Phuket’s Hidden Mangrove Hero: How three generations of Bangrong–Paklok restored a devastated forest into a living future

Bangrong-Paklok, Thailand
The Tourism Authority of Thailand, Phuket Office
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
People & Community

Summary of Good Practice Story
Bangrong–Paklok, a coastal community near Phuket, Thailand, lost more than 2,000 rai (3.2 km²) of mangrove forest to charcoal-production concessions between 1990 and 1996, taking with it fish stocks, coastal protection and local livelihoods while young people left for Phuket's tourism industry. Rather than starting with tourism, the community spent a decade (1997–2007) replanting and nursing the mangroves back to health with support from Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, then built a community-based tourism system atop the restored forest — mangrove kayaking, seafood experiences, cultural workshops and the Blue Swimming Crab Bank — training residents through Phuket Rajabhat University and Phuket Technical College. A third generation now guides visitors and maintains trails as conservation ambassadors. The mangroves proved their worth by helping shield the village during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and community tourism income grew from about 850,000 baht in 2023 to over 1.4 million baht in 2025, now supporting roughly 100 local people. The three-generation model shows that ecosystem restoration must come before tourism, and that conservation only endures when it also secures livelihoods and keeps younger generations rooted at home.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

When people think of Phuket, they often imagine beaches, resorts, and mass tourism. Few realise that beyond the island's famous coastline lies Bangrong–Paklok, a coastal community where a different story has been unfolding for more than three decades — a story of restoration, resilience, and community pride.

For generations, local people depended on mangrove forests for food, income, coastal protection, and cultural identity. When the forest became degraded, the community faced the loss of both natural resources and livelihoods.

Instead of starting with tourism, Bangrong–Paklok began by restoring its mangrove ecosystem and rebuilding the relationship between people and nature. Over time, the restored forest became the foundation for a sustainable community-based tourism model rooted in conservation, local culture, and community participation.

Today, visitors can experience mangrove kayaking, cultural exchanges, seafood activities, mangrove planting, and environmental learning. Yet the true story of Bangrong-Paklok is not tourism itself, but how a community transformed a disappearing forest into a source of pride, opportunity, and hope for future generations.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

Between 1990 and 1996, more than 2,000 rai (3.2 km²) of mangrove forest in Bang Rong were heavily degraded due to charcoal production concessions. Large areas of forest were cleared, leaving the ecosystem damaged and local natural resources depleted.

Mr. Prasert, now President of the Bang Rong Community-Based Tourism Enterprise, still remembers the scene from his childhood:

"I still remember it clearly. I was just a child. The forest was completely bare — no trees left, only a few remaining species that couldn't be used for charcoal."

The loss was not only ecological. It was emotional, economic, and generational. As the mangroves declined, so did the fish stocks, the crabs, the coastal protection, and the livelihoods that depended on them. At the same time, many young people began leaving the community to seek employment in Phuket's urban tourism areas. The village was facing two kinds of disappearance at once: the disappearance of the mangrove forest, and the disappearance of the next generation from community life.

The community was forced to confront a simple but heavy question: How can we ensure that people stay with the forest — and that the forest can take care of the people?

That question became the turning point. If nothing changed, Bang Rong risked losing not only biodiversity, but also livelihoods, local identity, community continuity, and the long-term future of its people.

The Vision: What you set out to do

The community did not set out simply to replant trees. They set out to restore relationships: between people and nature, between generations, and between livelihoods and conservation.

Their vision was to create a living system where environmental restoration, local livelihoods, youth engagement, and responsible tourism could sustain one another over the long term. The mangrove forest would not be treated as a protected area fenced off from daily life. It would become the foundation of the community's future — a source of food, a place of learning, a basis for local income, a shield against coastal risks, and a reason for young people to remain connected to their home.

This vision was not defined in a single document. It was carried by the beliefs of the first generation of leaders, the skills built by the second generation, and the daily choices of the third generation who grew up within it.

In Bangrong–Paklok, the goal was never "tourism first." The goal was life first: restore the forest, restore local confidence, restore livelihoods — and then allow tourism to grow from that foundation.

The Journey: How change happened

The Three Generations of Restoration

The First Generation: Restoring the Forest (1997–2007)

After the charcoal concession ended in 1996, Bangrong–Paklok began a long journey of recovery. Around 1997–1998, local religious leaders and villagers joined forces to restore more than 2,000 rai of degraded mangrove forest. With limited resources and no guarantee of success, they planted mangrove seedlings and cared for the recovering ecosystem for more than a decade, driven by a shared belief that the future of their community depended on the future of the forest.

The restoration was supported by the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), which assisted with monitoring mangrove growth, and the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), which helped establish governance foundations and community-based tourism planning. Over time, the landscape transformed from a degraded area into a thriving mangrove ecosystem, with biodiversity and coastal resources gradually returning.

The Second Generation: Building the System (2008–2018)

As the forest recovered, a second generation of leaders recognised an opportunity to create sustainable livelihoods through conservation. Community members developed mangrove boat tours, kayaking, seafood experiences, cultural workshops, and environmental education activities.

This marked a shift from ecosystem restoration to community development. Phuket Rajabhat University supported the creation of local products and souvenirs, while Phuket Technical College provided training in hospitality, guiding, food preparation, and vocational skills. Financial institutions also contributed to the model. The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC/ธกส.) supported agri-tourism development linked to pineapple and rubber farming, while the Government Savings Bank (GSB/ออมสิน) helped strengthen community enterprises and tourism products.

Tourism remained closely connected to conservation. Visitors were encouraged to participate in mangrove planting, environmental learning, water-quality improvement activities, and the Blue Swimming Crab Bank initiative, reinforcing stewardship of coastal resources.

The Third Generation: Guardians and Ambassadors (2019–Present)

Today, the third generation has grown up within the restored landscape. Young people actively participate in mangrove conservation, waste management, nature trail maintenance, visitor guiding, and environmental education activities. Rather than simply learning about conservation, they take meaningful roles in protecting and interpreting the ecosystem for visitors.

The story of Bangrong–Paklok has therefore become a story of three generations. The first generation restored the forest. The second generation built a community-based tourism system around conservation. The third generation continues to protect, promote, and carry this legacy forward.

Together, they demonstrate that successful ecosystem restoration is not only about recovering nature, but also about creating livelihoods, strengthening community identity, and ensuring that future generations remain connected to the places they call home.

Across the years, the journey of Bangrong–Paklok became a three-generation story:

The first generation planted the forest.

The second generation built the tourism system.

The third generation grows with the forest — and becomes its future guardian.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

Today, more than 2,000 rai of mangrove forest in Bangrong–Paklok have been successfully restored. What was once a degraded landscape has become a thriving ecosystem that provides food, livelihoods, biodiversity, blue carbon benefits, environmental education, and protection from coastal disasters.

The value of restoration became especially clear during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, when the mangrove forest helped reduce damage to the community. As Ms. Saimai recalled, “The forest we planted helped keep our village — and our children’s future — safe.”

The restored forest has also become the foundation of a community-based tourism model that benefits around 100 local people, including fishers, boat operators, farmers, women’s groups, local restaurants, and tourism service providers. Tourism income increased from approximately 850,000 baht in 2023 to more than 1.4 million baht in 2025, demonstrating that conservation-centred tourism can generate sustainable economic value.

Rather than pursuing mass tourism, Bangrong–Paklok has chosen a community-managed approach that prioritises quality, local benefits, and environmental protection. The model has gained recognition from tourism partners, including Asian Trail, Sea Tour, TAT, TCEB, and the Phuket Tourists Association, helping connect the community with domestic and international visitors.

More than 20 local youth now actively participate in conservation and tourism activities, strengthening intergenerational stewardship and helping reverse the outmigration trend that once threatened the community’s future. Today, Bangrong–Paklok stands as a living example of

how ecosystem restoration can create environmental resilience, local prosperity, and lasting community pride.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

The Three-Generation Mangrove-to-Livelihood Model

Bangrong–Paklok learned that restoring nature alone is not enough. Conservation succeeds when ecosystems, livelihoods, culture, and future generations grow together. This insight inspired the Three-Generation Mangrove-to-Livelihood Model, a practical framework that can be adapted by other coastal destinations.

The model begins with restoring more than 2,000 rai of degraded mangrove forest, creating benefits for biodiversity, climate resilience, coastal protection, and community well-being. This contributes to SDGs 13, 14, and 15.

The second step reconnects conservation with livelihoods by linking fisheries, farming, local products, and community enterprises to tourism, supporting SDG 8 on decent work and local economic growth.

The third step develops low-impact tourism experiences that combine environmental learning, cultural exchange, and conservation participation, reflecting GSTC principles on environmental and cultural sustainability.

The fourth step empowers youth as guides, conservation ambassadors, and future stewards of the ecosystem.

The final step keeps tourism community-managed, prioritising quality, local benefits, and environmental protection over mass tourism growth, in line with GSTC sustainable destination criteria.

Together, these steps show how a restored mangrove forest can become a source of livelihoods, learning, resilience, and community pride while securing a sustainable future for the next generation.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

The story of Bangrong–Paklok has grown beyond the community itself. Today, it is recognised as a model for community-based tourism and coastal ecosystem restoration, attracting visitors and practitioners who come to learn from its experience.

Tourism supports local livelihoods, including fishers, boat operators, farmers, women’s groups, local businesses, and youth involved in conservation activities. A single restored forest now generates income while strengthening local identity and community pride.

Covering more than 2,000 rai, the restored mangrove ecosystem provides biodiversity, blue carbon benefits, and protection against coastal erosion and storms. Its value was clearly demonstrated during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, when the mangroves helped protect the community.

Bangrong–Paklok shows that tourism does not need to be large to be meaningful. By keeping conservation at its core, the community has strengthened local livelihoods, climate resilience, cultural identity, and youth engagement.

Today, the mangrove forest is more than a restored ecosystem. It is a living classroom, a livelihood base, and a promise to future generations. Bang Rong demonstrates how community-based tourism can sustain conservation, community well-being, and long-term stewardship.

Awards or Certifications

8th Thailand Tourism Award 2010, Responsible Thailand Award 2024: Responsible Community Tourism, Responsible Thailand Award 2025: Responsible Conservation, Thai CBT Directory / ITB 2024 Listing, Thailand Good Travel Destination 2025

Web Articles

https://responsiblethailand.com/bang-rong-community-based-tourism-phuket/
https://responsiblethailand.com/responsible-thailand-awards-2024-winners-runners-up/
https://responsiblethailand.com/responsible-thailand-awards-2025-winners-runners-up/
https://share.google/OyddVluqjTFJame1V
https://www.asiantrails.travel/latest-news/baan-bang-rong-community/
https://www.thailandgoodtravel.info/

Other Relevant Links

https://www.bangrongconnect.com/
https://www.facebook.com/cbtbangrong
https://www.facebook.com/share/v/14gshKZn5UV/
https://www.facebook.com/share/r/18t8oenM5g/
https://www.asiantrails.travel/trail/cbt-baan-bang-rong-community/
https://khiricampus.com/baan-bang-rong-community/
https://carbonneutral.tours/product/baanbangrong-itinerary/
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DDF_iGAyeDmSjjE-3dN6P0tn_QpFcMS6?usp=drive_link

Quotes or Testimonials

1. Bangrong Connect (Customer Review)
"We had an amazing day... We learned a lot... We definitely recommend booking the full-day tour. You won't be disappointed."
"Experience the hidden pearl of Andaman through a meaningful journey of the true lifestyle of Phuket."
Source: https://www.bangrongconnect.com/
2. Mekong Tourism
"Bang Rong's tourism has created a circular economy dynamic that protects nature while sustaining local livelihoods."
Source: https://mekongtourism.org/thailands-community-first-approach-to-sustainable-travel/
3. Fan Club Thailand (UK Tourism Media)

"Guided journeys through the mangrove channels reveal an often-overlooked side of Phuket's landscape."
Source: https://fanclubthailand.co.uk/beyond-the-beaches-in-phuket/
4. Responsible Thailand
"Bang Rong CBT can be visited all year round..."
Source: https://responsiblethailand.com/bang-rong-community-based-tourism-phuket/
5. Bangrong Community-Based Tourism
"We are not only restoring a forest. We are creating future generations of leaders who will continue protecting our community, our culture, and our mangrove ecosystem."
"Many people know Phuket for its beaches and luxury resorts. But beyond the mainstream destinations, Bang Rong offers another side of Phuket — where tourism grows together with nature conservation and local livelihoods."
"We preserve traditional occupations such as fishing, pineapple farming, coconut farming, rubber plantations, and local handicrafts so that visitors can experience authentic local life while creating income for the community."
"Our goal is not only to welcome visitors, but to ensure that tourism helps protect our forest, sustain local livelihoods, and pass our way of life on to future generations."
Source: Mr. Prasert Ritraksa, Second-Generation Community Leader, Bang Rong Community-Based Tourism (CBT), interview conducted on 8 June 2026. The full interview video is available via the Google Drive link provided in the previous section.