

Cultural Villages of the North Andaman

The North Andaman coast of Thailand is an extraordinary region of ecological and cultural diversity and interest. Compared to other areas of natural beauty in the region, it is remarkably undeveloped and many communities still survive by their traditional livelihoods.

Much of the mountain and coastal zones have been designated as protected areas, in recognition of their unique importance to Thailand's natural heritage. Two of the oldest and richest ecosystems on our planet, the coral reefs and the Southeast Asian rainforest, which date back 160 million years, still survive here almost side by side. The combination of mangrove swamps, coral reefs, limestone karsts, beaches and evergreen tropical forest provide habitats for an amazing array of wildlife. This rich blend creates a fascinating environment for exploration which is as contrasting as it is captivating.

The Muslim, Buddhist, and Moken communities that live alongside each other here exude a warmth and generosity of spirit that is rare to find nowadays. Most villages along the coastal belt are predominantly fishing communities that survive on the bounty of the sea to which their fate is inextricably linked. On 26th December 2004 when the tsunami hit, these communities were devastated by its impact but their resilience and incredible recovery has become a source of inspiration to visitors.

This undiscovered part of Thailand will captivate visitors who wish to learn about traditional ways of life and who want to contribute to the conservation of this outstanding natural environment



North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR)

North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR) has been working with coastal communities in the North Andaman since the tsunami struck. To date, over 60 projects in 12 villages have been completed. NATR is now helping survivors recognize the transition from crisis relief to post-tsunami development. Before the tsunami, most affected communities lived a traditional fishing lifestyle and many young, talented people would leave the region to find work in larger cities. There is very little economic diversity in the area, so tourism as it slowly makes its way north from Khao Lak, presents a real economic opportunity. More than ever, the region is being exposed to the threat of large and exploitative tourist developments. Unless action is taken soon there is a danger of local communities being unprepared, both in terms of job skills and cultural resilience. This could lead to rapid community and natural degradation.

NATR is in a unique position to support individuals to visit these communities and participate in community-driven tourism development because we have a

- strong relationship with community members
- qualified field staff with extensive local knowledge
- deep understanding of the importance of listening to the needs of each community
- History of delivering on our promises
- Shared vision for the future

What is Community-Based Tourism (CBT)?

CBT is a tourism that does not simply seek to maximize profits for investors. Rather, it is more concerned with the impact of tourism on the community and environment. CBT emerges from a community development strategy, using tourism management as a tool to strengthen community organization through community-wide participation.

“CBT is tourism that takes environmental, social and cultural sustainability into account. It is owned and managed by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life.” (REST, 1997)



For more information contact relieffund@inet.co.th



Typical Itinerary

DAY 1

- 08.00 Meet in Kuraburi.
- 09.00 Welcome to village and hear first-hand about village's amazing story of post-tsunami struggle



- 10.00 **Activity Option 1**
Take traditional style boat with local fisherman to lay hand-woven fishing nets and learn about sustainable fishing practices – Adventure on to discover beautiful deserted island with coral reefs for snorkelling, and swimming – Picnic lunch on beach, under shade of coconut trees, including sumptuous hand-prepared regional dishes – Mangrove exploration to discover hidden waterfall, chance to see many indigenous species of exotic wildlife; macaque monkeys, kingfishers, otters and owls

- 17.00 Return to village and relax in homestay

- 18.00 Help prepare dinner, learning how to prepare local specialties



- 19.30 Eat with family, sharing stories and cultural experiences

DAY 2

- 09.00 **Activity Option 2**
Rainforest trek up Eagle Mountain – Local experts point out jungle plants with ancient culinary and medicinal uses – Arrive on summit for breathtaking views of forest steeped mountains, and islands – Descend through wetlands and mangroves for picnic lunch – Bike tour round island visiting livelihood projects and village cultural sights – Sunset on beach, drinking fresh coconut juice



STEPS TOWARDS CBT

Community Feasibility Study

Find out if tourism meets the wider needs of the whole community

- Workshops to agree on community goals and motivation
- Exploration of positive and negative impacts of varying types of tourism, included field trips to working tourism models e.g. Koh Yao Noi, Kiriwong and Khao Lak
- Pilot tour: opportunity to experience tourism and assess its suitability

Community-driven development

Create quality activities shaped by the community. Develop skills for tourism through training and community empowerment

- Village Model, Sense of Place booklet, Life and Nature trail
- Intensive Business and Guide training
- Computer and English lessons

You can be part of the process!

Visit the Cultural Villages of the North Andaman and support tsunami impacted communities

- Build a tradition of positive cultural exchange
- Give hands-on experience to local tourists
- Provide a valuable critique of service and experience
- Have an enjoyable and meaningful experience and tell your friends about it
- So they can visit, too!

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