

A Greek tragedy: how much can one nation take?



By Henry Foy

It has been more than 3,000 years since the remote Greek village of Efyra had its moment of fame. Perched on one of the rolling hills that undulate across the Peloponnese towards the western coast, it was named by Homer himself as a place that Odysseus once visited.

Today, Efyra draws no such strangers on heroic quests. It is lucky if the local bus, which strains to climb the twisting path to the town, stops more than once a day. For those who live here, it is not just its mythical past that prompts them to look back: many locals say it has no future.

"We are in danger," says Aggelos Petropoulos, a local baker and the village's mayor. "Everything is getting worse. Next year will be more so. Old people will die. Young people will not stay. We need help."

This is a plea increasingly heard across Greece, after more than eight years of financial catastrophe. Today the country has become a byword for the brutal economic, political and social fallout that followed the 2008 crisis. The economy shrunk almost a third in the ensuing years, and the government is effectively bankrupt without outside support: it owes about €320bn - not far from double its gross domestic product of €181bn.

The effects of such economic hardship are now being felt across the country. Unemployment is at 23 per cent and 44 per cent of those aged 15-24 are out of work. More than a fifth of Greeks get by without basics such as heating or a telephone connection.

In 2015, 15 per cent of the population lived in extreme poverty com-

pared with 2 per cent in 2009, according to a recent study by Dianeosis, a Greek NGO. "There are families that do not have anything to eat," says Petropoulos, a squat man in his mid-forties. "I give bread away for nothing. I know everybody here and I know who needs it the most."

In summer 2015, as Greece teetered on the edge of the financial precipice, the EU warned that its plight put the future of Europe at stake. After months of political brinkmanship by the country's leftist government and European authorities, the nation was granted an €86bn package, its third bailout in five years.

Eighteen months on, the Greek crisis has disappeared from the minds of many in Europe, replaced by new difficulties such as Brexit, a wave of terror attacks in capital cities and looming elections in countries such as France and Germany. But in Greece, the crisis rages on.

While the country is arguably in better shape financially than it was two years ago, the social crisis has intensified. In return for the bailout, officials demanded more austerity measures.

Spending on hospitals, schools and social safety nets has been slashed, leaving increasing numbers of Greece's most vulnerable without support.

EU officials may cheer signs that Greece's economy could be improving - it managed two quarters of consecutive growth last year and has forecast growth of 2.7 per cent this year - but a significant turning point looks unlikely. In many ways it is merely a recovery on paper: poverty is increasing and unemployment is

still the highest in Europe.

"Without a doubt, Greece has made enormous sacrifices to get to where it is now," said an IMF report last September. "But the significant achievements in balancing the budget, closing the current account deficit and improving the flexibility of the labor market have taken a heavy toll on the society and tested its endurance."

At the same time, the backlash among disillusioned voters is rising. The ruling Syriza party, caught between the radical, anti-austerity promises it made at the January 2015 election and the cold reality of not being able to pay its bills, is in freefall in the polls.

“ Old people will die. Young people will not stay. We need help.

AGGELOS PETROPOULOS
EFYRA'S MAYOR

Political instability, which has consistently derailed attempts to work through the crisis, looms large. Loans that Greece has been promised are now threatened because of prime minister Alexis Tsipras's attempts to water down austerity measures and an ongoing row between lenders over whether to reduce the country's debt obligations. Fresh elections or a breakdown in talks over future financial aid are becoming increasingly likely.

For millennia, Greece's villages have provided a safe harbor in times of national difficulty. Resilient social bonds and family cohesion, combined with a strong farming tradition, ensured a degree of protection and self-sufficiency when crisis struck. Yet today they are struggling. Just small cuts to local budgets are enough to end the vital services that keep places such as Efyra afloat.

Many local schools have been shut or had budgets trimmed. Bus routes, an essential link to nearby towns, have been axed, forcing villages to operate community taxi schemes.

Sweeping new taxes imposed across the economy have already left communities scrambling to survive. It is not uncommon for one retiree's state pension, which can be as low as €300 a month, to support an entire family, supplemented by food grown in their gardens. And pressure is increasing.

Last year pension payments were cut by as much as 40 per cent, while this year will bring €1bn worth of new taxes on cars, telecoms, television, fuel, cigarettes, coffee and beer, and a €5.7bn cut to public sector salaries and pensions. It is a drastic return to reality for many in a country where, for decades, tax enforcement has been lax and social benefits generous.

Young people have moved from villages in search of jobs in larger cities, reducing Greece's rural population by 2.5 per cent in eight years. Those that remain talk of an acute sense of abandonment.

"The Troika has really hurt us," says Litsa Andriopoulou, who runs the village's solitary grocery shop. She is referring to the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund, which jointly co-ordinated the bailouts and demanded the subsequent austerity measures in return. "Their demands have affected not rich people, but the poorest here."

"Human relationships have changed. People are closed off in their homes. They don't come out," she says. "Those that had businesses here have now closed them."

Three years ago, Efyra's secondary school was shut and the doctor's surgery and small courthouse are now also gone. The concrete skeleton of an unfinished building stands on the main road opposite the old school while a dog picks lazily at a pile of rubbish that has been left in the corner.

"My business is getting harder and harder," says Andriopoulou, who has run the shop with her husband for 35

years. Twenty per cent of her customers pay on credit.

"They pay when the pension comes. They pay when they can," she says, pulling out a well-thumbed notebook from next to the cash register. "Many times the old help the young. [2017] will be much, much worse," she says. "Because of taxes going up and pensions going down."

Fifty-two per cent of Greek households rely on pensions to pay their monthly expenses, according to a 2015 study. Yet Greece has only 2.7 million pensioners - 25 per cent of the population.

Austerity measures mean that close to half of pensioners now have a monthly income that puts them below the country's poverty line, according to a recent report by a group of retiree associations.

New taxes have eroded disposable incomes still further. Value added tax has increased to 24 per cent on food, disproportionately hurting the poor, for whom living costs represent a far higher proportion of income. Most detested is the Enfia property levy, which brings in €2.65bn a year - roughly €650 from each of Greece's four million households. Those in rural areas where incomes are lower fear Tsipras's intentions to levy new taxes on arable land this year.

"The money that the government gives us is just taken back in taxes. There is not anything left to survive on, for food, for essentials," says mayor Petropoulos, who also runs a small ramshackle goat farm a mile or so outside the village.

International creditors, and many EU governments, have argued that Greece's perilous economic situation is caused by decades of mass tax evasion, lavish public sector salaries, inefficient social spending and generous state pensions.

Austerity, they say, is the only way to put the economy on a sustainable footing, and to allow Greece to remain part of the eurozone. Greek politicians, and at least 3.6 million Greeks who voted to reject the Troika's demands in a referendum in July 2015 - despite the threat of eurozone eviction - disagree.

They say that creditors must forgive some of the debt Greece owes, and that austerity is only hurting a population that will never be able to raise the money needed to pay the debt in full.

"The situation is worsening," says Ekavi Valleras, general manager of Desmos, a humanitarian NGO that coordinates assistance for those hit by the crisis.

"The thing we see that is most needed right now is food. That shows



© The Financial Times Limited 2016. All Rights Reserved. Not to be redistributed, copied or modified in any way.

Greek tragedy: how much can one nation take? (continued)

that the problems are about essentials, not about quality of life. It is about subsistence," she says.

Nikos Konstantopoulos has felt the decline first-hand. The chain-smoking farmer is mayor of Roviata, a small village an hour's drive from Efyra where tracks snaking away from the main road are dotted with permanently shuttered buildings.

"We have reached the bottom," he says. "We don't work here. We don't have money. So, we don't make a life. Everyone here dreams of leaving." Only 150 people now live in Roviata, and almost two-thirds are retired. Konstantopoulos is one of three farmers left in what was once a bustling agricultural centre, growing grapes, tomatoes and corn.

Ever since the village school was shuttered, his son has had to travel to one 7km away. "My father had nine children. I have one. There is one child born here for every 15 deaths," he says. "In the end there will be nobody, and no village."

Dressed in a red polo shirt and ripped jeans, Konstantopoulos sits in the corner of a small café. There used to be seven other cafés here but now only two remain for those in need of a cup of thick Greek coffee.

Outside, a rusting yellow excavator is tearing up the village's only major road junction to lay some new pipes. The next day, a long thin scar of fresh tarmac will remain as proof that, sometimes, local authorities spend money here.

Konstantopoulos laughs when this is pointed out. "We applied for this work in 1992," he says, inhaling deeply on his cigarette. "The government should do more. But there is a crisis, right? There is nothing they can do."

As he talks, riot police in Athens, more than 200km away along a half-finished motorway, are firing tear gas at retirees protesting against cuts to pension payments. Such clashes have been frequent throughout the crisis and are continuing.

Tsipras, who was elected almost two years ago on a surge of popular support for his anti-austerity and anti-establishment rhetoric, now finds himself arguing for deeper cuts to government spending and greater financial support from the Troika.

His centrist opponents, who have built a commanding lead over the ruling Syriza party - 16 per cent according to an average of recent polls - say that his delays in implementing the terms of the bailouts have compounded the problem, inflicted more damage on the economy and ensured Greece remains a fiscal pariah on the international markets, where historically low interest rates could have offered the country some respite.

In Roviata, the blame is laid on the politicians who spent the 27 years of Greece's EU membership before the crisis loading the country with debt to fund increased defence expenditure, more public sector jobs and higher pension and other social benefit payments.

"All the mistakes we are paying for now we created in the past, ourselves," says Yannis Retsis, 58, a sports teacher at a nearby school who visits the village every afternoon to see his 85-year-old father.

"What happened to the economy was like spending all the money you have on a Ferrari and then giving it to your five-year-old. To waste all of that money for nothing is not a mistake. It is a crime. I do not trust what any of them say."

Like much of rural Greece, the region of Elis, home to Roviata and Efyra, used to be a stronghold for the centre-left. In the 2009 general election, 55 per cent of voters backed Pasok, the social-democratic party that has ruled Greece alone or as part of a coalition for 23 of the past 42 years.

But when the true cost of the financial crisis began to bite, Elis, like other regions across the country, turned against both Pasok and New Democracy - its centre-right rival with whom it had shared power since 1974.

In the January 2015 election that propelled Syriza to power, 38 per cent of the region backed Tsipras's leftwingers, part of a wave of support for the radicals who had promised to overturn austerity policies.

Many, including Retsis, thought that the far-left firebrand was a hero for calling the referendum and urging citizens to vote against another bailout and more austerity. Now Tsipras is seen as a traitor for backtracking.

Retsis believes he was duped. Fresh taxes levied on the schoolteacher's house, car and land mean new payments to the government worth €140 a month, before income tax, living costs or any debt repayments.

A teacher's starting salary at a rural school is €650 per month. His son works night shifts in a nearby town, cleaning dishes in a bar from 7pm to 4am. He gets paid €20 for nine hours' work. Such low employment and income prospects in the villages, combined with the new taxes, are making rural life impossible.

"The Greek tax system traditionally relies heavily on indirect taxes, which are considered less 'fair' because they affect everyone, rich and poor," says Thodoris Georgakopoulos, director at Dianeosis.

"The tax burden has largely shifted towards the diminishing middle class, while recent direct taxes like the new estate tax have affected households that have seen their income decline greatly during the crisis. The rise of VAT, meanwhile, only adds to the cost of life of poor families."

Retsis moved from Athens to Roviata as a 25-year-old. Soon, he says, his children will make the reverse journey, as almost all their local friends have already done. "All the children want to leave, because here they feel strangled," he says. "This is one of my main fears: what will happen to the villages and the land in 15 years? You see only buildings. Not people. Without people there is no life."

"I do not know the solution. But I can recognize the problem," he says. "Maybe we will all soon vote for Golden Dawn," he muses, referring to the ultranationalist neo-Nazi party that has 18 seats in the 300-strong parliament. "The people are desperate. When people are desperate they make mistakes, dangerous mistakes."

Greece's poverty is not restricted to its historically poorer rural areas. While the metropolises are far richer in statistical terms - Athens has roughly twice the GDP per capita of



A Syrian refugee child plays on the ground while a boy collects cardboard boxes at the refugee camp of Ritsona

Elis, for example - hundreds of thousands are struggling in the cities and Dianeosis's research suggests levels of absolute poverty are higher than in rural areas.

In the country's capital, people curl up on benches outside charity-run hospitals, while scores of homeless sleep in the doorways around the largest road junctions. Soup kitchens feed thousands of Athenians each day. Nine thousand people in Athens (out of a population of about 665,000) are homeless and 71 per cent of those began sleeping rough over the past five years, according to a survey supported by the city's mayor.

Drug addicts and prostitutes can be seen yards from hotels where tourists pay €200 per night for a room with a view of the Acropolis. "More than 1.6 million Greeks do not earn enough to afford the absolute necessities to survive," says Georgakopoulos, whose research estimates that 71 per cent of the country's unemployed are living in absolute poverty. "The problem is indeed acute and also largely overlooked and misunderstood."

Compounding Greece's struggles has been its location as the frontline of Europe's migration crisis, confronting a surge in arrivals from the Middle East and north Africa over the past two years.

More than one million people, many fleeing war and conflict in countries such as Syria, have arrived in that period, putting intense strain on already overstretched public-service provisions. The decision by Macedonia last March to close its border with Greece, across which the overwhelming majority of migrants had sought to begin their journey to western Europe, left about 60,000 people marooned in the country.

On top of the cost of handling these newcomers, Athens was also fearful that the mass arrival of migrants would harm its critical tourist industry, one of the economy's only bright spots.

So far these fears have not been realized. Tourists brought in €14.2bn in 2015, and the wider impact of the tourist industry accounts for about one-fifth of the Greek economy.

The small village of Inoi, down the road from Efyra, sees none of the benefits of the tourist trade. As the morning sun warms the empty road outside, Dimitrios Pantazis arranges the plastic chairs outside the café he runs in the tiny main square. Two

men shuffle inside, one on a walking frame, the other held up by a younger relative.

"The crisis has really impacted the village. People come here just to survive," Pantazis says as he sets down coffee inside the wooden room where black and white photos cover the walls. "A decade ago, farmers did not need to pay taxes, to pay Enfia. Now from one pension, half goes to taxes."

"The government has put all the economic pressure on the farmers, on the villages. They choose to squeeze those that cannot respond," he continues. "We are constantly doing something, anything to make ends meet." Three hundred people lived in Inoi five years ago. Now there are just 180 left.

"For sure the village could disappear soon. Seventy people - around 40 per cent of the village - are over 70 years old," Pantazis says. "Old people die here. And young people feel like they are dying. From 2009 things have been bad. And each year it gets even worse. The politicians are to blame. Not just now, but for decades. They make our life more and more difficult."

Pantazis was born here but left for Athens after school. Now he spends eight months in the village each year to look after his elderly and frail mother, and to run the café.

A fading photograph propped up on the bar shows a group of nine teenagers dancing in the street outside the bar 40 years ago. He is the only one from the group still here.

When his mother dies, he will close the café. It barely breaks even. "We keep it for sentimental reasons," he says, leaning back in the small wooden chair as the postman arrives and begins to count out an elderly man's €300 pension. "We keep it for the village. We have strong relationships here. That is how you survive in such places."

On the other side of the village, an abandoned school and playground speak to the impact of public spending cuts. "They said it would be made into a community center," says 14-year-old Theodore Karabilas, motioning towards the rusted swings and roundabout. "But that was five years ago."

"Nobody comes here and everybody leaves," he says. His parents run a small café on the edge of the village. In 2011 it turned over €30,000 a year. Now it brings in a third of that. His

mother Eirini has voted for Tsipras twice. "Not again, never again," she says. "He promised he would do things but he failed. He made things worse."

In 30 minutes, just one car passes down the narrow street that connects Inoi with the rest of the world. "Greece was the start of everything: maths, geography, philosophy, it all began here," she says with a sigh. "Now, we have nothing."

Yet not all are ready to call time on the rural communities that have endured through millennia. "The civilization here is very old. We have been here for 3,000 years. So even if we keep being driven lower, we must always believe we can jump higher," says Yannis Retsis, who runs a pottery in Roviata, and is a cousin of the teacher of the same name.

"We must be optimists. If you are in the sea, surrounded by waves, you must always tell yourself that soon you will see some land."

"Greece is a country of crises," he says. "In 20, maybe 30 years, things will be better." His pottery is one of the only successful enterprises for miles - the small clay pots, ornaments and crockery made by hand, baked and painted in a tiny workshop on the edge of the village are exported to Portugal and Turkey. The business employs five people. "We must look after ourselves," says Retsis. "We cannot think that others will come and help us."

From this month, new levies will mean the taxes paid by his business will jump 29 per cent, he says, while his payments to a state healthcare fund will rise by €4,000. But he is still optimistic.

"Democracy is based on some men working and some men thinking. Ancient Greece had 1,000 thinkers for every 4,000 workers. Today, many work, but far too many just sit and think," he says, chuckling.

"The Greek people should be blamed. We voted for these people," he concludes. "Yes, the government makes it harder and harder for people to make a living, to have a farm, to run a business. But we must try. You cannot just sit there and wait for them to come and kill you."

Henry Foy is the FT's central Europe correspondent

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2017



A cyclist passes a row of Buddha statues in Bangkok



Long-tail boats sit near a small beach on Ko Phi Phi Leh

TRAVELOG

2 weeks, 1 country and a world of wonders in Thailand

Courtney Bonnell, Bangkok

TRUDGING up a lush mountainside to a remote village, plunging through a swift-moving river in the footsteps of elephants and cruising Bangkok's gleaming luxury malls — with each step, I walked into different worlds, each one beautiful, all in Thailand.

Don't forget glittering temples, bustling night markets and world-famous Thai massages to soothe weary muscles.

BANGKOK

The capital's malls and markets are endless, from Siam Paragon, filled with designer brands and an upscale food court, to stands of cheap goods where souvenir-seekers haggle over the price of utensils, bracelets and trinkets. After dark, the night markets come alive, bustling with shoppers grabbing cheap sunglasses and shoes while families and friends enjoy soups and curries in more bearable heat.

Bangkok is also famous for its opulent temples, including Wat Pho, Temple of the Reclining Buddha, with its stair-step monuments to royalty cal-

led chedis, similar to stupas. The centerpiece is a massive horizontal Buddha, its gold girth touching the temple walls from end to end.

Next door at the white-walled Grand Palace complex, black-clad mourners waited in snaking lines to pay their respects to King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The beloved leader died in October after a 70-year reign — his image ubiquitous on billboards and shrines.

The complex also houses Thailand's most sacred temple, Wat Phra Kaew, or Temple of the Emerald Buddha, with sparkling, gold-decked buildings. The surprise was the size of the famed Buddha figure, carved from jade and dressed in gold, but just 26 inches high.

CHIANG MAI

Chiang Mai's walled old city houses more famous temples, including Wat Chedi Luang. Its towering red brick is worn to black, its steps have all but crumbled, but stone dragons still stand guard.

My favorite temple, moss-covered Wat Pha Lat, is tucked in a forest just outside Chiang Mai. From the university, I got

there by hiking Monks Trail, which is marked by strips of orange fabric. Head farther up the mountain to popular Doi Suthep temple or hail a songthaew, a shared taxi.

Hungry after hiking? Hit the street vendors and restaurant options that abound back in the tourist center: vegetarian-friendly green curried rice, fried mushrooms and pad thai, plus plenty of beef and pork speared on sticks for meat-eaters. To cool off from the heat or spice, try fresh-cracked pomegranate juice or coconut ice cream.

TREKKING

Chiang Mai is the jumping-off point for trekking, elephant tours and other outdoor adventure. A friend and I booked an ecotour trek and overnight home stay in a village some 4½ hours away in the Mae Hong Son region. The Karen ethnic group lives there, farming rice and cabbage on vibrant green hillsides. Our guides cut down wild passion fruit for us to sample, pointed out spiders as big as a hand and chopped bamboo to whittle into cups. After reaching the mountaintops near the

Myanmar border and making it to the village, we used those cups to slug homemade rice liquor.

We set up a bed of blankets on the wooden floor and rested between bags of rice as our hosts cooked dinner in a hearth built into the floor. Sleeping in a home open to the elements was the only time I got cold on the trip, and the only place I skipped a shower, passing up a tub of chilly water in an outhouse with a squat toilet.

ELEPHANTS

I wanted to enjoy these majestic creatures, iconic in Thailand but often exploited, in an ethical way. The Elephant Nature Park allowed us to travel alongside them, not on their backs. We kept them moving through the jungle by thrusting bananas and melon into their eagerly outstretched trunks. It was surreal and a bit unnerving as we led four mostly blind and elderly female elephants on a muddy, uneven path, trying to keep our balance while avoiding their feet. In another part of the sanctuary, we got a peek at a baby elephant.

PHI PHI ISLANDS

After trekking, we looked forward to decompressing on an otherworldly beach on the Phi Phi Islands — pronounced “pee pee.” But rain was falling as we arrived and promised not to let up.

Instead of the party-hearty main town on Ko Phi Phi Don, the largest island, we opted for a secluded resort. A long-tail boat plowed through choppy waters to get us there, leaving us windblown and wet from ocean spray and rain as we tried to photograph the green-topped rock rising from the Andaman Sea.

The weather cooperated enough the next day for a group tour to the smaller island, Koh Phi Phi Leh, and its hotspot, Maya Bay, which is breathtaking but overrun after the movie “The Beach” made it famous. Even early in the day, it was tough to find a spot free of people posing with selfie sticks.

Nearby, we reveled in an empty swath of sand framed by cliffs before winding through rock formations to the Blue Lagoon, a green-walled swimming hole packed with tourist boats.

After the beaches and long days in the devout atmosphere of temples, without blinking, our nights turned to buying knockoffs of favorite overpriced sandals, swigging 70 baht (USD2) beer and watching men in elaborate makeup and sequined ball gowns perform a dance in a packed outdoor market.

That's Thailand, country of contrasts. **AP**

Climate change may reduce some US grain harvests by half



Agnieszka de Sousa,
Megan Durisin

Some of the most important U.S. crops, from wheat to soybeans, are at risk of substantial damage from climate change.

Higher temperatures may cut the wheat harvest by 20 percent by the end of the century without efficient carbon reductions, according to a study

by researchers including the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and the University of Chicago. Yield reduction could reach 40 percent for soybeans and almost 50 percent for corn, relative to non-elevated temperatures, the group said in a report released last week.

"The effects go far beyond the U.S., one of the largest crop exporters," the researchers said.

"World market crop prices might increase, which is an issue for food security in poor countries."

For each day above 30 degrees Celsius, corn and soybean harvests could lose about 5 percent, according to the findings. Those temperatures will be more common amid "unabated" climate change, and yields could be further lowered if temperatures are above 36 Celsius. The researchers ran a set of

computer simulations of U.S. crop yields.

Without further pledges to curb emissions, world temperatures are set to rise by as much as 3.4 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels, according to a November report from the United Nations' Environment Program. Scientific consensus is that any increase above 2 degrees would lead to catastrophic changes to the climate -- from extreme droughts and coastal flooding to disruptions to world food supplies.

In 2016, global temperatures were record hot for a third straight year, according to U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration figures released this week.

"Increased irrigation can help to reduce the negative effects of global warming on crops," the crop study's researchers said. "This is possible only in regions where sufficient water is available. Eventually limiting global warming is needed to keep crop losses in check."

With one to three metric tons of water needed to grow one kilogram of cereal, farming ac-

counts for about 70 percent of the world's fresh water withdrawals, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. Competition for water will intensify as the global population grows, the agency said Friday.

Not all climate research has found the same results. A study from the European Union's Joint Research Centre last year said wheat yields may benefit from higher carbon-dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, while corn could suffer. The uncertain position of the Donald Trump administration is clouding the future of environmental research conducted by agencies such as NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Rising temperatures have yet to slow growth in U.S. crop yields. U.S. corn and soybean output has soared in recent years, aided by increased plantings of genetically modified seeds. Corn yields reached a record 174.6 bushels per acre in the 2016 season, up 37 percent from two decades prior, U.S. Department of Agriculture data show. Soybean yields at 52.1 bushels an acre were also an all-time high.

Still, crop production has been vulnerable to dramatic weather shifts. In 2012, a drought across American growing regions shriveled harvests and sent corn prices to an all-time high. **Bloomberg**

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



CAT INJURY TREATMENTS

A cat injury could be either mild or more severe as in traumatic injuries. It's important to know a few first aid procedures to perform in the case of common cat injuries. Some injuries such as fractures or wounds that are bleeding profusely may require emergency medical help and first aid shouldn't replace medical assistance.

MOST COMMON CAT INJURIES:

- Choking on foreign objects
- Broken legs or limbs
- Cat that has fallen from a height (Common in Macau and Hong Kong)
- Cat poisoning
- Seizures or convulsions
- Injury from cat fights or animal bites

TREATMENT FOR VARIOUS CAT INJURIES

If your pet is choking on an object you should promptly help her as the cat could pass out very quickly or suffocate. The cat will exhibit signs of gagging, coughing and wheezing. The first thing to do is call your vet or animal emergency care service. You may alternatively try to help your pet by opening the mouth wide and holding the tongue down with one hand. Look for the object and try to gently remove it with tongs if you spot it. If you cannot see the object, avoid further discomfort to your pet and seek medical help. The Heimlich maneuver is used to remove lodged objects. You may perform the Heimlich only if trained to do so.

BROKEN LEGS OR LIMBS

Cats with broken bones may be unable to walk or stand. Before taking the cat to the vet, examine the site and check for protruding bones, open cat wounds or swelling. If your pet has an open wound along with the fracture, gently wash the wound with water. Without applying any medication, hold the wound down with a clean cloth. It's important to minimize movement in pets with broken bones. Hold a folded towel under the broken limb and transport your pet to a doctor. Consider asking friends or neighbors for help as it could be a challenging experience.

INJURIES FROM FALLING FROM HIGH PLACES

If your pet has just fallen from a high ledge or a height, examine your pet's body and look for open wounds. If you notice cat blood on the ground where you're pet fell, it's likely your cat is bleeding. The cat may be agitated and suffering from nervousness. Speak to your pet in a reassuring tone and if you notice any broken bones follow the same procedure as you would for fractures.

CAT POISONING

Due to the curious nature of cats, accidental ingestion of poisonous or toxic substances may be fatal. If you suspect poisoning in your cat, look for the type of poisonous or toxic substance that your pet may have ingested or come in contact with through the skin. If it's a skin



related toxin, wash the site with plenty of water to prevent further absorption. Poisonous substances that are ingested are generally removed with induced vomiting. Call our 24Hr Clinic for poisoning emergency care. Follow the instructions to either induce vomiting or provide aid. Although vomiting is the best first aid treatment, it shouldn't be performed on pets showing signs of difficulty breathing.

SEIZURES OR CONVULSIONS

Dogs suffering from seizures show uncontrolled body movements like shaking or leaping in the air. When your pet suffers from a seizure avoid sticking a spoon or objects in his mouth. Often several seizures occur consecutively. Remove all objects around your dog that may harm him during the seizure. Note down how long the seizure lasts and the various symptoms exhibited. Since seizures cut off oxygen from your pet's brain, diagnosis and medication is vital. Don't panic as the cat may already be in a state of fright and requires a calm environment.

INJURY FROM CAT FIGHTS OR BITES

Cleaning cat wounds after a cat fight is necessary to prevent infection. If the wound is minor, carefully clip the fur around the wound and flush it with water and 3 percent hydrogen peroxide. Avoid applying any medication. Hold the wound down with a clean napkin to stop bleeding. Take your pet to the doctor as open wounds require both cat medication and dressing. Stitches are necessary for deeper wounds.

Remember to stay calm and contact your vet if you're in doubt. Always keep animal emergency and vet numbers at hand and ask friends for help if you can't handle the situation alone.

Hope this info helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan

Ask the Vet:
Royal Veterinary Centre
Tel: +853 28501099, +853 28523678
Emergency: +853 62662268
Email: royalveterinary@gmail.com