

Life in slum of Mr. Thong Chea

On behalf of Vana Adventures founder, Mr. Thong Chea would like to share his life during he lived in Borey Keyla Slum in Phnom Penh for over 3 years.



After he finished his studies at high school and from a son of poor farmers, he decide to come to Phnom Penh city for study at university as recommended by his relative. Because of poor and his family don't have any support him for study at university as well as for his living in Phnom Penh, it was make him to live in a slum in Borey Keyla, as the big slum in Phnom Penh during 2003. He stayed in a small room was built by other people because they want to get that own house there but they don't stay at there- he lived with other youth as most of them are drug users, in front of his room is oldest building and big garbage site.

Poverty are biggest challenge for him, stayed in poorest places, coverage all drug users, don't have cleaning water and electricity use, bad smell from garbage site, and all the time must be carefully with his personal wealth like clothes, shoe, old bicycle, and books. Around 3 months at the beginning, most of his roommates always negotiates and force him to test using a drug, but was denied many times from him and he always told to them, he need to study at university or any schools as well as need a good job for survive our current life. After they understood about him, most of them also help him and protect him as well. Especially, find some nigh job like carries some materials from containers that can earn some money around 2000 R or 0.5\$ (Khmer Currency) per hour and about 3 or 4 hours per night, but that work is don't have every day.

Because of that small budget, he can separate it for his meals, buy some books, using internets as well as paid for his bicycle parking at national library and some university. Most of day times, he always wears his high school clothes and rode to visit Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) as these university he want to study at there but don't have money to pay for a school fees. Seat on the grass and looked any students who studies at that university is his habit. During that time, at RUPP also have a good library (Hun Sen Library) that they will free to RUPP's Students to get there and from outside they need to make a visitor card as need to charge 7,000 R without photo per year, so he still don't have a chance to read some books at there.

However, because of his effort and he believe for kept a goodness and open mind for all people it would help him back at some times. The result were make him know National Library as free for entrance and need to pay only if he need copies and parking his bicycle. He spend, his time at there so many time to read some books, then he started know from other schools that offers free of short courses, and some places that free internet using such as US Embassy, as they free for internet using, free 14 pieces of paper for printing as well as that lab room also have some books and newspaper for read.

His life started to become better after his lived in that slum about a year, because in 2005 one NGO was make a small center in Borey Keiyla slum for collected all children and youth to get some knowledge on

drug using, how to prevent HIV/AIDs, STI, Reproductive Health and that NGO also invited some youth know need to get some vocational training, they can get it at Mith Samlanh Center. Mith Samlanh is a local organization working with marginalized children/youth, their families and their communities to build their futures and to develop creative projects that effectively support the children to become in independent and productive members of the community. He was became to peer educator in the Borey Keyla Center after he involved with them about 6 months. However, he never give up his reading at library, using internet, because most of them were teach him both knowledge and English as well as he have a time to search any jobs announcement and apply a jobs. Is really unbelievable, most of every day, he applied about 100 jobs with many position such as security guard, waiter, cleaners, volunteer etc. But the result fail all, because most of position are required candidates studies at university also having own motorbike and mobile phone. He don't have all about that, and he submit his resume by e-mail and hard copies also, that need him to spend a lot for prepare his resume and need to rode to all NGOs, Companies, Hotels, and Restaurants. However, it really good for him, because he can know all the roads in Phnom Penh, and most of his friends also called him like Phnom Penh GPS.



At beginning of 2006, he got full time volunteer with local youth NGO in Phnom Penh called "Child for Mobilization and Participation (CAMP)" that he can get a small of his allowance after 3 months' probation about 3\$ per month, but that NGO, was provide his knowledge and experience a lot. CAMP's recruitment staff was asked him that why you want to work with CAMP? His answer that, Children & youth are his focus point to work with them, because he know clear about street children and vulnerable youth who lived in slum or poor communities. Moreover, he don't have to study at university, so work with these NGO like his studies at university as he don't know at all about the university. During his volunteer with CAMP, he got many chance to learn from other NGOs that invited CAMP's members to join with their workshop, but most of CAMP's members don't have a time because they need to studies at their university, so only he that have a big lucky for that training, he got some of training courses in Phnom Penh and also at Thailand for Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation was organized by Asian Muslim Action Network as the amazing of training for him, especially the first experience on flight and travel by train from

Bangkok to Cheing Mai city in Thailand . Moreover, I was became 16 youth candidates for Youth Leadership Challenge in Session 2 was organized by Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC) cooperated with US Embassy in Cambodia. These program is TV show program in Cambodia Television Network Chanel (CTN), in each stage, all candidates need to compete with any topic was provide by judge. During that TV show program, he have a big chance to show his ability and voice to all audients, especially his villagers, and his high school friends that most of them know him already that came from poor family. After that, he was submit he essay wrote on "City of your dream" to World Bank in Norway, he got a top ten of participants

written, and then he was a 2nd winner of essay writing in Cambodia on Wetland Conservation in Cambodia was organized by Wildlife Organization and Panhansastra University with a cash prize 200\$, that he can change his bicycle. After he worked for a volunteer with CAMP for over 3 years, he was hired by any NGOs to work related child development policy, child protection policy and he started to work with private companies which need to learn more about private sectors in Cambodia.

He said, 2008 is his golden year, because in that year he started to studies in Royal University of Law & Economics (RULE) in faculty of Law, and in 2012 he is graduated that degree as well as the year of his got a marriage with intelligent and beautiful Cambodia lady who always encourage and support his meal since 2007 where he met her at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) as she got a scholarship to study there. After he involved with social work for over 10 years, he started to operate his small own business for Bicycle Tours in Cambodia with the name in Vana Adventures. Vana derives its name from the Sanskrit words called “forest” which his love environment and passion with adventure tour. Why he decide to operate bicycle tours? He said, because of he have over 10 years of working experience with NGOs, social works especially with child & youth, he still have feeling to love of his work. He add, his business is not only for income, but it was useful for environment, promote of tourism sectors, create more job for local people as well as for enjoyment. He believe that other travelers would share his passionate to real



adventure experiences in a responsible and sustainable development.

He still kept that, slum is the paradise for people who don't have anything and need to live and learn in Phnom Penh, therefor, if government don't want to see them, should be find better place for them for living. Better places for slum people is not living like rich people in big villa or apartment, they just need their area is suitable to find any school for study, can operate small business, having cleaning water supply and electricity, have health services, all garbage must collected from

private company like other house, and security of living as well as food safety. He still said, don't give up your dream about the education and struggle all the challenge to get it true!

Thanks for reading my story,

Best regarding

Thong Chea

Founder of Vana Adventures

WhatsApp: +855 87 883 898

E-mail: info@vanatravel.com

www.vanatravel.com