

the
natural guide

ANDAMAN COAST: Staying with locals during your vacation



Along the Andaman shore, several thousand people live nomadically or semi-nomadically. The Mokens live on wooden boats in Ranong and Phang-Nga provinces, and are one of the last communities who still embrace a lifestyle in line with spirits and nature. The Moklens, another community, were originally fishermen and farmers familiar with the mangrove swamps. Other nomadic communities live along the Phuket, Trang or Satun seashores, or on the Tarutao Islands. Thais call them *Chao Ley*, which literally means “people from the sea” and the Thai government does not recognize them as Thai citizens nor are they given basic rights.

To fully embrace cultural diversity, **living with locals** (a practice common all over Southern Thailand) is a simple yet extraordinary way to discover other people’s lifestyles and beliefs. Most host families’ resources are based on farming, fishing or craftsmanship. Hosting tourists gives them much-needed, additional income.

NATR AND COMMUNITY TOURISM

In the aftermath of the tsunami, Bohdi Garrett, a young American, received many offers of help from people in love with the area. Garrett created **North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR)** to channel these resources to help the villagers with food and logistics.

KURABURI AND THE SURIN ISLANDS

The Kuraburi area would most likely be completely unknown amongst tourists were it not for its pier for the Surin Islands. And yet, it displays a rich cultural mix, as well as a preserved and luxurious nature.

There are few hotels and tour operators near Kuraburi – tourism is hardly developed. Nevertheless, locals, with the help of NATR, offer 1,001 different ways to discover regional diversity by opening up their own homes and offering total immersion via a night’s stay with a local family.

Andaman Discoveries, solidarity vacations At the heart of the real Thailand

With long-term rehabilitation in mind, NATR created **Andaman Discoveries**, a voluntourism project which helps villagers welcome tourists. One can choose to teach English, train families to become hosts, help with workshop constructions, create community vegetable gardens, clean beaches or take part in other volunteer activities. T 087 917 7165 – www.northandamantsunamirelief.com – www.andamandiscoveries.com

The Surin Islands

A National Park since 1981, the Surin Islands are famous for their preserved and magnificent sea depths. In addition to not being recognized as citizens, restrictions are imposed



The Natural Guide to Thailand is the third in a series of guide books dedicated to appreciating and respecting people and the environment. Created by the Bumi Kita Foundation (www.naturalguide.org), the book is written by environmentalists, anthropologists, sociologists, journalists and artists – mostly Thais and insiders – who have selected only those businesses that actively demonstrate environmental and social commitment. In each issue, *Bangkok 101* presents a destination excerpt from this guide and hopes readers will consider *the Natural Guide* approach when travelling in Thailand. *The Natural Guide to Bali* is also available.

on the Moken's fishing and use of natural resources. The Mokens now tend to get more involved in tourism by offering boat rides. There is no hotel, but visitors can stay in bungalows on Koh Surin Nua. Be careful though, as the park is closed from May to November. *T 07 649 1378 – www.thaiforestbooking.com.*

KOHYAO NOI

The Koh Yao Noi community has been involved in a community tourism project (Community-Based Tourism, or CBT) for ten years. Their goal is to use tourism as a supplemental income source and as a pressure tool on fishing industries that trawl illegally. Trawling uses fine-knit nets that damage coral reefs. CBT is also trying to facilitate exchanges between the island's residents and foreign guests, which is possible due to involvement from the locals.

KYN Ecotourism Club has an immersion option to stay with the locals which is different from the more traditional option where guests merely stay the night with hosts. In this case, guests spend the day with their hosts, have dinner with them, go fishing with them etc. *T 07 659 7244 – M 086 299 2175*

Tha Kao BayView is a small hotel started on the initiative of Baan Tha Kao's headman and has since been developed in tight collaboration with KYN Ecotourism Club. Visitors have the advantages of both a community hotel and a stay with a guest family. Bungalows are made of natural building materials such as recycled wood, bamboo and palm leaves. *T 07 659 7559 – M 089 589 9105*

KRABI

Krabi is a pleasant little city which provides a port of call on the way to the national parks and the islands, and visitors may enjoy spending a few days in the city to discover the wild mangrove swamps and Thara Park on the river bank.



Krabi Blue Bay Bungalow Khun Nithi has charming bungalows made entirely of natural and recycled materials, linked by a small wooden bridge which makes wends through diverse vegetation. If you are interested in learning more about local lifestyle, ask to organize a visit to the Muslim fishermen's villages on the other bank. *T 07 563 0559*

North of Railay, in Muslim **Baan Nateen** village a dozen families are now opening their doors to travelers. The comfort is minimal but there's still privacy. During the day, villagers will take you to observe and join them in their daily activities: production of coconut craftsmanship, batiks, rubber, or fishing at sea.

The "home stay" project adopted by the village was conceived in 2001 with the help of TAT to limit the population's exodus to the neighbouring tourist villages. This allowed the village residents to take advantage of tourism while still living within their community. *M 081 968 8532 – T 07 563 7390 – www.thaitambon.com*

