Make an informed decision

On first arrival in Cambodia, it is very easy and natural to be moved by the plight of some of the poorest people in the world and to want to do something to help. Without guidance, however, knee-jerk reactions to what you witness can actually do more harm than good.

If you’re only in Siem Reap for a few days to a couple of weeks and are thinking of doing some short-term voluntary work, please read on to allow you to make a more informed decision about ways in which you can help.

Why do you want to volunteer?

Think carefully about your reasons for wanting to volunteer. Volunteering is not about what you want to do, but about the kind of help that is really needed. Be open-minded and look at the bigger picture.

What is the need for volunteers in Cambodia?

In Siem Reap, as in many other parts of Cambodia, there is a real need for volunteers, however it is usually more useful and cost-effective for an NGO* to take on a long-term volunteer rather than to ‘accommodate’ a volunteer just for a few days.

*NGO = Non-Governmental Organization, which for this leaflet’s purpose specifically relates to charitable organizations.

For more information on how you can help to make a difference during your stay in Siem Reap, please drop in to the ConCERT office (near the Old Market) where the staff will be more than happy to discuss the options available to you.

ConCERT Cambodia
www.concertcambodia.org

For information about responsible volunteering and child safety, please visit these websites:

Good Intents
www.goodintents.org/volunteering-overseas

Idealist
www.idealist.org/info/Volunteer

Think Twice campaign
www.facebook.com/thinktwicecambodia

Friends International
www.friends-international.org

UNICEF
www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cambodia

Save The Children
www.savethechildren.org

Read on for how best to help

Only here for a few days?

Visiting Cambodia and want to help?
Ways to help
There are many other ways to help during a short stay that you may not have even considered – activities that are just as valuable as volunteering.

* Give blood – drop in at Angkor Hospital for Children or Kantha Bopha Hospital. Sterile and safe facilities.

* Buy from shops or eat at cafes or restaurants that support local NGOs or social enterprises that provide much needed vocational training.

* Take a tour with a responsible tour operator that provides community-based ecotours which help to support local people and the environment.

* Join a local pub quiz! All $1 entry proceeds plus donations go to a variety of local good causes.

* Build awareness back home. Helping can continue long after your visit. Make friends and family aware of the situation here and think of fun ways you can raise much-needed funds.

* DONATE! Money for projects is always desperately needed. In fact, this is one of the very best ways in which you can make a difference. Please see “Giving money/Donating items”.

Consider these points:

* Thinking of visiting an orphanage?
Ask yourself this... Would you randomly visit an orphanage in your own country? An orphanage is a child’s home. It is essential for the children's physical and mental well-being, stability and safety that they are allowed privacy and are not exposed to a multitude of (non-police checked) strangers.

* Does the project or organization you want to volunteer at meet a real need, and is their response appropriate to that need?
For instance, there is much concern from many organizations such as UNICEF, Childsafe and Save the Children that orphanages are not the right response to the needs of children in poverty - views supported by the Cambodian government. According to UNICEF, over 75% of children in orphanages still have one or sometimes both parents. It is a far better alternative to help organizations that keep families together.

* Who do daily orphanage dance performances really benefit?
Be especially wary of organizations that provide easy access and interactions with children.

Share your skills
“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” - Chinese proverb
For a short term impact, consider using your skills. For a long term impact, consider teaching your skills. Carrying out a task yourself may deprive locals of valuable income. If the country is to really get back on its feet, Cambodians need to be taught skills that can continue through generations.

Giving money / Donating items
After consideration, you may decide that donating is actually a better option all round. However, before giving money or items to ANY person or organization, please bear these points in mind:

1. Giving to beggars and street kids only continues a culture of begging and dependency. It’s better in the long term to give to an organization that seeks to help the community as a whole.

2. Know where your money is actually going. Ask questions about how your money will be spent. Give to organizations that are financially and procedurally transparent.

3. Want to buy items to donate? First ask the organization what it really needs rather than assume, and then buy the items locally to support local businesses.

Please remember
Children are NOT tourist attractions.
www.thinkchildsafe.org/thinkbeforevisiting