

Thailand: Khao Lak Develops Responsible Tourism after Tsunami

In 2004, on the Boxing Day, several parts along the coast of the Indian Ocean were devastated by a mammoth tsunami. Khao Lak, a sleepy resort in Thailand with beachfront, was one of the worst hit areas. The coastal topography of Khao Lak and its deep beaches and the fact that a major part of the flatland was above the sea level by only a few meters were cited as the key reasons for its devastation.

The accommodation that was available in this resort consisted of low-rise as well as single buildings which also included several conventional bamboo bungalows, unlike Phuket's high-rise hotels. They could not withstand the onslaught of the more than 10 meters high waves.



However, except for the police boat that was washed inshore by about a kilometer, there is no sign of any devastation now. The boat is now a part of the tsunami memorial site. The evacuation route signage (in the event of a tsunami) and the siren towers that have been installed stand as subtle reminders of the tragedy.

It is highly recommended that tourists to Thailand visit the small museum in Bang Niang village which provides an account of the devastation as well as recovery. Admission to the museum is free, but donations are accepted by the museum to help aid the regeneration of the area.

Though more than 50 shops and restaurants have come up along the central thoroughfare, including international brands like McDonald's, Khao Lak continues to retain its appeal and charm when it comes to experiencing an authentic Thai resort. Khao Lak is about an hour away from the highly developed Phuket.

Today, tourism is flourishing in this place as tourists admire Khao Lak's laid-back culture, unspoilt beaches and natural beauty. Near to this place, there are about five national parks, including the stupendous Khao Sok, one of the biggest natural mangrove ecosystems in Thailand. The spectacular marine park Similan and Surin Islands for which Khao Lak is the departure point offers world-class snorkeling and diving and an opportunity to meet the local Chao Ley (sea gypsies).



As far as accommodation is concerned, one of the leading hotels in this area is the Sarojin. In addition to offering a luxurious resort experience, the hotel assumes a leadership role when it comes to implementing sustainable practices and community engagement.

The five-star property is located 20 minutes away from Khao Lak. The hotel is named after a local Thai nobleman's eldest daughter, Lady Sarojin, who is known for her hospitality. In recognition of the commitment and dedication the staff who worked at the hotel after the tsunami, the rooms are named after these staff members.

When tsunami struck, the resort was under construction. One week after the tsunami hit the region, a community fund was set up by the hotel to raise and distribute money to the people in the local community. Guest donations went to building fishing boats, homes, schools and roads; providing prosthetic limbs; supporting the local orphanage; and animal welfare activities.



After its opening, the Sarojin has been working with national park guides and offering responsible eco-tours which offer guests an insight into the life and customs in Thailand. The hotel won the community tourism award (Green Excellence Awards) in 2013 from Thailand's Tourism Authority in recognition of their effort to promote conservation of natural as well as cultural resources and develop sustainable tourism.

Accepting the award, the co-owner of the hotel, Kate Kemp, said that it is the company's priority to create environments and opportunities for guests to engage with the local community in a sensitive as well as cooperative way. According to her, some guests have donated thousands of dollars after returning home from their holidays.

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