



*Banyan Tree's resorts (both pictures this page) escaped any serious damage in the disaster*

## NAPHALAI AREESORN

PRESIDENT, THAI SPA ASSOCIATION



Only one member of our association was seriously affected by the tsunami – the Khao Lak Bamboo Resort and Spa. The other spas in those areas very fortunately escaped serious damage.

As far as the association is concerned, we've tried to assist by matching therapists out of work [as a result of the tsunami] with spas able to take on staff elsewhere, as well as by making cash donations. We're also asking spas to prepare special packages which we can sell at very competitive rates via travel agent associations.

Most of the damage has now been repaired and many places are physically back to normal. However, business is very slow to return and this is what is even more destructive than the tsunami itself.

The government and specifically the Tourism Authority of Thailand are working hard to rebuild confidence and bring back tourists, and we can only hope the results will be seen as soon as possible. Thai Airways International, along with a number of private businesses, is chipping in by working with tourism representatives to attract tourists with special packages, and facilitating trips for the media, travel agents and road shows.

As to how long it will take for the south to recover, I am an optimist – given the resilience of the Thai tourism industry, I think it will take much less time than expected. With Chinese New Year and the approaching Easter/spring break, bookings from overseas are now picking up, and in April it will be the local holiday period.

Unfortunately we then get into the low season, but I expect to see lots of special packages to get locals to travel there until the start of the next high season in August/September. By this time I am sure things will be almost back to normal.



## YVETTE TEE

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER,  
BANYAN TREE HOTELS AND RESORTS, ASIA



Banyan Tree Phuket, Banyan Tree Maldives Vabbinfaru and Angsana Maldives Ihuru were very fortunate to have escaped any serious damage. When the tsunami struck, the Sands Restaurant at Banyan Tree Phuket was damaged but was repaired in a few days. The jetty at Banyan

Tree Maldives was damaged but repaired within 24 hours, while at Angsana Maldives Ihuru, some rooms were flooded and quickly cleared up. There were no casualties at any of our resorts.

In early January, Banyan Tree Group set up an Asian Tsunami Recovery Fund to assist recovery and help rebuild livelihoods in affected areas. The fund will function as a channel for the company, its staff, guests, business partners and well-wishers who would like to offer direct assistance to communities in Indonesia, the Maldives, Phuket and Sri Lanka. It will be managed by the Banyan Tree Group's organisational network and distributed to affected people through local community organisations.

At the same time, from January to March 2005, the Green Imperative Fund (GIF), which supports Banyan Tree Group's ongoing environmental conservation and community development efforts, will be re-channelled to the Asian Tsunami Recovery Fund. The GIF, which asks Banyan Tree and Angsana resort guests for a US\$1 contribution for each night they stay, will now request an additional US\$1 to help boost the Tsunami Recovery Fund.

Finally, we recently entered a partnership with the United National Development Programme (UNDP) on a joint recovery effort in the Maldives. This unique private sector/NGO co-operation will focus on the reconstruction of homes and buildings in Naalaafushi, an inhabited island in the Soth Male Atoll of Meemu.

Like other resorts in Phuket, Banyan Tree Phuket experienced some cancellations but bookings have been increasing for February and March. The resort was full during the Lunar New Year period.

With regards to attracting more visitors back to Banyan Tree Phuket, we are offering an attractive 'Return to Phuket' package for guests. We've also advertised in selected key publications worldwide, informing the public that Banyan Tree will pledge 10 per cent of proceeds to the Fund with every stay.