



HAVEN IN THE KINGDOM

Raina Ng found this buzzing restaurant tucked cosily in the middle of Sok San street in Siem Reap offering comfort to the dining hungry tourists, and some of the city's lost children



01 Lok-Lak
02 Tom-Kha-Gai
03 Rice Dumplings
04 Haven Restaurant
Entrance 05 The Terrace
06 Tom-Yum-Goong
07 Khmer-Curry
08 Calamari

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It was about 2pm when we walked in and Paul politely told us that the kitchen takes a break at 2:30pm. Mindful of that we quickly ordered. The cheerful staff served us with five-star courtesy and as the food arrived I tucked in to a Khmer Curry that was exquisite and faithfully Cambodian. But Haven is more than just a restaurant as we found out from a chat with Sara Wallimann who with her husband Paul founded Haven for their love of Siem Reap.

What were the both of you doing before Siem Reap?

Back in Switzerland we lived, we loved, we worked, we met friends. I'd say we had a good life and were in general happy. We enjoyed our private life and we had good jobs we liked doing. Paul was a Food Engineer and consultant for food hygienics & microbiology for big hotels and restaurants as well as a teacher at the Belvoir Hotel School in Zurich. After doing that for 10 years, he went on to study Marketing and became a teacher at a Marketing School in

Zurich which he did the last 2 years before we went on our world trip.

I worked as a PR- and Communications specialist in several agencies and companies. But even though we had a good life and interesting jobs, something was missing. So we decided to quit our jobs, sell everything we had and go and see the world for an indefinite time. It was on our first leg of the 2-year trip, in 2008, when we came to Cambodia for the first time and got stuck in Siem Reap.

What particularly about Siem Reap were you both drawn to?



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REVIEW

HAVEN TRAINING RESTAURANT

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It wasn't Siem Reap itself, even though we did like this little town (which, back in 2008 was a lot more quiet and was nothing like the booming tourist town it is today). What really drew us in was the orphanage 14km outside Siem Reap that we had found and grew attached to (at that time volun-tourism wasn't an issue yet). We stayed and volunteered for 7 months and we got attached to Siem Reap. We had made friends in town and knew our way around. It became our new home.

What were in your hearts and minds when you decided to start Haven?

We realised back in 2008 that there were no programmes specifically for young adults who have outgrown the institutions they grew up and lived in. We just could not imagine going back to our old lives and pretending that it was all good. Cambodia for us was not a distant exotic country anymore, her people had become our soul mates and it became our home. We started wrecking our brains about how we could help but we didn't want to create anything that would live off purely on donations - it had to be something that would be self-sustainable. We also didn't want to offer help by just handing out money to these young adults: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," right? So with this philosophy in mind, we came up with the idea to offer these young people a stepping stone from institution into real life, by offering them a place where they could turn to get vocational training and learn real work skills, so they can fend for themselves in the future.

Tell us about the building of Haven.

Anyone who has ever built anything will agree that building is a hassle and we had very different quality expectations than they are used to in Cambodia. Nothing came out right the first time. Everything had to be done and re-done several times. The whole building time, which took about 5 months, was very stressful, to say the least. And during the finishing time came the devastating floods (this was in October and November 2011) that turned all of Cambodia into a water world for 6 weeks. Even Siem Reap town was completely flooded and we had to wade through hip deep water every day to check on HAVEN.

Then in December 2011 we opened the gates to HAVEN. We started the first year with 2 trainees (one as a waiter and one as a cook) and eight employees. It was exiting and scary at the same time. The whole first year was a lot of learning by doing for us and we were learning to optimise everything (from the training, to the dishes, to the opening hours, just everything). It was indeed a very intense time. But we got a lot of support from wonderful guests who would recommend us to other travelers. And so we had quite a steady flow of guests right from the start.

And now?

Haven today is a busy little training restaurant with currently 7 cook trainees in the kitchen and 14 employees. Among the employees are teachers who help us train, but also normal employees making sure everything runs smoothly. And then we have our "Juniors". These are people who come from very poor or difficult backgrounds, but are not connected to an institution. We take them in, hire them like normal employees and train them like our trainees, offering



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course the menu has to be appealing to our guests. We had to make sure that we have the right balance between traditional Khmer dishes, unique fusion dishes, Asian and Western favourites and also special Western creations.

Another thing that is really important to us is the ingredients we use, like our organically grown rice, our free-range eggs, etc. We guarantee high quality products and ingredients while supporting local organisations and farmers who are committed to the healthy and safe development of Cambodia. Our Chef – Chef Pardet who really deserves all praise goes to the market every morning to buy the freshest and best ingredients for all our dishes. He is such a passionate cook and a wonderful teacher to our trainees and juniors. He has been with us from the beginning on and Haven simply wouldn't be what it is today without him!

What are your future plans for Haven?

The Haven Training Guesthouse is our next big project so we can expand our training capacity. Every year we are getting more and more applications and we simply don't have the capacity to take everyone in at the Haven Training Restaurant. Also not everyone wants to be a cook or waiter. During our interviews we hear the young people tell us of wanting to become a receptionist, or to organise tours. With a training guesthouse we can offer these vocational trainings and take in more young adults.

We have already found and rented a property that enables us to implement the Haven philosophy. We have a lot of construction work ahead of us again, as we will have to build most from scratch. But we haven't been able to start yet, as the high season was and is so busy. We have however started with the fundraisings to set up the Training Guesthouse and hope we can start building in the low season. In line with the Haven Training Restaurant, the Training Guesthouse too will have to become self-sustainable and will not rely on donations after the defined start-up period.

And finally, do you both miss home – or is this now home?

This is home. With all its up- and downsides. With all its joys and frustrations. With all its fascinating otherness and boring daily routines. Simply home.

them too the chance to learn a work skill, get into the trade and be able to support their families.

The trainees come to us through organisations. Usually in May we inform the organisations that we will be starting with the interviews and that's when we get all the applications. We meet everyone who applies for a training. Whenever possible we also go and visit the different organisations, where they come from. The decision, who we pick, is based on our gut-feeling. Which has so far proven to be good.

How did you come up with the menu, and the recipes?

Paul and I can't cook at all. But we always ate out and knew exactly what we liked and expected from a menu. We put the menu together with our Khmer Head Chef Pardet Chhom and our manager (and enthusiastic home cook) Stef Feierabend. There were a few considerations: first, the menu had to include a good mix of Asian and Western dishes, adding many vegetarian options, because we believe it is really important for our trainees to learn the different ingredients, flavours and preparations of these foods/cuisines/dietaries in order to find good work after they finish at Haven. And then of

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AROUND TOWN

Siem Reap has an abundant variety when it comes to food and some of these places may surprise you with their finesse



FCC ANGKOR
Pokambar Ave,
Next to Royal
Residence,
Siem Reap
W fccCambodia.com
FB Fcc.Hotels

The FCC Angkor (Foreign Correspondents' Club) is set in the former French Governor's residence and has a decor and setting that most guests rave about. Its quiet space is a popular escape even amongst the local expats. While the price is on the high side, it offers a good mix of Asian and Western dishes, and of course a great wine-list.



CUISINE WAT DAMNAK
Wat Damnak village,
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E info@cuisinewatdamnak.com

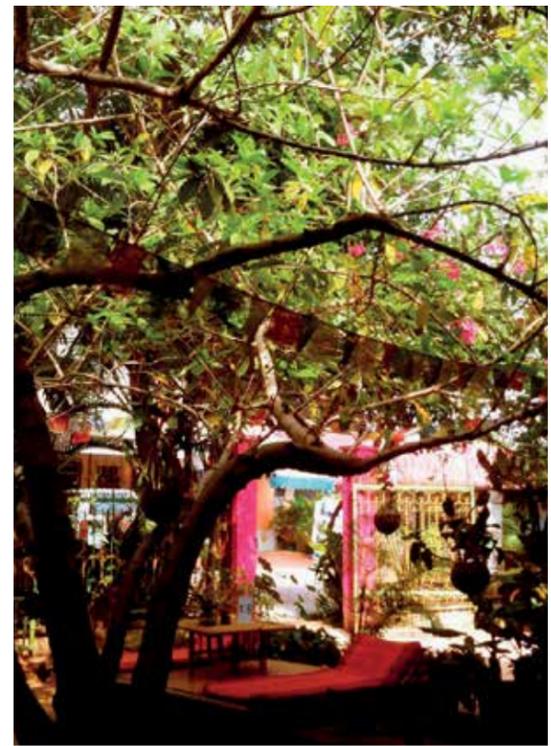
The restaurant offers a degustation menu that is an interpretation of Cambodian cuisine by French chef Joannès Rivière. The menus are updated every fortnight and is a great way to taste Khmer flavours a-la-francais.



Compiled by RAINA NG

IL-FORNO
Pari's Alley 16, The Lane
Siem Reap
W ilfornorestaurantsiemreap.com

Italian owners Manfredi, Maddalena and Giovanna has created a little Italian corner in the heart of Siem Reap known for their wood-fire pizzas and extensive Italian wine list.



ABACUS GARDEN RESTAURANT AND BAR
Road No 6 to the Airport, Siem Reap
W cafeabacus.com **E** abacusrestaurant@gmail.com

The French-owned Abacus has been Siem Reap's expat crowd's top pick with its French influenced contemporary Western cuisine mainly the steak, creme brulee and foie gras. It is also, as some guests say, very much worth the US\$2 tuk tuk ride from town for the best burgers in town.