

2010 Responsible Tourism Award



Winner
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Andaman Discoveries
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Helping Hands, Open Hearts: Community tourism gains international recognition

Kuraburi, Thailand

Andaman Discoveries, a grassroots responsible travel organization in Thailand, is the Winner of the 2010 Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards.

After months of consideration and site visits, Wild Asia's judging panel has finally selected its 2010 RT Awards winners. Operators such as Andaman Discoveries (Thailand), Heritage Kandalama (Sri Lanka), and Sarinbuana Ec lodge (Indonesia) have surpassed judges' expectations for their high standards of environmental protection and social responsibility.

With one billion tourists expected to hit the road by 2010, the tourism industry's impact on environment and communities around the world is immense. Now in their fifth year, the Awards are part of Wild Asia's Responsible Tourism Initiative to promote sustainability through tourism.

This year's winner for best tour operator, Andaman Discoveries, stems from tsunami relief pioneered by volunteers who wanted to give back. Now, guests and volunteers can choose from six villages to stay in, and people from all walks of life are getting involved.

Helping fourteen local guides improve a nature trail through thick jungle might not be everyone's idea of a romantic start to a married life; however, Meredith and Dave aren't your typical tourists.

After hearing about Andaman Discoveries' Hands-On Tours, the couple was inspired to include a three-day homestay in Ban Talae Nok as part of their honeymoon. Their visit coincided with a villager-initiated project to clear their nature trail and repair hand ropes for the safety of visitors.

Proceeds from Andaman Discoveries village tours directly support local conservation efforts and cultural preservation, and the villagers are always delighted to have guests and volunteers help with the hands-on work. A leader in sustainable travel and development in Thailand, Andaman Discoveries allows visitors and volunteers to directly support community education, village-led conservation, and cultural empowerment.

"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. For the villagers, they have become stewards of their own experience, making decisions as a group about how to introduce travelers into their lives rather than losing control of their culture."

For more information:

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