

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 - Nepal – Shiva Shakti School – 04/02/2018 – 4 week volunteer placement.

As I had volunteered through People and Places previously, I was quite happy to allow the pre departure preparations to be sorted out with little involvement. This was done very efficiently.

The only comment I would make regarding the pre departure is that the website was a little ambiguous concerning the transfer from/back to Kathmandu. I would have liked to be advised that I could reduce my costs by taking a bus and there were other options to an internal flight. I may have arranged my schedule differently. However, I can appreciate this could have been a very daunting experience for someone who had not travelled much in a third world country. It's an 8 hour journey.

Note from *people and places*: we have now added information on the project page about this option.

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience at Shiva Shakti School. As this school had not had volunteers before, consequently, I went with a very open mind as to how things would be at the beginning. On my first day the headmaster had little idea what to do with me. He speaks very little English and I felt very much 'out in the cold'. I was left with classes on my own without any native teachers! Obviously I was completely out of my depth, with no knowledge of the Nepali language. This situation was quickly rectified through my project contacts. Maybe here a little more forward planning on both sides would have been useful prior to my arrival.

Note: we have discussed this with our local partners at Tiger Mountain and are reassured that this situation will not reoccur. Our local partners fully appreciate that each placement must be discussed in depth with the project / headmaster.

I found the main issue with the English of the children, regardless of their ages, was the great ability to write and read English, but the actual conversational English was very limited. The children simply rote learn English and there is a real lack of individual asking of students to assess their understanding. It was evident that they have little practice of conversational English to be able to verbally communicate.

A lot of my time was spent, especially with the older children, in role play conversations. I wasn't given any real guidelines by the staff as to what they wanted from me and this didn't change despite my efforts for clarification. I came to the conclusion I had to take the lead. The teachers seemed just 'bowled over' by my different teaching ideas resulting in the children actually having English conversations! I think this was probably because they had not had volunteers before and simply wanted the students English to improve. Some of the teachers had very little English speaking skills

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themselves which was obviously a challenge in itself. There are very few teaching aids and recreational facilities. A imagination to make the most of limited resources and the use of basic things like stones, plastic bottles, leaves etc for learning aids was a challenge!

Note: as Penny points out, the local teachers' lack of confidence in spoken English and teaching methodologies influences the way placements are planned and develop. However, from our previous project and placement experience, this is something which gradually improves

Most of my time was centred on conversation and making speaking English fun by games, role play, singing, individual student attention, more use of computer resources, the sorting and using the limited English library books, nature walks and litter picking to promote counting etc ! The flash cards I took with me were invaluable and I wish I had taken more resources. I hope that some of these ideas will be carried on by the teachers. They are definitely a building block for future volunteering. I do think to be of the most benefit to the school and for the placement to be of any value, it needs to be for a longer period. I felt that I was leaving just as things were moving forward with the students and the teachers seeing the benefit of sometimes trying teaching in a different way.

I think the disappointment of the placement was that I wasn't there long enough! The highlight was seeing how the children had progressed with their English speaking and them singing songs in English on my last day, at assembly, without me leading them! Twinkle Twinkle Little Star will never be the same again!

I would highly recommend this placement, but the necessity of going with an open mind is a must! I didn't expect to 'take the lead' as much as I did, but as I say, I was the first volunteer at this school. I didn't find this a problem but it may be to future volunteers who want more of a structured plan and also to the school, in getting the most benefit from future volunteers.

The accommodation at Tiger Mountain was superb. I was very well looked after on all accounts. There were also some very interesting people staying there throughout my stay. The set up is basically a very friendly atmosphere with shared tables at dinner etc. This added to the enjoyment as I did wonder, when I first arrived, if I would be a little lonely as the only volunteer at the lodge. During my leisure time I did a lot of walking on my own or if a distance with a lodge guide, I read a couple of books, went to two village festivals, visited various teachers' houses (they having invited me for tea!), visited the local town and sights. I enjoyed the peace and quiet of the lodge. The walk to the school each day could be challenging to someone who struggles with hills. However I did not find this a problem and usually walked back part of the way with some of the school children.

I would say to anyone thinking of this project to allow some extra time at the end for further travel in Nepal. I did a trek in the Himalayas, visited Kathmandu for 5 days and ended at a yoga retreat. Nepal is fabulous country with very warm friendly people. A great experience all round.

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