

Abstract

As a part of the Amazing Thailand programme initiated by the Tourism Authority of Thailand for the year 1998-1999, the Community Development Department and Plai Phongphang Administrative Organisation had initiated a tourism and heritage conservation project, giving tourists a chance to stay with local people, living with them in traditional Thai house, witnessing local culture, and sharing their ways of life like commuting by boat.

Named as "Thai House Conservation Project for Tourism", the project was eventually established in Tambon Plai Phongphang on June 16, 1999 under the direction of a local leader who was then Kamnan (chief of Tambon) and the chairman of Tambon Administrative Organisation. Sensing the high potential for such a programme, he selected a few traditional Thai houses for foreigners to stay which would also provide them with an insight into the local lifestyle and age-old profession of palm sugar making, local fishery, and spectacular fireflies.

This tourism plan established under the eco-tourism concept, with the underlying emphasis on relationship between hosts and guests, helping them to learn about each other and thereby bridge the gap between people from different cultures. The attractions that the village offered met the longing of many tourists as life in the modern world bombards everyone with stereotyped images through print, visual and electronic media. Many feel that their world is not genuine and set off on a journey in search of authenticity and a romantic past which they feel their society has lost.

However, the study has found that dozens of tourists began to travel to this village each weekend to enjoy the rustic charm and the authentic way of life of the people there. Unfortunately, many of these tourists only paid attention to the pleasure part of the trip rather than the core of eco-tourism: the relationship between hosts and guests.

But inevitably, the eco-tourism did not only bring tourists to this village but it also brought some unmistakable changes to the hosts' lifestyle affecting the community, both directly and indirectly.