

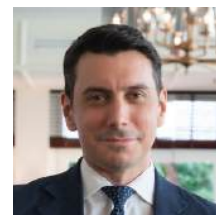




CAMBODIA  
LEADERSHIP  
REVIEW

# 30

F&B and Hospitality



# CHIVAS REGAL



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# Editors Note

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the fourth edition of the Cambodia Leadership Review and our second special feature highlighting “Top 30 Leaders” across key industries. Following the strong reception of our inaugural finance edition, this issue turns its spotlight to the dynamic and rapidly evolving F&B and hospitality sectors—two pillars of Cambodia’s post-pandemic recovery and international appeal.

Cambodia’s hospitality industry has long been a tale of dual identity: luxury and legacy on one side, and grassroots, backpacker-friendly vibrancy on the other. From storied institutions like Raffles Hotel Le Royal to bustling hostels and beachside resorts, the country has long catered to a diverse set of global travelers. Yet, in recent years, a new chapter is being written—one marked by increasing sophistication, international investment, and a deepening appreciation for world-class food and beverage experiences.

In this edition, we profile 30 international voices who are helping to shape this next chapter. From award-winning distillers and luxury general managers to innovative restaurateurs and socially responsible entrepreneurs, these individuals are redefining what hospitality means in Cambodia today.

Compared to its regional neighbors—Thailand with its mature tourism ecosystem and Vietnam with its fast-developing culinary identity—Cambodia is entering a more refined and ambitious phase. International hotel brands are expanding their footprint, boutique properties are curating ever-more immersive guest experiences, and F&B operators are elevating everything from casual dining to mixology.

The presence of global leaders now choosing Cambodia as a base reflects growing confidence in the country’s potential.

At the same time, Cambodia’s unique advantage lies in its openness to innovation, its deeply rooted cultural heritage, and the entrepreneurial spirit of its people—traits that continue to attract talent and investment from around the world.

The 30 profiles featured here are more than just résumés of success; they are snapshots of leadership in action—bold, adaptive, and globally connected. As we look ahead, it is these leaders who will help Cambodia compete not just as a destination, but as a place to build, invest, and create.

We hope this magazine serves as a source of inspiration and insight for readers across the region. Thank you to all contributors and partners who helped make this edition possible.

***Harrison White***

***Editor***

***Cambodia Leadership Review***



## CAMBODIA LEADERSHIP REVIEW

### How We Came Up With the Top 30 List

The Top 30 F&B & Hospitality Leaders in Cambodia list was carefully curated to highlight individuals who are shaping the industry with leadership, innovation, and meaningful engagement in the local business ecosystem.

To ensure a fair and balanced process, nominations were reviewed by a panel of three independent judges drawn from CIR Media and the International Business Chamber of Cambodia (IBC). These judges brought diverse perspectives from both media and business sectors, lending credibility and insight to the final selection.

### Each nominee was evaluated across four core criteria:

- Impact – Measured by leadership influence, business growth, or contribution to industry advancement.
- Uniqueness – Recognition of distinctive approaches, innovations, or brand differentiation.
- Reach – The scale of influence, whether through business footprint, customer base, or regional presence.
- Connection with the Ecosystem – Active engagement with Cambodia's F&B and hospitality sector, including partnerships, mentorship, sustainability, and community involvement.

This year's list reflects not only international excellence but also a deep connection to Cambodia's unique business and cultural environment. It recognizes those helping to elevate the Kingdom as a world-class destination for food, drink, and guest experience.

We thank our judges for their thoughtful deliberation and all nominees for their remarkable contributions.



**Alex DARROCH**  
Co-Founder Mad Monkey  
Hostels



Alex co-founded Mad Monkey Hostels in Phnom Penh with a bold idea—to create a hostel that combined unforgettable travel experiences with real community impact. From humble beginnings, the brand has grown into one of the biggest hostel networks in Southeast Asia, now operating across Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Australia. Known for its energetic vibe and strong social values, Alex continues to drive its regional expansion while staying true to its founding mission.



**Andrew TAY**  
Director Himawari Hotel  
Apartments

Andrew is a prominent figure known for his involvement in various charitable initiatives and community outreach programs. He successfully took over ownership and management of Himawari in 2005, building up the brand over the next seven years. With a background in hospitality and a strong commitment to service, Tay brings a blend of leadership and compassion to his role. Andrew was also previously the President of the Singapore Club Cambodia.

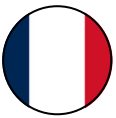




**Andy HEWSON**  
Managing Director of  
HEINEKEN Cambodia



Andy became Managing Director of HEINEKEN Cambodia in August 2023, bringing with 15 years of experience with the company across the Asia Pacific. He has held leadership roles in Singapore, New Caledonia, and the Solomon Islands, and also chairs HEINEKEN's APAC BOOST talent development program. In Cambodia, Andy leads a team of 700, focused on building sustainable growth and continuing the legacy of brands like Heineken®, Tiger, ABC, Anchor, and Gold Crown.



**Arnaud DARC**  
Founder & Chief Executive Officer  
Thalias Hospitality Group

A hospitality veteran, Arnaud began his journey in Cambodia in 1994 at the historic Sofitel Cambodiana. He later founded Thalias Group, which has become one of the country's most respected names in hospitality. Today, Thalias operates a diverse portfolio of leading brands. Beyond his business ventures, Arnaud plays an active role in shaping Cambodia's business environment and representing the private sector's voice in key policy discussions.



**Charlie BETTENCOURT**  
Chief Executive Office  
DFI Lucky Cambodia



Charlie Bettencourt is an international retail leader with over 32 years of experience across more than ten countries. He has held senior roles in wholesale, hypermarkets, supermarkets, and health and beauty sectors. With over 20 years in senior leadership and 10 years on boards across Asia, MEA, and Europe, Charlie is known for delivering company vision, strategy, and results. As CEO of DFI Lucky Private Limited in Cambodia, he brings extensive expertise in commercial, operational, and general management.



**Charles-Henri CHEVET**  
Area General Manager at Sofitel  
Phnom Penh Phokeethra

Charles-Henri Chevet has been a driving force in Cambodia's luxury hospitality scene since arriving in 2009. With over two decades of global experience, he leads Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra with a leadership style that is direct, dynamic, participative, and focused on development. Favouring a family-style approach over top-down management, Charles-Henri is known for empowering the next generation while keeping operations efficient and people-focused.





**Cyril GROUVEL**  
Managing Director  
Le Manolis Wine Corner



Cyril arrived in Cambodia in 2015 and quickly became a familiar name in the local hospitality scene. He previously held roles as Restaurant Bar Manager at The Village Café and Food & Beverage Manager at Shinta Mani Hotels in Siem Reap. In 2020, he founded Le Manolis Wine Corner in Phnom Penh, known for its French cuisine, fine wines, and warm ambiance. Most recently, he launched Cin Cin, a new concept featuring proper Neapolitan pizza and an apéritif-focused bar.



**Dagmar LYONS**  
General Manager  
Raffles Hotel Le Royal (Phnom Penh)

Dagmar Lyons is an accomplished luxury hotelier with over 20 years of international experience across North America, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. She was appointed General Manager of Raffles Hotel Le Royal Phnom Penh in 2024, following her role as Hotel Manager at Fairmont Pacific Rim in Vancouver, where she helped secure Forbes Five-Star ratings for both the hotel and spa. With prior leadership roles in Shanghai and Doha, Dagmar now leads one of Southeast Asia's most iconic heritage hotels.



**Daniel PACHECO**  
Co-Founder & CEO  
Samai Distillery



Daniel Pacheco is a Venezuelan-born entrepreneur, educated in the United States, who has dedicated nearly two decades to building purpose-driven ventures in Cambodia. He first arrived in 2009 to work on renewable energy initiatives, later founding NRG Solar, now one of the country's leading solar energy companies. In 2014, he co-founded Samai Distillery, Cambodia's first premium rum distillery. As CEO, Daniel has helped transform Samai into one of Asia's most awarded rum brands—blending craftsmanship, tradition, and innovation to proudly place Cambodia on the global rum map.



**Daniel RUPRECHT**  
General Manager  
Farmhouse Resort & Spa

Daniel is a hotelier with over 20 years of global experience in hospitality. A graduate of SHL Hotel Management School Lucerne, he has held senior roles across Thailand and the Maldives. Since 2023, he has served as General Manager of Farmhouse Resort & Spa in Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia—a sustainable luxury resort developed by Smiling Gecko. Daniel now leads a mission-driven property that combines Khmer-style hospitality with social impact, farm-to-table dining, and immersive guest experiences.







**Daniel SIMON**  
General Manager  
Rosewood Phnom Penh



Daniel is a luxury hospitality veteran with over 30 years of global experience spanning hotels, restaurants, and cruise lines. His journey has taken him through leadership roles at renowned brands such as Four Seasons, Celebrity Cruises, W Koh Samui, and Anantara Siam Bangkok—each shaping his deep passion for exceptional guest experiences and culinary innovation. In 2021, he joined Rosewood, where he continues to bring his signature blend of service excellence and global perspective.



**Darren GALL**  
Creative Director  
Vindochine

Darren is a seasoned wine and hospitality expert with over 30 years of global experience. He has held senior roles in Australia's top wine regions and spent the past two decades consulting across Southeast Asia. Currently Consulting Winemaker at Red Mountain Estate in Myanmar and Creative Director of Vindochine (formerly Urban Flavours), Darren is also a published author of books on food and wine in the region, and an international wine judge at events.



**Daren ONG**  
Managing Director  
Pernod Ricard Cambodia



Since December 2020, Daren Ong has led Pernod Ricard Cambodia as Managing Director, bringing over 18 years of experience across Singapore, Indochina, Taiwan, and Vietnam. He is known for his leadership in brand building, sustainability, and promoting responsible drinking. As a member of WSBIDA, he has championed the Legal Purchasing Age and fought against counterfeit products and parallel imports. Daren also plays a key role in talent development, corporate recognition, and fostering sustainable growth within the organization.



**David RICHARDS**  
Senior Business Development Director  
Bay of Lights

David Richard brings over 15 years of experience in business development across Southeast Asia, playing a central role in shaping the \$16 billion Bay of Lights project in Sihanoukville. Spanning 934 hectares, the coastal development aims to become a regional hub for tourism, culture, and commerce. David has been instrumental in forging partnerships with global hospitality and tech leaders, helping to position Bay of Lights as one of Cambodia's most ambitious and transformative urban destinations.





**Jan VAN DYK**  
Director of Culinary  
Rosewood Phnom Penh



With over 20 years of international culinary experience, Jan van Dyk has helped shape Cambodia's luxury dining scene since joining Rosewood Phnom Penh in 2022. He has overseen the evolution of six dining venues, introduced zero-waste initiatives, and launched the country's first indoor hydroponic farm. Committed to sustainability, local sourcing, and chef development, Jan has played a key role in elevating Rosewood's culinary reputation while supporting the growth of Cambodia's next generation of hospitality professionals.



**Jeremie CLEMENT**  
General Manager  
Tribe Phnom Penh Post Office Square

Jérémie brings over a decade of hospitality experience across Asia, including leadership roles in Mongolia and Cambodia. Since joining TRIBE in 2024, he has helped position the hotel as a bold, design-led lifestyle destination focused on creativity and community. A graduate of Avignon Université, Jérémie is passionate about blending modern hospitality with local culture, elevating guest experiences while supporting Cambodia's emerging creative and urban lifestyle scene.



**Jef MOONS**  
Founder and CEO  
Knai Bang Chatt



Jef Moons, a Belgian entrepreneur, has been a driving force in Cambodia's coastal tourism since 2003. As the founder of Knai Bang Chatt in Kep, he transformed a collection of 1960s villas into a barefoot luxury resort blending minimalist design with Khmer heritage. Beyond hospitality, Jef spearheads Kep West, a broader destination concept integrating fine dining, sailing, and eco-tourism. A sustainability advocate, his resort is internationally certified and serves as a model for ethical tourism in the region.



**Joseph COLINA**  
General Manager  
Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor

Joseph took the helm of Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor in 2023, bringing nearly two decades of experience within Accor. His career includes leadership roles at MGallery Sapa and Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi, following earlier positions in Washington, D.C., and Chicago. Since arriving in Siem Reap, Joseph has overseen the hotel's post-renovation revival, introducing immersive cultural experiences and reinforcing its legacy as one of Cambodia's most iconic and historic hospitality landmarks.







**Juan MERCADANTE**  
General Manager  
Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh



Juan Mercadante is a seasoned hospitality leader with over 25 years of global experience across five continents. Before joining Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh in 2022, he held key roles at Hyatt properties in Mexico, London, Dubai, and Seoul, including pre-opening leadership at Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen and Andaz Seoul Gangnam. Known for his dynamic leadership and commitment to guest experience, Juan continues to elevate the hotel's reputation in Cambodia's luxury hospitality scene.



**Kenji TSUZAKI**  
Chief Operating Officer  
UNWASPA

Kenji Tsuzaki, a Japanese-born distiller and COO of UNWASPA, has made a name for himself by blending Japanese expertise with Cambodian ingredients. After global experience in the UK and US, he relocated to Cambodia in 2020 to build the MAWSIM Distillery. There, he crafted award-winning gins using local botanicals. In 2023, his Tropical Citrus Gin became the first Asian gin to win World's Best at the World Gin Awards—championing “Made in Cambodia, Made by Japanese”.



**Marco PIGNOTTA**  
Beverage Manager  
Shangri-La Phnom Penh



Marco Pignotta brings over 15 years of global bartending experience and a deep passion for creative mixology. Originally from Italy, he is known for crafting cocktails that fuse bold flavors, house-made infusions, and unexpected local touches—each one designed to spark connection and curiosity. At Shangri-La, Marco curates a drinking experience that is both refined and personal, where every sip tells a story and every detail is an invitation to linger.



**Mike VONGSKEO**  
Chief Operating Officer  
S-Liquor

Mike is a leader in Cambodia's fast-moving consumer goods sector, currently serving as Chief Operating Officer of S-Liquor. With over 15 years of experience in the IT and retail industries, he has played a key role in expanding S-Liquor's nationwide presence and improving customer service standards. Mike is also a strong advocate for responsible alcohol consumption and has actively supported the adoption of Cambodia's legal purchasing age policy.





**Peter KAELLI**  
Founder and CEO  
The Unique Collection



Peter Kaelli is a highly accomplished hospitality leader with over four decades of global experience in hotel management, development, and investment. As Founder and CEO of The Unique Collection of Hotels & Resorts, he has overseen the opening and management of over 25 properties across Southeast Asia. He currently serves as Managing Director of Paradise Beach Resort in Koh Samui and The Royal Sands Koh Rong, while also providing consultancy in hospitality and real estate across the region.



**Pierre TAMI**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Shift360 Foundation

Pierre is Founder and Chair of the Board of Shift360 Foundation and has lived in Cambodia for over 35 years. A pioneer in the country's development, he founded the Academy of Culinary Arts Cambodia—the nation's first Swiss-accredited hospitality school. Deeply committed to youth empowerment and vocational training, Pierre also serves as an adviser to Samdech Hun Sen, President of the Senate, and has been awarded the Royal Order of Sahametrei by His Majesty the King of Cambodia.



**Rapytha BONAMY**  
General Manager  
Newrest Catering



Rapytha, General Manager for Newrest Catering Cambodia, part of the Newrest Group, leads the company's operations, strategy, and growth. With both French and Cambodian roots, she's deeply committed to social responsibility, managing to blend business success with impactful initiatives that create sustainable practices and boost Cambodia's food service sector.



**Sambath SOTHEA**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Auskhmer Import Export

Sambath Sothea, also known as Rami, is a key figure in Cambodia's food and beverage industry. As the driving force behind Auskhmer Import Export Co. Ltd., he has helped shape the country's premium wine and spirits market through exclusive partnerships with leading global brands. He also founded Chez Rami, a boutique tea house in Phnom Penh. Passionate about cross-border collaboration, Rami actively promotes business ties between Cambodia and Thailand through his regional leadership roles.





**Sarah MOYA**  
General Manager  
Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh



Sarah Moya has carved a distinguished path in hospitality, with nearly three decades of experience across Southeast Asia. Her leadership has been instrumental in elevating guest experiences and operational excellence. At Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh, she has championed community engagement, notably through cultural collaborations and charitable initiatives supporting local causes. Recognized as one of Cambodia's Best General Managers by CMO Asia and the World Federation of Hospitality Professionals, Sarah continues to inspire excellence and inclusivity in the industry.



**Thomas BIANCO**  
Executive Assistant Manager - F&B  
Raffles Hotel Le Royal

Thomas has played a key role in shaping the food and beverage experience at Raffles Hotel Le Royal for over a decade. Arriving in Phnom Penh in his early 20s, he quickly became immersed in the city's evolving hospitality scene. Under his guidance, the iconic Elephant Bar grew its gin collection to over 200 labels, including local collaborations. His focus on innovation and mentorship continues to elevate Raffles as a leader in luxury hospitality.



**Tania UNSWORTH**  
Co-Founder  
Seekers Independent Spirits



Tania arrived in Cambodia with a passion for hospitality and a vision to create something distinctly local. In 2018, she and her partner, Marco, launched Seekers Spirits, introducing Cambodia's first premium gin. From Kampot pepper to Battambang green orange, their award-winning spirits celebrate regional identity and craftsmanship. Today, Seekers is more than a distillery—it's a creative hub for sustainability, community, and culture, proudly bringing the bold flavours of Cambodia to a growing international audience.



**Tim WALLWORK**  
Chair  
APISWA

Tim serves as Chair of the Asia Pacific International Spirits and Wines Alliance (APISWA), a coalition of 11 leading global spirits and wine producers. Under his leadership, APISWA advocates for responsible alcohol consumption, supports fair regulatory and tax environments, and promotes sustainability within the industry. The alliance focuses on fostering a vibrant and responsible hospitality sector across the Asia-Pacific region, ensuring that alcohol is enjoyed in moderation and in line with international best practices.





# ALEX DARROCH

CO-FOUNDER OF MAD MONKEY HOSTELS



*Since launching the first Mad Monkey in Phnom Penh in 2011, Alex Darroch has helped grow the brand into one of Southeast Asia's most iconic social hostel networks, now spanning seven countries.*

*In this interview, Alex reflects on the journey from a small shophouse to a regional brand known for community, culture, and connection. He shares insights into leadership in the fast-moving hostel space, the evolving expectations of Gen Z travelers, and how Mad Monkey is blending fun with purpose—especially through new projects like Koh Sdach.*

## **Pioneering Social Hostels in Southeast Asia**

**CLR:** As Co-Founder of Mad Monkey, you've helped shape one of the region's most recognizable hostel brands. What does leadership look like in Southeast Asia's fast-moving hostel industry, and how has your vision evolved as the brand has expanded across multiple countries?

It's been an incredible journey since we opened the doors to the first Mad Monkey in Phnom Penh back in 2011.

We started with fewer than 40 beds in a humble double shophouse, and today we operate more than 2,500 beds across 24 properties in 7 countries.

That kind of growth doesn't happen by accident — it's the result of a shared vision, relentless hard work, and a culture that has remained true to its roots.

Leadership in Southeast Asia's hostel industry means staying agile and deeply tuned in to the evolving needs of the modern traveler, especially in the post-pandemic era.

It also means leading with purpose. From the beginning, our goal wasn't just to build a chain of hostels — it was to create a platform that brings people together, supports local communities, and inspires cultural exchange. That's still the heart of our mission today.

As we've grown, our vision has matured. We've put a lot of work into our brand standards — things like a lively F&B venue with daily events, custom-designed signature tours, curated onward travel support, and always having a pool, great food, and, of course, a clean and comfortable bed.

But what makes Mad Monkey special is our people.

Many of the team who helped open our first hostel are still with us today, and that continuity has helped us retain our culture and values as we've scaled.

Ultimately, we believe that great leadership in this space is about fostering a strong culture, delivering consistent guest experiences, and empowering local teams — all while remaining authentic and adaptable in a rapidly changing landscape.

### **Koh Sdach: Redefining the Island Experience**

**CLR: With Mad Monkey Koh Sdach launching in a remote, culturally rich fishing village, what makes this location special for the brand? How are you balancing the party vibe Mad Monkey is known for with growing demand for wellness, sustainability, and authentic local immersion?**

Our confidence in Koh Sdach stems from our strong supply chain and our understanding of the island's development vision. We knew that if we built the right experience, one that respects the location and offers something genuinely different, travelers would come. We're approaching this site a bit differently by placing more focus on sustainability, wellness, and authentic local immersion.

We're approaching this site a bit differently by placing more focus on sustainability, wellness, and authentic local immersion.

We're working closely with the local fishing community to develop culturally enriching experiences — from snorkeling and traditional monk blessings at the nearby pagoda to future offerings like Cambodian cooking classes. We're also committed to regular beach cleanups and community support initiatives to ensure we leave a positive footprint on the island.



While Mad Monkey is known for its social, high-energy atmosphere, Koh Sdach is giving us the chance to expand beyond just the bar and events. However it's never a Mad Monkey without a party and we have daily and nightly events to ensure the madness isn't far away.

### Youth Travel Trends: The New Backpacker

**CLR: What major trends are you seeing among Gen Z and millennial travelers across the region? How is Mad Monkey adapting its concept—from design to events to wellness—to meet the changing expectations of today's socially conscious, digitally connected backpackers?**



Travel habits are evolving faster than ever, especially among Gen Z and millennial travelers.

Expectations, values, and spending habits have all shifted dramatically since we opened our first hostel in 2011.

As founders and leaders, it's our job to stay ahead of those changes — to recognize emerging trends and let go of what might have worked in the past but no longer resonates today.

At Mad Monkey, we're not trying to transform into a wellness retreat — that's not who we are.

We are still MAD MONKEY But we've fully embraced a "play hard, recover harder" mindset that balances fun with well-being.

Yes, we still create unforgettable social experiences and nightly events, but now we're complementing that with healthier food options, fitness spaces, cold plunges, steam and saunas along with activities that help travelers feel good, recover, recharge and start all over again.

Today's backpackers want more than just parties — they want experiences that are meaningful, sustainable, and Instagrammable, yes — but also authentic.

Whether it's starting the day with a swim in the ocean, joining a walking tour, hitting the gym or having a bloody mary with new friends, we're designing spaces and programming that reflect the full spectrum of what young travelers are looking for now.



## Elevating Cambodia's Backpacker Scene

**CLR: Cambodia has long been part of the Southeast Asia backpacker circuit.**

**In your view, what more can be done to strengthen Cambodia's position as a must-visit destination for young travelers? What role can operators like Mad Monkey play in shaping the country's global reputation?**

Cambodia has incredible potential to become a leading destination for young travelers — and there are some exciting developments underway that could support that.

The opening of the new Phnom Penh International Airport and the expansion of regional flight routes will significantly improve accessibility. There's also growing momentum around opening sea borders, which would allow smoother travel between Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam — a game changer for regional connectivity. As operators, we have a big role to play. Hostels can't just cater to the party crowd anymore — we need to elevate our offerings across the board.

That means improving facilities, service standards, and guest experiences, while also showcasing Cambodia's incredible diversity — from its cultural heritage and cuisine to its stunning natural landscapes and adventure opportunities. At Mad Monkey, we see ourselves not just as a place to stay, but as a platform for positive impact.

We're committed to sustainable tourism, investing in our staff, and working closely with the local communities in which we operate.

It's our responsibility to help protect and promote the destinations we're in — making sure that we're not only creating unforgettable experiences for our guests, but also contributing to the long-term growth and global perception of Cambodia as a must-visit travel destination. With stronger marketing and collaboration across the industry — especially highlighting Cambodia's food, history, islands, and eco-tourism opportunities — we believe the country can take its rightful place on every backpacker's bucket list.

## Scaling with Purpose

**CLR: As Mad Monkey continues to grow regionally and globally, how do you ensure that each new property retains the brand's core values of community, fun, and impact? What are your priorities in expanding the network while staying true to the original mission?**



For us, everything starts with community — and that begins internally, with our team. As we expand, we make it a priority to integrate into the local community by participating in grassroots initiatives and creating meaningful employment opportunities. The majority of our staff are hired locally, which not only supports the regional economy but also brings authentic cultural experiences to our guests. It's this local connection that gives each Mad Monkey its unique personality while still feeling part of a global family.

While we have strong brand pillars — community, fun, and positive impact — we don't take a cookie-cutter approach. Each property is designed to reflect the character of its location, from the architectural style and F&B offerings to the tours, events, and even how guests are welcomed.

We believe in letting the local culture shine while delivering the core Mad Monkey experience: a place where travelers can connect, contribute, and create unforgettable memories. As we continue to grow, our focus is on scaling with purpose.

That means remaining intentional about where we go, how we operate, and the legacy we leave behind. We're not just building hostels — we're building experiences that enrich both the travelers who visit and the communities we serve. At Mad Monkey, we remain intentional about where we go, how we operate, and the legacy we leave behind. We're not just building hostels, we're creating experiences that enrich both the travelers who stay with us and the communities we call home.

Since opening our doors in June 2011, Mad Monkey has proudly supported a range of CSR initiatives across Cambodia, including the Cambodian Children's Fund, the Cambodian Buddhism Association, Epic Arts, The Rabbit School, and many more. To strengthen our commitment, we've united our Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) efforts under a new initiative we're proud to call MadLove.

As part of this initiative, Alex will be taking on the incredible challenge of completing a full Ironman later this year to raise funds for The Rabbit School, an organization close to our hearts that supports children with disabilities through inclusive education. **CLR**







**THINK YOU'VE SEEN IT  
ALL IN CAMBODIA?  
BET YOU HAVEN'T MADE IT  
HERE YET...**





# ARNAUD DARCI

CEO AND FOUNDER OF THALIAS



*Arnaud Darc has a three-decade journey in Cambodia and has helped define the country's modern hospitality landscape. From launching iconic brands like Topaz, Malis, and Khéma to advocating for policy reform and talent development, Arnaud's leadership is guided by unwavering values: clarity, care, and consistency.*

*As Cambodia's culinary and service sectors evolve, Arnaud continues to shape not only a group of successful restaurants—but a national identity rooted in excellence, resilience, and cultural pride.*

## Leadership Values and Guiding Principles

**CLR:** Arnaud, as a leader in Cambodia's restaurant and hospitality industry, what core values and guiding principles have shaped your leadership at Thalias Group? How have these principles contributed to the company's success and its role as a leader in the sector?

When I first arrived in Cambodia in 1994, I had no roadmap; just a strong sense of values. Thirty years later, those same principles still guide every decision at Thalias: clarity, care, and consistency.

Clarity means knowing precisely why we exist. Each brand at Thalias was born to solve a local need: Topaz to define French fine dining in Phnom Penh; Malis to restore Khmer cuisine to its rightful cultural status; Khéma to democratize access to quality through everyday elegance.

These missions are not decorative; they drive operations. When a guest's experience doesn't align with that purpose, we act. During our first years at Malis, some critics thought we were "softening" traditional dishes. But our goal was never replication. It was revival; treating Cambodian recipes with respect, technique, and pride. That clarity held us firm despite resistance and ultimately defined our identity.

Care is not sentiment. It's the discipline of attention. We train more than 200 staff annually and reinvest heavily in people; because hospitality is an ecosystem, not a transaction. During the 2020 COVID shutdown, when revenues dropped by over 90%, the easy option was to hibernate. But I refused to let our people drift. We retained 86% of our workforce, cross-trained waiters into logistics roles, and even piloted new product lines in our CPU. That crisis tested every principle we claimed to hold. And it confirmed them. Care, when it matters most, is action.

Consistency builds trust. It's not about repetition; it's about reliability. From our AI-assisted purchasing systems to the daily bread production at Khéma's central kitchen, we've invested in processes that outlast personalities.

When guests return to Topaz for an anniversary or bring family to Malis, they're not chasing novelty. They're trusting us to deliver what they remember; with the same quiet precision. That kind of trust isn't built overnight; it's earned one perfectly laminated croissant at a time.

Still, these values have been tested. In 2003, after expanding too quickly without adequate systems, we were forced to shut one of our ventures. It was a costly lesson; but a defining one.



It reminded me that speed without structure is fragile. We regrouped, slowed down, and built stronger foundations. That setback still informs how I lead today.

Working in Cambodia taught me to adapt these principles to a local context. Here, trust is built over time; through relationships, not contracts. Regulatory frameworks can shift quickly, and talent development often means investing in people with raw potential rather than formal qualifications.

But that's also a strength. It forced me to lead with humility, to listen more, and to build systems rooted in shared purpose, not just imported models.

Looking ahead, these values aren't just a legacy; they're my compass. As we expand Khéma Go regionally and push for a Michelin-level Cambodian restaurant in Phnom Penh, the temptation will be to chase trends. But clarity will keep us grounded in identity. Care will ensure we bring our teams and suppliers with us. And consistency will protect the trust we've earned.

Leadership isn't about avoiding mistakes. It's about having a framework strong enough to guide you through them. That's what these values offer; not perfection, but alignment. I don't lead with noise or slogans.

I lead with rhythm. Walks before sunrise. Calm reviews with my team. And the conviction that if we build with care and clarity, the results; growth, loyalty, trust; will follow.

So far, they have.

## Challenges and Opportunities in the Restaurant Industry

**CLR:** The restaurant and hospitality industry in Cambodia is constantly evolving, with growing competition and shifts in consumer behavior. What do you see as the biggest challenges and opportunities for the industry in 2025, and how is Thalias Group positioning itself to stay ahead?

The hospitality industry is always evolving, but 2025 brings a different kind of complexity: One of the main challenges today is the pace at which new concepts appear—fast launches, flashy openings, a strong online presence. But often, they lack the foundations: no real training program, no supply chain discipline, no operational backbone.

That's speed without structure. At the same time, there's a lot of visibility—posts, influencers, campaigns—but very little substance behind the guest experience. In Cambodia, this is amplified.

The market is evolving fast. Urban growth is real, consumers are more informed, and yet the regulatory framework—tax, labor, hygiene—remains inconsistent and unclear.

So we operate in an environment where you have to be both highly adaptive and deeply anchored. If you're only fast, you burn out. If you're only solid, you get left behind.

That requires strategic patience. And systems.





Another major challenge is human capital. Across the region, there's a growing gap between what guests expect and what many teams are trained to deliver.

Talent retention is difficult, especially in post-COVID economies. At Thalías, we've responded by doubling down on internal mobility. Today, 100% of our General Managers started with us in operational roles. We don't just recruit; we grow. And we measure success not in hires, but in promotions.

There's also the issue of cost. Food inflation, energy volatility, and logistics constraints make profitability harder to sustain without compromising quality.

That's where data becomes essential. We've implemented AI-assisted forecasting tools across our operations; from purchasing to portioning.



This isn't about replacing intuition; it's about equipping our teams with sharper tools so we can make smart decisions in real time.

But where there are challenges, there are also deep opportunities.

The first is cultural pride. Post-pandemic, we see a stronger appetite; especially among younger Cambodians; for authentic, high-quality local cuisine. Malis has benefited from this shift, but we're also seeing interest across our bistro and bakery lines.

There's a generation that doesn't want French food instead of Khmer food; they want both—each with clarity and excellence.

This shift opens doors for more meaningful storytelling. People no longer dine out just for nourishment; they dine to learn, to connect, to experience something thoughtful.

That's why we've created wine and cheese nights at Khéma, chef's table evenings at Topaz, and regional tasting menus at Malis. We don't just serve food; we tell stories. And stories build loyalty.

The second opportunity is regional. With Khéma Go, we're taking the production systems and culinary integrity we've developed over 15 years and scaling them. Not to become a chain; but to show that casual dining can be beautiful, consistent, and profitable across borders. Our first flagship outside Cambodia is under preparation.

It will be led by a team that was cross-trained during the COVID shutdown—proof that crisis breeds capability, if you use the time well.

Third: the digital shift. The Cambodian consumer is more connected than ever. Online bookings, loyalty apps, e-commerce for F&B retail; these are no longer optional. We've invested heavily in the Thalias App and are exploring ways to make our artisanal products (like cheese and charcuterie) available online, with nationwide delivery. Our vision is not just "restaurant as venue" but "restaurant as platform."

My advice for anyone entering this industry is simple: be clear on your purpose. The competition is not other restaurants; it's attention. And attention only lasts if you deliver something meaningful, consistently. Don't build what you think the market wants. Build what the market will remember. And then serve it, every day, with humility and discipline.

At Thalias, we've faced war, blackouts, SARS, economic downturns, and COVID. We've learned to adapt. But what protects us is not just resilience; it's relevance.

Relevance comes from knowing who you are, serving with meaning, and building systems that endure. That's how we face every new challenge; and how we seize every real opportunity.

### New Developments at Thalias Group

**CLR:** What are some of the new initiatives or innovations happening at Thalias Group this year? How are these efforts helping the company enhance customer experiences and adapt to changing market trends?

At Thalias, we don't innovate for the sake of novelty. We innovate to stay relevant; to serve better, think smarter, and strengthen the systems that support our teams and guests.

This year, we are building in three directions: deeper operational integration, new consumer formats, and regional scaling.

First, our Central Production Unit (CPU) has entered its next phase. What began as a support facility has evolved into a full-fledged R&D and production hub; responsible for everything from our house-aged cheeses and charcuterie to sauces, condiments, and pastries. The CPU now supplies ten outlets daily and ensures quality uniformity across the group.

In 2025, we're expanding its role further, with an in-house fermentation lab, better cold-chain logistics, and a circular waste strategy in collaboration with local farms.



This is not back-office work. It's what allows us to serve thousands of guests a week with consistency and transparency.

Second, we're launching PureBite; a healthy food delivery platform focused on nutrition, taste, and convenience. This is not a pivot; it's a complement. PureBite is designed for a growing urban audience that wants clean meals, balanced macros, and ingredient traceability; all accessible through mobile ordering. It draws on our production capacity, our internal know-how, and the trust we've built over decades.

Whether it's cold-pressed juices, keto-friendly meals, or plant-forward Cambodian bowls, the goal is simple: to make health easier without making it elitist.

Khéma Go also continues to evolve. Originally launched during the pandemic as a survival response, it's now a permanent brand with its own identity. We've streamlined packaging, improved e-commerce logistics, and integrated customer feedback loops via the Thalías App. The model is simple: artisanal quality, ready to go. And it's working. In 2025, we'll open our first Khéma Go flagship outside Cambodia. It will be led by a Cambodian operations team trained in Phnom Penh during the COVID downturn; a full-circle moment that proves long-term thinking pays off.

We're also refining the experience at the table.

At Topaz, our chef's table program is expanding. It's no longer just a menu; it's a dialogue. Guests meet the brigade, understand the sourcing, and experience the technical precision behind each dish.

The goal is not to impress, but to involve. We're pairing this with curated wine nights, regional French showcases, and behind-the-scenes kitchen tours for culinary students. Luxury, for us, is not about formality. It's about presence.

At Malis, we're going deeper into the roots of Khmer cuisine. This year, we've partnered with culinary historians and village elders to document regional recipes before they disappear. These recipes aren't just being archived; they're being reinterpreted for modern service: lighter, seasonal, but always authentic. The result is a new generation of Cambodian dishes that carry identity forward; not in a museum, but on a menu.

On the digital side, the Thalías App is becoming a full customer platform. What started as a loyalty tool now handles reservations, delivery orders, event bookings, and member-only perks. In the next quarter, we'll integrate real-time order tracking, QR-based tableside payments, and a curated retail section for our artisanal goods. The future of dining is hybrid — digital ease, physical intimacy — and we're building both sides.

Behind all of this is one constant: our people.

Every initiative; from PureBite to Malis research; is led by someone who came up through the system. That's the real innovation. We don't outsource growth; we cultivate it. Our goal is not to be everywhere. It's to be clear, committed, and capable; wherever we are. In a world where attention is fleeting, depth matters more than reach. And at Thalías, innovation isn't something we announce.



It's something we build, patiently, purposefully, and with the quiet confidence that comes from knowing who we serve and why it matters.

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### **Cambodia's Culinary Future: A Sector Growing Into Itself**

**What are some of the new initiatives or innovations happening at Thalias Group this year? How are these efforts helping the company enhance customer experiences and adapt to changing market trends?**

The Next Chapter Isn't a Copy — It's a Signature



After thirty years in Cambodia, I can say this with certainty: we are no longer a hidden gem. We are a rising voice.

The restaurant and hospitality sector in Cambodia is maturing — not by copying others, but by building its own language of excellence. That shift is visible not just in the growth of the sector, but in the confidence of its people.

When I co-founded Thalias in the late 1990s, there were only a handful of fine-dining venues in the capital. French techniques were revered, but local cuisine was relegated to nostalgia. Food safety was inconsistent. Professional hospitality training was almost non-existent.

### **Today, we are seeing something powerful:**

- Young chefs returning from France, Australia, Thailand and Singapore, ready to reinterpret Cambodian flavors with global discipline.
- Local guests demanding more; not just in service and hygiene, but in storytelling, design, and depth.
- International diners coming not only for Angkor Wat, but for the kind of refined culinary experiences that define a country's soul.

The ground is fertile; but growth now depends on structure, standards, and purpose.

### **Thalias' Role in Shaping What Comes Next**

At Thalias, we've always seen ourselves as more than restaurateurs. We're builders of ecosystems. In 2025 and beyond, we are focused on five impact areas:

### 1. Training as a Pathway, Not a Perk

We train more than 200 staff annually, across roles from kitchen prep to guest relations to product development. But we also mentor. A dishwasher at Khéma can become a pâtissier. A waiter at Malis can become a sommelier.

Our next goal is to formalize a full career lattice model, linked to Cambodia's National Qualifications Framework; so young Cambodians can build a future in this industry with dignity and vision, not just wages.

### 2. Exporting Cambodia's Culinary Identity

Malis, our Khmer fine dining brand, was born from the conviction that Cambodian cuisine deserved a stage equal to Thai, Vietnamese, or French.

We've invested in research, reinterpreted forgotten recipes, and built a kitchen that treats prahok with the same respect as foie gras.

Our new Malis outlet at Phnom Penh International Airport and the R&D work behind it are part of a broader ambition: to turn Living Cambodian Cuisine into a global story.

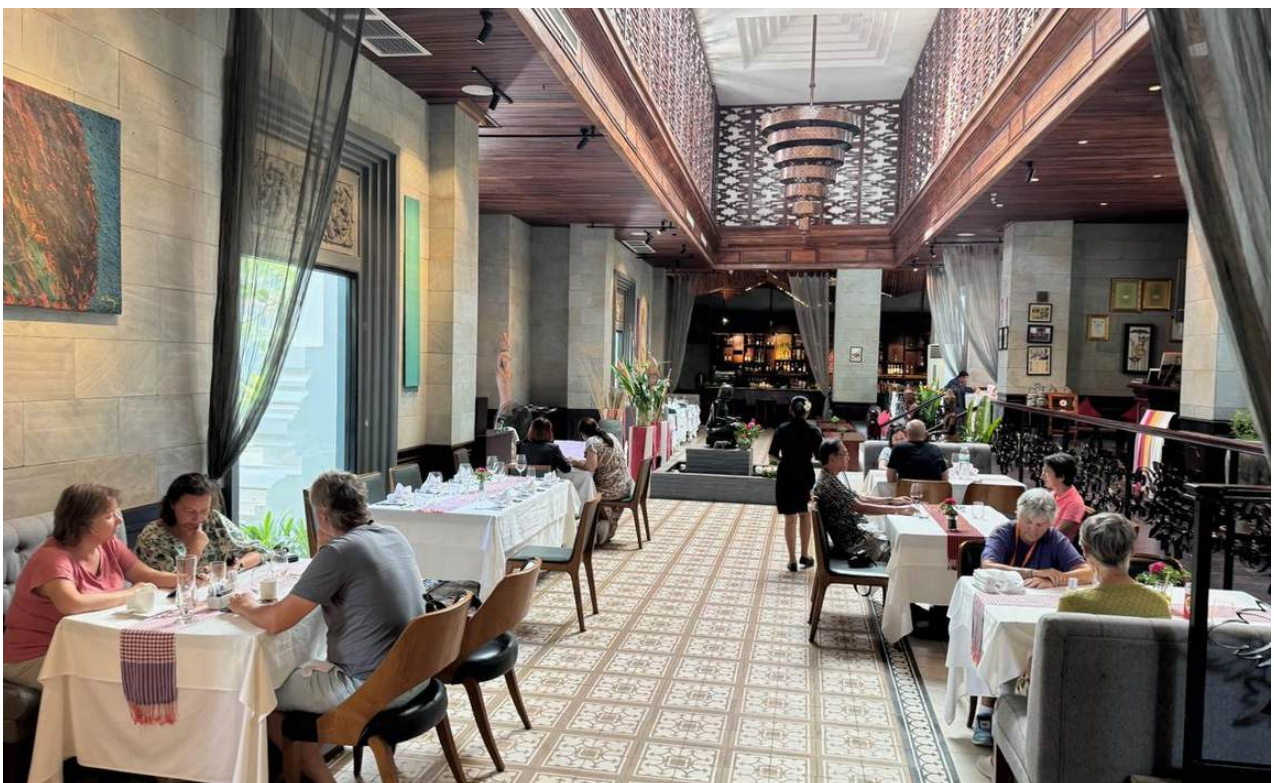
This isn't just about food. It's about pride, memory, and national branding.

### 3. Hospitality as Economic Infrastructure

As a member of the Government-Private Sector Forum and President of the Cambodia Restaurant Association, I've worked directly with policymakers on tax reform, licensing efficiency, and post-COVID recovery.

Restaurants create jobs — but they also activate supply chains, agriculture, logistics, and tourism. Our vision is to position hospitality as a pillar of economic development, not just lifestyle or service.

That means policy, not just praise.



#### 4. Making Quality Scalable

From our Central Production Unit to our Khéma Go model, we are proving that excellence doesn't have to be exclusive. We produce our own cheeses, sausages, pastries and more m; not to save money, but to protect standards and transmit know-how.

The future lies in scalable craftsmanship; where quality can reach more people, across more formats, without dilution.

#### 5. Helping Cambodia Find Its Culinary Voice

We're in the early days of something profound: Cambodia is becoming a food destination. Not a sideshow. A signature.

We see it when guests return to Topaz each year for the truffle tasting. We see it when expats bring visiting friends to Malis as a cultural experience. We see it when Khéma Wine & Cheese nights sell out in under two hours.

Hospitality; when done with purpose; becomes national soft power. It invites the world in, and it sends your story out.

#### My Advice to the Next Generation

If you're entering this field, know this: the kitchen is a crucible. It teaches humility, precision, and teamwork. But don't lose sight of the guest.

The real work begins when you ask not just "Is the dish correct?" but "Does it matter to someone?"

Success in this industry comes when you treat each plate as a message, each guest as a relationship, and each teammate as a partner.

If you build from that place — not just with talent, but with meaning — then you're not just making food. You're shaping a future. **CLR**





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# DAGMAR LYONS

GENERAL MANAGER - RAFFLES HOTEL LE ROYAL PHNOM PENH



*Few properties in Southeast Asia carry the legacy, prestige, and emotional resonance of Raffles Hotel Le Royal. As its General Manager, Dagmar Lyons is entrusted with leading one of Cambodia's most iconic institutions—a hotel that has embodied timeless elegance and resilience since 1929.*

*In this exclusive interview, Dagmar reflects on the meaning of stewarding such a historic landmark, how global leadership experience informs her approach in Phnom Penh, and what it takes to preserve Raffles' heritage while adapting to the evolving demands of today's luxury traveler.*

## Leading a Cambodian Icon

**CLR: Raffles Hotel Le Royal holds a unique place in Cambodia's history as a symbol of elegance and resilience since 1929. What does it mean to you personally and professionally to lead such a legacy property?**

**How do you approach the responsibility of honoring its heritage while steering it forward in today's competitive luxury hospitality market?**

Leading Raffles Hotel Le Royal is both a tremendous honour and a profound responsibility. Personally, it means being a steward of a national treasure - a place that has witnessed the ebb and flow of Cambodian history, from its golden eras to its most challenging times.

I feel deeply connected to the stories that live within these walls, and everyday I am inspired by the resilience, grace and culture richness the hotel represents.

Professionally, it's a unique privilege to lead a property with such a storied legacy. Raffles Le Royal is not just a hotel - Its an icon. The challenge and joy lie in honouring that legacy while ensuring the hotel continues to evolve in ways that resonate with today's luxury traveller.

To balance heritage with progress, my approach is rooted in authenticity and purpose.

We preserve the architectural integrity and timeless service traditions that define Raffles, while carefully integrating modern amenities, sustainability practices, and personalized guest experiences that reflect contemporary expectations.

I also place strong emphasis on training and empowering our team - many of whom are proud Cambodians - to be ambassadors of both tradition and innovation. Ultimately my goal is to ensure that every guest who walks through our doors feels the soul of the past and the promise of the future - experiencing not just a stay but a living story.

### **Global Perspective, Local Excellence**

**CLR: With leadership experience across North America, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, how are you applying your global outlook to elevate service standards at Raffles Phnom Penh? What have you learned from other markets that you see resonating here in Cambodia?**

With a leadership journey that has taken me across North America and Canada, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, I've learned that while luxury is universal in its aspiration, it must always be locally grounded in its expression. At Raffles Le Royal, I draw on this global outlook to elevate service by blending world-class standards with authentic Cambodian warmth.

For instance, from North America & Canada, I bring a strong focus on service personalization and proactive guest engagement, while from Europe, I've adopted a deep appreciation for heritage and craftsmanship - something that beautifully aligns with the legacy of Le Royal. The Middle East taught me the importance of intuitive hospitality and attention to detail in guest expectations, which has inspired new training modules for our team here.



*The Hotel Le Royal under construction in 1929. Photo: Raffles Hotel Le Royal archives*



Yet what truly resonates in Cambodia is the spirit of humility and genuine care that's inherent in Khmer culture. By aligning this with international best practices in luxury hospitality, we're creating a service experience that feels both refined and deeply human. It's about building pride in local identity while delivering at a global level.

### Culinary & Cultural Prestige

**CLR: From Restaurant Le Royal to the legendary Elephant Bar, Raffles is known for its distinctive F&B experience. How do you plan to continue evolving the hotel's culinary identity while staying true to its heritage and the tastes of a discerning, international clientele?**



At Raffles Hotel Le Royal, we are deeply proud of our rich heritage - from the refined Indochine flavours of Restaurant Le Royal to the timeless charm of the legendary Elephant Bar.

Our culinary identity is rooted in storytelling, authenticity and elegance. As we look to the future, our goal is to evolve in a way that honours this legacy while embracing innovation and global influence.

We are enhancing our menus with more locally sourced, sustainable ingredients, working closely with Cambodian farmers and producers to spotlight the exceptional quality of the region. At the same time, we are introducing curated collaborations with renowned international chefs and mixologists to bring fresh perspectives and globally inspired experiences to our guests.

Our culinary evolution will also be guest driven - attuned to the palettes of our well-traveled clientele, who seek both authenticity and surprise. Whether through refined tasting menus rooted in Khmer cuisine or seasonal reinterpretations of classic colonial-era dishes, we aim to deliver a dining experience that is luxurious, culturally immersive, and unmistakably Raffles.

### Sustaining Luxury in a Competitive Market

**CLR: In today's fast-changing hospitality environment, what does "luxury" mean to you? How is Raffles Phnom Penh adapting to the expectations of modern luxury travelers while preserving the timeless charm that sets it apart?**

In today's fast-changing hospitality environment, luxury is no longer defined solely by opulence or exclusivity - its about authenticity, personalization and meaningful experiences.

For me, true luxury lies in the ability to anticipate and fulfill a guests unspoken desires, while creating a sense of place that feels both inspiring and deeply comforting. Its the seamless blend of impeccable service, cultural immersion and emotional connection.

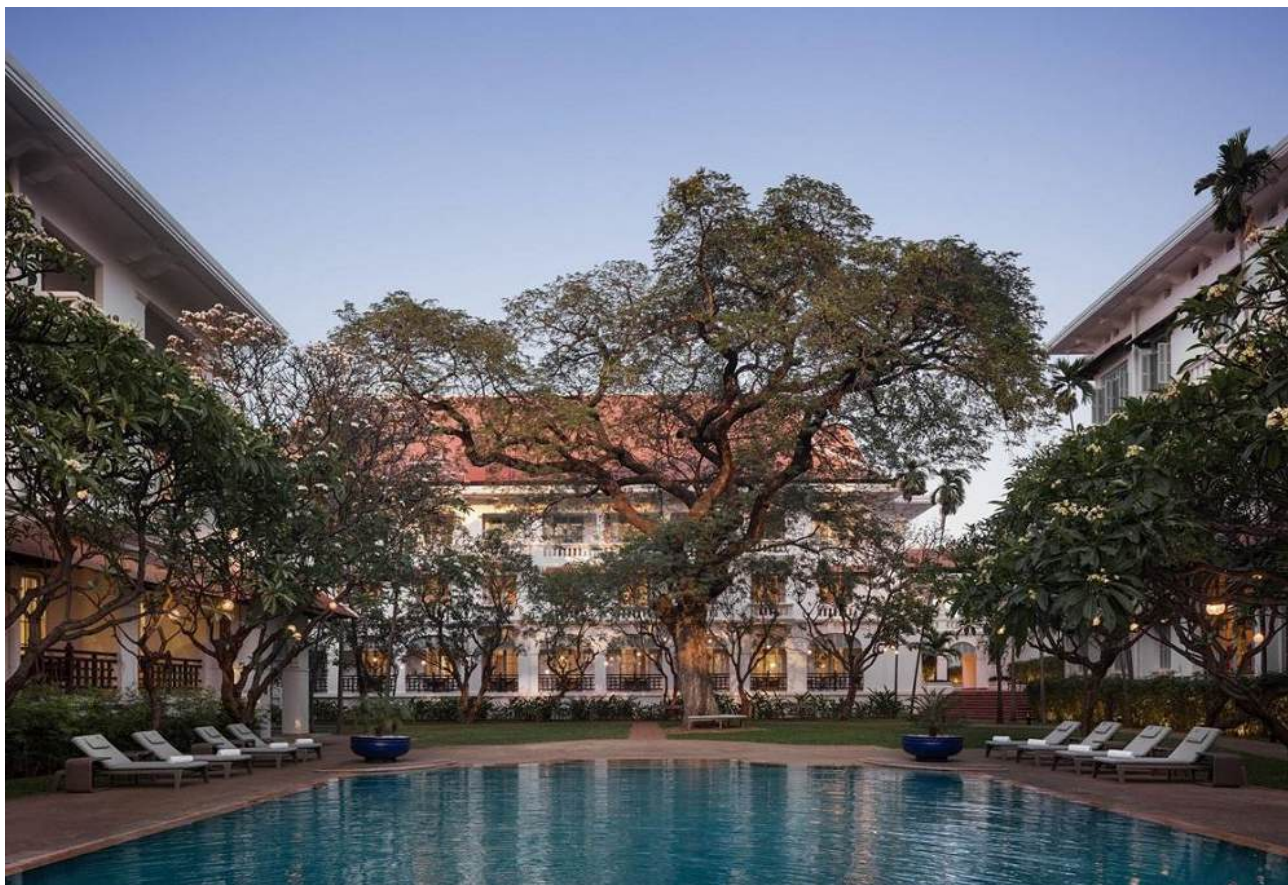
At Raffles Hotel le Royal, we are uniquely positioned to offer that kind of luxury. Our hotel is a living testament to Phnom Penh's rich history, having welcomed guests since 1929. The timeless charm of our colonial architecture, heritage suites, and storied Elephant Bar remains intact - but we've carefully integrated modern expectations as well.

In this we had the unwavering commitment from our Owners, colleagues and other stakeholders.

Whether it's through curated local experiences or our commitment to sustainability and wellness, we are constantly adapting. Today's luxury traveler seeks both substance and story, and we are proud to offer both - rooted in tradition, elevated by innovation, and delivered with the signature warmth and elegance of Raffles.

### **Leadership, Recognition & Resilience**

**CLR: You've led hotels to achieve Forbes Five-Star ratings and other global accolades. What leadership principles guide you during both high-performance moments and times of challenge?**



Leadership in luxury hospitality, especially within a storied property like Raffles Le Royal, requires unwavering clarity of purpose and a commitment to both consistency and adaptability. During high-performance moments, I focus on celebrating excellence, amplifying team strengths and ensuring that we never grow complacent - success must be a platform for continuous refinement.

In times of challenge - whether external disruptions or internal shifts - I turn to resilience, transparency, and empathetic leadership. It's essential to remain visible, to communicate clearly and honestly with the team, and to make decisions anchored in our core values of graciousness, respect, and attention to detail. Regardless of the climate, I lead with a long-term vision, balancing immediate priorities with the preservation of our legacy.

**CLR: How do you build and sustain a culture of excellence within your team?**

Excellence at Raffles is not a goal - it's a daily habit. It begins with curating the right talent - those who not only possess technical skill but who embody our ethos of genuine hospitality.

Consistency is achieved through clear standards, regular feedback and empowerment. I encourage my leaders to lead with heart, to model the standards we expect and to recognize performance in meaningful ways.

We celebrate the small wins, learn from setbacks and foster an environment where everyone understands their role in delivering unforgettable experiences.

CLR: What leadership principles guide you during periods of both growth and challenge, and how do you foster excellence among your team?

Periods of growth require vision, alignment and agility. I lead with a focus on strategic clarity, ensuring every department understands how their goals contribute to our collective success. During challenges, my leadership is rooted in calm presence, and principled decision making. I believe in facing adversity with integrity and using it as an opportunity to strengthen our culture.

Fostering excellence is an ongoing journey. It involves nurturing a performance-oriented yet emotionally intelligent culture, where high standards are paired with high support. At Raffles Le Royal, we uphold tradition while embracing innovation, and I continuously challenge the team to elevate both the guest journey and their personal development. Excellence becomes sustainable when it is lived authentically, every day, by every colleague.







# DANIEL RUPRECHT

GENERAL MANAGER OF THE FARMHOUSE RESORT & SPA



*At the intersection of luxury and social impact lies The Farmhouse Resort & Spa, a hospitality concept unlike any other in Cambodia.*

*Operated under the Smiling Gecko Cambodia (SGC) social enterprise, the resort offers more than just a high-end rural retreat—it's a purpose-driven model reinvesting its profits into education, vocational training, and community development.*

*In this interview, General Manager Daniel Ruprecht shares how The Farmhouse blends commercial success with community uplift, offering guests immersive rural experiences while empowering local talent.*

*From redefining off-the-beaten-path travel to setting new standards in sustainable, experience-led tourism, Daniel explains how leadership in this unique setting means not just working with the community—but being the community.*

## Purpose-Driven Leadership in a Changing Sector

**CLR:** The Farmhouse Resort & Spa is a standout example of hospitality with a social mission. As Cambodia's tourism landscape evolves, how do you lead a luxury property where commercial success must also deliver meaningful community impact?

Leading The Farmhouse Resort & Spa is similar to managing any other resort—but with one key difference: we are part of Smiling Gecko Cambodia, a nonprofit social enterprise.

All our earnings are reinvested into the project to support its sustainability and growth. Achieving full self-sufficiency for SGC is our ultimate goal.

Most of our team members come from the surrounding community, and we provide them with both education and employment. For me, the difference is clear: we don't just work with the community—we are the community.

## Rethinking Rural Travel Experiences

**CLR:** A major challenge in Cambodian tourism is encouraging travelers to explore beyond Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. What role can destinations like The Farmhouse play in changing travel patterns, and how are you drawing visitors into rural, experience-driven stays?

We offer a visit off the main tourist track.

Our primary market is Europe, and we've observed a strong demand for meaningful holidays. Guests want their spending to have a direct, positive impact on the community. We call it "a visit with purpose," and by staying with us, guests directly support the mission of Smiling Gecko Cambodia.

At the same time, we offer visitors an opportunity to engage more deeply with rural Cambodian life—something they wouldn't typically encounter. Our resort provides cultural immersion alongside comfort, from stunning natural settings to outstanding meals, including a fine dining restaurant. It's an experience designed to create lasting memories.

The local market is also very important to us. With everything we offer, it's the perfect escape from the city. Families enjoy nature and the pool, food lovers explore our farm-to-table and fine dining options, and couples can unwind in the spa—all in a green, welcoming, and warm environment.

### **Blending Luxury with Local Engagement**

**CLR: Guests today are seeking more than just comfort—they want connection.**

**How do you deliver high-end service while keeping your guests engaged with the resort's sustainability efforts, agricultural roots, and the local community?**





Every guest is invited to join our Farm Tour, which offers a deeper understanding of the work done by Smiling Gecko Cambodia.

Guests can engage with the local community throughout the resort and on the farm, and we also organize excursions with local families to showcase rural life in Cambodia.

Our guests understand where our team members come from and the purpose behind what we do, which makes the experience even more meaningful.

High-level service remains a top priority, and our team is proud to deliver it.



### Talent Development with a Mission

**CLR: The Farmhouse is closely linked to vocational training and education. How do you turn this social mission into a core part of your talent strategy, and what does leadership look like when your staff includes youth from underserved communities?**

You could say we operate as one large educational facility. Most of our team members come from the local area, and it's inspiring to see how quickly they learn.

Many of them are highly motivated and understand that, with effort and support, they can progress in their careers.

We've seen many examples of team members who started with little and have worked their way up.

Executive Chef Mariya is one of the best examples of that success. While it may take a bit more time, with the right training, trust, and self-confidence, our team proves that real growth is possible.

### Trends in Sustainable Hospitality

**CLR: From wellness to ethical sourcing, new trends are reshaping luxury hospitality across Southeast Asia. What emerging expectations are you seeing among travelers, and how is The Farmhouse staying ahead of the curve while staying true to its core values?**

Because our concept is quite different from most other resorts, many of the usual trends have less of an impact on us.

Our guests are specifically seeking experiences they wouldn't normally encounter, and we deliver that.

Of course, we monitor industry trends and look for opportunities to enhance our offering.

But we always stay true to what we do best—creating meaningful, purpose-driven experiences in a setting that blends comfort, culture, and community impact. **CLR**





# DARREN GALL

CREATIVE DIRECTOR - VINDOCHINE



*As Cambodia's wine scene continues its transformation from niche curiosity to cultural mainstay, few voices have guided the journey with as much insight and passion as Daren Gall, Creative Director of Vindochine. With decades of experience across Southeast Asia, Daren has played a pivotal role in shaping how wine is understood, appreciated, and integrated into Cambodia's evolving hospitality and lifestyle sectors. Darren reflects on the country's maturing wine culture, shifting consumer tastes, and the importance of storytelling, education, and accessibility in building a sustainable future for wine in the Kingdom.*

## Leading Cambodia's Wine Conversation

**CLR:** As Creative Director of Vindochine and a long-time voice in Southeast Asia's wine scene, how do you see your role in shaping Cambodia's emerging wine culture? What does leadership in such a young but rapidly evolving industry look like today?

I have always said that as a wine critic, buyer, seller and as a person who endorses or recommends wines to people, it is definitely not about telling people specifically what wines they should be drinking based on what I like.

It is about understanding what they enjoy or prefer in a wine and sharing with them those wines I feel will best fit their pleasure receptors and looking at wines that are best in terms of quality to price ratio within their brief.

Wines can be good to exceptional at any price point, from most countries and regions, from most varieties and in most styles, as long as they are made from high-quality wine-grapes with hygienic and technically proficient winemaking.

## Trends in the Glass: Understanding Cambodia's Wine Drinkers

**CLR:** What are some of the most notable trends you're seeing among Cambodian wine consumers—from varietal preferences to how and where wine is enjoyed? Are local tastes maturing, and how are importers adapting?

Cambodia has had a long-term love affair with Bordeaux reds, from the powerful, full-bodied reds of the Left Bank to the more seductive and approachable medium-bodied reds of the Right Bank.



However, of late, there are signs of the national palate moving towards lighter, more elegant styles such as Burgundies and more fruit-forward wines from the New World, such as Argentina, Australia, Chile and more.

For many people entering the world of fine wine consumption, especially with one's peer group, it is about drinking the right wines and being seen to be drinking the right wines, labels, brands.

However, as we mature, become more secure in our wine purchases, and our palates evolve, we prefer wines that fit our lifestyle, our diet and are most pleasing to us.

**Perception vs. Reality: Pricing, Value & Accessibility**

**CLR: Wine is often perceived as a luxury product in Cambodia. What are the biggest misconceptions about wine pricing and value in this market, and how can the industry improve accessibility without compromising quality?**



Good question. As previously mentioned, wines can be good at any price point, and the best of them over-deliver on quality for the price. There are different wines for different moments, occasions, and times. You might own a blazing red Ferrari, but you wouldn't take it to an off-road bash with your buddies or use it to drive your mother-in-law to temple.

Some wines are luxury products; some wines are everyday consumer goods. For many of us, we enjoy a glass of wine with a meal each day, it enhances the dining experience, aids digestion, and stimulates conversation.

However, for most of us, these daily occasions are usually not the time to open the vinous equivalent of a bottled Ferrari! Most often, we are looking for well-made wines, from quality grapes, that we can feel comfortable drinking with our meal, without giving our bank manager heartburn.

Some wines are indeed luxury goods, usually made in tiny quantities, with the strictest and most rigorous management in the vineyard, producing tiny crops. These wines are given the most expensive, handmade treatment in the winery, the most expensive oak to mature in, and often come in expensive packaging. This is wine as high art, and to the discerning palate, the prices they fetch are as worthy as that of a magnificent artwork.

We digest art through our senses, paintings with our eyes, music with our ears, fine food and wine with our sense of smell and sense of taste. To me, the finest wines are as worthy of high price and high praise as a painting by Matisse or a composition by Mahler.

In terms of accessibility, the most common reason people will buy wine for the first time is that they tried it somewhere, an event, a dinner with friends, a wedding etc.

This is why the industry spends so much time and money on creating experiences for people to be introduced to their wines, such as tastings, exhibitions, master classes, dinners, soirees, and all manner of creative events to bring wine drinkers and their wine brands to each other.

For the service industry, it is about developing knowledge and imbuing them with the confidence to engage with consumers, discuss with them what they are looking for from a wine and making recommendations.

Aside from having actually tried the wine somewhere, high up on the list of reasons for purchasing a wine for the first time is recommendation from a trusted source, be that a friend, a wine critic, a sommelier, or the rep in the wine shop. For those that become that trusted source, customer loyalty and repeat business is the reward.

### **The Future of Wine Production in Cambodia**

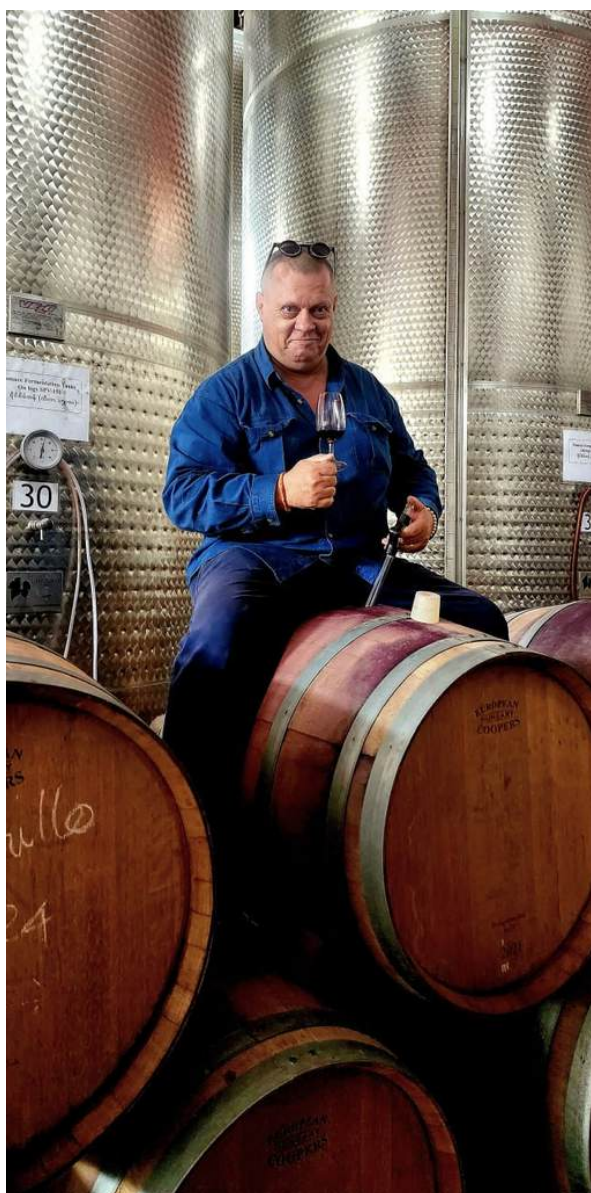
**CLR: While Cambodia imports most of its wine, is there any serious outlook for local or regional production? What would it take—climatically, technically, and commercially—for Cambodia to be on the map as a winemaking destination?**





In my nearly twenty years here, I have been asked to look at two potential vineyard sites, one was not suitable (poor soil), whilst the other showed genuine potential, but ultimately the costs were prohibitive.

It is not just about planting a vineyard; you must also build a winery. There is a small local producer in Battambang (Banan Winery). It caters to tourists and has been around for many years. The wines are very earthy and rustic, and they are not really going to grow much beyond what they offer now.



Wineries tie up a lot of money, they tend to be asset rich but cash poor, with enormous costs in land, equipment, production, and stock holdings. There is a very famous saying in the industry that the only way to make a small fortune from wine is to start out with a big one.

However, all jokes aside, it is an immensely rewarding industry for those who manage to do it well and add real value to what is essentially a primary product. To produce wine cheaply, you need to make and sell a very large amount of it. To make a small amount of wine and sell it for a very high price, you need to be very, very good at all aspects of the industry, or have deep enough pockets to employ people who are.

In countries this close to the equator, you need altitude, so that the nights get very cold and the cold air runs down the slopes and into the valleys. This stretches out the diurnal rhythm and slows down the ripening period. You also need suitable soil, dry weather during the ripening season, access to water, and minimal disease and pestilence pressure.

### Cultural Relevance and the Next Generation

**CLR:** Beyond retail and fine dining, how can wine become a more integrated part of Cambodia's broader food, hospitality, and lifestyle ecosystem? What role do storytelling, education, and pairing experiences play in growing the market sustainably?

Great stories sell wines, is a mantra I have always taught students of wine, and anyone who knows me will tell you I love to tell wine stories and don't shut up once you get me going!



Our sense of smell is the only sense we have that plus straight into our memory (within the limbic system of our brains, which also governs how we feel about things), all of our other senses take a more circular route through the neo-cortex.

We have an enormous capacity to remember smells, and they are all wrapped up in our own personal histories, our own experiences, and emotions. These 'Proustian Moments' where in hearing the stories, and smelling and ingesting the wine, we unlock our own memories and the emotional attachments we have to them.

Like watching the animated movie Ratatouille and seeing the fierce and much-feared food critic Anton Ego taste a humble, Provencal dish of stewed vegetables and be transported straight back to his...

mother's kitchen as a child, or talk to a Cambodian about the magic of a mother who could make an amazing meal with only rice and prahok because she knew how to fill it with love. For wine to become a part of the everyday lives of Cambodians, to fit into their lifestyle it must be shared, talked about and enjoyed with food, families and friends, to make the food taste even better, to bring people together, to stimulate stories, promote a sense of occasion and create special moments and fond memories wrapped around it in our minds and in our hearts.

I also see the Cambodian Sommeliers Association as having a leading role in developing education, offering attractive career paths for young people in the hospitality industry, and sharing their knowledge and the many pleasures of responsible wine consumption with people in Cambodia. **CLR**





# ROSEWOOD

## PHNOM PENH



# DAREN ONG

MANAGING DIRECTOR - PERNOD RICARD CAMBODGE



*Since taking the helm of Pernod Ricard Cambodia in December 2020, Daren Ong has played a central role in guiding Cambodia's premium spirits sector through a critical period of transformation.*

*With over 18 years of experience across Asia, his leadership is defined by a strong commitment to brand integrity, responsible drinking, and sustainable development. In this interview Ong shares how his people-first approach, strategic partnerships, and focus on local empowerment are not only building Pernod Ricard's legacy in Cambodia, but also helping to shape the future of the Kingdom's fast-evolving hospitality and beverage landscape.*

## Leading the Spirits Sector Forward

**CLR:** As a leader in Cambodia's growing premium beverage sector, how do you see your role in guiding both the team at Pernod Ricard Cambodia and the broader evolution of the local spirits industry? What leadership principles are most important to you in driving industry transformation and consumer education?

At Pernod Ricard Cambodia, we view ourselves not just as a premium spirits company, but as a people-centric organization. That's why our leadership approach is deeply rooted in our global framework 'The Way We Perform' which emphasizes values that guide both individual growth and collective success.

To me, leadership is about living these values every day. Whether it's through collaboration, delivering results efficiently, or fostering diverse and inclusive teams, I see my role as one that empowers others to thrive. Our commitment to consumer and customer centricity ensures that every decision we make is relevant, responsive, and future-focused.

We've built a culture where continuous feedback, both from managers and peers, plays a critical role in identifying growth areas.

This structured feedback culture directly informs our internal development programs — allowing us to nurture talent, foster a growth mindset, and create high-performing teams.

From an industry perspective, I believe that by focusing on people — our team, our partners, and our consumers — we can truly drive transformation.

Whether it's educating the market on responsible drinking, elevating service standards, or delivering premium experiences, Pernod Ricard is proud to lead the way by developing not just brands, but also the capabilities and culture that will define the future of Cambodia's spirits sector.



## Partnerships That Matter: Investing in Cambodian Talent

**CLR:** Pernod Ricard Cambodia has strengthened its partnership with Pour un Sourire d’Enfant (PSE). How does this collaboration reflect your social responsibility strategy, and what role do such partnerships play in developing future talent for Cambodia’s hospitality and service industries?

Cambodia is rapidly becoming one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the region, and the hospitality sector plays a vital role in supporting this growth. However, there remains a shortage of structured training and access to career development for young people who aspire to work in this industry. The collaboration with Pour un Sourire d’Enfant (PSE) is a powerful example of how private sector partnerships can help bridge that gap.

By supporting PSE’s efforts to provide underprivileged youth with practical hospitality training, the initiative directly contributes to building a stronger, more professional service culture in Cambodia.

This kind of partnership not only addresses immediate social needs but also plays a strategic role in developing future talent for the country’s tourism and service industries. Investing in education and skills development helps ensure that the next generation is equipped to meet international standards, elevate guest experiences, and drive long-term economic growth.

Ultimately, creating access to opportunity and reinforcing quality in the hospitality sector is a shared responsibility — and one that holds significant potential for positive impact across the country.



## Hospitality as a National Growth Engine

**CLR: As Cambodia aims to grow its tourism and hospitality sectors, where do you see opportunities for deeper collaboration between private companies like Pernod Ricard and the government? What would further accelerate industry development?**

As Cambodia continues to position itself as a leading tourism destination in the region — supported by major infrastructure projects like the development of what will be the world's ninth-largest airport — there is a significant opportunity to deepen public-private collaboration, especially in the areas of talent development, service excellence, and sustainable tourism practices. Private companies like ours can contribute industry expertise, the best international practices, and training capabilities.

By working closely with government institutions, vocational schools, and tourism authorities, we can co-create programs that are aligned with real market demands — from upskilling in hospitality and bartending to promoting responsible service and consumption.

This is not a one-day initiative; it's a long-term commitment we have already demonstrated over the years. We've actively contributed to building this foundation in Cambodia through partnerships with institutions such as the Academy of Culinary Arts Cambodia (ACAC) and Pour un Sourire d'Enfant (PSE) in Phnom Penh, and in key tourism provinces like Siem Reap, where we've collaborated with École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme Paul Dubrule and the Siem Reap Tourism Association. Through our Pernod Ricard Academy, we've also delivered bartender training programs focused on quality, safety, and sustainability.



One key area for deeper collaboration remains in education and workforce development. Joint investments in training workshop, certification programs, and apprenticeship schemes can create clear pathways for young Cambodians to build fulfilling careers in hospitality with the right skills and confidence.

Additionally, better alignment on policy — including responsible alcohol marketing, licensing frameworks, and tourism standards — would help create a more professional, safe, and attractive environment for both visitors and local businesses.

Ultimately, accelerating the development of Cambodia's tourism and hospitality sectors requires a shared vision between the public and private sectors — one rooted in quality, inclusion, and long-term sustainability. If we work together, Cambodia is well-positioned to become a global benchmark for world-class hospitality.

### **Strengthening Local Roots for Global Impact**

**CLR: You've spoken about driving greater operational efficiency through closer local partnerships.**

**How does this localization strategy support both agility and relevance in Cambodia's dynamic market, and what lessons have you drawn from this approach?**

We see localization not just as a strategy, but as a necessity in a market as dynamic and culturally rich as Cambodia.

By building close partnerships with local stakeholders, we're able to stay agile and deeply attuned to local consumer needs and market shifts, especially during the tough period such as the Covid pandemic, and recently on the global economic impact.





These collaborations give us real-time insights and enable us to co-create relevant solutions to twist ourselves into so many flexible activities reflected in actual situations. This level of responsiveness wouldn't be possible through a centralized or one-size fits-all approach. For instance, working alongside local bartenders, and outlets team has allowed us to tailor brand experiences that truly resonate with Cambodian audiences.

At the same time, our partnerships with training institutions as well as the local organization who have a common goal help us invest in the next generation of hospitality talent — a critical foundation for long-term industry growth.



One of the most valuable lessons we've learned is that true agility comes from mutual trust, collaboration, and shared purpose. By empowering local partners, we not only gain operational flexibility but also ensure our brands remain authentic and culturally relevant.

### **Serving Cambodia's Market into the Future**

CLR: Looking ahead, how is Pernod Ricard positioning itself to continue serving the evolving needs of the Cambodian market? What does the next phase look like in terms of portfolio innovation, consumer engagement, and industry leadership?

As créateurs de convivialité, our mission is to provide genuine, friendly, and responsible moments of sharing. We continue our ambition to accelerating the growth of our Prestige portfolio and brands while protecting the strong icon portfolio in Cambodia.

We place strong emphasis on engaging with consumers in well-established experience conducted through our Marketing Activities that align with our global values and standards, ensuring every interaction reflects our purpose.

On the industry front, we aim to maintain our leadership in Cambodia by consistently providing authentic, high-quality products that meet all local regulations.

Our focus is to support Cambodia's evolving market needs, foster sustainable growth, and continue setting the benchmark for excellence in the spirits sector. **CLR**

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# DAVID RICHARD DOBSON

SENIOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR - BAY OF LIGHT



*With over two decades of experience shaping Sihanoukville's hospitality landscape, David Richard Dobson brings deep-rooted expertise and a bold, forward-looking vision to his role as Senior Business Development Director at Bay of Lights.*

*As one of Cambodia's most ambitious mixed-use coastal developments, Bay of Lights is more than a real estate project—it's a statement of intent. From championing international hospitality standards to redefining the region's identity as a lifestyle and investment destination, Dobson is helping to steer a transformative journey for Cambodia's southern coast.*

## From Hotelier to Leadership

**CLR: With over 20 years shaping Sihanoukville's hospitality scene and a track record of successful hospitality ventures, you've witnessed its evolution firsthand.**

**As Senior Business Development Director for Bay of Lights, what fuels your leadership approach in shaping a destination led project of this scale, and what key principles guide your team as you push through this pivotal stage of growth?**

I've been part of Sihanoukville's story for over two decades — I know this coastline and the islands inside and out. From managing multiple hotels to leading experiential diving excursions in the Koh Rong archipelago, I've lived through the highs and the quiet moments of this city's evolution. What I've learned is that success here demands more than vision; it takes grit, resilience, adaptability, and a real connection to place.

Hospitality, to me, has never just been a business—it's a cultural driver, a community anchor. That experience has shaped how I lead today: building not structures, but ecosystems. Bay of Lights isn't a conventional development — it's 934 hectares of intentional design, blending coastal living, next-generation infrastructure, and lifestyle experiences.

What key principles guide your team

What drives me now is the chance to help reshape how the world sees Sihanoukville. Where some saw a place that had lost its way, we saw untapped potential. I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of this chapter — not just for Bay of Lights, but for Cambodia's coastline.



We're building something that's never existed here before: a destination that draws people in — not just to visit, but to stay, invest, and be part of something lasting.

What guides our team through this next phase is clear: Developing international standards, local authenticity, creating local opportunities and the belief that when you build with intention and integrity, people respond. That's what keeps us moving forward.

#### Hospitality at the Heart of Bay of Lights

CLR: Bay of Lights is emerging as Cambodia's premier mixed-use coastal development. How are you integrating hospitality and F&B experiences into broader development, and what sets it apart from other coastal developments in the region?

Hospitality and F&B aren't just add-ons — they are an integral part of the full experience; built directly into the lifestyle we're creating.



Take Summer Bay Beach Club & Cabins for example: a seaside getaway for families, couples, and groups for visitors from all over the world looking to disconnect and enjoy some classic beachside hospitality. The Beach Club restaurant serves Asian and Western flavors that invite you to slow down and connect with the coast, that will reset you during your stay into that holiday mode.

But hospitality here goes well beyond F&B. Summer Bay's pool bar is a social hub — whether it's cocktails by the pool or evening beach parties, it's designed to bring people together. The venue also offers flexible spaces for everything from corporate meetings to private celebrations, with capacity for up to 500 guests across indoor and outdoor areas.

What sets Bay of Lights apart is how naturally these experiences combine — we're building a coastal destination that can merge all of these ideals together... comfort, culture, innovation, and connection — something truly unique in the region. It's a place where business travelers, tourists, and locals all come to live, work, play, and be a part of something bigger, and I believe we are starting to see that come to life now.

#### IFC Building

CLR: The International Financial Center Building is central to Bay of Lights' financial development pillar. How will the IFC Building help shape the future of Sihanoukville's economy, and what long-term role will it play within Sihanoukville's evolving financial landscape?

The IFC Building is one of our six core pillars. It represents the financial backbone of our master plan and built to help shift Sihanoukville from a traditional port into a regional financial gateway.

From the outset, we've been deliberate in our approach: we've built Sihanoukville's first international-grade infrastructure tailored for a business environment to cater to the future of Cambodia's economic ambition. Nine floors of well-designed workspace, tailored for investment advisory, corporate HQs, fintech firms, and professional services, all under one roof.

Its core strength lies in easy of entry and connection — a launchpad where international firms establish roots, Cambodian professionals scale, and new opportunities emerge through innovation and commerce.

Surrounding the IFC Building is a fast-developing ecosystem: digital infrastructure, smart mobility, hospitality, and a lifestyle experience built for today's investors and tomorrow's entrepreneurs.

But what sets the IFC Building apart isn't just what happens inside the building. It's what surrounds it. You won't find traffic jams or chaos here. Just a secure, modern environment where your city career can be interlinked with a coastal lifestyle within just a few minutes walk from the office. Set minutes from the beach, with unobstructed views of the ocean, islands and mountains, open space, and — a combination that downtown Sihanoukville can't match. This is what the future of work life balance should feel like: crafted, not retrofit.

### Boosting Regional Tourism

**CLR: As Cambodia's tourism sector gains renewed momentum, how are you and Bay of Lights helping to redefine Sihanoukville's appeal on the global stage?**

**With landmark events like SKYFEST attracting tens of thousands and strategic partnerships such as The Ascott and Radisson, elevating hospitality standards, how can the hospitality community, government, and investors collaborate to unlock the region's full potential—transforming it into a world-class coastal smart city that's both authentic and future-ready?**

We're at an exciting point — not just for Bay of Lights, but for Sihanoukville and Cambodia as a whole. Sihanoukville's coastline does offer pristine beaches and islands rivaling Phuket and the Maldives yet retains authentic charm –



However, it is yet to be market ready. Our mission is to transform this potential into a sustainable, inclusive, and premium destination built to last. Our role at Bay of Lights is to elevate that potential into something long-lasting - a new coastal smart city with purpose. That means integrated hospitality excellence and infrastructure that makes it convenient and enjoyable to stay, invest, and return.

We're crafting an experience that resonates on the global stage. Landmark events like SKYFEST have already attracted over 22,000 participants over 2 days, signaling Sihanoukville is ready to showcase events from the world-class entertainment stage.

But no one builds a destination alone, this has always been and continues to be - a collective effort. As an early member of Bay of Lights, we work closely with government, regional partners, and investors from Southeast Asia to the UAE, ensuring our vision aligns with Sihanoukville's broader tourism revival — focused on quality, connection, and opportunity for Cambodians.

For those of us involved, this is an extraordinary moment. We have a fantastic opportunity, but also a huge responsibility at the same time, and that's something that the team and I are always conscious of as we take each step forward.

### The Future of Hospitality in Cambodia

**CLR: As a key player in hospitality-led development, how do you see Cambodia's F&B and tourism sectors evolving—especially along the coast—and what role will iconic developments like Bay of Lights play as a catalyst for accelerating this transformation?**

I've spent most of my career shaping hospitality experiences across the UK, Spain, and SEA's top tourism destinations — and I can tell you with full confidence: Cambodia's coast has the potential to stand among the best. What draws people in — and keeps them coming back — is experience. International standards, events and activities, but whilst curating something authentic, with character and depth, rooted in Cambodia's charm and coastal beauty.





This is where developments like Bay of Lights become a catalyst — not just for Sihanoukville, but for the nation. Cambodia and Cambodians alike, are actively searching for new experiences, activities and attractions, they want and need more within the domestic tourism market.... Whilst international travelers, they love the experiences they have in Cambodia, but they want more than just a 2 day stop over tour.... That's where we can add so much value, creating tourism that is more than a stop gap, but a true destination that can keep travelers happy for a week or more.

Bay of Lights is creating something far more ambitious than just a one of resort or a single entertainment facility. We aim to create something livable with career value and lifestyle all in one...

Adding to that vision is our Bay 19 Golf Course — An amazing first, with a Greg Norman-designed 19-hole championship venue. Complete with USGA standards, it will feature a state-of-the-art driving range, an exclusive clubhouse, and stylish waterfront villas that redefine luxury and lifestyle in Sihanoukville. Opening later next year, the driving range promises an unparalleled experience with sophisticated design, exceptional amenities, and seamless integration into the natural surroundings.

But beyond that, we're creating infrastructure for long-term impact.

With the right vision, strategic partners and leadership, I believe Sihanoukville will rise as one of Southeast Asia's premier coastal destinations — and I'm proud to play a role in this defining chapter for Cambodian hospitality.

**CLR**





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# JEREMIE CLEMENT

GENERAL MANAGER - TRIBE PHNOM PENH POST OFFICE SQUARE



*TRIBE Phnom Penh is redefining the hotel experience in Cambodia's capital—bringing a fresh, design-forward, and purpose-driven approach to lifestyle hospitality. At the helm is Jeremie Clément, a seasoned hotelier leading the brand's mission to deliver "functional luxury" tailored to modern travelers.*

*In this interview, Jeremie shares how TRIBE's journey from its origins in Australia to its bold arrival in Phnom Penh reflects the changing face of global travel.*

## **From Perth to Phnom Penh: TRIBE's Global Journey**

**CLR: TRIBE began in Australia with a mission to rethink the hotel experience—prioritizing smart design and essentials over excess. Can you share how the brand's journey from Perth to Phnom Penh unfolded, and what makes the Phnom Penh property a unique expression of the TRIBE philosophy?**

TRIBE, part of Accor now, started in Australia in 2017 with a clear mission: to redefine the hotel experience by stripping away the unnecessary and focusing on what really matters. It is a brand rooted in functional design, comfort, and creativity, a lifestyle approach that speaks directly to modern travelers. When TRIBE expanded into Southeast Asia, Phnom Penh was a natural choice. The city is at a turning point: it is developing fast, but it still holds a strong cultural identity. That balance is exactly what TRIBE is about.

At TRIBE Phnom Penh Post Office Square, we've brought that original Australian DNA into a completely new context. We are located in the heart of the capital, near embassies, the riverside, and the historical Post Office, which gives us access to both business and leisure travelers. But beyond location, what truly makes this property unique is how we've embedded the TRIBE philosophy into every detail, from our creative social spaces to our bold Food&Beverage offerings and thoughtful room layouts.

In a market that's often polarized between ultra-luxury and budget, TRIBE presents a new category: affordable lifestyle with smart design and quality essentials. Guests appreciate that we don't over-promise, we deliver exactly what's needed, beautifully executed. Whether it's our rooftop pool and bar, our multiple dining concepts, or our new MICE facility, "The Studio," we've created a hotel that feels fresh, fun, and functional, without losing sight of comfort.



### Leadership in a Lifestyle Brand

**CLR: As General Manager of a hotel that's part of a fast-growing, design-forward brand, how would you describe your leadership approach? What does it take to lead a team and deliver guest experiences in such a dynamic hospitality environment?**

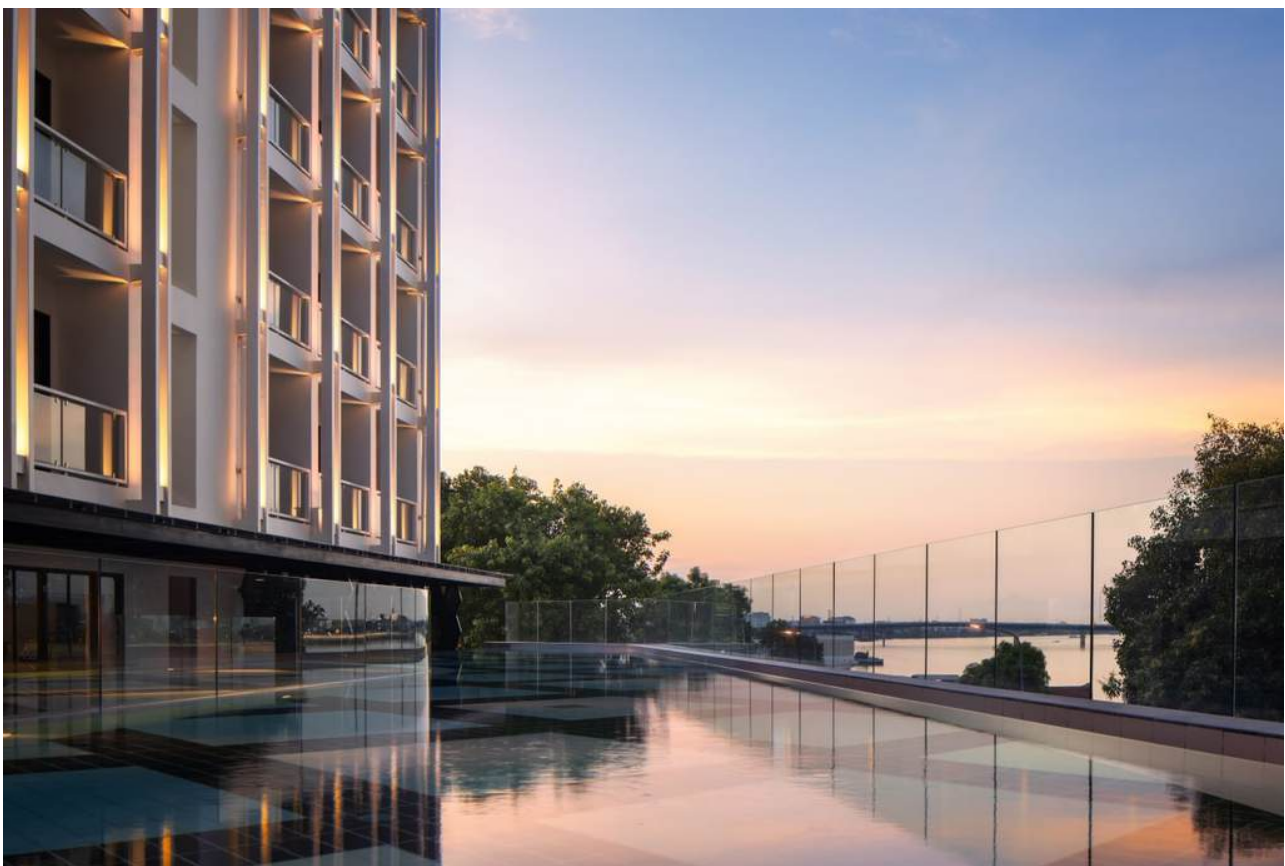
Leading a lifestyle brand like TRIBE requires a different mindset than a traditional hotel. It is not just about maintaining standards, it is about building a culture that reflects the brand's personality.

At TRIBE Phnom Penh, my leadership style is grounded in empowerment and adaptability. I believe in surrounding myself with creative thinkers who understand the brand values and can bring them to life authentically.

We operate in a fast-moving environment. Lifestyle travelers don't just want service, they want connection. That is why I focus on developing a team that is not only trained in service delivery, but also encouraged to be themselves and bring their own energy to the guest experience.

This is especially important in Cambodia, where hospitality is naturally warm and welcoming. I want my team to feel proud of where they work and excited about what we offer.

The pace of change in the hospitality industry is accelerating, guest expectations shift quickly, especially in emerging markets like Phnom Penh. Leading in this context means staying close to the ground, listening to feedback, and being agile in our response.



Whether it's updating our Food&Beverage concepts, improving digital touchpoints, or adjusting our MICE packages, I believe leadership in lifestyle hospitality is about constant evolution, while keeping the team engaged and aligned on the bigger picture.

That said, TRIBE may be a lifestyle brand, but I am a General Manager who is still deeply focused on guest satisfaction and service. To me, happy guests and returning guests are the most important indicators of success.

I always aim for top rankings across all platforms, TripAdvisor, Google, OTA channels, and the Accor system. Achieving that requires consistency, discipline, and hard work from the entire team, and it is also incredibly rewarding for all of us.



### Catering to the Next-Gen Traveller

**CLR: TRIBE's model focuses on functional luxury—everything guests need and nothing they don't. How do you see traveler expectations changing in Cambodia, and how is TRIBE positioned to meet the needs of this new generation?**

Today's travelers, especially the next generation, are no longer content with just a bed and breakfast. They seek a space that reflects their lifestyle: flexible, inspiring, connected, and thoughtful. At TRIBE, we focus on what we call “functional luxury”, offering everything guests need, and nothing they don't. That's the essence of our concept, and it is what truly sets us apart.

In Cambodia, traveler expectations are evolving rapidly. We are seeing a growing number of regional business travelers, digital nomads, and short-stay urban explorers. These guests aren't looking for excess, they want value, purposeful design, and convenience. They expect fast and stable Wi-Fi, great coffee in the morning, inspiring food throughout the day, and spaces where they can work, connect, or simply unwind. TRIBE Phnom Penh is built exactly with this in mind.

We are more than just a hotel; we are a real lifestyle experience. Guests who check out at noon but have a flight late in the evening will never feel out of place or like they're just passing time. They can stay and enjoy our Tribe café, grab a fresh snack, or set up in our co-working space. They will be greeted by name because our team remembers faces, and more importantly, we remember people. That sense of welcome, of recognition, is part of the lifestyle we offer.

What makes us especially unique in the Cambodian market is the diversity and quality of our in-house offerings. With six distinct restaurants including a rooftop bar, all-day dining, and casual social spaces, we create an environment that is vibrant and inclusive. This isn't something commonly found in hotels here, and we are proud to be among the first to offer it in this way.

The "next-gen" traveler wants spaces that blend leisure and productivity, and TRIBE does that effortlessly. But honestly, it is not just for the next generation.

We see senior travelers, creative professionals, corporate guests, and first-time visitors all enjoying what we provide. Whether you're in your twenties or sixties, everyone is welcome at TRIBE. The lifestyle we offer isn't defined by age; it's defined by attitude.

We have noticed that travelers in Cambodia are becoming more discerning. They are moving beyond the "cheap and cheerful" mindset and are willing to invest in experiences that feel curated, warm, and meaningful.

At TRIBE, we meet that expectation with a design-led environment, sincere hospitality, and flexible services that allow every guest to make the most of their time, whether they are here for 12 hours or 12 days.

In short, TRIBE Phnom Penh is not just a hotel stay, it is a full lifestyle offering where guests feel at ease, inspired, and connected. And that's exactly what the modern traveler is looking for.

### Global Standards, Local Connections

**CLR: How do you ensure that TRIBE Phnom Penh maintains international standards while still offering authentic Cambodian hospitality? What role does the local context play in shaping the guest experience, design, or food and beverage offerings?**

One of the key challenges in managing an international hotel is maintaining brand consistency while embracing local authenticity. At TRIBE Phnom Penh, we work hard to strike that balance. We adhere to global standards in service, hygiene, design, and technology because that's what our guests expect. But we also infuse local elements throughout the property, in ways that feel natural and relevant.





Sustainability is also a core part of our identity. TRIBE Phnom Penh was proud to be the very first hotel in Cambodia to receive the Green Key certification.

This recognition reflects our commitment to operating responsibly, reducing our environmental impact, and supporting the local community. For us, it's not just a trend, it's a long-term mindset.

We are also proud to offer six outlets within the hotel, catering to all kinds of tastes, from a fun Cambodian concept to Italian, Chinese, a steakhouse, and even a creative Mekong-inspired rooftop venue.



Just steps from our doors, we also have a true French retro bistro and a lively Italian restaurant, adding even more variety for our guests. When it comes to local connections and culinary diversity, TRIBE Phnom Penh is ideally positioned, offering an experience that is both global and deeply rooted in the local scene.

The human touch is where Cambodian hospitality really shines. It is something you can't teach, you feel it. We encourage our team to be themselves and to interact with guests genuinely. That's what turns a stay into a memory. We are not trying to replicate Perth or Paris, we are building something that speaks to Phnom Penh while still being unmistakably TRIBE.

### Phnom Penh's Growing Tourism Scene

**CLR:** With Cambodia investing heavily in tourism and infrastructure, what excites you most about the growth of Phnom Penh as a regional destination? How do you see TRIBE contributing to that evolution over the next few years?

Phnom Penh is at an exciting crossroads. The city is investing heavily in tourism infrastructure, from roads and riverside upgrades to the long-awaited new airport.

These developments are critical if Phnom Penh wants to compete with cities like Bangkok or Ho Chi Minh City. While those cities target tens of millions of tourists annually, Phnom Penh is aiming for 7 million by 2025, a big goal, but one that reflects growing ambition.

What excites me most is the opportunity to shape the identity of Phnom Penh as a fresh, modern destination. Unlike other capitals that feel overcrowded or overdeveloped, Phnom Penh still offers room to breathe. There's authenticity here, real local experiences, creative entrepreneurs, cultural depth and that is attractive to today's traveler.

Tribe is very much a part of that movement. We are more than a hotel, we are a hub for ideas, events, business, and creativity. We recently opened "The Studio," a flexible ballroom space for over 200 guests, to meet the growing demand for MICE and social events. We're also seeing strong traction in Food&Beverage from both residents and expats, who see Tribe as a lifestyle destination in its own right.

Looking ahead, there are real opportunities in niche markets too. One area I'm particularly optimistic about is golf tourism. With the launch of Chhun On Golf Resort and other high-quality courses nearby, Phnom Penh is quietly becoming a player in this segment. That is a great fit for hotels like ours, which cater to travelers who mix business with leisure.

Ultimately, I believe Phnom Penh has the potential to be one of Southeast Asia's most exciting capitals over the next decade. As long as we keep improving flight connectivity, investing in quality experiences, and supporting creative development, the city will continue to rise. At TRIBE, we're committed to being part of that journey offering a new standard of hospitality that reflects the best of Cambodia's past, present, and future. **CLR**



# JEF MOONS

FOUNDER / CEO KNAI BANG CHATT BY KEP WEST



*With a leadership philosophy rooted in empowerment, sustainability, and strategic vision, Jef is helping redefine what high-end, purpose-driven hospitality looks like in Cambodia. Drawing from years of experience in the sector, his approach goes beyond managing a resort — it's about crafting a destination that honors the local environment, empowers communities, and elevates Cambodia's position on the global tourism map. From regenerative travel initiatives to culinary innovation and long-term planning aligned with Kep's master development vision, this is a story of leadership built on values, impact, and ambition for a better tourism future.*

## Leading with Purpose in Hospitality

**CLR: As a founder and long-time operator in Cambodia's hospitality sector, how would you describe your leadership style? What does it mean to you to be a leader in shaping both a resort experience and the broader direction of high-end tourism in Kep?**

My leadership style combines transformational and strategic elements, with a strong focus on planning, empowerment, and team engagement. I strive to inspire my team to achieve their highest potential, fostering an environment where everyone can excel and contribute to meaningful change.

My approach emphasizes long-term impact by cultivating a culture of participation and shared ownership. I view leadership as more than operational management—it involves shaping distinctive and authentic resort experiences that embody local culture and values. By upholding high standards for service, ethics, and innovation, I aim to set a benchmark for others to follow.

## Sustainability Beyond the Surface

**CLR: Sustainability is becoming a defining pillar of modern hospitality. How do you implement meaningful environmental and social responsibility at your resort, and what trends are you seeing that go beyond surface-level commitments?**

Knai Bang Chatt by Kep West's approach to environmental and social responsibility is embedded in every aspect of our operations, going far beyond surface-level commitments.

As a Green Growth 2050 Platinum certified resort—one of only a handful worldwide—we have made sustainability a core part of our ethos and guest experience.



Cambodia has amazing history and we can become leaders in eco-friendly authentic travel, also thanks to places like Knai Bang Chatt by Kep West. But to really compete with countries like Thailand and Vietnam we need to improve our connectivity, tighten the gap in HR skills and offer product diversification.

We also do not have to fully rely on tourists coming to see the temples only. We should offer more things for visitors to do and see all over the country. I see the government making strides toward attracting high-value niche markets, including business travelers, retirees, and eco-conscious tourists.

Looking ahead, I am encouraged by Cambodia's efforts to improve connectivity by land and sea, and I expect that the new Phnom Penh airport will bring strong growth opportunities to our coastal regions.

Travelers today want experiences that help the environment and support local communities. In Cambodia, more people are looking for things like active lifestyle retreats, activities and cultural explorations that offers a deeper connection to location.

With these kinds of experiences and to let people travel beyond the temples I believe Cambodia is on track to become a leader in responsible and meaningful tourism for the future.

### **Crafting Culinary Identity**

**CLR: Food and beverage are clearly central to your resort's identity. How do you develop a culinary strategy that reflects local heritage while appealing to an international clientele? What role does dining play in shaping the guest journey?**



Food and beverage are central to our resort's identity, serving as a vital part of the guest experience and a reflection of our core values. Knai Bang Chatt along with Kep West has evolved into a renowned culinary destination. Many visitors now travel from Phnom Penh specifically to savor our cuisine.

This success stems from the culinary strategy led by Mr. Peter Brongers, a passionate food lover, food critic, and gastronomy consultant, who, together with our chefs and F&B team, continuously refines and enhances our dining offerings.

We feature four distinct dining venues, each offering a unique ambiance and flavor profile, showcasing both Asian and Western culinary traditions.



Prioritizing premium, local, and organic ingredients, we support local farmers while ensuring our dishes remain fresh, authentic, and sustainable.

#### Kep's Next Chapter

CLR: With infrastructure improvements and renewed interest in coastal investment, Kep appears to be entering a new phase. How do you envision Kep evolving over the next 5–10 years, and what role do you see your resort playing in that development?

I believe Kep is uniquely positioned for sustainable, high-end tourism growth. With no heavy industry, protected national parks and coastline, and strong infrastructure—including a new airport that will bring travelers within 1.5 hours—

Kep has all the ingredients to thrive as a nature-based high end travel destination.

The new Kep Tourism Master Plan 2023-2035 sets a clear vision: transforming Kep into a premium eco-tourism and luxury resort hub, guided by sustainability, quality, and smart tourism principles.

In the next five to ten years, I envision Kep becoming a premier eco-tourism destination, offering a diverse range of new accommodations such as resorts, apartment complexes, and villas, alongside a variety of eco-friendly activities and attractions.

The area will reclaim its reputation as Kep sur Mer, or the Saint-Tropez of Southeast Asia. Our resort will play a pivotal role in this transformation by expanding its Kep offerings, prioritizing sustainable practices, supporting local communities, and highlighting Kep's unique natural beauty and cultural heritage. **CLR**

*For those seeking a refined coastal retreat that blends understated luxury with environmental responsibility, Knai Bang Chatt explore exclusive packages, wellness retreats, and bespoke experiences by the sea, visit [www.knaibangchatt.com](http://www.knaibangchatt.com) and book your journey to Kep's most iconic eco-luxury destination.*





# JUAN MERCADANTE

GENERAL MANAGER - HYATT REGENCY PHNOM PENH



*As Cambodia's capital city rises in prominence on the regional travel and investment map, Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh stands at the forefront of this momentum. Juan discusses his leadership journey as the brand's first GM in the country, and how Hyatt is blending global hospitality standards with Cambodia's local identity.*

*Juan offers insight into how the hotel is navigating evolving guest expectations—from digital convenience to curated dining experiences—and why sustainability and community development are integral to its long-term strategy.*

## Leadership In A Transforming Industry

**CLR: As the first Hyatt General Manager in Cambodia, how do you define your leadership role—not just within your hotel, but in the broader hospitality landscape? How does Hyatt as a brand stay agile in responding to changing consumer expectations, from digital convenience to elevated experiences?**

As the first Hyatt General Manager in Cambodia, I see myself as both a brand ambassador and a bridge between Hyatt's global standards and Cambodia's unique local identity. My role goes far beyond the day-to-day operations of Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh—it's about inspiring excellence, nurturing local talent, and contributing to the evolution of hospitality in a market that's full of potential. Our presence here is a reflection of Hyatt's belief in emerging destinations like Cambodia—not just as places to expand, but as communities to grow with, invest in, and learn from.

Leadership today requires agility, empathy, and an ability to anticipate change. We're seeing a clear shift in guest expectations—people want seamless digital convenience, but they also seek meaningful, personalized experiences.

At Hyatt, we balance both by leveraging technology to streamline operations and empower guests, while investing in our people to deliver authentic, elevated service that reflects both global standards and local culture.

Our approach is grounded in the belief that true hospitality is personal. That's why we continuously innovate—from digital check-ins and curated experiences to our World of Hyatt loyalty program, which is designed around flexibility and personalization. Being agile means listening closely to our guests, empowering our colleagues, and staying connected to the evolving pulse of the industry.

In Cambodia, where tourism and hospitality are rapidly transforming, it's an exciting time to lead. I'm proud to be part of a movement that's not just about building beautiful hotels, but about creating inspiring destinations that resonate with both travelers and locals.

### Resilience & Reinvention

**CLR: The hospitality sector continues to face global headwinds—from post-pandemic recovery to shifting travel patterns. What are the biggest challenges you've faced as a leader, and what trends or strategies have you embraced to adapt, stay competitive, and keep delivering value to both guests and staff?**

The past few years have tested every aspect of hospitality leadership. Navigating the post-pandemic recovery has been both one of the biggest challenges and most meaningful learning experiences of my career.

For us in Cambodia, it wasn't just about reopening doors—it was about rebuilding confidence in travel, re-energizing our team, and finding new ways to deliver value in a world that had fundamentally changed.

One of the toughest challenges was managing uncertainty—around travel restrictions, guest behavior, and even colleague wellbeing. In those moments, the most important thing was to lead with empathy. Our people were going through so much, so we focused on creating stability, listening closely, and making sure they felt supported. That human-centered approach helped us stay resilient and, ultimately, stronger as a team.

From a strategic standpoint, we've had to be agile. Travelers today are looking for more than a stay—they want connection, safety, convenience, and meaning.



We've adapted by reimagining guest experiences to be more flexible and personalized, while also investing in digital tools that enhance convenience without losing the warmth of human interaction.

On the business side, staying competitive means thinking differently—about partnerships, about sustainability, about how we engage both international guests and the local community. We've seen a rise in “purposeful travel,” so we've aligned our experiences to reflect that—whether it's through curated cultural programming or supporting local suppliers.



Ultimately, resilience isn't just about surviving tough times. It's about how we use those moments to rethink, reinvent, and grow. That's been our approach at Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh—and it's something I try to carry forward every day, both as a leader and as part of this incredible team.

### **Designing Culinary Experiences That Connect**

**CLR: F&B is a standout feature at Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh, with everything from rooftop dining to immersive bar concepts. What's your philosophy in creating memorable dining experiences, and how do you balance innovation with consistency across such a diverse offering?**

Food and beverage is one of the most powerful ways to create connection—not just between the guest and the property, but between cultures, stories, and emotions. At Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh, we approach F&B not just as a service, but as an experience that should surprise, delight, and resonate long after the meal is over.

My philosophy is simple: every venue should tell a story. Whether it's the vibrant rooftop energy of FiveFive Rooftop or our Market Café, All day dining, each outlet is designed with intention—blending distinctive design, local influences, and a sense of discovery. We want guests to feel something memorable the moment they walk in, whether they're visiting for a special occasion or just winding down after a day of exploring Phnom Penh. Balancing innovation with consistency starts with the team. We work closely with our chefs, mixologists, and service staff to ensure we're constantly evolving our offerings, but never at the expense of quality or identity.



That means seasonal menus that reflect global trends while celebrating Cambodian ingredients, and service standards that are personal, attentive, and seamless across every touchpoint.

We also listen—a lot. Guest feedback, colleague input, even what’s happening in the local dining scene—it all informs how we grow. Innovation doesn’t always mean being radical; sometimes, it’s about refining the details or finding new ways to elevate something familiar. Ultimately, our goal is to make every dining moment feel special, whether it’s a crafted cocktail at sunset or a bowl of noodles that reminds someone of home. That emotional connection is what makes an F&B experience truly stand out—and it’s something we strive for every day.

#### Sustainability as a Standard

CLR: Sustainability is more than a trend—it’s a necessity. How has Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh incorporated environmental and social responsibility into daily operations, and how do these efforts align with rising guest awareness around ethical and eco-conscious travel?

At Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh, sustainability isn’t treated as a standalone program—it’s woven into how we operate, how we engage with our community, and how we plan for the future. As hoteliers, we have a responsibility not just to our guests, but to the environment and society we’re part of. And in a destination like Cambodia, where cultural heritage and natural beauty are so intertwined, that responsibility feels even more personal.

On the environmental side, we’ve implemented a range of practices to reduce our footprint—from energy-efficient systems and water conservation to eliminating single-use plastics wherever possible. Our in-room amenities are eco-friendly, and we’ve introduced waste separation and recycling programs to minimize landfill contributions. These aren’t just checkboxes—they’re daily habits we embed across departments.

We also focus heavily on sourcing. Our culinary teams work closely with local farmers and suppliers to support sustainable agriculture and reduce transportation emissions.



Not only does this help the environment, but it also ensures our menus are fresh, seasonal, and rooted in local identity.

Social responsibility is equally important. We actively invest in developing local talent, providing training, mentorship, and career pathways for Cambodians across all levels of the hotel. We've also partnered with NGOs and community initiatives focused on education and inclusion—because we believe true sustainability includes uplifting people and communities.

What's encouraging is that today's guests are more informed and engaged than ever. Many travelers now make decisions based on a hotel's values. So when they see our efforts—from eco-conscious amenities to community impact—they know they're staying somewhere that aligns with their principles.



Finally, sustainability isn't a project with an end date. It's a mindset, a commitment to doing the right thing, day in and day out. And that's the standard we hold ourselves to at Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh.

### **Phnom Penh's Growing Global Footprint**

**CLR: With Cambodia attracting more attention as a tourism and business destination, where do you see Phnom Penh's hospitality sector heading? What role will properties like Hyatt Regency play in supporting its emergence on the regional and global travel map?**

Phnom Penh is on the cusp of a remarkable transformation. With the upcoming opening of the Techo International Airport in July 2025, poised to become one of the world's largest airports, the city is set to enhance its connectivity and appeal to international travelers.

This development, coupled with a surge in luxury hotel investments and a burgeoning MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector, underscores Phnom Penh's emergence as a vibrant hub for both business and leisure tourism.

At Hyatt Regency Phnom Penh, we are deeply committed to being a part of this exciting journey. Our role extends beyond providing exceptional hospitality; we aim to be a catalyst for positive change in the city's tourism landscape. By offering world-class facilities, personalized services, and immersive cultural experiences, we strive to showcase the rich heritage and dynamic future of Cambodia to the world. **CLR**





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# PIERRE TAMI

FOUNDER- SHIFT360 / ACADEMY OF CULINARY ARTS CAMBODIA



*With more than three decades dedicated to economic development, vocational training, and social impact, Pierre Tami—founder of SHIFT360 and the Academy of Culinary Arts Cambodia (ACAC)—has been a driving force in shaping Cambodia’s hospitality landscape.*

*From establishing the country’s first internationally certified culinary academy to creating pathways for marginalized youth, his work is rooted in the belief that dignity, opportunity, and excellence should be accessible to all.*

*In this interview, Pierre reflects on the evolution of ACAC, the role of hospitality in fostering inclusion, and Cambodia’s growing potential as a regional training hub.*

*With initiatives like the Naomi Tami Memorial Scholarship Fund and a strong focus on regional collaboration, his mission continues: to unlock potential, elevate standards, and ensure no young person is left behind.*

## Training the Next Generation

**CLR:** You’ve played a pivotal role in shaping Cambodia’s hospitality education landscape through the Academy of Culinary Arts Cambodia. What was your original vision for ACAC, and how has it evolved to meet the demands of today’s industry?

When we established the Academy of Culinary Arts Cambodia, the vision was clear: to build a world-class institution that would equip young Cambodians with the skills, mindset, and professionalism needed to succeed in the global hospitality industry. We wanted to shift perceptions — to show that hospitality is not just a job, but a dignified and aspirational career.

In fact, I had to fight to keep the word "academy" instead of "school," and we speak intentionally about "chefs," not "cooks." These distinctions matter — they set the tone for excellence and respect. The gap in international-standard hospitality training was well-documented by various development agencies. ACAC was created to address that chronic shortfall.

Since then, the Academy has evolved to keep pace with industry changes. We’ve integrated digital tools, sustainability practices, and global certification standards — while always anchoring our approach in excellence and character formation.

What inspires me most is seeing our students become ambassadors of Cambodian talent, both here and abroad.

Many have been recognized internationally for their skills and professionalism. Their success is living proof that quality education transforms not just individual lives, but entire industries.

### **Empowerment Through Hospitality**

**CLR: Through SHIFT360 and your wider work, you've emphasized dignity and opportunity for vulnerable groups. How do you see the hospitality sector as a tool for long-term social and economic inclusion in Cambodia?**

Hospitality is one of the most inclusive industries — especially for young people with limited formal education.

It doesn't ask where you come from; it asks what you're willing to learn and how committed you are to grow. That's incredibly empowering. At SHIFT360, our focus has always been on building pathways that link vulnerable and marginalized communities with real, sustainable opportunities. Hospitality offers more than employment — it offers dignity. It teaches confidence, communication, and pride in one's work. When someone puts on a uniform, serves with purpose, and feels valued, it redefines their future.

We're now preparing to launch a Housekeeping and Butler Academy — with a strong emphasis on professionalism and service excellence. Encouragingly, we are seeing growing participation from women, including in leadership roles. For example, one of our board members is an Emirati woman who became the first local female General Manager of a five-star hotel in Dubai.



Her passion for skill development in this sector is inspiring, and her involvement reinforces our belief that excellence should be accessible to all — regardless of gender or background.

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### **Regional Collaboration & Talent Mobility**

**CLR: The Mekong Hospitality Alliance brings together top schools across the region. What opportunities do you see for Cambodia to emerge as a regional hub for hospitality training and talent export?**

The Mekong region holds enormous untapped potential — culturally, economically, and especially in its youth. The Mekong Hospitality Alliance brings together leading institutions from Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, with the shared goal of raising training standards and facilitating talent mobility across borders.

Cambodia has a real opportunity to position itself as a regional hub — not only by training local talent to international standards, but by hosting cross-border exchanges, internships, and specialized academies. ACAC graduates are already working in countries like Japan and the UAE, where their skills are in high demand. Imagine the impact if we scale this approach.

But it requires more than strong curriculum — it needs trusted certification, regional cooperation, and aligned standards. We're at a critical juncture where Cambodia has the infrastructure, momentum, and international goodwill to lead in this space. We just need to seize it.



### A Legacy of Opportunity

**CLR: With the Naomi Tami Memorial Scholarship Fund now supporting women and youth in hospitality, what do you hope this legacy initiative will achieve in the next 5–10 years?**

The Naomi Scholarship Fund is deeply personal. It honors the life of our daughter — her compassion, her strength, and her unwavering belief in giving others a chance. Naomi grew up in Cambodia and shared our family's commitment to service, especially toward youth and women.

She graduated from a Swiss hospitality school and later moved to the U.S. to further her development, always intending to return to Cambodia and contribute. That dream now lives on — not just in our hearts, but in the lives of the many young Cambodians inspired by her legacy.

For many of these students, financial hardship would have made such a journey impossible. The scholarship removes that barrier.

Today, Naomi Scholars are working in respected positions, and some have even launched their own businesses. As Naomi's favorite song says, they truly “shine like diamonds in the sky.”

In the next 5 to 10 years, we want this fund to grow into more than just financial support. We hope it becomes a symbol — a movement — that reaches beyond Cambodia. We want it to inspire a regional commitment to never leave any young person behind.

Too often, poor youth are offered second-rate alternatives. But they deserve quality, they deserve excellence, and they deserve a future filled with dignity and opportunity.

A solid education, a well-paying job, social justice in society, and dignity for the individual — these are not privileges. These are rights. And they are rights that our family has worked toward for more than 35 years. Through this fund — and through Naomi's enduring memory — we will continue to fight for a future where no one is forgotten, and everyone is lifted up. **CLR**



# SARAH MOYA

GENERAL MANAGER - COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT PHNOM PENH



*With over 30 years in the hospitality industry, Sarah Moya brings extensive international experience to her role as General Manager of Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh.*

*From early leadership roles across Asia to helping shape Marriott's presence in Cambodia, her approach blends strategic thinking with a strong focus on team development and service quality.*

*In this interview, Sarah reflects on her leadership journey, the evolving hospitality landscape in Phnom Penh, and how Courtyard is positioned to meet the needs of both business and leisure travelers in a growing tourism market.*

## **A Journey Through Leadership and Legacy**

**CLR: With nearly three decades in the hospitality industry across multiple countries, how has your leadership style evolved?**

**What core values have guided you through the various stages of your international career, and how are you applying them now at Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh?**

I have indeed passed the three-decade mark in my career as a hospitality professional. Hospitality is very much a people-centric industry. You look after people, various stakeholders, day in day out. Time and people are the best teachers. Both molds you and sharpens you.

Having been in different locations to represent and/or manage anything from a business hotel, a luxury resort, a wellness retreat or a multi-property setting, has made me more attuned to the local cultural nuances, to the diverse personalities of guests and to varying hotel brands' unique ethos and standards.

Time and experience had honed my business acumen and had amplified my adaptability.

I have always chosen to work for companies which put people first, which pursues excellence in what they do, which put an emphasis on integrity in their business practice, which sees an opportunity in over-changing economic and cultural landscape, and which teaches its associates to care for the community and the world outside its walls.

I strongly believe in these and they are at the core of who I am. I am fortunate to be with Marriott, as its essential beliefs perfectly match mine.

**Breaking Barriers in Hospitality**

**CLR: You were one of the first female General Managers in Cambodia. Looking back, what were some of the key challenges and breakthroughs in your journey?**

**What does it mean to you to now be mentoring and leading a team that includes multiple accomplished women?**

Back in 2009 on my first General Manager assignment, I was the only female General Manager in Cambodia. Delighted to report that I have never encountered gender bias. From my experience, your credentials matter most.

It was about your accumulated set of skills aligning with the company's goals.

I mentor every team member I have had the same way. My role is to prepare them for their journey, enhance their strengths and help ease them past areas they need to improve on.

**Empowering Teams, Elevating Brands**

**CLR: Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh has welcomed several women into senior leadership roles. How do you foster a culture of empowerment, and how does diversity in leadership impact the performance and reputation of the property?**

It goes beyond Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh. Marriott International, the world's largest hotel company has several women in significant leadership goals.





For instance, Marriott International's President for its China region is a woman. Diversity and inclusivity are entrenched in the Marriott culture. We train every associate for them to imbibe this mentality.

My job is then to practice what we preach and to ensure integration of ethos to daily operations. We learn from each other. Therefore, we listen to each other without prejudice.

This fosters bond, a strong sense of ownership from each associate of the goals that we have year on year.

The end-result is, as a team, we have had been good at achieving our KPIs.



By simply living out what we believe in as an organization, we are able to define for the community who we are and what we believe in.

#### Shaping the Guest Experience in Phnom Penh

CLR: How do you define the Courtyard guest experience in today's Phnom Penh market? What distinguishes your hotel in terms of service, innovation, or positioning as both a business and leisure destination?

Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh opened its doors in January 2019.

It is well regarded for being a Marriott branded hotel, its central location, its product offer within what can be referred to colloquially as 'affordable luxury' and above all, its efficient, personalized service.

We endeavor every day to live up to our brand standards.

Remembering a guest's name, his preferences is an intrinsic part of our operations. When guests feel like they have discovered a 'home away from home', you have earned yourself an ambassador, a resident.

#### Cambodia's Hospitality Future

With Cambodia increasingly investing in tourism infrastructure and international connectivity, where do you see Phnom Penh—and Courtyard by Marriott—fitting into the region's competitive hospitality landscape over the next five years?

Cambodia is very much still a gem to be discovered. Beyond the glorious temples of Angkor, Phnom Penh has a character and unique vibe that is a joy to explore.

The beaches, the hidden waterfalls, the nature trails are fascinating tourism facets. As a destination, Cambodia has many superlative dimensions that are ingredients for a beautiful narrative.

The new airport with its capacity to cater to more tourists, more aircrafts can only pave way for a new age of travel to Cambodia.

It is also very promising that the government and the private sector are working together to promote the manifold character of this country as a destination. All these are signs of bright future for tourism in this country. **CLR**





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# TIM WALLWORK

CHAIR - ASIA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL SPIRITS & WINE ALLIANCE



## ***Cambodia's Emerging Culture of Moderation: Industry's Role in Shaping Responsible Drinking***

***By Tim Wallwork - APISWA (Asia Pacific International Spirits & Wine Alliance) Chair***

Cambodia is entering a new era in its relationship with alcohol. A recent government directive to ban alcohol prize ring-pull giveaways—proactively requested by beverage companies—marks a new model of private-sector responsibility.

Once characterised by rising harmful consumption and minimal regulation, the conversation is now shifting—towards responsibility, moderation, and public-private partnership. Encouragingly, this change is not only being driven by government and public health advocates.

The alcohol industry itself is taking a proactive role in reshaping norms and supporting sensible, evidence-based regulation.

This may come as a surprise to some. But for the Asia Pacific International Spirits & Wine Alliance (APISWA), this approach is not new.

For years, APISWA has worked to promote responsible drinking across Asia, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

These call for the reduction in harmful consumption, but also crucially for partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society.

These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people at the centre, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level. In Cambodia, our commitment to collaboration has never been stronger.

## **A Foundation for Change: Supporting National Guidelines**

A critical milestone in this shift was the release of the 2025 Asian Vision Institute (AVI) report, "[Developing a Policy Landscape in Cambodia to Combat Harmful Alcohol Consumption](#)".

This white paper policy report, supported by APISWA, laid the groundwork for national drinking guidelines based on international best practice and local insights.

The report highlighted several urgent challenges:

- More than one in three current drinkers in Cambodia engage in hazardous or harmful alcohol use.
- Nearly one in four young Cambodian men aged 15–19 engage in heavy episodic drinking.
- There is currently no legal minimum purchase age for alcohol, and public awareness of responsible consumption guidelines is limited.

Primary survey data compiled as part of the research revealed that Cambodian youth report learning about alcohol not from school or health workers, but from peers, social media, and advertising.

These are issues that demand action.

That's why APISWA is working closely with local stakeholders to support three foundational regulatory measures:

- Establishing a Minimum Legal Purchase Age to limit access to minors.
- Promoting the 'standard drink' concept to help consumers make informed choices.
- Restricting irresponsible promotional practices that may encourage over-consumption.

We believe these evidence-based reforms are not only feasible—they're essential. And importantly, they serve both public health and the long-term sustainability of Cambodia's tourism and hospitality sectors.



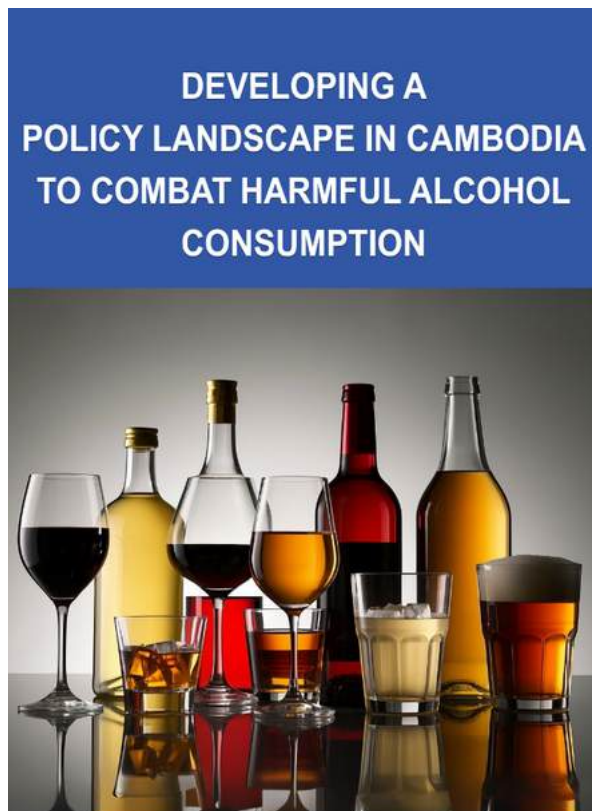
### A Campaign Grounded in Local Culture

In parallel with our policy work, we've focused on public education.

We know that over 90 percent of Cambodians support the government's move to promote responsible consumption, according to a recent study by the Royal Academy of Cambodia.

That's why we launched Responsible Drinking APAC and a regional social media campaign—to start real conversations around moderation and show how alcohol can be enjoyed responsibly as part of a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

The goal is to raise awareness, encourage informed choices, and promote a culture of moderate drinking across local communities.



Localised into Khmer and rooted in humour and realism—not finger-wagging—it helped young Cambodians think more critically about their drinking habits. It also brought clarity to new concepts like a “standard measure drink.”

As a result, we are seeing early signs of change: there's rising visibility of mocktails/ low ABV drinks, increased social acceptability of saying no, and more online discourse around moderation, safe drinking limits and drink driving awareness.

### Hospitality at the Heart of the Solution

It's easy to forget how deeply alcohol is intertwined with tourism, celebration, and hospitality. When enjoyed responsibly, it enhances Cambodia's cultural experiences—from rooftop bars in Phnom Penh to Mekong sunset toasts.



But when consumption turns harmful, the entire ecosystem suffers. Irresponsible drinking hurts families, burdens the healthcare system, and damages the reputation of Cambodia as a safe and enjoyable destination.

That's why APISWA's approach is aligned with the interests of in the hospitality chain: government, producers, bar and restaurant operators, and consumers. We are advocating for the implementation of a Minimum Legal Purchasing Age (MLPA) to protect youth, which includes promoting the MLPA regulation through evidence-based policy recommendations.

Together, we can build a framework that protects the vulnerable, educates the public, and preserves the positive role alcohol plays in Cambodia's economy and culture.

### Industry as a Partner, Not a Passenger

Perhaps the most important message we want to convey is this: we don't resist regulation—we help build it. The old dichotomy of industry versus public health no longer applies.

In Cambodia, we're proving that responsible producers can be credible partners in reducing harmful drinking. Our actions—from advocating for responsible and ethical marketing practices to co-developing public education materials—speak for themselves.

There's still more to do. But momentum is building, and we're proud to be part of it.

Cambodia's culture of moderation isn't just emerging—it's being shaped by collaborative leadership, smart policy, and shared values across society. **CLR**



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Special Membership fees at IBC events	✓	✓	✓
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# ROYAL SALUTE

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