

## **CAMBODIA 2008 ... a student's perspective**

The Cambodia Trip was a wonderful experience. The country is very different to expectations. Being a part of the Cambodia Trip with Georgiana Molloy means that you get to experience Cambodia in a way that would otherwise not be possible. Being in close contact with the Cambodian people is something that wouldn't happen if you just went there as a holiday. The Cambodia Trip is an opportunity to see more of the country and of the people, and to build relationships with people in Cambodia. From the trip you will take once in a life time experiences and memories that will remain with you for the rest of your life.

The Cambodia Trip happened for the first time in Georgiana Molloy in 2008, and it was a great success. The trip ran smoothly thanks to the planning of Fr Tim Russell. We left for Cambodia at the wonderful time of 2.10 am on Monday, 24 November. Upon arrival we checked into our hotel, and then visited a baby orphanage, the Sisters of Charity. The orphanage was a moving experience. The children had absolutely nothing they could call their own and yet they were the happiest children I've seen. They were incredibly excited to be able to play with us. This happiness was amazing because they had so little and were in such a poor situation in life, and yet they were perfectly happy under the care of the Sisters. The children inspired hope into us all. There is no reason we cannot be happy, with all we have, if they can be happy with so little.

Our second day was a heavy one. We visited S21, were briefed by Tabitha and visited the Killing Fields. We gained a lot of knowledge on Day 2, as we learnt much about the history of Cambodia, especially in the last 20 years and about the horrors the Cambodian people experienced during those years. It was an emotional day, but what we learnt will never be forgotten and it will be a good reminder that no matter how bad things get, other people have been through worse.

On Day 3 we began our building, which was the focus of the whole trip. Building the houses was not complicated, we were only nailing on the bamboo floor and the tin walls. Even though it wasn't complicated, the work was fairly hard, especially nailing on the tin. The heat was intense, but luckily the Cambodian people looked out for us and supplied a big vase of water to help us cool off. When we started our building, the Cambodian people stood to the side and watched. They seemed to be assessing our determination to do the job, to make sure we were here to help them. Once we got to work, they soon joined us. The men helped with the hard work of putting the tin up and the women and children collected fallen nails and prepared fruit for us to eat during our breaks.

Building continued on Day 4. In total we built 12 houses. The process of building houses really developed a relationship between us and the Cambodians. The experience was touching as we presented the families with their house and a blanket to go into it. The building experience was wonderful and all gained a lot out of it. In building houses we could see that we were making a really valid contribution to the community. The work was hard, but not hard enough that we wouldn't do it again tomorrow.

Day 5 was a day of travel. We took a bus to Siem Reap, a tourist city about 6 hours out of Phnom Penh. Travelling by bus allowed us to see the countryside of Cambodia, which was very green during our visit. It broadened our view of Cambodia. Upon arrival to Siem Reap, we checked into a hotel, which was of 5 star standards, because they don't offer any less in Siem Reap. At night, we went out to a restaurant for dinner, called the "Dead Fish Tower". It was the most amazing restaurant I've seen. They built it out of an old warehouse, so it had multiple levels and a pulley between them for food. It had a small performance stage and various other attractions, like crocodiles being able to swim into the back of the restaurant.

On Day 6 we had a guide lead us through several of the temples in the area. They were all amazing and all old. Angkor Wat was the highlight, being the biggest of the three, but also the biggest religious building in the world. It had massive stone spires and a very large moat with a solid stone bridge leading across it. Angkor Wat was in use up until recently, and our guide had actually been an initiate at the temple when he was younger. He gave us an incredible insight as to his life at the temple. We toured the other two temples and each had something outstanding about them. Angkor Tom (?) was amazing because of the forest growing over it. Massive trees were growing right over the walls and vines were creaking into various places. It was slowly crumbling to pieces and it was an incredible sight. Angkor (?), the third temple, had a large wall around the outside of it. The temple was one of the original ones, and it had actually acted as a city, with people living inside the walls near the temple. It was also very tall, and was still standing in a fairly strong condition. You could climb up and look at the massive face carvings and look down onto the countryside below. All of the temples were immaculately carved on the inside, and the carvings told various stories. The temples were an amazing part of our trip.

On Day 7 we visited the markets, before leaving to travel back to Phnom Penh. The markets were amazing, with so much packed into such a small place. You could buy anything, from food, to car and bike parts, all in the one group of markets.

Day 8 was our last full day in Cambodia. On this day we visited the Sunshine House Orphanage and the school that was near by. We met children who were as old as us, who lived at the orphanage and went to the school near by. We visited classrooms at the school and saw how they studied. Then we went back to Sunshine House and had lunch with the children and took a tour of the Orphanage before playing Duck, Duck, Goose! with them. The aim of going to the Sunshine House Orphanage was to hopefully forge a relationship between our School and them so that we could offer some real support to them and hopefully learn a lot from the experience.

Day 9 and 10 were days that we travelled home from Cambodia. We stopped off in Kuala Lumpur overnight, before taking a flight to Perth the next morning.

The Cambodia Trip is really about experiencing something different, something that you may otherwise never get to experience. A holiday trip to Cambodia would not be the same as the building trip we went on with the School. There is much to gain from the experience and it is definitely a life changing one. Everyone who went on that trip will remember it for the rest of their lives and everyone who went on that trip will take something out of it. Whether that something was small or whether it was big will depend on the person, but the trip was something that will not be forgotten. It brought

us closer as a group of students and it gave us an insight into another part of the world. It was an amazing experience, and I sincerely hope that others in the future will have the opportunity to go on a similar trip. It is definitely worth while; you won't regret it and you certainly won't forget it.

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