

ECO TOURISM in Thailand

Eco Tourism is a concept covering a wide range of realities and is gaining in popularity world round.

It invites travellers to carefully consider the impact their travelling has on the places they visit and to carefully consider where they stay and who they contact when planning their travels; purpose being for them to have the least detrimental impact on the environment.

Yet eco tourism requires for an approach at times in contradiction with the practices. Indeed, conflicts between economic and ecological interests generally work out in favour of the former. The environmental problems engendered by economic interest include deforestation, air and water pollution, flooding, habitat loss, and consequent species loss.

Fortunately, several nongovernment organizations (NGOs), such as the **World Wildlife Fund**, have an active presence in countries where they attempt and succeed – but not always – to draw attention to the most serious problems. In country authorities do increasingly start to take tiny to bigger steps to preserve the nature and wildlife of their ecological zones.

The tourism industry itself is raising awareness to the different issues at stake and higher education and research institutions assist in building momentum by publishing research showing the various impacts (positive and negative) of tourism on countries. Research concerns the economy, the sustainability of societies (their culture, their lifestyles, etc.), art and civilisation including food cultures, etc. Based on the research findings sustainable initiatives are being developed.

In Thailand for instance one can look out for **Doi Kham** brand fruits, vegetables, juices, and preserves. These are products of the King's royal projects, which provide work for rural people while following organic farming principles.

When booking hotels, particularly on the beach, consider carefully whether you really need a room with air-conditioning and other power-draining equipment such as fridges, TVs, and DVD players. These days many eco-friendly, luxury resorts do not offer air-conditioning; instead, they provide well-designed, wooden bungalows with balconies that attract a delicious breeze, allowing you to appreciate your surroundings more than in an enclosed room, and mosquito nets over the beds can save you from night-time discomfort. You can also sleep more soundly knowing your stay is making minimal impact on the environment.

In more than 110 **national parks**, visitors can see the local wildlife species in residence, as well as appreciate the delicate balance of each habitat. The more popular parks have clearly displayed interpretation facilities at their visitor centres, as well as trails with bridges and catwalks, and markers explaining the important elements of the environment and its inhabitants. They also provide log-cabin-style bungalow accommodations, plus tents and supplies for campers.

General Resources for Green Travel

The following websites provide information on sustainable travel:

- www.frommers.com/planning
- For a list of local green operators, contact the **Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association** (tel. **02642-5465**; www.teata.or.th).
- Some hotel groups, such as the **Banyan Tree** resorts in Bangkok and Phuket, have made huge efforts over the past decade to implement sustainable projects, including a pledge to reduce their carbon footprint in all their resorts by 10% each year. To see a list of green hotels, contact the **Green Leaf Foundation** (tel. **02652-8321-2**; www.greenleafthai.org).

- Get in touch with the **Department of National Parks** at tel. **02561-0777**, or visit their website (www.dnp.go.th/parkreserve/nationalpark.asp), where you can find information about the parks and also make online reservations.
- **Responsible Travel** (www.responsibletravel.com) is a great source of sustainable travel ideas; the site is run by a spokesperson for ethical tourism in the travel industry.
- **Sustainable Travel International** (www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) promotes ethical tourism practices, and manages an extensive directory of sustainable properties and tour operators around the world.
- **Carbonfund** (www.carbonfund.org), **TerraPass** (www.terrapass.org), and **Carbon Neutral** (www.carbonneutral.org) provide info on "carbon offsetting," or offsetting the greenhouse gas emitted during flights.
- For information on animal-friendly issues throughout the world, visit **Tread Lightly** (www.treadlightly.org).

Sources :

For a list of even more sustainable resources, as well as tips and explanations on how to travel greener, visit www.frommers.com/planning.