

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)

## Volunteer placement report Treak Cambodia

**Volunteer: Zara Sekhavati**

### What was your motivation for volunteering?

I volunteered as part of the Sophie Christopher Volunteer Award that was set up by Penguin Random House and people and places. I had previously volunteered in Morocco and taught English abroad and wanted to continue helping others and to make a difference. Sophie believed that literacy has the power to change lives, and I couldn't agree more. I wanted to be part of an important cause in honour of such an incredible woman.

(Note from people and places: the Sophie Christopher Award was set up by Penguin Random House to commemorate one of their employees who had tragically died – Zara was selected from all applicants to be the first recipient of the award)

### Placement dates and project

28th November 2022 - 9th December 2022, Treak, Cambodia

### Pre departure preparation - were you happy with the information we shared with you during your preparation for this placement? What information did you consider most useful?

Yes I was very happy with the information shared. The documents that were sent just before departure were useful to print out and to have to hand while out in Cambodia. The most useful information was given during my last call with Dianne before I departed. We talked in greater depth about what I would be doing in Cambodia (following on from our previous call with Michael and Dara), working hours, dress code, what would happen on arrival etc.

### Orientation and preparation at the start of the placement

It was very helpful to be picked up from the airport and to be taken straight to Victory Guesthouse. The walking tour and introduction talk by Sophea on the first day was a fantastic introduction to Cambodia. I felt prepared for my first day at Treak and the placement as a whole.

**Your experience and work – including what resources you may have left behind and with whom – please attach copies of any written resources you may have left behind, and let us know of any others**

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Dara has a copy of any resources and work I made. I worked on the school's Google Drive and saved Word documents and presentation slides on it. I printed off some teaching resources I made and put copies of the activities in the reading folder.

### **Successes, disappointments and challenges of your placement**

Successes - developing the literacy program. I held a presentation about reading activities to the rest of the teachers and to the parents about the importance of reading at home.

Disappointments - I can't say there were any. Just disappointing to leave so soon!

Challenges - volunteering was quite an emotional experience for me. I was very moved by the locals that I met. It was also quite emotional for me as I was doing the volunteering as part of the Sophie Christopher Volunteer award, so I was thinking about her a lot while I was there. I've also found it challenging being back in England, and have experienced culture shock going there and coming back.



*Zara in the classroom with Dara (headteacher)*

### **What was the highlight of your volunteer experience?**

It was fantastic to meet the other teachers and children, they were incredibly friendly and generous. Everyone always made sure you were ok. It was wonderful meeting the children's parents too.



*Zara with parents who had just attended her reading workshop*

### **Would you recommend volunteering to other people or not? please tell us why**

Yes. 100%. It was such a great experience. In various ways, the experience has been life changing and life affirming. The experience has made me reflect. Volunteering is also about you as an individual as well as the project, so it was a very touching experience.

### **How did you spend your leisure time?**

I spent my leisure time exploring Siem Reap. I ate in various restaurants, attended yoga classes and explored the temple that was situated close to the guesthouse. At the weekend I went on tours or attended classes eg cooking.

### **How was your accommodation?**

The accommodation was a great way to meet other volunteers and to interact with locals. Mouy and Penny (the owners and managers of Victory Guesthouse) were extremely helpful and made travel arrangements for me if I needed any. The food was great and very cheap. I didn't have hot water in my room but in a way it didn't matter as it was so hot at that time of the year! Victory was a fantastic place to stay while volunteering.

### **Anything else you would like to share with future volunteers about your placement**

I would encourage anyone to volunteer with people and places. I communicated mostly with Dianne (people and places' Placement Director) during the preparation for the placement and I can't thank her enough. Dianne was incredibly friendly and was very patient with me when I asked her many, many questions over the months/years of preparation for the placement! (Zara's placement was delayed for two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The volunteering was such a moving experience and it's made me reflect on the important things in life. It's also made me see the importance of volunteering so much more (for both you as an individual and the placement) and I would love to volunteer again in the future.

Regarding the placement, Michael, Dara and the rest of the teachers made a real effort to make sure that you were ok and happy with what you were doing. I felt comfortable asking them any questions and it was a pleasure to meet everyone at Treak. Everyone at Treak and people and places were easy to talk to as well.

Please note – this report is supplied by a former volunteer and the contents are intended solely for your information and personal use. *people and places* has permission to publish this information to you as a future volunteer. Please check with us if you would like to publish it beyond your own circle of friends and family. Thank you.