

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of **your** experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project. If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at dianne@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Volunteer placement report Treak Cambodia

Volunteer: Denise Hughes, RALEIGH, NC USA

Volunteering in Cambodia for a month was a monumental endeavor, or so I thought, as I was as far away from that part of the world as is possible. But I didn't regret it not even for a second.

My motivation for volunteering came when a friend asked me if I'd like to join her at a small community center in Siem Reap. Having never been to that part of the world, and having a someone to work alongside with, in a country such as Cambodia, I knew this was a great opportunity. And coming from the USA and all its extravagances, I felt it right to go be part of something bigger and more important.

I signed up for just under a month, from January 23, 2023- February 21, 2023. I would have loved to stay longer and help more, but I had to get back to the states for my children.

Orientation and preparation were very explanatory and easy. However, being from the US, the background check was a little more involved and took longer than I had hoped. I would have liked to purchase my airfare sooner as it ended up expensive because I booked it so close to the date of my departure.

I felt well prepared as I knew I would be painting murals so I planned accordingly. I packed what supplies I knew I'd use and bought the rest on site.

What was really helpful was getting somewhat of a tour with a volunteer who was leaving a few days later. She showed us around and gave us recommendations on where to go, to eat, and tours that we'd like. I feel that Katie and I took advantage of most anything on offer!

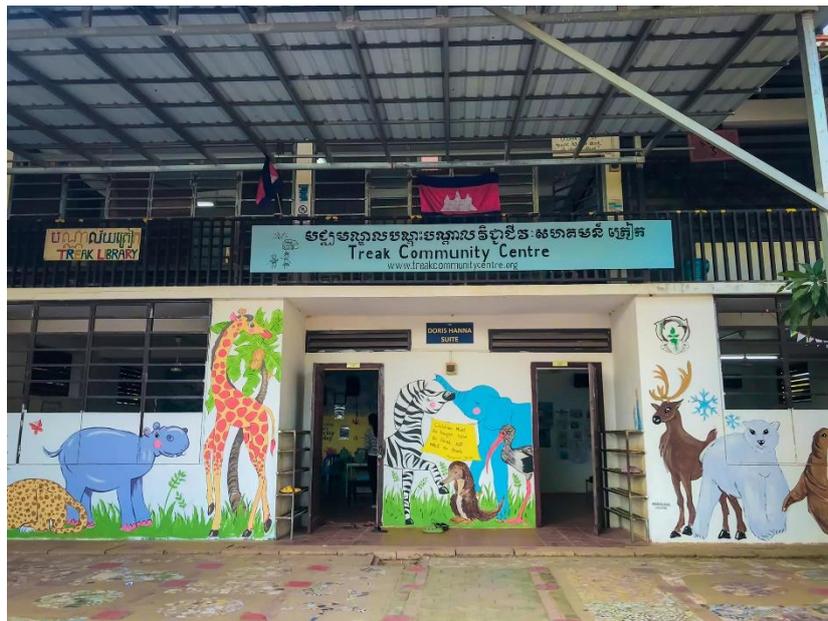
Working at the Centre was a lot of work but so rewarding! The children loved watching me paint the murals and interacted with them daily. The world map was a huge success and they constantly measured the size of their country to the larger ones surrounding them as well as their size compared to the vast oceans.

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After finishing 2 main murals and a few sign paintings for the school, I realized my help was needed for the sewing business. So I designed things to be made by Salin and her team and helped select appropriate fabrics for the pieces. I then completed a large “Animals around the World” mural on the front of the school. My only regret is that I was unable to spend much time with the children. I had really hoped I could teach some art but time ran out.



I left behind materials for Finger puppets, something I had hoped to make. Hopefully the school will be able to use the materials in some way.

One of the many highlights was when I was painting arctic animals (because I was told the children loved the idea of snow), I added 2 small characters from the movie Frozen. When they saw this, they all ran over and started singing “Let it Go, Let it Go”. It was so sweet.

I would highly recommend this opportunity to anyone. I am highly adaptable, so it suited me to the ground. The utter joy you gain from this sort of experience is unimaginable!

In our leisure time, we took full advantage of what was on offer! The first weekend, we booked 2 tours. The first one was the "Floating Village" tour of Tonle Sap Lake. Absolutely amazing!! The second tour was a full day temple tour. It was extraordinary, however, a little too long and a little too hot! And I definitely should have worn my proper sneakers for all of the walking! On the second weekend we went to Battambang for a few nights. It was very interesting, especially the cultural tour in the countryside, because it is such an agricultural area. We stayed at Maisons Wat Kor which was fabulous. On our last weekend, we treated ourselves to flights to Siem Reap and ferried over to Koh Rong Island which was magical and just the respite we needed from the heat of Siem Reap. We stayed a few nights in a luxury tent at Tamu and a night at the Secret Garden Resort (amazing food!). Unfortunately, we missed our flight back because the Ferry broke down and ended up having a night in Phnom Penh. But we were glad we got to see the city as it was not on our original schedule. We also did the Phare Circus one night which I would highly recommend!!!!

Our accommodations in Siem Reap were OK. You couldn't beat the price, however, there was a constant gap in the doors which allowed bugs and mosquitos in. If I had to do it over again, I would probably spend a little more money to stay at one of the many hotels in Siem Reap rather than at a guesthouse.

(Note from people and places: Denise stayed at the locally-run guesthouse recommended by our local partner. We do offer a hotel option too for volunteers who would like to spend a little more, and volunteers are welcome to book accommodation at a hotel independently if they wish)

We tried all sorts of restaurants and our favorites were, Temple Design, Banlle Vegetarian, New Leaf Eatery, Sister Srey, Crepe Italy, Il Toro (pizza), Viva Mexican, Endora, Haven, and Mamma Shop.

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