
The EMinENT Project

Entrepreneurial Mentorship in Environmentally Neutral Travel
Concept Paper

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Protection of Thailand's coral reefs must ultimately come from Thai people

The EMinENT project is a phased initiative to build a model of social and environmental responsibility in a commercial travel enterprise. Funded through grants from the EU and BAAC banking institution, and administered by Kenan Institute Asia in collaboration with the Ecotourism Training Center of Thailand, the project will be submitted to take part in the Global Social Venture Competition (GSVC) stemming out of U.C. Berkley and under the direction of Thammasat University for the South East Asia region. It is designed to be built before the eyes of world media as a collaborative example of the travel industry, academia, environmental groups, NGO's, and local communities working together to address the pressing issues of our time. The intention is to exhibit the model project to a global audience increasingly concerned with the impact of travel: A successful commercial travel concept that encourages travel as the means to protect the environment, and empowers local cultures with the economic opportunity, education, tools, and desire to do so.

The premise is that the world is changing. Global environmental issues are now at crisis level, forcing solutions that are effective, powerful, and that make a tangible impact. Inspiration, Leadership, Collaboration are the necessary ingredients to bring about that change. Commercial for-profit travel enterprises are needing to show proof of social and environmental responsibility, Non Profit Organizations concerned with environmental and cultural impact are expected to blossom into self sustaining enterprises generating their own funding. The travel industry is keen to find solutions that truly help the environment and in so doing secure its own future growth, and travelers are equally keen to find solutions that they can truly believe in. Collaboration between these non-profit and for-profit enterprises holds key answers.

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The EMinENT project is the result of a challenge to create a sustainable position for the Ecotourism Training Center, a humanitarian and environmental non-profit mission born out of the Asian Tsunami Disaster. Having judged the ETC as an important instrument to economic development, environmental conservation, and educational outreach, Kenan Institute Asia has empowered the ETC to use the paradigm of social entrepreneurship: building commercially viable enterprises which are measured not only on profitability, but on humanitarian, social, or environmental indices as well. Kenan Institute has successfully engaged Thailand's top universities in the project, and also the local communities and government officials of Phang-Nga Province where the ETC operates. ETC is engaging partners in global media, and the travel industry to participate.

On the environmental and humanitarian side this project is about sustaining a proven instrument of effective land and marine based conservation. It's about building core capacity and local resources to protect local environments. It's about sustaining educational outreach and public awareness to support conservation. It's about fostering sustainable tourism practices, and it's about giving local Thai people the tools, the knowledge, the training, and the opportunity to participate in protecting their natural and cultural treasures—by sharing an economic stake in the ecotourism industry.

On the commercial side, it's about building a competitive dive and adventure travel enterprise capable of financially supporting the humanitarian and environmental missions above. The competitive marketing advantages and positioning in the offering stem from the very same focus: travel partners and their clients choose the company over competitors because profits from the commercial trips will in every case empower a growing range of environmental, social and cultural projects put forward by the Ecotourism Training Center (ETC)—which has already built an outstanding record of successfully delivering its mission, a large media following, and a coalition of partners to do so.

The first offerings will include luxury class live-aboard and day trips to Thailand's Similan Island National Park and Surin Island National Parks, and also commercial tour products aimed at universities seeking environmental and social projects for study abroad. Follow on offerings will include an expanding portfolio of sustainable adventure tour products including sea kayaking, trekking, guided watershed experiences, and cultural / community based tour products as well.

The commercial enterprise will be a wholly separate legal entity from the non profit ETC to allow both enterprises freedom and clarity of purpose, but there will be great synergy and shared branding identity between the two, as they are sister organizations each empowering the others mission. The essence of the concept is that the quality and substance of the environmental and humanitarian mission becomes the central marketing tool for the commercial side, and the commercial side becomes the means for the non-profit ETC to provide commercial training experience for its students, to provide employ-

ment opportunities when they graduate, and the very means for sustaining the ETC mission itself.

In this way, social and environmental value actually differentiate the commercial product and contribute directly to the bottom-line value of a commercial organization. However it is important to note that the commercial side will be capitalized entirely from traditional investment and will not utilize resources or assets belonging to the non-profit ETC for commercial gain. The commercial side will benefit only by promoting it's mission of financially supporting the ETC as it's marketing emphasis.

All leaders of the tourism industry are keenly aware that the future of the tourism is inextricably linked to successful protection of the environments that travelers flock to, the same environments that so many non-profit organizations are eagerly building resources to protect. We believe this fact translates into a willingness to participate in this initiative by demonstrating the aforementioned ingredients: the inspiration, leadership, and especially the collaborative spirit necessary to truly help get the job done. This project is for those who still believe that humans have the capacity to address the problems they have created, and to perhaps even turn the situation around where travel is credited for being a big part of the solution to environmental protection, instead of being painted as a culprit to it's continued demise. The success of conservation is nearly always linked with economics— traditionally in negative ways, as profit taking has been blamed for the ruin of much of earth's most sensitive environments. But today, as the value of the environment grows in the collective mind of humanity, and specifically to the travel industry and their clients, there will be many opportunities to realize profit in environmental protection, repair and regeneration. The travel industry has a good opportunity to show leadership here.

The EMinENT project clearly demonstrates how this can work. In this case, foreign dive tourism profits can be the fuel for building local conservation resources, public education, public awareness and dialog, and ultimately public will —to protect the coral reefs of Thailand. In addition, foreign dive tourism can help break social economic barriers and allow local Thai people the chance to see their own undersea national parks for the first time, and even to participate in the economy of the diving industry as the stewards, and protectors of their own national heritage. The aim is to generate will on the part of the travel industry to encourage, support and nurture this type of social entrepreneurship— and feature model products that not only change perceptions but realities as well. The further goal is to make it a logical business oriented decision for partners to direct travel business to this blended value enterprise which is designed to offer the same great experience and value to the traveler, yet simultaneously address social and environmental issues. Such partnering can develop new business channels as well, marketing to a new generation of tourists, and for the same profit margins.

ETC backgrounder:

The Ecotourism Training Center was formed after the Asian Tsunami as a grass roots relief program. The mission goals were to provide young adult tsunami victims with the vocational training necessary to participate in the recreational scuba industry, and to build a capable conservation core to help restore the local environment. The mission plan also included working with the media to insure continual positive press for the local area. This step was to help regenerate the tourism industry that graduates of the program would eventually participate in. The ETC has not only achieved it's goals, but exceeded all expectations and predictions. The ETC story has been out to 620 million people and counting. The ETC graduates are gaining employment in the dive industry at a 90% success rate, and the program now works with local schools, the Royal Thai Navy, Governmental, and private scientific bodies, National Park Services, and the local community at large. ETC has participated in numerous clean ups, reef regeneration and monitoring projects, historical preservation projects, hosted educational outreach programs, and cultural exchange programs with universities from all over the world. The ETC graduates and the active students form an effective conservation core and a skilled undersea labor force to assist in any marine conservation project. And they are eager to protect their coastline with a deep understanding of the need to do so.

Our mission is now expanding to build National public interest in recreational scuba diving, and to engineer ways of allowing extremely low cost diving opportunities to local people in exchange for participating in university sponsored coral reef conservation seminars. The idea is to build marine conservation awareness and responsibility in local cultures by illustrating the link between the health of the reefs and the economic health of their communities. We let them trade their time for the free diving experience and training. We will be partnering with the Thai National parks and Thailand Universities, and also with Thai celebrities and government officials to make this program as successful as possible. We intend to challenge the media to ensure it's success and to spread the conservation message to the Thai public.

The ETC is currently in it's 3rd year of operation, with 18 economically disadvantaged students. The entire instructional staff of the ETC is built from graduates of the program itself with the exception of the native speaking English language instructor. The students leave the 9 month intensive program with computer literacy, English language skills, Emergency Medical Training and certification, and professional level dive credentials as PADI divemasters and instructors. Along the journey, they receive training from an astonishing list of professionals who donate their time and knowledge to the program as guest lecturers. They include medical professionals, journalists, dive professionals, tour operators, marine and land based biologists, undersea video professionals, and many others. The program has been supported by PADI, PATA, OpUSA, French Red Cross, Invision Communications, Intrepid Foundational , Amistad International, KIAAsia, and a long list of private donors.

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The EMinENT Project:

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Phase One:

The simultaneous engagement of the players.

ACADEMIA

The Universities of Thailand are now being engaged to select 18 top university students for an social entrepreneurial mentorship program. The students will form half of a task force built from various disciplines and will be sponsored by a university faculty member in their field of study. This group will meet up and partner with the students of the ETC, who form the other half of the task force. Their mission is to assist in creating a commercial travel counterpart to sustain the ETC's growing humanitarian and environmental missions. The group will create the business plan and strategy, as well as the marketing collateral for the project, under a broad scope of mentorship including the travel industry. This camp begins on March 26th and goes until April 4th

The University faculty members will also be assisting to create educational materials and to help design ETC travel products tailored to meet International Baccalaureate requirements for science and community service, as well as public educational materials, and a mini conservation curriculum to be taught by ETC students to their local communities.

TRAVEL INDUSTRY

The travel industry is being engaged provide a receptive environment for the final product launch, and to assist in the mentorship process, by providing expert knowledge, guidance, and support to assure a successful outcome. This includes ongoing review and judgement of the plan and strategy, keynote lectures to the task force, and professional advice in creating the model. Specifically, PATA can be of valuable assistance by public endorsement of the project concept and introducing the project to PATA members as an important example, and the needed evidence that creativity and collaboration can address the large issues the industry faces. Lastly PATA can help the student task force identify it's key partners and provide the project access to those members willing to share in the vision. It is important to note these partners are not donors: the commercial aspect means that such partners are engaged to create business partnership and strategy links with the project and create new channels, new product options and new travel business. PATA is already engaging, and allowing access to it's board of directors, and invitations to share the EMinENT project at key events.

WORLD MEDIA

The ETC already has an arsenal of media support, but this project is will drive a new level of media coverage. The collaboration of the travel industry, academia, NGO's and Environmental programs helping tomorrows young leaders in a "think tank" environment to address the hottest media topic of our time is simply great news material. Along the path are several media-centric opportunities, taylor made insertion points for the media. They include but are not limited to:

1. The ETC students taking journalists, media celebrities and government officials on first time diving experiences.
2. Thai youth conservation projects with the Royal Thai Navy.
3. Prominent academics lecturing to the task force.
4. Travel industry partners mentoring to the task force and key partners providing press releases of their own.
5. Triumphant personal stories of individual ETC students.
6. Public marine conservation awareness programs in action.
7. Dive and Travel industry promotion
8. Public speaking engagements
9. The discovery and survey of an ancient sea wreck in local waters (currently in production on Star Cable network for 53 nations, 100,000,000 viewers)

The media is a key instrument, not only for the success of this project, but also for the inspiration that it can provide as a model. It is a show of dedication to address the problems with elegant solutions. It is also the channel to build public awareness for the overall conservation message.. All along the process, we intend to court the media to follow the story, and to ask our partners in the Universities and the Travel industry to do the same: the more support and attention garnered, the more we will continue to attain, and the more powerful the outcome.

NGO PARTNERS

Other NGO's concerned with environmental issues, developing sustainable tourism practices, or social economic development are being engaged to partner with the ETC to include additional tour products in the portfolio, to develop collaborative outreach missions, and to utilize the labor force that is a core part of the ETC. Kenan Institute, OpUSA, CHARM, and several others are current partners.

ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

Environmental experts and organizations are being engaged to supply scientific guidance and project partnering for the ETC conservation mission. Phuket Marine Biological Center, University Scientists, Thai National Park Services, Phang-Nga Provincial Government, Reef Check International and Project Aware are currently partnering with the ETC, or have projects in the cue with the ETC.

Phase Two:

The Mentorship Camp. A superb exchange between industry, academia, and local culture.

The first week of the mentorship camp will be held in KhaoLak at the ETC facility commencing March 26th, and ending on the 4th of April. The Kenan Institute will supply the base curriculum and staffing to help facilitate the process. Camp will include conceptual exercises and activities in the entrepreneurial process. There are exercises for setting objectives and goals. Breaking down larger objectives into smaller achievable goals. Visualization exercises. Strategic partnering exercises, timing exercises, challenges to marshal resources. Team building exercises. Marketing Strategy and the role of PR and news media and many other aspects of the entrepreneurial process. The exercises are put in play, and then the task force is asked to apply the conceptual process to the real world task of creating a commercial enterprise capable of sustaining the ETC humanitarian and environmental mission. The business plan will be introduced and the task force act as a think tank environment to enhance the business plan. There will also be a series of real world travel entrepreneurs to lecture at the camp and to field questions and provide guidance.

The students end camp by forming action committees and charge themselves with the objectives and goals of specific missions to support the implementation of the business plan and strategy. Some will be working on our tour product designs, some on public relations and media attention, some adding detail to the business plan, some on financial data and cost projections, and others on brochures and marketing collateral. They work for two months reporting in weekly on their progress and come together a second time to collaborate and put the whole plan into final form. The end product of phase two is the completion of the strategic business plan, the financial model, the list of current partner commitments, the list of targeted partners, the marketing collateral design and the PR strategy.

The model is delivered to the universities, the Thai government, the Travel industry and to the existing partners for review and critique and final changes are made.

Phase Three:

The real world test. June 2008

The ETC task force implements the final strategy in the commercial world— Building partnerships, seeking financing, marketing the products to it's target audience, canvassing the media and monitoring the outcome of the vision.

The graduates and current students of the ETC are already preparing logistically to begin operations in the next high season for the new company, with the ambition to become the best commercial dive operation in Thailand and a top contender for foreign business. The ETC will continue to function with it's new group of trainees while the commercial enterprise will be run by students that have already gone through the program and graduated. The commercial operation will support the ETC program both financially and with internship experiences in the commercial enterprise to enhance the training program. This way the graduating class can give back to the program that brought them opportunity, and provide the mentorship for the group just starting out.

CONCLUSION:

One of the principles of the entrepreneurial camp training is illustrating that an entrepreneur takes calculated risks, but then tries to align every factor in favor of the greatest chance for success. With all the guidance, participation, media exposure and a solid success story already in play... and the collaboration in a win-win partnership with leading travel companies and the universities of Thailand, we believe we have set the stage for the young leaders to be part of a great success. The EMinENT project has already been invited to be a part of the Global Social Venture Competition, GSVC, initiating from University of California at Berkeley and directed by Thammasat University for South East Asia region. This will undoubtedly attract a great deal of attention from interested investors, and from the media, and from other universities world wide.

Any success will be shared with the travel industry partners, not only in terms of public perception, but in financial terms of generating new business, and inspiring the industry to shift — all based around effective environmental and social support. The industry will have helped a great mission succeed in becoming a sustainable mission, the press will have a great story to tell, and all the excellent work that the ETC is capable of continues and expands. Travel customers benefit also, in becoming certain that their travel impact can be good for the planet. This is the eminent vision of the EMinENT project. The ETC story has so far inspired the world, we hope that this project will take it to the next level.