



The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Cambodia

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Projects Abroad in Cambodia

House 101, St 122, SangkatTeklaok 1,  
Khan TuolKork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Tel: +855 (0) 23 881 250

[www.projects-abroad.net](http://www.projects-abroad.net)



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## Cremation Ceremony of King-Father Norodom Sihanouk

From the 1st to 7th of February, 2013, is our second mourning for our King Father Norodom Sihanouk. During this week all Cambodian were allowed to have two days off from work on 1st and 4th of February in which these two days were the most vital of the Cremation ceremony. On the 1st, the King Father's body was moved to from Royal palace to the crematorium at the Meru filed side next to the Royal palace then remain kept for three days and on fourth was the cremation day.



On the 7th, the Royal Family brought the ashes of the body which was put in an urn to be placed in a stupa at the Royal Palace.

A lot of Cambodians cried and came to pray for the King Father at the crematorium, it is our sad historical event that we will never forget.

## First Aids Training



Chamroeun practiced how to rescue when there is someone lost consciousness.

From the 25th to the 27th January, Projects Abroad in Cambodia conducted a First Aid training for 10 staff members, our trainers were from the Cambodian Red Cross.

It contained important and interesting topics such as how to prevent the blood coming out, help when someone has a heart attack, lost consciousness, high or low blood pressure, protection when shark bite, traffic accidents, poisoning and so on.

During these three days, we learnt and practiced each topic case by case. This is a life skill that is very useful to learn. We finally got to do a test and received a certificate of this training course valid for a year from the Cambodian Red Cross.

## Cambodia Highlight – Article from Sam.C and Tess. B

From day one, my time in Cambodia was absolutely incredible and there was not one moment of the trip that I regret. My travel buddy Tess and I lived in Phnom Penh for one month to volunteer and then moved around for a week of exploration after during our University holidays. Neither of us knew much about Cambodia, and when we had attempted a google search it came up with Angkor Wat and the fact that people wear pyjamas as day clothes. We stayed in Apartment 6 (just past the Russian Market) with an interesting bunch of roommates coming from other parts of Australia, France, America, Belgium and Denmark. There was not a single moment in our apartment that we could have said we were bored.



Sam and Tess with other volunteers while visited Angkor Wat

Some highlights from Phnom Penh were the crazy TukTuk rides, with drivers who didn't always obey the traffic lights – these trips always made for more interesting tales. Blue Pumpkin, where we got to choose from a wide range of icecreams, and then attempt to sit on their pure white couches without making a mess. Sight-seeing was pretty amazing, with the Killing Fields, S-21, Wat Phnom, The Royal Palace and the Silver Pagoda as some of the main attractions. Or simply, our daily walks down to the Russian Market to buy something new, or enjoy a mocha frappe and free Wi-Fi at Coffee House. However, what truly made my time in Phnom Penh as incredible as it was were the hours spent at my placement, VCAO (Vulnerable Children Assistance Organisation).



Sam and Tess at her placement VCAO teaching their students.

The VCAO aims to help street children and garbage pickers get some form of an education, as many of their parents cannot afford to send them to public school. The children ranged between the ages of three up to 17-years-old, although it was often very difficult to determine who was how old, as there were only three classes. Each day, we would arrive at 8am to be greeted by huge smiles and screams of 'CHA CHA!' – which is their lazy way of saying 'teacher' – as we were very quickly grabbed by various tiny hands and dragged into the school to play. Once the bell went though,



it was time to put on our game faces and attempts to teach them some English that they could all understand, and that would be useful to them in the future. The days were made up of one hour classes, one hour play time in the morning, and then a repeat of this in the afternoon after lunch.

Both Tess and I became quickly attached to all our students, and we found ourselves constantly missing them each night when we went home or on the weekends when we were discovering new parts of Cambodia. Apart from teaching and playing, we had a one day lice clinic. This involved a lot of shampooing and combing hair to remove hundreds and hundreds of lice from the children – although in the end, we came to realize the full extermination of lice would be an impossible task.



Teaching at VCAO

Every Thursday some of the older children and the Khmer teachers would help to cook up a big feast for all the children and on occasion, they would brush their teeth or be running around with balloons they bought from a cart out the front of the school. Rotting teeth is a big problem at the school, as most of the children have never been to a dentist and don't have access to toothbrushes and toothpaste, or are simply not educated in dental hygiene. Tess ran a class for her younger children on how to brush your teeth, and got them all to follow by her example until they got it right. We pushed for the school to ensure that every day there was a chance for the kids to brush them. Sadly, one day at school, I had a student who was in so much pain from a hole in her tooth that she was unable to take part in class and went to lay down with the younger children. When she showed me her mouth and the gaping hole, I'd simply had enough. I contacted Projects Abroad and got the name of a free dental clinic. The very next day, we were at the dentist and after Neil, a Canadian dentist volunteering in Cambodia had a look at it, 15 minutes later Soy (the 12-year old girl) had her tooth removed and we were on our way back to school. This was her first trip ever to the dentist, and she didn't cry once.

In our last week at school, I attempted a 10 minute science experiment which involved dropping mentos into diet coke and watching it fizz up and explode. The kids loved that. We also brought along a cheap set of speakers and an iPod and played Gangnam Style on repeat, it was crazy seeing how much they love PSY and his crazy dance. Even at the markets, the number of t-shirts with 'Keep calm and Gangnam Style' or 'Oop, Oop, Oop, Ooop, Oop, OopaGangnam style' was outrageous! I organised a photo board for the classroom with a photo of each child, their name and their age. Finally being able to put names to faces helped me to remember all their names for once! Trying to remember SreyPich, Ponleu, Phanmai, Mean Pich and so on became overwhelming, especially when you were trying to tell off the children who cheated during spelling tests! It's not so easy when you don't know whose name to be yelling!!

On our final day of school, we dreaded saying goodbye. We took photo after photo to remember all the children and we handed out Angry Birds pencils and erasers (yet another craze the kids all love). Both Tess and I left with tears in our eyes but promised the kids we'd be back as soon as possible to visit them all! Quite a few suggested they just come to Australia in our suitcases, however, we had to explain about Australian Customs and that perhaps having little Cambodian children pop out of our cases would not be taken well.

On the weekends we travelled to numerous different locations. On our first weekend in Cambodia, we simply stayed in Phnom Penh to sightsee, and on one day took a two hour tuktuk ride out to Udong. We prayed that this bumpy, exhausting ride would not be for nothing and we were definitely impressed by the stupas on the mountains and the incredible Monk centre. The temples were beautiful, and there were various amazing sculptures. Sihanoukville offered us beautiful beaches and islands and crazy nights of partying. Kep was once again another seaside town, but was far



Sam and Tess travelling in Cambodia.

more relaxed and it was like going on a tropical holiday. The architecture in Kampot was interesting to see the French influence, however, was very quiet. In our final week in Cambodia, we visited Siem Reap to see all the incredible temples! Waking up at 4:30am to see Angkor Wat at sunrise was definitely worth it, even if we crashed very early that night. We even signed up for a \$13 Cambodian cooking class where we got shown around the local food market, then cooked a three course meal that we ate at the end! Our last adventure took us to Mondulkiri to visit the Elephant Valley Project, another amazing foundation that is working to save elephants from work and teaching them how to be real elephants in the wild again. Even though we knew very little about Cambodia before we left, we never could have imagined how much there was to see and the variety of things to do!

To anyone contemplating a visit to Cambodia, don't think twice. Travelling around was so easy to do, and everything ridiculously cheap! The people that we met, both travelers and locals were all so kind and helpful and simply made our trip one that we will never forget.

**Written By Samantha Currie**

**From Australia**

**Care volunteer at VCAO for 1 month**

*Thank you so much Sam and Tess, We really appreciated that you have a lot of contributes for Cambodia kids and share your experiences to other.*

## Tale of a Lost Island – Diving & Marine Conservation volunteer

This is my account of how such a small decision has led to one of the best things I've yet to experience. First things first, my name is Clinton Elliott, and I'm a 22-year-old underground electrician from a remote town in central Australia. The town is a desert, or what the more positive refer to as a 'semi-arid-region'. Clinging to a decadent mining boom with population of 23,000 and a voxpopuli for convention, the town temperament resists change and abhors any alternative vicissitudes.

After four years I knew where my life was heading and could visualise better versions of myself there, slightly higher up in the hierarchy of authority, but nonetheless stranded in a mitigated, disillusioned paradise with uber pay. Paying for the future with my youth was becoming exponentially inflated, and I could see my life playing out in front of my eyes within my older friends. With all love and no disrespect to them, this is not who I am. Repeating the same quotidian tasks, mundane procedures, I was an ill-contented shadow of something I had yet to find. I have a checklist of things for when something is perfect, but when you know, you just "know". My father had always told me that he knew the meaning of life. Look after your family, be the best version of yourself you can be and live it. I had one out of three. I knew that I was an answer, but I just had to find my question. You have to lose yourself before you can find yourself! So there I was in search...



I was told of a random volunteer site, viewed it, and booked a 9 week diving volunteer project on an island in Cambodia. First, I had never dived before, and second, where the hell was Cambodia? I do not play with dice and do not believe in coincidence, only 9 weeks I thought, too long or not enough? People asked me what I was doing, and to be honest, I just couldn't reply, because I actually didn't know! I didn't know what I wanted so I thought I might as well help people who do.

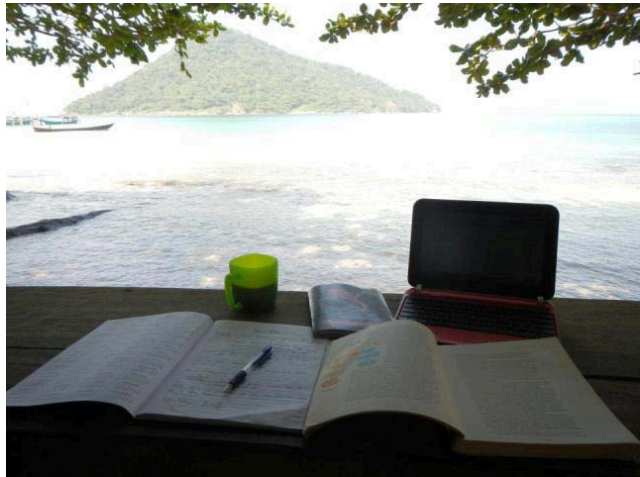
I quit my job, sold or gave away all my possessions and stored the modicum of the remainder. Armed with a backpack, a one way ticket to Cambodia and high hopes of a blissful aberration, I farewelled my loving family with a glint of sadness and profound fortitude. I left more than my family at the airport, I left everything I knew and everyone I know. Good things always come after you're consumed by ambivalence. Was this the right decision? What will I gain from this? What can I give? The domineering malice the entire flight was all encompassing and honestly disconcerting.

The moment of touch down and as I peered out over the elder Malaysian woman's shoulder I read on a huge sign "Welcome to the Kingdom of Cambodia". From that exact point, that salient fragment of time, I "knew". Then the hustle and bustle of Asian life, the coolest representative from Projects Abroad picked me up, hooked me up with a sim card and even let me destroy him in pool three

times. Surely he wasn't trying. I'm still surprised with the ease and organisation of the entire ordeal. It was very thorough with great efficacy.

From Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville the bus had to slow down to avoid a cow, no, perhaps maybe a remote buffalo. Apparently I still had a lot of adjusting to do to fit into Asian life.

One boat ride to the island and boom, Koh Rong Samloem. Just a noun which I couldn't even pronounce that would later become a part of who I am and forever shape my character. A word is just a word, until it finds someone to give it meaning. This is not a strange place I told myself, this is just a new place.



Scenery of the island and paper learning.



The bungalow for our volunteers stay while doing the project.

The first step before I could survey any reef or seahorses was obviously to learn to scuba dive. Now, being a bloke from a desert, I wasn't used to water. As I studied my textbook at the main bungalow, drinking Cambodian coffee, I could hear the harmonies of the ocean echo in my cochlea. I gazed up at the beautiful Cambodian ocean, just meters away, and thought to myself that I had to be in the best study room in the world. Wish those dirty miners could see me now. Now I was on an island with no crime, with a chief who everybody acquiesces to democratically- not out of fear of reprimand,

but respect. The island is a community, a friendly network of people, an extended family- where, oddly enough, even crazy Australians are included. The food, well rice, I had never been a huge eater of rice, but now I think I'm a rice grain.

People pass through the main bungalow, from diverse countries and various occupations, a virtual living library, there are always people asking questions, swapping stories and trading perspectives. They say that travel broadens the mind, that the world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page. Well I've found a page worth book marking. You can have many different lives in one and if you live it right, just once is enough.

The difference between a job site and a volunteer site is that people actually want to be there. The temperate, the mood and general atmosphere is encapsulating and you can feel it. It cannot be escaped. You are free, alive and being the change you have wished to see in the world. We are building a playground for the local Khmer children at their school. Thank God many hands make light work. After levelling a 10m x 5m plot, 1000 bricks and 250 kg of cement arrived. Sounds reasonable,



but no cars or trains here city slicker. Now add a 50m wooden jetty, 50m cement jetty and 300m sandy track. Challenge accepted for our hearty volunteers. This was a monumental undertaking. We were tossing up between a great pyramid, sky scraper, or a playground; we went with the playground. Seventeen volunteers forming potentially a world record for fireman-chaining and the funniest [I'll get to that later] and happiest group annihilated that pile of bricks to the construction site.

Playing Chinese whispers all the volunteers were sending jokes and mirthful digs at one another up and down the chain. People actually fell over laughing. I would not have called it travail, rather humanity. It made the 125 rounds of eight bundles cruise by. Synergy is something that is made which is greater than the individual parts which comprise it. We were the quintessential model for synergy on that day. We were all united under one banner. Not French, not Australian, not English,



Clinton and the other volunteers going to dive.

not Danish, not German, not Khmer, not American, we were all earthlings. The only race was human; altruism. I'm genuinely proud to have accomplished something which is palpable and finite that was entirely free of any remote modicum of corrupt agenda. This was compassion and pure human nature at its finest, the language of the world.

In hindsight, I feel like this project has given me more than I could give it. As the days wilt away on the zephyr of time and I realize the "conveniences" of modern society and essential "commodities" really don't matter, my respect grows for the other volunteers, the Khmer people and myself. On this anachronism, this island that is KohRongSamloem its future is certain; prosperous. It's a lost island that I hope continues to stay hidden from the world, or else I'd have to leave. Thank you for reading this and thank you Projects Abroad for the opportunity.

**Written By Clinton Dante Elliott**

**From Australia**

**Diving & Marine Conservation for 2.5 months**

*Thank you so much Clinton Elliott, We really appreciated that you have a lot of contributes for Cambodia and share your experiences to other.*



## Cambodia Diving & Marine Conservation Project – January 2012

In January, the volunteers surveyed 31 seahorse sites. We continued to monitor reef sites as well as continuously training new volunteers. The playground wall was completed and construction on the playground itself has begun. The volunteers were all very excited about this and were motivated for the work to continue. Work also started on an incinerator for the village. The windy weather has kept the volunteers busy with beach cleans.



### **Conservation Projects**

#### **Seahorse Surveys**

This month we have expanded the survey area to include an extra 150 survey sites. The volunteers have been spotting seahorses here and are very excited about exploring the area further. Calmer weather has also made practice surveys and training dives much more effective.

All new volunteers were trained in seahorse identification and survey methods. Once fully trained, they can then help to train other volunteers as well as survey, which most people like to be very involved in.

#### **Reef Surveys**

We are continuing to survey each of the reef sites in an effort to build up a database for this season and compare fish and invertebrate populations and substrate composition. We hope to compare this data with past information to determine the long term effects of sustainable fishing methods and the community fishing area. Some long-term volunteers hope to closely study fish populations in particular.

#### **Clean Ups**

The prolonged wind meant the volunteers were doing daily clean ups around the beach, village and project. The group would often be split to cover more area in a day and several volunteers took the initiative to do a beach clean on their own when they saw it was needed.

### **Community Projects**

#### **Teaching**

Our teaching volunteer Eileen worked together with Anita to revamp the school. Eileen wanted to implement some more structure to the class while Anita's teaching experience came in handy. Together they were able to establish set class times and ensure the kids were

getting the most out of the allocated time slots. Extra volunteers were giving some kids one-on-one classes to give them more attention and help in the specific areas they required.

### Community Playground

The playground was up and running again this month with the end of the rain. Mark, our building volunteer, used his experience and expertise to help us with the surrounding wall. This was completed by the hard working volunteers, with 2500 bricks set in place. 15 support posts were also put in place this month so we can start February by moving sand into the playground.

### Community Incinerator

We have just commenced work on an incinerator for the village. The volunteers have exercised their muscles the past week by unloading 4000 bricks, 17 bags of cement, 35 rice bags full of rocks, and 120 bags of sand. Some more experienced volunteers are keen to help out with the brick work and rendering and even happy to help out over the weekend. We hope to encourage the village to dispose of their waste in a more environmentally friendly way.



### Other stuff...

We helped a lot of volunteers celebrate their birthdays this month. Ranging from trivia to dress up parties we helped everyone celebrate. We also had some movie nights where volunteers watched a documentary on seahorses and helped them better understand the global population decline and why we are doing the work we are. It helped motivate the volunteers further.

**Ali Barlow**

**Diving & Marine Conservation Project Coordinator, Cambodia**

*Thank you so much to all Diving & Marine Conservation volunteers and staff, We really appreciated that you have a lot of contributes for this project.*

## Dirty Weekend at Our Home



To be continue from previous month which the Dirty Weekend was at Our Home for re-painting the classrooms, in January we had and intention to do drawing picture in the classrooms for students at Our Home again.

We had started leaving from our accommodation to the side at 9am and were ready to draw right after we arrived. Everyone was divided in 3 groups and responsible for two classrooms. Having five or six per group, we successfully draw 3 classrooms before lunch and finished the other three after lunch. All look nice and we are sure that the children will be happy to see it on Monday.

Thank you so much too all of our volunteers who spent your weekend time to make this plan complete.

## PHOTO PAGE



Jess our Care volunteer trying to learn the way Cambodian greet other people from the little girl.

Thank you *all* of our volunteers who spent their time volunteering in Cambodia.



Lis F. our Pro-Volunteer doing a Dental care for the kid