



Update 36

June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007

### Erik's Ramblings – Passing the Torch

With many of life's missions, it's tempting to seek a definitive endpoint, a set date when the job is finally completed and it's time to move on. As a volunteer with NATR last year, I tried to pinpoint this date for myself, but it proved elusive. I extended my initial three-month commitment to six months, and then again to ten months. I could have easily kept going—the hard work and my sense of duty to the people of the north Andaman region never waned. Eventually, though, the time came to acknowledge that I'd satisfied my promises to the best of my abilities, and that it was time pass on the torch.



NATR as it has existed for over two years is now coming to an end, and we're ready to pass on the proverbial torch: the tsunami handicrafts co-op is a fully independent enterprise; villagers are proposing and managing their own community development projects; and our English team has designed a series of curriculums that we're now handing over to organizations doing similar work. And although communities are now empowered to *do* community-based tourism, they will still require ongoing support to fully realize its potential. Therefore, where NATR leaves off, Andaman Discoveries will take over.

Indeed, for all of NATR's training and efforts to be truly sustainable, communities need real opportunities to put their skills into action. Andaman Discoveries continues to develop a clientele base and promote CBT for villagers until it becomes self-sustaining. Andaman Discoveries will also continue to oversee NATR's other ongoing projects, including the Ban Talae Nok community center, educational scholarships, environmental education, and various community activities.

So while staff meetings at NATR are increasingly focused on closing parties and where to donate furniture, the good work goes on. And it is for this reason that I find myself back in Kuraburi.

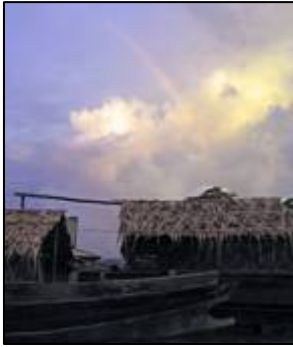
### Program Updates

#### Scholarships – New Faces

Naruwuth "Faruth" Intan has a smile that lights up a room, in spite of his heartbreaking circumstances. In addition to having been diagnosed with Down's syndrome, the seven year old from Ban Talae Nok village lost his mother last year and his father has since remarried and left the village, leaving Faruth in the care of his grandmother. He is in first grade and attends classes at the regular school; his family fears he will be mistreated in a special education program. Faruth is the latest of 135 students who interviewed for an NATR scholarship this month, and will receive educational assistance thanks to a generous grant from Rotary Club of Patong Beach.



## Kabang – Moken Houseboat Finds a New Home



You may recall Bodhi's impassioned rant in Update 20 about an unscrupulous television crew literally sinking Thailand's last remaining pair of Moken houseboats, or *Kabang*, at Kuraburi pier along with the hopes of 14 cheated Moken tsunami survivors. After being rescued and spending more than a year serving as a local landmark in front of our TREC center, one of the *Kabang* is being restored to seafaring condition by a Moken community in Thai Yai, just north of Phuket, where it will serve as a floating cultural center for visitors and Moken youth alike. It's the most honorable legacy we could have hoped for—instead of outsiders *preserving the boat* in a museum as a tribute to sea gypsy culture, the boat is actually helping *preserve Moken heritage* under the auspices of its creators.

## Computer Classes – Logging Off

This month the computer lab at TREC fell silent after more than a year of tapping keys, clicking mice, and students having fun as they gained valuable new skills. Our final section of community computer class concluded on May 17th, and all students graduated with basic skills in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, e-mail, and the Internet. Over the past year the computer skills curriculum was tried and tested, and was one of NATR's many successful vocational training initiatives.



## English – The End is only the Beginning



Laughter and language abounded in the village of Tung Dap this month, a fitting finale to the NATR English program. Indeed, it was the end of an era as the English team taught their final lesson, wrapping up more than two years of English teaching in the Koh Phratong area, including classes at TREC and in several villages.

Because of the high demand for English education for rural adults in Thailand, NATR took a “structural approach” to its English program from the beginning, creating a diverse range of materials to accommodate students of varying education levels as well as teachers with different degrees of experience. Also unique is that our materials have been thoroughly documented and organized, and we are now ready to share them with similar organizations. We're busy networking with other organizations that need English training, from the hill tribes of northern Thailand to other homestay programs here in the south.

## Sense of Place – Promoting Local Pride

The perfume of fresh ink and glossy paper filled the foyer of TREC when 1,500 eagerly-anticipated copies of the *Sense of Place* booklet arrived this month. The book describes the traditional way of life in each of the villages NATR works with, with stories and facts told by the villagers themselves. At a time when the local culture—youth in particular—is so susceptible to the perceived benefits of western ideals, this publication presents their existing way of life as both worthy and sustainable, and aims to increase pride in the community. The booklets are now being distributed to villagers as well as at local schools.



## Andaman Discoveries CBT – Ready for Prime Time

Curious what all the fuss is about? Now you can get an up-close look at Andaman Discoveries through our new promotional video! Learn what makes us unique, and why the culture and ecology of the north Andaman region is so special. Watch the video (requires Flash) on our website at [www.andamandiscoveries.com/movie.html](http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/movie.html). Special thanks to the hard work of Austin Lovell for producing the video for us!



May was a big month for Andaman Discoveries press. Bret Walberg, a much-missed volunteer, wrote a wonderful article for Phuket Magazine about his experiences in village. Andaman Discoveries was also featured on TITV, a Thai television network, in a program called “The Way of the Good Path,” which documented the achievements of NATR and Andaman Discoveries since the tsunami. Many viewers were inspired and have since contacted us to help or visit the villages.



The Global Ecotourism Conference reviews and celebrates the achievements in the ecotourism field, as well as assessing challenges facing the industry. Although it took place in distant Oslo, Norway, this year, Andaman Discoveries participated via the Internet. In recognition of our efforts in the area of community-led tourism, founder Bodhi Garrett gave a presentation titled *From Relief to Self-reliance: Developing Community-Based Tourism after the Tsunami*. His talk provided a detailed account of our experience over the past two and a half years and included valuable insights in the area of relief and sustainable development.

Finally, we'd like to share our appreciation to our recent visitors, including Martyn Schulz from the U.S., who read about our work in the Bangkok Post and was inspired to spend a few days volunteering in Ban Talae Nok village. Of his experience he said, “*You are making a difference to the lives of such beautiful people and in turn they are making a difference to yours.*” Tracy Suff from the U.K. spent an action-packed five days volunteering at Ban Talae Nok village; her help landscaping at the new school was much appreciated by the villagers as was her assistance in the classroom.



Our trips are also proving popular with families. This month we welcomed the Daehnick family all the way from the States. “*To be able to stay with a Thai family, get to know them and to experience their culture is a life-changing experience. Our children have fallen in love with Thailand and thanks to the efforts of NATR we will certainly return to this wonderful part of our planet.*”

## Kuraburi Information Center – A Successful Model



About the only *farang* in Kuraburi these days all work at NATR, and with the onset of low season came the closing of The Kuraburi Information Center. During its final month the staff produced two valuable resources: a brochure for the Tung Rak Crab Conservation Farm, and a directory to improve cooperation between local tourism businesses. The operation and management of the tourism center is well documented, and can be used as a blueprint for a similar venture in Kuraburi or the surrounding area. We're now gauging government interest in taking over the effort next year.

## Tung Nang Dam Orchid Project

Orchids are a popular decoration for homes and restaurants, and are becoming an increasingly rare sight in the jungle as a result of over-harvesting. Noy, a former ACE Expert from Tung Nang Dam, has therefore started a project aimed at restoring the orchid population. The process involves transplanting cuttings from orchid stalks and incubating them on her farm; once mature, the seedlings are returned to the forest. The activity is designed with CBT tourists in mind, getting them directly involved in local conservation efforts. It proved popular on a recent homestay, and will be continued in future tours.



## Ban Talae Nok – Coral and Mangrove Conservation



This month we partnered with Kim Obermeyer from Reef Check Foundation, an international non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of tropical coral reefs. Kim is providing training for operators of community-led tours to the Koh Kam Islands, including snorkeling-related education for guest safety, and reef conservation to increase awareness of coral with guides and visitors alike. He'll be offering this important training to the guides in Ban Talae Nok, who enthusiastically received him at their last CBT development meeting.

Mangrove swamps provide a vital coastal buffer and ecosystem, and Ban Talae Nok is now involving CBT tourists in local restoration efforts. In addition to replanting mangrove habitat where it was destroyed by the tsunami, the villagers are simultaneously implementing standards to monitor and assess their progress, such as tracking diversity and mapping survival rates.

## Visitors & Volunteers

With one last *giddy up*, Jason Terzis rode off into the sunset this month, blazing his way south to make a name for himself at Chawang Ratchadapisek School. Jase had a big impact on NATR and Kuraburi during his six-months here. In the English program, he organized materials to create an Introductory Rural English curriculum, on which he based his lessons in the village of Tung Dap as well as the Junior Guide class at Kuraburi High School. In addition, he was helpful in transitioning the handicrafts program to autonomous, local control. He's never at a loss for an original line and always ready for an off-the-wall adventure, and life here is a lot quieter without him.



NATR co-founder and enlightened Yogi Lucy "Lucy Lu" Dixon-Clarke made a special stop in Kuraburi from Botswana this month. With her hallmark energy and enthusiasm, she plunged headlong into the chaos at the office, helping tackle the NATR annual report. Also during her ten days here she was able to spend time reconnecting with her many friends in the villages. We're very grateful to Lucy for her hard work and friendship.

Devout to the NATR cause, Erik Rogers made his yearly pilgrimage back to Kuraburi this month to lend a hand during our transition. The espresso machine at the local Internet café purred with increased frequency the day he settled back into his roles in both the English department and as our intrepid Webmaster. Already the NATR website has received its final rendering (it will remain as a cyber-testament to the good work NATR has done over the past two and a half years), and big changes loom on the near horizon for the Andaman Discoveries website as well. He's also busy helping the English team compile over a year's worth of lesson plans, worksheets, game ideas, and media for sharing with other organizations in Southeast Asia, including putting the curriculums online.

