

## people and places:responsible volunteering

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](mailto:dianne@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

Place : Treak Community Centre, Siem Reap, Cambodia. ConCERT.

Dates of placement : 06/02/20 - 13/03/20

After several discussions with Kate and Dianne at People and Places with regard to my wish to volunteer it was decided that a suitable placement would be in Cambodia. As a retired GP I wanted to work as a general volunteer but somewhere where my skills and knowledge as a doctor would be useful. I provided PeopleandPlaces with my ' Life Story' so that all the discussions I had were pertinent and useful in helping them find a suitable placement and for me to make my decision. I had the opportunity to speak, on the phone, to Michael Horden ( CEO of ConCERT and that was most helpful.

The advice I received prior to departure was relevant and again most helpful. I was able to provide all the necessary paperwork and it was processed most efficiently. I was put in touch with a Travel Agent who was aware that I was going to Cambodia as a volunteer and he arranged good, competitively priced flights.

I was sent very an excellent document - Guidelines for all visitors - and a good resume on the ethos of Treak Community Centre.

Dianne contacted prior to departure to check all was well and that I had no queries.

Prior to arrival Michael sent me an outline of the tasks that I could perform which allowed me time to think about this and access some suitable recourses.

On arrival I was met by Sophea, a ConCERT staff member which was reassuring. She helped over the first few days by showing me around the Centre, and part of Siem Reap in order for me to get my bearings.

My role was to check and update the main first aid kit and organise small simple kits for each classroom. To give First Aid training to key staff members. To discuss issues revolving around general health and hygiene. To do a few talks to the early evening students ( aged 15-20 years ) about my work and experience together with advice on how to have a healthy body. I also helped support and assist the teachers in the English classes.

I was given £100.00 donation by my old surgery and used this to buy essential items for the first aid kits which were sorely in need of updating and replenishing!

I provided information about a very good App supplied by British Red Cross which two key teachers downloaded and can use this to supplement the written information that I used to instruct and which I left at the Centre.

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I updated the tooth brushing procedure used by the 2 lower classes (and which were chaotic!). Provided each child , 135 in total ,with a new tooth brush and left written instructions and a flow chart for the teachers to follow.

The whole team in Siem Reap were amazing, welcoming and dedicated and all kept the best interests of all the children who attended the school at the centre of every action. A safe guarding course was facilitated by Michael which was excellent, I have been on many during the course of my career and this was appropriate for issues that were universal but also those that were relevant to Cambodia bearing in mind cultural differences.

It was a joy to be involved and I have developed a new and great respect for teachers!

I feel that I was of assistance on several levels during my placement. I think that the teachers are now more confident to deal with first aid problems. I was able to use my medical knowledge to help a couple of staff members and several children which was great. I was just disappointed that because of the Coronavirus pandemic the school was shut suddenly and I was unable to say farewell to all the children and most of the teachers.

I opted to use a bicycle as my means of transport rather than a Tuk-Tuk, nerve wracking as last rode a bike >30 years ago ! However this was a highlight, you got the sights and smells of Cambodia as well as a sense of achievement, I would recommend it! There were numerous other highlights - finding other volunteers staying in the same guest house and some working at the same school, the sheer joy of working with children from very poor families and feeling that you are helping them by teaching English which will improve their prospects of further education and a good job in the future, the difference in one's understanding of a country and its problems when visiting as a volunteer and not purely as a tourist. I feel that volunteering is fantastic on so many levels as well as those mentioned above and I would certainly recommend it to anyone at any age, the group I was working with came from several different countries and were aged from 19 to > 70 !

The accommodation recommended was excellent, basic, clean and reasonably priced. It was a family run Guest house and I was more than happy with it, the family were most helpful, the food choices were limited but all freshly cooked and delicious. It was very easy and cheap to go out and eat at a local restaurant to ring the changes. The only thing lacking was a pleasant, shaded area where one could sit, read and enjoy a beer! Luckily there was a guest house across the road that provided these facilities plus a swimming pool at the very reasonable price of \$2.00 !

I was delighted to find 2 other ' mature ' ladies who were sharing the same accommodation and who wanted to spend leisure time seeing and doing so we went on several courses ( pottery, palm leaf weaving, digging for land crabs, rattan baskets !!!) we also attended 2 sponsored shows supporting young disadvantaged youngsters, visited Angkor Wat and a lake village. I was delighted to have done some touristy things and to have company while doing so.

I know this report/resume has become rather long but I cannot end without making special mention of Michael, Salin, Sophea and Sary who are all doing an amazing job in carrying forward their aims of creating opportunity not dependency for the community that they are supporting. Their aims are laudable and I saw at first hand how Michael has trained and supported all the Cambodian members

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of his team so that they can take ownership of the project and continue it for their community, the children, their parents and everyone else involved. Michael needed to go home at the beginning of the Corona outbreak and his team, with support from him via frequent FaceTime meetings, managed the situation extremely well, going well beyond the call of duty. I know that Michael wanted to empower them and he was so right to do so. Luckily he made it back before I left.

Michael is a good man with a heart in the right place, he made all the volunteers feel welcome and supported, was easy to talk to and I am sure that with his guidance, after the current difficulties are over he will be able to continue with all the good work that Treak Community Centre undertakes. I wish him well as I know it will be tough.

I have absolutely no regrets about my decision to volunteer, it was a rewarding experience for me and, I hope, a useful and helpful one for them .

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Thank you