

while respecting the integrity of the heritage resources and providing a consistently high-quality visitor experience.

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## **Conference Reports**

### **Ecotourism in Thailand**

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The international *Ecotourism: Concept, Design and Strategy* conference was held from 6–8 February 1995 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was organized by the Institute of Eco-Tourism, Srinakharinwirot University with sponsorship by UNESCO, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and the Canadian International Development Agency. The Institute was established in 1994 and its immediate focus is to present short-term training programs in ecotourism for countries in South East Asia. A longer term program is to prepare an ecotourism plan for the sub-Mekong River catchment basin which covers parts of six countries.

The conference was opened with an address by Savit Bhotiwihok, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. He welcomed the 200 participants from 26 countries and described the contribution tourism makes to Thailand. By the end of 1995, it is estimated, 6–7 million overseas tourists will visit Thailand and generate US\$6.1 billion in foreign currency. The growth area for tourism in Thailand lies in the fostering of cultural and nature based tourism.

Speakers at the conference covered a wide range of topics. The most spirited address was given by Robert Burns, Chairman of the World Travel and Tourism Council. He spoke on the future of tourism and underscored the point that the Asia-Pacific region is the fastest growing destination in the world. He noted that apart from China, Thailand has the biggest inventory of hotel rooms in Asia. This, combined with its diversity of culture and depth of heritage, will assist in the continued growth of tourism, but he warned that Thailand had many environmental problems to address before it can compete as a major ecotourism destination.

The most interesting part of the conference consisted of a number of Asian country case studies on ecotourism. Considerable differences exist between the understanding and development of ecotourism among the countries. For some the concept is new and developments are few (e.g., Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam), but for others ecotourism is viewed as an

opportunity to add value to their more traditional forms of tourism such as mountain trekking (Nepal) and cultural tourism (India).

At the close of the conference a final panel discussion identified a number of outcomes and made suggestions on the possible role of the Institute of Eco-Tourism in the South East Asian region. Proposals included the identification of ecotourism resources and requirements in the region through the implementation of a research program; the raising of awareness about ecotourism in governments, the tourism industry, and community groups by an education program; and the need to foster the development of regional, national, and international ecotourism development strategies in South East Asia.

The conference helped place ecotourism on the public agenda for tourism development in Thailand and it succeeded in laying a base for information sharing between countries with advanced ecotourism developments such as Australia, Canada and the United States, and the Asian participants. More importantly, it also brought together academics, tourism operators, and decision-makers in the field from a number of Asian nations. However, a key failing of the conference was the lack of Thai presenters sharing about the problems and/or successes in ecotourism development in the host country. Apart from a report in the *Thailand Times* during the conference, scant media attention was given to it. Yet, ironically, in the days following the conference two unrelated articles were published in *The Nation* which presented an overview of the past, present, and future directions of ecotourism in Thailand.

The first article headed "Playgrounds of the Future", by Natedao Phatkul (*The Nation* 10 February 1995) outlined a masterplan for the development of ecotourism in Thailand. It described the TAT's Ecotourism Promotion Plan for the country. A feasibility study has just been completed which identifies more than 100 potential ecotourism development sites categorized into low, medium, and high potential areas. The results of the study headed by Surachet Chettamart, Kasetsart University, identified 16 sites in the high potential group and includes mountain, forest, wetland, coastal, and island environments. At the top of the list is Khao Sok National Park in the southern province of Surat Thani. It has been chosen as an ecotourism pilot project based on its location near major tourism areas, the health of its ecosystem and its biodiversity. Surachet suggests that the park could be developed for a wide variety of ecotourism activities such as bird watching, trekking, and boat tours. He predicted that the ecotourists would come mainly from Western countries but stated that a secondary market would be 10 million Thai tourists who already visit natural areas each year.

However, an article two days later, "Critics see Downside to Thai-style Ecotourism", by Teena Gill and S. Satyanarayan (*The Nation* 12 February 1995) presented some of the problems facing ecotourism development in Thailand. They stated that controversy over ecotourism in Thailand's national parks first erupted in the late 1980s over TAT's construction of a resort and golf course inside Khao Yai National Park. The finding of dead deer in the park which had eaten golf balls, and incidents of elephants killed by falling off steep cliffs after new roads in the park obstructed their normal feeding routes, finally led to the closing down of these projects. Gill and Satyanarayan state that with barely 15% to 20% of forest area remaining in Thailand, environmentalists believe that the increasing demands on the forests made by ecotourism are now causing intrusions into the last few patches of "unopened" territories. They conclude that Thailand may be treading into dangerous territory as watershed areas become exposed and polluted, natural forests destroyed, and the remaining biodiversity of the country lost.

Clearly all does not augur well for the future of ecotourism in Thailand. Just as the traditional forms of mass tourism have led to the despoilation of Pattaya and Phuket, the authorities must make some hard decisions now as to the various sites, styles, types, and levels of ecotourism which should be fostered in relation to the conservation of the natural environment and community well-being. To this end the establishment of the Institute of Ecotourism and the Khao Sok National Park Ecotourism Pilot Project will help position ecotourism in a sustainable context for the future development of the industry in Thailand.

Details of the availability and cost of proceedings of the Bangkok conference, as well as future conferences are available from the Institute of Eco-Tourism, Srinakharinwirot University, Pathumwan Campus, Henri Dunant Road, Bangkok 10330, Thailand. □ □

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## **Tourism Labor Market**

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An international workshop on the *Tourism Labor Market* was held in Berlin, Germany, on 8 March 1995, as part of the official program of ITB, the world's largest tourism exchange. The workshop was organized and arranged by AMK Berlin and NIT (Institut für Tourismus- und Bäderforschung in Nordeuropa), Kiel, Germany and conducted by NIT.

Today tourism is one of the world's largest generators of employment. It is estimated to create about 212 million jobs, both directly and indirectly, according to estimates by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The workshop tried to examine what the tourism labor market of the future will look like and what has to be done today to cope with the situation likely to emerge. To set the stage, Jörn Mundt (Berufsakademie Ravensburg, Germany) presented a paper on the tourism labor market focusing on the main problems and prospects. His findings and suggestions were discussed by an international panel, followed by a question-and-answer period.

Members of the panel were Chris Holloway (Bristol Business School, UK); Jafar Jafari (University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA); Martin Lohmann (Institut für Tourismus- und Bäderforschung in Nordeuropa, Germany); Michael Noack (Bundesinstitut für Berufsforschung, Germany); Lina McQuillan (Erhvervs Uddannelses Center Faaborg, Denmark); and Max Voormann (Kurverwaltung St. Peter-Ording, VDKF Schleswig-Holstein, Germany). The panel was chaired by Torsten Kirstges (Fachhochschule Wilhelmshaven, Germany).

Many general and specific points were raised and discussed at this international gathering, with the significance of the tourism labor market