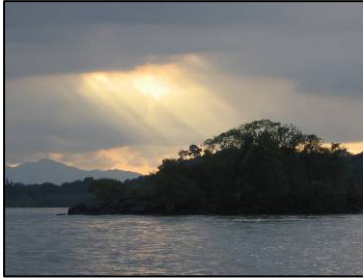




Update 35

May 9th, 2007

Bodhi's Bit



Recently, NATR sponsored a project led by Pin and other villagers from Tung Dap. After visiting the island of Koh Lao last year, the villagers of Tung Dap decided that they could be of assistance by teaching the people there to fish for squid.

Koh Lao is not a remote place – it takes only 30 minutes by boat to reach the provincial capital of Ranong. Yet, the Moken community on the island is faced with a great many challenges. Medical care is almost non-existent. The day we arrived, two people died from dehydration – an old woman and an infant. The men are often recruited for illegal fishing trips, and 14 of them have been shot by the Burmese military, leaving many widows and children with no support.

At the same time, Koh Lao is one of the few places in Thailand where the Moken culture is still practiced in a relatively traditional way. The old ceremonies and rituals are still regularly observed. The knowledge of the sea, especially the shoreline, is still taught to the children.

The way of life in Tung Dap, also a Moken community, is not quite as traditional as that in Koh Lao. The fishermen now use modern gear and techniques. The quality of life in Tung Dap is also considerably higher – adequate nutrition and medical care, roofs that don't leak, and a balance of power with their Thai neighbors.



Working with NATR, Pin and her team from Tung Dap held a workshop on basic squid fishing techniques for the children of Koh Lao. In addition, Pin wanted to continue the tradition of exchange between Moken communities - a staple of their culture in the past, but less frequent since the Moken had been settled in villages.



The project was valuable for two reasons: it taught fishing skills to the local children, and the people of Tung Dap shared their experience in community development. Pin is currently writing a project proposal to provide crab nets and training for the widows of Koh Lao.

While there is much to be done for the people of Koh Lao, any real improvement in their quality of life must originate from within the community. No amount of external aid can substitute for self-determination. Through friendship and exchange from the people of Tung Dap, the villagers of Koh Lao saw an example of a Moken community determining their own future. Let us hope that more good things are to come...

Program Updates

Tung Dap Mangrove Restoration – Lights, Camera, Action!

Just north of Tung Dap village, a healthy stand of mangroves broke the force of the tsunami, thereby saving several houses and lives. In contrast, many homes were destroyed in an area to the south of the village, where the mangroves had recently been cleared. After being denied assistance by the government in replanting the northern mangrove forest, the Village Conservation Committee (VCC) decided to take action. NATR sponsored the reforestation as part of our ongoing Mangrove Restoration project.





In April, a three day stint of mangrove reforestation resulted in over 4,000 seedlings being planted, and many people joining in the effort. After Pa Kiep (a Moken woman who has spent years of her life in the mangroves) defined the area to be replanted, village youth and NATR staff planted the seedlings. Instead of relying on highly paid, outside experts, this project relies on indigenous knowledge. On a personal note, Pa Kiep's house is directly behind the replanting area, and she feels strongly that she would have died in the tsunami if not for the protection afforded by the mangroves. Congratulations to the VCC in Tung Dap for their great success!

Andaman Discoveries – Please Nominate Us

Andaman Discoveries has had our first tourists straight from the Rough Guide! NATR was featured in the most recent Rough Guide giving tourists another option while in Kuraburi than simply going to Koh Surin. Our marketing strategies are paying off! Here's hoping that many more tourists will find Andaman Discoveries through our media coverage /guide books/websites - and help local villagers by visiting them and staying in their homes.

Andaman Discoveries is looking for nominations for the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards 2007, given to individuals or organizations that provide responsible tourism opportunities. Winning this award will help Andaman Discoveries get our name out there so more tourists will come support our villages. Please help us by nominating Andaman Discoveries at www.responsibletravelawards.com/nominations/ Or, email Kelly for more information info@andamandiscoveries.com

Out of thirteen categories, Andaman Discoveries qualifies for the following:

- Best Tour Operator
- Best Small Accommodation/hotel
- Best for Conservation of Cultural Heritage
- Best Personal Contribution
- Best Volunteering Organization
- Best Destination

Here is the information you will need to fill out the form:

We are Andaman Discoveries, in Southern Thailand

website: www.andamandiscoveries.com

email: info@andamandiscoveries.com

People involved: Kelly May and Bodhi Garrett

Moken Rediscovery Program – Heading for Disaster?

The following is an excerpt from well known author Thom Henley's chronicle of a recent project co-sponsored by NATR and Thai Nature Education:

It had all the makings for a disaster, and we were chewing our nails. Twelve Muslim youth from the Kuraburi area were bound for Koh Surin to attend the Moken's biggest festival of the year. There would be dogs roaming the village, ritual alcohol consumption, and animist ceremonies. Our concerns, however, proved unfounded as we came to realize these students ability to empathize with and respect cultural values completely different from their own. At a time in Thailand's history with increasing tension between religious and ethnic groups, it was encouraging to see this level of tolerance.



On the last night of the trip, around a candle vigil on the beach, the students shared their thoughts on the trip. Certainly the whale sighting was a highlight for all, as was snorkeling in the cleanest waters with the best corals these kids had ever seen. But the big surprise was how much they had come to respect the Moken.

“If the Moken were to come to our village, we would welcome them into our homes and our mosque. There are lots of similarities with our lives and the Moken's – ceremonies, medicines, knowing the weather, and harvesting food from the sea,” said 17-year old Dusadee Wenghungchai.

Koh Phratong Animal Safety

The current number of dogs on Koh Phratong poses a threat to local villagers. More dogs are turning wild and threatening villagers as they walk from village to village across the island. In addition, wild populations of dogs are more prone to diseases such as rabies which can be a threat to humans through transmission to domestic dogs or attacks in the wild. By controlling the dog population now, present and future threats can be diminished.



Phase II of NATR's Animal Safety program was successfully completed, with a total of 65 animals (47 dogs and 18 cats) spayed and neutered in Tung Dap, Bak Jok, and Tapa Yoi. The veterinarian team from PAWS (Phuket Animal Welfare Society) were amazing – professional, friendly, and very hard working. NATR would like to give a big thanks to them for their help and support of our project, as well as to the villagers for their participation and enthusiasm.

Ban Talae Nok Community Centre

The Community Centre is a hub of activity these days, with waste management planning in the works, aerobics every day (except Fridays), soap promotion and displays, and the registration of Informal School students. These students are at all levels of schooling, right from primary to senior high. A total of 22 people have signed up to take these classes. Best of luck to all!

CBT Development



The CBT Development team has been working very hard lately on trainings in Ban Talae Nok. The focus of late has been introducing the homestay activity, cooking activity, free time activity such as making a dessert, making a fishing net, Muslim dress, showing photos, and playing with kids in the family. They have had good cooperation from the homestay group, as training took place when the homestay group was free to learn, and not busy doing other work. After homestay, guide training was on the agenda. This included a sunset activity on the beach and snorkeling. Participants include both youth and adults who work as community guides.

English

Twice a week the English team has been to Ban Talae Nok to assist with the CBT training. Due to requests from the villagers themselves, there are no formal lessons being carried out. Instead, the team is highlighting the relevant vocabulary required during Thai training and taking part in practical role play scenarios as tourists.

The English-Thai phrasebook is now complete and 50 copies have been bound in nice paper by Su, our resident handicrafts lady. We have already used it effectively in the Homestay training and it has provoked interest from the Homestay families. Because of this we are now working on a Thai-English version, to be provided in May.

Environment Education

Last month, NATR's Environment Education teacher, Dear, was able to join three different activities regarding Environment Education, in order to gain more knowledge and get ideas of how to run his program. The first was Thom Henley's Moken Life Education Project at Surin Islands, as described earlier in the update. The second is Magic Eyes' Prem Center Barge Program which taught international students all about Thailand's largest river, the Chao Phraya, with respect to wildlife, plants, livelihoods of the people who live along the river, as well as its cleanliness (or lack of). The third activity was a workshop with Robert Steele in Bangkok that taught Dear how to be a good facilitator. Dear has been in major planning stage this last month, in preparation for the new school term when he will recruit his 40 students for the Environmental Education Program.

Visitors & Volunteers

Kimballe Robinsen (Balle) has left NATR to pursue his passion for the Moken culture. He plans to stay in the Kuraburi area for a while, building a traditional-style Moken Kabang and raising funds to help the Moken on Koh Surin. Balle was a great help to NATR with marketing for CBT as he set up a central contacts database (with the help of Gordon our IT specialist) and gave us much valuable feedback and constructive criticism. Thank you Balle for your two months of dedication and good luck with your future endeavours.



Charlotte (Lottie) X (*need to find surname and name of her organization*) came to visit NATR in order to make a short documentary of our past, present, and future projects. This video will capture the unique quality of NATR's projects, and will also explain why we are changing from NATR, a tsunami relief organization, into Andaman Discoveries, a sustainable, community-led development and tour service.

Visitors in April also included Dr Rowan Mactaggart from GRM International and Dr Johannes Bauer from Sustainable Tourism, CRC who are currently developing and supporting community-based tourism in Thailand and had heard of the impressive work of the villagers of Ban Talae Nok. They wanted to see for themselves what the villagers and NATR have been doing over the past two years. They are interested in using the ACE training curriculum as well as the CBT handbook and Phrasebook for their CBT communities.