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O46 - Designing Darkness: From a Phuket Luxury Resort to Accessible Astrotourism for Everyone.

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Astrotourism is increasingly recognised as a form of sustainable tourism that connects astronomical observation, environmental conservation, science communication, and place-based experience. However, developing astrotourism in established tourism destinations remains challenging, particularly in areas affected by light pollution, tropical weather, seasonal cloud cover, dense tourism activity, and the operational demands of hospitality. This presentation examines a practitioner-led case study of supporting an ultra-luxury hotel in Phuket, Thailand, in its effort to achieve Dark Sky certification. The process required not only adjustments to lighting practices, but also coordination among hotel management, staff, guests, guides, and other stakeholders while balancing environmental objectives with safety, aesthetics, and service standards.

Drawing on the speaker's experience as an astroguide at the hotel, the presentation also explores how visitors engage with the night sky. Their responses were shaped not only by scientific knowledge, but also by cultural background, emotional expectations, attention, comfort with darkness, and the social context of the activity. These observations suggest that effective astrotourism should be designed as a human-centred experience combining astronomy interpretation, storytelling, hospitality, and an understanding of visitor behaviour.

Following this work, the speaker established an independent astrotourism initiative aimed at making stargazing accessible beyond luxury hospitality. Activities were organised across Thailand, from northern destinations to relatively dark locations near Bangkok, while also exploring stargazing as a tool for relaxation, mindfulness, retreat, and psychological restoration. The presentation argues that accessible astrotourism can provide a strong social foundation for Dark Sky conservation by embedding meaningful experiences of darkness into tourism, education, leisure, and everyday life, thereby strengthening public awareness of light pollution and long-term support for protecting the night sky.

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