

JASMINE LODGE, SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

Jasmine Lodge is a family-run business owned and managed by Chab Van Kunn, his wife Yandy (Jasmine), and their extended families. It opened in 2003, providing budget accommodation for visitors to Siem Reap/Cambodia. Jasmine Lodge's development has been driven by two overriding ideologies of its owner.



Creating an improved host/guest relationship

When the guesthouse initially opened in 2003, Kunn travelled to the border of Thailand on a tri-weekly basis to pick up potential guests and bring them back to Siem Reap. On arrival, many chose not to stay at Jasmine Lodge and of those who did, they could often be distant during their stay, not engaging in conversation or forging any kind of relationship with the family. Kunn soon became disillusioned with this sort of business exchange and the poor host/guest interaction that resulted from it.

Spreading the benefits of tourism

Kunn wanted to see the benefits of tourism reaching further afield, where fewer opportunities exist for Cambodians. Well versed in the nuances of the tourism industry, having worked as a cook and tour-guide, Kunn was ideally positioned to help expand tourism in the region.

Kunn now revels in the tourism exchange, his family are very much a part of any visit, and guests enjoy the genuine interaction, cultural immersion and authenticity they experience from a stay here. As a result of their efforts, in 2005 Jasmine Lodge received the Lonely Planet Author's Choice accolade for "going the extra mile" to ensure guests were well looked after. Kunn partly attributes this accolade to the years of success and high occupancy that have followed.

Initiatives

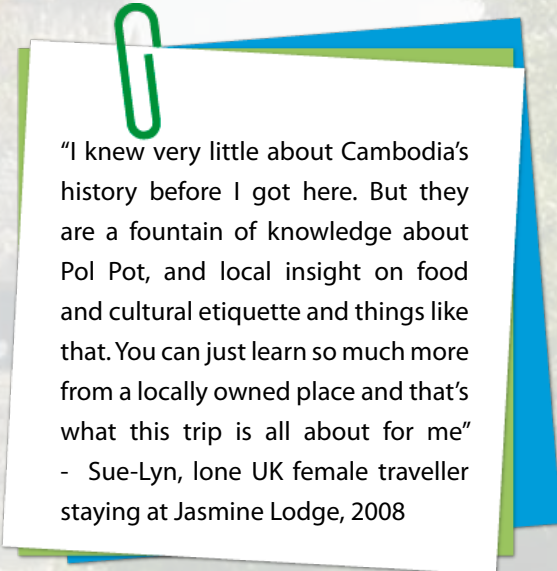
Actively Encouraging Interaction, Cultural Immersion and Understanding

Kunn has created an informal "home away from home" for tourists, with a large communal lounging and eating area, encouraging interaction between both his family and fellow travellers. He teaches his guests about the country's history and culture through conversations with him, his family and his staff, as well as by sharing literature. He also showcases educational / cultural films daily, playing titles such as The Killing Fields, Angkor Wat history, and Have Water Have Fish - Tonle Sap, to name a few.

While he enjoys this exchange, the tourists also enjoy the authenticity of the experience and learning they get out of it:

Actively Encouraging Guests to Stay Longer and Travel Further

To counteract tourist perceptions that Cambodia is only about the Angkor complex, Jasmine Lodge offers, and heavily promotes, a comprehensive list of package tours from 2-7 days both around Siem Reap and further afield. These package tours include trips as far as Phnom Penh, using a network of local transport and accommodation providers. Tours go beyond the expected temple visits, including trips to off-the-beaten track community projects, initiatives and attractions that many tourists may have otherwise missed with stops at Artisans d'Angkor, the silk farm, floating villages, the handicraft centre, a paddy field visit, the Phnom Koulen waterfall etc.



"I knew very little about Cambodia's history before I got here. But they are a fountain of knowledge about Pol Pot, and local insight on food and cultural etiquette and things like that. You can just learn so much more from a locally owned place and that's what this trip is all about for me"
- Sue-Lyn, lone UK female traveller staying at Jasmine Lodge, 2008

Policies on Tourism and Poverty Reduction:

Despite a booming tourism industry, Siem Reap province remains one of the poorest in Cambodia with little economic prosperity reaching those in the countryside. Jasmine Lodge has attempted to remedy this where possible with its employment, tour and food policies.

Kunn employs eight permanent members of staff (6 general, 1 cook and 1 laundry) and all have been recruited from villages outside of Siem Reap (Kunn: "Tourism does not reach there"). All eight employees receive accommodation and training, and can go to school locally. They also receive \$40 per month in salary. These staff benefit from on-the-job English language training, through interaction with guests.

In addition to the 2-7 day tours, Kunn also offers and promotes alternative tourism experiences in the form of homestays. Using his background and knowledge of the countryside, he offers guests the opportunity to experience rural life, connect with the local communities and eat traditional food, while spreading the benefits of tourism.

Philanthropy

In 2004 Kunn set up the Angkor Jasmine Foundation, a not-for-profit association, hoping to benefit those in isolated villages through tourist philanthropy. Kunn asks guests to donate any unwanted clothes, books, stationery etc and deposit them in a large basket in the reception area. Once every quarter a village is chosen where all the materials are distributed.



Tourists are also able to donate cash or offer services in kind, and are encouraged to come along on these charitable 4WD tours to visit the villages.

Any cash donations are used for medicines and educational materials (stationery, school uniforms, pens, pencils etc). Large donations can also be made to sponsor children to go to school or recruit English-speaking teachers to teach them.

Early Environmental Measures

While environmental aspects of CSR are currently thin on the ground, the property has recently installed solar panels for heating water. All rooms also include the generic water-saving advice to guests.

Investments in the Project

CSR comes less from any official plans or large financial investments, and more from immersion, education, opportunity, encouragement and support. These have been holistically integrated into the philosophy and day to day running of the business, leading to a mutually positive experience and a thriving guesthouse, while optimising the chances of spreading the benefits of any tourism.

Some of the initiatives may actually be saving the guesthouse money. For example, by acting as a sort of hospitality school, providing opportunities and training to rural people, Jasmine Lodge saves on the wages that would have to be paid to more experienced recruits.

The guesthouse received much guidance from Thomas Holdo Hansen of angkorhotels.org (worldhotellink.com). Notably he assisted Kunn in creating the comprehensive website showcasing the accommodation, which approximately 70% of the business is now believed to come through.



Financial Benefits for the Company and Other Stakeholders

With around \$500 per month spent on food at local markets and \$320 per month on 8 staff from isolated rural areas, Jasmine Lodge has an estimated continuing 'pro-poor' value of \$9,840 per annum. However, the less tangible benefits (i.e. training, livelihoods) and unofficial knock-on financial benefits of the various initiatives (i.e. tourists travelling further / staying longer), are believed to be a lot higher.

The benefits of implementing the initiatives for Jasmine Lodge are clear with high occupancy, very little seasonality, the Lonely Planet endorsement, satisfied clientele and much word of mouth recommendation.

“Staying in Jasmine Lodge made us feel like at home. Mr. Kunn and his staff have been very accommodating. He also shared his knowledge of the tourist attractions there, recommending to us where are the good places to visit besides Angkor Wat. Thanks also to the tuk-tuk driver, Mr Chong, for driving us around and being so humble even though he is a man of a few words. I will definitely come back to Siem Reap and stay at Jasmine Lodge”. Sarina & Kelly, Singapore

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Sources

www.jasminelodge.com

http://www.angkorhotels.org/Jasmine_Lodge