



Update 37

July 23rd, 2007

The End of the Beginning - Bodhi's Ramblings

So, this is it. The last of the NATR updates. What a long strange trip it's been.



What is NATR – are we a relief group? Grassroots community development? An international community of caring people?

We are all of these things, and a whole lot more. For me NATR has been the opportunity of a lifetime – a chance to serve, to be part of an organization that holds true to the values of justice, equality, compassion and wisdom.

As a wise sage once said, “luminous beings are we.” It’s true – we all have the ability to shine. In a world where things can seem so very dark, it’s important to remember that there is hope. It is within us all. To quote another wise man, “be the change you want to see in the world.”

I hope that your participation in NATR, in whatever form, has been meaningful.

Beyond all of the philosophy and analysis, I know one thing is true – we have made a difference. We have not saved anybody, but through hard work, friendship, and sacrifice, we have created opportunities for a better future.

Thanks for your love and support, and let’s keep up the hard work.



What's Next?

As we have mentioned, NATR is not actually closing – we are evolving. Our long-term projects will become independent. Andaman Discoveries will continue with community-based tourism. So come visit, and you can see NATR’s legacy for yourself. Starting next month, you can expect regular updates from Andaman Discoveries – including the happenings of the Ban Talae Nok Community Center, Tung Dap conservation, and other exciting news.

We are still seeking support to continue YouthACT - our environmental education program that brings that can-do philosophy of NATR to local high schools. Please contact us if you would like to donate, or if you have any suggestions for funding.

Please note that we have new contact information – it can be found at the end of the update.

Closing Ceremonies – the long kiss goodbye

NATR hosted a series of small parties in each village – to thank the villagers for their cooperation and say goodbye to the friends we have made there. Highlights included delicious curries, touching speeches, and lots of hugs. For a grand finale, we invited over 200 people to attend a closing ceremony at TREC, our education and training center. Much to our delight, over 500 people showed up for the event!

Villagers, officials, NGOs, and other friends all joined in the festivities, which included speeches, a raffle, dinner, and a talent show from the children of Ban Talae Nok and Tung Dap. The talent show featured a fashion contest in which kids dressed up like NATR staff, and a puppet show about Bodhi’s adventures in Ban Talae Nok. Then, in true Thai tradition, it was time for a karaoke/dance marathon that lasted late into the night. At one point, Bodhi found himself dancing in a circle with the government officials, Muslim ladies from Tung Nang Dam, volunteers from France, and Moken from Tung Dap.



Village Surveys – Assessing NATR



In an effort to get feedback on NATR’s work over the last two and a half years, we surveyed almost 200 villagers from six communities. The general response was very positive. Many recognized NATR’s commitment to empowering villagers to lead their own community development. Our long-term scholarship program and the Tung Dap Water Tower were among the most highly praised projects. Juree Klathalay, a Moken woman from Bak Jok, told us, “I would like to thank NATR. Because of your scholarship program I do not have to take a loan – I do not have to be in debt in order for my children to study.”

Thai people tend to keep criticisms to themselves in an effort to not let the recipient lose face, thus it has been difficult for many organizations to get honest feedback. Because of the trust and friendship we have built, villagers were willing to provide constructive criticism. NATR received a number of suggestions as to how we could have improved our projects, including better management of the school boat in Laem Naew, more English lessons for community-based tourism, and a perception that Moken families received more benefit than Thai families in Tung Dap.

Villagers also shared their views about tsunami relief. According to Prayut Kho-sakun, an elder in Tung Dap “Organizations that come to work here should be sincere about their work with the community, and keep their word. There were many problems, but for Bodhi and the NATR team, I trust them and am confident in their work.”



Program Updates

Ban Talae Nok Community Centre – Full Speed Ahead

The community centre in Ban Talae Nok is busy as ever. The government has approved a funding request from the village chief for over 600,000 Baht! Cha, as the project administrator, is busy designing a village beautification scheme that will include tree planting, information signs, and improvements to the tsunami housing. The community center has also been invited by Laem Son National Park to start a youth conservation group – their first effort will be replanting coastal forests impacted by the tsunami. Cha is also busy supervising the recently initiated mangrove conservation and waste management projects.

Environmental Education – Action Conservation Training



Monsoon rain isn’t the only reason things are getting greener in the Koh Phratong area. Youth Action Conservation Training (Youth ACT), NATR’s environmental education initiative for 34 regional high school students, kicked off this month at the nearby Naka Wildlife Preserve, home to elephants, tigers, and six species of hornbills. The class is a mix of Buddhist and Muslim pupils, chosen by teacher recommendation for their enthusiasm. For homework, students carried out interviews with the elders of their communities. The interviews revealed the challenges that villagers face in creating a sustainable lifestyle.

In June, students journeyed to Koh Phratong, where they joined the villagers of Tung Dap for mangrove reforestation. After wading through knee-deep mud and surviving the onslaught of biting flies, the students were treated to a tour of the community conservation area, where they learned the “how” and “why” of villager efforts to protect crab breeding grounds.

YouthACT is now helping the students to design and implement their own conservation projects. The kids of Suksamran District have decided to start a recycling program at their high school and help Ban Talae Nok replant beach forests destroyed by the tsunami. In Kuraburi, students will be engaging in mangrove conservation, and planting a communal herb garden at school.



Andaman Discoveries – Community Based Tourism

June was a fairly quiet month for Andaman Discoveries in terms of visitors, with only one voluntourist, Bilal, who came to spend a few days in Tung Nang Dam. The rain didn't seem to bother him as he helped Noi with her orchid conservation project, replanting some species in the forest. This was the quiet before the storm, however, as the Andaman Discoveries team is preparing for an overwhelming July and August. The upcoming visit of 11 students from Birmingham University in England (staying for 5 weeks) has seen Kelly and Tui running around like chickens with their heads cut off in preparation.

Marketing Training – Shameless Self-Promotion

At the beginning of June, we were invited to the Bangkok Tourism Fair. The Tourism Authority of Thailand provided us with a free booth for the duration of the fair (which would normally cost over 20,000 Baht) and Marion, our marketing super-star, accompanied women from Pak Triam, Tung Nang Dam, and Ban Talae Nok. Having recently been featured on a popular national television show, the ladies and their displays attracted much attention from the crowds.



Taking part in the Tourism Fair helped the community-based tourism groups realize that Thai people really are interested in visiting their communities, not just foreigners. So the villagers have decided that they want to do some marketing of their own. Being new to the business world, they are naturally hesitant and have asked for some basic training from Andaman Discoveries. Thus, Tui and Kelly will provide basic training to help the ladies get started including preparation of brochures, identifying potential customers, and an outreach/networking plan.

Tapa Yoi Water Filter – Agua Para Vida



The water quality in Tapa Yoi has been atrocious of late. NATR has thus teamed up with the Rotary Club of Patong Beach to provide a water filter for the village. In June, a weather protection facility was built to hold the water filter and allow it to provide clean water for the village without the worries of a beating from the monsoon. Now that the weather protection is in place, Rotary Club of Patong Beach will install the filter, and the villagers will have readily available drinking water.

Tung Dap Conservation - Waste Management and Mangrove Reforestation



Pin (left), our fabulous village-based project manager, is now 8 months pregnant, and has handed over her duties to Duan (right), another of Tung Dap's motivated youngsters. The project, now in Phase 2, will focus on long-term efforts to maintain the successes of Phase 1. Working voluntarily, Duan and local children will collect and sort waste. With support from NATR, the community conservation group will continue to patrol and survey the mangrove forest – making sure that fish and crab populations have a chance to recover from over-harvesting.



New Contact Details - Stay in Touch

For community-based tourism and handicrafts, please contact Kelly and Tui: info@andamandiscoveries.com
For all other programs, or to contact Bodhi and Jo, the new email address is Bodhi@northandamantsunamirelief.com

Also, we have a new office address:
120/27 Sukapiban 3 Rd.,
Moo 1. T. Kura, A. Kuraburi,
Phang-Nga Thailand 82150