Experience an amazing volunteer opportunity: Reaching out to rehabilitate elephants.
Everything you need to know about the Cambodia Elephant Sanctuary Program

“I signed up for this program not knowing what to expect, but after completing the program, the past two weeks have thus far been one of the best times in my life.”

— Lili

REACH OUT VOLUNTEERS
Whereabouts in Cambodia will I be?

Volunteers will arrive in Siem Reap home to Angkor Wat. A thousand years ago Angkor was the world’s largest city, with a population of 750,000 — it was ten times the size of medieval Paris and London combined.

Now only the stunning temples of this city, the UNESCO-listed Angkor complex, remain in the jungle near Siem Reap.

Siem Reap is a small city with Khmer- and Chinese-influenced architecture. In the city you will discover traditional Apsara dance performances, craft shops, and even silk farms. Siem Reap, surrounded by rice paddies and fishing villages, is near Tonlé Sap, the largest lake in Southeast Asia, and the Prek Toal bird sanctuary.
For the elephant week of the program you will travel through the ruins of Angkor Wat to the north of Cambodia (about two hours from Siem Reap). The sanctuary, situated on 1 million acres of jungle habitat, is working to conserve native flora and fauna species, including the Asian elephant, tigers, monkeys, and buffalos.

Until recently, elephants were considered a financial asset for those working in the logging industry — the elephants were their tractors. When logging was banned in many areas, these elephants became a financial burden.

The elephants in this sanctuary were rescued from the logging industry and given a natural life in the lush jungle. They are free to roam around, swim, eat, and just be elephants — always under the care of their mahouts.

This safe haven requires a lot of upkeep: you will be harvesting and replanting food supplies, improving infrastructure, and participating in general maintenance, such as planting trees to conserve the jungle. You will also work in the garden to help the sanctuary become more self-sufficient and grow its own produce.

And you will be bathing, feeding, and hanging out with the elephants every single day!

“Being able to interact with elephants was amazing.” — David

The Elephant Sanctuary
“I loved that the program mixed so many different types of volunteering (community work, teaching, animal work, etc.) as well as so many different facets of local culture (food, language, history, etc.). The trip was even better than I had expected! I will never forget the kids in the village, or watching the house frame go up, or getting to bathe Moon and Milot one-on-one.”
— Sam

“I loved this program. The village was absolutely amazing and I cannot wait to go back.”
— Max
Activities

You’ll take Khmer language classes and Aspara dancing, learn the history of the Khmer people and their fascinating past, witness temple blessings, and much more!

Siem Reap is home to one of the wonders of the world: Angkor Wat. This area, once the centre of the Khmer empire (between the 9th and 15th centuries), is scattered with temples and the archaeological remains of a vast culture.

Your itinerary will make sure you get to view temples such as Ta Prohm (featured in Tomb Raider) and the beautifully decorated Bayon (famous for its 37 free-standing towers and spectacular sculpted faces).

You will also visit the devastating Killing Fields, where an estimated 1.5 million Cambodians were killed and buried during the Khmer Rouge regime, between 1975 and 1979.

“My breath was taken away at Angkor Wat!”
— Zoey
Activities Continued from previous page

Siem Reap is in the low-lying central plain, which makes it an ideal place to explore on foot. To really immerse you in the daily routine of Siem Reap, you’ll visit the Old French Quarter, with its local and international restaurants and cafés, and the vibrant Old Market, known for its spectacular food stands and vendors who sell everything from spices to clothes to housewares.

One night you’ll go to a carnival, where you can shop at market stalls, try a variety of foods, play carnival games, and go on rides.

Did you know that fried tarantula is a specialty of Cambodia? Will you be game to try one? When in Cambodia…
“I enjoyed every part of the cultural experience. Jimmy and his stories were very moving and inspirational. Going to the carnival allowed us to feel a part of the community and see what they do for fun, seeing their dances at the night markets, trying new foods, learning the language, everything that we did showed me different lights in the Khmer lifestyle.”

— Taylor

“I learnt a lot about respect for other cultures and beliefs. I experienced their way of life, living conditions, cuisine, transport, education/history, language and entertainment. I particularly enjoyed the story telling style of traditional dance that we observed.”

— Astrid
The majority of Cambodians are Khmers and descend from the Khmer Empire that once extended over much of Southeast Asia and reached its peak between the 10th and 13th centuries. This is the civilization that built Angkor, which was once the world’s largest city. After a long period of decline — fuelled initially by Thai and Cham attacks — Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863. After 1887 it was part of French Indochina. Following the Japanese occupation during World War II, Cambodia gained full independence from France in 1953.

In April 1975, after a five-year struggle, Communist Khmer Rouge forces captured Phnom Penh and evacuated all cities and towns. During the Khmer Rouge regime, under the dictatorship of Pol Pot, an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians — one-eighth of the population — died from forced hardships, starvation, or execution (many in the mass graves that became known as the Killing Fields).

In December 1978 the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and drove the Khmer Rouge into the jungle. The Vietnamese occupation lasted for 10 years and was followed by 13 years of civil war. The 1991 Paris Peace Accords mandated democratic elections and a ceasefire, which was not fully respected by the Khmer Rouge. In 1993 the United Nations sponsored elections that helped to restore some semblance of normality under a coalition government. Factional fighting in 1997 ended the first government, but a second round of elections in 1998 led to political stability. The remaining elements of the Khmer Rouge surrendered in early 1999, and several high-ranking members have been tried for genocide.
The Wildlife:  
The Asian elephant

Elephants were once a vital part of Cambodian culture and civilization. They were used to build the great city of Angkor and were revered in Cambodian Hindu and Buddhist culture. They also lived in large numbers in the wild — in fact, Asian elephants once lived as far west as Iran and over much of China. Now they are endangered in the wild. In Southeast Asia they have been mistreated for decades, first by the logging industry and today by the tourist industry. Many elephants in captivity have been tortured as babies and separated from their families.

Elephants are perhaps the most nurturing animals in the world. They are not weaned until around the age of three, and female elephants typically stay close to their mothers until the mother dies of old age, while males stay until adolescence. Elephant herds are big family units led by the oldest female in the group. The whole family works together to care for each other and protect their young. Elephants are one of the few animals to live in a society of grandparents. They are also believed to be as intelligent as great apes and dolphins.

“I loved our team, the villagers, the elephants, well just about everything. The program wasn’t exactly what I was expecting but it exceeded my preconceptions and expectations.”

— Zoey
Elephants living far from the cool shade and soft undergrowth of the jungle are prone to sunstroke and dehydration, while blisters, cuts, and infections — caused by the hot concrete streets of modern Cambodia — damage their feet. They also suffer from respiratory problems triggered by pollution.

Did you know?

- Elephants eat 149–169 kilograms (329–373 pounds) of vegetation daily and spend 16–18 hours a day feeding (that’s 80% of their day!).
- Elephants love tree bark, which is a good source of calcium and roughage.
- An adult elephant requires about 68–98 litres (18–26 gallons) of water daily but may drink up to 152 litres (40 gallons).
- An adult male can consume 212 litres (56 gallons) of water in less than 5 minutes!
When it's 6 a.m. in New York, it's 5 p.m. in the afternoon in Siem Reap! Communication with home can be tricky — but that's where the ROV blogs can fill the void: we provide daily updates with snippets of news and lots of photos! The blogs are updated daily while you're in Cambodia so your friends and family can see what you're up to. All they need to do is go to www.rovolunteers.com and choose your program.

Blog: Live from Cambodia!

Want to know what your life will be like in Cambodia? Check out current and past blogs to find out how a Cambodian program operates.

“Thank you so much for the daily blogs. It was nice to be able to see what was going on and to assure myself my daughter was just fine. What an amazing, life-changing adventure this was for her. Thank you!”

— Joni F.
Getting ready

Weather
The months of November to January are dry in Cambodia. Humidity levels are low and there is little rainfall. Daytime temperatures are mild, while the nights are cool. The hot months are April to May, with temperatures from 30°C (86°F) to (more often) 40°C (104°F). In July, monsoons bring rain and humidity that last until October. All this water means Angkor is surrounded by fertile land and lush foliage, but rain can also make it difficult to access the villages where we work.

What to bring
Think about your favourite clothes, shoes, and handbags — and then discard those thoughts! Think practical, comfortable, and easy to wash. Think work clothes, work gloves, hats, and sunscreen.

Your program will involve lots of hard, practical work, and you won’t require precious garments or flashy jewellery. (After all, you don’t want any light to reflect off glittering gold into an elephant’s eye!)

A very practical and thorough Get Ready list (which will guide you from sign-up to departure!) will be provided to you once you’re ready to start packing. It’s about sun protection, easy wear, and no hassle.

Continues…
**Flights**  
For flight and airport information, don’t forget to check your Get Ready list. You will be able to access it once you have paid your deposit. Email admin@rovolunteers.com for flight details if you are doing an extension program.

**Visas**  
A Cambodian tourist visa is purchased on arrival for around US$25. Make sure you have an extra two passport photos in your hand luggage. Cambodians operate on a dual currency, but prefer U.S. dollars, so we recommend that you bring cash. A valid ATM or credit card can also be used at the airport ATM (which dispenses U.S. dollars). Note that if you plan to use your ATM or credit card in Cambodia, you should let your bank know ahead of time to avoid blocked transactions.

**Insurance**  
Although our programs are safe, we recommend you take the stress out of your trip by making sure you are fully covered for any unexpected health or travel problems that might arise, including coverage for emergency flights and hospital visits.

“**It was really cool to see the inner workings of Cambodia as well as being able to be a tourist a bit.**” — Max