

TO DO! 2010

Contest Socially Responsible Tourism



Award Winner

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES

Represented by:

**Bodhi Garrett,
Founder of
ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES
Kuraburi**

Thailand

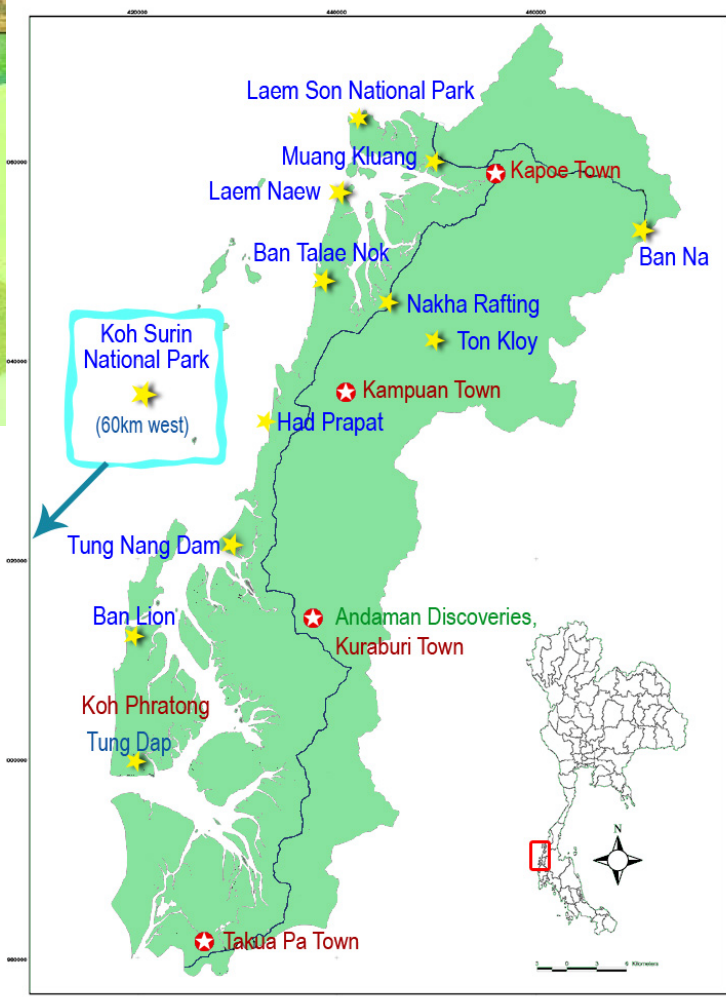
Rationale for the Award

by

Dr. Christian Adler

เครือข่ายการท่องเที่ยวชุมชนชนพื้นเมืองบนเกาะเหนือ

North Andaman Community Tourism Network



1 INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V. (Institute for Tourism and Development), the author visited Kuraburi in southern Thailand in October 2010 in order to check the application by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES on site. For this purpose, he participated in a five days' round trip, visiting Tung Nang Dam, Ban Talae Nok, Ban Lion, an orphanage, and a Burmese Learning Centre (of the Burmese minority living in the region). He participated in various activities offered by local people. The information provided in the application was verified in detail.

On the basis of his insights and findings and in appreciation of their objectives, principles and activities, the author recommends awarding ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES a TO DO! 2010.

What needs to be highlighted is the holistic approach taken by a small group of people working on designing and strengthening local development in a coastal region of Thailand, involving the population and protecting the coastal environment. A network of local communities has emerged from this. All the projects are targeted at long-term social, economic and ecological sustainability.

2 BACKGROUND AND SETTING

2.1 Tourism in Thailand

Tourism in Thailand is mainly concentrated in the capital Bangkok, in destinations in the north of the country (the so-called "Golden Triangle"), furthermore in the region around Pattaya in the east of the Gulf of Thailand, and on the islands of Koh Samui in the west. The tourist centres in the south of Thailand are situated on Phuket island in the Andaman Sea, e.g. in Patong, and further north in the region of Khao Lak.

In 1998, the country registered 7.8 million tourist arrivals, which grew to 14.5 million by 2008. However, there were several temporary declines in visitor numbers, due to the SARS epidemic, bird flu, and the tsunami in late 2004. In 2009, visitor numbers fell by 390,000, due to the riots in Bangkok and the closure of the airport.

In 2008, the tourism industry's contribution of to the country's gross national product was only 6.5 percent. Nevertheless, international guests spent 17.6 billion US-dollars. They stay for nine days on average. European holidaymakers account for 22.2 percent of all tourist arrivals (almost four million). Far more visitors come from East Asian countries, mainly from Malaysia and Japan (52.4 percent in 2008). Domestic tourism also plays an increasing role in Thailand.¹

2.2 ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES – History and Environment

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES is a travel agency which currently has seven paid employees working full time. The office is located in Kuraburi in Phang Nga province in the south of Thailand. In the area north of the tourist centres of Phuket and Khao Lak, which has hardly been opened up for tourism, Buddhists, Muslims and Moken (sea gypsies) peacefully live side by side, following their traditional ways of living as fishermen and farmers.

The region situated on the Andaman coast was severely hit by the tsunami in 2004. Many villages were fully destroyed, many people died. The region subsequently received generous aid. New settlements and schools were built with money donated by the royal family of Thailand,

¹ Sources: thaiwebsites.com, Euromonitor International, National Economic and Social Development Board (NSDB) Bangkok.

Lions Club International, Rotary, Swiss foundations, and many others. Fishermen, who had lost everything due to the disaster, got new boats, etc. A tsunami early warning system has in the meantime been installed, and all along the coast signboards point out possible escape routes.

Following the disaster, Bodhi Garrett, an American who had been affected by the tsunami himself, initiated the aid organisation NATR (North Andaman Tsunami Relief). This NGO also helped the coastal people in the reconstruction of villages. A committed network of supporters, volunteer helpers and donors emerged. During the years that followed, the network implemented 120 reconstruction projects in 22 communities – always in direct cooperation with the villagers.

This intensive but only relatively short term tsunami aid, however, was not sufficient. For example, fishermen who had got new boats could not afford fuel or buy new nets. This led to temporary food shortages².

Long term development programmes had to be conceptualised and implemented in order to open up new job opportunities and sources of income. Under these circumstances, an agency was set up, which later became ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES in Kuraburi. It was founded by Bodhi Garrett who grew up in Asia, but has American roots. He regarded community based tourism as a good opportunity to provide an additional, socially responsible source of income to the villagers without affecting their traditional ways of living. Together with the local people, he developed tourism programmes, continued to collect donations, and worked towards sustainable rehabilitation. ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES represents also a kind of link to the coastal people. The agency initiates and gives advice. In cooperation with Thai tour operators, it arranges stays in the villages and visitors' programmes and thus helps the local people earn direct income. Furthermore, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES has various other ways of supporting village community development, which will be described in the following.

Initiated by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES, the N-ACT (North Andaman Community Tourism) network, an association of independent village communities, was developed from the tsunami aid (NATR). The twelve network members actively cooperate with each other. ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES currently also works with another six villages. The representatives of N-ACT are volunteers.

3 TOURISM PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES offers visits for one day or several days, which can be booked at local agencies or on the internet. Guests spending their holiday in Khao Lak, about 100 kilometres from Kuraburi, can participate in the villages activities for a day and can return to their hotel in the evening.

If they stay for a couple of days, several villages can be visited and home stay accommodation in clean and simple rooms is available. Guests are warmly welcomed by the local people and thus have the opportunity to get to know the rural life of a Thai family. If the guests are interested, the villagers also involve them in their daily activities. They would ask them to help weaving together Nipa palm leaves which are being used to thatch roofs. The guests may accompany fishermen going out to the sea; they may either just watch them or try fishing themselves. They can learn Thai cooking from the house wife hosting them, or they may join in the production of handicraft, e.g. in dyeing cloth, weaving, producing batiks, or producing natural soap.

² The declining fish stocks, the proliferation of oil palm and rubber plantations, and the unrestricted cutting down of mangroves are an exploitation of resources and increasingly affect the traditional life styles of the coastal population. Furthermore, these people live with the trauma of a horrible natural disaster, which continues to have an influence on their daily lives.

In order to avoid difficulties of interaction, every guest is accompanied by an interpreter during the stay. In the evenings, there are possibilities for discussions and cultural exchange with the hosts.

The range of eco and adventure tours offered is multifaceted and varies from village to village. The villages involved are located in a region which extends over 130 km from north to south. Visitors can go on excursions to the village surroundings which have remained remarkably natural. Hiking trails lead to spectacular waterfalls, through wetlands but also through savannah-like arid areas. Guests can stroll through pristine rainforests boasting an extraordinarily diverse flora and fauna, and they can watch monkeys or rare hornbills. In the nearby protected areas, there are even endemic wild elephants, tigers, and tapirs. In search of the almost extinct sea cow (dugong), guest will walk across the mudflats to the sea cows' sea weed grazing grounds. One can take a motor-boat or canoe through a labyrinth of seemingly endless canals lined by mangroves, or book a harmless rafting tour on a picturesque river. The river banks are lined by water lilies which can now be found only in this region. Furthermore, local people also invite their guests on bicycle tours.

Guests looking for relaxation will find mile long, deserted, sandy beaches. They can visit remote islands, swim or snorkel in the clean, turquoise water of the Andaman Sea, or simply enjoy the tropical sunsets.

Furthermore, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES offers long-term stays for volunteers who can get involved by working free of charge with educational institutions, an orphanage, or with nature conservation projects. For students and academics, tailor-made educational and info trips will be arranged. If visitors want to stay longer for study purposes, there are possibilities for field research on coastal ecology or on socio-ecological issues.

The prices for individual services are being determined by the villagers themselves and vary slightly. Accommodation for one night costs around 5 € per person, including full-board 10 €. In addition, 12.50 € will be charged per day as a fee for a local guide, plus 32.50 € for an interpreter sent by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES and to cover transport. A fisherman, for example, gets 45 € for a boat trip to Ban Lion. For trips by car, the rates applicable in Phuket will be charged.

For a hiking tour accompanied by a local guide and an interpreter, 12.50 € will be charged, a visit to an orchid garden costs 1.25 €, and the same is charged for joining women binding Nipa leaves. Joining in the production of soap costs 4.50 € and participating in a meeting of youth groups 12.50 €. There will be a surcharge of 20 percent on these prices which goes to the communities, plus 15 percent as a profit margin for ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES as an agent.³

As transport to a village often requires a vehicle and/or a boat, the costs for an individual traveller quickly add up to 125 € per day. A group staying for ten days for study purposes would be charged about 400 € per person. Participation in a 26 days' educational programme, e.g. on "sustainable village development", is offered – depending on the size of the group – from 850 €/person.

³ Note by the author: It might be easier and more comfortable for visitors if they did not have to pay each activity or service separately, but if it were instead possible to centralise the collection of payments.

4 ASSESSMENT

The comparison of the activities conducted by **ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES** with the **six TO DO! contest criteria and three additional questions** leads to the following assessment:

Evaluation against the **TODO!** contest criteria

4.1 Taking into account the different interests and needs of the local people through participation

"We give all the power that was taken away from the villagers by the tsunami back into their own hands", says the company's founder Bodhi Garrett. When helping the villagers, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES above all seek to initiate processes which will lead to a future development designed by the local people themselves. The objective is to regain and secure their economic independence on the basis of ecological sustainability.

At first, there is a need for a well-founded knowledge of the local conditions as well as an intuitive understanding of the respective place. Reaching this point requires a lot of time, empathy and diplomacy. Therefore, before starting any activity, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES would send a representative to find out details regarding the motivations and opinions of the villagers. The villagers will be asked to articulate their special needs, values, cultural characteristics, and expectations in the context of tourism and to describe how they themselves see their respective village. The outcome of this self-evaluation is a so-called "Sense of Place Book", a kind of common denominator the villagers themselves identify with. It is the basis to build on in their joint efforts to develop community based tourism at a later stage.

The success of the N-ACT network is based on a careful selection of communities wanting to promote tourism in their village. Villages will be accepted as members only if they fulfil or accept the following conditions:

- If they are prepared to participate in a home stay programme;
- If the profit generated benefits the villagers themselves;
- If a group of people is motivated and interested;
- If there is a diversity of attractive possible tourist activities;
- If links between tourism and sensitive ways of relating to nature are accepted.

4.2 Enhancing the awareness of the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural lives

This first step is followed by careful preparation of the village community. For opportunities also result in new obligations and responsibilities. On the one hand, this preparation happens in various workshops, showing both positive as well as negative impacts of tourism. On the other hand, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES arranges trips to see existing tourism models in communities with functioning community-oriented programmes – or to Khao Lak, as an example of mainstream tourism development.

In 2006, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES, in cooperation with the Thai Ministry of Tourism and the Thailand Eco Adventure Tourism Association, organised a conference in which local government officials, community leaders, media and many interested villagers also participated. The conference promoted sustainable, socially responsible tourism in the region. After these events, the villagers had a basis for their decision and were free to decide whether they wanted to participate in implementing such projects.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES has a particular interest in raising awareness among young people, so that they will recognize the value of their cultural tradition and the need to protect the environment. This effort has yielded some success: Several youth groups are now active on the northern Andaman coast. These young people are involved in projects related to their own future. They work on protecting the biodiversity in their surroundings, e.g. by doing surveys of the flora and fauna, by protecting the rare water lilies and marine turtles, or by developing nature trails.

The young people of Ban Talae Nok planted more than 300 trees in order to make the tsunami affected coast more resilient against future storms and to prevent further erosion. Another group is engaged in the restoration of mangroves, as the crabs living in the mangroves are an important food source, especially for poor sections of the population.

The youths have been introducing waste segregation and recycling in their villages. They meet every weekend in order to collect discarded waste. They also initiated a village beautification competition. They have been promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, e.g. in agriculture. There is also a group working on "organic waste". This group manages its own vegetable garden, among other things. In Ban Talae Nok there is even a group organising puppet shows to raise environmental awareness among elder villagers. Of course, among all these activities, the youths do not forget to have fun, so they also meet in a dance and sports group. These projects have long been running by themselves, with ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES only providing guidance or helping in getting financial support, if needed.

It made sense to involve these youths in a socially responsible tourism model and to create a network among them. In appreciation of their remarkable commitment and good knowledge of their area, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES invited the groups a couple of years ago to exchange experiences. Representatives from twelve villages came and have since then been keeping in touch with each other and cooperating.

4.3 Participation of broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

Within the villages that are part of the N-ACT network, every family is free to decide whether and in what manner they would like to benefit from the tourism programme. For example, there are 226 people in Ban Talae Nok, the village has 62 houses. 32 of these households are involved in the community based tourism programme. 15 households provide rooms for guests. Members of other families are involved as local guides, organise transport by boat, are available for hiking tours, fishing, or crafts. Again others produce handicraft items.

The situation in Ban Lion with about 80 houses is similar: 20 households are involved in community based tourism, 9 families offer home stays. In the small village Tung Nang Dam, there are only 60 to 80 inhabitants left, living in 30 houses. Five families are prepared for home stay guests, generating 1,925 euros (in 2009). The village of Ban Talae Nok even generated an income of 332,000 baht (8,300 euros) in this way.

The guests hand over the money to a coordinator in the village, who is also in charge of accommodation and passes the money on to the service providers. The guests will be put up with different families on the basis of a rotational principle, so that none of the hosts will be at a disadvantage.

The existing capacities have not been fully used at all. In 2009, the twelve villages received a total of 429 visitors. As already mentioned, each of the families involved in the home stay programme hardly hosts more than one guest per month. Therefore, fishing as the main source of income is not being affected.

As 20 percent of the income generated is being retained and passed on to the community, the tourism income eventually benefits all the villagers, for example by being spent on improving the village infrastructure or by being invested in nature conservation. In Tung Nang Dam, this money is used for the conservation of wetlands, in Ban Na for the protection of the endangered water lilies. In other places, the money is used to support children from families with less income in their schooling, or in order to finance school excursions. In Ban Talae Nok, the money is used to organise festivities on 7th December, "Children's Day". Each of the children would get a gift and food would be organised for the whole village.

4.4 Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions relative to payment, social security, working hours as well as education and training

A precondition for the creation of jobs in tourism is, first of all, a respective training of the people. As part of their support for the villagers, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES go far beyond mere tourism requirements and meet much broader needs. They generally support the villagers' skills and their self-development. The measures implemented are numerous and only some of them can be mentioned here.

For example, the various measures offered by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES include English classes, taking into account people's different levels of education: For villagers, there are general classes in "In-Village-English", for guides in "Junior-Guide-English" and for families involved in the home stay programmes in "English for Community Based Tourism". As teaching material, a phrase book is available, printed in both Thai and Latin characters, which has been compiled by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES and which contains tourism-related phrases. As there are still people, for example in the sea gypsy communities, who are illiterate and are not familiar with the Thai alphabet, English classes for them concentrate on learning through verbal communication.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES organises computer classes for people to learn common applications and to use the internet.

Special emphasis is placed on the training of "ACE experts", which has already been completed by 22 motivated persons. ACE stands for "Adventure, Community based, Eco-Tourism". This long-term programme includes all the relevant subjects that are necessary for the participants to implement an eco-friendly Community Based Tourism (CBT) project themselves at a later stage. It includes training programmes to develop management skills, a training in book keeping and CBT management, and an introduction into coastal ecology and nature protection. Furthermore, it includes exercises in regional folk traditions, a course in first aid, and a course qualifying participants to work as tour guides. The students who participated to date had to take part in various workshops and also got the opportunity to learn about tourism in the mountain communities of northern Thailand. They went to see the beaches in Phuket which have been developed for tourism, and participated in a national seminar in Bangkok.

For every training programme, curricula developed by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES are available which have been evaluated and approved by the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Even the curriculum for the training of guides is very comprehensive. Candidates are expected to know the area extremely well. They learn about the flora and fauna. The curriculum also includes subjects such as the authentic interpretation of traditional culture, religion and history, hospitality, tourist expectations, guiding of groups, conflict resolution, safety standards, as well as kayaking and boating. Before sending strangers to a place as guests, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES will send a test group. Experienced local tour operators help in training the guides.

At the end of their training as "ACE experts", participants will get a certificate issued by the tourism ministry, which will help them to immediately get a job in a sustainable tourism project. For example, some of them were hired to implement a six months' outdoor education programme for young people.

There are also groups of people without sufficient education to take part in such a training. For example, the Moken (sea gypsies) who immigrated from Burma again need to be mentioned in this context. They were also severely affected by the tsunami and lost everything. At times, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES even supplied food to them and continues to help them obtain medical care.

The Moken are not only admirable seafarers, they are also very skilled craftspeople and excellent boat makers. In order to help them generate an income again, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES encouraged them to produce models of their traditional boats. A small-scale souvenir industry developed from this activity, currently involving 20 men. Their products sell extremely well in the tourist markets. Together with other handicraft items produced by N-ACT members, the boats are also sold on the internet at fixed prices.⁴

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES also supports an orphanage taking care of children who lost their homes and their parents in the disaster. This "Home and Life School" works with volunteers who are sent by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES. The children sing and perform Thai dances for the guests and can in this way also benefit from tourism. In October 2010, for example, they generated an income of about 1,000 €, along with visitors' donations.

Furthermore, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES helps with long-term scholarships to provide school education and training for 130 children from poor families. It should be emphasized at this point that two students have already reached university level. One of them is from a Moken family and wants to be a doctor, the other one is studying tourism management in Surat Thani.

In a nutshell: ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES organises contacts with partner companies, organisations, and schools, with government institutions and universities, recruits paid or volunteer trainers and also does considerable lobbying, in order to get the support of decision makers for these projects.

These measures require considerable financial resources. ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES is getting funding and financial support from various sources⁵.

4.5 Strengthening the local culture and the cultural identity of people living in tourism destination areas

In the predominantly Muslim communities on the Andaman coast, people still live according to their cultural and religious traditions. Girls and women are covered or wear black scarfs, only their faces are visible. The population that lives according to Buddhist traditions also has a rather traditional orientation. In these villages, the Western life style which characterises modern Thailand in the big cities and in the tourist centres has hardly had any influence. Community based tourism as it is currently happening will not change this for the worse.

All of the culturally oriented programmes focus on activities that strengthen the traditional self-image and thus the cultural identity of the coastal population. (Participation of tourists in activities such as weaving nipa leaves, weaving, fishing, see above). The hosts experience a high degree of appreciation for their living environments from the side of the tourists.

⁴ <http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/andaman-handicrafts-boats.php>

⁵ One example: In 2009, the costs for the students' scholarships amounted to 15,000 €. This amount was financed from a fund which got contributions from the following donors: a British foundation, a Swedish family, a school in Singapore, a Rotary Club in Thailand, the Protestant church in Bangkok, and a yoga school in Bangkok.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES promotes cultural initiatives, e.g. traditional music and Thai dance, gives children the opportunity to learn to play an instrument, and also supports performances during traditional festivals. They also maintain close contacts with a Buddhist monastery situated outside Kuraburi as well as a Burmese study centre.

4.6 Avoiding and minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism in tourism destination areas

As described above, avoiding social problems caused by tourism starts with the careful selection of the communities that may be involved as N-ACT members in the participatory tourism model. To date, 25 communities have been able to qualify.

At the same time, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES will check in advance which tour operators may be offered the opportunity to market the villages participating in the N-ACT network, as only responsible tour operators will be allowed to sell the programmes. They will be the only ones to be supplied advertising materials.

The tourists, too, will be carefully prepared for their stay. They will get an introduction prior to their visit (a "Pre-Departure Information Booklet") which apart from general information about the region and Thai culture, transport to the destination, equipment, etc. also provides guidelines on behaviour in the villages ("In-Village-Guidelines"). At the beginning, seven important recommendations are made which are to be observed: In the predominantly Muslim villages, alcohol is prohibited. People would frown upon women showing too much skin (bikinis are not allowed). Showing strong affection in public is not permitted (kissing is not acceptable), and guests must take their shoes off before entering a house or a temple. Taking people's photos is only acceptable if they have been asked and given their permission. To ensure that children do not develop a begging mentality, guests are asked not to distribute money or sweets.

Visitors are even given full details about the local ways of taking a bath and using the toilet. At the end of the paragraph on "responsibility" it is written: "We would like to ask the guests to be patient, open-minded and ready to accept what is new for them."

The local guides and interpreters see to it that the "dos and don'ts" are being respected. The guests are given basic vocabulary in the form of a small phrase book and are encouraged to learn a bit of their hosts' language.

At the end of their stay, guests will be asked to fill in a form and to evaluate the services they experienced. At the same time, the hosts are also asked to provide feedback on how they experienced the guests' visit and whether they noticed any adverse effects on their village lives. Any criticism will later be discussed among N-ACT members at their meetings in order to make the necessary changes.

Evaluation against the TODO! additional questions

A) Could you give some examples which document that your project/measure is in line with environmental compatibility?

It can already be seen from what has been said above that in the villages of the N-ACT members, strong efforts are being made to link tourism with environmental conservation. Guests are therefore explicitly welcome to work as volunteers in one of the environmental projects (often as part of a long-term stay). This is a good opportunity to learn something new and an ideal way for visitors to give something back to the local community.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES provides guidance, organises workshops and other training programmes and also provides material support for the villages in their nature conservation efforts. A considerable financial contribution comes from one of the oldest international nature conservation organisations, the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). There are also NGOs working together with local environmental groups in the region for the survival of sea turtles and sea cows, for the restoration of mangroves and the conservation of coral reefs.⁶

As many of the villagers do not have the financial means to provide food and accommodation for volunteers, the experts of NGOs have to pay for their stay just like the tourists. It has to be pointed out, however, that small NGOs in particular provide their staff with very limited resources. In order not to endanger running activities, they help each other, unbureaucratically and without any sense of competitiveness.

B) Are there any examples in the framework of the project which make clear that a just participation of women and men has been taken into account during the planning/ implementation phase of your project/measure? Considering gender relation, can be found any improvement of the status/situation of women within your project/measure?

The division of tasks in community based tourism comes in a natural manner with the traditional gender roles. That means, men are responsible for the boats or work as work guides, women are in charge of the household work such as providing food and home stay, as well as most of the handicraft activities. The example of Ban Talae Nok shows that women generate more income in their fields of activity. In seven months in 2008, women's groups in Ban Talae Nok earned 178,745 baht (4,468 €), while during the same time the men earned only 47,370 baht (1,184 €).

For the women, community based tourism means a considerable improvement of their life situation. For them, there is no other possibility to earn money within the villages – opportunities are only in one of the nearby towns, in Phuket or Ranong. A normal family life would not be possible then. And the men's income as fishermen is just about enough to cover the daily needs. Nowadays, the women thus contribute significantly to the family's standard of living, without their tourism activities getting into conflict with their traditional family duties.

There is no particular measure behind the fact that most of the coordinators in the villages and most of the members in the tourism groups are women. The staff of ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES also consists of only one male and seven female employees. This might rather be due to women generally being comparatively more interested in social matters. However, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES supports training programmes for women to get into managing positions in their communities.

⁶ For example, one should mention "Wetlands International", "Naucrates Conservation Group", "Reef Check Thailand" or "The Mangrove Action Project". Furthermore, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES works with Thai institutions such as the Thai Environment Institute.

C) Through which measures/mechanisms is the economic and institutional sustainability of the project guaranteed?

We need to distinguish between the economic and institutional sustainability of the N-ACT members' network on the one hand, and ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES as a travel agent, supplier of ideas, organiser, promoter and facilitator to obtain funding on the other hand.

The objective is that the N-ACT members organise their own administration, marketing and continuous development. Another objective is that they should no longer be dependent on external support and should achieve full independence – also independence from ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES. Currently there is a very clear dependence, as community based tourism only helped to increase the family income and to improve the living conditions in the communities.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES remain the driving force and try to make the progress and weaknesses in village development visible through constant monitoring and evaluation. ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES want to empower the villagers to eventually become fully self-sufficient and to independently follow sustainable business plans.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES are also trying to convince government institutions to cooperate with the N-ACT members. They regret that at the government level the understanding of sustainable, participatory forms of tourism is not really developed yet. Projects are usually only acknowledged once they are economically successful. At least, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES has managed to have three villages integrated into national advertising campaigns run by the ministry of sports and tourism, and to have them marketed internationally as "Southern Trail".

Another step towards more independence: ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES got the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives to train the tourism groups and handicraft producing groups in the communities in professional marketing.

For the twelve communities of the N-ACT network, a "corporate identity" and a website "andamancoast.org" have been developed. Links are provided to connect the network with the internet portals of other CBT networks. Several attractive advertising materials were printed, including flyers, also in German language. ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES help the villages to be represented at tourism fairs, etc.

Currently, all the projects still stand and fall with the involvement of the staff of this company. Therefore, the institutional sustainability of ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES is also crucial for the overall success of the development efforts.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES derive about 60 percent of their income from their work as a travel agent, 40 percent from the work of their staff in the context of projects funded by donations. Donations are only used for specific projects and are not related to the company's tourism business, which is managed completely independently.

The CBT programme is self-sustaining. That means, the income that the company got from the guests covers the company's organisational costs and salaries. Services for the communities of the N-ACT network are provided free of charge.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The strength of ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES mainly lies in the high personal motivation and determination of their staff to really make things move in this coastal region. They want to show that the implementation of sustainable, socially and ecologically responsible development concepts can be a successful option: a counter example to the primarily materialistic projects that open up areas for tourism, and an alternative to the kind of tourism that destroyed the cultural diversity and environment in other places in Thailand.

The positions taken by ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES are based on experiences at the grassroots level. Measures are implemented only after a detailed discussion with the people concerned. The means are chosen in agreement with the local people. After the initial phase, ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES withdraws to now adopt the role of a service provider, making professional expertise available along with various consultancies and training programmes.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES is also characterised by their clear targets, and especially by their continuity in realising the objectives. What is especially worth mentioning – because it is hardly ever done with such precision and such major effort – is the transparent manner in which ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES documents every single phase of the projects, starting from the reasons for a project, the concept and the planning details. Every single activity during the implementation is documented, including the results achieved, and they are presented to the members in the communities in a reproducible manner. Evaluation and post-processing are also excellent.

Consistent monitoring helps the twelve N-ACT members to evaluate what they have achieved, and it helps them to compare their results with those of neighbouring communities. It also compares the current state achieved to date with the target state. The villagers are thus motivated to continue with their activities.

The people working in this project are not idealistic, but realistic. They work in a pragmatic manner, with their purpose in life being to help a coastal population that was hit existentially hard by a natural disaster. The success of their commitment is clearly visible, as well as the opportunities resulting from it for the villages and their future. ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES has created a successful network operating in a sustainable manner, which has already developed its own dynamics in the villages.

ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES is well accepted everywhere at the grassroots and is welcome everywhere. New communities would like to join the network; donors are approaching Bodhi Garrett and want to provide funding because they trust ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES.

This success, however, is being called into question by a situation that may become reality in the future and that may endanger all the efforts made so far. The plots along the coast have already been sold to investors by the previous generation. Since then, prices have risen to such an extent that nowadays local people can hardly afford a plot of land close to the beach.

The beaches are still pristine. But once they are opened up to tourism, as it has happened in Khao Lak and along so many coastlines where we find one hotel next to the other, there is a real danger that the local people will be bulldozed by investors' development plans. What shall a fisherman do when he no longer has access to the coast with his boat?

This is one of the reasons why ANDAMAN DISCOVERIES especially supports young people. They are the next generation of decision makers. They will live their lives in ways that were already engraved in their minds when they were children: With a sense of responsibility for the natural environment, a readiness to act in a socially responsible manner, and an understanding for the value of traditions.

English translation: Christina Kamp

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