize a community-driven process, and work toward long-term community and environmental sustainability, to ensure that tsunami victims have access to housing and education, and can rebuild and/or diversify their livelihoods.”

In November, we graduated the ACE Experts after six months of training. Now, many of the ACE Experts have created their own community development projects, which they will implement with the support of NATR. So, the very people who were tsunami “victims” are now taking an active role in the future of their communities. We are very proud to have villagers leading their own way – not just in terms of project participation, but in terms of design, implementation, and leadership. Empowerment is not just a feel good term, it is the painstaking process of allowing communities to have a greater say in their own development, the difficult path of using the tsunami as an opportunity for a better future.

Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to stay informed about what's going on in a small corner of Southern Thailand. Thank you for caring about the villages that were ravaged by the tsunami. Thank you for helping develop a model of disaster to development that is motivated by compassion and wisdom. Thank you for being part of NATR.

### **Feeling flush?**

If you are feeling the holiday spirit, and are moved to support charitable causes at this time of year, feel free to include NATR in your generosity. We are currently seeking support for our community center in Ban Talae Nok, our environmental education program, youth education in Tung Dap, and waste management in Tapa Yoi and Laem Naew.

### **Project Updates**

#### **ACE Expert Vocational Training – Graduation!**

Congratulations ACE Experts! The ACE vocational training program concluded earlier this month with a comprehensive final exam, followed by a graduation ceremony on November 17th. The students received English and Computer certificates (pictured right), as well as a diploma acknowledging completion of the overall course, recognized and signed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

The ACE experts now find themselves in a better position to earn a sustainable income and serve their communities. Armed with a new arsenal of skills, the graduates are now developing and implementing community projects, including waste management, environmental education, community-based tourism, and so on. Four of the former ACE students are now full-fledged NATR employees, working at the new Kuraburi Information Center, training other villagers in CBT practices, and managing our community center in Ban Talae Nok. Yet other graduates have found employment with local tour agencies and hotels.



## Scholarships – Hope for a Better Future

Quite simply, we adore kids at NATR, and for that reason we eagerly anticipate scholarship interview time at TREC. November marked the start of the second semester this year for our ongoing educational scholarship program. Participating students submitted written reports, grades from their past term, drawings, and essays. Bank transfers occurred in mid-November, and we're now busily compiling information and sending donor reports. We'd like to extend our sincere gratitude to all of the supporters who make this valuable program possible.



## Ban Talae Nok and Laem Naew Sports Day – Competitive Spirit Abounds

What's the perfect way to book-end a long rainy season? Another sports day, of course! On November 27th Ban Talae Nok faced off with neighboring village Laem Naew under sunny skies for a day of competition and fun. The day consisted of activities for kids of all ages, including a drawing competition, races, and football (the type where you actually move the ball with your feet) games. The athletes at NATR boldly challenged BTN's footballers and got their pride handed to them on a platter! At the end of the day



Laem Naew took home the gold, receiving a set of authentic jerseys donated by the Liverpool Football Club. Special thanks to Dear and Su for their efforts in organizing this special event, and to Paul Saunders who procured the jerseys, shorts, and paraphernalia from Liverpool and brought it to Thailand.

## Sense of Place Book and Village Updates – Fit to Print!



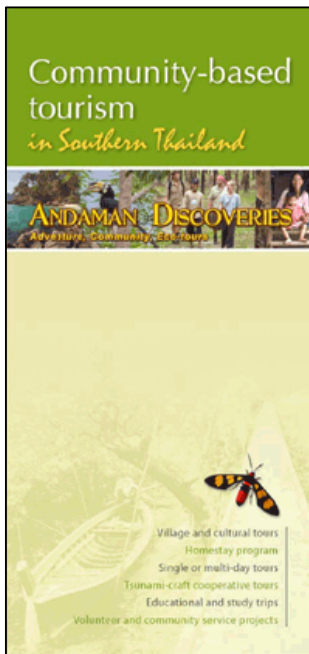
The Thai version of the widely-anticipated Sense of Place book has been shipped off to the printers and will be ready for distribution in January. Written by the ACE Expert team, the book contains a cultural, historical, and environmental overview of the villages of the north Andaman that seeks to increase regional knowledge and pride. Once printed, we will distribute copies of the book at our new Kuraburi Information Center, as well as in the villages and schools.

We've also launched a new initiative to keep the villages we work with better informed of our work through bi-monthly village updates. Written by our Thai staff and ACE Experts, the first edition was distributed earlier this month, and included informative stories about NATR's village programs, including ACE and community-based tourism. It has been received positively, with villagers eager to contribute to future editions.

## Community-Based Tourism – High Season in Kuraburi

If our CBT team seems a little exhausted right now, it probably has something to do with the record-setting twenty-two tourists and various media that descended upon Andaman Discoveries in November. As always, the team endeavored to make each tour an incredible experience, and with four people describing their time in village as “life-altering,” it seems they've succeeded! Andaman Discoveries would like to thank everybody who visited the North Andaman region this month and participated in community-based tourism firsthand. Anyone who's considering a trip to Thailand, or is simply interested in learning more about sustainable tourism, should visit our website at [www.andamandiscoveries.com](http://www.andamandiscoveries.com) for more details.





When we're not busy providing our visitors with an intimate peek into traditional life in rural Thailand, we're focused heavily on our marketing efforts. Working with a graphic artist, we've developed a striking tri-fold brochure (pictured left) that we will distribute both locally and in the nearby tourist bastions of Khao Lak and Phuket. To improve our on-line visibility we've launched several ads using "Google AdWords," while simultaneously tracking detailed user statistics from our new website. For the CBT tours themselves we're creating signage along village trails and compiling information related to key activities (i.e., local flora and fauna, natural rubber processing, handicraft production) to produce informative handouts.

Finally, the widely-anticipated Kuraburi Information Center (KIC) is nearly ready for prime time. Set for a mid-December opening, this center aims to enlighten Kuraburi visitors about the bountiful cultural and ecological diversity this unique region possesses. The project has been many months in the making, and preparation to-date has included distributing questionnaires to local businesses, processing feedback, obtaining real estate, and hiring new staff. Located directly behind the bus station in the heart of Kuraburi's restaurant district, the center will be hard to miss and should generate a lot of buzz for CBT and other NATR programs.

### Handicrafts – Keeping up with Demand

This month we set a new sales record with a single soap order totaling 10,000 Baht! Perhaps less astounding but no less significant, progress continues in the domestic marketing of soaps, with high-end hotels in Phuket and Koh Samui recently requesting samples and considering installing sales displays such as the one at the Phuket Holiday Inn. We're also hustling to keep pace with the Christmas rush, which has brought a high volume of orders, particularly with cards. Thanks again to everyone who's ordered products from our new website; if you're still struggling to find the perfect gift for that special someone who has everything, it's not too late to consider supporting tsunami-affected villages by purchasing a distinctive hand-made creation. Check out the handicrafts website at [www.tsunamicrafts.com](http://www.tsunamicrafts.com) for some great gift ideas!



### Computers and English – In the House



With the completion of ACE English and our general classes at TREC, the English program is now focused on individuals in villages who lack access to English. To this end, we launched a new class in Tung Dap on Koh Phratong in mid-November (pictured left); the class meets Wednesday evenings after the day's fishing concludes, and is attended by both adults and children. After class, the English team then enjoys an overnight homestay, offering them the unique opportunity to observe their students firsthand as they use and practice their new language skills. The weekly homestays have also generated useful ideas for expanding our pioneering "Homestay Language Packs." These packs contain flashcards and conversation ideas that can be used by tourists and homestay families on CBT

tours, providing a mutually beneficial language learning experience. We plan to expand the village English program in several more villages in the coming weeks.

The computer education program at TREC continued its track record of successful and well-attended classes this month. Students in the two current classes—an intensive weekend class and weekday sessions for Kuraburi high school students—are making great progress, and will complete their study and receive certificates in mid-December. We're already gearing up for plenty of fresh new faces in 2007, when several new computer classes are slated to begin.

## Visitors and Volunteers – Bursting at the Seams



This month we welcomed Bret Walburg from the San Francisco Bay Area. When he wasn't recovering from Cambodian-borne malaria or dazzling high-ranking Kuraburi government officials with his saucy Karaoke dance moves, Bret has been plenty busy putting his promotional skills to work for both our CBT and handicraft programs. Bret studied International business at UC Berkeley, concentrating specifically on the political and environmental aspects of the discipline. While only here for a short stop on his round-the-world adventure, his skills in this area have been indispensable to several of our programs and his impact here will resonate well beyond his visit.

Janine Kraemer likes to give German lessons in her spare time, which is precious when you're a dedicated NATR volunteer! She comes to us from Winterthur, Switzerland, where she spent years writing insurance policies designed to guarantee farmers good premiums on their livestock. For unfathomable reasons she abandoned this career path and headed to St. Moritz (yes, the ski area) to become a student of world tourism. She's traveled to Australia and South Turkey to study and observe the population aspects of mass tourism firsthand, and couldn't buy a ticket to Thailand fast enough upon learning of NATR's community-based tourism projects. She's now doing excellent work for us on CBT International marketing.



As recent graduates of NATR's innovative ACE Expert vocational training program, Cheudphong Sirisampan (Tam), Apichart Noochim (Chane), Chanhu Samutwaree (Kae), and Apichart Wongsakol (Ood) (pictured above from left to right) are well suited for their new roles in the organization. They're each heavily involved in organizing and setting up the new Kuraburi Information Center, which, when open in December, will be staffed by Ood and Chane. Ood is also involved in the design and implementation of a youth education program that's set to take off in 2007. Tam and Kae will fill vital roles training villagers in the best practices of CBT using the knowledge they've acquired during their instruction at NATR.

## Erik's Hilarity – Nothing is Sacred

We are born into this life wee urchins lost at sea; while navigating the brackish maelstrom we often lose our way, gasping for breath as we struggle against being pulled asunder by swirling eddies and violent swells, eyes searing and all hope seemingly dashed from our corporeal incarnation—we are but mere agglomerations of protoplasm adrift in the abyss. Are we on the same wavelength here? But then we find Bodhi Garrett; his puppy-dog eyes and Alan Alda-esque compassion guide us towards a righteous path and we can't help but join his mission of goodwill and peace on earth. We are found. We have purpose. We are NATR! Heck yeah!