



Ponheary Ly Foundation
www.theplf.org



Volunteer
Orientation

Some Basics



Cambodia is a developing country, recovering from decades of civil war, genocide and occupation. During the Khmer Rouge era all infrastructure was destroyed along with all the schools and hospitals. Change is rapid but there is still a very long way to go. The gulf between the towns and the countryside is ever widening as towns prosper and villages do not. 80% of the population of Cambodia lives in the countryside and for the majority, life is a daily struggle.

We encourage you to read up on the history of Cambodia, especially the last 40 years, before your visit. You'll have a much easier time understanding what the country is up against and why. To read more on the History of Cambodia, [click here](#).

Ponheary Ly Foundation is based in **Siem Reap**, the service town for the Angkor Complex. It is very well served with good restaurants and pubs. It is a relaxed and friendly place that is very safe, although the usual precautions apply. Increasingly, the selection of shops is diverse and most things for your everyday needs are available.

Seven Candles Guesthouse

Seven Candles Guesthouse, owned by Ponheary and her family, is where volunteers must stay. The guesthouse is home to three generations of the Ly family and the whole family works hard to ensure that your stay is as comfortable as possible. There is always someone at reception to answer any queries that you have and to help with any touring information you require. The PLF office is also always manned by someone who can help with any PLF-related questions, concerns or ideas.

The guesthouse is situated on Wat Bo Road, which runs parallel to the river and is about a 10-minute walk from the Old Quarter. The rooms are comfortable and clean. All have an en-suite bathroom, a/c, fan, a mini-fridge, hot water boiler and tv with international cable and dvd player. Breakfast is available at extra cost, but there is no obligation to eat at the house. There are many good restaurants to be enjoyed up and down the street. In your room you will find suggestions for our restaurant picks in Siem Reap. There are three large communal verandahs that are comfortably furnished for the guests' use and these are popular places for socializing and enjoying a cold drink while making new friends.



There is a selection of books, a DVD library and two computers for communal use. There is a hotel with a lovely saltwater swimming pool a couple of doors away that our guests can use for free if they buy a drink. There are bicycles to borrow for exploring. The housekeepers provide a next day, ironed laundry service for \$2 per kilo. WiFi is provided free of charge. You'll also find the storage closet on the first floor across from the office. It is stocked with teaching materials, arts and crafts supplies, classroom supplies, lesson planning books, maps and much more.

Your Health

This is a brief overview of **very important health information**. The vast majority of our volunteers come through without any medical issue, though it is not uncommon to experience a bit of diarrhea as your stomach adjusts.

HOWEVER, we have, so far, been involved in four separate medical evacuations, so these things do happen and we want to be **very clear about how to avoid disaster**. Volunteers should be moderately fit and in good health as our working conditions can be basic and the heat can be intolerable to some. If you have any health concerns, please check with us first.

Hospitals and Medicine in Cambodia

It is a MUST that all volunteers have **travelers insurance that includes medical evacuation** and agree to our **Contract with Volunteers and Visitors**. We are happy to discuss the details of these policies with you.

DO NOT under any circumstances go to a local health clinic should you become sick in Cambodia. It is estimated that 80% of all pharmaceutical drugs in Cambodia are counterfeit; not only useless but often toxic. It is important that you bring any essential medicines with you. [Read more](#).

IF you need to purchase any medicines when you are here ONLY USE the UCare Pharmacy. There are three locations, one on Pub Street, one at the Lucky Mall, and one on Sivutha Boulevard; we are happy to help direct you.

You should check with your doctor what inoculations you need well before your travel date. Malaria and Dengue Fever are rare but still a reality, and precautions against mosquito bites should be taken. Should you develop a high fever accompanied by headache or rash while you are at the house, please let us know sooner rather than later.

Water, Hydration, Hygiene

Use bottled water for drinking and brushing teeth. It's okay to shower in the tap water. It's important to stay hydrated in the heat. You may want to consider bringing re-hydration powders, which are also available to buy in Siem Reap. Drinking fresh coconut water is the very best thing for staying hydrated.

You can't wash your hands often enough. Gone are the days of amoebic dysentery with every meal, but your hands are still probably your worst enemy for getting sick. Bring hand wipes with you and use them. It's a good idea to be tested for TB upon your return home. Be careful of any head-to-head contact with children at school, a good many of them have lice.

Dogs, Cats, Monkeys

Leave dogs and cats alone, do not pet them or approach them. Should you be unfortunate enough to be bitten by one, you will need a course of anti-rabies shots. These are available at the International Hospital. There are monkeys around some of the temples. They are incredibly devious and have been known to steal snacks and cameras from unsuspecting tourists. Never approach them and never feed them as a bite from one will also necessitate an immediate anti-rabies course.

Read up on recommendations from the [Center for Disease Control](#).

Examples of Costs in \$usd

30 day tourist visa	\$30
Local beer	<\$1
Meal	\$2-20
1 day Temple Pass	\$20
3 day Temple Pass	\$40
7 day Temple Pass	\$60
Tuktuk ride in town	\$2
Foot Massage	\$4
100 BW Copies	\$1.25



Cultural Do's and Don'ts

The Cambodian psyche is dignified, friendly, polite, optimistic and humorous. Smiles and laughter abound. Losing your temper is the easiest way to lose respect and trust. Confrontation is not acceptable and leads to a loss of face and future avoidance. Always maintain your dignity and show respect by smiling and using humor to deflect a difficult situation.

You will hear “yes” to almost any question, even if the answer might actually be “no”. Be aware of this display of politeness and form your questions with some forethought. Respect that everyone here has gone to great lengths to learn your language so it's helpful for you to speak slowly, simply and with a posture of patience and friendliness.

If you invite someone out for coffee or to Paris for the weekend, it is assumed you will pay. Be aware of this when making plans with people. Also know that if you invite one person they might bring their family. Be prepared to give a moderate cash donation at weddings, funerals and festivals in pagodas.

Ask before taking photos – In Cambodia a smile is often a sign of shyness or discomfort, so don't ever presume it's okay to take a picture of someone. Ask first – if you receive a nod along with a smile, feel free to snap away! Also remember that many Cambodians will not want their photo taken in a group of three, as it is believed that this will bring bad luck to the person in the middle.

Dress

Cambodians are conservative and dress modestly. Even in the hottest months they will wear jeans, sweaters, turtlenecks, and/or scarves. Shorts are acceptable but should be knee-length. Mini skirts, skimpy tank tops and low-cut tops are not acceptable in the countryside. Shoulders should be covered, especially when visiting the Temples and absolutely when teaching. Around town you will see many tourists dressed in skimpy clothing but, as a savvy traveler and representative of PLF, you should be as sensitive to your surroundings as possible.

It is customary to always remove your shoes at the door of all Khmer homes, in some shops and at the main door of a pagoda (monastery).

Bodily Gestures

Do not touch anyone's head or point your feet at anyone. Cambodians are not “touchy” people with people they don't know well. Refrain from physical contact, especially anyone of the opposite sex unless they initiate it. Most Cambodians are uncomfortable shaking hands and men should not touch women at all. Public displays of affection are not polite between men and women, but you will see two men arm in arm or perhaps even slow dancing together. It does not carry the same connotations as it does in the west.

Beckoning someone with your palm up is considered aggressive and to beckon with one finger is sexually suggestive. Therefore, always beckon someone with your palm facing downwards.

It cannot be stressed enough the enormous cultural differences between the westernized city of Siem Reap (where you'll be staying) and the very traditional way of life in the villages (where you'll be working). Please be sensitive to this at all times.

Above all else, keep a smile on your face and a relaxed attitude, *no matter what*.

Buddhism

The majority of Khmer people are Buddhists and their faith permeates all areas of life. There are five pagodas on Wat Bo Road alone. You are free to wander around these and, indeed, the monks will often engage you in conversation to practice their English. Please be respectful to the monks at all times. Women specifically should never touch a monk, hand things directly to a monk or even brush past one on the street.

Money

The US dollar is the de-facto currency. The Riel is used for smaller transactions and for small change. There is no need to get local currency at the airport or the border, particularly as the rate will be very bad. Dollars are accepted everywhere in Siem Reap. Cambodia is a largely cash society and credit cards are only used at some shops, hotels and restaurants, but don't count on it.



There are ATM's in Siem Reap dispensing USD but you should notify your bank that you will be in Cambodia before you leave home. Seven Candles does accept credit cards. There are no coins in Cambodia. If you bring dollars into Cambodia, please note they cannot be torn or mutilated. Also, Riel cannot be exchanged outside Cambodia so use or exchange any that you collect along the way before you leave the country.

Visas

Visas are available on arrival at Siem Reap or Phnom Penh airports as well as various border crossings. Bring cash in USD and a passport photo. Note that your passport must have six months validity left on it and two blank pages.

Tourist Visa: Cost \$35usd. Valid for an initial period of thirty (30) days and may be extended for another 30 days once only. After which, you must leave Cambodia and then reenter on another visa. Overstaying an initial tourist visa for a short period only is not a big deal but will cost you \$5 per day.

“Ordinary” Visa: Cost \$40usd. Initial period of validity thirty (30) days but then it may be extended, and re-extended, for a fee, virtually indefinitely without leaving the country. If there is the slightest possibility you would be staying more than 60 days, get the business visa on arrival. The 6 & 12 month business visa is multiple entry. All others require a border crossing to renew past 60 days.

These prices have been known to fluxuate. It is a good idea to double check [here](#) for current prices.

Phones and Wifi

Mobile phone coverage in Cambodia is very good. You can purchase a local SIM card for just a couple of dollars. You can buy a phone, sim card and \$10usd of time for less than \$50usd. Let someone at the Seven Candles front desk handle that for you. Skype is always an excellent option too, especially if you buy a \$10usd skype credit and use the call-to-phone feature.

There is wifi at the house but the bandwidth will not be what you are used to. Before you arrive, learn how to downsample images; the uploading of high res images is guaranteed to make you scream. There are three computers for communal use on the verandahs. Feel free to bring your own devices; the wifi is accessible from all the common areas, and the café, the rooftop as well as the rooms. Wifi is available at most of the cafés and bars that foreigners frequent around town.

Transport

Tuk Tuks



The most common form of transport is the tuk tuk. PLF has regular drivers who will do so much more than drive you around. They all speak English and will help to translate in your class and generally assist in any way necessary. There is a charge of \$15usd per day for your roundtrip transport to school. You pay the driver directly at the end of every day. If there are other volunteers working at the same school, you are encouraged to share a driver and split the cost, though we can't always guarantee this as an option.

If you have time before or after your class and want to visit the temples or any other nearby attraction your driver will be happy to take you. If you would like your driver to take you anywhere that is too far afield, or not covered by his day rate, he will make it plain what that extra charge is. All of the drivers affiliated to the house are great friends of the Foundation. They help out, voluntarily, behind the scenes, whenever there is anything that needs doing. They are part of the PLF family and they will soon become your friends too.

Bicycles

There are bicycles at the house and you are welcome to



use them for free. There are certain "rules of the road" that are a little unusual so

you should get a short briefing before heading out. The bikes have locks on them and you should use them as the theft of bicycles is fairly common, especially around Pub Street and the Old Market. If a bike disappears during your watch, you are liable for replacing it and they cost \$38. Riding a bike in Siem Reap and the surrounding countryside, including the temples, is a pleasure that we highly recommend.



Motorcycles

Motodops (scooter drivers) are on every corner and will take you anywhere in town for \$1usd. You can hire one for all day for around \$8usd. Be advised many motodops don't have proper license to drive and possess limited driving skills. It is against the law for foreigners to rent petrol powered motorbikes or cars in Siem Reap. However, you will see them being

rented; be advised if you do, you are breaking the law. If you get caught, the moto will be confiscated and you will be heavily fined. You can, however rent an eco friendly "Green e-bike". These are electric bikes that can take you up to 30km in one charge at 32km/hr.

If you need help with transport to other destinations in Cambodia, the front desk is happy to help and there are also a couple of good travel agencies that can assist you as well.

Culture Shock

Culture shock happens. Some prior knowledge about the conditions of the country will help alleviate this. Above all you need to have a positive, flexible attitude or you may find your stay in Cambodia rather difficult. Siem Reap is one of the poorest provinces in Cambodia. Although the town, with so many tourists, has a veneer of prosperity, the countryside, where you will work, has almost no electricity, access to clean water is almost non-existent, there are very few latrines and the poverty is grinding. You will see dirty, undernourished children every day. They are still just children, please remember this.

Local approaches to work may seem very inefficient to you. Try to have an open mind, avoid criticism and be aware that there are different ways of doing things and that West is not always best. You may find the attitude to animal husbandry somewhat shocking. If you're a dog lover, prepare yourself. You may find, especially in the countryside, that children are not always treated with kindness.

Try not to judge. Try not to bring your ideas of "how it should be" to the equation. Do your best to find solidarity whenever and however you can.



Child Sellers and Beggars

It is estimated that there are over 1,500 children living and working on the streets in Siem Reap and the Angkor Temples. All of these children are increasingly abused and/or exploited either by their handlers or sex tourists. Visitors often unknowingly increase their vulnerability. We ask PLF volunteers to **NOT BUY ANYTHING FROM CHILDREN** on the streets, or at the temples. **YOU SHOULD ALSO NEVER** give money to begging children or to any adults using children to beg. If you want to buy trinkets on the street or at the temples, please buy from **ADULTS ONLY**. Many of these children you meet are rented out by their parents for a pittance and are controlled by an overseer. **DO NOT** support or sustain child labour and exploitation with your gestures that have the right intention but the wrong effect. The best thing that could ever happen to these children would be if all the tourists collectively decided to stop transacting with them entirely. We abide by ChildSafe standards and regulations, [read those here](#). We also support [Think Twice Cambodia](#).

Adult beggars & scams

You will encounter plenty of adult beggars in Siem Reap and you'll have to use your own judgement about what to do in every situation because they are all different. We would encourage you, whether you give or not, to always have a posture of compassion for those who are living on the edge in a place like Cambodia. Yes it can be tiring but it doesn't cost you anything to be polite.

There is currently a scam around Pub Street where women borrow babies to beg outside certain convenience stores, asking for formula, which people go into the store and buy and then the woman sells it back to the store owner for half price. Again, please do not encourage begging, especially when children are used to do it.

There are also "fake monks" running around Pub Street giving people blessings in exchange for donations. No monk will ever ask you for money, so if an orange robed person does, you can know they are a scam.

Weather

November to February is the “cool season” and precipitation is rare. The humidity is gone and early mornings and late at night can be cool but never cold. If you’re teaching this time of year, it makes sense to have a long pair of pants and perhaps a windbreaker or at least a long sleeved shirt. While it’s nice to stroll about in shorts and a t-shirt, rides in a tuktuk through the forest in the early morning, can be chilly this time of year.



March to May is the “hot season”. It will not rain at all. It will be exceptionally hot, humid and very dusty and does not cool down much in the night. The rivers dry up and boat travel becomes arduous. The upside is that there are fewer tourists.

June to October is the “rainy season”. It will rain a little every day, mostly in the late afternoon and late at night. Temperatures are still high but the rain helps cool things off. October sees the heaviest rains, with occasional monsoons dumping so much rain that the town floods and roads in the countryside become impassable.

Theft and Safety

Like anywhere, there is opportunistic theft in Siem Reap. If you leave something laying somewhere it probably won’t be there when you come back for it, same for your bike if you leave it unlocked on Pub Street, it may not be there when you come back. But chances are extraordinarily slim that someone is going to rob you at knife point. Women are usually safe walking around, even at night, although the usual precautions should be taken. Don’t wear flashy jewelry or flaunt your cash. Bag snatching is known to happen, where they will rip your bag or purse off your shoulder, even if you’re on a bicycle, tuktuk or moto. Hold your belongings close to you or better still don’t carry a bag. There is security at the house at the front gate from sundown to sunrise. Luggage locks are a very good idea while traveling point to point, and you should not put anything in your check-in luggage (aboard buses, boats or planes) you can’t live without.

Landmines

Cambodia has a very serious problem with landmines and unexploded ordinances. It is estimated that, at the current rate of clearance, it will take 100 years to clear the country of all mines. Landmines, in the more remote areas, are still affecting hundreds of people every year. There are no landmines in Siem Reap. The temple area has been cleared of mines and is safe. As a general rule, it is always best to stick to well-trodden paths and not to wander off established routes when in the countryside. This is particularly important if you are working at schools in Koh Ker or Srayang or in remote areas.



In Siem Reap you will see many victims of landmine explosions selling books on the street and there are several “Landmine Orchestras” who will entertain you in town and at the Temples. It is very difficult to gain employment in Cambodia if you have any form of disability and, by providing these services and not begging, they are trying to earn a living for their families. Support them how you can.

Never Forget These Points

- Don't do drugs in Cambodia. At all. Ever.
- Don't buy artifacts. Don't take stuff from temples, not even a random rock.
- Avoid the roadside snails sold as snacks, no matter how adventurous you're feeling.
- Don't get drunk and/or disorderly in a PLF t-shirt. You're wearing a name on your dirty shirt that is recognized and respected in the community.
- Cambodia is a haven for sex tourists and pedophiles. If we have any sense that you are having any inappropriate contact with children or prostitutes we won't hesitate to notify the local authorities at once. Do not go with any children to their homes, or anywhere for that matter, unless part of an PLF-organized outing.
- Single men will be approached by prostitutes regularly in Siem Reap. You should be aware that it is estimated that 75% of all "bar girls" in Cambodia have HIV. Behave accordingly. You should also be aware that most bar girls are "observed" by local thugs who will use any opportunity to separate you from your wallet. Be careful out there, nothing is as it seems.



At School

A PLF t-shirt must be worn at school and dress should be otherwise modest. Men should wear long shorts or pants and women should wear long skirts, pants or bermuda/capri length shorts. You should never wear a hat indoors.

There is no smoking on school grounds and mobile phones should not be used in the classroom. Set a good example at all times. You should be punctual for your classes and respectful to the Khmer teachers.



The government schools have a split system. Half the children attend school from 7:00-11:00am and half from 1:00-5:00pm. English, Science and Arts and Crafts classes are extra-curricular and are held in between sessions, from 11:00am-noon and from noon-1:00pm.

You should wind up your class at 12:50pm to allow the children to clean the classroom, prepare for the afternoon session, use the bathroom, etc. It is essential that their Khmer classes start promptly at 1:00pm.

Volunteering Opportunities

The “things to do” list is almost endless and we are always open to your suggestions. Our students want to know *everything*, so think about what you know how to do and would enjoy doing with the students. We are always running the four programs listed here in addition to whatever else you can dream up. Visit the website to see the ever-changing list of **current classroom needs**. Proper planning is crucial to successful outcome, so please email volunteer@theplf.org to discuss your ideas in more detail.



Arts and Crafts

Hands-on, visual activities that inspire creativity are what we're looking for. You'll work with the school librarian (who has no English) and your tuktuk driver, who will help you translate. Workshops are from 11-12 and 12-1 with about 20 students in each class. They will be 8 to 12 years old. You should work to involve the school's librarian to really show them how you're doing the activity so they can do it again for other students after you're gone. **Visit our Pinterest page for ideas!**



Science Club

To make science come alive for our 6th grade students, PLF has piloted an extra-curricular Science Club. A curriculum has been written that tracks the Khmer 6th grade Science class and includes four months of Biomes, four months of Human Biology and three months of Physical Science. Depending on what time of year you are arriving, we will let you know what the students will be studying and your job is to work with the teacher to come up with activities/experiments that fit into those lessons. Please do all you can to explain fully how to search for and plan, so that he might perform the experiments himself at a later date. Above all, remember to keep your lessons engaging, yet simple. **Visit our Pinterest page for ideas!**



English

Before arrival, you'll be given the textbook the students are currently using and your assignment will be to review what the children have already learned, putting a special focus on listening and speaking activities. The rural beginner classes are in the mid-day and there are also evening classes for intermediate and advanced students, who especially need to practice English conversation. **Read more about the English Program.**



Srayang Dormitory

It takes a very special type of person to be up for the challenge of working at PLF's Srayang Dormitory in an isolated rural setting, but it is often the most rewarding of our volunteer positions. To understand more about what volunteering at Srayang means, please do **be in touch**.

Student Behavior

You will find that the children are very well behaved in class and anxious to learn. It would be rare if you had to, but do not tolerate any bad behavior. You'll find your students, bright, engaged and fun. You should be the same.



Cambodian schoolchildren like to 'help' each other; some might call it cheating. There is a great emphasis here on "sharing knowledge" which is understandable given the fact that it is in such short supply in these rural areas. This propensity toward "helping" will be challenging for you when you're trying to see who knows what, but please just relax. Our job is not to change village culture, we just want to teach a little English.

Children remove their shoes before entering the classroom; you do not. Removing them in the library is okay because that is more of a "play environment" and removing your shoes removes your authoritarian position.

It is normal to have extra students, not part of your class, listening and looking through the window, sometimes even participating. You can spend time trying to shoo them away but it won't work. They're curious! But, work with the other staff on hand to make sure the students in the classroom are the ones on your roster, we are trying to implement a sense of order in the classroom.



And finally...

It is a condition of our 501(c)(3) status with the US Government and our agreement with the Government of The Kingdom of Cambodia that politics and religion are not to be discussed, at school or in the villages where they are located, while working with The Ponheary Ly Foundation. Breaking this rule constitutes a serious breach of trust between our organization and the communities with whom it works, Betraying that trust potentially jeopardizes our 501(c)(3) status and our relationship with the Ministry of Education. For this reason, proselytizing in any way or criticizing the government either verbally or in writing will necessitate your immediate removal from the PLF's program.



photos by eyes-open.org

What to bring:

All your normal medications plus something to treat travellers diarrhea and some tylenol/paracetamol. Some people bring their own antibiotics, but they are available here and much cheaper. Bring a simple first aid kit with bandages, neosporin, alcohol wipes and **anti-itch cream**.

All hygiene products: lotion, soap/body wash, deodorant, sunscreen, toothbrush, toothpaste or you can buy all of that when you get here but it's not usually available at guesthouses. Women's sanitary products are available here but many people bring them from home.



Please bring the appropriate clothing!

Men and women need to keep knees and shoulders covered **at all times when you are in the countryside**. Even if you're swimming. Even if it's hot. At all times means **at all times**.

A PLF T-shirt should be worn any time you are engaged with students. Wearing them at school means the kids will feel more comfortable with you and you will be viewed/treated differently. It also means you need to behave appropriately while representing our organization in the community. You will be given one shirt on arrival and can buy more if you like (\$5)

A compact umbrella is useful in all seasons; a hat is also useful in the sun.

A sweater in cool season. It can actually be a bit chilly in a tuktuk going through the forest early in the morning in December and January.

A rain poncho in rainy season (May through November) available in Siem Reap for \$1.50

A flashlight and extra batteries can be useful.

Mosquito spray should contain DEET, no more than 30%, no less. In the countryside you should stay protected at all times. In the city, particularly at dawn and dusk. If you decide to take anti-malarials be advised that in this area, malaria is drug-resistant and the World Health Organization recommends Malarone, not Doxycycline. If you take anti-malarials, you still need to worry about Dengue Fever, so mosquito protection is a must.



Teaching materials. Please bring your own whiteboard markers and any supplies/materials you need for your planned activities. Many things are available in Siem Reap if you don't want to carry them over, but we should review your materials list with you before you leave home.



Bring sturdy shoes that dry out quickly and allow your feet to breathe (Keens & Tevas seem to be perennial favorites)

Med-Evacuation Insurance is required in order to volunteer at Srayang Dorm and highly recommended for all visitors to Cambodia. If you have a policy and want us to keep your details in case you should become incapacitated, please do bring us a copy on arrival.

The most important things you need to bring are
your sense of adventure
your desire to be of service
your ability to be flexible
your easy-going disposition.



The Seven Candles and Ponheary Ly Foundation Family

Ponheary, Lori and the entire family and PLF team are always open for talking and answering your questions. Don't be afraid to pop by for a chat! We have a lot of thoughts about what your time here means.

[Read more about those thoughts and our philosophy.](#)

We have learned over the years that volunteers find their time much more rewarding if they become invested in spreading the word about their work and the Foundation with friends, family and social circles well before, and hopefully after, their time with us in Cambodia. Don't be shy about owning what you're doing in Cambodia and give your network an opportunity to support you in that effort.

[Get started now; here's our online toolkit to help you.](#)

Useful Information

[PLF's Pinterest Page](#)

[Open Equal Free](#)

[ESL Worksheets](#)

[ESL Handouts](#)

[Cambodia News](#)

[About Cambodia, UNDP](#)

[Angkor Wat](#)

65.3%

Under age 30

63.6

Life Expectancy at birth
(HDI 2013)

5.8

Mean years of schooling

1,036

GDP Per Capita (usd)

80%

Rural population

45.9%

Population living in
multi-dimensional
poverty



Recommended Reading:

[The Geography of Thought](#)

[Cambodia's Curse](#)

[The Gate](#)