

Going cheap?

Simon Burton dines with crocodiles and ponders whether you have to splash out once in a while to get what you want.

ICOME TO YOU this month with words of wisdom from a long forgotten world.

The ancient Cambodian city of Angkor may be better known to you as the setting of the *Tomb Raider* movie and you may well think that the collapse and demise, in the 16th century, of this majestic civilisation suggests it has little insight to offer the 21st century exhibition industry beyond some fantastic design ideas for temples and the management of the movement of lots of visitors. But you would be wrong.

Modern day Angkor has a restaurant called the Deadfish Tower. I was keen to dine here, not because I suspected I would find inspiration for this column, but because it has a crocodile pit and you can throw food to the crocodiles while you eat. Don't tell me that doesn't sound pretty cool to you too.

"Don't expect that better can be cheaper. Please accept that cheaper will make your trip horrible."

The local advertisement for Deadfish Tower has several insights for visitors including advice to speak slowly when ordering, accept that cultural differences may make you feel the service you get is different, to take care of your belongings and so on. All relevant stuff for everyday exhibitionists you'll agree, but one of the aphorisms stands out a mile for us in our situation today, and I quote verbatim.

"Don't expect that better can be cheaper. Please accept that cheaper will make your trip horrible."

And there you have it in a nutshell, "Cheaper will make your trip horrible." Knowledgeable service, quality ingredients, pleasant environment, clean, well maintained furniture and cutlery, skilled chefs, all these things come at a price. If we aren't prepared to pay sensible prices for the products and services we want or need, we shouldn't expect them to be any good.

This may seem to strike a particular chord because of the current debate about the price of shell scheme, but it has wider and more general resonance. Whatever you are currently



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looking to buy, new equipment, graphics, design, marketing and PR or staff, the quality of what you get, and in turn what you can deliver to your customers, has a great deal to do with the price you are prepared to pay. Quality and expertise don't come cheap.

Don't for a second think that Deadfish Tower isn't like an exhibition, crocodile pit excepted, it also has a café, offers free head massage and internet, and I can't remember the last exhibition advert I read which didn't offer me the very same things. In the exhibition industry, as in a restaurant, you get what you pay for and you need to be prepared to suffer the short and long term consequences of that purchase decision.

I'll leave you with the last words of The Deadfish Tower advertisement which certainly don't need stating by any organiser, contractor or venue in the UK exhibition industry. "Be assured that Deadfish Tower doesn't serve dog, cat, rat or worm." Actually, come to think of it, one or two of those venue caterers...

Send your comments to: rduffy@mashmedia.net