



FEMALES ONLY!

Being one of the island's major charity fund-raisers, **Sisters On Samui** is a lot more than just a lunch club for women.

SOS! To most of us, that's the internationally recognised 'Mayday' distress signal. But here on Samui, it has a very different meaning. It's the acronym for 'Sisters On Samui' and, in contrast to being a call from the needy, Samui's SOS actually provides help for many of the island's better causes.

So what is *this* SOS then, exactly? Well, quite simply, it's a group of ladies from all around the world, either living on the island or visiting, whose objective is to gather for lunch every month at one of Samui's best restaurants (a different one each time), have a few glasses of wine and some great food. But, at the same time, raise a huge amount of money for different charities. It's a win-win situation.

SOS also provides a great platform for new arrivals of the fairer sex to connect with others, make friends and have a lot of fun. And at the same time providing essential funds to pump back into the island that they've grown to love!

From its early beginnings, some 14 years ago, SOS has gone from strength to strength and is now one of the longest running organisations on the island.

Sue Holehouse, a long term resident of Samui, toils tirelessly to arrange the monthly luncheons and continues to work with organisations across the island that are in need of support. She's clearly passionate about SOS and has been giving her time freely for more than seven years.

Sue says, "When I first came here, SOS was just a few friends meeting for lunch. It was a very casual affair. But our numbers have grown so much over the last 10 years, it's just fantastic!" Sue is clearly an unsung hero on the island for her magnificent efforts, but she is very keen to point out that SOS was actually the brainchild of three ladies living on Samui in the '90s, who came up with initial concept over drinks one day. There were lamenting over how difficult it was to meet other like-minded women. And so they decided to combine their contacts and set up a lunch date. To their amazement they managed to gather over 30 females together and thus SOS was born.

From the very beginning, these ladies agreed that the idea of a committee and a chairwoman was much too formal. There would be no forms to fill in, no initiation ceremonies. All you'd have to do was turn up and introduce yourself. In addition, fundraising was deemed to be almost 'a given' as a



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So, with no membership fee, no committee and no rules – the only proviso being to have been ‘born a woman’ – how on earth does it work? Today, SOS has 266 women on its list so it’s a huge job for someone to take care of the logistics. And that someone is Sue Holehouse.

Through her years of experience, Sue knows which months are going to be the busiest in terms of numbers. She knows that the biggest turnout will be at Christmas, closely followed by January and February due to the fluctuating island population. She knows that the location of each lunch must be carefully considered to cater for the differing numbers at different times of year. And as Samui has so many superb places to eat, it’s rare that the SOS lunch will be held at the same venue twice in a 12-month period.

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In addition, fundraising was deemed to be almost 'a given' as a small contribution for a slap-up lunch in convivial surroundings was a superb way of doing something positive whilst having a great time.

As SOS was originally started as a social network for women, Sue is still keen to continue along this line. She says, "If you're new to the island and you want to come alone, you're more than welcome. I will always introduce new ladies to others and look after them as we know it can be daunting. Some people are very shy, so I personally try to make sure they feel comfortable."

Sue's enthusiasm for Sisters on Samui shines through. She continues, "The idea is to mingle. Christmas is a lovely lunch as we have such a good turnout and it's always a big money raiser. Due to our ladies' support, last year's Christmas event alone raised an amazing 82,500 baht."

Sue takes enormous care when distributing funds raised by the SOS. The donations are passed on in the form of goods and not cash to ensure that it all ends up where it's supposed to. And SOS also receives a great deal of support from hotels on the island providing generous donations in the form of raffle prizes, which creates a huge proportion of the revenue raised. "It's important that contributors know where the money is going so I always write to them to let them know, tell them how much we raised with their help and thank them." Sue enthuses.

SOS is aiming to reach 100,000 baht by the end of February. The money will be used to buy an infusion pump and laryngoscope for Nathon Hospital's dialysis unit. SOS has supported Nathon Hospital generously over the years providing many essential items, such as: two pulse oximeters for the premature baby unit at a cost of 100,000 baht, a radiant warmer for a further 70,000 baht, and a much-needed mother and baby room is to be created for 90,000 baht.

Samui Rescue is another favourite with SOS. This free, paramedic emergency service saves lives every day on Samui. It's an entirely volunteer-based organisation which relies totally on donations. Samui Rescue says that SOS is their biggest supporter and, last year alone, 'the ladies who lunch' (as they charmingly refer to them as) gave them 150,000 baht's worth of life-saving equipment. Alan Brewis of Samui Rescue claims that SOS has quite literally saved lives and that words alone just cannot convey the difference they've made.

But apart from the amazing work that these wonderful women do, SOS is a great organisation to get involved in just to meet people for friendship, seeing more of the island and even just for finding out where to buy that lampshade you've been after for months! So ladies, it doesn't matter if you're visiting for a while, just passing through or if you're living here full time, come and join in. All you have to do is let Sue know that you're coming and, of course, that you were born a woman!

Kathryn Amberley

The next SOS lunch is on 16th March 2011 and is being held at The Barge Restaurant, Nora Buri Resort. For further information, contact Sue Holehouse by telephone on: 0 819 681 277, or email her at: sistersonsamui@gmail.com

