

Climate-friendly tourism in Thailand: the example of Trat

Trat is a peaceful rural province with rich natural resources in the Gulf of Thailand. Its main attractions are three islands and a beautiful coastline of 165 kilometres. The province is situated next to Cambodia, and where lush green countryside is a feature on both sides of the border. There are rich resources on land as well as in the ocean. Life remained leisurely simple until the wake of the tourism industry, when a great food, lodging, and transportation demand and supply abruptly exploded, and with an inevitable accumulation of tremendous amounts of waste. Changes are taking place in all respects, with consequences for all the people living in the region and their surroundings. How can Trat still remain a green and pleasant home?

■ A call for environmental conservation

“Climate Friendly Tourism” is the answer. The project was initiated in close co-operation with the people of Trat and with the public organisation DASTA (Designated Areas for A Sustainable Tourism Administration) and GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit). The two organisations are providing knowledge and training, and work shoulder to shoulder with the Thai Trattourism Association (TTA). As a solid band, they envisioned and established climate friendly tourism under the brand of “Oriental Eden”. The goals were for the new industry to surpass green tourism, involve all sectors, and create unique characteristics of Trat tourism. The carbon footprint is incorporated in tourism planning; as a result, the first low-carbon hotel in Thailand has been built.

The project began with the appointment of Miss Charuwan Chintakanont as chairwoman of the Thai Trattourism Association (TTA). With training in economics and profession in local agro food products, Charuwan involved roles in all walks of life, from the tourism businessmen to farm people and government officers. The ordeal goes beyond an environmental issue, and the real work was to convince people to take ownership and run this mission as integral parts of their life.

Charuwan was determined to establish ecotourism and turn Trat into an “Oriental Paradise”. With the strong support of DASTA and new concepts from GIZ, trainings and pilot projects have been implemented. Goals and action plans were set as parts of the governor’s strategy for a “Green City”. A pioneer team of business owners who wanted to increase profits from “Good Housekeeping” participated in the GIZ and DASTA resource management training programmes in order to reduce waste energy and greenhouse gas emissions, and results showed significantly less business expenditure. A biogas project was introduced for investors on one of the islands – Ko Chang – to promote healthy energy and enhance waste management on the island, where the tourism industry had sharply boomed. The tourism authority of Thailand promoted successful cases which drew more benefits to the business, enhanced role models for the public and gained community attention.

■ Developing agrotourism and fruit production

Having successfully set up the ecotourism project on the islands, Charuwan took a side step to inland agrotourism and local fruit farmers. Khao Saming, a gateway to the province, turned into a hub for agro industry, where fruit farmers gathered to spearhead two projects: “Trat Amazing Fruit Paradise” became a tourist place to visit and enjoy fruits and farms on the basis of efficient resource management, where sufficiency of demand and supply is strictly required. The number of tourists

is determined by the fruit available, not the profit reckoned with, so farms are not abused by any massive inflow of tourists. The “Oriental Garden Shop” is organised as a community local agro product and craft centre where tourists can lavishly enjoy their shopping spree without wasting time and energy travelling from place to place to buy local products. Meanwhile, organic farming is being subtly introduced among farmers.

Values are shifted, new approaches are taken, and people are learning from real experience. All efforts promise to be successful, yet this has just been the course of two years, and the beginning of a much longer road that lies ahead. “My earnest desire is that Trat remains beautifully luxuriant, with no abusive business to drain resources and leave behind deterioration. Painstaking efforts must be made by all sectors in order to make everyone understand and take part,” Charuwan commented ahead of hand over her position. Changes in policy and strategy may take place as leaderships are transferred.

How can Trat remain green today and always? The people are the key. Everyone has a role to play in sustainable tourism. Yet, good initiatives will not remain unless people live out their conviction.

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How many people visit the „Trat Amazing Fruit Paradise“ is determined by the amount of fruit available.

Photo: C. Klaijumlang

