



TANOP COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTRE (TCEC)

# Volunteer Guide



We hope that the information contained in this Guide will help make your visit to the Tanop Community Education Centre (TCEC) as comfortable and rewarding as possible.

We have tried to cover all bases from **pre-arrival & arrival** to **stay & departure** in as much detail as required.

We know it is a lot to read but the Guide is based on our belief that respecting your host community and being culturally sensitive to community traditions and behaviours is the foundation of all successful volunteering.

In short, we believe that the more informed you are, the more rewarding your visit will be.

Your time in Cambodia will be greatly enriched if you read up about Cambodia – its history both recent and ancient, its culture and its traditions – prior to your arrival. Start with a reputable Travel Guide or online search and if you have time, follow up with whatever further reading is recommended.

**It is important that you take time to read this Guide and if you need further information, please contact the Volunteer Program Coordinator: [Carolyn Watts](mailto:carolyn@singingkites.org) email [carolyn@singingkites.org](mailto:carolyn@singingkites.org)**



## PRE-ARRIVAL & ARRIVAL IN PHNOM PENH

### VISAS

A visa is required for anyone visiting Cambodia.

The official rate of a Cambodian tourist visa is USD\$30\*.

Visas can be obtained at the airport on arrival in Phnom Penh. Present your completed visa application form with ONE passport photo and the above visa fee at the Visa Processing Office on disembarking.

You can also apply for an e-Visa (tourist only) online before you depart at [www.evisa.mfaic.gov.kh](http://www.evisa.mfaic.gov.kh)

*\*Amounts subject to change*

### HEALTH

We recommend you see a reputable Travel Doctor at least six weeks before travel to organise your vaccinations. Some require more than one injection over a period of time. Your doctor will advise you on what to do to prevent mosquito-borne diseases and will help with suggestions for a medical kit to take with you. Take and use a good quality insect repellent, sunscreen and antibacterial hand sanitiser.

We recommend a visit to the dentist before departure. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take spares.

*Medical insurance is essential when traveling in Cambodia.*

### BEGGARS

Begging is often the only means of survival for impoverished people in developing countries. There is no social security system in Cambodia so giving to the elderly, handicapped or disabled is a matter of personal choice.

We recommend that you do not give money to child beggars however, as this can encourage children to stay on the street and become dependent on handouts rather than attending school.

### SAFETY AND SECURITY

Poverty can lead to crime in many under-developed countries like Cambodia. Visitors need to be vigilant at all times with personal property such as handbags, cameras, wallets and phones particularly when travelling on a motor bike or tuk tuk, shopping and sightseeing.

### WHAT CLOTHES TO PACK

Cambodia has a rainy and a dry season. The rainy season normally begins in June and continues through to November.

Regardless of the season, you can expect hot and humid conditions. April is normally the hottest month with temperatures reaching 35°C or more. December to late February are usually cooler but even then, temperatures rarely fall much below 25-30°C.

Pack light cotton clothes and be sure to include a couple of pairs of long trousers and long sleeved shirts for evenings and temple visits. A hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, cotton scarf and small torch should all be considered. Do not pack expensive jewellery and think in advance about how you intend to secure your money and other valuables during your visit. You will be able to lock these securely in your cottage when you are at the school.

### ACCOMMODATION AND EATING IN PHNOM PENH

Most volunteers stay in Phnom Penh for a night or two before travelling to the school as there are things you need to organise before your visit. Organize your accommodation in Phnom Penh in advance using the internet. There are plenty of options for all budgets. A highly recommended website to get an idea of accommodation options and contact details is: [www.canbypublications.com](http://www.canbypublications.com)

If you would like to contact us, we are happy to offer accommodation suggestions.

We can organise your transport to get from the airport to your accommodation with our recommended driver. The cost for this travel is approximately \$US15.00.

As with accommodation, there are plenty of eating options to suit all budgets. Again, use a reputable internet sight to help you make your restaurant choices

A word on responsible spending: a dollar counts for much in Cambodia. As you have already decided to volunteer, you are probably a traveller who wants to make a difference to the lives of the people you meet. You can do this from the very start by ensuring you stay and eat in places which are ChildSafe members, support or are affiliated with local NGOs, train or employ disadvantaged people, have policies to combat sex tourism and have environmentally sensitive infrastructures.

### MONEY

The local currency is the Cambodian riel but prices are widely quoted in US dollars, particularly in Phnom Penh. If paying in US dollars, you may receive your change in riel for low-cost purchases.

With US dollars, choose your notes carefully as any worn, torn, taped or those with writing on them may be rejected. Riel are accepted in any condition.

If you are carrying US dollars, smaller denomination notes are easier for daily use – USD\$US1, USD\$5, USD\$10, and USD\$20 – but USD\$50 and USD\$100 notes are useful for big-ticket purchases.

ATMs are now in use in Phnom Penh (and other tourist cities such as Siem Reap and Sihanoukville) but you might need to shop around for one that takes your card.

Note that many places charge commission on credit card payments.

**It will be difficult to access banking facilities between Phnom Penh and the school so it is wise to ensure that you have sufficient money (in cash) for the duration of your stay at the school.**

While volunteer security has not been a problem at the school to date, please talk with the Assistant Director Nop Pich when you arrive if you have concerns about this.

## PREPARING FOR YOUR STAY AT TCEC

### What do you need to organise before leaving Phnom Penh

#### MONEY

Bring enough cash to cover your spending costs while you are at the school. There are **no banking facilities in the village**. Please ensure that you have sufficient \$US to cover your accommodation costs at the school. You will need to make this payment to the Assistant Director Nop Pich during your visit. You will receive a Singing Kites receipt to acknowledge payment. This is not a tax receipt.

#### FOOD

**You need to supply your own food for the duration of your visit.** Think about what you want for breakfast, lunch and dinner and stock up at one of the bigger western-style supermarkets like **Lucky's** or **Pencil** in Phnom Penh before you leave.

There are also a few higher-end food shops that have greater varieties of western food items like cheese, bacon, chocolate, bread, pastries etc. Check your Travel Guide for locations. We can also organise a shopping trip for you, with our driver, on the way down to the school.

**There are NO opportunities to shop for supermarket items between Phnom Penh and the village.** In Tanop, the only food supplies available are Khmer – fruit and vegetables – but there is a local bakery on the way to the village.

Accommodation at the school includes refrigeration but there is limited freezer capacity.

#### Some shopping items to consider:

- eggs (these will be hen eggs as distinct from duck eggs that you can find in the village)
- yoghurt, juice, cereal, butter/margarine, cheese, jam, peanut butter, mayonnaise, bread, muesli bars
- tea, coffee, sugar, UHT milk
- onions, garlic, ginger, fruit and vegetables of your choice
- Buy any meat you think you will need at the supermarket in Phnom Penh rather than in the village but remember that *freezer capacity in the cottages is limited*
- pasta, pasta sauces, noodles, tinned vegetables (eg tomatoes, lentils, corn)
- canned fish (eg tuna), spaghetti/baked beans, coconut milk, spices & condiments (eg salt, pepper, curry powder)
- sauces (eg soya, fish, chilli etc), sweet biscuits, crackers, cooking oil, matches
- detergent, laundry powder, chux wipes, toilet paper, mosquito coils
- personal items such as soap, toothpaste, hand wash, shampoo, antibacterial hand sanitizer are best brought from home.

#### DRESS CODE

Staff at TCEC take great care to dress professionally during working hours and volunteers are required to dress with the same care. Clean trousers, shirts, tee-shirts, skirts, dresses, medium length shorts etc are expected. Cambodians are modest people and do not respect skimpy dress on either men or women. The wearing of singlet tops, short shorts and short skirts is not acceptable.

#### MEDICATION

You will need to bring whatever medications you use with you to TCEC as there are no western medical or pharmaceutical facilities in the village. We also recommend that you don't rely on filling scripts for ongoing medication requirements in pharmacies in Phnom Penh.

We recommend you take and use a good quality insect repellent, sunscreen and antibacterial hand-sanitizer while you are at TCEC. It is also recommended that you take diarrhoea and nausea relief medication in your luggage.

It can be quite dusty in the village at times so eye protection medication is advised, particularly if you wear contact lenses or have sensitive eyes. Remember to carry a spare pair of glasses or a supply of lenses to the village.

**A precautionary word:** the best way to avoid health problems when at TCEC is to drink only boiled or bottled water, avoid consuming ice, eat only cooked or peeled food and avoid hand-to-mouth bugs by using antibacterial hand wash/soap and hand-sanitizer to ensure clean hands.

#### BRINGING GIFTS

Before loading up your suitcase with gifts for the school, remember that most items such as pencils, exercise books, readers, art paper etc are much cheaper in Cambodia and can be easily purchased in Phnom Penh or in the local market place.

If you wish to donate resources, please contact **Carolyn Watts** for a list of ideas.

Volunteers are discouraged from giving gifts to individual students or villagers as this contributes to a culture of dependency and works against what we are trying to achieve at the school. It can also put pressure on villagers to reciprocate with gifts that they cannot afford.

#### ELECTRICAL ITEMS

There are power points in each cottage for light-duty electrical items such as shavers, hair dryers, traveling irons etc. A basic multi purpose adapter is a recommended purchase. This can then be used later in any country.

There are also facilities to charge computers and phones.

## TRANSPORT TO TCEC

The journey from Phnom Penh to the village takes about 90 minutes by road. Our reliable driver can be organised to pick you up from your accommodation by contacting [Carolyn Watts](#). **The cost is approximately \$US60.00 per vehicle and is the responsibility of the volunteer.**

We do not suggest using public transport to get to the village as we cannot advise on these options or guarantee cost, comfort or reliability.



## ARRIVAL & STAY AT TCEC

When you arrive at the school, you will be greeted by Nop Pich, Tith Tek and the teachers. You will be shown your accommodation and have time to freshen up before being shown around the school by the Assistant Director Nop Pich and given a short introduction to the school's history and foundation.

After that, you'll be free to decide how you want to spend the rest of the day. You may want to just 'settle in' or launch straight into your volunteer schedule.

Our [Assistant Director Nop Pich](#) will ask you for your passport at some point so that he can formally register your visit with the local authorities. Your passport will be immediately returned as soon as this process is completed.

Nop will also provide you with wifi connection details.

### SANITATION

There is no western plumbing at the school or indeed in the village, hence no automatic flushing toilets, sinks or taps. But don't panic. There are western toilets in each cottage bathhouse which are 'flushed' with water from the adjacent water tank.

Visitors are asked to place soiled toilet paper and sanitary items in brown paper bags and place in the covered bin provided. It is the visitor's responsibility to burn this waste once a day in the incinerator outside each cottage. The gas gun provided is ideal for lighting the incinerator in Cambodia's humid conditions.

We suggest you wash your hands thoroughly with soap, shake hands dry and apply hand sanitizer after using the toilet or before eating.

### WATER

Water is a very precious commodity at the school (and indeed in the whole village) and utmost care should be taken to conserve water at all times.

We have a limited water supply during the dry season so it is important for volunteers to conserve water.

Water is collected during the rainy season in large water tanks and jars strategically located around the school and cottages. On arrival you will be provided with 1 large (15L) bottle of potable water and 1 box of bottled drinking water. If you need to replenish supplies please see [Nop Pich](#) to arrange a further delivery. Large bottles are USD \$1 and a

box of bottled drinking water is USD\$4. These purchases support a local business.

The cottage bathrooms are fed by water tanks with finite capacity so please be mindful of how much water you use each time you 'shower'.

#### Some water-use precautions:

- It is important to keep hydrated when traveling in Cambodia.
- \* Use only bottled water in the electric kettle
- Use only bottled water for drinking and teeth cleaning.
- Use water from the water tanks and jars for washing clothes and cleaning.
- Avoid consuming ice from the village.
- If you buy vegetables from the local markets, you may want to soak them first in water purified with iodine tablets. It is suggested that you bring a supply of these tablets from home.

### COOKING FACILITIES

Each cottage is equipped with two one-burner gas cookers and its own set of cooking utensils, crockery, cutlery, glasses, mugs, plastic bowls, plastic food containers, scourers, tea towels. etc

You will be able to prepare a variety of cooked meals using these facilities.

Some meal ideas can be forwarded to you on request.

After preparing food, place food scraps in the covered food scraps bin outside your cottage and food packaging items such as used water bottles, empty tins, used tea bags, tissues etc in the bin supplied for recycling. The food scraps will be collected from you each day and used for moulching the community vegetable garden.

Take care when lighting the gas bottles and make sure that the gas is completely turned off when you finish cooking.

At the end of your meal, please don't leave dirty dishes, pots and pans overnight as they will attract vermin.

Place water from the large jars of drinking water and pour this into a plastic dish with detergent to wash your dishes. A small quantity of hot water from the kettle can be added. Place the washed dishes in the covered dish rack to dry.

## THE SCHOOL DAY

At TCEC, the school day starts at 7.30am with several primary English classes scheduled from 7.30am to 9.30am. The preschool program is scheduled from 7.30am to 10.30am.

Seeing and greeting the little preschoolers as they arrive each morning and run to their classroom is one of the joys of early rising at TCEC.

There is a school lunch break between 11am and 1pm.

The rest of the Primary and Secondary program commences at 1pm.

The afternoons are busy with English, Maths, Khmer Numeracy and Literacy, Art, Music, Computer and Sport classes from 1pm until 7.30 pm, with an afternoon break from 4pm to 4.30pm

School finishes each day at 7.30pm and is **closed on Saturday and Sunday and Khmer public holidays.**

## ALCOHOL TOBACCO DRUGS

We are aware of our influence as role models for our students and ask that you do not smoke or consume alcohol during school hours or at any time anywhere in front of the students.

If you wish to smoke and/or drink with your evening meal when the staff and students have gone home, please do so discreetly and dispose of your butts and bottles quietly and carefully.

Absolutely no recreational drugs of any kind are to be brought into or consumed at the school for the duration of your visit.

## TCEC STAFF

Many rural Cambodian villages have extremely limited employment opportunities. Villages often operate at subsistence level, with families making a meagre living from their small plots of land. The proliferating number of garment factories opening up in rural areas are expanding employment opportunities for some but wages are low, with hours and conditions that are not really family friendly. In Tanop, the main local employment source is labouring work in the quarry up the road from the school. Education is slowly helping build employment opportunities for young people but many rural families still cannot afford to send or maintain their children in school.

**It is a founding principal of Singing Kites to employ only local people at the school. All teaching and ancillary staff at TCEC come from the village or surrounds and all construction and maintenance work is locally sourced. This policy has helped bring a measure of visible prosperity to the village and wider community.**

All our TCEC teachers have completed secondary school and most are now completing university study in Phnom Penh at the weekend. In the eight years the school has been operating, teachers have significantly developed their skills both through personal effort and the very generous

## GENERAL HOUSEKEEPING

Our cleaner Chamroeun will sweep your cottage each day and remove the rubbish but it is your responsibility to keep your accommodation and the bathrooms generally neat and tidy for the duration of your visit.

You will probably spend a lot of your leisure time on the veranda of your cottage so please make sure that furniture is not removed and that dirty dishes, pots, pans, bottles, food etc are not left lying around after meals or at night. Please also wipe down table surfaces before you go to bed.

Large basins are provided for personal washing, which you can hang on the washing line outside your cottage. Use water from the cement water jars and rainwater tanks for washing clothes.

You will need to let **Nop Pich** know if your gas bottle runs out or if you need to purchase a large bottle or box of drinking water. He will also help you with any other day-to-day problems you may have in this regard.

You are not expected to tip any of the staff during your stay but any donation you choose to make to the school at the end of your visit will be very gratefully received.



work of the volunteers who visit the school. Our teachers take enormous pride in developing their professional skills and continue to be very keen to improve their own English language proficiency as well as to learn and practice new teaching techniques to benefit their students.

You may notice an initial degree of shyness or reserve as you work with the teachers. They sometimes see you as the “foreign expert” and can be self-conscious about what they perceive to be their lack of skills. Remember that Cambodian people are generally very polite and not as up-front as we can be in expressing personal feelings. Be conscious of how bad it is for Cambodians to lose face in public so choose your words carefully, enunciate clearly and never say bluntly what you think they should be doing.

It is important to be patient with the teachers, and to build trust and mutual respect. The Cambodian classroom is very different to the western classroom and it is important not to undermine the teacher’s authority by pushing ideas of methodology that the teacher is not yet comfortable with. After all, you will be there for a short time, the teacher will be there forever. Try not to take over. Your lasting contribution will be to give the teachers confidence to try new things in the classrooms.

## YOUR DAY

You will have discussed your volunteer duties with our **Volunteer Program Co ordinator, Carolyn Watts**, prior to your arrival at TCEC, so you will know roughly what you'll be doing before you start.

You will have approximately 3 hours of formal duties per day (more if you wish) but there is plenty of opportunity to engage in a range of informal interaction with the students and staff, such as joining in games, conversation, homework, small group reading, lesson planning etc

Carolyn will also have sent you a copy of the current school timetable and an important document called

**'Notes for Classroom Volunteers'**. This is a guide that provides some general background information about education in Cambodia and suggests a range of positive ways you can work with our teachers and contribute meaningfully in the classroom. The guide also includes an extensive list of fun activities and language games volunteers could try in the classroom. Please refer to this guide to help you plan how to use your volunteering time at the school and don't hesitate to contact Carolyn if you'd like more information.

Your free time is your own to explore the local attractions (see next section), read, rest or just chill out!

## YOUR FREE TIME

There is much to explore and enjoy in Tanop and surrounds. A list and information on local attractions can be found in your cottage.

Use the school bikes to get around but make sure you observe the following rules:

- Always tell someone at the school where you are going.
- Do NOT go out after dark
- Plan your excursion so that you are back at the school before nightfall
- Take your water bottle and phone with you but not any other valuables
- Do not ride alone in isolated areas
- Do not swim in any ponds or dams in the vicinity as the threat of infection is too great
- Do not engage in solo motorbike riding for the sake of your own safety

As a volunteer, you are a guest at the school and in the village. You need to conduct yourself in a respectful manner at all times, dress modestly and be conscious of what is deemed appropriate interaction with the local community. Be respectful of villager privacy and always seek permission before taking photographs. Please remember that the villagers are poor but generous and may invite you to share food or a meal. It is probably best to decline their offer as graciously as you can, but at the same time make an effort to acknowledge the kindness.

Unseemly and/or over familiar behaviour with villagers reflects badly on the school and can compromise the school's standing in the community.

The school is responsible for your safety and needs to know where you are at all times. If you do not return to the school when you are expected or 'go missing' for any reason, staff will need to be deployed to search for you which is costly, time-consuming and could be ultimately embarrassing.



## DEPARTURE FROM TCEC

We hope that by this time, you will have had a wonderful experience at the school and are already planning a time to return!

In the meantime, we would appreciate your cooperation with the following to ensure a smooth transition for the next volunteer's arrival.

### ON DEPARTURE

- Strip your bed, and place your towel and bed linen in the laundry basket supplied for Chamroeun to wash
- Burn toilet refuse in the incinerator outside your cottage.
- Leave one toilet roll and some paper bags in the toilet for the next visitor.
- Place gas cooker and gas lighting gun inside the cottage.
- Make sure that all cooking utensils, crockery, cutlery etc are washed and returned to the cupboard in your cottage, ready for the next visitor. Please return any utensils you may have borrowed from another cottage to the original cottage.
- Dispose of all perishable food from the fridge and clean the inside of the fridge thoroughly but *do not* turn the fridge off when you leave.
- You can take your own sealed food items with you when you go or if you prefer, you can leave them for the next visitor. Unopened tinned and/or bottled food can be left on the shelf in your cottage but packet food that may attract vermin should be left in the sealed food cupboard.
- Hand sanitisers, soap, insect repellent, tissues, toilet rolls etc that you have bought for your visit can be taken with you or, left for the next visitors.
- Make sure all the cottage and toilet lights are off when you leave.
- Report any problems with the cottages/ bathrooms to Tith or Nop.
- If you want to leave a cash donation to support the school at the end of your visit, please hand your donation to Nop Pich the Assistant Director. You will be given a Singing Kites receipt to acknowledge your contribution, and a tax receipt will follow before the end of the financial year.

### MAINTAINING FRIENDSHIPS

While we encourage friendly interaction between volunteers and students, we also strongly discourage the exchange of email addresses, phone numbers and social media contact details. This is as much to protect the privacy of the volunteer and that of the students and their families.

### REMEMBER

Cambodia is a rich and diverse country in the process of transition. You will find the younger generation – our students – to be generally quite at ease with you and eager for social interaction. They are lively, curious, responsive, respectful and unfailingly polite.

Their parents, however have experienced civil war, extreme political repression, privation, family loss and starvation during their lifetime and can be reserved, cautious and sometimes hard to read, but also, kind, generous and amazingly resilient.

Rural Cambodian society, while inexorably changing, is still very much based on traditional values of deep respect for family, friends, peace, faith and the land. We have much to learn from the indomitable spirit and amazing courage of these smiling and hospitable people, if we just choose to embrace the opportunity this village experience has to offer the volunteer or visitor.

