

Case Study: Community-based Tourism on Koh Yao Noi island, Phang Nga Bay, Southern Thailand, as a Tool for Sustainable Coastal Resource Management and Cultural Empowerment.

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1. Koh Yao Noi, Phang Nga, Southern Thailand... Crisis, Struggle and Success!

Koh Yao Noi is a small island, located in Phang Nga bay, southern Thailand, which is inhabited by Muslim families who have preserved traditional, small-scale sustainable fishing practices.

During the 1980's, large scale, illegal trawlers frequently entered traditional fishing grounds in Phang Nga Bay. These industrial fishers used illegal fishing equipment, such as electric shock and dynamite, as well as massive industrial drag nets to catch huge quantities of fish.

These practices lead to serious degradation of the marine ecosystem, including coral and sea grass, which were nurseries for baby fish. As a result, fish stocks were depleted and local fisher families in Koh Yao Noi found it increasingly difficult to find fish and to feed their families.

The Koh Yao Noi Small Fishers' Group was established in 1984, and subsequently lead the struggle against illegal fishing. The group coordinated with local village leaders, facilitated community meetings, educated fellow community members about the importance of protecting coastal resource to their livelihoods and families, and invited village leaders to form a united front against illegal fishing.

The Small Fishers Group worked with 7 villages in the island; neighboring sub-districts, such as Koh Yao Yai and provincial movements in Krabi, Phang Nga and Phuket. Subsequently, the 3 provinces established an Andaman Network, The network acted as a forum for community members to share their problems and to communicate with the Thai government. Despite their action and solidarity, one of the main challenges faced by the small fishers was that, located over 1000 kilometers from the capital of Bangkok, their struggles were unknown to most people in Thailand. The trawler owners were wealthy, and actively encouraged an indifferent attitude towards law-enforcement.

In the early 1990's, the Small Fishers' Group were assisted by The Responsible, Ecological, Social Tours Project, under the Thailand Volunteers Service (TVS-REST) to develop 'community-based tourism' as an innovative strategy to communicate their struggles with mainstream Thai society, and to demand more action and better law enforcement. During this time, students, journalists, academics and cultural tourists visited the island, met the fishers, learned about their struggle and spread the news.

2. Harnessing Community-based Tourism as a new opportunity

By 2001, the combination of local action, complemented by using CBT as a channel to communicate with the outside world had been successful. The attention of the country had been drawn to Koh Yao Noi, the law was better enforced and Illegal fishing had been swept out of Phang Nga Bay.

Some of the members of the small fishers' group decided to continue to develop CBT as a way of educating visitors about the life of small fishers. Several members of the Small Fishers' Group decided to establish the 'Koh Yao Noi Community-based Ecotourism Club', with the aim of educating guests about the life of small scale fishers, creating a model of tourism which was sensitive to Muslim culture, supporting local conservation work and providing additional income for participating families.

Members of the CBT group began working seriously on tourism in 2002, including defining objectives and a code of conduct. Tourists were invited to join host families at sea, to see and understand "traditional fishing", and learn how to fish using traditional wisdom, depending on low and high tides.

Cultural tourists, government workers, community members and other students continued to visit Koh Yao Noi to enjoy community-based tourism, and study coastal resource management. In 2003, the club received the World Legacy Award from National Geographic Traveler and Conservation International, and has also received several leading Thai awards from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

3. How did Koh Yao Noi benefit from community based tourism in the long term?

After assisting Koh Yao Noi community to solve the problem of illegal fishing, CBT has continued to contribute towards community development; grass-roots human resource development; preservation of local Muslim culture; environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management:

Community development and grass-roots human resource development:

- CBT has led to an average 10%+ increase in the annual income of participating families;
- 10% of income from CBT is contributed by members to the Koh Yao Noi CBT Group Fund. Currently, this fund has 170,000 Baht (approximately \$5,000 USD);
- These funds are used for the day to day administration of the CBT group, and also to sponsor human resource development activities for the CBT Club members. E.g.:
 - Fund club members to join activities at the local and national levels;
 - Fund club members to attend and to be speakers at various events;
 - Fund trips to meet with local politicians.



Hosts and guests enjoy shared moments of life & laughter, Koh Yao Noi, Phang Nga.

- If there is an opportunity to join an meeting or seminar, the group use a rotation system so that all members have equal opportunities to representative the group. They have the chance to discuss and share their opinions with the public – this is also human resource development
- The CBT Group also has a further Community and Environment Fund, which is collected through a flat 100 Baht (\$2.5 USD) charge per tourist / per visit. This fund is used to sponsor sports activities in cooperation with the local administration – 20,000 THB / year (\$600 USD)



Koh Yao Noi CBT Group Planning Together...

- After forming the group, the members have become more confident to express their opinions and discuss. There has been a continuous exchange of ideas, which has meant that people are not confined to their own opinions, and this has improved relationships with neighbours;
- Hygiene and cleanliness in living, sleeping and cooking areas among the CBT group members has improved, because the CBT club members want their guests to feel satisfied;

Preservation of local Muslim culture;

- The group created rules and regulations for tourists, in order that tourism does not impact the lifestyle and culture of the local Muslim fishers to an unacceptable level – for example, modest dress and abstaining from alcohol.
- The CBT group assisted 2 local Mosques for 6 years – total of 36,000 Baht (\$1000 USD+). They plan to continue to assist the mosque;
- The group built a toilet for a further mosque.



Koh Yao Noi CBT Group welcome you to our home... but please follow the rules!

Environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management:

- The CBT club include conservation as one of the activities in the CBT program. For example, organising mangrove planting as an included activity, or organising fishing with the small fishers, in order for guests to understand local lifestyle, and understand the challenges of fishing, and to create understanding and environmental protection consciousness;
- Through the Community and Environment Fund, the group have funded:
- Funded youth environment camps at Koh Yao Noi Wittaya school
- Funded sapplings and refreshments for students to plant forest 10 times, a total of 20,000 Baht
- Every month, the CBT Group sponsors waste collection. Now completed 1 year



Community-Based Tourism (CBT) was an important tool in the struggle to secure food security for the small fishers of Koh Yao Noi, Phang Nga Bay.