

The Phnom Penh Post

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Monday, the 18th of August 2008

Banana school in slip up



Written by Denise Heywood

FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 1994

At the entrance to Kabko market a bright sign announced The Banana Center. If you buy your bananas at that market, you might think how enterprising the stall holders are to advertise - and in English.

But further investigation proved The Banana Center not to be a food stall but a new English language school.

To lure students, they have festooned the city with big plastic bananas. To lure journalists, they offer to "serve you a drink to keep away from dehydration."

An impromptu visit to the center proved fruitless as no one spoke enough English to give any information.

But we found Mr **Van Zandycke Filip**, the enthusiastic Belgian manager, at a bar one night. We asked him about the school he opened on Nov1, with director Sok Khieng. He responded to the first few questions with the answer "eh?", but soon warmed to the subject.

Why is it called The Banana Center?

"I dunno," he said, "director's idea... never asked him why.

"But Khmer people like bananas. Banana is a nice fruit. They use it for different things. At the temple it's almost holy fruit, right? We might offer bananas. We might even give students a banana each. A sweet taste of English. It's like a carrot. But it's serious business. We have dictionaries there. But you don't have to take it too seriously. In most schools, they just learn grammar, grammar, grammar. But you can't have a conversation with a Khmer. We put the emphasis on conversation."

He said they already had 250 students enrolled who will pay \$60 a three-month term, to learn for one hour a day, five days a week. So far, they have three teachers, who are Khmer.

"I can't tell you which schools they trained in," said **Filip**. But he has placed advertisements for more English teachers at the Foreign Correspondents Club.

Filip was teaching English in Thailand, and came to Cambodia in July. He saw a need for his skills.

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