

Who here has a June birthday like me?" I ask the 80 or so high-spirited students, ages six to twelve, gathered around me in school uniforms and party hats under a rainbow of balloons. Not a single hand goes up. Hardly a mathematician, even I understand that the odds on no June babies in Sabour, a farming hamlet 45 minutes by mostly dirt road from Siem Reap and Angkor Wat, are low. Few, if any, of these kids know when they were born. "This will be the first birthday party they have ever attended," says Chitra Vincent, executive director of the Siem Reap-based Shinta Mani Foundation (SMF), when we made plans to include these kids in my celebrations.

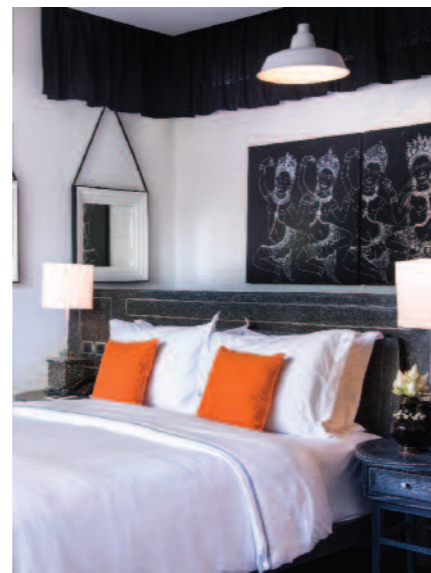
Sabour has seen more than its share of firsts since Vincent came here in 2009. Along with Cambodia We Care, an American charity, Vincent's team erected Sabour's first proper school building, plus a canteen that serves breakfast and lunch daily to 165 students. Vincent, a Sri Lankan who has lived in Cambodia for 11 years, brought me here to answer my question "What about the piglets?" Five years earlier, I bobbed up and down in the backseat over 50 unpaved kilometers outside Siem Reap to visit communities benefiting from piglets, water wells, and even wooden houses paid for by guests of Shinta Mani, an 18-room inn along the Siem Reap River owned by Cambodia-born, Bangkok-based entrepreneur Sokoun Chanpreda. His innovative community outreach scheme involved setting aside a percentage of the room rate plus donations made directly by guests to support not only the village improvements I saw but also a hospitality training school housed on the hotel's leafy grounds.

"Our goal is to eliminate the need for ourselves," Vincent explains as we drive back to the hotel, stuffed full of chocolate cake. "The villages we support now have houses, working farms and clean water. Our next goals begin with giving their children a chance at a brighter future." She promises me it will still be possible to donate piglets, but that nearly

**DOING GOOD** Clockwise from right: The redesigned reception area of Shinta Mani hotel; Shinta Mani Foundation executive director Chitra Vincent; one of the hotel's deluxe rooms; hospitality students getting on-the-job training.

## REACHING OUT IN SIEM REAP

The Shinta Mani hotel's charitable mission has taken on a new dimension with the launch of a namesake foundation dedicated to improving the lives of Cambodia's rural poor  
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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN MCDERMOTT

everything else about Shinta Mani and its community outreach has undergone an impressive upgrade. In 2011, Chanpreda invited Vincent to trade in her role as the hotel's general manager to helm the newly established foundation, a Cambodia-registered nonprofit. Together, they expanded its mission to two additional areas, medicine and microfinance. SMF's mobile medical unit transports doctors, nurses, and dentists to patients in isolated communities, while Vincent meets personally with applicants for the foundation's interest-free loans from US\$500 in start-up materials, not cash. So far, she's helped finance a chicken farm,

a tuk-tuk driver, and a photo-postcard business.

I find an even more astonishing transformation at the hotel itself. Now sporting 39 rooms, Shinta Mani has been entirely redesigned by architect Bill Bensley, who developed a soft spot for the property during a stay in 2003. "I have admired Sokoun Chanpreda's good work for years," Bensley says, "and felt that my partner Jirachai and I could do a bit more ourselves." Which explains the photogenic showpiece he created on a shoestring. Only the original 20-meter infinity pool looks vaguely familiar as I stroll the grounds on our return. Each of the sleek black-and-

white guest rooms boasts high ceilings and a haunting photo of Angkor set in a recess over the plump bed; even standard rooms are well appointed and light-filled.

It is still early days, but as we cool off over lime sodas in Kroya, the hotel's nouvelle Khmer eatery, Vincent explains Shinta Mani's long-term plan. "Right now those kids we visited don't know why they are getting this education. We bring the best students here to meet our hospitality graduates, whom they see living beyond anyone from Sabour's wildest imagination. We're creating the groundwork for dreams, and the path to realize them." ☺

### HOW TO SPEND A RESPONSIBLE DAY IN SIEM REAP

**7 A.M.** Wake up in five-star comfort at **Shinta Mani** ([shintamani.com](http://shintamani.com); doubles from US\$250) knowing that your room rate is helping to support the on-site hospitality training program.

**8 A.M.** Go back in time with **About Asia** ([aboutasiatour.com](http://aboutasiatour.com)), a locally based tour operator run by Oxford-educated scientists who have trained their guides to show guests round crowd-free corners of the Angkor temple



complex, above, including exquisite but rarely visited ruins such as Ta Nei. The company donates all of its net profits to educating Khmer children—51,000 and counting.



**10:30 A.M.** Help others while helping yourself to playful lacquered sculptures of water buffaloes and elephants by young artisans-in-training at **Theam's House** ([theamshouse.com](http://theamshouse.com)), above, or stop in at **Amansara** ([amansara.com](http://amansara.com)), whose boutique is both philanthropically and stylishly kitted out with Saarti candles made of soy wax sourced from the Maddox Jolie-Pitt Foundation, and hand-loomed silk scarves by Weaves of Cambodia, a village workshop staffed by landmine victims. Those who covet Amansara's chic woven floor mats can order their own water-hyacinth homewares just five minutes away by car at **Saray** ([osmosetonlesap.net](http://osmosetonlesap.net)), a fair-trade initiative created to help families living along the Tonle Sap River.

**1 A.M.** Go for lunch at **Le Jardin**

**des Délices** ([ecolepauldubrule.org](http://ecolepauldubrule.org)), where every dish is prepared by cooking and pastry students of École Paul Dubrule, a restaurant-training institute started by the founder of France's Accor Hotel Group. The menu of the day may include grilled beef tenderloin and wine-poached fish as well as Khmer specialties such as banana-flower salad.

**3 P.M.** The spa manager at Siem Reap's Amansara hotel, Vijaya Goyal, spent a year teaching massage techniques to four visually impaired Cambodians. They include Daley, who, together with his wife, now operates **Daley Blind Massage** ([855-92/219-100](http://855-92/219-100)) near Angkor Wat. A good rubdown never felt so satisfying, particularly after a day of trekking around the temples.

**8 P.M.** Have dinner at **Snappy** ([855-977/179-790](http://855-977/179-790)), a cheery American-style diner behind the Hotel Riviera that serves Bengali and Sri Lankan curries, made-to-order sandwiches, and scrumptious homemade cakes. Its expat owner opened the restaurant as a way to support four talented graduates of

Shinta Mani's hospitality program, as well as her own adopted Khmer daughter.

**9 P.M.** End your day with a spot of shopping at Alley West, a quaint pedestrian retail lane where **Smateria** ([smateria.com](http://smateria.com)), below, sells colorful handbags and home decor crafted from recycled material, including motorcycle seats and milk cartons. Around the corner at **Three Seasons** ([855-12/415-909](http://855-12/415-909)), look for KeoK'jay cotton tees and dresses block-printed with local motifs such as water lilies and fishing boats. Pack your new purchases in a quirky carry-on satchel fashioned from Khmer rice sacks and sold at **Bloom Cambodia** ([bloomcambodia.com](http://bloomcambodia.com)), a corner store committed to "making trade fair, one bag at a time." —CR

