

THE BLOG

Together We Rise

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Elena Murzello



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I have a love and appreciation for start-up companies and small businesses. I realize that being on your toes 365, 24/7 isn't for the faint of heart. Luckily, I've got a strong one. It's one of the reasons why I pursued a business degree; I enjoy creative problem-solving and establishing connections.

When I went to Cambodia a month ago, I was interested in supporting Siem Reap's local ventures. I was definitely not disappointed (as everything was a mom-and-pop shop)! Curiously, I noticed a trend there: a portion of revenue from these businesses was continually fed back into supporting the community through skills, housing and direct income. Even our hotel assisted with a few initiatives around Siem Reap. One notable cause was detailed in a previous post entitled, [A Better Place for Our Plastic Bottles](#), which encourages the use of, and even distributes, reusable aluminum water bottles for tourists versus the use of plastic water bottles.

Farmer's markets are my go-to places to experience a more authentic encounter with each country. In fact, at The Made in Cambodia Market along the Siem Reap River, there are

internationally-recognized artisans and designers, like Saomao, Grace Gecko Creations, Friends International and Rehash Trash. I especially liked the latter as they make functional housewares out of plastic bags. One-of-a-kind, modern designed pieces at rock-bottom prices.

After some browsing and touring the intricate Angkor Wat temple, it was time to indulge in some local fare, which was found at HAVEN. HAVEN, is a training restaurant for young adults from orphanages and safe shelters, as well as underprivileged, rural areas. On the menu, I saw that there was influence from both Asian and Western cultures; my recommendation would be the Khmer (Cambodian) curry using fresh coconut milk and lemongrass. Besides the tasty food, I was impressed by how professional the young adults were at their dinner service. Along the continued theme of supporting their country, I learned that these students not only trained at the restaurant, but are also offered guided shared housing, meals, medical care and a monthly training allowance.

After my taste of delicious Khmer fare, I wanted to learn more about the traditional dishes native to Cambodia. From my hotel, I was transported via tuk tuk to an outdoor kitchen at Countryside Cooking Class. Included in the market stop was at a stall for crickets. Yes, just like on *Amazing Race*! For those of you that were wondering, they are crunchy and taste like seasoned chips – just make sure you take off the wings (they can be quite sharp). As the meal was served, I learned about how children-centric they are through the stories of Ben, the founder of the class; 25 orphaned children actually live on the cooking class grounds, sleeping on floors, while nearly 71 children benefit from the proceeds of the cooking class.

I saw the same theme at the Cambodian Landmine Museum and Relief Center, where former child soldier, Aki Ri, highlights the dangers of landmines and their use in the Khmer Rouge Army. Money from ticket sales help clear landmines, build schools in villages that have no access to education, build wells and provide hygiene programs in small villages. The children living in the Relief

Center have been abandoned, orphaned, suffer from polio or come from low-income families. Schooling is offered with a chance to gain a university scholarship. Without these local businesses looking out for their future generation, any country would be at a loss of how they would continue to thrive in this demanding and unforgiving world.

As I returned home, I contemplated about how my business school education emphasized the need for competitive advantage. Defining yourself from the pack can help run out your competition but it does not necessarily help build community or revenue. Cambodia is certainly embracing this latter notion and combining them gracefully. I can see that working together to support each other is the business strategy utilized in Siem Reap. I look forward to seeing them succeed and rise together.