

# Responsible Tourism

## A Golden Buddha View on Responsible Tourism



### Introduction

At Golden Buddha Beach Resort we have lived and breathed ecological and community sensitive hospitality for the last 18 years. Initially this was as much by necessity as by design.

Located on a remote island with no electrical mains, no scheduled boat service and the only village one hour away has ensured that Golden Buddha has become acutely aware of its environment and its importance.

At Golden Buddha we pride ourselves on our approach to responsible tourism. Put simply we define this as: To maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts of tourism on the local community and environment.

Importantly we do not view responsible tourism with the mindset that once we have achieved the badge, stamp or accreditation that we are there. Instead we believe it is an ongoing process of improvement and development whilst finely balancing the objectives of business and responsibility.

### Guiding Principles

At Golden Buddha We recognise that approaches to responsible tourism can take many forms. With many years experience we have found our position through trial and error and through ultimately adapting our business to the local conditions and environment rather trying to change them to suit our requirements.

As a set of simple practical principles we like the 2002 Cape town declaration and use this as well as our own experience as a guide:

Minimise negative economic, environmental and social impacts

Generate greater economic benefits for local people and enhance the well being of host communities Improves working conditions and access to the industry

Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances

Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and the maintenance of the world's diversity

Provide more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural social and environmental issues

Is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and host and builds local pride and local confidence

### Certifications

We have not actively chased accreditation or certifications as part of our current marketing approach. Rather we have simply relied on strong support from our guests many of which return year after year and belief in our approach to responsible tourism. We do, however, have support from the following organisations.



# A Golden Buddha View

The definition of an Eco Resort is generally left up to marketing geniuses. For instance, Blue Bamboo Eco Lodge might say, "Only organic soaps and shampoos are used in our facilities." All the while consuming huge amounts of energy on air conditioning, water features and paying staff below the minimum legal wages and firing them with a day's notice.

At Golden Buddha we have a period of 6 months with little rain and a lot of sunshine that brings strong interest from international visitors followed by 6 months of the southwest monsoon with lots of rain and storms. These characteristics lead Golden Buddha Beach to use simple, low impact construction for its 25 individual houses and all communal buildings. The luxury must be provided nature, not man. Buildings are spaced apart and permitted to comprise no more than 12.5% of any one-rai plot. Building heights are restricted to maintain the spacious feel and emphasise the surrounding rain forests. All buildings are constructed predominantly with plantation sourced tropical hardwoods using local Thai craftsmen.

As all power has to be generated on site, it was obvious that big generators and daily transport of large quantities of fuel were going to be both wasteful and expensive. Thus, the decision was made to rule out the use of air conditioning and hot water showers and excessive electricity. This policy continues to this day.

Golden Buddha hires locally wherever possible. This policy is both practical and necessary. Who else knows how the island's community life works? What is acceptable and what is not? Who else knows the local environment and wildlife better? Furthermore, most people on the mainland think it is a bit peculiar to live in such an isolated environment with few urban conveniences. Currently all the staff at Golden Buddha are from Thailand and 90% are from the island or the nearby coastal villages. In addition, where services are available by local businesses, large or small, we use local. The head of the island's Tah Pae Yoi village provides all boat services to and from the resort using energy efficient long tail boats powered by 14 hp engines. Small business operators in Kuraburi town provide ground transportation services for our guests. The

closest accountant is in Takuapa and we use her services. It is a symbiotic relationship.

Yet simply hiring local does not mean one is building responsible tourism on Koh Phra Thong. It takes much more. All of our staff are paid significantly above the legal minimum and we pay their taxes and social insurance. They all get paid legal holidays and vacation pay. Unlike many Thai hotel operators, we try to provide year around employment to staff that want it. When we are not busy with guests, they take their holidays and visit family, and at the resort do maintenance, plant trees and carry out other rainy season tasks.

Training is another important contribution to the local staff on the island. Our training is heavy on skills for the hospitality industry and English language. Other training is more specialised such as food management, hygiene, carpentry, diesel engine maintenance, computer usage and sustainable gardening.

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## Recycling and Waste

- We use durable service items such as cups, glasses, dishes and storage
- We buy fresh and local to reduce packaging and transport emissions.
- We purchase in bulk to reduce packaging
- We recycle paper, glass and aluminium
- We have zero waste in the kitchen
- We serve local water not bottled water
- We compost organic matter and use in our gardens.
- We limit our paper based marketing and other administration to a minimum

## Land and Nature Conservation

- We minimise tree removal when building houses
- We minimise external illumination
- We do not burn
- We plant plants that prevent erosion.
- We support the local Naucrates Turtle conservation project
- In conjunction with our Dive and Adventure partners Blue Guru we run coral restoration and Whale Shark Exploration and Turtle Awareness programmes.

## Community

- Over 90% of Golden Buddha Staff are local
- We use local suppliers
- We re-invest resort income locally
- We pay above local prevailing wage
- We pay into local social security
- We use regular staff meetings to educate staff about sustainable processes throughout the resort
- We support projects in the local village and school of Baan Lions

# A Golden Buddha View 2...

Our environmental policies continue to evolve. They are based on 1) good science, 2) practicality, and 3) guest acceptability. We lose a lot of business by not having air conditioning and hot water, but there are plenty of places for those tourists. Instead, we provide healthy food made with fresh, local ingredients. Electric power is provided from 6pm to 11pm in the houses, which is acceptable for most people. We have two generators of different sizes. Except when the resort is at full capacity with guests we use the smaller one at 2 litres per hours of fuel consumption. That saves 4 litres/hour over the larger one, which is generally only used 20 or so days/year, or as a backup. We don't power water pumps for swimming pools; rather we provide miles of un-spoiled oceanfront beaches and a calm bay for guests to enjoy in just about any weather condition.

What works in some places doesn't work in others. Waste material is a problem everywhere. We would like to see everything that comes on the island go off again. Whereas in some communities' glass beer and soda bottles are recycled, that is not possible here. As recently as 2 years ago the glass bottles were simply being buried after crushing. In 2008 year

we realised that beer and sodas in aluminium cans would actually solve an environmental problem for us. Aluminium has commercial value and is purchased locally. We no longer buy any bottles and only get beverages in cans. The result is that our staff collect these from any place they can; from the bar, the houses or those left carelessly on the beach and take them to Kuraburi to sell for some extra money.

Another simple waste management problem has been plastic packaging. Two years ago a businesswoman in Kuraburi that sourced all our vegetables, fruits and meat was using a massive number of disposable plastic bags. We cannot recycle them and the only practical thing to do with them is burn them. We don't have the complete solution, but we have made great strides. We have reusable plastic boxes and coolers, which go back and forth to her business. She packs them up and sends them to the pier and they return to the island. What plastic packaging does come to the island now goes back to the mainland for proper disposal.

Since our island is virtually all sand and poor in biological carbon, we are able to benefit by saving all food scraps which are

composted along with grass clippings, coconut branches and other natural trash. During the rainy season our staff utilise the compost in our gardens. These vegetables and fish they catch after work make a substantial contribution to wholesome staff meals for almost six months each year.

At Golden Buddha we do care about the environment, our staff and the local community. And, of course, we care about our guests. After all, we are in the hospitality business. Guests want to relax and enjoy the local surrounding without hardship.

We are believers in science. It can have bad uses or good uses. We will continue to explore ways to use wastewater for our gardens, solar for power and lower energy techniques to purify water. We are not too sanguine about making ice in the resort. The laws of thermodynamics are not very forgiving and it simply takes a lot of energy to cool water from 25 C to -4 C with current technology.

We continue to look for improvements and we welcome all feedback, suggestions and potential partnerships.

## Water Conservation

We pump and treat fresh water from shallow wells.  
We use rainwater for drinking  
We naturally treat fresh captured water using aeration  
We use low water use toilets  
We use table mats that can be wiped and not laundered  
We use biodegradable laundry detergent, dish soap and hand soap.  
We do not have a swimming pool and instead have the beautiful Andaman Sea.

## Energy Conservation

We restrict availability of self generated electricity to each house to 6pm to 11pm  
We use natural air circulation and fans, not air conditioning  
We use natural light during the day  
Minimum use of fossil fuel powered vehicles, machines and equipment. We have just 1 truck and 1 tractor  
We use no hot water except in 2 houses which is heated through solar power  
We use energy efficient appliances and electronics