

ConCERT.. Newsletter 2009/2010



Dear All

With the end of the year, and the beginning of a new decade, it's time to reflect on what has happened, and also to share some of our plans for the future.

The last 3 months have continued to be action packed. It's both exciting and challenging to start something new, and ConCERT is a new concept, making it easy for would be supporters to find organisations who are looking for the kind of help they can give. The idea is a partnership, bringing together NGOs, supporters, local businesses, and ConCERT, who all play their part in providing help for a wide range of people and issues in and around Siem Reap.

In addition to increasing the **amount** of support, an important part of ConCERT's work is to share our knowledge and experience of Cambodia and Siem Reap, and our vision of Responsible Volunteering, to increase the **quality** of support received. This innovative combination led to our success at the British Guild of Travel Writers' Awards in November, and is shaping the future of our work.

ConCERT is proud to have contributed content on responsible volunteering for the new edition of the **Stay Another Day** booklet, and we have just received confirmation that we'll be in the new edition of **The Lonely Planet**.

We are currently in discussion with a range of tour operators who wish to improve their volunteering holidays and we see this as a very positive step in ensuring that volunteers bring real benefits to the host organisations.

ConCERT continues to be supported by an excellent group of staff and volunteers; see the section below for more details.

With the establishment of the core team, we are continuing to develop new services for our members, and to improve on what we do. For example, we have developed the area in front of the office to encourage passers by to drop in, and have designed an ecotours display for the entrance to better promote the tours on offer by our various members. We have also instigated a programme of regular visits to both business and NGO members to check on current requirements and if we haven't been to you yet, we're on our way!

Michael Horton



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Development of the Entrance

As you were able to see on our Facebook page, we have been busy developing our former empty space in front of the office. Nowadays the gate is framed by two big boards giving information about our work. In the courtyard are tables and chairs where people can sit and read our members' leaflets and other general literature, especially useful when there are too many visitors at ConCERT for our small Office ;-)



Tommy laying the gravel

The success of this board – it was and is a magnet for people just walking past - led us to create another one with more general information about the work of ConCERT and the information we have inside our Office

Today the entrance is much more inviting and the information boards explain very clearly what we do. This has been reflected in the increased numbers of people dropping in as they pass by.

The improvements started after we had problems with the massive flooding in September. We decided to fill the muddy entrance with gravel. Afterwards we began to let our plan of a drop in centre come true; we bought some bamboo chairs and tables to create a more welcoming entrance and also an opportunity to sit outside. Thong created - with the support of Michael's son James - a new Board about responsible tours available around Siem Reap. In front is a desk with all the Information about activities provided by our partner NGOs and Tour Operators.



ConCERT entrance

Ecotours & Community Based Activities

Many of the organisations we support provide community-based ecotours, supporting the local people and the environment as well as giving visitors a more meaningful experience. Tours support local communities, treat the environment with care, and encourage intercultural dialogue.

As described above, we are working on increasing the visibility of the responsible tours provided by several of our members.

The finished Poster which can be seen on the right is fixed on a Bamboo board, and in front is a desk full of information about the tours, plus we designed some information sheets with contact details and maps making it easy for visitors to find the tour operators.



Staff Updates

It was with sadness that we said goodbye to Thong in early December as he goes off to find his future. His knowledge and enthusiasm were great assets, and he discovered he had a real talent for training and public speaking.

Mom joined us in the middle of December; she is proving to be a quick learner and an excellent trainer, and she is keen to learn her new job - you can read her story below.

Tommy called in to the office in September to see if we could help him find somewhere to volunteer, and ended up staying and helping us for 3 months whilst Michael was back in the UK! He is now developing the idea he had when he came to Cambodia, and is volunteering at COF, one of ConCERT's member organisations.

Jan Philipp, our long term volunteer from Germany, continues to impress all who meet him. He is

hardworking and mature beyond his years, and is now adding graphic design to his list of talents... You can read about his experience on page 4.

Aris made his fourth trip to Siem Reap and continues to be instrumental in helping shape our future direction. He is now on holiday in Greece and is due back in February.

ConCERT and me

My name is Mom; I started working for ConCERT in the middle of December.

I am originally from a small village in Battambang Province. There are 6 people in my family, (parents and 4 children), and I'm the second oldest child.

My family was poor because my father died when I was 8 years old.

He had been sick for 3 years before he died and we had to sell everything from our property to care for my father. After he died my family had several problems: we didn't have enough food because we'd sold the farm. We stopped studying so we could earn money to buy food. At one time my family had to eat bobor, a sort of watery rice porridge, for 1

year because we hadn't enough money for buying food.

There were no jobs in our village, which is why we decided to go to work in many provinces in Cambodia. We also went to Thailand and the Thai border to try and earn money to feed my younger sister brother. In some places there were many landmines but we needed to find bamboo shoots so we could sell them. We only got 200 riels (5 cents), for each 1kg. In the evenings we had free time and we went to the pagoda to study English. Later on we heard that Siem Reap had a lot of tourism and many jobs, so we decided to come to find a place to work.

After arriving in Siem Reap I started working at a hotel; it was very hard. We had to work 12 hours a day and no day off for a month, and we got a little salary. I didn't like it but I had to do it. After the first hotel I changed my job many times; some bosses were good, some were not.

My new job is at ConCERT. I think I like it so much because it is a good time, a good salary, a good boss and we do good work. I come in contact with the guests, and we try to help the poor people in my country. I like this job and I will try the best from my heart to work with ConCERT.

In time, if I can find a sponsor, I will open an organisation for helping poor people in my village at Battambang.

"In time, I will open an organisation for helping poor people in my village"

Jan Philipp — volunteer for 12 months through the Weltwärts programme, funded by the German government.

I work with the Siem Reap based NGO ConCERT. We help visitors, moved by what they see, to find a place or way to support. They see street children, landmine victims or just simple the poverty, that's why tourists often decide to do something, but where can they go? There is no central point with information about NGO/Charities in Siem Reap, but there are more than 300 of these Organisations. That's why ConCERT was established, to help responsible tourists to find a place which they can trust, and which needs the type of help they can give. We have 23 NGOs working in all kind of development sectors: healthcare, environmental education & protection, agriculture support, HIV/AIDS, land mine clearance and rehabilitation of victims, vocational training, combating human trafficking, water supplies and sanitation, infrastructure projects, conservation, fair trade, emergency support for families in crisis, and general community development and support. We also have schools, orphanages and day care centres.

On the other hand we are connected to businesses in Siem Reap working with tourists. Their fee is our main income. The reason for their membership is that tourists who find a place to support are happy, staying longer or coming back.

My work at ConCERT is mainly dealing with customers coming to our office, so I get to know people from all over the world. On the other hand I was visiting our entire partner NGOs, which was a real exciting and impressive way to get another view on Cambodia itself. Other jobs are the development of our Office and Website work and meeting with Business – managers to recruit more hotels, guesthouses, travel agencies and restaurants. All in all working with ConCERT is a very multiple task.

“We help visitors, moved by what they see, to find a place or way to support”



There are 6 Weltwärts volunteers in Siem Reap, renting 2 houses. The house we are living in is located nearly the countryside and it's a 15 minutes ride with my bicycle to the centre. Markus helped us to buy these. At the moment we have problems with the owners of our house, because they sold a part of the houses garden. Our activities since arriving in Siem Reap were discovering the City, places to go, shops and restaurants for daily life. The Cambodian Staff member of ConCERT helped us a lot to find these. People we met were volunteers in other NGOs in town, which is very interesting, because volunteering is a worldwide topic. We also met tourists, but after a while we recognised that most of them were telling the same stories about their journeys in South East Asia.

Most of my experiences in Cambodia came through ConCERT. I visited Beng Mealea temple and the village around in the countryside, looked behind the doors of a centre for girls rescued out of prostitution, etc. At these trips I met a lot of different interesting people Cambodians or foreigners. The organisation of the DED was pretty good; we have had a preparation in Phnom Penh, what has a big effort on my work and Khmer-Knowledge. Furthermore I would say that my experiences since arriving in Cambodia are really wide ranged: Learning English and Khmer, displaying more patience, getting a deep view on Cambodia and its culture.



Children on their way to school

Aris, volunteer

When I left my job in the UK to travel around Asia and South America for a year, little did I know that I would end up spending half my time in Cambodia, and never make it to South America..

A year later, it is great to see ConCERT transformed from concept to reality, having under its wings organisations working in numerous areas of development, from education to landmine clearance, to environmental conservation, agriculture, water access and the combating of human trafficking.

Moreover, helping visitors to learn more about the current situation in Cambodia and putting them in touch with well-run grassroots projects where they can make a real difference has been a great satisfaction. These are exciting times ahead and everyone at ConCERT is working on expanding and improving our service, further strengthening our network, and accessing a wider range of people who are looking for ways to support the local communities.

Looking at the bigger picture, with the turn of the new decade, the world is only 5 years away from the end date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The work being done on the ground by our member NGOs is contributing bit by bit towards each of the goals as defined by the United Nations Development Programme. Their funding reduced as a result of the recent economic crisis means our work is becoming more and more critical.

Responsible Tourism's role is key here. With Angkor Wat receiving more than 2 million visitors per year from every corner of the earth and Siem Reap town being full of modern amenities, bars and international cuisine, the term global village springs to mind. At the same time, there are people living in villages less than 8kms from Angkor Wat who are struggling to make a living and have never had the ability to visit either Angkor or Siem Reap; the results of poor income, lack of infrastructure, and access to employment and education.

My experience in Cambodia has been a combination of many things. But above all is the admiration towards the resilience and positive attitude of the people, the smiles, the witty humour, the openness; the constant reminder of what happiness is really all about. Well, and the fact that no single day will go by over here without experiencing something remarkable.

To find out how you can help, visit our website at www.concertcambodia.org or drop us an email at info@concertcambodia.org

Have a happy New Year

from the ConCERT team