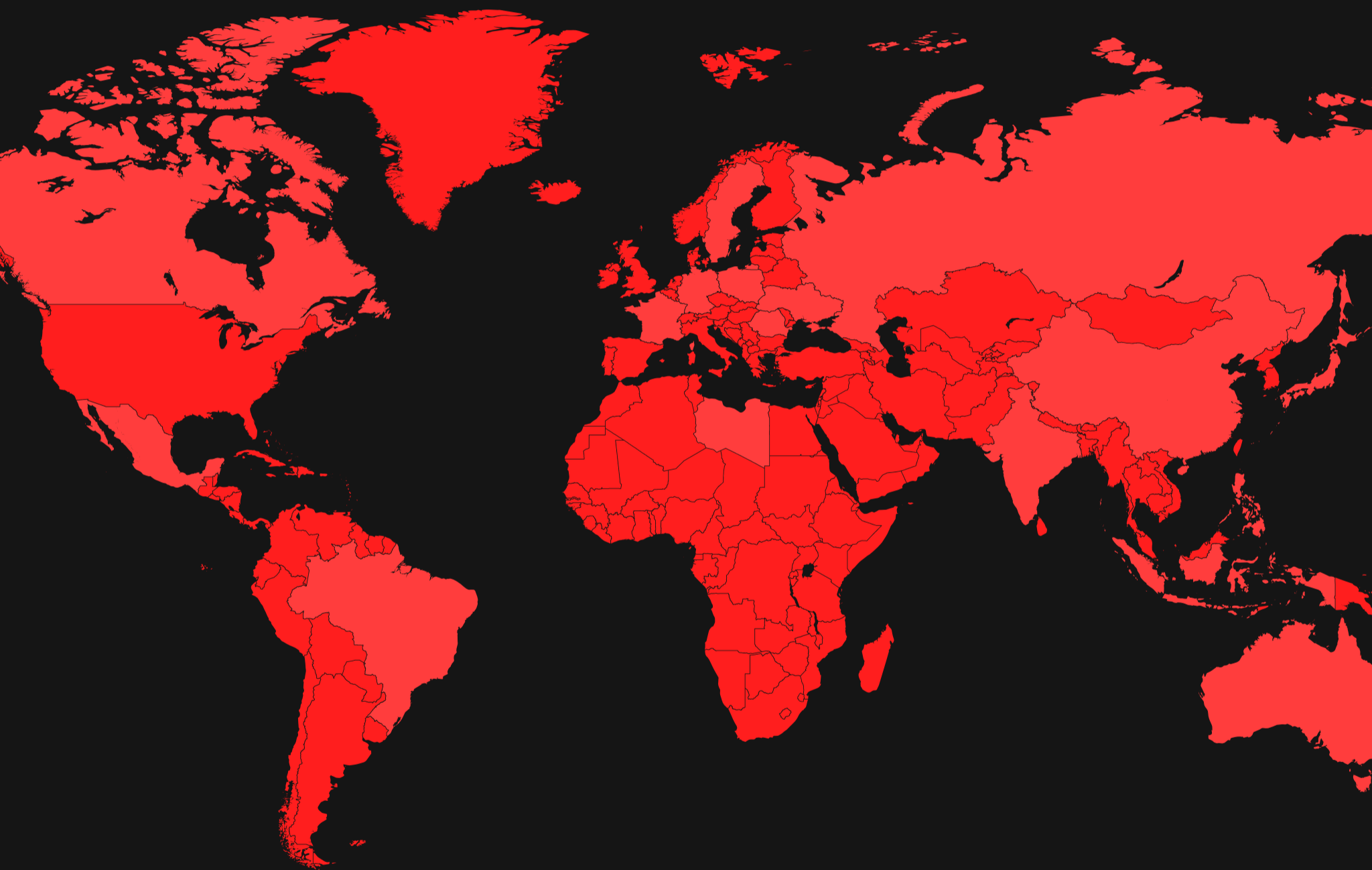


MAKE IT **FAIR**

Yesterday **Cambodia,**



tomorrow **the world.**



Cambodia is built on a foundation of corruption. The minority have all the power and wealth. Elections are undemocratic. Government officials require bribes, scams are rife and everyone has a horror story to tell of being taken for a ride. Employment conditions are terrifying, the tourist sex trafficking trade is booming and the majority of children live on the streets begging, rather than going to school.

To many, that description sounds hopeless; how can you help a situation that is bent at its very core? But to Kerrie Meehan, when she first visited Cambodia eight years ago, it was because of the corruption, that she saw how essential help and hope were to the Khmer people trying to get by and better their lives. Fortunately for Cambodia, the word futile didn't cross her radar.



MAKE IT **FAIR**

THE TRIP THAT **CHANGED A LIFE**

Kerrie's life was turned upside down when she took that trip to Cambodia.

She was no stranger to third world countries or poverty, in fact as a travel agent, she'd seen more than most people. But Cambodia triggered a reaction in her that other countries hadn't.

"Perhaps I was just at a time in my life when I was ready to truly see the situation, rather than just stay in a comfy hotel, look at the temples and go home. The Cambodian people got under my skin and I read all I could about their country's history, in an attempt to understand why it was so ravaged. Why was there

a missing generation? What had turned it into a nation of young, malnourished, uneducated people? I was in shock at what I learned and the stories I heard literally broke my heart."

Cambodia's history was a horror story: indiscriminate bombing by American war planes during the Vietnam War, and five years of terror during the Pol Pot years, when 2,000,000 educated Cambodians were rounded up and executed. Pol Pot decimated the country's infrastructure until all that remained was an uneducated nation of rice growers. He declared it the Year Zero.

Kerrie understandably found it harrowing to see the photos of the atrocities, but what she

found even more upsetting, were the photos of Cambodia pre Pol Pot's destruction. It had been sophisticated, with state of the art roads, hospitals, schools, a thriving culture of fashion, art, music and dance, its people prospering; life was good.

It cut her to her core. She knew that she couldn't return to Australia to her comfortable safe middle-class life, knowing that Cambodians were living without access to clean water, the chance of education or fairly paid work. They simply had no future, and their government was perpetuating this cycle. Yet the Cambodians she had met were hard working, smiling and determined to better their situation. It was then that Kerrie saw a way to help.



What Kerrie did to **help?**

Cambodians are resourceful in a way the West is not. Nothing is thrown away, as everything can be mended and recycled. Little is bought, most things are home-made. The Khmer people sell their wares to tourists; jewellery, bags, pictures, spices, incredibly beautiful resourceful recycled items. They wait near the temples to catch the tourist trade or at the markets where again, it's the tourist dollar they are after.

Kerrie decided if she could sell their products for them internationally, they would reach a far larger audience. So, with no previous retail experience and no idea how to export goods from a country as corrupt and chaotic as Cambodia, she set up [Fairly Cambodian](#), a shop in the

pretty Australian Yarra Valley town of Healesville.

Her shop (and [online shop via her website](#)) sell products that have been made under Fair Trade conditions, by Cambodian artisans. Kerrie personally ensures that the money from each sale goes back directly to the person who made it. She meets each individual artist and producer, in order to guarantee she only deals with Fair Trade individuals and organisations.

Two years on and with her business thriving, she has decided to broaden her business model, and so her business Fairly Cambodian, is transitioning to Fairly Global. Under her new business name, she will sell Fair Trade items made by people all over the world.

“Cambodia woke in me the need to help. But the more I learn about the world and its inequalities, especially for women, the more I realise I cannot restrict my efforts to just Cambodia. I have met workers in Laos, Uganda, India and here in Australia who make stunning high quality items Fair Trade, but who are limited by their market reach. Fairly Global will help the artisans sell to more people whilst educating Australians about the countries these people live in and the life they face.”

“The majority of my customers buy from us because we are Fair Trade. They may have been to Cambodia and have a connection with the country, but they are also worldly people who are making a conscious buying decision to buy Fair Trade and that is really heartening. Awareness is key. Once people know about the artisans’ situations, it stays with them.”



It's more than Fair Trade, it's about **Ethical Travel.**

With my travel agent background, I suppose it was inevitable that I would end up taking tours to Cambodia. My customers would ask me when I was going next and if they could come with me. By taking people myself, I can ensure that the tour is ethical, which is at the heart of all that Fairly Cambodian stands for.

Sadly there are still plenty of tourists who visit the country whose actions make matters worse. Giving money to begging children perpetuates the poverty cycle, visiting orphanages without prior research, supports corrupt, dangerous organisations

– these are decisions that tourists need to take responsibility for.

“We live in an age where ‘conscious buying’ and ‘ethical travel’ should be a given, not something people have to be reminded about. It is at the very core of the tours I take to Cambodia. At the end of the day, it all comes back to respect.”

With the expansion of Fairly Cambodian to Fairly Global, will the next logical growth area for Kerrie’s business be taking ethical tours globally as well? “Well, I think big” she replied, smiling, “so yes, give it a year or so, and that’s the way we’re heading!”



If it moves me, I’ll gladly write about it. Helen Collier, owner of [Just Words](#), writes for businesses, magazines, philanthropists and always ...for pleasure.

