

Indiana Jones in Cambodia

A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE PILOT PROJECT OF THE DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA



A hidden temple of Koh Ker site.



Ancient surveying instruments used to design and build Koh Ker site, State temple of King Jayavarman IV, built between 921 to 941 A.D.



Contemporary dancer of Cambodia, Belle Sodhachiv Chumvan and Bo Mach, a villager of Koh Ker.

All photos by Men Pechet, 2013.

As you hack your way through the jungle, burning under the tropical sun, you cannot help but ask yourself, “What are you doing here?” But then, as you emerge from the trees, your eyes glimpse what appear to be stone ruins. Walking through the tall remains of statues, archways, and moss-covered walls, you realize you are standing on the grounds of an ancient and long abandoned Khmer civilization. You spot an intricate sculpture on the jungle floor—have you disrupted a looting? You feel like Indiana Jones. Yet, you are not an archeologist, career adventurer, or a lost traveler. No, actually you are a Business Associate at the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), and today is just another day at the office.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) seeks several exceptional business students to serve as Business Associates in 2013–2014. Business Associates will spearhead the development of a unique cultural tourism enterprise that will fund the ongoing efforts of DC-Cam to bring memory, justice and reconciliation to the survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide. Yet this social enterprise is about far more than funding the efforts of a worthy NGO. This social enterprise project seeks to reclaim Cambodian cultural heritage for the Cambodian people, working collaboratively to stop opportunistic looting and provide visitors with an experience that goes far beyond the ordinary shuffle through ruined temples.

DC-Cam’s vision is for sustainable, community-based development of important archaeological sites throughout Cambodia. The business will potentially link museums, historic sites, cultural tours, hotels, restaurants and archeological guide services, with projected visitors conservatively numbered at 1.5 million. DC-Cam’s vision is transformative: to use culture to help bridge the divide between a glorious ancient history and an all-too recent tragic past.

DC-Cam is an independent Cambodian NGO originally created by Yale University scholars pursuant to the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act of 1994. It is dedicated to ensuring memory and justice in Cambodia with respect to the abuses of the infamous Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime. The Center documents the history of Democratic Kampuchea and promotes accountability and the rule of law, holding the world’s largest body of information and potential evidence against former DK officials.

While DC-Cam has become world-renowned for its efforts in documenting the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, it is also highly successful in a wide variety of other projects that touch upon the reconstruction and rehabilitation of a post-conflict society.

Recently, the Royal Cambodian government has authorized DC-Cam to develop the Koh Ker temple site in the interest of tourism and cultural preservation. Koh Ker lies approximately one hundred and twenty kilometers northeast of Siem Reap. It is reached by road and footpath, and it is surrounded by rivers that flow from nearby mountains. The area is associated with the reign of Jayavarman IV (928–941 A.D.), who left the Angkor capital in 921 A.D. to install his seat of power in Chok Gargyar, now known as Koh Ker. Upon his death, his son’s successor Rajendravarmen II reinstalled the capital at Angkor, leaving Koh Ker abandoned until its rediscovery by French explorers at the end of the nineteenth century.

Koh Ker is an area shrouded in an ancient, natural beauty that captivates all visitors. While difficult to describe, let alone appreciate in words or pictures, the Koh Ker site has attracted a variety of Cambodian artists looking for inspiration and a re-connection to ancient Cambodian civilization. See: http://d.dccam.org/Projects/Living_Doc/Photos/2013/Women_on_Koh_Ker/index.html

DC-Cam is eager to seize this opportunity by developing a plan for creating sustainable tourism in the area that would benefit the local community. In recent years, Cambodia has suffered an immense loss of its cultural heritage. Unscrupulous individuals often take advantage of the lack of security around remote heritage sites, stealing priceless artifacts and statues. In addition, there is a lack of education on Cambodia’s cultural heritage. Villagers—often uneducated on the value of their local heritage—sell, trade, or give away priceless artifacts, which are then sold to tourists or smugglers. DC-Cam has been disturbed by this phenomenon and, having received permission to develop the Koh Ker site, it hopes to use Koh Ker as a model site for sustainable tourism in other parts of Cambodia.

Business Associates assigned to this project would play a critical role in DC-Cam’s development of this area by providing business ideas and advice on social enterprise strategies. In addition, Business Associates will have the

opportunity to contribute to seven other sustainable tourism projects that are currently on the table. Such projects include, in addition to the development of a remote temple site, the establishment of various types of museums, conservation, and education centers, a café, and an art exhibition hall. While each project will have its own unique challenges, questions, and available resources, an Associate should expect to accomplish the following:

- Identify target market and recommend marketing strategies for each proposed site (e.g., Koh Ker temple, Genocide Museum, etc.);
- Conduct analysis of expectations in terms of logistics and service to/from the proposed project site;
- Study and present cost/revenue analysis. This analysis should include various cost estimates for transportation, food, logistics, and additional services between site and transportation/tourism hubs;
- Conduct local market analysis for recommending revenue strategies;
- Provide input on a proposed work plan and strategic development;
- Provide recommendations for sustainability; and
- Study and present recommendations for short- and long-term benchmarks.

Because certain projects are based on a cooperative agreement or memorandum of understanding with a government ministry, the Associate will be asked to also assess and recommend the optimum arrangement in terms of revenue for the proposed project (e.g., lump sum payment or profit share with the respective government ministry).

Applicants with a background in social enterprise studies and using sustainable tourism for the development and protection of rural communities in the developing world are highly encouraged to apply.

The position does not come with funding, but we will be glad to recommend successful applicants to funding bodies at their home universities. Applicants should e-mail a resume, a one-page statement of interest, and the names of two references to legal advisor Christopher Dearing at truthchristopher@dccam.org. Applications accepted on a rolling basis.

dccam.org | cambodiatribunal.org | cambodiasri.org | cambodialpj.org | ariverchangepcourse.com

¹ Koh Ker is one of many names used to describe this temple site. Koh Ker means “island of wealth”; however, the site has also been called Koh Ker, which means “island of change.” These are the prominent names; although local people have also been known to call the area the “City of Lingas” as well as other descriptions. Copyright © 2013 by the Documentation Center of Cambodia.