



Trailblazer Foundation Volunteer Protocols



If you are interested in volunteering for Trailblazer Foundation, and working with our local staff (including joining them on field visits to our partner villages), then it is best for you to know what sort of behavior is appropriate in Cambodia. The following guidelines, or protocols, will give you a sense of what will be required of you as a volunteer. It is imperative that you are aware of, and comfortable with, these guidelines – most of which are focused on ways to act when in Cambodia.

The following are essential guidelines for participating in any of Trailblazer Foundation's projects:

1. Volunteers need to act in a responsible and respectful manner while interacting with the local people, local staff, and other volunteers.
2. When working with any of our team in the countryside, you must dress appropriately. The basic rule is to cover your knees and shoulders (see "Dress Code" below).
3. If you are invited to join one of our teams on a work field trip into the countryside, please come prepared to deal with sun, dust, and thirst. If it is during the rainy season (June/July – September/October), you can also expect rain. If you believe you will need more than a lunch, please bring some snacks.
4. When working in the countryside, the Trailblazer crew typically eats a lunch prepared by the family at whose home the crew is working. As a volunteer, you are encouraged to join the crew in eating that lunch. The food is always fresh and well cooked, so there is no need to worry about getting sick. However, if you have dietary restrictions or serious concerns, you can decline. If you want to decline, please do so in a respectful manner. Cambodians will understand if you say that you are not eating the food because it would be against your religion, or it is a matter of your health.
5. If you experience any improper treatment by staff or other volunteers, please report it to Trailblazer's management staff.
6. Handing out political or religious materials is forbidden, and against our agreements with the Cambodian government.

Dress Code:

Cambodia is a conservative country, and we ask that you respect them by dressing accordingly. Siem Reap hosts many tourists, and one of the major concerns of the Cambodian people is the liberal and inappropriate dress worn by tourists. The basic rule is to cover your knees and shoulders. Please do not be influenced by the liberal attire of other tourists; it is much better to use the locals as your fashion guide. In doing so, you will see that they cover the knees and shoulders.

T-shirts covering the shoulders, and anything that covers the knees, are the bare minimum of acceptable. Modest, high cut sleeveless tops are ok. Men should always wear a top, and woman should always wear a bra. Buddhism is an integral part of Cambodian life. However, you will rarely see a Cambodian walk off the street into a temple. More likely, they will wash and change into clean, conservative clothing before entering. Also, hats are not to be worn inside temples.

Basic Protocols for Interacting With The Locals:

- Cambodians are very friendly, and a smile goes a long way.
- Be respectful to elders.
- Shouting or public displays of over-emotion are considered impolite.
- Remove your shoes before entering someone's home, or a temple.
- Dress respectfully, especially when visiting temples. Again, cover your knees and shoulders.
- Do not point your naked foot at someone, and do not touch a person's head (including kids).

Buddhist Monk Etiquette:

- Buddhist Monks are very highly regarded in Cambodia. Be very respectful of the Monks, and follow these next guidelines.
- Wait until a Monk acknowledges you, before you acknowledge him.
- It is forbidden for a woman to touch a monk, or brush past his clothes -- not even a hand shake!
- Women may not directly pass anything to a Monk. She must place it on a table for him to take.
- Try not to make the Monks feel uncomfortable by sitting next to them on public transport.
- Monks in Siem Reap are fairly used to foreigners, and will try to be tolerant and flexible, respecting our culture as we respect to theirs.

Body Language:

- The normal greeting in Cambodia is to place your hands together and bow your head. Many people, however, will now extend their hand to shake yours. Be respectful by greeting them in their tradition, thereby going that step further in immersing yourself in the Cambodian culture.
- Cambodians believe the head is holy and the feet are low and dirty. To touch someone on the head is an insult, and to point your feet at someone is also an insult. To point your feet at the image of Buddha is unforgivable.
- Never show anger, or try to make someone look stupid. In Cambodia, saving face is important, and one should maintain a cool head.
- When bartering, do so with a smile – Cambodians are not aggressive barterers.
- It is best to not show emotions towards your partner in public. Hugging and kissing is considered inappropriate public behavior.
- The left hand should never be used for handshakes, eating, or to exchange money or goods.

Toilets:

Guesthouses have western style flush toilets, where you can usually put the paper down the toilet. However, this is not a typical practice of Cambodians. They typically place their used toilet paper in a garbage bin. If you see a bin in any bathroom, it is there for your toilet paper. Also, you may encounter a “squat” toilet, a toilet without a seat, where you squat to use it. This is the normal style of toilets for Cambodians. With a squat toilet, you will likely see a tub of water and a scoop. Use the scoop to place (pour) water in the toilet, to manually flush it.

Cambodian Time:

Those of us who live in “western” countries are typically much more focused on time than Cambodians. We like to make concrete schedules, and be on time to meetings. Cambodian people are not as focused on time, and it is not uncommon for things to happen later than arranged. Just go with the flow, and enjoy their lifestyle.

Photographs:

- Always ask permission before taking someone’s photograph. You can ask permission by saying, “Som tort rupe?”
- Children will be very interested to see their image on your digital camera, and may rush to see it after the photo is taken.

Hawkers, and Beggars:

- Be courteous to hawkers selling gifts to tourists. A polite “no, thank you” (or, in Khmer, “aw te arc oon”), and a smile is usually all that is needed to be left alone.
- Even though the beggars may be poor, begging is an unsustainable way to make a living. We strongly recommend you not give anything to beggars. By being a Trailblazer volunteer, you are providing Cambodians with a sustainable future.
- Giving sweets to children who have no access to tooth paste or brushes causes major problems, when you consider that they also have no access to dental care.
- Giving money to children inspires them to spend more time begging, which likely will keep them from going to school. Without an education, they will be more likely to need to beg when they become adults. It is best not to give children anything – especially money.