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November 2007

December 26th marks the third anniversary of the tsunami, the infamous day when over 168,000 people tragically lost their lives. Let us remember these people while looking towards the communities of the North Andaman who have turned grief and loss into opportunity and hope. These communities have rebuilt their lives from almost nothing, and have moved on to community-led initiatives that allow them to make their own decisions and dictate their own futures. They truly are remarkable and inspirational people, united by grief yet motivated by genuine concern for their fellow villagers and surrounding natural resources. Andaman Discoveries evolved from North Andaman Tsunami Relief, and we'll never forget that tragic event that brought us together three years ago.

We've received several honors for our bottom-up approach to community development, in which we're assisting several communities in the design, implementation, and management of their own educational and conservation projects. We were delighted to receive the prestigious Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Award for "Best for Cultural Preservation" this year, and to come a close second in the Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards. We've proven that even small, grassroots, non-profit organizations can compete against some of the largest travel companies in the industry to create genuine cultural and travel experiences. A huge thank you to all of you who have contributed and supported us over the past three years – we wouldn't be here without you.

Project Summaries

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Words of Praise

"Andaman Discoveries recognizes that the best custodians of Cultural Heritage are the people who make it. They have worked with communities, to empower them and create a sense of place, identifying what villagers see as important, and using this information to develop tourist activities and making productive relationships with the industry."
Justin Francis, Director, Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards

Ban Talae Nok Community Centre

The centre has become a real focal point for the village and is in constant use by the villagers. The centre is open to all and many take advantage of the resources, library, and numerous health and education activities. The daily aerobics is proving so popular that it may move to the school. "The local authorities are very impressed and want to start aerobics in other villages to encourage people to keep fit and healthy, explained aerobic fanatic 42-year-old Chumnumporn Phunchung, who also admitted the aerobics kept her young!



A healthy body is nothing without a healthy brain and more people are interested in the adult education classes, held every Friday. "I've always wanted to be able to read and write Thai but couldn't get into town to learn," explained 30-year-old Orranutch Kardmai. "Now I can walk straight to classes from my home and there's no excuse for being late!"

Ban Talae Nok Waste Management

It's hard to believe that until recently there was no public trash collection in Ban Talae Nok! With the support of Andaman Discoveries, the village now has a trash bin for every home and is in the process of providing bins for public areas such as the beach. After months of campaigning the local authorities are now making weekly trips to collect the trash, and a recycler is now coming to the village to buy recyclable waste, whereas before everything would be burnt or buried. Villagers are also making efforts to reduce the amount of waste created and actively recycling. The Ban Talae Nok Youth group has been encouraging younger members to Reduce, Recycle and Reuse with the help of their fun and informative puppet shows. "We need to be proud and take good care of our village and the environment," said 39-year-old Arpai Saksun.



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Reef Check – Environmentally-friendly Reef Practices



Andaman Discoveries, in cooperation with Reef Check International, hosted a Reef Education Program in four communities along the Andaman Coast. Over 60 people of all ages participated in the workshops. The practical workshops were designed for those communities participating in tourism and those wanting to minimize the effects of their activities in the delicate marine ecosystem. Workshops addressed everything from environmentally-friendly reef practices for anchoring and snorkeling to issues of boat safety. "I'm a fisherman," explained 39-year-old Somsak Madsaron, "I've spent my life above the sea not under the water, but if our reefs and fish are to have a future, it's up to me to take care of the reef." Panya Surbhead, a community-based tourism boat guide explained, "I

have lived all my life with the sea, but tourists are different. It is my responsibility to make sure they are safe while they are in my care." A set of boat stairs were donated to each community to make it easier for tourists to get in and out of the boat.

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Steps Towards Sustainability – Looking Towards The Future

Andaman Discoveries is committed to sustainability and constantly seeks ways to assist the villagers realize their long-term goals. This month, we took 15 community-based tourism members, including our vocational graduates, to the "Phang Nga Grand Opening Tourism Festival." "Attending this event was a chance to see how other communities and areas are marketing and promoting themselves," explained Eakachai Vijitr, Youth Conservation member and community-based tourism guide for Ban Talae Nok. "Khao Lak is a popular destination with tourists, so there were many lessons to be learnt." Other villagers used the event to distribute their brochures and meet with tour agents offering similar tours. "If we want people to come to our village we have to find ways to tell people about all that we have to offer and how different we are from the typical tourist areas of Phuket and Samui," explained community-based tourism manager, 27-year-old Darunee Pakdee. The Handicraft groups, with the support of Andaman Discoveries, attended a workshop for packaging and logo design to improve their competitiveness and appeal.



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Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards – We Won!

A mere two years since its conception, Andaman Discoveries has won this prestigious award in the category of “Best Preservation of Cultural Heritage” for our ground-breaking work in crisis relief and sustainable community development since the tsunami.

Responsible Travel is a new way of traveling for those who have had enough of destructive mass tourism and want to minimize the social, environmental, and cultural impact of their trip. Here at Andaman Discoveries, we use local knowledge and International expertise to ensure that both visitors and locals get the maximum benefit from each trip. Andaman Discoveries was born out of the North Andaman Tsunami Relief’s dedication and commitment to tangible, realistic, and long-term development. Co-director Kelly May is pictured collecting the award at the World Travel Mart. The full press is release available on our [website](#).



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. Edmund Bartlett, Minister of Tourism, representing Jamaica Tourist Board.

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Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards – Finalist



Co-Director Thamrong Chompusri is pictured receiving the award from Wild Asia’s founder, Dr Reza Azmi.

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Andaman Discoveries was also runner-up in Asia’s biggest Responsible Tourism Award, hosted by Wild Asia, for our homestay program. The awards recognized exemplary efforts and for making a real difference using responsible practices both at village and organizational level. Luckily, the awards were held in Phuket which meant that we could collect our certificate in person in front of over 200 participants and guests. Wild Asia see the awards as the first step in engaging wider stakeholders in partnership, understanding and working towards sustainable development goals. The full press is release available on our [website](#).

“After the Wave” Inspirational Documentary About Our Work

Independent film maker and Lonely Planet contributor Joel Gershon had wanted to visit Andaman Discoveries since close friend Kelly May joined the team nearly two years ago. He finally made it this month, filming a moving documentary, titled “After the Wave,” looking into the lives of the villagers of Phang Nga, almost three years after the tsunami. The documentary focuses on the efforts of North Andaman Tsunami Relief and Andaman Discoveries to empower villagers to rebuild their lives in a way that’s practical and sustainable. If enough people vote for it (green light it), it’ll make it onto the Al Gore-owned cable/satellite Emmy-award winning network, Current TV. To view the video, click on this link:

http://current.com/items/87710321_after_the_wave (requires Flash) and remember to cast your vote!



Photo by Victory Lonnquist

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Read All About It – Writer to Help Spread the Word



Promotion and publicity is vital if Andaman Discoveries and the community initiatives are to be sustainable. We are constantly looking for ways to tell others about our work and the opportunities available for people to get involved and make a real difference to the lives of others.

In October, Co-Director Kelly May spoke at a British Women's Group luncheon about her experience working for Andaman Discoveries and how Expat women in Bangkok could play a vital part in our community initiatives by visiting the region or simply telling their friends and family about our eco tours and volunteer placements. Inspired by Kelly's remarkable tsunami story, well-respected writer and BWG member Jenny Beattie decided to volunteer for five days on several projects in Ban Talae Nok and Tung Nang Dam villages. "I lived in Thailand many years, but never felt as close to its people or culture as I do now," admitted Jenny. Jenny will now write articles for several publications including the British Club's Outpost magazine, the Australian and New Zealand Women's Group magazine, the British Women's Group magazine, and hopefully for the We Care Section of the Bangkok Post.

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Volunteers Needed – Join Our Team!

Andaman Discoveries is looking for motivated volunteers to join its dynamic team, based in Kuraburi, Phang Nga, Thailand. We need open-minded and dedicated people to assist in a variety of areas depending on your skills, experience, and interests. We offer a rewarding experience and ask that you stay with us for at least one month. You have to cover your own living costs; however, clean, comfortable accommodation is readily available at a cost of 3,000 baht (US\$95, £50) per month and food is around 150 baht (US\$4.60, £1.60) a day. If you want to live in paradise only 20 minutes away from deserted beaches, stunning waterfalls, and lush jungles, then drop us an email because we really need help. Duties include but not limited to;

- Communications and administration
- Marketing and promotion
- Public relations
- Website optimizations
- Fundraising
- Graphic design
- Writing and editing

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Forever Young – It's Never Too Late To Try Something Different

Villagers of Ban Talae Nok and Tung Nang Dam welcomed eight visitors from the Phu Phiang "Craft and Culture" group, one of whom was our oldest ever guest, a mere 70 years young, proving that you're never too old to try new things and discover new places. A 60-year-old guest commented, "I've spent my life reading and watching on TV other people do these types of adventurous trips to exotic places, now I'm here doing it myself, and it's fantastic!" A member of Andaman Discoveries staff is with visitors throughout their stay to ensure maximum enjoyment and engagement with locals.



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Tung Dap Waste Management and Conservation

Our wishes go out to Jariya Petsai, our Tung Dap Coordinator, Duan's mother, and inspirational leader in conservation and community issues. Jariya is currently in hospital and we are waiting for news of her situation. For this reason, the Tung Dap village report was not completed in time for the Update, but activities went ahead as usual. Jariya is pictured second from left.

If you would like to visit us or fund a project, please contact us at info@andamandiscoveries.com. Everything we and the villagers do is made possible by volunteers and donations. It doesn't cost a lot to make a lot of difference!

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