

## From Relief to Self-Reliance: Grassroots tourism project recognized by BBC World Challenge

*Andaman Discoveries has been nominated as a finalist in the BBC World Challenge 2009, in recognition of its contribution to community development in Southern Thailand.*

Kuraburi, Phang Nga, Thailand. September 28, 2009 – Helping a local community to improve a trail through the jungle might not be everyone's idea of a perfect holiday; but for Dave and Meredith it proved to be fascinating insight into a traditional way of life that is under threat from the rapid pace of tourism development in Southern Thailand. As part of their holiday, the couple visited a homestay in Ban Talae Nok, and jumped at the chance to help the villagers clear the local nature trail and make it safe for future tourists.

"We are passionate about this type of tourism because it benefits both parties," explained Meredith. "For us, it enriched our lives and informed our sense of the world. The villagers have become stewards of their own experience; making decisions about how to introduce tourism into their lives, rather than having Western tourism forced upon them."

Founded in the wake of the 2004 tsunami, Andaman Discoveries has grown from providing emergency disaster relief into an internationally acclaimed community-based tour operator. Over the past five years the social enterprise has helped tsunami-affected communities achieve environmental, cultural and financial sustainability through conservation programs, vocational training and providing interactive cultural tours for responsible tourists.



Andaman Discoveries now supports eight villages to achieve sustainable development on their own terms. Through homestays, handicrafts production and guiding, it creates supplementary livelihood opportunities for the communities, that provide much-needed additional income in a way that complements the villagers' traditional way of life.

Noi, a member of a Moken (nomadic sea-faring people) community that recently started opening its homes to tourists, says that, "since being involved with Andaman Discoveries, my life has been better. No one cared about us before; but now people are interested in our traditional way of life. I feel proud and excited when we have guests. They teach our children the importance of preserving our culture and the environment."

The World Challenge is a global competition hosted by BBC World News and Newsweek magazine, in association with Shell. The 12 finalists for this year's competition were selected from more than 900 nominations on the basis of their innovation at grassroots level in "countering socio-economic and environmental issues".

Tui Chomphusri, Director of Andaman Discoveries, observed that, "the BBC World Challenge is a chance for us to share with people the difference we are making. Whether it's providing income to women's handicraft groups or training the next generation of conservationists, community-based tourism allows visitors to enjoy the traditional Thai way of life, whilst helping to preserve the unique culture of our region."

### How to vote:

Vote online for Andaman Discoveries at [www.theworldchallenge.co.uk/2009-finalists-project07.php](http://www.theworldchallenge.co.uk/2009-finalists-project07.php)

### When to watch:

Andaman Discoveries' profile will air on October 17 at 2:30 p.m. (GMT) and October 18 at 2:30 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 5:30 p.m. (GMT). Video profiles of all the finalists will be available during the voting period from September 28 through November 13 on the World Challenge website ([www.theworldchallenge.co.uk](http://www.theworldchallenge.co.uk)).

### About Andaman Discoveries:

Andaman Discoveries enables visitors and volunteers to directly support community-led development, conservation, education and cultural empowerment. It provides interactive cultural tours and homestay programs, unique volunteer projects and placements, as well as educational study tours for university and high school students.

### Contact:

For more information visit [www.andamandiscoveries.com](http://www.andamandiscoveries.com) or contact Mimi Cheung, Program Development Manager, +66 (0) 87 917 7165.

