



Helen Walch taking a singalong in English with students of the school.

Travelling with a purpose

Two Otaki women who took part in a pilot 'sustainable tourism' trip to Cambodia with Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) in November say getting off the tourist trail and giving something back to the people was an immensely satisfying part of their recent 'Adventure' trip.

Judith Miller, 52, and her 62-year-old partner, Helen Walch, who normally lived on a lifestyle block in Otaki, helped build a reading shelter and set up a library for pupils in a rural school in Takeo Province in Cambodia while on

their two-week trip.

"It was really special to see some of the school kids come tentatively into the library, pick up a book and start reading. They just got engrossed in the books. For me, that was what the trip was all about," said Ms Walch, who also got a chance to use her English as a second language teaching skills while at the school.

'Adventure' VSA was a way for people who could not commit to the usual two-year assignment overseas to still be part of 'sustainable' or 'responsible'

tourism, where there was value added to local people's needs, as part of their interaction with overseas visitors. Participants also fundraised or donated half their trip costs of \$5500 to VSA.

"We hope we have helped make a small difference for the children at Kla Krohim High School. If they have greater opportunities to read more widely, that would be good," said Ms Miller.

VSA had teamed with New Zealand-based Gecko Trails to run this first Adventure.

Based in Nelson,

Gecko Trails was a small, New Zealand-owned company offering small-group adventures. Jennie Wilson, a Gecko Trails director, was one of the group's leaders. "The emotion expressed in our farewells when we left the community tells the story of how successful this first trip was," she said.

"The Cambodian people really appreciated the work of the Adventurers, and enjoyed them being there, involved in the school, and home-staying with families." Submitted by VSA