

## Update 32

February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007

### **Bodhi's Ramblings**

Anyone remember the ACE Experts?

They were the group of villagers that, from April to November last year, participated in NATR's vocational training program. The program focused on tourism, English, computers, and community service. Participants came from 8 villages, and from all different backgrounds. The ACE training program was unusual in that it focused on building versatile, real-world skills – it did not intend to guide the participants in a specific direction.



So, four months after graduating, what has become of the ACE Experts? Have they gone on to international stardom? Are they languishing in a cell?

Of our 22 students, 16 have found full or part time work in tourism or community development. This includes work at a floating raft house, starting a new community-based tourism project, managing a community center, and leading tours to Surin National park. Other ACE Experts are managing community service projects including a conservation trail, a floating pier, waste management, and the Kuraburi information center.

It is my hope that the ACE training curriculum we have can now be used as a tool to help other communities. In areas where tourism is on the horizon, there are currently very few options for locals to harness its potential. Hopefully, the grassroots approach that NATR and other progressive organizations are taking will not go unnoticed by the scions of development.



### **Tales from the Front - Children's Day**



On January 14, NATR staff participated in four separate children's day celebrations - attended by a more than 400 children! In Tung Dap and Ban Talae Nok we provided a wrapped gift for each child. In Tapa Yoi we distributed free ice cream., with the standard Thai toppings of corn and pumpkin. In Hat Praphat, we led environmental education activities throughout the day, in the mangroves and on the beach. Aside from the obvious benefits, working with children is a great way to maintain strong friendships within communities, and catch up on local gossip.

What is Children's Day? In addition to special days for mom and dad, Thailand also observes a holiday for kids. The day is usually spent watching the children play games and perform dances, and then giving them gifts. During my three years here, I have seen everything from eating competitions and sack races to cross-dressing cat walk contests. Not to mention the normally masculine fishermen of Tung Dap breakdancing in skin-tight neon spandex – see for yourself.



## Got a Few Minutes? Make our family your family

Our community-based tourism programs are a new idea, and often new ideas spread through unconventional channels – like guerilla marketing. To tap into the larger trend of responsible tourism we are employing new methods for outreach, including MySpace, Facebook, and Tribe online accounts and are actively seeking friends (so please make us yours!). Also, if you ever post on travel forums, feel free to mention the cool stuff happening at [Andaman Discoveries](#).

## Programs

### Ban Talae Nok Community Center – Change is Afoot

We are pleased to welcome Cha, one of NATR's ACE Experts, as the new manger of the community center. Cha has a very clear vision for the community center – and will develop it into a community information and education center. This will include night classes for adults to obtain high-school diplomas, and a display center for village enterprise, including soap, batik, and community-based tourism. Here in Kuraburi, the very capable Nattaya is helping Cha to design and implement a work plan.



Cha has already sprung into action, hosting a community meeting in which the villagers requested training in homestay techniques, and giving a presentation to a room full of government officials and academics. And, through it all, the Soap Group continues to cook up wonderful smelling batches of herbal soap.

This month, we said goodbye to two wonderful women – Garn, the community center's manager, and Saroh, who ran the daycare program. With the beginning of the new school year, we no longer have any children enrolled in our daycare program. And Garn, who is pregnant, has decided to take it easy until she gives birth.

### English – Is “G'day Mate” the same as “Hello”?



In recent lessons, we have run up against the challenge of teaching English to students who cannot read or write. But we're adaptable, and so is our teaching program which has shifted its emphasis to speaking-orientated activities. In Tung Dap the lessons are progressing quite well with role-playing games, and villagers aged 10-50 in attendance. Meanwhile, at Kuraburi High School, we are teaching the Junior Guides, and the first two lessons have kicked off with many smiles and many laughs.

With these programs we hope that our students will be able to know that while “G'day Mate” will suffice as a salutation, it is nevertheless the vernacular of convicts. Just kidding.

## Websites

Check out the two new sections at the NATR website this month. There's now a link to our [Kuraburi Information Center](#). Then be sure to click on the [Partners](#) link, a page acknowledging the many friends and allies who have helped us over the past two years. Also a big thank you to Rotary Club of Koh Samui, whose two year alliance with NATR has come to a successful conclusion after countless projects serving the Koh Phratong communities.

## Tsunami Crafts – Off and Running

A big thank you to all who ordered Tsunami Crafts over the holidays, it has put a new spark of enthusiasm into the handicraft groups. Whoever said that the market slumps when the spirit of Christmas wanes clearly has not been in business with soap mavens of Ban Talae Nok!

Handicrafts momentum has unexpectedly gained with a sale of Moken boats of more than 20,000 baht. One of our regular clients, Atsumi Spa, has asked for a custom designed soap and we have been all too happy to supply them with a product that represents quality and ingenuity.

Check out the new [handicrafts website](#) when you have a moment – options for all budgets!



## Community Based Tourism – Andaman Discoveries

Adding to these efforts to get Kuraburi on the traveler maps, we are excited to announce that the newest edition of Rough Guide includes an entire page for this sweet hamlet, info provided by NATR. Our sights are now set on Lonely Planet, and other reputable guidebooks, so let us know if you know someone who knows someone.



And, of course, if you want to get out of the chair and spend some time in a village, enjoy a tropical sunset, and eat delicious food, [Andaman Discoveries](#) is here for you!

## Kuraburi Information Center– Making Connections

Our second month was full of meetings and greetings, including dozens of tourists seeking guidance and the local Junior Guide Club, who dropped in to learn hospitality techniques. The KIC also organized a trip by several ACE Experts to the National Convention on Disaster and Risk Management – three days of training and discussion on how communities can be better prepared for natural disaster.

Erik, our webmaestro-at-large has designed a virtual tour of the [Kuraburi Information Center](#) (KIC). Click on that link and enjoy a virtual tour of this new facility, which we recently opened in downtown Kuraburi to much fanfare. Located prominently behind downtown bus station, the KIC aims to give visitors and locals valuable information about the area.

## Visitors & Volunteers

After three months of hard work and plenty of fun, Janine has finished her time with us. With a Master's in tourism management, Janine helped streamline our community-based tourism program. Now back in Switzerland, she continues to help us attract German speaking visitors. Janine quickly adapted to the details and elegance of Thai culture, and is missed not only by NATR, but her many admirers in Kuraburi.



We were also joined for a short time by Michael Silverman and Leanna Liebel. In addition to doing research under sponsorship from UCLA, Michael assisted with designing our environmental education program, and plans to bring his students here on a study tour. Thanks Michael!

Fresh from a monthlong homestay in Krabi, Lea's time here put her knowledge of ecotourism into action writing handbooks on Mangroves and Guiding Techniques. We are fortunate in that Lea has left NATR ready to help promote community-based tourism back home in Canada.