“Whatever has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing.”

Kimsuka Sutta

Hanchey Eco-Retreat
Kampong Cham, Cambodia

sunrise over the Mekong at Hanchey
What is Hanchey Eco-Retreat?

The Eco-Retreat is a development in Cambodia’s rural heartland offering short and long-stay accommodation for those who want to explore beyond the standard tourist trails. It is particularly aimed at people who are interested in deepening their knowledge of Cambodia’s Buddhist cultural heritage. Construction on phase 1 of the development began in October 2016. This phase includes 10 villas, a dormitory, the restaurant, the meditation centre and the swimming pool complex. Also under construction are the reception building, the kitchen and the on-site staff accommodation building. Phase 1 is scheduled for completion in early 2018, when we intend to open the retreat to guests.

Hanchey Eco-Retreat will offer a unique and authentic immersion introduction for the spiritual and cultural tourist to Cambodian culture and Buddhism. A range of activities will be provided that can be tailored from relaxing day visits and overnight stays, to week-long planned retreats that include daily yoga, meditation, Buddhist talks, and excursions to local cultural, historical and natural sites. Our guests are free at all times to choose their level of immersion into our spiritual and cultural programmes: Hanchey Eco-Retreat can also be enjoyed simply as a vacation and wellness centre.

The retreat is being developed as a social enterprise project and is owned and run by a management team - the accredited NGO Buddhism for Social Development Action (BSDA) - that was founded by local monks.
Where is Hanchey Eco-Retreat?

The retreat is sited 24 km north of Kampong Cham, the capital of Kampong Cham province: this is Cambodia’s most populous province with 928,694 inhabitants spread over 4,549 km². There are 1,758 villages and the majority of the population live from subsistence farming, with one annual rice harvest.

The town of Kampong Cham is located 124 km north-east of Phnom Penh (2.5 hour bus journey) and 231 km south-east of Siem Reap (4 hour bus journey). It is Cambodia’s 6th largest town with a population of 63,771 people (2006).

For those wishing to organise their own travel arrangements, there are frequent and inexpensive bus connections from both Siem Reap and Phnom Penh to Kampong Cham. Most hotels, hostels and guest houses will arrange bus tickets and transport to the bus stop for a small fee. Once in Kampong Cham it is easy to take a tuk-tuk to Hanchey (travel time approx. 60 minutes), or to hire a motorbike (travel time approx. 45 minutes) or a bicycle (travel time approx. 90 minutes). Alternatively, we can arrange to meet you directly from your flight, or on your arrival in Kampong Cham and bring you to the retreat: please let us know well in advance, particularly for airport pick-ups.
Taking the time to explore in and around Hanchey and Kampong Cham is a rewarding experience. Our guests can book a tuk-tuk with an English-speaking driver, or hire their own motorbikes or bicycles at the retreat. You will find yourself greeted warmly by the rural population and almost every child will want to say “hello”. Cross over by ferry to the river island of Koh Treng and enjoy cycling through the beautiful villages there. There’s even a large beach during the dry season!

Our nearest neighbour is Wat Hanchey, dating from the 8th century AD, reachable on foot in 20 minutes. Wat Hanchey is a fascinating complex of temples from all periods of Khmer art history, enjoying spectacular views over the Mekong. We have close relations with the local Buddhist community and will be pleased to arrange contact with English-speaking monks.
What is BSDA and what is “social enterprise”? 

Hanchey Eco-Retreat is fully owned and is being developed and managed by “Buddhism for Social Development Action” - BSDA. BSDA was established in 2005 by seven monks from Wat Nokor Bachey Pagoda, Kampong Cham. It was started because the local monks saw a lack of support and services for disadvantaged people in their community. BSDA now offers a large scope of services to disadvantaged people in the provinces of Kampong Cham, Tbong Khmum, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat and Koh Kong. Our programs focus on health, education, good governance and the environment, providing a home, vocational training and scholarships for orphans, vulnerable children, victims of domestic violence, abandoned children and children living with HIV. As a local NGO our programs are tailored to the needs of the communities we serve.

Buddhist philosophy is at the heart of BSDA’s goals, vision and mission. It is embedded in all our programs and the day-to-day management of the organisation.

BSDA is a registered NGO and is dependant on donations from abroad to carry out its work. Or aim is, however, to greatly decrease this dependence by means of “social enterprise”: quite simply this means starting local business ventures whose profits will be used to fund the BSDA’s core business of empowering the seriously disadvantaged.

Since 2009 BSDA has been running Smile Restaurant in Kampong Cham: aimed primarily at the tourist market it now has an average annual turnover of US$ 160,000, the profits from which are channelled directly into our social programs. As a registered NGO we are obliged to have regular, external audits made of our financial activities and it is open to anyone with an interest to assure themselves that this money does indeed flow to its intended goals. Social enterprise is not only about opening a business: Smile Restaurant is a training site for young, local people who would otherwise find it impossible to receive vocational training of this nature. We are equipping them with various skills that offer real chances of employment in Cambodia’s burgeoning tourist industry.

The first phase of Hanchey Eco-Retreat has been made possible by a very generous grant made by our largest sponsor, EcoSolidar from Switzerland. To speed up the construction of the following phases - which would decrease the time we have to wait for returns from the project - we would be very interested to hear from further, potential donors. In return for investment we can offer attractive rates for future accommodation in one of our villas.

Hanchey Eco-Retreat is our second social business enterprise and will be run on the same model as Smile Restaurant, as a vocational training centre for local youth. The profits it generates will be returned to the local community through the BSDA’s various programs. By staying at Hanchey you will be empowering the disadvantaged to take economic control of their lives, and you can be sure that the money you spend will stay not only in Cambodia - unlike many tourist facilities - but locally, in the community that provides the backdrop to your stay. Furthermore, you can be sure that this money is managed in accordance with Buddhist principles and that it will go to the benefit of the needy, irrespective of their religious and spiritual beliefs.

The trainees at Smile Restaurant: No. 1 on TripAdvisor! BSDA educational and vocational training centre
Why “Eco-Retreat”? Sustainable construction at Hanchey

At Hanchey we are aiming to set standards for sustainability that will be benchmarks not only in Cambodia but worldwide. Our two main building materials are bamboo and earth bricks. The bamboo is taken from farmed supplies all based within 30 km of the construction site. Farmed bamboo is 100% sustainable, with cropping taking place on 3-5 year cycles. Insect proofing of the bamboo is carried out in a soaking tank on site, using a solution of borax and boric acid, both products used in the food industry. No chemical insecticides are used. The earth with which we make our bricks is excavated on site. Most of our bricks are made just with this, mixed with water and locally-sourced rice chaff and dried in the sun. These bricks are laid using mud mortar and locally-sourced rice straw, the walls are plastered with a mud/rice chaff mix, with the addition of starch powder to give elasticity and smoothness to the final layer. For walls which will be exposed to rain we use a 1:6 cement/earth mixture, using a manually-operated mould to compress it into bricks. Our use of reinforced concrete is limited to the foundations; because our constructions are lightweight, foundation depth can be minimised.

The physical advantages of mud bricks have been appreciated for many centuries: their buffering effects on both temperature and humidity are unparalleled, as are their sound absorption qualities. Mud brick structures are, as a result calm, cool structures with a comfortable feel to the air they contain. These characteristics, coupled with their minimal ecological footprint make this building material ideal for Hanchey Eco-Resort.

The principles employed generally by the BSDA are also being used on the building site: with the exception of the swimming pool, we are using no contracting companies. We employ our building teams directly, and they are made up of local people. In this way, the money we spend remains in our community. Many of our people have worked as itinerant labourers and bring building knowledge and skills to our development. The skills required for the construction methods we are using are, however, new to them. We have therefore brought two small training teams from Thailand to teach these skills to our local builders. In this way the project brings not only fresh money into our local economy but also fresh and marketable skills. Many building projects in Cambodia bring neither of these things to the community, and the profits flowing from them are frequently exported out of the country entirely, leaving Cambodia dependant as before on grant aid. It is one of the aims of the BSDA to reverse such trends.
Why should I come to Hanchey Eco-Retreat?

Everyone in our neighbourhood knows about us and our project and supports our aims. Our guests will quickly be made aware of this in the warm welcome they receive from the local people. We offer an authentic immersion experience into Cambodian Buddhism and culture that we believe to be unique, and the money you spend during your stay with us will strengthen the cultural and social fabric of our people. Our programs and services include:

- Yoga and meditation classes delivered by experienced practitioners. Classes are held in the Retreat’s ‘Eightfold Path/Lotus Flower’ meditation hall, a unique experience for guests to find balance whilst enjoying the stunning views across the Mekong floodplain.

- Philosophical and cultural talks led by Kampong Cham and Hanchey’s most senior monks.

- Counselling sessions with Buddhist monks.

- Dining with breathtaking sunrise and sunset views while enjoying seasonal healthy and organic menus made entirely from local produce.

- Relaxing by our 165 m² swimming pool. There is a bar and snack bar, sun loungers, hammocks and 5 cabanas offering Khmer massage and other treatments.

- Khmer cooking classes

- Apsara dance performances

- Motorbike and bicycle hire with recommendations on where to go and what to see.

- Shuttle service to Kampong Cham
Villas

10 villas will be completed for our phase 1 opening, 23 are planned for the eastern part of our site. Each villa has 37 m² of living space, its own separate entrance and paved terrace and attached bathroom and toilet. The villas are distributed over the sloping site so that each has privacy, but all enjoy panoramic views to the Mekong. The eastern orientation allows the rays of the rising sun to penetrate the villas, while offering shade for the midday and afternoon period. The high, bamboo roofs and thick earthen walls provide an optimal internal environment for our sub-tropical climate; the villas are equipped with roof fans for further comfort. The hilltop site is exposed to the permanent breezes generated over the Mekong and the evening air is especially pleasant as a result.

No chemicals have been used in the construction or finishes of the villas, there are no paints or wood preservatives. The structural bamboo elements were soaked on-site under our oversight for three weeks in a 10% solution of borax and boric acid - both naturally occurring salts - to make them unpalatable to insects. The rich, red wall colouring is a natural pigmentation derived from our on-site earth.

Each villa is simply furnished with one double or two single beds, two bedside tables with reading lamps, a wardrobe and a table with two chairs. Outside are two hammocks. The beds are hung with mosquito nets, whereby our hilltop site is not the favoured environment of these insects.

The basic price of the villas on a night-to-night basis is currently planned at US$ 65.00/night. Please ask for special rates for donors and for multiple bookings, and for special offers during the period July-October.
The design of the meditation centre is based on the eight-petalled lotus flower. The building is poised on the edge of the highest point of our site. It is the most complex of our bamboo structures. The building will provide 140 m² of sheltered space for yoga and meditation classes, lectures, presentations and performances. At times when there are no planned activities our guests will be encouraged to use the space for their own activities.

The design of the restaurant is based on the floating leaf of the lotus flower. Like the meditation centre it enjoys one of the region’s best views in all compass directions. The building will provide 177 m² of sheltered dining space. The kitchen is housed in a separate structure. Land on the Mekong corridor can be farmed year-round and the food we serve will be exclusively from small, local suppliers, grown on organic principals, or taken from the Mekong or its lakes.

The reception building is the information hub of the retreat and the first point of call when assistance or help is required. Reception will be permanently staffed with trained, English-speaking people whose job is to ensure that your stay with us is as pleasant as we can possibly make it.
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We would be pleased to answer any queries you have about Hanchey E.co-Retreat, do not hesitate to call or write!

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See the Hanchey E.co-Retreat video at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQqCjeWOvF4
More information about BSDA can be found on our website at www.bsda-cambodia.org

EcoSolidar have made Hanchey E.co-Retreat possible with a generous donation. More information about them can be found on their website at www.ecosolidar.ch