

HELP + CAMBODIA

2023 Trip Report

After a hiatus of 4 years, we were excited to finally be returning to Cambodia. Our group comprised Help Cambodia committee members, Rotarians, sponsors and some newcomers to the organisation.

Below is a report by Sue McCaig, one of the newcomers who had never visited Cambodia before, providing her first impressions of the initial days of the trip. Thank you Sue for your insights.

On arrival and heading through the streets in the taxi it was so exciting and fun.

Seeing the big lit up billboards and driving along with tuk tuks and motorbikes weaving around us was exciting but then stopping at lights near a poor area we saw the not so fun side.

A little girl under 5yrs walking through traffic begging. Then spotted a little boy carrying a newborn begging for money.

A bit further on four little kids sitting in a park together. Getting settled for the night.

First day here and after breakfast at the rooftop bar I headed down the side street to the food markets to see live fish flipping. Every assortment of seafood as well as a strong smell of meat/blood as ducks and chickens were being cut up.

Paid tuk tuk driver to walk me across the street. Money well spent!

Then paid him to take us around for a few hours and wait outside the Royal palace, National Museum and temple as we explored. He spoke very good English and was lovely. Very grateful.

It is hot and humid but there is often a breeze. Especially when in a tuk tuk so not too bad.

Weather today is quite pleasant.

Today we visited The Killing Fields and then the S21 museum.

All very confronting and a very sombre feel from everyone particularly after S21. Lots of foreigners visiting and all had a shell-shocked look while walking around.

The highlight of the trip was of course visiting the DCC school!

Our tuk tuk driver took us from the hotel (which I must say is very lovely - pool, spacious rooms and lovely service) through the windy back streets to the school.

As we pulled up we heard excited whispers and giggles and one of the kiddies say 'it's them!'.

I was taken aback by the love and excitement shown to us and as the day went on, the fact they were all so grateful to us.

They had no hesitation letting us know how this has changed their lives, especially the older children who now had a future different to what they would have if it was not for this school.

They took us for a walk through the streets near the school.

It is both heartbreaking and uplifting to see how very little money can change a child's life by lifting them out of poverty and giving them opportunity.

The following day we were taken by bus to visit the rural home of Bophal (the principal and school manager) where he and his family spend weekends with his in-laws.

A few of the older children accompanied us on the bus to this rural village which was so lovely.

It was interesting to see the difference between the children who had been attending the school for longer and the newcomers. The confidence and English skills of the students who had been attending for longer was very obvious and to hear them speak so excitedly about their future of advancing studies and job opportunities was very rewarding.

It was a beautiful day with beautiful food prepared by Bophal's wife, Chantrea and served by the students. This was followed by karaoke singing and dancing by the pupils which we were encouraged to join in with.

I left Phnom Penh in awe of how such a small organisation can set off a ripple effect of change which will go on for generations. I feel very proud of DCC school and its organisers...

We then travelled on to Siem Reap by bus. A long but very interesting trip stopping off at the Spider Village and for a lunch break.

Here we connected with a few other charities to learn of the great work they are undertaking.

The first experience was a trip to a rural setting where Lotus House runs an Elderly Care Program providing for the welfare of grannies in need. Whilst in the area we completed an education program and kit distribution of Days for Girls Hygiene Kits at Poring High School and participated as honoured guests in the school's end of year presentation assembly.

The next morning was an early start for some to take in the sunrise at Angkor Wat and visit a few other ancient temples.

The next two days were spent volunteering at Heartprint where we ran a careers expo for the students who access this organisation. Such a fun and rewarding experience engaging with the students in this way.

Whilst in this tourist mecca of Cambodia we also enjoyed some of the other cultural attractions Siem Reap has to offer such as Kulen Mountain Temple, an Elephant Sanctuary, APOPO Demining Centre, Kampong Phluk Water Village, the Apsara cultural show and the Phare Acrobatic Circus. We had arranged our trip to coincide with the annual Water Festival which took place on the final days of our visit. This festival commemorates the end of the monsoon season and is a holiday period marked by many festive activities including hotly contested boat races viewed by excited spectators. It was great to be a part of this joyous fun-filled occasion.

After a morning of last-minute market shopping our group said goodbye to this vibrant country and its wonderful people. Our participants returned reinvigorated and full of enthusiasm to continue the impactful work in this captivating country. Already some additional sponsors have been gained and new projects are underway to continue making a difference.



With the students at DCC



DfG kit distribution at Poring Junior High