



## Update 31

January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006

### **Bodhi's Ramblings**

What is the long-term future of NATR? Good question – and one that has been on our mind since our inception. We are, by definition of our name, an organization founded around a specific event, with the goal of helping communities recover from the tsunami. If we do our job well, then it should have a definitive ending point. The job of a community developer, in summary, is to develop yourself out of a job. So, this has been a guiding principle of NATR – implement programs that encourage self-reliance instead of dependence on external assistance. As I have mentioned before, dependence on tsunami relief has been a major problem.

Early on, however, we realized that tsunami recovery presented an opportunity to help communities take an active role in creating a better future. This implied assisting in community development through disaster relief, empowerment, education/training, and, finally, opportunity. Good community development work takes time – Rome was not built in a day, and people take to new ideas slowly. Innovative leaders require support systems and resources to help them bring about positive change.

By creating an identity for each of our long term projects, NATR is enabling structures that address unique long-term needs. Over the next six months, as NATR draws to a close, it will give birth to several longer-term efforts. Over the last year, we have done our best to move away from the name NATR in our work with the communities. We opened TREC to serve educational and vocational training needs. We created Tsunami Crafts, which will soon become financially independent from NATR. The Ban Talae Nok community center is now run for and by the villagers. Andaman Discoveries has taken on community-based tourism, and the Kuraburi Information Center is attracting much interest from the local government.

For the time being, however, we are still very much a cohesive team. For example, we just developed a soap-making tour that involved people from our English, Tourism, and Handicraft projects, along with ACE Experts and the manager of the Ban Talae Nok Community Center.

The leadership for each project, however, is being transferred to the village level. In this way, the momentum built by our programs will continue under local guidance. This development of leaders in each village has been a key part of our recent efforts. After all, the people most likely to enact positive change within a village are the community members themselves. This is especially important in a context where so many aid organizations gave material assistance without the building capacity necessary to ensure long-term benefits.

NATR started by doing relief projects FOR community members. Then we progressed to empowerment, education, and training WITH community members. We are now starting our final phase, in which a majority of our projects are designed and implemented BY the community members. It's been a lot of work, and the road has not always been smooth, but I am proud to say that NATR has lived up to its promise.

### **Program Updates**

#### **ACE Projects – Time for Action**

After graduation in November, nearly all of the ACE Experts have found employment in the field of tourism or community development. Some have started working for local tour agencies, and some have become staff here at NATR (see last month's update). Others went back into their villages and, using their training, surveyed the needs of their community. Nine project proposals were submitted to NATR, and five were approved for funding. December was a big planning month with our staff assisting the ACE Experts with planning, budgets, timelines, and last minute details.





Getting to Tung Nang Dam at low tide has always been dangerous – climbing up the treacherous wooden ladder at the pier can be a harrowing experience for locals and visitors alike. Under the leadership of one of our ACE Experts, construction has already begun on the floating pier– a project designed to help avoid the slippery climb up the ladder. The bicycle tour program in Tung Nang Dam is already proving successful with visitors, who enjoy cruising through the rubber orchards and goat farms. Other projects include construction of a public bathroom in Laem Naew, further development of CBT in Ban Talae Nok, and waste management in Tapa Yoi. In addition to the ACE projects, NATR has developed a handbook for the communities describing community development, key facts, important information, and a project proposal writing guide. In the future, if any of the villagers have an idea to develop their communities further, they can write a proposal to an organization and lead the development, implementation, and documentation of that project in their village. They can thus be empowered to become the developers of their own communities, much like the ACE Experts are learning to do with their projects, rather than relying on an outsider to come in and tell them what they need and how to do it.]

### **Kuraburi Information Centre – Grand Opening!**

NATR had our grand official opening of our new information centre, KIC, on December 20<sup>th</sup>. Complete with Moken traditional music and dance, drinks, snacks, and presentations, this event was a great success enjoyed by all present. We even got the government representative present to get up and dance! Located in central Kuraburi next to the bus station and across from one of the most popular outdoor restaurants, the opening attracted the attention of everyone around, who came to watch the performance or even join in the dancing! KIC is a great place for tourists to stop in and get information on cool places to visit in and around Kuraburi. It is a general information centre, not only promoting NATR's projects, but also promoting community activities and providing brochures of the local tour operators, so tourists can choose what they want to do while in Kuraburi.



### **Computer Education – Goat Farmer Graduates**



On December 9, we proudly graduated our General Class after three months of training. As a final test, students were asked to make their own website. Their skills had grown in leaps and bounds – from not knowing what a mouse was to using the Dreamweaver program! Graduates included a policeman, a housewife, a goat farmer, and a restaurant owner.

The high school computer class continues, and our students have been surprised to learn that the Internet is useful for things other than video games and flirting.

### **CBT (Community Based Tourism)**

December was a very busy month! NATR has developed a CBT handbook for local guides with key information that was taught to the ACE experts, regarding safety, hospitality, guiding, and all the elements important to leading a good tour for visitors. With this handbook, every villager who is part of the CBT program will be able to learn the key aspects of what the ACE Experts learned in their six month course. Early in the month, NATR was invited by the government to display our Community-Based Tourism program for the Department of Tourism and Sport at a regional conference.

Many people from all over southern Thailand were present, thus giving Andaman Discoveries greater exposure and proving our standing in the community. We were also invited to put up a display at the annual Kuraburi Watermelon Festival in December.



We're also translating our Andaman Discoveries brochure into German for the nearby resorts just south of us in Khao Lak, and into Thai for the numerous native tourists that come through here on their way to Koh Surin. Finally, we've had several TV crews interested in our program coming down to our villages to film CBT and have even put some of NATR's faces on Thai television!

In terms of marketing, we've set up a Google AdWords campaign to direct more people to our website – we can even tell where our viewers are from. Most importantly, three sets of tourists visited our villages in December, one of whom being our first “volountourist” after Andaman Discoveries was set up.

### English – Christmas Carols



The English program is going strong with two main foci at the moment. First, village-based English in Tung Dap is progressing well with a consistent number of students. Drawing on villager feedback the focus is on conversational English to aid communication with visitors. December lessons included a marginally successful, but extremely hilarious, attempt at singing Jingle Bells with all 10 students. Second, with great progress in CBT development, English is now becoming more involved, working to enhance visitor and villager communication. Main areas concerned are the development of a simple phrasebook and additions to the existing homestay pack.

### Handicrafts – 'Twas the season to be jolly

Thank you to everyone who supported Tsunami Crafts this holiday season. The ladies of the soap and card programs are now catching up on the sleep they missed during late nights filling last minute orders. The success of the Christmas campaign was aided by our smooth running website, which has been optimized to perfection with the generous help of our friend Diana in the US. The stunning design and easy payment option has been a great boost for the villagers.

Our products have seen some new and improved eco friendly packaging, and will hopefully experience continued growth in sales in the coming months. Marketing is still going strong, with plans for trips to Phuket and Koh Samui to follow up on the hotels we have previously contacted there.

### Visitors & Volunteers



#### Erik “Penang Gai” Rogers

It was with tears in our eyes that we said goodbye this month to Erik Rogers, NATR English teacher and Webmaster for the past 10 months. Erik is the reason we have two fabulous websites, NATR and Andaman Discoveries, and luckily for us he has agreed to continue updating them from home in California in his spare time. The ACE Experts also have Erik to thank for their improved English skills as he was their teacher during their six month program. We will all miss Erik dearly, especially his antics in our favourite restaurant where he learned to make his daily dish of Penang Gai (a type of Chicken Curry) and Gai Pad Met Mamuang (Chicken and Cashew nut), as well as his hilarious attempt at copying people's accents. We hope to see you back here soon Erik!

#### Bret Walburg

Although he was only here for five weeks, Bret had a great influence on NATR both professionally and socially. When not suffering from Malaria that he caught in the jungle in Cambodia, Bret worked on marketing for our CBT program, setting up our Google AdWords campaign and getting in touch with his vast network of friends around the world in search of a bigger clientele for Andaman Discoveries. He was also great at making Italian food, which all farang appreciated! He was a fresh face with new ideas and we are grateful for all his help and hard work. Thanks Bret for your cheery character, being part of our team, and a great friend. Good luck on your trip around the world!

