

The entrepreneurs



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Thailand

[www.andamandiscoveries.com](http://www.andamandiscoveries.com)

**What's your story?**

On 26 December 2004, my world changed forever. Before the tsunami, I was working at a small eco-resort on the island of Koh Phra Thong in southern Thailand. Then the killer waves destroyed the resort and its surrounding communities. In the first week of January, working with a mobile phone, a borrowed computer, some salvaged furniture and a small group of volunteers, we started a relief project that grew from simple fresh food delivery into a sustained effort of more than 120 projects in a dozen villages. The long-term result was Andaman Discoveries, a social enterprise that combines eco-tours, homestays, and volunteer opportunities with handicraft production, education and vocational training.

One of our partner communities, Ban Talae Nok was devastated by the tsunami – the lower half of the village and school were swept away, with eight children and their teacher inside. A government official sent to assess the situation said he could see no sign that humans had ever lived there.

The only trace was a kids' swing left swaying in the wind. In the aftermath of this horror, many of our projects in Ban Talae Nok focused on education and income generation for women, a group previously discouraged from economic activity.

**What works?**

The people of Ban Talae Nok and surrounding villages are determined to see that tourism serves the goals of the community, allowing progress to coexist with the traditional fishing culture.

So far, they have been successful – community tourism has generated steady income and international recognition, while also supporting a children's centre, orchid conservation, and other community development projects. The new opportunities are also helping to change conservative attitudes. Parents now see how a daughter's income can contribute to their recovery and future well-being.

**What advice would you give to anyone else wishing to set up a tourism business?**

Community-based tourism is not a quick fix. It takes time, dedication, training and cross-cultural sensitivity on the part of both the communities and their supporters.