

KHMER TIMES

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More rooms at the inns



Katrine Solhaug (2nd L) together with her husband Simen Julner (R) and children run the Babel Guesthouse in Siem Reap.

On a more egalitarian level, Siem Reap's emerging mini-accommodation-tycoon Katrine Solhaug, together with her stalwart husband Simen Julner, jumped back into the post-COVID fray over two years ago, reopening their Babel Guesthouse in June 2021.



Then, in June this year work commenced on the first building using aircrete, a type of eco-friendly lightweight but very strong and durable concrete, for what is planned to be a mini eco-resort on Nesat beach in Koh Kong province's Srae Ambel district.



“We managed to complete the structure of the building, but it took way more time than expected,” Katrine said, “The plan is to finish it with paint and tiles and install the toilet and shower in late October.”



Meanwhile, on October 1 Katrina also opened the nine-room Babel Boutique Hotel in a building that's always been an accommodation house since its construction in 2008.



Picture after their 5 months of construction work.
Picture by Stevie Mann.

“We wanted this hotel for more than five years, Katrine says, “Back then someone ‘snatched’ it from us the day before we were supposed to sign a contract.

“I was so devastated that I threw up, and stayed in bed for two days in deep depression. But we would never have survived COVID with two hotels, so it was lucky. When we saw the sign outside saying it was out for rent again, we took it because it’s such a beautiful building. The rooms are spacious and a big step up from our guesthouse.”

But she added that expansion wasn't the goal from the beginning.

“We have been running a guesthouse in Siem Reap for 15 years, and we just happened to want another challenge after so long,” she says.

“With our long experience in the tourism industry here, and our network and reputation, we believe it will be possible to us to have two hotels.

“It will be an honour to be able to hire more staff, create more jobs. Not only with our hotel, but also all the eco-friendly products we will have on the ground floor. Like Babel Guesthouse, our boutique hotel will also have an eco-shop with products to reduce use of single use plastic.



She said she will be able to pass on everything that's done at Babel Guesthouse in terms of responsible tourism. The same tuk tuk drivers will be used who know the kind of tours that focus on responsible tourism and both staff and tuk tuk drivers are trained by Friends International in child safe policies.



“And because this hotel has only nine rooms, it will be easy to keep track of the guests and develop personal relationships with them. Just the way we love it.”



Katrine Solhaug (2nd L) together with her husband Simen Julner (R) and children run the Babel Guesthouse in Siem Reap. Photo: Regis Binard