

Jef Moons

New life story in Cambodia

He originates from Arendonk in the Antwerp Kempen and holds two master degrees in Economics. Jef Moons (55) travelled to Cambodia for the first time in 2003 and immediately fell in love with the country and its inhabitants. At the time he purchased three derelict buildings with a friend, in the fishing village of Kep, during the French colonial era a popular seaside resort for the French and Cambodian elite. Kep fell into the hands of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s and is now on the way to regaining its former glory.

Jef Moons has been living and working in Cambodia for fifteen years. He runs a small resort with eighteen rooms and a sailing club. He shares his passion with travellers looking for a deeper local connection, for the 'Cambodia of today'. Everything started with three derelict houses, where a few snakes were the main residents, located in a region that was virtually destroyed in the 1970s. Jef Moons:

"The intention of my travel companion and myself was not only to renovate houses. We also want to promote the region as a holiday destination. After the first renovation in 2005, I moved to Cambodia definitively and adopted a five year-old boy. My travel companion left the project a few years later and a second renovation and extension to a resort with eighteen rooms followed, named **Knai Bang Chatt**. For the village

Chamkar Bei a project was started to support more than 550 families. Many people have discovered the resort in the meantime and stayed there. Such as Yves De Smet, journalist and former chief editor of De Morgen.

Life architecture

"The architecture I present in the new resort is based on sharing our human values. With this business model, I expand my 'capital' with long-term investments in people, society, and environment. With this vision you not only can offer unforgettable experiences to the travellers, but you also need these ingredients to ensure long term economic growth. Together with my friends, I have already invested a million dollar in the well-being of the families.

Currently, I still support some five hundred students in our school, I sponsor the last year students to go to university and I fully invest in the housing, education and well-being of my own employees. The resort is managed with great respect for nature. By working on 408 international directives daily **Knai Bang Chatt** is currently the only international certified sustainable hotel in Cambodia (Gold GG2050 certification). See me as a solid investor who respects what is important to us all."

The First sailing club

"We have 450 km of a beautiful coast, but Cambodia did not have any sailing accommodation at all. By starting a sailing club here, the young people can also discover this sport. We now have five catamarans and seven one person sailing boats. The Tourism Minister Dr. **Thong Khon** has inaugurated the **Kep Sailing Club** in person. There are a few young people who have enough talent to grow into real sport sailors. The final intention is to build a team that can participate in the South- East Asian games (SEA games), that will be organised in this country in five years time. The fact that a national sailing team has been created in the meantime will surely contribute to this."



Q & A

> How is life in Cambodia?

"Everything moves here. Cambodia experiences economic growth that is four to five times that of Belgium. Our democracy is not that divided, and politically we have strong commerce that promotes growth. It is neither better nor worse here, and anyway you should never compare.

Just know that freedom starts with accepting the rules, and that is the case in Cambodia too. I am very glad that I can live here, not only as a Belgian, but also as a Cambodian. I have a great sixteen year-old Cambodian son who studies well and who gives me a lot of life energy. At weekends our home is always full of young people and we like riding our dirt bikes through the rice fields.

We both work hard, travel a lot and we keep in touch with family and friends in Belgium. The world has become so much smaller in the last ten years, which means there are fewer reasons to go back today. Anyway, if necessary, we are back in Belgium quickly."

> Apparently your dream is an island?

Yes. The new trend is not to become larger but have more impact. We are going to achieve this by adopting a small deserted island. We will build a protected zone around it, create projects for the local fishermen and develop ecotourism activities to provide international travellers with an experience of local reality and to connect them with our unspoiled rough beauty. My big dream for this island is an underwater museum. After four years' preparation, the green light is now on and we start making a strategic-operational plan. This project is a co-operation between the private sector (Knai Bang Chatt) and the Ministry of Tourism."

> What are your additional challenges?

"Further refining our life style to the pure essence. The bond 'location, human, nature' must be at the core. Today's luxury no longer is Gucci or Prada, but is provided by reaching deeper connections that make you better as an individual."

> What do you expect here definitely?

"Volunteers for sailing, for our island and for our school. Or to co-operate on one of our sustainable programmes. It is a great experience!"

More info: www.knaibangchatt.com