



Andaman Discoveries
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PRESS RELEASE

1 December 2007

A new kind of tourism for Thailand: Community-based efforts gain International recognition after the tsunami

Kuraburi, Thailand

Andaman Discoveries, a grassroots responsible travel organization in Thailand, is the Winner of the 2007 Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards AND finalist of the 2007 Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards.

Nartladda Klongwitti, or Chim as her friends call her, smiles as she welcomes the group of foreigners to her village on the Andaman Coast. Unlike the majority of visitors over the past few years, this group of visitors is not here to see the destruction wrought by the tsunami of 2004. Instead, they are here as tourists to enjoy the cultural and natural splendor of Tung Nang Dam, a village of 35 houses situated in between the coral reefs and dense rainforests of Southern Thailand.

Since rebuilding their lives after the tsunami, some villagers in rural Thailand are using tourism as a tool for community development. One such project, Andaman Discoveries, is based in villages along the North Andaman Coast that were among the most severely affected. With the assistance of international volunteers, villagers such as Chim now offer homestays, day tours, and other activities -- allowing visitors to participate in the traditional way of life that so often eludes the casual tourist.



As she guides a group through the village, Chim explains, "The tsunami was a terrible thing, but it also helped us to open our minds to new opportunities. We are now ready to welcome the world, and share our way of life with respectful visitors."

Unusually, the new opportunities have been created by and for the community, allowing progress to coexist with the traditional fishing culture. A village committee approached tsunami relief groups and requested assistance in developing community-based tourism, leading to the formation of Andaman Discoveries -- a non-profit dedicated to linking development and tourism in tsunami affected villages.

As a result of its groundbreaking efforts, Andaman Discoveries was awarded overall winner of the Best for Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards, the biggest of its kind in the world and came second in the Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Award for Community or Family-run Homestays for two years in a row.

"Andaman Discoveries has recognized that the best custodians of cultural heritage are the local people and they have worked with communities to empower them," said Justin Francis, Director of Virgin Holidays Responsible

Tourism Awards. The awards are organized by online travel agent responsibletravel.com, in association with The Times and the magazine of The Royal Geographical Society.

When asked what she has learned from her experience in Tung Nang Dam village, Chim declares, "We understand how to connect tourism with our culture, and in way that makes our village strong by supporting needs such as children's activities, a community center, orchid conservation, and waste management awareness."

Tourism, as Chim sees it, is complex - its inevitable spread across Southern Thailand has led to great economic benefit, but also to cultural and environmental degradation. With resorts rebuilding and guests returning after the tsunami, Chim and other villagers are determined to use tourism as a tool for community development.

Links for the Media

Andaman Discoveries (<http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/>)

The Virgin Holiday Responsible Awards (<http://www.responsibletourismawards.com/winners07.html>)

Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards (<http://www.wildasia.net/main.cfm?page=article&articleID=381>)

Media Team

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About Andaman Discoveries

Andaman Discoveries, a leader in sustainable travel in Thailand, allows visitors and volunteers to directly support community education, village-led conservation, and cultural empowerment. Andaman Discoveries evolved from an NGO with a strong track record of work in Thailand's tsunami-hit communities.

Andaman Discoveries facts and quotes

The Virgin Holiday Responsible Awards

The Virgin Holiday Responsible Awards, the biggest of its kind in the world, are organised by online travel agent responsibletravel.com, in association with The Times, World Travel Market and Geographical Magazine - the magazine of The Royal Geographical Society. For the fourth year running World Travel Market is playing host to the Responsible Tourism Awards, sponsored for the first time by Virgin Holidays The Awards celebrate tourism ventures that make a positive contribution to conservation and the economies of local communities whilst minimizing any negative impacts of tourism.

Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards

The awards act as an inspiration to others to implement responsible practices for the benefit of communities and their natural resources.



Pictured (L to R) Justin Francis, MD of responsibletravel.com; Amanda Wills, MD of Virgin Holidays; Kelly May, Co-Director of Andaman Discoveries; and the Hon.

Quotes

"By creating quality experiences that bring equal cultural exchanges between guests and villagers, Andaman Discoveries assists communities to preserve their traditional ways of life and natural environment."

Kelly May, Assistant Director of Andaman Discoveries.

"The 'Preservation of Cultural Heritage' category is a new category for 2007 and the standard of entries has been high. Andaman Discoveries has been short-listed for their approach to tourism - for putting people first. They recognized that the best custodians of cultural heritage are the local people and they have worked with communities to empower them."

Justin Francis, Director, Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards

"One the strengths in Andaman Discoveries is their ability to work so closely with the community. They are part of it and work from within listening to the villagers ideas and guiding them towards making them reality. It's the communities themselves who are driving this initiative."

Rebecca Thomason, Responsible Tourism Coordinator, Wild Asia

"The tsunami was a terrible thing, but it also helped us to open our minds to new opportunities. We are now ready to welcome the world, and share our way of life with respectful visitors."

Nartladda Klongwitti, Chim Tung Nang Dam local guide

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World Travel Market 2007, ExCel, London
RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AWARDS
WINNERS, Conservation of Cultural
Heritage. Pictured (L to R) Mr. Tanes
Petsuwan, Director of TAT London office;
Mrs. Juthaporn Rerngronasa, Deputy
Governor for International Marketing; Linda
May; Kelly May, Director Andaman
Discoveries; Mrs. Phonsiri Manoharn, TAT
Governor; Mr. Thawatchai Arunyik,
Executive Director of Europe, Africa and
Middle East Region