

BILLIONAIRE



THE GIVING ISSUE

A PRAYER FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

COVER STORY • Singaporeans are donating to charities but are we doing enough to give back to society?

TASTE • Donating unopened cans of food might not be the best way to feed the poor.
TRAVEL • 48 Hours in Berlin, Germany

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Heart's Content

Angelina Jolie spent three months living at Phum Baitang, a resort in Cambodia, with now estranged husband Brad Pitt and their six children, while directing her new movie.

by Tara Loader Wilkinson

Directing a war movie in a remote part of Cambodia has plenty of challenges, not least deciding where you, your husband, six children and staff will live during filming.

This was the quandary faced by actress-turned-director Angelina Jolie when she was preparing to go to Battambang to direct her new Netflix film, *First They Killed my Father*, an adaptation of a book she co-wrote with Loung Ung.

But, as luck would have it, while leafing through the pages of a magazine during a flight, Jolie came across a new luxury resort in Siem Reap launched by Belgian hoteliers Zannier Hotels: Phum Baitang. It was about to launch just as Jolie was due to start filming last October. So she made an enquiry.

"We were open for just two weeks last October and we got an email saying she wanted to book 15 rooms until February, which meant closing the whole place to further bookings. So they made us an offer and we accepted," recalls Arnaud Zannier, founder of the boutique hotel group.

The new hotel was perfect for Jolie. Designed like a 'green village', the property is comprised of 45 private villas over eight hectares, resembling Cambodian houses, set among swaying plantations of lemon grass. There are two restaurants proffering typical Khmer cuisine, using fresh organic herbs and vegetables from

the resort's own gardens. There is the Temple Spa with seven spa treatment rooms, and a yoga pavilion, as well as a magnificent 50m infinity pool. The average nightly price is approximately US\$500.

What Jolie really loved, recalls Zannier, was the truthfulness of the place.

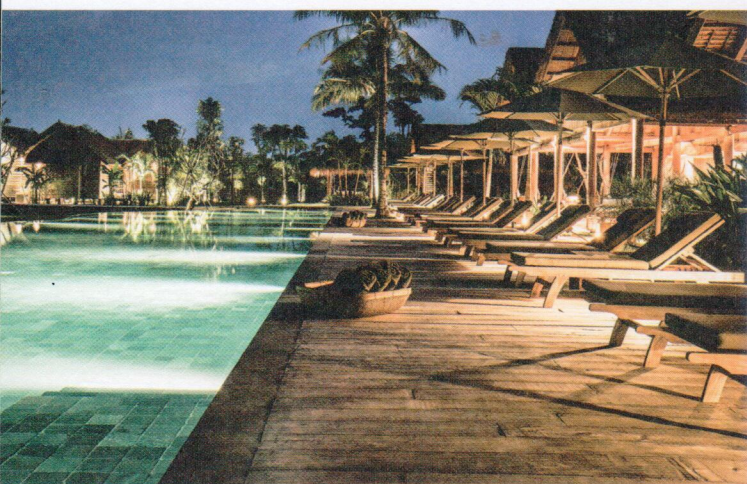
"She said it's the best hotel she has seen in the world," he says. "She loves the fact that the resort is very authentic, very simple, very emotional. We have tried to transport the real Cambodia within the walls of the hotel. We have a paddy field in the middle of the property with farmers working the paddies. It's amazing when you have worked on a concept that is totally new, and you have someone such as Angelina Jolie saying what she said about the product," adds Zannier.

Twenty-five gardeners from the local provincial Siem Reap village work on the Phum Baitang paddies, and are given "a good wage, uniform and meals. They are a part of the extended Phum Baitang family while doing something they are familiar with," says Zannier.

Phum Baitang cultivates 20 paddies of rice of a variety called *sen kro orb*, which is a Cambodian fragrant rice. It has slim kernels and a natural fragrance, similar to jasmine rice. *Sen kro orb* is not widely grown in Cambodia,



CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP:
MAIN BAR;
RECEPTION; POOL







THE VILLAS AT PHUM BAITANG

as farmers tend to grow varieties that are easier to cultivate. Each harvest, the resort produces between 200kg to 400kg, for use in the staff canteen and as a gift to guests in the form of small vacuum-packed 250g bags. "It's a remembrance of their time spent at our 'green village,'" says Zannier.

Zannier adds that Jolie's only hesitation before booking was that her children would be sleeping in separate houses, as they usually stayed together as a family, says Zannier. But as soon as she arrived, that was laid to rest. "She was hesitating because she'd never tried it. I said the rooms are quite close to each other and very secure. In the end they just loved it. For the kids it was their home for four months. Shiloh [Jolie's son] had a tent in the garden out of the front room."

One of Jolie's three sons, Maddox, was adopted from Cambodia, so the war-ravaged country is a place close to her heart.

Zannier says that Jolie was so enamoured with the Zannier Hotels concept — to weave social responsibility into every project — that she put him in touch with a friend who was selling a stunning property in Namibia. "She said, 'it's a great country and the property will fit your philosophy.' So I went to see the estate, and ended up buying it in May." Zannier plans to combine the estate with the one owned next door, close to where Jolie is building a conservation clinic for wildlife on the estate. The property in Namibia is under renovation and due to open in 2018.

"I spent a wonderful three months at Phum Baitang, where the best of Cambodia is shared with those who are looking to enjoy peace, tranquillity and the uniqueness of the country," says Jolie. "Its blend of Cambodian traditions and culture with a modern consciousness was exactly what appealed to us as a family. It was a wonderful base for us during filming in Cambodia, and the warm and friendly staff could not have been more welcoming." ◇