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## Volunteer placement report Treak Cambodia

### Volunteer: Lizzie Shea

I decided to volunteer in Cambodia at Treak Community College as my children had all left home and finally I thought it was time for me to push my boundaries, learn about new cultures and hopefully give back a bit to communities in need. I have lived in Asia before and although not in Cambodia, I felt I would feel more comfortable here than some of the other projects that P and P offer.

I chose People and Places to go through as they seemed to have an older profile of volunteers and I didn't want a gap year feel to my experience.

The pre-departure information was exemplary. I met the Treak team through a facetime call and I also spoke to other volunteers who had been. I felt very well supported and prepared.

On arrival, I have to admit I felt a bit overwhelmed. After two days of no sleep (the flight and nerves before I travelled) the guest house, on first impression, was basic and felt very foreign. However, I was met at the airport by a tuk-tuk and shortly after arrival I was met by Sari and another teacher from the college and they took me and another volunteer for a walk around the town. We got our Sim cards. This wasn't free as I thought but that wasn't a problem as they were so cheap. I would recommend an unlimited data sim. (Note from people and places: volunteers are provided for free with a sim card for local calls which has a couple of dollars on it. If volunteers want a data package to include Internet and international calls, as Lizzie did, they need to pay for this themselves)

My and the other volunteer then had dinner in lively Pub Street and after a good night's sleep I was ready for school for the next day. The early start was great and I would recommend going in the day after you land as it gets you into the placement quickly and helps you get orientated.

The following day, I started cycling with my friend and the team were fantastic in going with me until I knew the way (it's easy) and was comfortable with the traffic (it seems manic to start but actually is fabulous as everyone is so courteous and after a few days I loved it. The only problem was a mad dog near the school crossroads that chased all bikes but we soon found a new route by the river that was fine.)

At the school, Dara the headteacher and in fact all the staff were so welcoming and I would strongly recommend you get to know them and have chats over lunch and play with the kids during breaks. Initially, I hadn't realised that as well as supporting the children, Treak is all about giving the staff opportunities to get a career and learn English.

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They are all very keen to learn English and so motivated to grasp the opportunity they have been given. Building relationships with them was the best part of my time and I have so much respect for Salin and all the team.

The first week I spent shadowing all of the classes and then the next three weeks I spent my mornings helping a lovely new teacher and showing her how to plan, assess, differentiate and just teach. I'm not a very experienced teacher but she has only had 10 days shadowing ever and no formal training so I hope that every little helped. Her class spans three years and has a huge ability range which is a challenge for the best teacher yet alone one that isn't trained. (Note from people and places: as Lizzie has said one of Treak's priorities is to provide opportunities for local people – appointing someone who has not had the chance to access formal training and training her on the job will provide this new teacher with a very valuable opportunity to support herself and her family. Dara (Headteacher) and Viphou (Deputy Headteacher) will set up a training programme for her within the school).



Art and craft activity in the library

In the afternoon, I helped Salin to develop her sewing business called 'Treak Creative' and build a starter website for her. As they are short of money it isn't transactional but is a start. If you want any clothes made, bring a picture or an example of what you want. Salin will make it for you and you in turn will help her get extra funds for the college. Leave space in your case to bring back items she makes for your friends too.

The days were full and start at 8-11am with 20 mins for break. A new set of children come in for the afternoon between 1pm and 4pm and the lessons are repeated from the morning. I think on the P and P website the times stated aren't quite correct. (Lizzie arrived at Treak just as they reverted to their pre-Covid timetable and before we had had the chance to update our website – it is correct now!)

During my time I made a good friend of another volunteer from Ireland and we spent most evenings together which was lovely, when we weren't too tired! I also got lots of massages and ate some good food although vegetables are in short supply.

There was also a group of volunteers from Australia who were great and we went out for a picnic at a local beauty spot with the staff one weekend and also had a BBQ at Michael and Salin's house that was lovely. Plus every Friday any volunteers all get together with Michael and Salin and go for dinner after school.

After my initial reticence, I soon realised that the strange men who slept in hammocks were actually security and Moy who ran the guest house is lovely. It felt like home but make sure you ask for a room in the new white building. It is like chalk and cheese and the first room I was given was so basic and tatty and would have been a struggle for me. I had brought photos from home that I put up over the mirror with blue tac and it was lovely. I didn't realise until my last day but 30 seconds away is a guest house that you can use for free if you have a drink and its pool area and bar are like a luxury boutique hotel. Can't believe I didn't find it sooner! I think this should be shown on the

initial tour. (Note from people and places: we can arrange accommodation of various standards according to how much the volunteer wants to pay. The white building is new so the quality of accommodation is higher and this is reflected in the price)

Washing is done for \$1 per kilo and comes back the next day – fabulous. Food is basic at the guest house. I ate out mostly but would recommend having the Asian dishes and steering clear of the western food - the garlic bread was interesting!

In addition, I went to Angkor Wat, Phnom Penh by bus and returned via plane and explored Siem Reap which felt very safe and like home in no time. One big tip is to download the grab app. It's like Uber and will get you a taxi in seconds and is very cheap.

Overall an absolutely fabulous experience that I am so glad I did.

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