

Award winning ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel



Autumn newsletter 2016

Editorial



Firstly my apologies for the absence of a summer newsletter this was due to "technical issues" with our blog!, which have now been sorted by the long suffering Kerry!

You will see in the newsletter an invite to our November social at Kate's, if you can come please let Kate know asap, the people and places team always love these gatherings as there is such a buzz and it is really helpful to prospective volunteers to talk to "old hands".

We have two of our partners with us this year, Adama Bah from The Gambia and Michael Horton from Cambodia so if you are thinking of volunteering in either location this is an ideal opportunity to speak to our local partners.

Nigel Pegler

Any comments and volunteer experiences welcome at newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Dianne visits our Cambodia volunteer projects - old and new

CAMBODIA – PROJECTS NEW AND OLD FRIENDS

by [Dianne Ashman, volunteer programme advisor](#)

As I write this article I am right at the end of my latest trip, to visit our projects in Cambodia. I was last here in 2011 working with Michael, founder of [ConCERT who are our local partners here](#).

On the 'tips for volunteers' sheet Michael and I compiled in 2011 he asked that volunteers bring a jar of Marmite with them as he and his family love it and it's hard to get hold of here, so on my arrival at Siem Reap airport I was not at all surprised to see someone holding up a large sign saying

GOT ANY MARMITE



The temples at Angkor Wat just outside Siem Reap are now the most popular tourist attraction in the world, and tourism has had a massive impact on the size and prosperity of Siem Reap. I have noticed a huge difference in the five years between my visits. The town is larger, there is much more traffic on the roads, the ubiquitous pushbikes on which Cambodians used to carry everything you can possibly think of have now been replaced by motor bikes and the number of restaurants, bars and other places where tourists might spend money has grown enormously. All this is great for Siem Reap, but you don't have to travel far out of town to find that life for normal Cambodian people continues as it has for generations – you can still see wooden carts being pulled by cows, haystacks by peoples' houses where straw from the rice fields is piled up, traditional wooden-framed houses, often on stilts, with walls made of panels woven from grass or palm leaves and strips of bamboo, and pigs, hens, ducks and cows all sharing the space under the house with wood piled up for the fire, the motor bike, and hammocks to relax in away from the hot sun. Most people are subsistence farmers or fishermen, and literacy levels in the rural population are very low, as a direct result of the political disruption the country suffered in the 1970s under the Khmer Rouge.

The projects ConCERT supports are all focused on improving life for the poorest in society and/or on environmental improvement. Up to now we have supported just two of these projects, both community centres providing support for families, in the hope that by improving their educational and economic opportunities they can help them to stay together and function as successful family units. They both provide lessons to supplement the school curriculum, including English lessons – as there are not enough teachers or schools in Cambodia the normal pattern is for children to attend school for just half a day, meaning the teachers have to teach two shifts, in the morning and afternoon, to two different groups of students.

I had visited one of these centres, [Grace House](#), before and was delighted to pay a return visit. They are now supporting well over 300 children and have expanded the work they do to include an early years' class and a class and home for a small group of disabled and special needs children.

When I was there previously the women of the community were learning to weave so they could make baskets to sell; they now have a small shop by the roadside selling their products which provides important money to support their families. The classrooms at Grace House are all beautiful open-sided rooms so it is easy to see what is going on without interrupting lessons. I was pleased to note how good most teachers English is and how many different interactive methods of teaching they were employing, as I know this is not standard practice in government schools here. All the teachers I spoke to said they had only ever taught in NGOs and said everything they had learned about English and about teaching came from working alongside volunteers, which really emphasises what a massive effect volunteering here can have.



Volunteer Benjamin working alongside one of the teachers at Grace House

[The second community centre, Treak](#), is one I had not visited before so I was pleased to be able to spend some time there too. Around 20% of the people living in this rural village are on the official government poverty list which means they earn less than 50 cents a day. Here too they are working with the 300 or so children who attend the school to supplement the education they get in state school and enhance their future employment prospects by teaching them English. They have a school library and children with no access to books at home enjoy coming here to read, both in Khmer and English. I was very impressed by the quality of some of the teaching here, although they still have lots of ideas for ways they could use volunteers' support to help them improve on and expand what they do. The school buildings at Treak are brand new and they are building the school themselves, ingeniously making their bricks and improving their environment at the same time by mixing discarded plastic bags with a little sand and cement which soon sets in the hot sun. They hope to add more school buildings soon so they can also provide vocational classes to the local community.



Children playing at Treak Community Centre

As well as visiting these community centres where we already send volunteers, my brief for this trip was to see if there are any more of ConCERT's projects which would make suitable placements for *people and places* volunteers. In particular I was looking for possible placements for people interested in volunteering in the broad fields of health care and of business and marketing. So I have spent much of my time here meeting many different people and visiting the places where they work. We have not had time yet to finalise which of these projects we will offer as volunteer placements, but I have met a lot of inspirational people doing fantastic work all focused on improving the lives of the poorest people in Cambodia. I have met a doctor who runs a mobile health service for people living on the edge of Tonle Sap Lake, the largest lake in south-east Asia. He is aware that people from these isolated communities have no chance of getting to doctors or hospitals in town if they are sick, so he has two boats with a team of nine medical staff on each who spend three days every week out on the lake, enabling people who would otherwise have no access to health care to see a doctor or dentist. I have met some people working in three rural villages to run workshops in basic health care, for example providing water filters to enable them to access clean water and showing them how to make vertical gardens so they can grow more nutritious vegetables to enhance their diet. They are running workshops in a variety of health care issues ranging from the importance of basic hand-washing and teeth-cleaning, to the dangers of going barefoot, to basic nutrition, and have already made a substantial difference to the lives of people in this community. I have met people who run a school and home for children rescued from a life of begging on the streets (which is a real problem here in Siem Reap). Many of their mothers were also beggars or sex workers so there was little prospect of these children ever having any chance in life. The school and home has given them the support they need to turn their lives round – I spoke to one of the girls from the school yesterday who tells me she is now in class 10, that she will certainly stay at school until she finishes class 12, and if she passes her exams she really hopes to be able to go on to university. What a turn-around for a girl who started her life as a street kid. Their mothers are also being given employment as weavers – they are making very stylish home furnishings out of waste plastic bags. Tourists are encouraged to drop in to visit them at their workshop and to be taught by them how to do the weaving – this is a positive effort to increase their self-confidence to a level where they are able to interact happily with foreigners so they can get work in a shop.



One of the ladies at the weaving workshop

The people who run the school are also starting an alternative therapies clinic as a fund-raiser for the school, but they hope to use these premises to train local women in these alternative therapies as this will also enable them to earn money – there are plenty of places in town offering massages but the better ones earn more money, and a wider range of alternative therapies would certainly enable them to earn a higher income. I have visited a project focusing on providing vocational training to young people who hope to widen their training to include more specific business skills, and I had lunch in a training café used to train former street kids to be chefs, waiters and front of house managers. Finally, I have visited a factory where the focus is on environmental improvement, using waste cooking oil which would otherwise have been reused unhealthily by the street food-sellers or discarded down the drains, to make biodiesel fuel with a by-product of glycerine which they are using to make soap. This is being distributed to local villages as part of campaign to improve general health and they have got this going as a good business enterprise, selling day trips to environmentally friendly destinations in and around town with the by-line that the cost of one day's trip provides soap for one family for a year.

All the people I have met have been resourceful people, mostly locals, who are using the opportunities that tourism provides to make a real difference in people's lives. If any of these projects appeal to you as places where you would like to volunteer, keep your eye on our website – there will be more projects in Cambodia going up there soon.

Master's student & volunteer - Lisa's placement was a clear 'win-win'

people and places has facilitated several such placements - Master's students who need 'in situ' experience to complete their research & assignments. The key for us is that such placements will also be of benefit to the communities / projects where volunteers such as Lisa are placed ... Lisa's report shows how this can work, and what we mean about this being a 'win-win' volunteer placement.



People and Places was so helpful in preparing for my departure, even before I decided to go Kate was quick and helpful to reply to my questions. We set up a few Skype calls which was a great way to gain a better feeling for those working for/with People and Places. Kate is extremely passionate about what she does and wants all volunteers to have the most rewarding experience they can.

I first found People and Places when I was researching Voluntourism companies. I am doing my Master's in Social Anthropology and I am focusing on this sector of tourism which is how I ended up working with People and Places and Calabash. I am sure if you are reading this you have done your research on the MANY options available to volunteer abroad. This is why I find this industry so fascinating yet also so terrifying sometimes. How does one know what company is the 'best' fit for them? Not only that—but this experience you choose to embark on is not only about you, it is about those you are going to be working alongside and meeting. It can be very overwhelming to choose the right fit and the right company.

I can honestly say that People and Places lay it out for you and tease out the sticky questions that are inevitably a part of the volunteerism industry. What does it mean to be ethical as a tourism operator? How can volunteering not only abroad but also in an unfamiliar cultural context be ethical? People and Places works with organizations that have been locally established and continue to be locally run. This I think is what many voluntourism operators are lacking and I can certainly say [People and Places](#) and [Calabash](#) are striving to be the best in the business by recognizing that they cannot be perfect. For me, this was what I found most important.

I found People and Places to be extremely efficient (as my placement had to be organized quite quickly- Thank you Paul and Kate).

The orientation provided by Paul was wonderful and I was pleasantly surprised with how much thought has gone into preparing volunteers. You are provided with cultural information, local contacts, a local cell phone, some language guidance, an agenda for your placement, and local resources. It is clear that Calabash certainly does not just want volunteers arriving at the school and taking over a class in their own way. You are a guest and you are not able to simply go into a space in which you have never been and change things the way you feel are 'best'. The orientation helps volunteers arrive at this mindset if they are not already and I could see how passionate staff members of Calabash are about the work they do and their connections in the communities.

My experience at W.B. Tshume was great all of the staff are so very friendly and welcoming. I miss them very much!

I worked mainly in the gr. R class with Ntombie and in the grade 6 and 7 English with Rita. These women are amazing and I grew close with them quite quickly. I wish I could have stayed longer because I really found myself gaining a strong connection with the grade 6 and 7 learners. We would spend time in the library together and I would help with small groups of about eight learners. I mainly did creative writing and poem performances with them, which they seemed to really enjoy. I found when the learners were given space to write or talk about what they found interesting we would have some amazing discussions/writing. There are a few learners who struggle with English, this was tough at first, I had some frustration for them and I felt like I wanted to 'blame' something. I couldn't though, and this was a tension I had to work through myself.

It is tough, the schools are understaffed and the teachers are under a lot of pressure with large class sizes. Generally the mornings I would spend with Ntombie in the grade R class. I was nervous at first about the language barrier, but I actually had a blast in the grade R class. I began to ask Ntombie for help and her opinion on activities etc. and from that point we began to work more as a team in the classroom together.

It really was amazing and I think the learners enjoyed our combined teaching methods. Ntombie and I would work together or take turns on books, songs, and lessons and I think we actually brought the energy up in the room when we were together and the learners really seemed to enjoy this.

I have been to South Africa before and was introduced to what it meant to be on 'South African time'. I will say that you must be open and to go with the flow, things may not always be on time or finish when they should. Just be aware of this sometimes and mainly just be open to how schedules move and be aware that they may not move how you may like or may be used to.

I would definitely recommend volunteering with People and Places. I had an amazing time and I really do think it is an unforgettable experience where you will meet unforgettable people and learn so much about yourself. I believe it makes you a more understanding and well rounded person. To and from my placement I was either driven my Xolani or Nelson (regular drivers and very much part of the Calabash team!), both very friendly and open people. They would always check in to see how I was doing and would always be willing to answer any questions I had. The main thing Nelson would always tell me is that we just want to make sure you are comfortable and that you are enjoying yourself.

My accommodation was amazing and more importantly my host Mickey was the BEST! I did not think going into this experience that I would gain a second family but I sure did.



Mickey & Lisa

This woman is wonderful and is such a welcoming, easy going and funny person. Mickey has a great read of people and I think she adjusts well with whoever is in her home. We got along great, we had very similar personalities and I was often told I was her long lost daughter! I felt extremely comfortable, she is an amazing cook, and Mickey knows so many people, which was a great way to get to know people. I miss her very much and it was emotional leaving my second home. I loved spending my evenings with Mickey cooking, having tea, talking and watching shows together.

I spent one weekend at Summerstrand at 5th avenue (*Fifth Avenue Beach House – another of our vetted accommodation options for volunteers*) and spent the rest of my weekends in New Brighton. I was only there for a short period of time so I really wanted to try and get a feel for the place. Mickey is a busy woman so I found I was always up to something. One of her friends took me to a rugby match one weekend and Mickey took me to bay west mall and to visit her family another.

Morocco - high achievers in the High Atlas !

In the fantastically beautiful High Atlas Mountains of Morocco, EfA (education for all) is a local NGO working tirelessly to help educate girls ... as EfA say themselves: 'educate a girl and you educate the next generation', and the next, etc. !

[This is the project where our volunteers work](#) - in the girls-only, homes-away-from home where Berber village girls have access to education, beyond what is available in their villages ...

And just look at the results for this last academic year ...

"CONGRATULATIONS to the 12 girls who have passed their baccalaureate (A'Level equivalent)! 8 are university-bound and 4 will go onto vocational college. Everyone of you who has supported EFA is part of this amazing success which is changing lives for generations to come. THANK YOU!"



These girls are bound for a new stage in their lives, and you could support future graduates, as well as their house mothers, in continuing EfA's great work ...

How's your French ? Want to volunteer ?

a great volunteer story from South Africa

Finnish volunteer, Roosa, is a professional in the art of graphic design. She worked for 6 weeks with the 'media team' in [Hazyview Digital Learning Campus](#) - and my goodness, her work was hugely appreciated!

"Even with years and years of experience in graphic design, when you ask Roosa if she will be able to help in that field she always replies saying: 'I will try.' And then delivers a masterpiece."



a photoshop session with volunteer Roosa

[Read here - what the local team at Good Work Foundation say about Roosa's work](#)

to campaign or not to campaign ...

TO CAMPAIGN OR NOT TO CAMPAIGN – WHY I HAVE DECIDED TO GET INVOLVED

by [volunteer programme advisor Dianne Ashman](#)



As you will know, there are two connecting strands to the work

people and places does. We send volunteers on placements where their skills and experience have been carefully matched to local needs, and we campaign for responsible practice in volunteer tourism – and both these categories have been reflected in awards *people and places* have won, for [Best Volunteer Organisation](#) and [Best for Responsible Tourism Campaigning](#).

Up until now I have preferred to focus my time and energy on the volunteering side of things, helping our local partners identify needs and helping to prepare volunteers to do their bit to meet these needs. I have not wanted to get involved in the campaigning side of our work as I am personally uncomfortable with the rather negative and critical connotations of some forms of campaigning (not necessarily ours) and I prefer to focus on the positives of trying to make our volunteer placements as successful as possible for all concerned. However I have always taken an interest in the issues raised through our campaigning, particularly those involving children and child protection. I have therefore followed with interest all the publicity around the negative impact of volunteers working in, and foreigners supporting, children in orphanages. One of the articles published as part of a recent ['blogging blitz'](#) on the dangers of orphanage tourism really made me think. The writer of the article was talking specifically about student volunteers going to orphanages as part of a gap year experience, and he made the point that we are wrong to criticise these young people for taking part in a misguided form of volunteering because we have never taught them that it's an inappropriate thing to do. As a teacher that really struck a chord, and fits in exactly with my views – I don't want to criticise bad practice but I do want to raise awareness about what some of the issues are and how to make good choices when volunteering or supporting people in developing countries.

In fact, having once thought this, I now feel it would be irresponsible of me to know something about the issues and not to spread the word.

"The challenge is certainly not to stop supporting children in developing countries – the need has not decreased – but to make sure we are doing this in ways that genuinely help and are not designed simply to make us feel good - and that requires real thought."

The group I decided to start with is my local church. They have always taken an interest in the volunteering work I do, and although none of them are going to go volunteering themselves many of them do support charities and organisations abroad, including orphanages – in fact I believe I have read that the biggest donors to orphanages are churches. So I wrote the letter reproduced below for my church magazine. I was quite nervous about writing it, fearing I would offend really well-meaning people who would think I was criticising the charities they choose to support. In fact I have had a really positive response, with a number of people thanking me for opening their eyes to issues they had no idea about and saying how much better informed they now feel.

AN UPDATE ON MY VOLUNTEERING WORK – FOCUSING ON KEEPING CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

It's a year now since I last wrote something for the magazine about the volunteering work I do with *people and places* – so time to bring you up to date! My next trip will be to Cambodia. In Cambodia I will be visiting two community centres in Siem Reap – we place volunteers at both of these centres to work with families from some of the poorest local communities.

I have also been expanding the work I do in this country to raise awareness of some of the issues pertinent to this volunteering work. I am regularly asked to speak at a variety of local meetings such as church groups, local WIs etc, and I'm currently widening this to include work with local schools and with the local branch of Save the Children.

The current focus for this awareness-raising work is on the issues attached to volunteering with and supporting children in developing countries, particularly children in orphanages. I have learned so much I did not know before about the potential dangers of this kind of work, as well as the benefits, and I'm going to share some of that information with you here – so, before you read on, here's the health warning – I intend this article to be thought-provoking!



The community centres we support in Cambodia have been set up specifically to help families from these very poor communities keep their children with them at home. In the Far East in recent years, as in many developing countries, a large number of orphanages have been founded with the apparent aim of giving 'orphans' a better life. However re-search shows a link to a paper that orphanages / children's homes are not the best place for children to grow up – children thrive in families.

In our country for many years now there have been no children's homes; children unable to remain with their birth family for whatever reason are placed with foster families and/or are adopted. Children who grow up in institutions become institutionalised and frequently find it hard to function in society when they become adults, and we all know from stories in the media that there have been many cases of children in residential care being abused.

You will be as shocked as I was to learn that **80%** of children in orphanages around the world are not orphans. So how do they end up in orphanages?

Some are trafficked, some are sold by desperate families who simply have no money. Many are given to the orphanages by their families who are told that in an orphanage their child will have a better life because they will receive funding from international donors, and maybe international volunteers will come who will teach them English and bring them gifts and money. In the past some have been the result of deliberate government policy, as in Romania in the 1980s. Some of course are genuine orphans – life expectancy is lower in the developing world and in southern Africa in particular AIDS has left many children orphaned; however in most developing countries family responsibility is seen as more important than it is in our own culture, and the majority of genuine orphans are cared for by other family members such as grandparents, or by other friends in their community. Most orphanages exist in parts of the world where international tourists go – as tourism develops so the number of orphanages grows.

And who supports these orphanages? There are three main categories of funding, all originating in countries such as ours. One source is volunteers, who pay to go and volunteer in an orphanage and bring funding with them. There are some volunteering companies (*people and places* is one of them) who do not place volunteers in orphanages, but many still do because it is a popular choice among volunteers who have not thought through the implications of what they are doing. There are some countries where the government is working hard to set up community-based care systems for children and where it is illegal to open new orphanages or children's homes, but the orphanages still exist because of the demands for placements from companies who send international volunteers. One thing I shall be doing in Cambodia is meeting with representatives from an international charity to begin to draw up a code of conduct for people sending volunteers to work with children abroad, but this will be a long process.

[A second source of funding is holiday makers](#) – it has become quite common for a holiday tour to include a visit to an orphanage– tourists are shown round the orphanage, children are made to tell their sad life stories to the tourists and the hat is passed round for donations. In the worst case scenarios the money does not go to support the children at all (after all if the children look well fed and happy donations won't be so high) but is kept by the orphanage owners as income, with the tour guide taking a cut.

And the third source of funding for orphanages is well meaning people such as ourselves, who are only too willing to give to what sounds like a really good cause. Some of the biggest donors to orphanages are churches, where people see it as a way of fulfilling their Christian duty to support the needy.

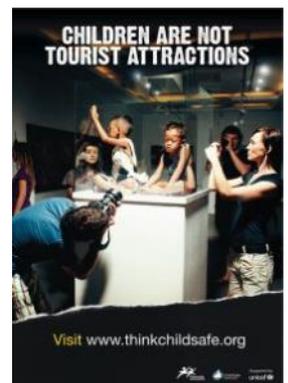
So what can we learn from this? I have learned to ask questions. In the past I have certainly given money to people raising money for an orphanage. Now I would want to know why those children are in an orphanage and what moves the people running the orphanage are taking to get the children back into families within their community. There are obviously some well-run orphanages for genuine orphans where the children are looked after well in what is in effect a large family – but I have learned to be cautious.

If I were on holiday and someone tried to take me to an orphanage I would refuse to go and would explain why – I did this when I was in Kenya – people don't necessarily understand why you are refusing but the word is starting to get out there and we have to start somewhere.

I have learned to use as a benchmark what would be acceptable in our own country – to think how we would feel if a coach-load of tourists turned up at, for example, a playgroup and expected to come in, cuddle the children and take photographs of them. If it's not acceptable here (and of course it's not), it's not acceptable in a developing country – children are not tourist attractions and should never be treated as such.

And in the past, given the choice between giving money to an orphanage or to some sort of community-based project, whether that be a school, a community centre or a charity supporting needy families I would almost certainly have chosen the orphanage because it would have sounded like the most worthwhile cause. Now without a doubt I would give to the community project, and I would encourage you to do the same.

The challenge is certainly not to stop supporting children in developing countries – the need has not decreased – but to make sure we are doing this in ways that genuinely help and are not designed simply to make us feel good - and that requires real thought.



volunteers' social meeting - November 12th - are you coming ?

We all enjoy our volunteers' social meetings - a lot - and November meetings are especially popular because one or more of our local partners is usually here in the UK and are able to come along and join us. This year, we're delighted to announce that both **Adama Bah from The Gambia** and **Michael Horton from Cambodia** will be here in Faversham!



Adama Bah



Michael Horton

Date & Time: Saturday 12th November – 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Our invitation is to ALL volunteers - previous and future - why not come along and meet Adama & Michael, as well as [the 'people and places' UK team](#).

Please let us know A.S.A.P. if you plan to come too, as we have rather limited space here at 'head office' (i.e. Kate's home!)

Just email Kate - kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk - to book your place !

Looking forward to meeting many volunteers, both 'new' and 'old' (!)

Swaziland volunteer project opens a sixth neighbourhood care point!

This is such wonderful news from our partners in Swaziland - big congratulations to all concerned

A Neighbourhood Care Point (NCP) is a community-based, non-formal, day care centre offering care and support for vulnerable children of pre-primary age in a safe, protective environment under the care of volunteer caregivers. Using funds raised by volunteer project donations, along with the support of Swaziland Charitable Trust (SCT) and Cooper Dean Fund, our local partners at All Out Africa were able to work with the community to build a classroom, store room, toilet block and play area for Nkhanini.



25 children are now attending and receiving daily meals, learning opportunities and lots of play time.

[Learn more about how you could volunteer with this programme here](#)

great news for Emmanuel - thanks to volunteer Trez

Fantastic news from one of our previous volunteers, Therese Bateson - 'Trez'.

A not-for-profit organisation she is involved in in the UK has decided to part fund the food programme at Emmanuel Community Centre until April 2017.



'Baby Angels' aims to: "Relieve poverty among underprivileged children and their families world-wide by financially supporting meaningful development initiatives, aiming to promote positive change within their lives and help build sustainable livelihoods"

Thank-you so much Trez and Baby Angels!

calling all volunteers- please share you story



Yep, we are asking for a favour!

When potential volunteers are researching volunteer opportunities they often use sites that post reviews by volunteers.

We're not allowed to post reviews on your behalf - rightly so! - we need you to post your own review. We know our volunteers are very busy people and may not have a lot of time to do this. However ...

We also know, from communications between our previous and future volunteers, that what a volunteer thinks and says about us is **SO** much more important than anything we could say.

Hence, our asking a favour - would you write consider writhing a short review about your experience with us ? Please contact sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk - and Sallie will be able to send you a link and quick instructions about how to post.

Here are some examples in an attempt to convince you it would not be too onerous:

https://www.volunteerforever.com/program_reviews_detail/peoples-and-places

and here are a couple of longer ones!

<https://www.gooverseas.com/volunteer-abroad/gambia/people-and-places/22396>

If you haven't already spotted our YouTube channel it's worth a look. There are video interviews from volunteers and if you have videos of your time volunteering or one of the talks you have done – we know many of you talk to groups on your return from volunteering – please send them to us so we can share them.

click the logo



meet the *people and places* team [here](#)



[Take a look here at slideshare for slide shows from volunteers](#) – if you have a slide show to share please do send it to us, thanks so much to all the volunteers who have contributed to date.

Remember we are on facebook too - [follow us here](#) – in the blog and on facebook are where we tend to post our latest news.

If you like beautiful pictures and funny visuals we are also on [pinterest – follow us here](#)

and finally we are tweeting too – [follow us here](#)