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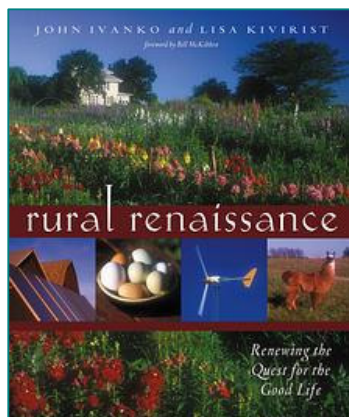
**Potjana Suansri & Peter Richards: “Thai tourism is still being allowed to develop as a viciously competitive, purely individualistic, bottom-line driven, ‘dog eat dog’ venture with almost no meaningful participation or consultation with communities”** [Full Interview on Page 2](#)

**Editor’s Blog** War on Terrorism Cost: USD 3,000,000,000,000 – The Iraq war could cost US up to 2 trillion, according to Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz and Forbes magazine. War on Want Cost: USD 45,700,000,000 (20 times less). WaronWant.org estimates that just US\$45.7 billion would be required for 62 countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals. *More from the Editor at:* <http://www.ecoclub.com/c/index.php?automodule=blog&blogid=2&>

## ECOCLUB Ecolodge News

### 🌱 Fossil Fuel Free is In Inn Serendipity (Browntown, Wisconsin, USA)

Energy Conservation and renewable energy has earned our Ecolodge Members Inn Serendipity a prestigious Award. A 5.5 acre bed and breakfast and organic farm recently recognized by Natural Home & Garden magazine as one of the “Top 10 Eco-Destinations in North America,” Inn Serendipity is one of nine small businesses named Energy Star Small Business Network Award winners in October 2005. The awards honour organisations for exemplary pollution prevention and stewardship of the environment via energy efficiency.



The Inn is generating clean, renewable electricity on-site harnessed from the wind and sun using a .5 kW photovoltaic and 10 kW Bergey wind turbine system. The Inn’s renewable energy systems are generating approximately 8,500 kWh of renewable energy annually and saving approximately \$1,000.

An array of improvements and innovative strategies include: double-paned, low-emissivity (low-E) windows, the attic space was insulated to a R-Value of R-19, caulking and weather-stripping was applied, and the water heater and hot water pipes were insulated. The only cooling used is an ‘Energy Star’ qualified room air conditioner for the office. Much of the Inn’s water heating is provided by a solar thermal system, so guests shower with water heated by the sun. ‘Energy Star’ qualified screw-in compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are used throughout the facility. Laundering of clothing and linens is accomplished by an ‘Energy Star’ qualified washing machine while its refrigerator is an ‘Energy Star’ qualified Sun Frost.

Pictured above, the book *Rural Renaissance: Renewing the Quest for the Good Life* (New Society, 2004), captures the owners Lisa Kivirist & John Ivanko’s entire story at Inn Serendipity and provides practical resources on how other Innkeepers but also homeowners can do the same.

- ▶ <http://ecoclub.com/innserendipity>
- ▶ Book available from <http://www.newsociety.com/bookid/3872>
- ▶ Preview at <http://www.innserendipity.com/inn/insidFOE-demobk.pdf>



### 🌱 Supporting Indigenous Culture Eco-Hotel Uxlabil (Lake Atitlán, Guatemala)

With great enthusiasm, weavers and painters of San Juan La Laguna, village on Lake Atitlán in Guatemala, participated in an exposition-sale of indigenous paintings and textiles. This activity was carried out in the prestigious hotel museum Casa Santo Domingo of Antigua Guatemala between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> of January.

A total of 11 painters of different ages and managing different styles and topics, some of them with international experience showed and sold directly their artistic work. Among them, Angelina Quic, seen on the left, the only one woman of the group, celebrated for her bird-eye view paintings. Textile

products covered a varied range coming from three women's associations. Most now use natural colours extracted from plants like ilamo, achiote, sacatinta, carrot, cinnamon and other vegetables. During the exhibition visitors to purchase various attractive items including robes, tablecloths, bedspreads and hammocks. An association of artisans that produce shampoo and soaps from chamomile, Aloe vera and other plants also participated. This exposition-sale is organised by Eco Hotel Uxlabil Atitlán. Hundred per cent of the income will be destined directly to the producers, many of them affected by the recent storm Stan. In ways like this Eco hotel Uxlabil participate generating development and pride for the community of which it is part, San Juan La Laguna.

► <http://ecoclub.com/uxlabil>

## THE INTERVIEW



### **Potjana Suansri & Peter Richards of REST** on Community Based Tourism & Thailand after the Tsunami

*ECOCLUB had the great pleasure of meeting Ms Potjana Suansri and Mr Peter Richards in Thailand and observing first hand their community tourism work in villages. Both Peter and Potjana work for REST a Thai NGO. Originally a project of the Thai Volunteer Service, REST has for the last 11 years assisted Thai communities to develop and promote their own Community Based Tourism (CBT) programmes. In 2002, REST co-organized the 2002 International Year of Ecotourism Regional Conference in Chiang Mai. At community level, REST carries out feasibility studies, needs-assessment, group building, the planning and development of CBT services. At national and international level, REST assist partner communities to market their products, deliver professional 'Training for Trainers' programs and consultancy services to local communities, government offices and NGO's.*

***Potjana Suansri:** is Project Coordinator for REST. Throughout her career as a Social Development Worker, Ms. Suansri has dedicated herself to empowering communities. Positions have included: Community Worker for Foster Parent Plan International (PLAN), where she helped improve the quality of life of communities and families in Bangkok's slums; Trainer and Fundraiser for the Thai Volunteer Service (TVS), preparing Thai university graduates to work alongside disadvantaged rural communities; Founder of the 'Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project of the TVS' (TVS-REST) where she began organising study tours to local communities in which community development projects were taking place. REST became an independent entity in 1997 and through it Ms Suansri has so far assisted over 25 communities to design and implement ecotourism, one of which, the Koh Yao Noi Community based Ecotourism Club, was awarded the World Legacy Award for Destination Stewardship in 2002. Based on this experience Potjana Suansri wrote an acclaimed 'Community Based Tourism Handbook' in 2003. Since then, as interest in REST's model of Community Based Tourism has grown steadily, Ms Suansri has coordinated regular CBT study tours for groups from across Asia while also conducting national and international consultancy work, for, among others, Thai Research Fund, Thai Fisheries Department, the Department of Hill tribe Welfare; the European Union and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation.*

***Peter Richards** is Marketing Manager for REST. After obtaining a Literature and Linguistics degree at Birmingham University, Peter "unselfishly dedicated himself to the discipline of full time backpacking for a year" in South East Asia. Inspired by the diversity and culture of Thailand, Peter applied for a job at a local school in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand as an English teacher, allocating his free time exploring, learning to speak Thai and studying Thai and ethnic minority lifestyles and cultures. He thus, as he puts it - "became interested in how to develop rural village tourism from commodified mutual objectification into a truly human meeting between hosts and guests". Thus, for three years after 2000, Peter worked as a Small Group Tour Leader for Intrepid Travel, a leading Australian Ecotour operator, guiding groups of cultural tourists and students to remote areas of South East Asia, facilitating cultural exchange and mutual respect between hosts and guests. Subsequently, Peter became the Regional Responsible Tourism Coordinator for Intrepid Travel in Thailand and Lao PDR, developing responsible travel standards, training Small Group Leaders, collaborating with local operators and local community members, developing Thai and Hill tribe language resources, 'Responsible Travel Itineraries,' and identifying grass-roots community organizations and local NGO's for Intrepid Travel to work with and support. In March 2002, Peter attended the International Year of Ecotourism regional conference in Chiang Mai, and there he met REST, who were the organisers and volunteered part-time for them, until 2004 when he was invited to assist REST full-time. He now concentrates his energy on marketing Community Based Tourism and Training local community members, students but also government officers and NGO staff.*

**The Interview follows:**

*✿Overall are you satisfied with the response of the tourism authorities to the challenge of reconstructing tourism infrastructure after the Tsunami? Have authorities taken into consideration environmental and social issues or were these a luxury?*

**Peter Richards:** Tourism is incredibly important to the Thai economy. The scale of private and public investment, and the extent of vested interest are staggering. Even during 'business as usual' it is extremely difficult to motivate either the government or private sector to allocate time, energy, human or financial resources towards a sustainable tourism industry. The tsunami was a crushing blow to the government and hundreds of business owners, their staff, traders, producers, artisans, etc. After the tsunami a 'panic button' was hit and, somewhat understandably, efforts were directed into 'getting Thai tourism back to normal as soon as possible' rather than 'making Thai tourism better than before.' Many debates focused on the opportunity to develop more sustainable tourism after the tsunami, and some visible efforts can be seen, for example to limit the distances that businesses can build from the ocean. However, Thai tourism is still being allowed to develop as a viciously competitive, purely individualistic, bottom-line driven, 'dog eat dog' venture with almost no meaningful participation or consultation with communities. Sustainability requires education, dialogue, cooperation, consensus and action – Human Infrastructure – that's what is really missing from tourism development in Thailand.

**Potjana Suansri:** If tourism is going to be more sustainable after the tsunami, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) needs a significant change of direction and vision in three major areas: Accept that it will take at least 3 years to revive the tourist industry after the tsunami. Accept that for tourism to be more sustainable after the tsunami, multi-stakeholder participatory planning processes before tourist sites are reopened are essential. TAT should harness the trends which have been initiated by the tsunami, and use the disaster as an opportunity to develop new, potentially more sustainable products in tsunami affected areas, for example volunteer tourism, CBT and cultural tourism. Above all, the TAT needs to accept that truly sustainable tourism relies on participation and cooperation from local communities. By not rushing to redevelop, facilitating a participatory planning process, and focusing on markets and styles of tourism which maximise benefits to local communities, the TAT could earn far greater respect.

*✿Community Tourism is alternately defined by academics as, Community Owned Tourism, as Tourism that is conducted with the active participation of Community in management and profit-sharing, or simply as Tourism that involves the community in some way, for example by taking place within villages. Which of these is genuine Community Tourism in practice, based on your experience in Thailand, and why?*

**Peter Richards:** In practice, there are all kinds of people developing diverse models of 'community tourism' and everyone is eager to lay claim to the legitimacy of their own definition. In Thailand, in practice, tourism 'taking place in the community' often means just tacky, production line village visits where busloads of tourists are ejected daily into the same little villages for 15 minutes to ogle, take photos and distribute candy to the kids. For REST, CBT means facilitating group processes to build the cooperation, skills, knowledge and commitment which are necessary to in order for local community members to develop and manage small-scale sustainable tourism projects which will make a real contribution to their quality of life - economic, social, cultural and environmental. It's about harnessing tourism for holistic community development. CBT is also about assisting community members to recognise and define the wonderful essences of their lives; and empowering them to share these gifts with their guests. Because tourists chose whether or not to buy tourism products, and there is no sustainable tourism without tourists, the final definition of genuine Community Tourism in practice, and the sustainability of the concept itself depends on effective branding, marketing and consumer recognition. The market which is attracted to REST's CBT has already been frequently disappointed by greenwash and spin. Our challenge is to build a recognised brand, develop recognised participatory standards, and catalyse consumer recognition.

*✿They say never judge a book by its cover, however your book cover is very interesting: You write: "Community Based Tourism is far from a perfect, pre-packaged solution to community problems. Nor is it a miracle cure or a knight in shining armour that will come to save the community. In fact if carelessly applied, CBT can cause problems and bring disaster". So, can you offer such examples of disaster, and what were the main mistakes to be avoided?*

**Potjana Suansri:** For REST, developing CBT products isn't the goal. CBT is developed by local partner communities as a tool to achieve many diverse and unique goals. CBT isn't principally a product - it's a holistic community development process. In our experience, some of the most significant benefits of CBT are realised while local people are working together, analysing how tourism could benefit (or impact) their communities, planning how to harness CBT to achieve specific goals, and developing their own services and activities. The CBT process builds the cooperation, skills and knowledge which form a foundation for the future sustainable management of CBT. In practice, this process takes significant time (several months) and is fraught with some argument and disagreement. However, fundamentally, sustainability relies on local ownership of CBT benefits and impacts by the community. The CBT process plants and nurtures the seeds of understanding, cooperation, confidence, ownership and responsibility - the keys to sustainability. Some communities have been assisted to develop CBT and have only focused on developing CBT products. They have rushed to develop homestays and cultural shows, or to learn how to cook for tourists. CBT activities haven't been developed through a participatory process, or based on the things that local people really want to share with guests, but rather have been put together quickly by outsiders. This results in a lower sense of ownership, lower enthusiasm and much less dynamic experiences for guests. Communities' enthusiasm for tourism and their

impetus for cultural exchange and interaction with their guests rely significantly on their pride and excitement at having developed CBT activities and management systems by themselves. A good product is essential. However, focusing only on product-development undermines the spirit and the opportunity of CBT. Mechanisms such as income distribution, codes of conduct and CBT groups are more effective if they have developed from the 'inside-out' - where the CBT process is a catalyst, facilitators are educated assistants and communities are actors.

*☛One reads your CBT Handbook with great interest and marvels at the detailed coverage. However, how transferable are some of the guidelines for other countries? Have you received feedback from people trying to use it to introduce CBT elsewhere?*

**Potjana Suansri:** CBT practitioners from neighbouring countries including Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Nepal have visited our sites, shared their own experiences and ideas, and studied REST's CBT processes and 'products'. The handbook has been one element of the training process. After the training, all groups have been able to apply significant lessons learned to their own unique contexts. In particular, participants have benefited from studying CBT development processes, which are by nature 'open-ended'. REST have also visited several of these countries to offer our advice and consultation on-site. One clear advantage that Thai communities have is that local community members often have prior experience participating in similar participatory development processes. For example, in Thailand there are many projects working to develop models of Community-based Natural Resource Management, self-sufficiency projects, and Participatory Action Research projects seeking to integrate local wisdom into community development. This means that community practitioners developing CBT often don't 'start from square one'. Grass-roots development experience in Thailand also includes several decades of developing Farmers and Fishers Networks and Peoples' Movements. These experiences make it easier for community development practitioners to replicate successful projects. In addition, there is also a committed group of social activist journalists who are always enthusiastic to communicate stories of successful community development initiatives with the general public, and to draw people to come and visit CBT communities. In countries with less participatory community development experience there are poorer soils to nurture initiatives like CBT. The fundamental capacity of local people to plan, develop and manage community-based activities is less developed. Successful CBT relies on a sensitive balance between CBT Product and CBT Marketing. The fundamental knowledge, understanding, and motivation of local organizations (both Government and Non-Government) to develop 'CBT for development' is often low. Thus, practitioners and responsible actors often lack ownership and vision for CBT. This creates an unequal balance of power and knowledge, resulting in initiatives often being led by donors.

*☛From your experience, with Thailand's communities, how community-minded rather than individualistic, really are Communities, when it comes to managing Tourism?*

**Peter Richards:** There are a mixture of community-minded and individualistic people in every community that I have visited in Thailand (and at home in England!). Many people are very happy to do something positive and generous for others and 'the community', providing they don't have to sacrifice too much. When they lack a clear opportunity, they just get on and live independent lives. Different processes and power structures give voice and opportunity to different kinds of people. Hopefully, CBT empowers the generous and the good hearted!

*☛Is outside funding for community tourism - eg by aid agencies: (1) Necessary, (2) a Necessary Evil or (3) Dangerous?*

**Potjana Suansri:** Outside funding can be a blessing or a poison. This depends on whether community members have had the opportunity to consider and analyse why they want to develop CBT; whether they have been free to decide how and for what purpose they will use funds; and whether the decision has been made by individuals or through a participatory process which analyses the benefits and impacts of CBT for the whole community. Of course, when there is opportunity without experience people can make bad decisions. In Thailand, we say: "When one has opportunity, one lacks experience. When one has experience, one lacks opportunity!" Whether funding will truly create sustainable opportunities depends on 4 factors: (a) Funding should be based on real problems or needs (b) Action should be preceded by participatory analysis and planning (c) Action should be preceded by studying lessons learned by others who have gone before (d) Whenever possible, funding should be used to benefit the whole community rather than individuals.

*☛Universities are increasingly interested in organising tours for their students, the so-called Study Tours, perhaps also as a way to make their courses more attractive, and offer quasi-work experience for their students CVs. However, what would make a Study Tour really beneficial, both for students and for the host community?*

**Peter Richards:** Our experience is that CBT communities actually enjoy hosting study tours more than any other kind of tour. This is because the visitors really come to learn, not only to have fun. Students usually ask a lot of questions and are enthusiastic about the answers. The community members feel proud that they have been considered interesting enough for students to cross the world to study their community or surroundings. It's very positive. It's important that the community is informed well in advance that a study group is coming, and what their learning objectives are, so that they are prepared for questions. You should coordinate with key local resource people well in advance. For example, if you know that the students are interested in community forestry, then contact specific community members who have this experience, so they are available for discussions. It's also important during a study tour that community members are empowered by the learning process, tour facilitators and academic supervisors to share the teaching role. The community should not be passively studied as objects, but rather empowered by the study tour process to contribute their own perspectives within the overall learning. Students must be prepared

in advance that a community member's interpretation of the meaning of a natural or cultural point may be different from an academic interpretation. Where volunteer work is a part of the study tour, this should be based on the real needs of the community, and presented to students as sharing and exchange rather than charity. Pity is corrosive, while admiration is empowering. So, have a clear mix of activities which empower both hosts and guests as givers and receivers, teachers and students. It's also good that academic studies which are completed are translated into the local language and sent to the community, so that they can add to their body of knowledge.

*☛Do aspirations of community members usually coincide with those of benevolent outsiders? For example, and to put it bluntly, a certain community may "just wish to make money" from tourism. Do you say no thank you and move on to the next community, or do you deal with them and slowly try to change their mind? Or in another way, do you choose a community (and how) or do they choose you?*

**Potjana Suansri:** How to choose partner communities is at the heart of CBT. For CBT projects to be successful, both the community and REST need to choose each other and share similar goals. In our experience, communities which are most likely to succeed at developing CBT have a strong natural resource base; self-sufficient production capacity; experience in community development; understand and accept the concept that CBT is a community development tool, and have enough patience to prepare for CBT and work together. Of course, this is an ideal situation! In practice, if community members were really purely interested in money, and were completely disinterested in other goals or in the CBT development process, then REST would choose not work with this community. It would be impossible to succeed, and would likely risk opening a weak community. If communities tell us that they need money (who doesn't!), but are sincere, prepared to commit to the CBT process and to analyze other issues, REST is happy to work together.

*☛Do you feel that the general tourism development model in Thailand has improved since when REST started, or are things stagnant? And how about the tourism image of Thailand abroad? Any changes from the usual 4 "S"?*

**Potjana Suansri:** 10 years ago, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) categorically refused to believe that local Thai communities had the motivation and the capacity to develop and manage tourism, or to maintain standards. Even after REST and the community of Koh Yao Noi had been recognized and awarded the National Geographic Traveler and Conservation International World Legacy Award in 2002, the TAT still refused to believe that any 'real' tourists would be interested to visit our community based tourism programs! However, the numbers of tourists who visited Koh Yao Noi to 'learn about and experience the life of small-scale fishers' has increased steadily. Initially, REST assisted partner communities to develop CBT Product. Then, without government support we were forced to pioneer CBT Marketing – an unusual and controversial role for an NGO! We have worked to promote CBT among tourists and the industry, and in particular to prove that tourism based on mutual respect, sharing, living, and learning really exists! CBT is, and will remain a niche market. The TAT consider that, as a fundamentally low-volume product, CBT is a low priority for resource allocation, support and development. They consider that CBT won't have a meaningful impact at the macro level, and thus it has been difficult to develop CBT. This is why REST have decided to focus on CBT –specific marketing strategies and developing a national Thai CBT Network, so that communities can work together and with selected Thai and international tour operators to offer their products and balance carrying capacities with high demands for volume. CBT takes place far away from the sad stories of Pataya and Phuket. Neither REST nor CBT can offer an alternative to the classic 4s's. Nevertheless, REST and our community partners can offer an alternative, creative and symbolic experience which is fundamentally respectful, empowers the beautiful people of Thailand as teachers and actors rather than commodities, and helps to redefine Thailand in the eyes of the world.

**Peter Richards:** There are lots of people within the Thai government and private sector who are focused on developing quality tourism and don't want Thailand to be a cheap destination. There is some support for sustainable tourism among individuals. Nevertheless, as the industry accounts for 5%+ of GDP, many people are focused exclusively on volume and income. It's tragic that tourism development and marketing are handled by separate organisations, so the Tourism Authority of Thailand, (the marketers), can concentrate single-mindedly on increasing volume without taking responsibility for tourism impacts. On a far more positive note, Diethelm Travel reported in their recent Thailand Tourism Review 2005, that Thailand is no longer a male paradise, referring to this achievement as one of the greatest success stories in the history of tourism marketing. According to Diethelm Travel, the number of female visitors has nearly doubled from 2,620,045 in 1995 to 4,948,162 in 2004. This has led to an adjustment in the female: male ratio of visitors from 38:62 in 1995 to 43:57 in 2004. All indicators suggest that soon 50 % or more visitors to Thailand will be women. This is also good news for CBT, because market research shows that between 60 and 80% of sustainable tourism products are purchased by women. (and perhaps the other 20% were sent to shop by their wives?!).

*☛Are all of your tourists satisfied with community tours and homestays, or does it all depend on their prior expectations? Do you monitor satisfaction and how? And what about host satisfaction?*

**Peter Richards:** REST ask all of the guests that we send to our partner communities to fill in a feedback form. Overall, 99% of our guests are satisfied by their experience with CBT communities. There have been some individual criticisms about food, hygiene and accommodation, and CBT groups services have developed as this feedback was shared and discussed with community members. For example, we started with 100% local food for every meal, which isn't everyone's cup of tea, and can really detract from peoples' experience if they aren't able to eat spicy food, or eat rice for breakfast. So small changes were made. Expectations and expectation management are crucial to the success of CBT. CBT has a fairly self-selective market - people more or less know whether the idea of a totally local experience appeals to them or not before they choose to book. If

independent travellers contact us then we show them the website, which is poetic, but shows them the reality of the CBT sites (*'5000 star accommodation - all visible through the holes in the roof'...*). For travellers arriving on group tours (often trips are integrated into an outbound tour operators' longer tour program), it's very important to identify and work with the right partners in the industry from the start, so that you can share information honestly, send thorough orientation materials to tour leaders and guests, and make sure that the right message is being communicated in the brochures. We are working on this now! Host satisfaction is monitored through host-guest sharing at the end of the CBT trips, and also by REST during CBT Group meetings which we hold from time to time. Monitoring & evaluation is also integrated into other training. Now that several communities have years of direct experience with different types of guest, we are also trying to facilitate more proactive and participatory marketing, where CBT group members analyse their experiences with different kinds of tourists, and choose who they would like to target. But early days yet!

*🌱How important is the language barrier for a community, with reference to both the inability to speak the national language, as well as the language of the visitor? Do you feel it is appropriate to teach a community the national and foreign language?*

**Peter Richards:** Language is an issue that both hosts and guests get very frustrated about. However, despite oodles of cash being spent on English for Tourism courses, it's actually not an area that we'll be able to quickly overcome in Thailand. The reality is that even if one can teach local community members basic English (which is very worthwhile), it's almost impossible to equip them to answer the questions that the Community Based Tourism Cultural Eco-Adventurers really want to ask on ecosystem, biodiversity, cultural impacts, benefits of tourism. How many languages can you talk about these in? For this reason, REST try and get around the language barrier in two ways so that people feel comfortable. First, we suggest that guests go with tour facilitators. These staff are trained to act as bridges between guests and hosts, so they can translate and help with the detailed questions. Secondly, we give bilingual language sheets to hosts and guests and stress that communication is about how you communicate, and how hard you try to communicate rather than worrying too much about what you are actually saying! I don't think that it's inappropriate to teach communities new languages, as long as they get the chance to teach some of their own. Communication is always a high point.

*🌱Interpretation is linked with visitor satisfaction. How hard in practice is for community members to be trained in interpretation (knowledge & language) skills for bird watching, local history & culture?*

**Peter Richards:** It's easier, more natural and more empowering to work with knowledge that community members already have, rather than try to develop alien specialist or scientific knowledge. Therefore, our community interpretation training is designed to assist community members to develop their ability to communicate what different places, people, and culture mean to them practically, symbolically or spiritually. We have just developed a new local guide training program called REST SMS - Safety, Meaning, Service. In our experience, it's often difficult for local people who are not used to formally organising their order of presentation to prioritise information, and communicate meaning and knowledge in clear ways. This is one of the challenges of working with local guides. When successful, it can be a very useful skill not only in the tourism industry, but also communicating or even advocating / lobbying in public forums. Again, customer satisfaction is affected by how effectively you orientate guests to the roles of local guides, and managing their expectations honestly and clearly. REST are interested to learn from other CBT organisations who have successfully set up technical trips like bird-watching or scientific nature interpretation with local community members.

*🌱Are Homestays intrinsically better in any way than purpose-built Community-owned guesthouses?*

**Peter Richards:** The level of interaction and cultural exchange is far greater in a homestay. The sense of having met and stayed with a family is more intimate and I personally consider it to be a more meaningful learning experience. On the other hand, there is less privacy in a homestay, and some people feel pressured to communicate when they are already tired. Quality control is far easier in a community lodge, because you don't need to negotiate standards. Also, you can include all families, no matter the state of their home, in lodge management. So, distribution of income from the accommodation component of the CBT tour could potentially be much easier to manage in a lodge. Still, I prefer homestay.

*🌱In what way does Community Tourism better acknowledge the position (and plight) of women, rather than impose an extra burden on them?*

**Potjana Suansri:** CBT gives women a real and meaningful opportunity to participate actively in community development activities. In fact, the development of many core CBT activities and services (most obviously accommodation and food) requires the active participation of women. However, women do not only provide services in CBT. During the CBT development process, women analyze, plan, contribute towards management models and benefit distribution mechanisms and make core decisions. They are hosts, teachers, and owners of local knowledge. Through participating in CBT, women have developed greater self-confidence and pride, and have been empowered to meet, share and exchange their knowledge and experience with visitors from outside the community.

*🌱Many tourism communities operate a rotation system, so that no community member acquires an unfair advantage or burden. Is there a downside?*

**Peter Richards:** If you want to use CBT as a strategy to develop local skills, then rotation is a good tool, because it's a hands-on opportunity for community members to practice management. Overall, it works well and is regarded by community members as being a fair system. The downside from the point of the view of the tourists or tour operators is that all homes are never equal in terms of location, culinary skills, etc, so guests can compare and feel that they have been lucky or unlucky. However, if you focus on cultural exchange being the heart of the homestay system, and attract appropriate markets, then it works well.

*🌱Is there anything else you would like to say to our readers, perhaps on your current or future projects? And how can one order your Community Based Tourism handbook?*

**Peter Richards:** Currently, REST are actively seeking to form partnerships with outbound responsible tour operators who wish to actively support community based tourism in Thailand, and to integrate our partner CBT communities tour programs into their itineraries. We are also selecting Thai tour operators who are interested in CBT. We hope to facilitate win-win relationships between these inbound and outbound tour operators, and then mediate and coordinate between them and our partner CBT communities. If these pilot relationships are successful, then we hope to establish a Thai CBT Network Organisation. REST are interested to share lessons learned with any organisations or individuals who have experience developing CBT Networks, and are seeking funding support for this initiative. We would also like to mention here Ms Jaranya Daengnoy, REST Manager. Without her, REST would certainly have gone bust years ago. She brings business skills, expert training and facilitation skills and 'cool Thai chic' to REST. The [CBT Handbook](#) is currently between reprints, however, we should be reprinting during the spring. Due to the high fees for transferring money internationally, we ask interested readers to check with REST first with [an email](#), then send US\$ 25 in cash. On receipt of payment, REST will immediately dispatch the book.

*🌱Thank you very much*

- For more information about REST please visit <http://www.rest.or.th> or [send an email](#)
- For information about the Community Based Tourism Handbook, please see: <http://www.rest.or.th/about/handbook.asp>

## **ECO WORLD** – A selection of developments last month

**International:** Despite the Tsunami and continuing wars, international tourism arrivals continued to grow by 5.5% in 2005 (compared to 10% in 2004) and exceeded 800 million for the first time ever, according to preliminary results presented today by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Sub-Saharan Africa, plagued by wars and HIV shows the strongest growth as a region (+13%). In terms of national growth, turbulent Venezuela, Colombia and Saudi Arabia but also Turkey saw growth above 20%. Despite the long-maintained US travel embargo, tourism to Cuba was up 13%. WTO forecast growth to slightly slow down to 4-5% in 2006, although uncertainties like the avian flu and terrorism make accurate forecasting impossible.

A pioneering \$100 laptop programme, designed to bridge the digital divide, was launched with the signing of a partnership agreement in Davos, Switzerland, between UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Kemal Dervis and One Laptop per Child (OLPC) founded by Chairman Nicholas Negroponte (also founding Chairman of MIT Media Lab) The \$100 laptop is a sturdy computer which requires very little power and can even be powered by hand cranking. The computers can communicate with each other in a network, while several hundred machines can share a single point of internet access. Manufacturing will start when at least 5 million machines have been ordered and paid for, while the preliminary target for distributing the laptops to children in developing countries is early 2007.

**Bahamas:** The Compleat Angler, the wooden 12-room Bimini (Bahamas) hotel where Ernest Hemingway fished and wrote some of his novels in the late 1930s, also home to a Hemingway Museum and a historic landmark for the Bahamas, burned to the ground, in early morning hours.

Police are still investigating the cause of the fire, while the owner has not been found but is presumed dead. A past owner had been bludgeoned to death while doing the accounting for the hotel. Bahama's Tourism Minister, described the event as "truly tragic" and that it would affect tourism to the island in the short-term, however he pointed out that "other businesses and lodgings are being constructed as we speak". Bimini prides itself as the game-fishing capital of the world. Arson perhaps?

**Caribbean:** Passengers aboard the world's most expensive cruise ship, Cunard's Queen Mary 2, following a grounding accident that took one of the 4 propulsion pods out of service, refused to pay for anything on board, and threatened to refuse to disembark claiming that they had not been informed about a cancellation of scheduled stops in St Kitts, Barbados and Salvador in Brazil before the ship set sail from Florida to Rio. Cunard has offered a 50% refund however one passenger was quoted as saying he felt like a prisoner, as the cruise had become a non-stop voyage by sea from Florida to Rio. Scheduled calls after Rio in Montevideo and Acapulco were expected to be honoured. Over 200 passengers are later involved in group litigation against Cunard.

**European Union:** "The Turin 2006 Winter Olympics will be the first major European sports event that can rightfully call itself 'green'," according to EU Environment Commissioner, Dimas. From the Commission's point of view, the fact that the Olympics have been combining EMAS, the EU's eco-management and audit scheme, the European eco-label scheme and green procurement make them the "first ever truly sustainable major sports event".

**Greece:** In a decision applauded by Greenpeace as an example in democracy, the Greek government has defied a January 10 ultimatum by the European Union and has issued a decree banning the sale of genetically modified hybrid corn containing the MON810 (Monsanto) modification for another 18 months, citing disruption of biodiversity among non-harmful & beneficial insects in the Greek countryside. / Environmental NGO Arkotouros called for a ban on births of wild bears in captivity through sterilisation, following the death of two cubs at the Attica Zoo, alleging the cubs had been exposed to microbes and humans during shooting by a TV station covering their birth.

**Madagascar:** In an Interview with Reuters, Madagascar's Parks Director, Guy Ramangason, announced he was in talks with investors from Italy, South Africa and France to set up game Lodges, hotels, restaurants shops and camping, in the form of private sector concessions in Madagascar's National Parks.

**Maldives:** A Sri-Lanka based website covering Maldives, claims that 'over 50 percent of the staff attached to hotels are expatriates' with local staff in hotels mostly involved in room service. The website quotes a Maldivian Chamber Member saying "that 11 resorts are to be auctioned" but that the procedure adopted by the government "is not fair" while the new Finance Minister "is involved in the hotel sector".

**Pakistan:** In a press conference, the President of Ecotourism Society Pakistan (ESP) Agha Iqar Haroon accused local officials & relief agencies of not providing waterproof or winterised tents to earthquake victims, with about 80% of tents failing, and of not foreseeing the need to order heat stoves. Rates of gas and wood stoves have now doubled while there was no government policy to stop the price hike. ESP estimates that some 400,000 people above the normal snowline of 5,000 feet, and about 2 million other were living in tents or emergency shelters below the snowline. The local UN office is reported to have told ESP that two million dollars per day were needed for relief activities however 'collection from donors was very slow'.

**Saudi Arabia:** In what Reuters described as 'a rare flurry of media criticism' for the Saudi Authorities, an editorial in the main Saudi daily Ashraq al-Awsat, blames the collapse

of the 30-year old hotel in Mecca, and the loss of at least 76 people on the 'bad management, bad supervision and nonchalance of the concerned authorities'. More than 1.2 religious travellers from around the world have already arrived for the annual hajj, a duty for all able-bodied Muslims who can financially afford the journey, which climaxes on January 9. Meanwhile health experts are afraid this year that the total of 2.5 could create conditions for a pandemic strain of bird flu to emerge.

**Spain:** The murder of a British couple, who had been living in Tenerife running a timeshare business for 15 years, may have been part of a "Timeshare Turf War" according to Spanish police. A local journalist told BBC of the increasing number of shootings and presence of eastern European mafia on the famous holiday resort island.

**Sri Lanka:** One of Sri Lanka's leading inbound tour operators has complained that the sudden surge of violence in the Tamil-dominated northeast with 80 dead in December, and not enough action to shake off the tsunami-hit image (despite a 7.3 m promotion campaign), has led to empty hotel rooms in the resorts. Another large tour operator is quoted as saying that "occupancy levels are 40-50 percent below pre-tsunami.

**Thailand / Laos:** Thailand and Laos are launching a 138km cross-border bus service, their second, between Thailand's northern Ubon Ratchathani city and Pakse town in the southern Lao province of Champassak to promote tourism and cross-border ties. Two transport companies will each provide 4 daily trips on 40-seat air conditioned buses.

**UK:** Huge crowds gathered as a 6m (20ft) long northern bottle-nosed whale, in perfect health, travelled up the River Thames to central London. First observed by a train passenger who thought he was hallucinating.... The Thames, declared biologically dead in 1957, is today considered one of the world's cleanest metropolitan estuaries. The whale soon became stranded in shallow water, but a GBP 100,000 rescue operation by British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), an NGO that involved lifting the whale out of the water failed and the whale died. A post-mortem is being carried out to determine why the whale entered the river. Hypotheses include disorientation from loud noise from undersea drilling or military sonar.

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## February ECO EVENTS

### *DUBAI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE TOURISM*

*04-06 February 2006, Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

Development of sustainable tourism through conservation of nature and human heritage and sustainable economic and social development policies. The Organizing and Scientific Committees invite papers addressing environmental, social and economic aspects of tourism, strategies, policies, and management tools for sustainable tourism. The Conference will also address regional and international cooperation towards achieving sustainable tourism. Papers may also address local, regional and global trends and patterns of tourism development.

► [www.zayedprize.org.ae](http://www.zayedprize.org.ae)

### *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE WTO – LONDON, UK*

*6-7 February 2006, Chatham House, 10 St James's Square.*

Key issues will include agriculture, services, subsidies, intellectual property rights, and the relationship between multilateral

environmental agreements and the WTO.

▶ <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk>

**CARIBBEAN MEDIA EXCHANGE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM (CME<sub>x</sub> VIII) – SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

February 9-13, 2006 - The Normandie Hotel

▶ <http://www.mediaexchange.info/Default.aspx?tabid=298>

**CONTESTED LANDSCAPES IN TOURISM: CULTURE, CONSERVATION & CONSUMPTION – KENYA**

16-18 February 2006 - Whitesands Hotel, Mombasa

The aim of the Conference is to discuss the relationship between tourism and landscapes in African context. The conference will focus on landscapes in tourism and their connection to culture, conservation and consumption in tourism research and management. The official language of the Conference is English.

▶ <http://www.atlas-euro.org>

**RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL FORUM – BALTIMORE, MD, USA**

22 February 2006

The one day Responsible Travel Forum will focus on educational travel with a priority focus on the positive economic impacts travel can have on local communities and places visited, while minimizing the ecological, social, and cultural impacts through pursuit of sustainable tourism agendas, traveler philanthropy and service/volunteer vacations, and support of eco-sensitive providers.

▶ [http://www.travelearning.com/content.php?file=responsible\\_tourism\\_forum.html&title=Responsible](http://www.travelearning.com/content.php?file=responsible_tourism_forum.html&title=Responsible)

For more Events check <http://ecoclub.com/events>

**ECOCLUB, Year 6, Issue 77, January 2006:**

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