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Welcome to our July Newsletter!

We're in the rainy season now, which is also known as "low season" in Siem Reap tourism business, but we still have many things going on.

On page 3 you can read more about the latest news about member business getting involved (which is always good news).

Read about the next big steps ConCERT is planning to take in the future on page 5. We've put a lot of work into planning and figuring out what's most needed from an organisation like us.

We're happy about your feedback and comments, just direct them to meera@concertcambodia.org

Enjoy reading,

Your ConCERT Team

WELCOME, NARI!

Nari is Mom's replacement. She started working for ConCERT at the beginning of May and has already become a valuable member of the team. She comes up with lots of ideas and loves talking to visitors. When she isn't busy finding places for volunteers or approaching Siem Reap businesses she takes care of the accounts and general administration.

Nari says...

I was born in Siem Reap so I know the town and the province very well. I have worked in a range of jobs and seen many changes. A few years ago Siem Reap was a very quiet town and now it is a major tourist centre in Cambodia.

I started working when I was 17 years old and I was very sad because I had to leave my school so I could work and support my family. I worked for very small



wages because I had no qualifications or experience. The jobs were hard and I worked from early morning until midnight. I really missed my school and I always wanted to go back to continue my studies.

After had been working for few years I realised I needed to learn English. I started trying to speak with the tourists that I met in my job and I practiced every day whilst I was working. I never get fed up of learning. Day by day my English began to improve. Even now I'm still attending English classes at ACE school and learning English has been important in helping me to find a better job.

I have a lot of experience working with NGOs, and in dealing with tourists and volunteers. I have known about ConCERT since it started and I am really pleased to be working here. One of my main jobs is helping people who want to volunteer or to give their support to the people of Cambodia in some way.



people and places: responsible volunteering



Harold Goodwin, Professor of Responsible Tourism Management and Director of the [International Centre for Responsible Tourism](#) at Leeds Metropolitan University in the UK, played a key part in Michael's decision to establish ConCERT back in 2008. He and

Michael met by chance in 2005 when they shared a taxi, and they subsequently stayed in touch. When Harold heard Michael had moved to Cambodia he introduced him to 3 of his Responsible Tourism masters degree students who were in the country. Their research and findings confirmed much of the anecdotal evidence Michael was collecting about the difficulties tourists were facing when wishing to get involved in Siem Reap. This information gave him an added impetus to start ConCERT.

The connection continues as ConCERT has just become the local partner for the UK based volunteer placement organisation, People & Places, www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk of which Harold is the non-executive Advisory Committee chairman. People & Places came from a chance meeting between Harold and two other travellers, Sallie Grayson and Kate Stefanko. They shared stories and realised *"they were all frustrated and cynical about the volunteer industry, but also inspired by the potential benefits for volunteers and local communities. Determined to do something they developed their own unique model of ethical volunteering, whereby all parties would be best-served and which would be totally open and honest in all its activities, including financial matters"*.

People & Places have projects in 12 countries and they approached Michael last November as they wanted to add Cambodia to their programme. Two of our members, This Life Cambodia and Grace House, were selected and in April, People & Places'

education adviser Dianne Ashman came to Siem Reap for 2 weeks for lengthy discussions with This Life and Grace House, and to check out the accommodation options.

People & Places' aim is to develop the exemplar model for the volunteer industry and of course, benefits greatly from Harold's input and expertise. We are impressed with their recruitment procedures for volunteers, including screening, selection and security checking. They take great care to introduce volunteers to people who've already been working at the projects, and they ensure that volunteers are as prepared as they can be before they start their placement with details of what they'll be doing, and how this fits within the overall aims of the project. It is the projects themselves that design the volunteer placements and have full say over what the volunteers do.

During Dianne's visit we made several small suggestions on how things could be improved, all of which were taken on board.

They are transparent and open about their financial matters with volunteers knowing exactly where their money goes.

As People & Places' local partner, ConCERT will take care of the logistics and support for the volunteers when they are in Siem Reap.

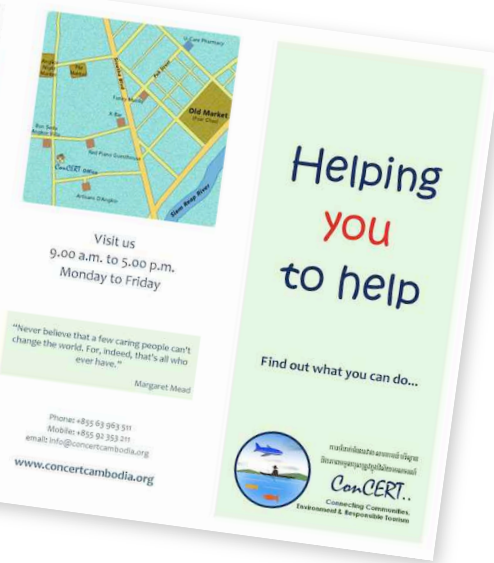


Dianne Ashman at ConCERT



NEW LEAFLETS

In May we redesigned our leaflets. We improved their content and overall look and we've had some good feedback.



BLOOD, TOIL, SWEAT, AND RUBBISH FROM THE RAFFLES GRAND HOTEL

In May we we're contacted by one of the Raffles' managers Cyrille Carmona who wanted to find out how to recycle the hotels' used cans, paper and plastic bottles in the most responsible way.

Ringling up a few of our member organisations, New Hope Cambodia, an NGO that works with the community in the very challenging area of Mondul 3 in Siem Reap, decided to collect up the waste and use the proceeds to support their work with the poorest families of that area.



Whilst the amount of waste is relatively small in the low season, they are expecting an increase towards the end of the year and plan to eventually hand over the source of income to some families. Raffles are looking at a whole range of ways they can support their local communities, from recycling glass bottles, to utilising the soap and shampoo leftover in their rooms.

It's a good example of how businesses can support their community, operate more sustainably, and also how to use *ConCERT* membership to achieve this.

In addition, the Raffles hosted a blood donation event for their staff, guests and outside visitors on June 26th in the Elephant Bar at the hotel to help the Angkor Hospital for Children to prepare for the expected Dengue epidemic. They provided free drinks and snacks and 58 people donated blood for the hospital.



DONATING BLOOD...

...is easy and safe to do when in Siem Reap. It really helps the two children's hospitals with their invaluable work.

Please consider donating blood in the future



CONCERT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The Social Sciences Bachelor degree at the University of Hong Kong includes practical experience such as an internship with a relevant company or organisation. A particular feature of the Hong Kong degree is that students have the option to volunteer for two months in Cambodia teaching English in rural schools.

24 students and their supervisors visited our office on June 8th for a two hour presentation about Cambodia in general, and its education system in particular, to introduce the students to the bigger picture and the situation they'll be working in. We also had a wider discussion about volunteering and how they expected to help to the children.

The programme was designed by Professor Ian Holliday, Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty, and we were happy to be asked to help with the planning for the next group of students in 2012.

MEERA'S FUNDRAISING ON BETTERPLACE.ORG

Early in June our Weltwärts volunteer Meera decided to start fundraising for *ConCERT* and set up a fundraising page on the platform betterplace.org.

The more people who write about their experiences with *ConCERT* and rate the project, the more potential donors are likely to trust it ("Web of Trust").

By now she has raised \$250 for bicycles and \$200 for new bicycle displays. Check out the page to see what else she wants to raise funds for. If you wish to support her fundraising efforts you can:

- rate the project
- write a visitor review or advocacy
- share the link with others
- donate

To do all this, you can easily log in with your **facebook** account.

<http://www.betterplace.org/en/projects/4611-responsible-tourism-in-cambodia>

CASUAL COLLABORATION

The Casual Collaboration was started by Richard James, Jessica Whitney, Kylie Hansen, Megan Smith and others in April this year to improve networking and cooperation among Siem Reap NGOs and to share information and expertise that's relevant for many. "Don't reinvent the wheel" is the motto of this event that now happens once a month.

Most NGOs have very limited resources and improved networking between NGOs helps us all to serve the people of Cambodia more effectively.

ConCERT is lending a hand with the logistics and the next meeting will be on the 27th July.



Michael discussing child protection with representatives from Anjali House and Green Gecko at Casual Collaboration

EXOTISSIMO TRAINING



As part of *ConCERT*'s goal of helping visitors to engage in activities that bring real benefits to Cambodia, we offer two types of training to our tour operator

members. The first is for tour guides to help them deal with visitor requests as they take them around the tourist sites, and the second is for managers, product designers and sales staff, to help them design and develop better products for their customers.

Exotissimo Travel, Travel Loops and Hanuman in particular have all worked closely with *ConCERT* over the last few months, and we have trained over 60 of their staff.



DEVELOPING ConCERT's ROLE

The 3 most common things we hear in the office are:

1. What exactly is it that you do?
2. We'd like to help Cambodian children; can you recommend an orphanage where we can visit or volunteer?
3. We're so glad we've found you – we're leaving tomorrow and we wish we'd found you sooner

So firstly, what do we do? Well, as many of you know, ConCERT helps visitors who wish to support Cambodia in some way during their stay. We answer general questions about Cambodia, and provide information so that people can make informed choices about the most effective ways to help.

Providing information to help people decide how they can best offer their support is a crucial part of our work, and it is growing in importance. Tourism is at an interesting phase. In the past, most people were content just to visit destinations and had little regard for their impact on the communities they visited. Nowadays, more and more travellers would like to contribute in some way, which in itself is a positive thing. The problem is that people are increasingly told by many agencies, (schools and universities, travel companies, volunteer placement organisations, the general media), that it's easy to do something whilst travelling that can "make a difference". The reality is that it's difficult during a short visit to gather enough information about the often complex and difficult situations people are faced with. Added to that, most visitors are not experts in the area they wish to help. Because of these factors, well meaning people can unknowingly support and encourage inappropriate practices that make matters worse for the very people they wish to help. This is especially prevalent in projects related to children.

Which brings us to the second point. There is a belief that orphanages are the solution, and the only solution, for poor Cambodian children. Orphanages attract large amounts of support and the number of privately run centres has risen dramatically from 132 in 2005 to 248 in 2010. Bodies such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Friends International assert that through supporting the rising number of private residential care centres, (many of which call themselves orphanages), in popular tourist destinations such as Siem Reap, well meaning visitors are unwittingly promoting and perpetuating the needless break up of poor families in the misguided belief that they are helping. At the same time, this practice is diverting

funds and attention away from more appropriate, (and cost effective), community support based solutions. Extremely vulnerable children are removed from their families and communities, (sometimes being moved to different provinces), thereby losing their natural first line of defence. Families on or below the poverty line are most at risk, especially mothers who are bringing up children alone. We have some additional information on our website that gives further information about this subject:

<http://www.concertcambodia.org/orphanages.html>

And so to the third point. It's no good having lots of information and experience if we can't share it with people. Our office is in a pretty good location and around 2,500 people have visited us in the last 3 years. But this is a tiny fraction of the total number of people looking to help and we would like a presence on or very near Pub Street or the Old Market which are visited by most tourists during their visit to Siem Reap. A teenager who recently left an orphanage in Siem Reap, (and whose experiences there have had a profound and disturbing effect on him), came into our office the other day and became very upset when talking about his time in the centre. He said, "Everyone should come to ConCERT first before they go to any schools and orphanages. Why doesn't everyone come here and then you can give them some advice?"

But with rents running at \$3,000 per month, an office on Pub Street is way beyond our budget, and we're not sure it would be an ethical way for us to spend funds even if we had them. Many Pub Street businesses however rent out some of their space for a few hundred dollars to reduce their overheads. We would like to rent a space sufficient for a small booth, to be operated by a member of staff. They would give out our leaflets and basic information, and anyone needing further assistance would be directed to our office 3 or 4 minutes away for more detailed discussions about how to best get involved.

We recently submitted an application for funding to the Canadian government, which would have enabled us to have a more central presence. We've just heard that we were unsuccessful, (there were 104 applications and they had enough money for 6!), but it was a very useful exercise and helped us to focus clearly on what the needs are, what ConCERT does, and how we can be more effective. **So... if anyone would like to help us get that presence on Pub Street so we can talk to many more visitors, please get in touch on info@concertcambodia.org Your support will be greatly appreciated.**



ANZ ROYAL BANK & GRACE HOUSE

In early April, Kathy Fossati, the communications manager from ANZ Royal Bank, contacted Michael to see if we could help them to arrange a team building activity for 40 of their senior managers. They also wanted the activity to do something useful for the local community. This is typical of the requests we get, and whilst it's relatively easy to devise a good team building activity, it's pretty challenging to design it in such a way so that 40 people arriving at a project for an afternoon can do something meaningful, and that doesn't undermine local people. Painting a school, for example, may be OK if the school really needs painting and if it doesn't simply do the locals out of a job, (and if it doesn't just reinforce the notion that foreigners will come and do the things that are needed).

After a bit of thought and some discussions with a few of our members, Alan Cordory at Grace House came up with an excellent idea. Grace House is a community centre serving 3 poor villages to the south of Siem Reap and they have a small field that they have set aside as allotments for poor families without land, so that they can grow food and feed their families. This works well but it floods in the wet season, and they had been thinking about building some covered raised beds

which would avoid the flooding and shade the plants from the blistering heat. They would also enable one villager, who was a keen gardener before he lost his legs in a landmine accident, to garden again in his wheelchair. The problem was funding – they didn't have any!

Alan devised a competitive event where 4 teams had to build up pre-prepared raised beds and install them on pre-prepared bases. All the materials were bought in the village and local people prepared the bases and the materials for the beds; ANZ covered the costs. Alan and his team prepared one earlier so the teams had something to copy and at the end of a very hot, sometimes chaotic, but very enjoyable afternoon on the 26th of May, Grace House had 5 covered beds!



Thank you for your interest.

Visit our office or our website for more information.

www.concertcambodia.org