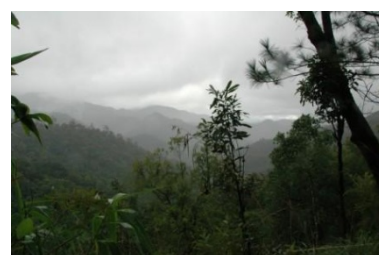




## PANG SOONG LODGE, OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE:

### THE PANG SOONG NATURE TRAILS PROJECT - A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO RESPONSIBLE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT



## **THE PANG SOONG NATURE TRAILS PROJECT**

### **A different approach to responsible ecotourism based development.**

The Pang Soong Lodge Outdoor Education & Research Centre is part of an initiative employing an alternative model for community based ecotourism development, as described below.

#### **1. The conventional model**

Normally involves a donor funded agency coming in to help set up the operating model for the ecotourism project. The community is then supposedly trained in the management and operation of the project, invariably the donor funded agency, is given a specific time frame and a fixed budget to achieve its stated goals.

#### **2. The alternative model**

Accepts that a growing body of research and expert opinion (WWF & others) acknowledge that there are few cases where ecotourism alone can provide communities with a viable level of revenue. The market for ecotourism products is simply too small to provide custom to those projects that are not in the top 2 to 3% in terms of access, appeal and quality of management.

They contend that whilst ecotourism, can play an important role in protecting the biodiversity of the forest or other natural attraction, 97% of projects will need to derive their revenue and support from other sources – some tourist related, and others completely independent of tourism.

The ideal situation would be where tourists and locals could be kept out of the most valuable biodiversity rich sites, whilst their protection of those sites was funded by revenues derived from allowing them access to others of slightly lesser importance.

The Pang Soong Nature Trails project relies on providing the village committee with a viable level of funding for its social security programmes from 'trail entrance fee revenue' paid by visitors using the trails as a platform for a range of activities.

These activities would need to be conducted by a well qualified and reputable local tour operator. The tourist industry product managers, responsible for buying tour programmes and activities, work mainly in trust with suppliers who have an established history and reputation.

For this reason, we have opted for a model under which the ecotourism attraction is owned by the community – by managed by a private sector tour operator under a fixed term contract. In this case the contracted period is 10 years. The agreement calls for the tour operator to:

- Help introduce alternative 'forest product based' revenue streams that are not dependant on tourism, selected in part for the amount of value that can be added to them ideally under a JV agreement – without upsetting the social norms of the community – before selling them on along the supply chain.

- It engages the assistance of an NGO (or other non-profit entity) and/or paying volunteers to assist in developing the capacity: (English language, Ecotourism & Hospitality Management) of those in the community – particularly the school aged students – who aspire to work for or eventually manage their community owned ecotourism attraction.

## **THE RESOURCES**

### **Lodge ownership**

The Lodge & Research Centre itself are privately owned and provides accommodation, meals, research, logistics and support facilities for the guests, visiting experts and interns.

### **Trails ownership**

The villagers of Ban Mae Lai have been custodians of the surrounding 30 sq. km. of pristine evergreen community forest, farming Chaa Mieng (fermented tea) on its boundaries for some 200 years. They have ownership over the ‘Pang Soong Nature Trails.’, that radiate out into the forest from the Lodge, and over all physical improvements that we make to them.

### **Trails management**

Track of the Tiger T.R.D. (Tourism Resources Development) is the contracted management of the Pang Soong Nature Trails attraction. They have developed and operate a product range of custom designed programmes that are conducted on the platform of the ‘Pang Soong Nature Trails.’

Under a 10 year management and capacity development agreement the Ban Mae Lai village committee are paid fixed rate entrance fees for every guest that uses the Pang Soong Nature Trails.

### **The product range**

Ecotourism, Outdoor Education, Environmental Education, Corporate Team Building, Scientific Research, Voluntourism, Adventure Activities, Expedition Training, Agro-forestry.

### **Direct revenues to the village**

All visitors using the trails pay ‘trail entrance fees’ to the Ban Mae Lai village committee. The revenues are used to:

- To subsidise school transport.
- To cover transport costs to and from the hospital for those who cannot afford it.
- To cover the cost of religious ceremonies, funerals etc.

### **VWB – Voluntourists Without Borders**

Voluntourists Without Borders is the non-profit arm of Track of the Tiger T.R.D. and is tasked to source funding, volunteers, interns, scientists and resources to undertake capacity development projects in support to the Pang Soong Nature Trails project.

Under the capacity development part of the agreement Voluntourists Without Borders has committed to longer term objectives clearly stated on the website:

[www.voluntourists-without-borders.com](http://www.voluntourists-without-borders.com) and in the following document:  
See: Roles & Responsibilities PDF.

They can be summarized as:

- (a) To develop the Pang Soong Nature Trails into a world class ecotourism product that can provide long term revenue to fund a social security fund for the village.
- (b) To develop a biodiversity monitoring programme for the Ban Mae Lai forest, that allows the Pang Soong Nature Trails to be used as a genuine educational platforms, and will provide accurate record of the change, negative or positive that our introduction of ecotourism and other low impact revenue generation schemes bring.
- (c) To develop the capacity of the next generation, now in school, to operate and manage their village owned ecotourism attractions in a responsible, sustainable and equitable manner.
- (d) To assist in teaching basic English to the non school age villagers who want to learn the language.
- (e) To assist the village community in developing agro-forestry based alternative revenue streams that are viable, NOT dependent on tourism and will further promote the protection of the forests and watershed – by increasing their value to the community.
- (f) To work with the community, within a under a commercial framework, to determine which ‘trees, bushes, shrubs, plants’ we should plant under a limited impact agro-forestry project. The challenge is to select the best ‘crops’ that will:
  - Provide the raw material for a ‘product’ or ‘products’ that will allow the villagers to add value at the community level before moving it along the supply chain.
  - Not have an adverse affect on the existing (presumably indigenous) biodiversity.

Provide employment and revenue spread across the year for the villagers, especially for the older folk who can no longer undertake hard physical labour.

**Note\*** A part of the pollution problem that often affects northern Thailand, Laos and Burma in March, April & May each year is due to rural folk burning off vast tracts of the dry vegetation. This is done by rural villagers to facilitate the harvesting of (Hed Torp) mushrooms which sell for app. Baht 250-350 per kg.

We can address this by ensuring that the value of their land and its crop is greater when it is not burnt.