

A Harrowing Escape from Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is one of the greatest human rights abuses today and is happening worldwide. It takes three factors:

- 1) People who are vulnerable - often living in poverty and feeling hopeless (usually teenage girls)
- 2) People who are devious and unethical who choose to profit by exploiting the vulnerable (the trafficker).
- 3) People who are selfish and inhumane—seeing others as an object to be used and discarded (usually men using girls for sex).

Human trafficking is common in Cambodia, where almost half of the population lives in poverty. Families struggle to get enough food to eat and cannot afford to keep their children in school.

Friendship with Cambodia is addressing trafficking by:

- 1) Empowering rural mothers through our Women's Groups so they can to keep their teenage daughters in school.
- 2) Supporting a Center for Street Children—to protect at-risk youth found living on the streets.
- 3) Supporting the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, an agency that does advocacy and runs a Women's Shelter and Recovery Program for battered and trafficked women.

Here is a true story: Phalla is 17 years old and lives with her family in Kampong Thom province. Her parents are fishermen and cannot afford to send their children to school. Phalla is illiterate. She stays at home and helps around the house.

Last year, news spread in her village that girls were being hired to work in Singapore as housekeepers and could earn up to \$500 per month. No skills were required. Phalla wanted to do something to help improve her family's living conditions and was very interested in going. She heard that she could work with her friends if they applied as a group, which would also be a safer option.

Phalla contacted a broker, named Ms. Pheap, to arrange to go to work in Singapore along with her two sisters and a friend. They were told to take a bus to Phnom Penh and wait for Ms. Pheap at Orussey Market.

The four girls stayed in Phnom Penh to prepare their passports and other documents in order to leave Cambodia. Pheap paid for all their expenses. Next, they took a bus to Vietnam with a translator named Ms. Chhay. Then they traveled to Burma to get their visas, and back to Vietnam again. Now they were ready to fly to Singapore.



Phalla (here ^^^ with her back to us) in a counseling session with other girls at the Women's Shelter & Recovery Program funded by Friendship with Cambodia.

While at the airport waiting to board the flight, Phalla's sister overheard Chhay telling the broker on the phone that they were ready to fly to China. The girls confronted Chhay who finally admitted that they were being sent to China to "marry" rich Chinese men. [They would probably be sold to a brothel.]

The four girls became very worried and told Chhay that they needed to go to toilet. Then they ran away. Luckily, they met a couple who paid a taxi driver to take them to the Cambodian border. From there, they got a ride to Phnom Penh and went directly to ABC radio station to tell their story on the air.

At this point, Friendship with Cambodia's partner organization, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC) started to investigate the case.

CWCC contacted the police who went to the house in Phnom Penh where the girls stayed while waiting for their passports. They arrested Chhay, the translator, and Pheap, the broker, as well as several other suspects. The police rescued another seven girls in the house from Phalla's village who were also being trafficked. CWCC helped the girls to file in court to press charges.

Phalla and the other traumatized girls decided to stay in CWCC's Phnom Penh Women's Shelter because they did not feel safe enough to go back to their community. While living at the shelter, they received skill training and counselling to help re-build their confidence.

After staying in the CWCC Women's Shelter for over a month, Phalla felt better and with CWCC's help, she was able to reintegrate back into her community and help her parents with fishing. Phalla declared that she will not fall prey to the false promises of brokers or traffickers again.

Student Sponsorship Program Highlights

We had 10 students graduate from university in 2017 and we added 14 freshman to our program in the fall.

Social Work and Community Development are the most popular majors because many young people want to help improve impoverished living conditions in the rural areas.

We had two star students this year.



Rous, Savy was ranked #2 in her class of 169 students majoring in **Medical Laboratory** and given an Appreciation Award.

Without the support of her generous sponsors, Savy could not have studied in university.

She grew up in rural poverty. Her father passed away and her mother has mental illness. After graduation, she plans to work in the Health Center in her community.



Son, Dem ranked number #2 in his class of 70 **Electrical Engineers** and was given a financial reward.

Alumns Organize Service Project Planting Mangrove Trees

Friendship with Cambodia organized our graduates into an Alumni Association for the purpose of helping younger students and for community service.

Recently, one of our graduates organized a trip to the coast to plant mangrove trees, to help restore the eco-system. Nineteen students and alumns visited Tapang Sangke Community Based Eco-Tourism (CBET) site in Kampot Province.

The students who couldn't join the trip gave their friends money to plant mangrove trees for them.

This poor fishing community became even more impoverished when a cruise boat port destroyed part of the coast line. The development decimated the mangrove forest, which is critical habitat for local fisheries.



Mangrove trees grow in water along the coast. They provide habitat for crabs, shrimp and baby fish. They purify the water from pollutants and prevent erosion and coastal devastation from cyclones.

Mangrove trees reduce global warming by absorbing 100 times more carbon dioxide compared to terrestrial trees.

This CBET site offers a "picnic area, fantastic Khmer food, accommodation, kayaking, amazing scenery, fireflies at night, Khmer-style fishing, and fresh air." They also offer a chance to learn about the eco system and plant mangrove trees.

Our students and alumns had a great time. For most, it was their first time to have a fun outing and to see the ocean.

Friendship with Cambodia's Programs

Education for Poor Rural Youth

43 students are currently attending university (35 girls and 8 boys). We give them career counseling, financial support, English and computer classes, confidence building and help them get internships and jobs.

71 students have graduated from university.

Empowerment of Women

We have been supporting the training of rural women as community leaders and we formed a regional Women's Network. We provide technical support to Women's Savings Groups and fund four groups. Through these four groups, over 471 women are improving their lives through economic empowerment.

Healing for Survivors of Trafficking and Gender Violence

We support a Women's Shelter for girls and women who were sex-trafficked, raped, or beaten by their husbands. The shelter is run by our partner organization, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center. They provide trauma victims and their family members with shelter, counseling, life-skill training, literacy, English classes, legal assistance, and vocational training in sewing, baking, and catering. This year all of the rape victims were children.

Care for Street Children

Through our NGO partner, Chamkar Morn Center in Phnom Penh, children living on the streets are offered temporary shelter with food, clothes, schooling, loving-care, and help in finding long-term solutions. The shelter hosts up to 30 children per night.

Help for Landmine Disabled

Four workshops were held for disabled women in rural areas to help them heal psychologically, grow in self-confidence and make plans to improve their futures. Based on requests, support was given for 18 income generation initiatives (often a small grocery shop in front of the house), 14 new houses, 27 new toilets, 34 wheel chairs, 4 bicycles, 22 libraries in a bag, 15 scholarships for their children, and 56 packs of emergency food for the most vulnerable. And peer counseling visits were provided to 1004 disabled people.

Enjoyable Vacations that Give Back

If you are thinking about escaping winter for a warm tropical getaway, consider using your tourist dollars to have a great experience while at the same time changing the lives of people living in poverty.

Here are three ways to leverage your vacation investment to help the poor and double your happiness:

1) Make an effort to find hotels, restaurants and gift shops that provide training and employment to disadvantaged women and youth. Search online for "socially responsible hotels + country name."

Friendship with Cambodia, has written about these opportunities in our book, ***Socially Responsible Travel Guide Cambodia***. A new edition was published in May 2017 and is available through our website for \$16 including shipping.

In Cambodia, you can have a fine dining experience and enjoy Cambodian-French cuisine prepared by former street children. Stay in a luxury hotel that is also a training program for disadvantaged youth from rural villages. Buy beautiful gifts made by previously destitute widows who live with their children in urban slums.

2) If you don't have the time or interest to do your own research, search online for "socially responsible tour company + country name" and let those with local knowledge and expertise help you make arrangements for a vacation that will be a pleasurable experience and help end poverty. Booking a "normal" vacation usually supports international businesses.

Thousands of people a day visit Cambodia's ancient temples of Angkor Wat, a World Heritage Site, spending millions of dollars annually. Yet Cambodia is still among the poorest countries in the world, where nearly half the children are malnourished and only 6 percent finish high school. Eighty percent of the tourist revenue goes to foreign businesses that own the tour companies, hotels and restaurants.



3) If you are feeling adventuresome and want to get off the beaten path, search online for "community-based tourism + country name." This could be one of the most interesting and rewarding trips of your life.

Community-based eco-tourism (CBET) sites are usually started by international non-profit organizations, such as the Wildlife Alliance, that are working with marginalized rural

communities. Each community has a unique feature, such as archeological ruins, natural beauty or endangered wildlife. The non-profit organization helps the community set up its own local tourism business that provides income while keeping the culture intact.

Cambodian communities offer visitors accommodations ranging from traditional-style home stays to comfortably furnished tent-cabins with indoor plumbing. Meals carefully prepared by local women are both hygienic and delicious. Try Cambodian curry on rice with fresh grilled fish.

The people who used to poach wildlife for their livelihood are now employed as guides for bird-watching, trekking and wildlife viewing. In Cambodia, local guides can take you on a boat ride to see freshwater dolphins, or on an ox-cart ride through local villages and farms, or guide you through ancient ruins, or give you the joy of bicycling on an island without cars.

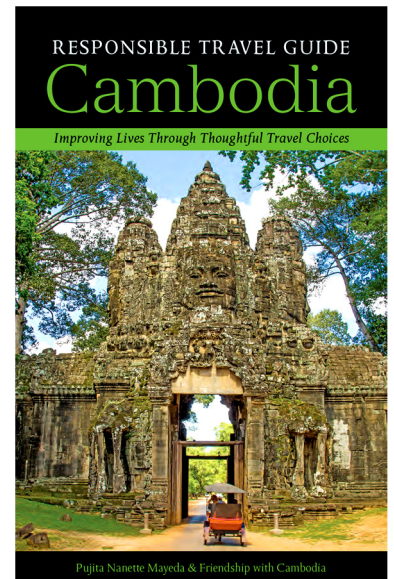
Your travel experience is so much richer when you meet local people and have an opportunity to observe traditional village life.

In Cambodia, you will see houses on stilts with hammocks beneath. Men plowing rice fields with water buffalo while women weave fine silk cloth by hand. Children catch fish using unusual baskets.

In the evening, you can relax under the stars and enjoy traditional Cambodian music played by village musicians. If you feel inclined, you can learn Cambodia's social dancing, enjoyed by all ages.

To make community-based tourism sustainable, villagers are trained in finance, management and marketing so they can take over the tourism business and manage it themselves.

Tourists vacationing in a poor country enjoy their experience more when they can do something to help.



Friendship with Cambodia

Founded in 2003 as a non-profit organization to provide humanitarian aid to Cambodia and education about Cambodia.
(541) 952-2009 www.friendshipwithcambodia.org
Please support our programs. Donations are tax-deductible.

A Better Life for Street Children

Srey Leak (left in photo) comes from a very poor family from Phnom Penh. Her parents are divorced and her father is unemployed. Her mother suffers from AIDS and used to work as a scavenger.



Recently her mother went to a medical clinic to receive treatment but disappeared shortly after that. The social workers are looking for her.

Before coming to the Center for Street Children that Friendship with Cambodia supports, Srey Leak also worked as a scavenger and begged for money. She is 13 years old

and never attended school.

Coming to the center has changed her life. She is so happy to get an education, three meals a day and proper clothing. She really likes going to the market and cooking. She enjoys chatting with the neighbors and vendors.

She loves going to class. Her favorite subjects are Khmer literature and civic education. She is a very good student and dreams of becoming a teacher when she grows up. At the center, she takes care of the younger children and teaches them hygiene and social rules.

A few months ago, she was referred to Krousar Thmey's orphanage. Now she lives there with her best friend, Srey Chov (right in the photo), whom she met in the street and is also 13 years old. They share a very strong bond.



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Training Women as Leaders

Puthry dropped out of school in Grade 8. She helped care for her family's farm, growing rice. She had very little understanding of the social issues in her village. Her family did not question the encroachment of illegal loggers into the community forests.

One day, Puthry's parents asked her to stand in for them at a village meeting, and she ended up being elected to the Community Forestry Committee. She was suddenly given the role of leading her community in protecting the forest.

Friendship with Cambodia's local partner NGO, Action for Environment and Community (AEC), helped Puthry learn about the issues and how to respond. Two years later, Puthry (second from the left in the photo) took on the role of leading her village's savings group. AEC trained her how to facilitate group meetings, monitor loans, and oversee the bookkeeping.

Over the years and with the support of numerous trainings by AEC in human and women rights, natural resource protection and active non-violence, Puthry, now 29 years old, has grown into a self-confident woman who takes a lead role protecting the forest and supporting women in her commune.

Puthry has also gained the respect of local authorities and she often travels to the provincial capital to meet with other land right activists.

Puthry broke through the tradition of silent women who defer to men and is now a role model for girls in her village.

