

cambodia 2007

In December last year, a group of intrepid Year 12 and 13 students from Hagley went on the adventure of their lives – to Cambodia.

It had taken 9 months of fundraising and organising: countless meetings, early morning car-parking in the winter months, many sausage sizzles, a trivia night, an art auction, raffles and delivering the yellow pages... you name it, they were out there doing it; plus they had some great support from friends, family and local organisations.

The idea came from Year 13 Dean, Rachel Hawthorne. Rachel teaches the Leadership Laboratory course at Hagley and also co-ordinates the Young New Zealanders Challenge (Duke of Edinburgh). "I wanted to provide an opportunity that would broaden students' horizons, but also give them the chance to make a difference in the lives of others," she explains.

Along with Nelson based company Gecko Trails (www.geckotrails.co.nz), who have extensive experience taking American and New Zealand students, and USA Adventure Volunteers through South-East Asia, an itinerary was formed that helped to combine both ethical tourism and education around global issues in a third world environment.

Glenn Newman, Hagley College counsellor, who accompanied the group, explains, "Students had to be prepared for everything such as environment demands such as vaccination from disease, exposure to extreme poverty and heat, and a lack of many things we take for granted – like sealed roads, education, food hygiene, access to medical care, libraries, rubbish collection etc." Along with



that is the trauma that Cambodia suffered during the reign of the Khmer Rouge and since, and how that legacy is still affecting everyday life in Cambodia.

The group came overland into Cambodia via Thailand – which only about 3% of travellers do. Jade Kentish-Barnes felt they had earned their place there, "I loved experiencing everything on the way; the rice paddies, the potholed roads, the dust and seeing everyday life."

Staying in Siem Reap the students visited and learnt about one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Angkor Temples. 90% of tourists to Cambodia come here, and here only.

Because of the heat, early morning starts were the norm but students all agreed with Ester Woolaston, who stated, "...it's the nicest time of day. It's quiet and cool. But tiring!"

Visits to humanitarian and aid organisations were a crucial element in the trip and the students used \$2,000 of the money they raised to donate to various organisations. "It was such an important component of the trip and so much more meaningful than sending a donation from New Zealand having seen the circumstances first hand," explains Rachel. When the average wage in Cambodia is US \$2 a day, it felt like a worthwhile contribution to a very needy population.

On behalf of Hagley, the group purchased and delivered 4 water filters to ensure schools and communities had access to clean water as 1 child in 7 doesn't live to 5 years old, mainly because of preventable medical conditions such as dysentery or malnutrition. They also visited the Angkor Children's hospital where they

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donated blood; Handicap International, where prosthetic limbs are made and distributed to the many landmine victims in Cambodia; and several schools where they spent time interacting with Cambodian students and sharing stories.

There were many difficult moments. The Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh was especially harrowing and dealing with the poverty and begging, especially from amputees or children, was challenging. A trip to Stung Meanchey, the capital city's dump was very intense. "It was smelly and dirty and toxic and a completely different world," explained Jade, "people lived there though, and were laughing and happy, which was amazing." Thousands of people, from babies to university students, live there and trawl the dump for things to sell, making about 50 cents a day.

The highlight for most students though, was a morning with children from KDFO, a non-governmental organisation that rescues orphan children who live on the dump or have been sold into trafficking



and gives them a home and an education until they are old enough to be safely independent. "It was great to see the kids happy. They were jumping with excitement," explained Ester.

The Hagley group had the privilege also

of having a home-stay with a rural family and taking part in community activities like the rice harvest, playing football and basketball, and visiting schools for conversational English. The hosts, Siphon and Mach, live in a family house next to a bomb crater that now has a thriving lily pond. Siphon told the group her own very moving account of growing up during the Khmer Rouge, a time when she had no shoes and just one skirt and shirt for three years, sometimes scavenging leaves from trees as her only food.

The students were taken by how respectful and smiley the Cambodians are and admired their commitment to family. They also loved experiencing the variety of transport including tuk-tuks, cyclos, elephants, ramosks and motos!

The authenticity of the Hagley students' experience and opportunities to interact with and make a difference in Cambodian lives was amazing and worth all the work it took to get there. "Take the opportunity if you get it. It really opens your eyes," states Jade.



ncea certificates and records of achievement

NCEA Certificates have been printed and sent to students.

Students may order hard-copy versions of retrospectively endorsed certificates by contacting Kerry Keats, NCEA Administrator, for an application form or by calling the NZQA Call Centre on 0800 QAHELP. A cost of \$15 per certificate applies, which is paid directly to the NZQA.

Records of Achievement, for 2007 Year 13 students and for others if requested, are also on their way. Students can still request a free copy of their Record of Achievement online via Learner Login on the NZQA Website until 30 June 2008. NZQA Website – www.nzqa.govt.nz and follow the Learner Login details.

