

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



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## October newsletter 2019

### Editorial



### Nigel Pegler

Welcome to the October issue of the volunteer newsletter.

Some wonderful stories in this issue from volunteers and partners, as is always the way with these things it`s all last minute panicking trying to get the newsletter together but we all manage somehow, apologies for any typos!

Any comments and volunteer experiences welcome at [newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## our partner in The Gambia -deserved recognition

By Sallie Grayson Programme director

We are so thrilled and proud for our partner in The Gambia - Adama Bah - his [honorary doctorate](#) is so well deserved.



I have known Adama for over 15 years - he is my friend, partner and most important of all - my mentor - much I have learnt about ethical and responsible volunteering - I have learnt from him - together we strive for the best and always challenge each other to do better.

Congratulations Adama on a well deserved recognition for all you do to make better places for people to visit and better places for people to live.

This is his acceptance speech

Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Graduands and Guests, good morning to you all. I am deeply honoured to be conferred an Honorary Doctor from this great university that holds a special place in my heart.

Today I would like to talk to you about stories leading to dreams and dreams to aspirations. There is an African proverb which states: "Dreams are voices of our ancestors" meaning they are related to the past but also connected to the future. Our dreams should lead us to tell our stories and as Maya Angelou reminded us "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." I choose to tell my story.

My story with tourism started when I was a hotel manager in The Gambia in the 90s. In 1994, the UK and Scandinavian governments issued a travel advice against The Gambia following a military takeover. This brought the tourism industry to a total halt. I thought if a foreign policy can cripple our economy in this way then something is terribly wrong.

I resigned from my job and started an NGO called Gambia Tourism Concern advocating for sustainability in tourism.

This was the start of my activism against an unfair model of tourism controlled from the outside. I worked with small businesses in tourism and with others founded the Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism enabling over 2000 women gardeners to sell their produce to hotels. We also worked with villages and communities so they too can benefit from tourism. Our most recent project is the Ninki-Nanka Trail, you are all welcome to join us in our next story telling trip in January 2020 following the trail of the Mythical Dragon along the River Gambia.

Through the journey of advocacy, I have been inspired by many like Dr Harold Goodwin who has been a great mentor. He encouraged me to pursue my Masters Degree with this University in my 50s. Here I met inspirational lecturers like Dr Simon Woodward, Dr Davina Stanford and Lucy McCombes amongst others. I sincerely thank them all.

I would also like to say thank you to Sallie and Kate from People and Places, Helen Wilcockson, Sheik Tejan Nyang and all my colleagues in the Gambia and abroad. Together through the responsible tourism movement we have collaborated and made remarkable achievements. To my wife, Lisong and our children and grandchildren thank you for your love and support. And finally, to the students, you too have dreams, do not leave them hanging with no purpose, nurture them, mould them, pursue them and most importantly tell your stories.

Learn more about our volunteer programmes in [education](#) and [wealth creation](#)

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## **volunteer story from Cambodia**

We work hard to ensure that all volunteers are carefully matched to the needs of the projects where they carry out their placements. But it is not until we get feedback from the volunteer and from the project that we really know whether or not the placement has been a success. Volunteer Kate went to [Treak Community Centre in Siem Reap](#) in June and we were delighted to read her positive comments about her volunteering experience in the report she wrote for us. Here are some extracts from what she had to say -



Kate at one of the Angkor Wat temples

'My orientation in Siem Reap was excellent and the way they welcomed and cared for the welfare of their volunteers was what helped me to settle in quickly and start functioning as a useful member of the team as soon as possible. Particular thanks go to Sophea who made sure I knew the cycle route, arranged a SIM card for me, got my VISA extension sorted and was just a reassuring, friendly English speaking person if you weren't sure about anything.

The school had also clearly given serious thought to my placement and had planned out an induction week. The NGO Director, Michael, also took the time to come out to meet me with the Head Teacher so that we could all formally introduce ourselves and he helped provide some useful background information about how as volunteers we could best work alongside our Cambodian colleagues. I can honestly say that the atmosphere was so professional, warm and welcoming with a large dose of humour that you couldn't possibly not feel that you were a valuable part of the team even though it's quite clear they have volunteers coming and going very regularly.

In that first week I drew up a plan for my time for the placement period so that I could apportion the hours I had available to the various tasks and not spend too long on one particular thing to the detriment of something else. This proved to be useful as a month isn't a huge amount of time and I did want to achieve something by the end of it rather than start a lot of things but not finish them.



Head teacher Dara

My placement supporting the Head Teacher was very clearly defined so I was able to get going with that very quickly. To support his professional development he had asked for training in time management and team management so I delivered three coaching sessions on these topics tailoring my knowledge to his specific needs.



Working with Sa Lin

The second project was working with the Project Manager, Sa Lin, on the product development, sales and merchandising of the fledgling social enterprise sewing group. Her main aim for me was to create a display area in reception for the products. As part of this, I needed to get a bigger picture of who the market was for these products, what products would appeal, what price they should be, what the costs were for each product and how they could be marketed with the display being one part of that. I spent some time looking at shops and markets in Siem Reap that sold handicrafts to see how they did it and to get ideas. I shared these with Sa Lin and together we picked ideas we liked that we thought would work.



Displaying products made by the sewing group

One of the products that the sewing group had made was a foldaway shopping bag and it needed a design on it. We decided to get the children to draw a design as it was felt this would be a memorable souvenir of a visit to Treak. One class came up with a couple of good designs and we took them to the local silk screen printing company to discuss. With a few tweaks they should be able to progress this. A side benefit of this visit was that they were impressed by the quality of the workmanship and said they might sometimes have a bit of work they could put Treak's way when a customer wants a small run of bags.

The project are already very good at posting on Facebook and Instagram but needed more guidance on how to use it strategically to create wider awareness and to drive action. I did a coaching session for Sa Lin on Instagram which helped towards that.



## Highlights:

Finding out how much of a difference you can make, how keen they are to learn new things and have your support.

Feeling part of the team at the school and at the NGO office – you feel like you are a valued part of their organisation

Working with Dara who is such a super chap and so keen to learn!

The unusual things that happen because it's Cambodia! Having the audio backdrop in the office of a Buddhist funeral on loudspeaker throughout the whole village for 2 days running and being allowed to go in and see the musicians and religious offerings; witnessing a huge, noisy, colourful procession one morning on my way into work to mark the start of becoming a monk for 5 young men.

If you have a skill that you could share and would like to immerse yourself in another culture then volunteering abroad is a fabulous experience. Because I was there to do a job that I really enjoyed it kept me going when sometimes other aspects were hard such as getting used to the heat or feeling under the weather! I think it's important to contribute as much as you can whilst you are there. I never felt I had all the answers but the willingness to get alongside your Cambodian colleagues and share with them what you know is really helpful.'



Thank you from the team at Treak

To read more about volunteering at Treak follow this link:

[https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/projects/278/children-belong-in-families---community-support-in-Treak%2c-Cambodia-\(CW\)](https://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/projects/278/children-belong-in-families---community-support-in-Treak%2c-Cambodia-(CW))

## A message from Kate

First of all – THANK YOU everyone for your good wishes while I've been away for a while ...

Next – I may have been away from 'people and places' desk, but I'm still keeping my finger on the pulse. Frequent calls with Sallie and Dianne ... and ... a lovely get-together in the summer with our wonderful local partners from The Gambia, Lisong and Adama ... as well as their daughter Mariama and grandchildren. Adama and Lisong were visiting to UK so Adama could accept his Honorary Doctorate - more about this elsewhere in this blog.



What a wonderful time we all had together.

Loads of fabulous memories shared and stored, as well as delicious Gambian and local food.

Lovely to refresh such strong friendships



I'll be back (as someone said) as soon as possible. In the meantime I love reading about your experiences and all the incredible work you are doing.

Best wishes to you all

Kate

## Luci to speak at leading responsible tourism conference

Our Young Professional adviser [Luci Gardiner O'Brien](#) has certainly been thrown in at the deep end - she is representing people and places on a panel discussing child protection issues at WTM London in November - Luci will be talking about something close to our heart - how volunteer travellers can work for children - working with projects that seek to keep children in families not in orphanages - for an example of our work take a look [here](#)



Here`s an outline of the session - if you are interested in attending please let us know - contact [sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

Tuesday 5th November 11.30

**The issue of the exploitation of children in orphanages to create lucrative attractions for tourists was first raised at [WTM London in 2011](#). There has been a session on child protection every year since raising awareness of the child trafficking and exploitation of children, many of them not orphans, to secure donations and visit fees from tourists and tourism businesses. This year we are focusing on what tourists and tourism businesses can do to support children in their extended families in the community and out of orphanages. Moderator: Martin Punaks**

**'Luci' Gardner-O'Brien peopleandplaces**

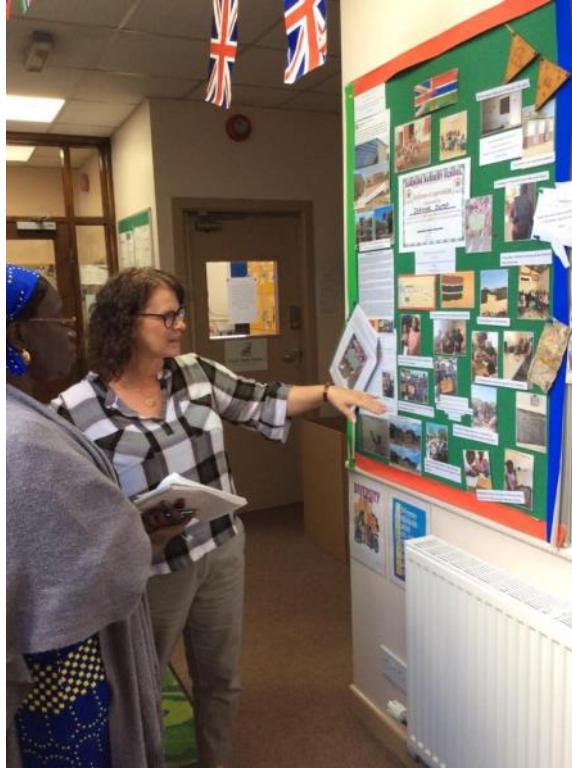
**Damien Brosnan The Code**

**Mehalah Beckett, Regional General Manager for Sub Saharan Africa, Intrepid**



## Sharing experiences works both ways!

We often include articles in our newsletter written by volunteers describing a visit their experiences in schools abroad. This time we are taking the opposite point of view! Lisong is the founder and manager of [Mary's Little Lambs, a nursery and prep school in The Gambia](#). Joanne is a volunteer whose skills and experience have been matched to Mary's Little Lambs, where she will be carrying out her volunteer placement in October. But this article does not describe Joanne's visit to Lisong's nursery in the Gambia - instead it describes Lisong's visit to Joanne's nursery in the UK.



Lisong and Joanne

During the summer Lisong happened to be in the UK – you will have read elsewhere in this newsletter about the award of an honorary doctorate to her husband Adama and of course Lisong accompanied him to the UK for the graduation ceremony. This was too good an opportunity to miss! Joanne immediately invited Lisong to pay a visit to her own nursery school and, with some trepidation, Lisong accepted. Her fears were nothing to do with the visit to the nursery – she very much wanted to go. But the journey from London to Lancashire would be the longest journey she had undertaken on her own in Britain, and the pace of life in the UK is very different to that in the Gambia! This was to be a bit of an adventure for her!

Adama accompanied her across London to Euston - the crowds of people and the many trains at Victoria and Euston stations did nothing to calm Lisong's nerves - and saw her safely onto the train to Preston where Joanne met her and drove her to the nursery school she started and manages, exactly as Lisong has done in the Gambia. Lisong told me that she knew immediately that she and Joanne have a lot in common. Even their family circumstances had some similarities – Lisong loved the fact that Joanne's mother lives very close to her as her own mother had done in the Gambia – it is her mother's house in the family compound which now houses Lisong's nursery school. Lisong felt well looked after and at home straight away. As well as visiting the nursery Joanne took her to a holiday club for older children, to her home and to an Italian restaurant for lunch – all part of the adventure!



Spaghetti bolognese for lunch

Lisong is an expert in nursery school education – she is highly respected in the Gambia for her knowledge of early childhood education and is instrumental in curriculum development and teacher training in her own country. But the Gambia is a poor country, less developed in terms of educational provision, especially for young children, and commercial educational resources are hard to find. Lisong’s philosophy of teaching is very child-focused and centres around learning through play; she encourages teachers in the Gambia to make educational resources out of anything they can find locally and not to feel they can’t teach because they have no commercial teaching aids. She thought a nursery school in the UK would probably be very different. So for her the highlight of the visit to Joanne’s nursery was to find they share exactly the same philosophy. Many of the resources at the nursery were made from recycled materials and Lisong loved their innovative ideas. She particularly enjoyed pretending to ride in the cars made from drinks crates and accepted a ‘lift’ back to London from a number of children who vied to be her chauffeur.



having a ride in the crate car

She loved the use of natural materials to make learning aids, such as a basket of sticks which the children played with in various ways, picking them up with kitchen tongs exactly as her children do in the Gambia to practise fine motor skills, counting them and arranging them into shapes such as triangles. Numbers and letters were painted onto offcuts of wood, and this is an idea Lisong has already taken back to her own school. She liked the fact that resources were not newly bought from the shops – old pots and pans made a play kitchen and single wellies were used as planting containers.



Lisong uses wooden letter blocks to write her name

Her favourite area was the Gruffalo house, a quiet area for reading with shelves of books and seats made from tree trunks, including a very impressive carved Gruffalo at one end of the bench. Lisong has already identified the tree stump at Mary's Little Lambs which will be her own Gruffalo – she just needs to find the right craftsman to carve it for her!



the Gruffalo house

Lisong was very impressed with how the classes were organised – the whole day was taken up with play, but it was guided play with so many opportunities for developing the children’s learning through conversation and interaction with them. She liked the organisation of the nursery space, both indoors and outdoors, into different learning zones, with areas for water play, reading, dressing up etc. Although this is a way of teaching she has always advocated she said how good it was to have her ideas validated by seeing them working so well in a country so different from her own. Yes, Joanne’s nursery had some resources and facilities she does not have at Mary’s Little Lambs, but overall she saw so many more similarities than differences and is so happy to know that the opportunities she is providing for children at her own school in the Gambia are really very similar to those being offered to children at Joanne’s nursery in the UK.

Lisong felt so welcomed on this visit, by Joanne herself, by the teachers and by the children. She cannot wait to welcome Joanne to her nursery when she goes to volunteer there in just a few weeks’ time. And maybe we can include an account of that visit in the next edition of our newsletter.



waving goodbye

[learn more about the Early Childhood Development Volunteer Programme here](#)

## **BBC interviews Cambodian volunteer**



[Click HERE](#) to hear the interview

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## **Abdou Rahman talks about his hopes for volunteer programme**



click on the picture for video



Kate - volunteer placement director talks about the challenges and rewards of her work

**there are loads of new video interviews and stories from volunteers and projects**

If you haven't already spotted our [YouTube channel](#) it's worth a look.

If you have videos of your time volunteering or one of the talks you have done – we know many of you talk to groups on your return from volunteering – please send them to us so we can share them.



**meet the *people and places* team [here](#)**

[Take a look here at slideshare for slide shows from volunteers](#) – if you have a slide show to share please do send it to us, thanks so much to all the volunteers who have contributed to date.

Remember we are on facebook too - [follow us here](#) – in the blog and on facebook are where we tend to post our latest news.

See our blog here <http://blog.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/>

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