

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 kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Penny Wilkinson – Treak community support – 6th February to 3rd March 2017

In truth, I didn't really think too much about my trip until a couple of days before. I had already planned to go to India in December and therefore this took precedence over my volunteer preparation. I was then very busy with work in January.

The preparation with regards to People and Places was very smooth but, as I have explained, I don't think I looked too deeply and asked too many questions. However I did feel they were as attentive in as much as I required and would have happily helped me in any way I requested. I liked their friendly approach and the support was always there.

One thing I did find a bit daunting was that I never had an email or contact confirming that someone would meet me at the airport. I had been so busy wrapping up my work schedule for the next 6 weeks away, my packing and preparation has been very hasty. Suddenly I sat on the plane thinking 'no one has confirmed I will be met at the airport.' I quickly got to grips with this - I knew where I was staying and had some dollars in my wallet! However, this could have been more of a problem for someone who hasn't travelled that much on their own.

Note: unfortunately, a missed email ... we always send contact details for volunteers before they travel

The actual placement experience was brilliant! Initially, I was very out of my comfort zone but I also surprised myself at my ability to slot into the programme very quickly. I also learnt a lot about myself! It was a very positive and fulfilling experience. The staff were so friendly at the project and they were so helpful. Nothing was too much trouble for them whether you needed practical help or advice. I was fortunate enough to work with children of all different ages rather than just one age group. I was so impressed with the organisation of the centre and the facilities they had available. They had a wonderful ethos.

I think my main advice to perspective volunteers would be to embrace the different culture and accept that things are very different to our western world. You need to always keep that is the forefront of your mind when dealing with situations. I think the induction day was very important and you always need to bear in mind what you learnt about Cambodia and it's peoples culture. I would also say don't be too hard on yourself – there are times when things don't go right or you get tired, but overall you will take away a fantastic experience. I met some wonderful people and would not hesitate in volunteering again.

The details of my actual placement were 'different' to that which People and Places had advised. An example of this was the size of the groups, hygiene programmes etc which didn't follow the information given by the programme advice.

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This was not a problem to me as I always intended to be as flexible as required. However, I do think some volunteers would want things, from the initial information, to be more accurate to what actually happens in the placement. The details of the teacher and ages of children I would be working with also varied from the programme I was given before my departure. Again this was not an issue to me but I felt could have caused a problem to some people.

Note: we do all that we can to ensure the accuracy of the placement outline provided to volunteers before they travel. However, the situation in such a dynamic community project as Treak can result in slight changes to the original placement outline – which is why flexibility and adaptability are key qualities in all volunteers, as Penny shows.

The accommodation, Victory Guest House, was basic but very friendly. A few holey sheets to be had I must admit. Overall it was adequate with a lovely communal area to talk over your day with fellow volunteers at other projects. I was surprised to be so close to the very touristy town of Siem Reap. Not having been here before I was taken back by being so close to 'Pub Street' etc. To begin with this felt a bit 'false' as I didn't intend this to be part of my experience.

However as soon as I got onto my bicycle and set off to my project location, things dramatically changed to rural poverty Cambodia. I suppose you could argue it was the best of both worlds.

There were plenty of hotel pools where you could use the facilities as long as you bought a drink. Massages, temple visits, country side sightseeing, endless restaurants and bars all forming activities available in free time. There was never a time when there was nothing to do!

Overall a very positive and rewarding experience. I would highly recommend it!

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Thank you.