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# Phnom Penh Tours

## Day Trips to Hell and Other Attractions

If you come to Phnom Penh you will almost certainly be bombarded with invitations to visit the Killing Fields and Toul Sleng incarceration and torture centre. From the beauty of Angkor or the charm of the beach it is not a particularly enticing prospect but it is what has defined Cambodia to the outside world since the Vietnam war. Phnom Penh has other attractions but most end up touring down to these sad sites and revisiting the scene of the atrocities. I did, eventually, just to see what remained after all these years, and how the places felt where so much horror had occurred.

personal stories that were in an exhibition. The photos of children I found deeply sad because not one child was smiling, to see a Cambodian child, even the poorest today, is to see a bundle of gladness hard to conceive in the abstract. And to see the happiness of the parents with their offspring makes the atrocities under the Khmer Rouge even more horrifying. The personal histories were of people separated from those they loved. One simple said: I never saw my husband again after they took him away but I remember him every time I eat sdo leaves as when I was pregnant with our child he climbed a tree so I could satisfy my craving. The bleakness of those words under a radiant photo of the bride and groom in their wedding attire is not easily erased from the memory.

There are countless accounts, diaries, films and journalistic accounts of the KR epoch but two that stand out are 'Surviving the Killing Fields' and 'The Gate'. The former is the true story of the actor who played the part of the Cambodian assistant, Pran, in the film of the same name and the later is an account of a French researcher who was actually released from KR detention and met many high ranking KR officials in the process including Duch, who is currently being tried by a ludicrously expensive piece of judicial buffoonery. What makes the first so fascinating is the fact that unlike many accounts the writer had no interest whatsoever in politics and simply relates what happened to ordinary people. The Gate is interesting in that it seems to give



The killing fields lies some 17 kilometres out of the city and you would probably do yourself a favour if you went by car. It is strange now because, despite its history, it is a peaceful reposeful site where nature once more is in ascendancy and bird song is a constant companion to the mass graves and pagoda of skulls. Above the bird song all that can be heard is the constant singing of recorded sutras for the dead. What is chilling are the signs everywhere explaining this depression marks the mass grave of 400 people, that this tree is where babies were killed by being swung, and the main sign telling of the 8000 or so who eventually came to their end here.

From this site your guide/driver will doubtless convey you to the Tuol Sleng prison. This is slightly more horrifying as it contains photos of the dead in the position many were found when the Vietnamese came to the prison. The sheer scale of thing becomes mind numbing after a while and as you shuffle round with the other stunned 'tourists' you become, to a degree, inured to the horror. For it is horrifying that a school should be taken over and used for such diabolical purposes. A place that, in theory at least, should provide hope and enlightenment. Ultimately what I found most perturbing were the photos of children working under the Khmer rouge and the

some insight in Duch and his principles.



After lunch, if you can stomach it, come the 'other attractions'. Those of a cultural bent will be well rewarded by The National Museum of Cambodia. Petite and very nicely surrounded by gardens this traditional building holds a host of fascinating Khmer carvings, metalwork and artistic work from throughout Khmer history. At 3 dollars it represents excellent value and a pleasant couple of hours can be whiled away here.

The Royal Palace is another interesting destination, a little pricier at 6 dollars or so, but none the less worth a visit



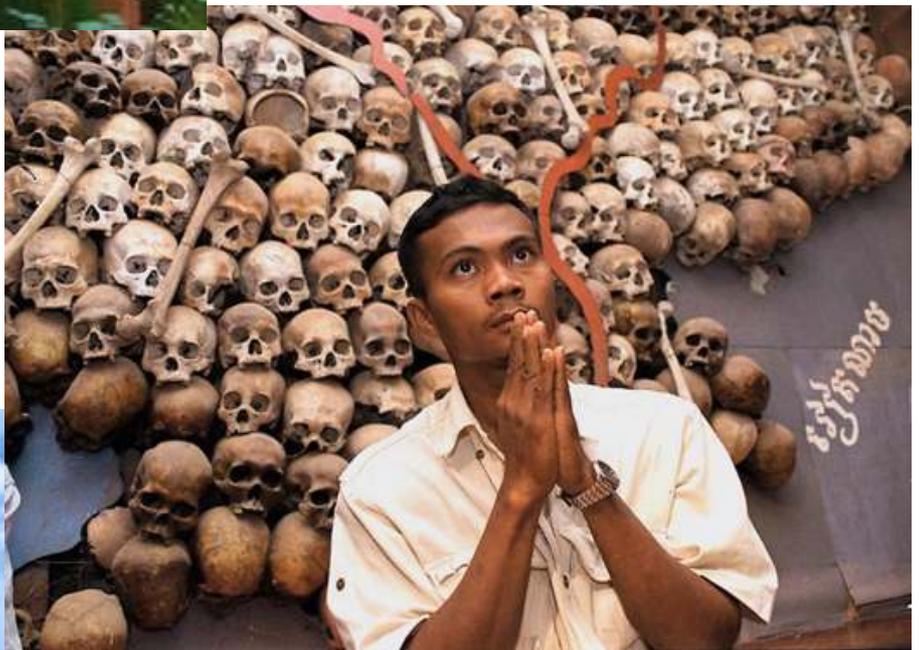
charming people you couldn't imagine.... Which makes it difficult to imagine how they came to the pass they did 30 years ago.

Markets are the lifeblood of any Asian capital and PP has plenty, the Russian market is an interesting example of the way things work here. You will be walking along inundated with requests to buy things when suddenly no one is talking to you because you have gone past the tourist area and are confronted by electrical switches or textbooks. The next thing you know you are walking chest high through pliers and tyres. They literally seem to sell everything here including, of course, food. Though it may not look that hygienic I have never suffered any ill effects and the snacks they serve up are delicious. Enjoy a bowl of banana flower bud with noodles and soup. Just the job after you have been sold some silver of dubious authenticity, 40 postcards a pair of pliers and an electrical switch dating from the Russian assistance days. The last two items really were inexcusable but it was the novelty of not being asked to buy something.

PP is as flat as a pancake and the only natural hill is Phnom Proom. Naturally enough it boasts a wat on its top. After the palace you may be a bit sick of wats but a visit to the hill is still rather pleasant. Come in the evening and watch the children watching the elephant being given a bath, stroll round and see if the clock is at the correct time – it is twice a day. If you have time enjoy the shade of the big trees, rather lacking in most places, and watch the locals taking their leisure. Finally make the ascent to the temple to gaze at the view, not spectacular but worth the dollar entrance fee.

You have come to the end of Phnom Penh's main attractions, if you want to stay longer you should perhaps

especially if you haven't been to the Grand Palace in Bangkok. The grounds are brimming with flowers, traditional music floats over the air played by musicians sitting in a Sala, and the architecture is stunning. There is a soaring lightness of touch to traditional temple building that carries the eye constantly skyward and the Palace has some great examples of these structures. It is good to see the pleasure with which the Khmers enjoy the scene as well; constantly giggling and taking photos of each other on their mobile phones, a gentler, more



find a purpose, but of course you are here because you haven't got one; you are on holiday.

The evening might be usefully employed by sitting on the riverside. There are so many places to go it is impossible to mention them all but Happy Phnom Penh Pizza is good value, the Riverside Bar boasts chess, foosball, pool and excellent sports coverage and, if you want to hob-nob with the Lords of Poverty you might give the FCC a go – prices are appropriate for those drawing large salaries by working to alleviate the suffering of others.

# Into Cambodia

The following is an extract from *A Dragon Apparent*. The year is 1950, and the author Norman Lewis is traveling from Vietnam to Cambodia, bound for Laos.

The Land Rover bounded westwards over the road to Cambodia. It was the only road of any length in the country open to unescorted, day time traffic, although it had been

papers had recently published an account of an attack by one of the garrisons on a car straggling behind a convoy in which the driver was shot dead, and a lady passenger's finger was almost bitten off in an attempt to rob her of a ring. We frequently found that ditches had been dug open to unescorted, day time traffic, although it had been across the road by Viet-Minh sympathizers, and



closed for a fortnight before the day we left owing to bad weather. We plunged through a bland and smiling landscape, animated by doll like Vietnamese figures, and mud caked buffaloes that ambled across the road, subsequently filled in with loose earth. A series of such

lowering their heads as if to charge, when it was too late. Children dangled lines from bridges, while their elders, gathered in sociable groups, groped for fish, waist deep in liquid mud. The kites, floating over the villages, were pale ideographs against a deeper sky. There were miles of deserted rubber plantations. It was better, said the driver, not to stop between the towers, and his method was to accelerate to about 65mph until a tower was two hundred yards away. He would then relax speed until we were past, and about the same distance on the other side. This confidence in the towers seemed not altogether well founded. The





this terrible road, while a group of monks stood by, watching them with saintly detachment. The trim pajamas of the Vietnamese had given way to a drab sarong like shirt, pulled in the men's case into the shape of breeches by bringing the waist sash through the legs. There might be, in addition to this, a jacket of some dingy material, and a rag wound round the head as a turban. It seemed that these descendents of the great Khmer civilization quite clearly didn't care in the slightest how they dressed. The Cambodians, like the Burmese and Laotians, are, by their own design, poor, but supremely happy. In these rich and comparatively under populated countries there is no struggle for existence, and this provides the ideal atmosphere for the practice of the gentle faith in which their people have been reared. The Vietnamese, whose Buddhism is diluted almost to the point of non-existence, has a competitive soul, is a respecter of work for its own sake, and strives to increase and multiply. As he works hard for himself, he can be made to work hard for others, and is therefore the prey of the exploiter. There are a few uneasily

sensation, even in the Land Rover. At one point we passed a newly burnt out car from which a tracery of smoke still arose. Cambodia, It was a place name always in my imagination by tinkling, percussive music. Although the

conducted plantations in Cambodia, and while I was there, in fact, there was a serious revolt in one of them. But Cambodia has no surplus population and no proletariat. Every man can have as much land as he can

Vietnamese had been encroaching for centuries upon Cambodian land, there were signs of a true physical frontier at the present border. We came to a wide river. On one side was Cochin China, which had once been Cambodia too, with neat Vietnamese mosaics of rice fields, and plantations. Across the river was the Cambodia of present times, and what too, must have been some early frontier of the ancient Khmer state, since everything changed immediately. A cultural divide, a separation of continents, on one bank of the river were the ordinary forest trees. The other bank bore sparse clumps of coconut palms, the first I had seen in my travels, and beyond them a foretaste of the withered plains of India. Great pied kingfishers encrusted the edges of yellow pools and ditches that served no economic purpose, there were no rice fields. Cambodians lounged inertly about the rare villages that were no more than a few squalid African type huts. In one village some women with dirty, handsome faces were pouring earth into some of the worst holes in





devouring the splendid fish that can be almost had for the taking away, down by the river. Refuse is thrown out of a window, or pushed through the floor. There is none of the well-bred aloofness of the Vietnamese about these people. The Cambodians stare at whatever interests them, and will giggle at slight provocation. The centre of Phnom Penh has, of course, been taken over by the Chinese, who have indulged in it to the limit their taste for neon signs, opened many cinemas, too many radio shops with loud speakers blaring in the doorways, and a casino, which, started in 1949 is said to already to have bankrupted half of the Cambodians of the capital. Phnom Penh was one of those synthetic Chinese towns with all the warm glitter so cheering to the hearts of Sunday night Coventry Street crowds. The Chinese are not interested in southeast Asian towns until they have reached on their own initiative a certain level of population and prosperity. They then descend like a flock of gregarious birds, galvanizing its life with their

cultivate. As far as I know no Cambodian has been shipped in the hulks to end his life toiling on some depopulated South Seas island. Spurred on by what the French call isolated acts of piracy, we reached the capital Phnom Penh, early the same afternoon. It is approached through unimposing suburbs, several miles of shacks among the trees, most of them reeling slightly on their supporting posts. The dogs of India are here, one per house, an ugly yellow variety with a petulant expression, and sometimes in a state of utter decrepitude. Together with



the pigs and occasional domestic monkeys they profit to the utmost, in their slow saunterings on the road, from the Buddhist aversion to taking life. Through the open doors one sees that the houses contain no furniture, in keeping with the Cambodians indifference to material possessions. The occupants wash, dress and, of course, eat in public, and half naked families are to be observed squatting round

crow like vitality. The feeble shoots of local culture wither away, and what remains is a degenerate native slum round the hard, bright, self-contained, Chinese core. *Part two, Madame Shum's opium den.*

# A Day in the Life

Quite a while back, at one of my favorite watering holes, which wasn't a girlie bar, I saw a member of staff lounging about so went over to make some lame joke about not working hard. She responded by telling me it was her day off. Day off? I couldn't quite assimilate the information at first.

After six long nights working in the bar wouldn't she have anything better to do than going there to hang out? Maybe something new or different perhaps. Or why not just stay home and relax. The work is not all that strenuous in itself but, especially considering the long hours, it would still have to weigh on a person. Many times, especially when it's late and/or business is slow they will complain about or be visibly tired.

As it happens, I've discovered the practice of going in on days off is more common than not. Even if it's just on the way to somewhere else they'll drop in for a short time. Also, going in when not scheduled doesn't mean they'll stay the full shift – though sometimes it does – but rather come and go at their leisure.

There seems to be a push-pull thing happening. On the one hand their domiciles are generally small and cramped if not mean and lowly. Many don't have a TV that might help to occupy their time. They commonly share a small room with one or two others. Some live with family in places where several people inhabit a small apartment, or where they might have to listen to their parents ragging on them.

Better to go hang out with friends where there's music and maybe good times. Sometimes when there are no customers they can get pretty bored, but when things are happening they can have a lot of fun. (Or so it seems; they regularly say they don't like working in a bar. While that may be true philosophically, there clearly are times when they are enjoying themselves.)

Maybe a regular customer will stop in and buy her some lady drinks. At first I thought, well if it's your day off then I don't have to pay extra for your drinks, huh? No way; as long as they're in the bar, you'll pay. That also usually applies to bar fines. If you meet her in the bar, even if it's her day off or she's been bar fined earlier that night, you are likely to pay.

One of the things they like doing when not working is visiting other bars, so I'll often bar fine them so they can check out the other venues. They ordinarily wouldn't be welcome in another bar, at least without an escort, since they might be in competition with the staff. The exception being if they worked there previously or they have a lot of friends there.

Until recently bar fines were always five bucks, but lately some have gone to ten. Still others are moving to ten on weekends or after a certain hour. I try to boycott the ten dollar ones. When I first got to Phnom Penh some years ago my funds were short so I'd be forced to wait until closing to save the five bucks.

The bar fine system is important for the bars since many staff would hardly show up on time or stay till closing without having to pay the penalty. Since bars owned by Khmers give only one or two days off per month - though Cambodian labor law says employees are entitled to one day off a week – the only way to get time off, when they are ill or need to leave work for any reason, is to pay the money. I've seen them work when they were obviously very sick. They felt they had to go in because they couldn't afford to lose the \$5 income. Really not fair.

Their pay is generally so low, usually \$50 or \$60 per month, if they take off very much time for personal reasons they wind up paying most of their salary back to the bar and are left with tips and lady drinks.

They get taken advantage of a lot by the bar fine system. One told me of how the boss let the girls off for two days for Khmer New Year, which is ok but not really enough since the holiday is

three days and they often have to spend a lot of time going back and forth. Staff was told if they wanted a third day they'd have to pay a \$20 bar fine. What's the big deal if the bar is a little short of girls for one or two days of the holiday? It's a special time. There are typically so many on staff, there'll always be some around.

She also remarked with displeasure that she gets docked one dollar if she's one minute late (her pay for the whole night is only two dollars) but when the bar is open long past the usual 2 AM closing time she gets nothing extra. Besides there aren't hardly any customers when the bar opens at 5 PM.

With salary, tips and lady drinks, the good ones can earn about \$150 month, but only if they don't take a lot of personal time off. Sometimes, for those who do need that time off over a longer period, or can't deal with working every night, they'll forego their wages entirely and just come to work for tips and lady drinks.

For those available for home service, there's also money for honey, but many do not go that route. It isn't just the virgins, which constitute a really surprising number, but also those who are quite selective or have a boyfriend and stay loyal to him. For many girls, especially those that aren't all that attractive, or are really to old for the job, the option of making that extra money doesn't come all that often. In the bars that are really slow, their pickins' may be slim indeed.

The bar becomes almost like family to many of them. They'll sometimes quit to work in another bar, be uncomfortable, then return to more familiar territory. They spend a lot of time together, so develop friendships that aren't easily duplicated.

In many bars business is very sporadic. Especially during the early hours there'll be 20 girls in search of a customer. All they have to do for much of the night is hang out together. While some bars have a strong customer base, enough to keep the gals busy, it's rare that they are all occupied.

With wages so low the bar can afford to keep many around. But competition is fierce with new bars opening almost every week. That makes for a lot of dead times, and dashed dreams for a lot of owners expecting to make big bucks. Though it may be easy enough to break even, or make a little money, not many provide a western style of living. Or maybe they'll do well in high season then merely limp along from Khmer New Year's in April till end of rainy season in November.

It presents somewhat of a dilemma for the girls to work in a quiet, so-so bar, since it isn't just boring but also limits their income. They may be comfortable there but are forced to leave to improve their earnings. While some can be found working in the same bar for years, most move around a lot. There're so many to choose from, they won't stay if they feel they aren't being treated well.

I've been getting myself in trouble lately going around to a lot of new bars looking for one super cuddly one I lost track of. I had visited her three times and was eager to jump in the deep water next time I saw her. I was even ready to buy her a cheap telephone since she was without, but she simply disappeared from the bar; I tried asking other staff but couldn't get a forwarding address. I've gone to half dozen new bars searching her out to no avail; however, in the process I've had my eye turned by several new babes, which is trouble since I don't have the time, space or money to add new squeezes to my roster.

I'm already afraid that some I've been pursuing and cultivating for months, even years sometimes, will pan out and leave me with an embarrassment of riches. Not the worst fate, but one that could nonetheless leave me in a pickle.

While they can appreciate what I can offer them, they almost

invariably are looking for something more, a boyfriend they can live with, possibly do the family thing. While it's true that there are far more willing young women than men who have any interest in longevity, I've known quite a few who've done really well for themselves; found partners who love and care for them, and some who've lucked out with guys who are flush financially. On the other hand they are quick to move in with a guy then discover he's really jealous, demanding and hard to live with, or he wants them to quit work and stay home while he continues to go out and play in the bars. Maybe he isn't playing with the girls or bar fining them, but he will still leave her home to get bored and make her feel she wants to return to work.

Some wind up with men who are good to them but who they aren't all that attracted to. They and their families may be well taken care of but maybe he's really fat or mostly wants the house to stay clean and tidy. One of the sweetest gals in town, who I was once in love with, has got a fat, old, very jealous boyfriend. He's also rich - at least according to one of the other girls, for what that's worth - and probably good hearted. Most likely, he also loves her very much. She's not all that happy with him but he takes care of her family and that's one of the most important things in her life.

Pudgy recently lived with a guy for a year. He was bossy and controlling - she much prefers the freedom I give her - but chauvinist attitudes aren't that unusual and all in all they seemed to get along pretty well. She left because he refused to give her money for Mama. He cluelessly brushed off her need to support her parent with lame excuses and gave up a jewel. I don't know if he's tight for cash or just stingy, but it's his loss and my gain.

## COCKROACH



### Dumber and dumber

You get on your dirtbike outside a bar. Start it and switch the lights on.

Talking to a friend who is getting on their bike a moto pulls up beside you.

You turn to look at him and with a cheerful smile he says, "Moto sir."

Left speechless by the sheer stupidity of the situation you drive off.

He gets the Bayon Dumbass of the Year award by a horse's mile.

### Lazyitis

We know things are a bit slow around town but on several research trips around town some bars seem to be suffering due to a local syndrome called Lazyitis.

You walk into a bar with a mate and you are the only customers. One of the ten waitresses greets you because she recognizes you.

She then walks back to a card game with the others who have not even raised their heads.

You get a drink from the bargirl and not one person speaks to you whilst you sup your beer. So on that note you leave.

Tactics in other bars are playing pool, watching Khmer TV or sleeping on available couches.

Will owners and managers take note that they need a kick up the arse as they are going feral. Customers will only have one drink if they are ignored.

But as is the local custom, when questioned waitresses/hostesses will all immediately say they have no customers and no money.

Well try working for a change you are not an NGO.

### How big are your buttons?

Twenty three Africans were arrested the other week as they tried to smuggle heroin out of the country hidden in huge buttons on clothes.

A police colonel was reportedly quoted as stating that, "Police are now actively hunting black people."

So nice to live in a racist country, reminds me of the Raj!

### Are you registered?

The British embassy is

Baby Doll, after two disappointing experiences with young men, told me if she could find an old man to take care of her family, she would not worry about his age.

Jealous men, once again, are the biggest hassle they have to deal with. It's not hard to understand the guys' emotions; these girls are beautiful and shapely and can easily attract attention. They're friendly and flirty; that's how they've survived and it's a part of their nature. Being as they spend a lot of time being playthings and relating to lots of men of all ages, races, sizes and dispositions, they're astute in the ways of men.

They often get cynical about men and depressed about money, especially those that don't shag. One beauty I've got a crush on who's yet to bed down the first time says, I no go with customer I no have money. She assures me she'll be ready in two or three months - I can hardly wait.

Another tells me she used to do it a lot but no more. Now she works two bar jobs, a full time and a half time, and is always tired and still short of money.

The cheapest apartment near work would cost \$40 or \$50 per month, though sharing would cut that expense, food is another dollar or two a day or another \$40 or \$50, motodop transportation about the same again and well, you can see it's already at the limit of their potential earnings, for the ones who are doing well, and still doesn't cover clothes and incidentals like medicine and soap.

Not to mention money for family. They literally can't go home for holidays without bringing some cash, they would feel ashamed.

All good reasons why I enjoy being generous to them. They are a thrill to me, it's the least I can do.

undertaking a campaign to get turning into more of a people registering online. You shambles than even we can enter minimum details but a predicted. It has however contact back home and any wasted more money than we medical conditions or allergies ever imagined.

should be entered as it could save your live in an accident.

We have been assured that any information is not shared with any other department of government.

Register at: [ukincambodia.fco.gov.uk](http://ukincambodia.fco.gov.uk)

### Dud notes

Be careful very good quality dud twenty and ten dollar notes

are now circulating around town. Probably from the Korea that we don't talk about because it has "the bomb." Or our coloured friends around town.

### Farce or trial?

The ECC pantomime fell further of the rails recently when one of the senior prosecutors resigned. He left on a quiet note talking about corruption, political meddling, and of course lack of funds.

The whole farce is

### Flying pig alert!!

Cambodia's first case of H1N1 has been detected in a visiting American girl. So expect locals to go into a panic buying up mung beans or something again. She is now at Calmette so if the pigs don't get her the hospital probably will!!



# Placating the Bankers, Again

## Obama's Bix Fix

The administration's financial fix-it plan was laid out this week and it was, underwhelming, to say the least. The New York Times dubbed it, "back to business as usual.." not a phrase commonly seen in the paper of record which, by the way, essentially managed to miss the true source of the country's crisis -- Underpaid America -- for two generations.

None of this comes as a surprise given the top priority Mr. Obama set early on to fund banks and financial institutions. Everybody else should hang in there and brace yourselves for the Great Marginalization. So, aid to banks stays in place; derivatives are to remain a critical part of the finance system; there'll be enhanced protection for accredited consumers who can still borrow money and invest. In other words, the protection of existing pools of money and investment is the goal of this government.

That is fine unless, of course, you have little or none of that money. That would be the millions of Americans who helped raise America's productivity to new heights and got no rewards for the effort, for whom a pension system has fallen away and for whom there are now mounting health care and energy costs. Let's keep in mind that the average consumer debt of an American family is \$10,000. Let's not kid ourselves: that's an amount that served to augment low wages (much like food stamps for the working poor) and did not fund extravagant lifestyles, a popular obfuscation in the media embrace of Obama's sociology.

Low wage America slammed people and NOTHING the Obama administration has on the table now or in the pipeline will address that fundamental dynamic this year, next ... ever. Meanwhile, profits are up. Business Week reports: "Bank Reap Handsome Profits Cashing Out of Chinese Banks." Those winners include Goldman Sachs, the investment firm that received \$20 billion via our government bailout of insurance giant AIG. That's called "restoring confidence".

We are to continue life in one of the most economically stratified countries in the industrial world...as speculators swoop in buying up foreclosed properties, adults compete with high school kids for summer jobs, the price of gas goes back over \$3 a gallon, and the stock market goes up, trumpeting "labor savings" as key to profit growth, the same labor savings that triggered the credit crunch. That simple and obvious construct -- low wages triggered the crisis -- seems to elude the so-called progressive pundits at MSNBC.

The crisis we face is Mr. Obama's cold indifference to the fact that growing numbers of American families cannot get by this year. He seems entirely disconnected from the economic realities of working Americans. If President Obama wants to get something done he is going to have to, in the words of one financial columnist, "make some bankers mad". Fat chance.

## Seeing Through Israeli Delay Tactics

The growing divide between the Obama administration and the Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu over Israel's expansion of its West Bank settlements has led to delay tactics by Israel. President Obama must see through them and press his criticism or risk losing credibility among Arabs.

The first delay tactic was an attempt to place the onus for the problems in the region on Iran. This idea was pitched by Netanyahu when he traveled to Washington. It was dismissed by President Obama in Cairo.

The second delay tactic, which seems to have gained more

traction than the first, is a plea for sympathy for Israeli settlers. They must be allowed settlement expansion to accommodate for "natural growth," the argument goes. If not, we would be asking settlers not to have babies. And how can anyone be against babies? This argument was repeated again in Netanyahu's speech June 14.

But the fact of the matter is, anyone with a basic understanding of three-dimensional construction could tell you that you do not need to usurp more Palestinian land to accommodate the growth of families. You simply should build up.

If the Israelis need any tips on dealing with the rapid growth of population in confined space, they should observe how Gazans have been living for the past 42 years under occupation. Consider that in Israel's largest West Bank settlement, Ma'ale Adummim, the population density is 673 persons per square kilometer. In Gaza, there are 4,118 Palestinians living per square kilometer.

The settlements are not simply an obstacle to peace because they exist on Palestinian land, but rather because of the way in which they are built to maximize control over land and its resources. That's why anyone who has seen settlers watering the lawns of their large houses while nearby Palestinian towns face water shortages realizes that the excuse of "natural growth" is a farce intended only to delay and deceive.

The Obama administration should not put up with any delaying tactics when it comes to a settlement freeze. Obama should make it clear to the Israelis that settlers should feel free to grow their families as long as their settlements grow vertically, and not horizontally over Palestinian land. The settlements shouldn't be there to begin with.

Further, instead of easing pressure on the Israeli government coalition, the United States should do the opposite and increase pressure until Israel complies with a complete settlement freeze.

The United States must put this coalition government in the position to choose between settlement expansion - which some Israelis hold dear - and a strong relationship with the United States, which the whole of Israel values.

Serious pressure coming from the president of the United States, in unison with the Congress, will allow Netanyahu to argue before his coalition that his hands are tied. He can explain that settlement expansion must be abandoned for the good of Israel, its relationship with the United States, and the future stability of the region.

It is key that both policy-making branches of the US government act together. Both have a variety of tools at their disposal to pressure Israel into freezing all horizontal settlement expansion.

These tools include an end to unconditional vetoes of UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel, the conditioning of military aid and loan guarantees, and calling upon Israel to open up its nuclear weapons program for inspection and sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

All of these tools are simply the suspension of privileges the United States extends to Israel. We must make it clear to the Israelis that privileges offered by the United States should not be taken for granted.

Obama raised the stakes when he spoke in Cairo. If Netanyahu calls his bluff in this international game of chicken, the United States will lose the credibility in the region that the president worked so hard to regain.

He better not be bluffing.

# THE P.P. PUB PAGE

June is normally one of the quieter months here in Phnom Penh and with the worldwide economic balls up this one certainly wasn't going to be any better. In fact the riverfront besieged with big stacks of mud and ugly fences has certainly been feeling the brunt. Tourist numbers are definitely down and its time to kick back and wait for busier times ahead. One new place on the river is Touk opposite the FCC, they are aiming to defy the somewhat quieter riverside vibe by creating a place that's a bit more for expats, and benefits from being on the second floor for a better of the Tonle Sap itself. Mixing it up with food buffets and live music nights at the weekend and various drink promos during the week it sounds like one to check out, unfortunately being the somewhat unprofessional journalist (for want of a better word) that I am didn't make it before deadline day so more next month.

Swiftly moving on at the other end of the river is the also relatively new, Jaan. Themed with traditional Khmer sculpture and soft silks it is both inviting and comfortable. Service seemed pretty good, although I was speaking Khmer most the time for ease. We ordered a beer and a starter of prawn wontons. The prawns were ground and mixed with a local spice blend before being wrapped and cooked in their crispy wonton shells, very tasty. The restaurant itself was playing nice mellow background music which would have provided a very relaxing ambience if it weren't for the night market just over the road with some vendors adopting that puzzling Khmer marketing strategy of playing music so obnoxiously loud that no one can get within a one hundred foot radius of their stall. Still this was a Friday night so you could probably expect a more peaceful time during the week. Having enjoyed the starter I decided to take a risk and go for the steak that was on the specials board, my partner went for a small tuna pizza. I ordered a glass of the house red and was also pleasantly surprised to find it a refined and subtle wine. Whilst the menu here had looked at first glance like one of those oh so average riverside menus, a bit of Khmer, a bit of Thai, pizza and some western dishes, it was actually proving to be of a higher caliber. The pizza arrived on a nice wooden platter and the dough was satisfyingly bubbled up around the edge. Taking a little slice as a starter before my steak arrived I was happy the sauce was not too sweet either, and the Italian spices were balanced, could have done with a little more cheese, but hey couldn't every pizza. The steak arrived heavily topped with it's American sauce which was flavoured well with mustard and onions. Cooked medium rare it was a juicy and flavorful, it was definitely a local steak, possibly from Dan Meats who are producing much more tender steak these days, I believe due to a new ageing room where the meat can be hung to age properly. Anyway back to the meal where this well sized steak was accompanied by some pretty tasty steak fries and a side salad, and all for seven bucks. I was happily surprised with this new addition to the riverfront.

After a relaxing meal it seemed like a good idea to head over to the Pontoon just opposite. There was also the elsewhere party at the train station, but for some reason that didn't appeal, possibly because of the entry fee, possibly because the crowd

was most likely trying to stand around and look cool, whilst indulging in the notion that they are in some fantastic party. Reports tell me that was the case with the added bonus of a hoard of motodups peering in through the iron gates wondering just why the hell all these foreigners got dressed up to go and listen to music in a train station. Pontoon on the other hand has continued evolving away from being the haunt of the self proclaimed "jet set" and is now a kind of cross between the Riverhouse Lounge and the Heart of Darkness. Attracting more and more Khmers it always seems busy at least at the weekend. The music is very much at the more pumping end of the house spectrum, and as the lasers fire across the dance floor the urge to dance is quite enticing. If that's not your thing however a new section of seating has been installed expanding the Pontoon out a little further, allowing you to sit behind the dance floor, and enjoy a clearer view of the river.

Another recent addition to Phnom Penh is its first dedicated Fish & Chip shop named I Love Fish & Chips. It's budget prices don't reflect that the owners have gone to the trouble of purchasing the large capacity deep fat fryers that are needed for a proper chippie. Now in judging the quality of the fish and chips I'd have to admit I got a delivery. It arrived wrapped in newspaper, good start, and they'd even placed it inside a cardboard box inside to prevent ink getting on your dinner. Provided was a bag with a plastic knife and fork, ketchup, and most importantly malt vinegar. There was also a separate pot of tartar sauce. OK to the food itself. Inside the box was a good hearty layer of chips, unfortunately cut a little too small, and a reasonable fillet of fish sitting in a nice golden batter on the top. The fish was tasty and well filleted, not a single bone was found in either of the two portions we had delivered. The batter to my mind was not crispy enough, but I'd have to say I have high standards coming from a coastal town in England and I've never had anything comparable in Asia. Combined with the chips being too small it couldn't match up to an English chippy, but..... they would score very highly for fish & chips produced in Asia, even higher if they could cut the chips bigger, and then there's the value. At \$2.50 for a regular and \$3.50 for a large (which was filling) it allows these minor complaints to be waived aside. Good luck to them anyway coz who doesn't love fish and chips?

Finally the only opening party I noticed going on this June was at Shiva Shack, not completely new, but re-launching, and again value hunters this one is worth checking out. They will be selling draft at 50c all the time, not just for the opening party, but everyday, nuff said. Well maybe I could add a little more, it's a double shop front on st130, they've got some cheap rooms upstairs, a pool table, a well priced menu, and plenty of space to hang out in the bar. Yes it's a bit backpackery, but it's in town, and well it's 50c a beer, oh and \$2.00 a massage apparently so if you need either cheap beer or a cheap massage to soothe your woes in these times of economic hardship you know where to go.

# THE EXPAT FILES

Graham Bamford is 65, and was born in South Africa, of British decent. He now resides in Cambodia, is semi retired, but teaches English a few hours a week, as well as advising Khmer friends in the hospitality industry.

'I'm often asked by people I meet, where I'm from, and I find this a particularly difficult question to answer'. 'The reason being as I'm actually from many different places, I was born in South Africa, but left with my family to what was then the British crown colony of Kenya when I was four years old, and it was in Kenya that I grew up and was educated'. 'It was quite an experience growing up in Kenya in those days, but of course at that age one didn't appreciate what the benefits were of living in that kind of environment, until many years later'. 'Now of course

that country has changed beyond recognition from what it was like in the 1950s'. 'My family decided to migrate to Australia, basically because they lacked trust in what was going to happen to Kenya's independents that was just about to take place in the early 1960s'. 'So we moved to Perth, and I must say I felt like an alien from outer space, I didn't particularly feel at home there, but I manage to fit in eventually'. 'I had a number of casual jobs before deciding to enter the seminary, and study for the catholic priesthood, but after getting for my degree in philosophy, I decide the scarlet woman of Rome and I wouldn't make particularly good bed fellows, so I left that particular pursuit'. 'I guess I was seeking adventure, as I then decided to volunteer for a teaching position with the catholic mission in Papua New Guinea, a place that few people new

anything about'. 'I felt at home as soon as the plane touched down, as the surroundings were very reminiscent of Africa, and that feeling didn't leave me for a very long time, I was on a three year contract, but ended up staying for thirty eight years'. 'There's a story I recall from 1968 when they had the second ever election in PNG, under Australian administration, and there weren't enough government officers to actually carry out the election.' 'Now the election in remote areas had to be carried out on foot patrol and meeting all the villagers, and as a young 25 year old I was press ganged into doing this.' 'So I was duly instructed as a returning officer to go on a three week foot patrol around the lake Kutubu area, and I found myself with fifteen carriers, six armed policemen, three interpreters and I felt like Wallaby Jim of the islands, I didn't have to go through the loops and hoops to become a patrol officer, and now here I am one'. 'I set off on this patrol, and it was really quite a hard slog because PNG is extremely mountainous, no roads off course, and up and down steep inclines'. 'I remember when we finally got to Lake Kutubu, marching into the first village with my entourage behind me, feeling extremely important, and all the natives scattering into the jungle.' 'Looking a little bewildered I turned to a policeman and what was going on, and he explained that they think I'm here to collect head tax, which understandably they weren't keen on paying.' 'So I said well go and round the buggers up, we don't have three weeks here, we're only overnighing in a camp, and they called out to these people who



were hiding that we were only there to collect their votes, and they furtively crept back to the village.' 'In those days in was preferential voting, and all the natives being illiterate, we had three photographs, which I pinned up for them to choose from.' 'Well they scratch their chins and had a little confab, and finally the village chief said we don't know these people, we've never seen them before, we don't know who to vote for, who do you think we should vote for?'. 'So with interest now flagging amongst them and the novelty of the situation wearing off, and not wanting to return with empty ballot papers, I gave each candidate equal votes.' 'As part of the job, I had to sign each ballot slip on the back, well, our journey took us down some pretty turbulent rivers in a dug out canoe, and on more than one

occasion these turned over, into the river we went and all the ballot boxes.' 'We couldn't open them as they were locked, so we did our best to drain them, well I did hear later that the people back at base were utterly frustrated with having to peg each ballot paper to a clothes line, enquiring as to who is this Graham bloody Bamford written on the back.' 'After the teaching assignment finished around 68, I went into business with some partners, it was a general goods trading company way out in the southern highlands, infrastructure was very rudimentary at the time, and the way to get there was to walk in or fly in'. 'While living in a tent we set up the first trade store selling tinned food items that the natives wanted, they didn't wear clothes as such, but wore bush clothes that comprised of a wide bark belt, croton leaves stuck down the back, and a long woven cloth at the front.' 'We had assistants in the store who were trained and could translate, and I distinctly remember one old guy who came in wanting to buy a tin of fish, fish and rice being the staple diet.' 'Well, he gently rolled back his foreskin and produced the 2 dollars from under there, and presenting these dollars to me I stepped back and said 'ah, you can deal with this Samson, I remember I have to do something out back.' 'Many of them were becoming interested in wearing western clothing so we stocked those items as well, we also sold fuel to the missionaries, and were agents for a local airline'. 'In those days PNG was still under Australian administration, and the Aussie dollar was the currency, most of the population were subsistence farmers, but those that worked for the administration or did odd jobs were part of extended families and money was past down'. 'So although the economy was strange, and this is true of today in some areas, that many of the locals were not immersed in the cash economy, but they did have money to spend, but it was a pretty primitive country, pretty primitive conditions'. 'After being involved in this venture for three years I then went to work for a company in the western highlands, setting up a company training scheme for their employees, basically training them in commercial practice'. 'I was also in charge of the vegetable produce, and the big challenge was to grade and market it, as I said before there were very few roads, so we depended on two DC3 aircraft a week that came in and picked

# SMART PUNS

up the boxed veggies and flew them to various centres around PNG, and this worked out pretty well'. 'It was now the early 70s, and I moved on to work for the Electricity Commission, recruiting high school graduates from the fifty six schools that there were at the time in PNG for training in various careers, and scholarships'. 'After a number of years, and a couple of other managerial positions in human resources, I and a friend decided to move to Madang, a beautiful resort spot on the north coast'. 'It was here we bought an old hotel that was in a pretty shocking state, and resurrected it'. 'In our naivety we didn't really know what this would entail, but we managed to make quite a success of it, even though our only experience of hospitality was having been customers of hospitality'. 'The hotel was situated within what had been an old coco plantation, right next to the beach with the smoking active volcano of Kar Kar Island in the middle distance'. 'Customers would comment on how it was like something from South Pacific, a paradise, which it was, but my partner and I would mutter under our breath on how we felt like prisoners of paradise, as we needed to be there 24/7, and had very few breaks'. 'We had to generate our own electricity, and water treatment, and had various pieces of cantankerous equipment around the property, a lot of work was involved'. 'Many interesting things happened there, we had a general store on site, and some thieves broke in one night, I rushed out clad in only a towel, forgot my glasses, it was pitch black, not realizing that the thieves were armed'. 'So they heard me pursuing them, and ran off through some thick undergrowth towards the beach, I charged after them, god know what I thought I was going to do, and the next thing was I saw a blue flash from a shot gun and heard pellets whistling about my head'. 'I dived into the grass, and thought what an ignominious way to die, having grown up as a kid through the Mau Mau in Kenya, I was now going to be shot clad only in a towel by a bunch of lousy thieves, however, now disturbed they took flight'. 'Eventually, after five years of blood, sweat and tears, we sold the hotel, and moved to the Capital Port Moresby'. 'I think the chalk dust got up my business partners nose again, who was a former teacher, and we set up what was initially a private tuition centre to what soon became in 1993, Port Moresby Grammar School'. 'It's still running today with fifteen hundred students, and I'm still on the board of directors, I do the odd foray to PNG every few months from Cambodia to make sure things are running on an even keel, which I'm pleased to say they very much are'. 'By 2002, I'd needed a change from PNG, I spent some time back in Australia, and I suppose still seeking adventure decided to teach in south east Asia.' 'One often has romantic notions before setting foot somewhere, and I envisaged wending my way on a motorbike through countries with a blackboard and easel strapped to my back doing itinerate teaching, but of course It's not quite as primitive as that.' 'I'd been to Cambodia before on a couple of short holidays, and I think the attraction of returning was that at the time it had been listed as one of the eighth poorest countries in the world, I find developed countries bore me quite quickly, I was very impressed with the people and the resilience they showed, bouncing back from the atrocities, and there was clearly a need for education.' 'I've only been here for about three years, in PNG we had this expression 'oh, he hasn't got his bags through customs yet', so I guess that accusation could be leveled at me, but I feel very at home here.' 'Because I suppose it is third worldish, and has this exotic mix of an ancient civilization, that's still apparent, still evident, can be glimpsed at different times, so here I am, and here I am for the foreseeable future.' 'At my age, health can determine how long I stay in Cambodia, but so far so good, and I have no plans to go anywhere else, day by day is the way I see it.' *If you're an expat with a story to tell email bp@forum.org.kh*

**Kevin Bolton**

1. The roundest knight at King Arthur's round table was Sir Cumference. He acquired his size from too much pi.
2. I thought I saw an eye doctor on an Alaskan island, but it turned out to be an optical Aleutian.
3. She was only a whiskey maker, but he loved her still.
4. A rubber band pistol was confiscated from algebra class because it was a weapon of math disruption.
5. The butcher backed into the meat grinder and got a little behind in his work.
6. No matter how much you push the envelope, it'll still be stationery.
7. A dog gave birth to puppies near the road and was cited for littering.
8. A grenade thrown into a kitchen in France would result in Linoleum Blownapart.
9. Two silk worms had a race. They ended up in a tie.
10. Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
11. A hole has been found in the nudist camp wall. The police are looking into it.
12. Atheism is a non-prophet organization.
13. Two hats were hanging on a hat rack in the hallway. One hat said to the other, 'You stay here; I'll go on a head.'
14. I wondered why the baseball kept getting bigger. Then it hit me.
15. A sign on the lawn at a drug rehab center said: 'Keep off the Grass.'
16. A small boy swallowed some coins and was taken to a hospital. When his grandmother telephoned to ask how he was, a nurse said, 'No change yet.'
17. A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.
19. The short fortune-teller who escaped from prison was a small medium at large.
20. The man who survived mustard gas and pepper spray is now a seasoned veteran.
21. A backward poet writes inverse.
22. In democracy it's your vote that counts. In feudalism it's your count that votes.
23. When cannibals ate a missionary, they got a taste of religion.
24. Don't join dangerous cults: Practice safe sects!

## ITS IN YOUR MIND

A psychiatrist was conducting a group therapy session with four young mothers and their small children.

"You all have obsessions," he observed.

To the first mother, he said, "You are obsessed with eating. You've even named your daughter Candy."

He turned to the second Mom. "Your obsession is with money. Again, it manifests itself in your child's name, Penny."

He turns to the third Mom. "Your obsession is alcohol. This too manifests itself in your child's name, Brandy."

At this point, the fourth mother gets up, takes her little boy by the hand and whispers, "Come on, Dick, we're leaving."

## IS IT TRUE?

A husband and wife were sitting watching a TV program about psychology and mixed emotions when he turned to his wife and said, "Honey, that's a bunch of crap; I bet you can't tell me anything that will make me happy and sad at the same time." She said, "You have the biggest penis of all your friends."

# BITS FROM THE BEACH

Last month we reported several business closures and some residents complained about the article being very negative. When asked, one of the complainants couldn't come up with anything positive that had happened in the previous month (well shit happens and it can't be a bed of roses all the time).

Well on a positive note Anns pub has reopened with a few fillies to entertain you. Angelos has reopened with a new owner but has kept the same staff and menu the coca cola ribs are now back on. In fact they were both re-open by the time the mag came out last month reporting their closure!

Last month it was announced that a new airline will be flying from the airport down here to Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. We'll wait and see if flights actually start this month. The Phnom Penh route seems to be a bit silly as with travel, check in etc its just as fast by taxi. Maybe re-opening the Pattaya route would be a more lucrative idea.

Golden Lions Plaza is firing on all cylinders with lots of changes down here. The former Sandgroper Bar has been taken over by an English dude with lots of energy. Kiss Bar is being run by another English man who is only renting it from the owner had reportedly made it into the third most popular bar in the plaza but it is has now been sold to an American.

Problems on the beach with loud music means Sessions 2 Bar in the Plaza is now up and operating. Jack Shack & Dolphin have been competing for the loudest sound waves recently and upset a local police man who has made sure there is no loud music after midnight. They had lost a lot of trade to Chivas Shack due to Dolphin having some kind of dispute with the local girls who took all their business further down the beach and of course all the western guys followed!

By the time you read this they will have probably chosen another

haunt as like everything down here things change day to day and week to week.

Both Utopia and Cool Banana have been told to keep the late night music to the bare minimum which will be a relief to other establishments in the area.

The former site of Sweet Chilli is now the Full Moon Bar with an Austrian owner who wants to have it stocked with girls. A few doors down a kebab house with a Turk owner has just opened but we haven't had time to try it out yet.

Rumours have been circulating that the red light areas have been closed down. This is not true as we have checked. Thank god! It appears that the coppers may have enforced a temporary closure to extract more tea money as they have been round bars etc trying to get a bit more cash recently.

If you pass Sokha Beach Resort heading towards Independence Beach the bridge has collapsed. The only access is by moto at the moment.

It was reported that an Indian riding his horse was the reason for the collapse. The Indian managed to escape unscathed but the horse is very sick and needs to be transported back to India. Strange but true as it came from the horses mouth!

The desperately needed widening of the bridge downtown has still not restarted as predicted. The probably need some more aid money.

On Victory Hill one of the longest running restaurants The Curry Pot which has been trading on the hill in different locations for 9 years has closed. No doubt the venue will be turned into a hostess bar soon.

The weather is great at the moment, nice breeze, sunny and not too hot. Why not pop down from grid locked Phnom Penh for a well earned break.

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# THE FOOTBALL PAGE

## *No European Cup win for Manchester United and no complaints.*

*By Tony Martin*

Manchester United left Rome in ruins, as they were not just beaten but played off the park by a Barcelona team superior in every department. Cristiano Ronaldo lost his personal duel with Lionel Messi in the Stadio Olimpico - a case of the Cristiano being thrown to the Lionel, and United totally lost their way. This was not how a previously outstanding season was supposed to end.

It was thought the experience of manager Alex Ferguson, who has seen and done it all, would find out young buck Pep Guardiola in his first campaign as Barcelona boss. Far from it. Guardiola asked all the questions and provided all the answers, as he completed an incredible treble of domestic league and cup and now Europe's biggest prize at the age of 38. In the process, Guardiola became the youngest ever Champions League winning coach and one of a rare breed to lift the trophy as both player and manager.

His brilliant midfield duo of Iniesta and Xavi ran the show. Such was their dominance in the 2-0 victory, it seemed United had decided not to bother with a midfield at all. They were dragged all over the shop and, at times, there was only Michael Carrick between defence and attack.

From the moment the Barcelona went ahead through a Samuel Eto'o strike on 10 minutes, they never looked like losing. They hit the post from a Xavi free-kick early in the second half and finished United off when the smallest man on view, Messi, rose unmarked and hung in the air for what seemed like an age before heading in 20 minutes from time.

How Thierry Henry revelled in the celebrations, as skipper Puyol raised the trophy. The popular Frenchman strived for so long to win the Champions League at Arsenal and was distraught when they were beaten by Barcelona three years ago.

Now he has all football's major medals in his trophy cabinet. Who would begrudge him that, after the entertainment he gave English football fans up and down the land for eight magnificent years?

Fergie had joked that Barcelona were his lucky team. They were the victims when he won his first European trophy with United in the 1991 Cup Winners Cup; he completed the treble in the Nou Camp in 1999 and knocked Barcelona out at the semi-final stage last year.

Yet if we thought Barcelona were fortunate to be here after the way they struggled past Chelsea, they proved what a great football team they can be if they are allowed to play.

They did have a wobble early on, though, when United took the game to their supposedly dodgy defence and Ronaldo might have had a hat-trick. A 30-yard free-kick tested a panicky Victor Valdes in the Barcelona goal and, just as Ji-Sung Park prepared to bury the rebound, former United defender Gerard Pique made a superb challenge to deny the midfielder.

Ronaldo had another go with a 35-yard shot which flew past the left post and also put a volley just wide. But then, out of nowhere, United conceded completely against the run of play. Iniesta, who broke Chelsea hearts with his last-gasp goal in this

season's semi, slalomed forward and fed Eto'o on the right. The Cameroon striker dropped a shoulder, cut inside Nemanja Vidic far too easily and prodded in a right-foot shot which found its way under the diving Edwin van der Sar. It was a savage blow, which knocked the stuffing out of Fergie's men. Suddenly they were nervous and ponderous, while Ronaldo forgot he had any team-mates by shooting from daft angles when there were better passes on.

Two years ago, Chelsea completed a Carling-FA Cup double by beating Manchester United to go with second place in the Premier League and the board told boss Jose Mourinho: "It's not good enough." Mourinho skipped the post-match 'celebrations', as did owner Roman Abramovich, and there has never been a more grumpy bunch of winners.

Chelsea lifted their only trophy of the season by beating Everton 2-1, having finished third in the Premier League - their worst position in the Abramovich era - yet owner, manager and players were dancing around the dressing room. If short-term boss Guus Hiddink had topped it by announcing he was staying you could not have got them all off the ceiling. But that is the effect Hiddink has had. He has given Chelsea pride, dignity and class. He will be missed not just in West London but by English football. Carlo Ancelotti has a hard act to follow.

It's good to hear UEFA president Michael Platini raising concerns about Cristiano Ronaldo's \$120 million world-record move to Real Madrid. "These excessive transfers are happening almost every day," Platini said. "They are a serious challenge to the idea of fair play and the concept of financial balance in our competitions." Good for two reasons.

One, his comments demolish the argument that he is anti-English and uses the debt as a stick to beat only English clubs.

Two, Platini can see that Real Madrid's maths is not up to scratch. Madrid president Florentino Perez has insisted that his club can afford the record spending spree through "increasing ticket sales, increasing bank loans and increasing the club's economic value". He added that "Real Madrid takes about \$500 million a year, the fruit of three sources of income—a third from ticket sales, a third from television rights and a third from merchandising."

That will be news to accountants Deloitte, who estimated Madrid's income last year to be \$400 million.

But who cares, just measure the headlines that Madrid have captured. Job done for Perez. "Transfers now, questions later" has always been Perez's modus operandi. It worked up to a point during his last presidency, when Zinedine Zidane was signed for a world-record fee and then scored a spectacular winning goal in the 2002 Champions League Final at Hampden Park.

Nobody in Spain seems to be asking questions as to how Madrid are going to pay for Kaka, Cristiano Ronaldo and whoever else arrives in Madrid this summer.

At the moment, the figures do not add up. Ronaldo's transfer to Madrid has also led to claims that Spain now has the most powerful league in the world. That's assuming, of course, that La Liga wasn't already ahead of England.

If you take the presence of three English clubs in the Champions League semi-finals for the past two seasons as proof of English football's financial if not footballing superiority, then change is definitely afoot with Barcelona's success in Rome and Madrid's transfer market rampage through the record books.

# Rice, Rice Baby

By Steve Hili

I was in a pub, just a few weeks before coming to Cambodia, having a chinwag to some mates about my forthcoming adventures, whilst trying desperately to impress the barmaid with my icy cool exterior ('Try' being the operative word - I only do it to see if I've still got it. Kat actually approves of this behaviour explaining that she is of the firm opinion that I have never 'had' it, but it might do me good to keep trying).

I was really overdoing the whole 'I'm off to do volunteer work and save mankind' jazz... with the hope that someone might offer me a drink for being such a nice bloke, when all of a sudden a small balding man with a greyish unkempt beard, a crazed look in his eye, and a nervous tick piped up from the corner of the bar.

'I hear you're off to Cambooodia' he cackled at me.

'That's right mate...' I said, preparing to accept the anticipated offer of a pint from this weird stranger.

'Just got back from there myself' he continued, his smile exposing a mouth with a huge number of missing teeth and the only remaining ones being so yellow they were almost luminous. 'I spent over 4 years in and around Phnom Penh. Cambodia... it changed me.'

'Four years? Impressive' I said whilst silently cursing the crazed old man for stealing my thunder. Four years? I was only going for 6 months. And what's more the barmaid was giving him a barmaid-type look.

'Son,' he said in an almost friendly voice, 'Tell me. How do you feel about rice?'

'Rice?'

I, like all the people I knew up until that point had never considered this question before. To paraphrase an old 80s song, Rice is Rice (la la la la). I ate it sometimes, never really craved it but did not hate it either. Rice meant nothing to me. I had never thought about it. On my interest scale it was lying somewhere between penguins and the colour beige.

'I guess I'm neutral about it' I told this loony, as the hope of the free pint started to diminish.

'Neutral?' He repeated, eyes widening. 'Neutral?' And you're going to Cambooodia?' And at that point he burst into the loudest most annoying cackle I have ever heard in my life (and I was in my school production of Macbeth). Then, without further ado, he slowly shuffled back into his dark corner, repeating the word 'neutral' between hysterical bouts of laughter.

And there this old man sat for the rest of the evening, looking at me, repeating the word 'neutral' and guffawing.

When preparing for my Cambodian trip, I had done a lot of research. I had learnt about the phenomenal Siam Reap, read about the fun of Sihanoukville and looked up the hustle and bustle of Phnom Penh. In fact, by the time Kat and I stumbled off our plane (high heeled shoes - Kat that is, not me) and into the arms of our very gracious hosts, I felt that I was pretty darn close to being an expert on all things Khmer (Yes I have a lot of free time and not enough friends). Of course, one of the things I had looked up was Cambodian cuisine and as I had expected I found out that rice is an integral part of many meals.

Rice is an integral part of many meals. Doesn't seem so bad right? That's what I thought. So what? In my family ketchup is an integral part of many meals. I can live with a bit more rice. No worries. That was what I felt during my first week and a bit in this amazing country. People do things differently in different parts of the world, I can live with that. It is all part of the beauty of travelling.

It soon dawned on me however that my rice research was flawed. In a major way. You see the sentence - Rice is an integral part of many meals - does not paint an accurate picture of the Cambodian diet. It implies that there is more to Cambodian food than rice-based dishes. Ok ok, so there are a few noodle dishes and you can also get some pretty delicious pancakey-style 'things' but that is like saying George W. Bush was a great American president because he always put his jocks on the right way round (we assume). Just because there is some evidence to the contrary we should not overlook the big picture here people - rice is not just important for many Cambodian meals... it is an essential part of practically (there you go noodles fans - 'practically' was for you) all of them.

In Cambodia, I ate A LOT of rice. And I mean that. Rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I know I should be grateful because at least I had food, and some people don't even have that. And I do understand that, believe me I really do... but after two and a half-months of rice, rice and then a bit more, I began to understand how Cambodia and the diet that comes with it if you really integrate yourself into Khmer culture, might change a man such as the pub cackler.

During my time in Cambodia I had rice with, amongst other things, meat, dried fish, veggies (I think salt (and only salt) bananas (yes in a sort of porridge (what would goldilocks have done?), and as a sweet (sticky rice).

The way I started reacting to my meals started to change - I stopped looking forward to them. Whereas before 'rice was rice', now it was beginning to transform into something else... something much more sinister. I began to develop little tendencies when sitting down to face another plate of this cereal grain. Whereas my pub acquaintance had his nervous tick, I started to grind my teeth. And the grinding would start as soon as I saw the rice. Then the nausea would kick in. This was even before I had taken a bite (do you bite rice?) Each mouthful would bring with it more of the same rice-ness - my body was hungry but my mind was saying no - mealtimes became an out of body experience.

Our ever-gracious hosts noticed us losing the plot during some mealtimes (The screams of 'not again, not again... why? why?' may have given them a hint) and to their credit, they did try to spice things up a bit. But Cambodians seem to really find it hard to comprehend a meal without 'bai' as they put it.

In our situation it was quite difficult to cook our own meals, however Kat did manage to wrangle an agreement which let her prepare the rice for a day. After weeks of anticipation, the day finally arrived. And to her credit, Kat actually managed to westernise the rice a little bit - putting together a real Euro-style rice salad with fresh veggies and tuna and topped off with mayo... yumme... our Khmer buddies were not impressed. You do not mess about with rice here - you eat it as it should be eaten. And certainly not with any of that mayonnaise rubbish. Anyone fancy some MSG?

Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months, and the rice kept coming. I would like to say that I got used to it... but that would be a lie. My teeth gradually ground down to make all the bugs bunny nicknames I used to have as a kid redundant - if only I had been given more rice in primary school I might have missed out on a half-decade of wedgies - but my body started accepting the diet more and more and toilet times ceased to have the fun, surprise element that characterized my first two months. Gradually the mind gets used to it as well, realising that fighting is futile. And you resign yourself to your fate, as all the defiance leaves you. Lobotomy by rice.

# SPAGHETTI

And then, it was over. In amongst all the emotion of leaving Cambodia and going home, my mind hardly realised that the rice-dominated diets were over. Before I knew it I was digging into a prawn cocktail, followed by steak and chips, and topped up with ice-cream. A whole meal without any rice! And then no rice the next day either. Or the next! Gradually my brain started to come to the realisation that I did not have to have rice anymore... I was in control of my destiny – ok the grinding hadn't stopped but so what? And that was the day I went down to the pub for a pint... and I heard a familiar cackle.

Want a drink? I said 'No mate' was the answer, I'm just getting a meal. 'How about you join me? I'm having a risotto' You're still neutral about rice, right?

For several years, a man was having an affair with an Italian woman.

One night, she confided in him that she was pregnant.

Not wanting to ruin his reputation or his marriage, He paid her a large sum of money if

she would go to Italy to secretly have the child.

If she stayed in Italy to raise the child, he would also provide child support until the child turned 18.

She agreed, but asked how he would know when the baby was born.

To keep it discrete, he told her to simply mail him a post card, and write 'Spaghetti' on the back.

He would then arrange for the child support payments to begin.

One day, about 9 months later, he came home to his confused wife.

'Honey, 'she said, 'You received a very strange post card today.'

'Oh, just give it to me and I'll explain it later,' he said.

The wife obeyed and watched as her husband read the card, turned white, and fainted.

On the card was written:

'Spaghetti, Spaghetti, Spaghetti, Spaghetti, Spaghetti.

Three with meatballs, two without.

Send extra sauce!!

Akimbo T. Larson, Country Director

by Raul C. Goldstein & Mr. Vespa

