

Story From The Field

*Contributed by
Mission Coordinator, Deborah Quigley*

Our latest AAI mission to Cambodia began October 3, 2009, when 8 team members united at the [Future Light Orphanage](#) in Phnom Penh, our comfortable home for the next 3 days.

We were greeted by 230+ excited children including Natra and Chheng Vorn, 2 children that are now sponsored by AAI thru [EFPI](#) (an excellent foundation sponsoring orphans and vulnerable children). That night we partied with the kids at FLOW's October Birthday Party followed by the exquisite ethnic dances performed by the children in their elegantly detailed costumes (all handmade by the dancers). Due to Cambodia's devastating loss of much of their cultural heritage and talented elders during the Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge era, it has been a passion at this orphanage to teach this new generation the dances, music, and other Khmer traditions honoring and sustaining their rich heritage.



Very early on Monday after their breakfast of rice and a tiny fish, the children were off on foot and bicycle to start their first day of the new school year. Then, our team began a new AAI tradition - yoga at 7am before breakfast! We spent the rest of the day exploring the surrounding villages, sights of much poverty, a beautiful colorful temple, walking hand-in-hand with the kids who had attended school in the morning, singing every song we could think of.



Tuesday was a full day, with our morning spent with Scott Neeson of [Cambodian Children's Fund](#) and some of the 500 children that CCF has rescued from working in the toxically dangerous city garbage dump. That afternoon we spent some quiet time at the Toul Seng Museum (tragic) and - at last - the Russian Market! Then, how about drinks at the famous Elephant Bar at the Le Royal Raffles Hotel? or a massage? or both!!!



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On Wednesday, we boarded our bus for a scenic journey thru the Cambodian countryside (sights of recent flooding everywhere after typhoon Kestana blew thru the week before) where the staff at our beautiful hotel in Siem Reap welcomed us.



At 5am the next day, we started with yoga but with a twist: Yoga at sunrise at Angkor Wat! What a spectacular privilege to see such a wondrous UNESCO world heritage sight as the sun rose. We explored many of the temples on foot, or, if you prefer, on elephant! And then, on the road to Banteay Srey temple, you will pass by [pump wells #144 and #145](#) that Airline Ambassadors sponsored in June 2009 to service local families.

After starting our Friday with yoga by the pool we brought our party spirits to an orphanage of 41 just down the road and across the river. The typhoon had flooded their home (the floor is their sleeping area) the previous week. We brought new school notebooks, music, hula hoops, Beanie Babies with zippered mouths (tummies filled with toothbrushes, toothpaste, soaps) and balloons. Everyone was consumed with laughter, song, dance, and "air guitaring". It was wild!!! Then - that afternoon we had a challenging time distributing 200+ pairs of CROCs at [New Hope Cambodia's Community Centre](#) where hundreds of hungry (borderline starving) family members arrived to receive their rice distribution for the month leaving their thumbprint as their signature (most of this community is illiterate). This slum area is rampant with malaria, AIDs, hepatitis, dengue fever, and TB. Previously the children here had no opportunity to go to school due to no transportation, lack of funds for school uniforms, shoes, and registration fees. But thanks to Kerry Huntley and Kem Sour 40 eager, beautiful, delighted children are attending school for the first time ever! Finally that evening, at last, our team sat down together with an Angkor Beer and dinner. Whew.



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Your time in Siem Reap is not complete until you've enjoyed the colorful bustling of a morning in the floating villages on the largest lake in SE Asia: floating markets, floating schools, floating church, floating homes, even a pig or 2 on floating rafts. Quite a sight. That Saturday evening, we arrived at [ACODO orphanage](#) greeted by the little children all dressed in their traditional dance costumes anticipating our arrival. It was totally delightful especially when the tiny puppy wandered onto the stage dodging the "serious" dancers (trying not to laugh). After rounds of applause, we distributed all the CROCs we had saved, Beanie Babies, Disney surprises, and multiple hugs for all. At last, our bags were empty! Our last day together in Cambodia ended with a most lovely dinner, toasts, laughter (ask Leela about her squeaking left breast) tears of true joy, and amazing memories for a lifetime!



With love, laughter, hugs
and blessings,

Humbly,

Deborah

