

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

Mateo Culic

Treak Community Centre

June – July 2025

What was your motivation for volunteering?

I wanted to volunteer for many different reasons. I wanted to volunteer to help a cause with my time and I really liked the idea of doing it alongside traveling to a new place, meeting new people, learning about a different culture etc. I learned about this possibility from a friend from my university, whose friend volunteered in Tanzania. So I started researching online. Then I bumped into all the ethical problems that come with this type of volunteering, but luckily I found people and places. I submitted everything that was needed and they matched me with Treak Community Center in Cambodia. I read a bit about Treak and Cambodia, everything sounded perfect so I accepted.

Placement dates and project

27 June - 24 July (4 weeks), at Treak Community Center

My placement outline initially consisted of 2 different activities: sports and sciences. Regarding sports, I was supposed to develop sports in the school (find new sports/games, design a timetable, check equipment, get girls more involved). Regarding sciences, I was supposed to run some simple science activities. When I got there, I saw that they also have a charity shop, named Laura's Dream (Treak Creations). I also got involved with that. We ended up not doing any science stuff, because sports and the shop took all the time.

(Note from people and places: it is important for a volunteer to be willing to be flexible – opportunities may come up to work in areas not considered until you are actually there, and the placement outline does not have to be set in stone!)

For sport, I mostly worked with Nirann and teacher Chhuer, to keep it short, I was able to help introduce PE Lessons in the weekly schedule and for the shop, I mostly worked with Nirann and Salin and I was able to help set up basic stuff like google maps, set up social media plans, take a lot of photos and videos, make a flyer, work on costs & pricing, etc.

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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?

We did a video call and I was able to meet Michael, the founder and Nirann, the headteacher. I was also well prepared for the trip. Dianne, Sallie, Musufing and Michael really made sure I had everything I needed, like travel insurance, visa and also stuff I didn't know I needed like invitation letter and accommodation confirmation.

Orientation and preparation at the start of the placement

Someone picked me up from the airport and at Victory Sreynoch was waiting for me and she explained everything to me. The next day, she took me to the school. There they gave me a bike for free, which was very useful throughout the month. My first day of school was a Friday, I was introduced to all the staff, did a school tour and I was able to introduce myself to the kids at the morning and afternoon assemblies. I spent some time in teacher Leap and teacher Channa's classrooms to understand a bit about what's going on in the school. Then in the afternoon I discovered the charity shop and Michael gave me the green light to get involved with that too.

Your experience and work

In the first week, we were still a bit unsure about how to pursue sports. I had to familiarise myself more with the current sport scene, for example there was a bit of a warmup in the assemblies, teacher Chhuer already was doing some light activity, the kids loved football and volleyball in the breaks, so I just ended up playing with the kids during breaks while focusing on the shop during the first week. Also, a big group came from Australia at the end of the week and they took over for 2 days, they were very nice and I loved going to dinner with them on Friday night.

I continued to help with the shop with Nirann and Salin throughout the next 3 weeks too and to summarize, I just did pretty basic stuff like setting up some google maps accounts, qr review sign for the shop, we made social media plans for the next months, a list of facebook groups to post in, prepared a lot of material to post, also posted a lot, also a flyer to leave around town. We sorted all the products and made an excel with everything that will help with pricing in the future. And all of these resources are in Nirann's drive. She knows how to use them. There are also some documents with strategies for pricing and marketing there.



Working with Salin

Around the second week, we started pulling classes out and doing sport lessons. We started with Teacher Chhuer and Teacher Ben because they were the teachers who wanted more sports in the schedule. It went well so we continued with Teacher Channa, Teacher Leap and Teacher Sinoun, and Teacher Din and Teacher Sear. Both the kids and the teachers understood everything really fast and everything went really well. So for the next weeks we just did these lessons (around 20 total) and experimented with tons of possible games and exercises, while keeping the same general structure. For example some games were good for Teacher Channa's class because they were a bit older but not suitable for Teacher Din's class who were smaller. But sometimes it was very random and it just depended on the chemistry the class has so experimenting a lot really helped. By the end, we had laminated documents for the lesson structure with every single step of the warm-up and documents with games that work for each class. I did some meetings with the teachers to talk about the purpose and structure of the sport lessons and made sure they know how to lead these lessons. I got some cones and whistles for the lessons. We updated the schedule for all classes to include the sport lessons and put a poster at the entrance of the sand field.



PE activities

Successes, disappointments and challenges of your placement

Successes: I think that overall, the sport lessons were a success. Now, the teachers are doing the sport lessons on a weekly basis with each class and they have the materials necessary. It was sometimes not easy to explain games to the smaller classes but we made it work. Also I wish I had time to introduce some more complex games. I would love it if some other volunteer could do that though.

Regarding the shop, it was also a success. In the beginning I got a bit too excited but then Michael and Salin were able to bring me back to the real world. I think that the things we were able to work on were important and now the shop is ready to expand and welcome more customers. The online presence, pricing strategy, flyer etc all were successes and I think they are a great help.

What was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

There were a ton of highlights during my placement. It was nice when the kids were asking to play certain games or I remember one time they literally forced me to play a game we did in the PE lesson, during a break. It showed that they understood the games and they were passionate about it. I also liked to see how they learned to organise themselves better, during PE lessons and also during breaks, for example actually making teams before playing football, not just running around with the ball. But I also really have to say that when I was working in the sewing shop, sometimes it was so funny we would almost die laughing, especially when filming videos.

Would you recommend volunteering to other people or not? Please tell us why

I would definitely recommend it to other people. It's very important to be committed and friendly and just have a good attitude in general in order to succeed. Since you are in a new place and far away from home, you can easily be disappointed by bad stuff but it's crucial to get up and keep going because this is how you will ultimately succeed.

How did you spend your leisure time?

I did a lot of things during this month. I tried to make a list. In the first day, I realised I was the only volunteer at the school and the only person in the guesthouse. Then someone told me it's the rainy/green season so there's not a ton of people around. I realized I'll have to put in some effort to meet new people and do fun stuff but I think this actually made my experience better since after that I just never stopped doing things.

I visited these places:

- Angkor Temples (I think it was 4 total) with Mr Chhuer + bike ride with everyone on another day
- Kulen waterfalls + Pumpkin Cupcakes + Phnom Kulen National Park: 1000 Lingas, Sleeping Buddha + Beng Mealea Temple + Floating Village Kampong Phluk (this was all part of a tour I found online; it was really nice and the group was actually decent)
- Botanical Gardens (nature and stuff)
- Theams Gallery (I wish I had a guide for this)
- Phare Circus (this was so fun, I really didn't expect it to be this much fun, the play was called Same same but different and it is referring to locals and tourists)
- Cambodia Quad Bike (this was a tour with ATV thorough the countryside, very nice)
- Khmer Ceramics & Fine Arts Centre (I took a pottery class here, it was fun)
- Choco garden (this is just a coffee shop)
- Apopo (this is the landmine rat museum, you can even hold the rat after the tour, definitely recommend)



Bike ride at Angkor Wat

There were more things to see but I preferred to hangout with people more. Stuff like the lady temple, landmine museum, Apsara Theatre, Angkor Zipline, Samoa Lotus Farm(very interesting farm). All nice places, recommended to me so you can try them if u have time.

I had a gym subscription at Royal Sports Club. I also tried another nice gym that's closer to Victory called Angkor Fitness but Royal Sports Club has literally everything and is so big so I recommend that one. Also very cheap, like 40\$. I took Kun Khmer lessons. I went to Mr Ly Gym. I did the private lessons because I was a total beginner and wanted to progress at least a bit. The coach was really nice. He is an active fighter but at that time he was injured. He didn't speak much English but enough to explain everything. The owner

of the gym is a foreigner so he speaks well.

I also joined an ultimate frisbee group. It's like american football but with a frisbee and no contact. The sport is nice, but the group is even nicer. A guy named Jared from the US started it some years ago and it's going really well. They even have a tournament team. I ended up being good friends with them. The locals are my age and very chill and also the expats were nice. It was very nice to go out with them. The frisbee games were nice too, I think I will even continue playing in Romania in the future. A girl from the frisbee group brought me to a touch rugby group. It's also a very nice sport but the rules are a bit annoying in the beginning. The group was mostly French but they were nice. They go out after games and this is also fun. There's also this place called Level Up. It's a board games/co-working place. It's a bit dead during the low season but the owner Rick is very chill. There's also a quiz on Thursdays at Pomme. I joined Rick's team and it was a nice quiz but to be honest I could answer like 2 questions out of 40 so I would recommend it if you are a bit older and know things.

I went to St. John Church. It's Catholic. They have an English mass at 6:30 on Saturdays. People are very nice there.

My friends took me to eat at Khmer places and gave me a ton of sweets to try but I don't really know the names of the places. I would recommend that in the first days you could eat from the western menu at Victory or at Source Caffe for 2 meals and just one Khmer. You should take it slow and adjust. Many expats and tourists told me they got sick for a week or 2 in the beginning but as a volunteer you don't have that much time to spare. Also, now I'm addicted to loklak and fried rice and I can't find them here in Romania. Angkor Market 1 and 2 are very nice. You can find literally everything there but they are a bit expensive. I also recommend Asia Market but not the 7-elevens. I spent some time at the old market, night market and pub street. The markets are nice. Pub street didn't really impress me but it was also kinda empty due to the low season. A-7 Internet Cafe is nice if you want to play video games. I also had a backup plan to hangout at hostels like Mad Monkey, Funky Village, and Onederz but ultimately there was no need for that. It's a good idea though. There is also a running group on facebook called siem reap runners. I recommend the 100GB sim card for 10\$ from METFONE.

How was your accommodation?

My accommodation was perfect. Decent price and insane quality. The food was great, I was able to try some Khmer stuff, but also when I ate a lot of Khmer stuff out and I just needed a break or had to play some sport and wanted to play it safe, they also had a western menu, a really good one. I remember one night, an Australian came to the restaurant and I ate with him. He told me that he never saw such a nice restaurant in Siem Reap.

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

Bring a laptop with you. You can do a lot of things here but try to make sure that all the things you implement will actually work. Whatever it is that you are working on, experiment it with the staff/children, see that it works, make sure that the teachers perfectly know how to do it alone and then move on to the next thing. You can also leave ideas for games and activities and other things that you are helping the school with but keep it simple, more like a bullet point list rather than a uni dissertation. They will use them with groups if they can easily understand them from the documents. The staff work a lot, some have more than 1 job so they don't have time to decipher complicated documents or understand complicated activities.

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