

Karina Shea

University of Oregon

Summer 2015 – Sovann Komar, Cambodia

Question Set #1

- 1. What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?**

My initial impressions of Sovann Komar, the organization, have been absolutely positive. From the first day I arrived, all of the staff and students have been so welcoming and friendly making me feel at home. I was introduced to everyone who works here and they joked around with me, which was an excellent way to break the ice. Upon the day of my arrival, I was extremely nervous because this is a completely new experience for me. Among the community children, there is so much respect for each teacher and the administrators. When class is about to start, the students stand up in unison and greet the teacher singing a chant. Sovann Komar/ Golden Children is a wonderful organization that provides students an education, community, and friendships. Specifically, the houses that are on the campus care for children who have been taken in by loving parents and are provided a home, education, community, and siblings. I have the opportunity to teach both the community students and the Sovann Komar students.

Immediately when I arrived, Mr. Kosal (my supervisor and the principal of the school) and I discussed what I specifically wanted to do for the organization. Before arriving, I knew that that I wanted to be able to create my own curriculums and implement them in classes. I wasn't sure what grade I wanted to teach, so I mainly spent the first week observing various teachers who taught kindergarten and grades 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th. In addition to teaching English to the students, I

wanted to incorporate what I've done at my past internship and school. I wanted to create curriculums that discuss topics of media and body image, alcohol, and drugs. Mr. Kosal thought it was a great idea and he also wanted me to incorporate a curriculum/lesson in study habits. During my second week here, I have started teaching both English to both Grade 1 and 2 and the study habits curriculum to the older students. Before I started teaching, I was extremely nervous, but now that I have started teaching the last four days, I have more confidence. I realize that I need to simplify my English for the older students and incorporate engaging and fun activities for the younger students.

I didn't have certain specific expectations that I listed, but my own personal goals were to improve my teaching abilities, public speaking, and have confidence teaching the students. The first two weeks that I have been here, everyone has been so helpful by giving me words of encouragement. These kinds words have instilled in me the confidence I never had. Being able to teach during the second week has given me more confidence in the work that I am doing here. I realize that the language barrier is larger depending on the class that I'm in and that I need to find creative ways of getting my point across which is challenging, yet exciting because I often act out things.

2. What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

One of the first things that stood out to me while arriving in Cambodia was the weather. It was extremely humid and I started sweating through the clothes I was wearing. One of the greatest things was that this was my first time travelling internationally and if I wasn't sure about a specific thing, I would just follow the group or ask if anyone spoke English, which was helpful. The driving here is by far so different from the states. There are numerous motos everywhere and tuk tuks. There are lines on the roads close to the tourist areas, but a lot of times the roads aren't maintained and there are various potholes. I was extremely frightened by the driving because there is no such

thing as safety or obeying traffic signals. Everyone, and I mean everyone, whether you are driving a moto, car, or bus drives however they want. Motos will appear out of nowhere on the side of your car and swerve to beat the less than 1 minute traffic. There are rarely any crosswalks, but that doesn't matter because the pedestrians don't have the right of way. One thing I learned was that if you are going to cross the street, you just need to walk and everyone will go around you for the most part. While driving through the city to my apartment, there are vendors everywhere that sell random things. You'll see random broke toilets, buddhas, motos, helmets, and then meat. It's all very eclectic and exciting because you don't expect that.

3. What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

I had numerous anxieties prior to departing because this would be the first time I travelled alone internationally. Firstly, I was anxious and nervous about being able to find my transfer flights at the other airports. I was very lost when I arrived in San Francisco, but luckily I asked two people who were able to direct me to where I needed to go - on the other side of the airport. Rookie mistake, I also didn't know that I had to recheck in and go through security (I'm really happy I figured that all out and made all of my flights). The next anxiety I had was getting accustomed to being independent and not having anyone I really knew. I knew that many of my friends were studying abroad with a group of students from the University of Oregon and elsewhere, but they had each other. I was about to embark on a journey by myself and not know anyone. The area I would be living in would be completely new and I was also scared. Before my living situation was secured, I was nervous to live alone in a new environment because often times I get scared and just want to stay in. I am very happy that I have roommates who offer any guidance to me when I have questions because they have been here for a while.

I am so happy that I arrived and made all of my flights. One of the flights was delayed for a bit, but I made sure to let everyone know. Since it has been only about 2 weeks since I have arrived, I feel like I have so much more confidence than when I started off last week. When I first arrived, I was so scared of leaving my apartment because I was homesick, everything was new, and I didn't want to cross the street by myself. But recently, I've told myself that the only way I'll be able to see and accomplish the things I want to do was to venture out by myself because a majority of everyone here has already seen the temples, museums, and various sites around Cambodia. I spent the weekend last week, navigating a tuk tuk myself with the little Khmer I know and visited museums around Phnom Penh. Through that experience I was able to meet two other Americans from California and we ended up hanging out the whole day together. Luckily, a teacher at Sovann Komar lives down the street from me and when I arrived, she helped me move, took me to lunch, and showed me around, which was so helpful. As the days pass, I am so happy that I have the opportunity to be here.

Question Set #2

1. How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?

Now that I have settled in for a bit here at Sovann Komar, teaching has been going smoothly. Having teachers who understand English well makes my teaching experience easier because they understand what I want to teach for my class. At times, when some teachers do not understand English, it is extremely difficult because I realize that the language barrier is vast and it hinders our ability to manage the class. I typically use my body language and ask the other students who speak English well to translate for me. In particular, there is one class I teach that is quite difficult because the students are

siblings with each other, they've grown up with each other, and there are so many of them that I find them the hardest to control because their bond is so strong. I've reached out and have asked for advice, and the teachers here have been giving me feedback, which has been wonderful. The support that I am receiving here is fantastic.

This aligns with a specific professional goal that I wrote down before I arrived and that was to effectively communicate across language barriers. At times I find it exhausting and tiring because we speak two completely different languages; however, I do my best to find creative ways to express what I want the class to learn. If my message isn't getting across, I ask students or the teachers who speak English to translate for me. Secondly, I wanted to be able to improve my teaching abilities. Before I began this internship, I never taught English to students before. I was nervous because I didn't know how I would be as a teacher. At times, I'd get nervous when another adult was present because I would feel like I was being judged and it made me anxious. However, having been here for about 4 weeks now, I can honestly say that I have gained more confidence in myself as a teacher. Speaking in front of the students, I was at first shy, but now, I have found my voice as a teacher and I'm thrilled to see the progress.

Within the next half of my internship in August, I will specifically work with the Sovann Komar children who live on school grounds with their loving parents. I tend to find these students more challenging depending on their grade because some classes are larger, while others are small. The larger classes are harder to control because as mentioned before, they often just want to play. I want to be stricter with them and set rules with them. It is difficult because some of them don't speak English well.

2. How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

Things are going excellent with my personal goals because more time has passed. It was especially difficult for me during the earlier weeks because I felt so foreign in a new environment. But now that I've been here for about a month, I know what I want and what I am comfortable with. I have made friends from all over that world and I am so happy that I have had this opportunity to be fully dependent on myself. Being in Cambodia, I start to realize that when I am in the States, I tend to rely on people for help - whether it be simple or large. But now that I am here, I am completely on my own. I have to find my own voice and act on it myself. If you put in the time and effort in exploring your area and being open-minded, you will meet incredible people and form new friendships. An area that I have made progress in is learning simple words in Khmer although I find it so hard. I do my best to remember certain words and I do have a translator/dictionary, but it's still very difficult. I'm going to start writing the English pronunciation in my notebook so I can refer to it any time. Right now, I do depend on my coworker and roommates to order for me or write things down for me in Khmer, but I'd actually like to know it myself. At times I feel embarrassed that I am not pronouncing the word right, but honestly, as long as I try, the Khmer people are nice and open to helping you. For the most part, I am doing my best to address all the goals that I have written down.

3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

Everything is going great with my cross-cultural goals. I have wanted to expand my taste buds more here in Cambodia and I have had the chance to. It has definitely taken me some convincing, but I am happy that I got that extra push. I haven't regretted anything so far. It has all been delicious mystery. I have been open and I have tasted new foods; however, I do get quite scared because of the stories I've heard. But I'm working on being open and telling myself that this is an opportunity. My supervisor here has been so helpful and anytime I have questions regarding the Cambodian culture, I ask him and he

happily answers me. I am learning a lot about their culture and I love it. Many of the students here have no concept of geography because they weren't taught it, but for the most part, the students know the United States of America and all would love to visit there sometime. It makes me sad because one of the first things they would say is that it is expensive (and their faces show that they will never be able to), but I tell them that anything is possible. It is my goal/mission to experience as much as I can here in Cambodia and outside of Phnom Penh. By leaving the city on the weekends, I am able to experience the difference between the city and the countryside and there are differences in the people. I am eager to learn more about their life and culture.

Question Set #3

1. Describe a day in your life - what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

I typically wake up around 6:45am in the morning and eat breakfast at home. I buy yogurt/ cereal and that would last me for the week. Around 7:40am or 7:45am, the bus picks me up right in front of my apartment! Sometimes the bus is late, but you'll end up being flexible because you know that traffic can be bad in the morning. The bus picks up a few other students along the way to the school and we all sit in a specific order. I usually sit in the front with another student and then I'll switch with the other teacher and sit in the back while going home. I'll get to the school around 8:30am or so and then I'll start teaching the students! Around 11:00am to 2:00pm there is a long lunch break. Mainly students and staff take naps for almost 2 hours so they can reenergize and begin to learn again in the afternoon. Because it is so hot here, it really can be difficult to focus, and taking a break helps with that. While it's break time, I'll do my own thing, which is lesson planning and then relaxing. When it hits 2pm, teaching starts again and it doesn't end until 5pm. After every 50 minutes of class, there is always a 10 minute break for restrooms or a snack.

The van usually drops me off in front of my apartment around 5:45pm. It's the perfect time because it goes straight to dinner time and by that time I'm quite hungry. I'll eat at the

Russian Market or wander off around the area finding some delicious food! I try to spice things up and eat different things. Two times a week I attend dodgeball with my fellow roommates and friends. Every Tuesday and some Thursdays, my roommates and I eat dinner together and then head over to the fields. Other than that, I'll hang with some friends or relax at home since I spend long hours at work.

I work Monday - Friday from 8:30am - 5:00pm and at first I wondered if I would ever be able to leave Phnom Penh because I would only have Saturday and Sunday to do so. In the beginning I was quite sad because I didn't have that many friends and everything was new to me. I always wondered what I would be doing each weekend. I started with the museums and tourist attractions because they all seemed interesting and then I realized that I wanted to leave Phnom Penh as soon as possible. Luckily, I met some amazing friends at dodgeball who are all curious, adventurous souls like me and we all have the same work schedule! We all have been planning trips that leave early Saturday and return on Sunday. It also works out because there are Facebook groups you can join to go on hikes or learn about events coming up with other expats. It's been great because the last couple of weeks, I have been able to leave Phnom Penh and explore new towns/cities across Cambodia. It's all very exciting.

2. Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

I currently live with two roommates, one from France and the other Germany, in an apartment two blocks away from the Russian Market. Our landlord lives on the 1st floor and we have the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floor. It's in a very Khmer neighborhood and the rent is very affordable. Right now, I pay \$120, which is really good compared to some of my friends who pay about \$200 or \$300. Utilities are never more than \$30. My roommates have been so welcoming since I first arrived. I remember being very cautious and nervous about everything and they would just tell me life will get easier here and I would get less anxious. Any time I had

a question, they would always answer and give me advice. In addition, the other English teacher I work with lives down 4 blocks from me and she has been a tremendous help.

Since my previous living arrangements fell through because the guesthouse was booked, I was supposed to live alone near Riverside. Riverside is known as a tourist area where there is a lot of theft that happens because the tourists are all on that area. I can't even imagine what it would be like living alone by yourself in a foreign country. In the beginning, I was so anxious and homesick that I didn't want to leave my apartment because I was scared to cross the streets by myself or the tuk tuk drivers were constantly asking if you wanted a ride. I needed that little push and my roommates helped me. They have guided me so much and I don't know where I would be if I lived alone. Also, the extra company creates a sense of warmth. It's nice to hear about their day and vice versa. For the most part, we all do different things and all have various interests and it's nice to get invited to events.

3. Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

My budget is working out great. To be honest, I don't budget often or well, but I think I am spending a good amount. It's difficult to say because during the weekdays I don't spend much on anything, but food. However, on the weekends, because I go out of Phnom Penh, I spend more travelling, eating, and living. Food wise, I could spend about \$30 or less depending on where I eat with friends or by myself. Street food is \$1 so if I did eat that every day for dinner, I would spend \$7. Recreation/ travel really depends on where I am going because if I were going to Siem Reap vs. Kep - those places are completely different. One takes about 6 hours, while the other is 3 hours. Transportation here is so costly because you would take a tuk tuk and they're more expensive than motos. Since I am an expat/western, they will often charge you more, of course you can bargain, but it'll still be more than what a typical Khmer person would pay. I'd wish that I'd written down everything I purchased. Sometimes I look at

my account and wonder where in the world did it go? Keeping track of where your money goes is very important.

4. Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

Thankfully Sovann Komar provides transportation to and from work. They pick and drop me off right in front of my apartment, which I am extremely grateful for. I am very satisfied with that choice because the school is a bit far and I wouldn't know how much a tuk tuk would be to go to and from every day. A lot of the schools that my friends teach at are biking distance, but from my apartment to Sovann Komar, it's quite the trek. Yes, I definitely do that time to explore the surrounding area on my time off. As mentioned previously, I do my best to get out of Phnom Penh on the weekends because it's my only chance. If I didn't, I would just be in the city really bored and sad that my time abroad didn't involve adventuring since it's a hobby I love to do. Meeting friends at dodgeball and seeing them weekly allowed me to have a stronger relationship with them. After knowing more and more about them, we all realized that we didn't like staying in Phnom Penh on the weekends when the other cities/towns of Cambodia offered more exciting opportunities. We all work Monday - Friday and we plan in advance when we want to leave the city. We are only gone for a night, but hey, something is better than nothing! Thankfully our group is quite large that we have the option to rent out our own private van for about 13 of us. It all ends up being cheaper too!

There are traveling agencies around the city and they all have bus prices. It depends on where you want to go and how long you have to travel. Most of the bus prices are very affordable and are cheaper than the US. If you end up having a large group like mine, I suggest renting a van out so you don't have random stops/pick ups and the mandatory lunch break the drivers do. Within Cambodia, I have so far only been to Kep, Koh Rong, and Siem Reap. I also did a hike named Basith Mountain that was about an hour outside of Phnom Penh. This week I

will be going on a mini-one- night vacation with my coworkers at Sovann Komar in Sihanoukville. In about two weeks, I will be heading to Mondulkiri Province with my friends to adventure. And lastly, my other friends and I are planning on visiting Koh Pich (Diamond Island) in Phnom Penh. There is so much to do and you just have to stick with it and do it. Siem Reap is a must do because of Angkor Wat and the various temples surrounding the area. It is a beautiful city with amazing people. There are also various markets everywhere and activities to do. Just read the tourist brochure and you won't miss a thing! I suggest attending the free tour of the silk farm. You get to see the silk items being made in addition to the silk worms. Overall, my experience here has been phenomenal and it's crazy that it's been 6 weeks.

Question Set #4

1. Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

My coursework for my major definitely prepared me for my internship because during my junior year I interned at two different sites. The two sites were vastly different: the first site - I worked with children and introduced them and their families to the benefits of eating local and healthy and the second site - I worked with adolescent girls ranging from the ages of 10-18 years old. At the later site, I would be a co-facilitator for girls' groups and help with drop-in where I would be a mentor, friend, and role-model for these girls. Being able to have that experience, I knew how I would act both professionally and personally. The knowledge of understanding and knowing the importance of personal and professional boundaries has been one of the most important so far. Being here in Cambodia, it is completely different. Some teachers treat their students as friends and their relationship is not only professional. Because the culture is so different here, I've had numerous students wanting to add me on Facebook, but of course, I have to politely decline because I am here as an intern and their teacher. It's definitely hard for them to understand because usually you would just be friends with them on Facebook, but for me, there's a line that I don't cross.

2. Cross Cultural: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

Being at Sovann Komar, I mainly teach students English and other subjects. Nonverbal communication is what I tend to rely on when I can't get my point across to the students who don't understand what I am saying. There was this one instance when I wanted a student to come up and I had my fingers pointed up and my palm curved. It is a nonverbal expression I use in the States that means "come." However, to my knowledge from another teacher, it means that you're calling them for something sexual. I was truly surprised and freaked out. The correct way of calling a student up is to have your fingers pointed downwards and have your palms curved facing upwards. So now I am in check of my nonverbal movements.

3. Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience? What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?

The first most important thing that I have learned about myself thus far is that I can let go of plans not working out well. I've noticed that since living here for 2 months, I've had schedules work and not work. Instead of being frustrated with the person for not going according to plan, I just shrug it off. Cambodia has a different lifestyle and I can honestly say it has changed me. Time is not of the essence here. They value personal connections much more. In the United States, I would get frustrated and angry if something didn't work out well because I was programmed to have my life running on a set schedule and time. But I realize, why would I want to constantly be stressed? Another important thing that I have learned about myself is that, I would love to be independent and go on adventures, but I enjoy having another friend with me. Don't get me wrong, I've toured around Phnom Penh by myself, but it just isn't the same.

The greatest personal challenge for myself has been to slightly put aside some of the fears that I have in the night. Because I work for an assault prevention shuttle, there have been multiple

times where I scare myself into thinking that assault and robbery happen constantly. Because I live in a quiet neighborhood, there are times when I don't go out very late because you hear stories of tuk tuk drivers taking you to a quiet place and then robbing you. I've just had to tell myself that these things happen all over the world and not just a developing country. Sometimes I let it get to my head, but I need to remind myself that if I'm with other people, then I will be safe.

The greatest reward has been having the opportunity to travel alone to Cambodia and complete an international internship. By spending 3 months here, I have learned so much and to what I potentially want to do in the future. In addition to rewinding and going through the memories that I have had in the last 7 weeks. They have been absolutely phenomenal. From the very beginning of making sure I was catching the correct flights to meeting friends from all over the world and planning adventures outside of Phnom Penh. All of these experiences have taken me outside of my own comfort zone that I wouldn't have been exposed to in America because I would have my set friend group and typically that's who you'd be with. At first I felt vulnerable being in a new environment with completely different cultural values. I told myself that if I wanted to experience I wanted before coming here I needed to come out of my shell and experience it. Alongside, I've had my wonderful roommate be supportive and the new friends I made at dodgeball. Now, I have more confidence and I believe that if I set my eyes on something, I can accomplish it.

Question Set #5

1. Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you have been gaining for your next endeavors (job search, graduate school applications, etc). Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal or cross-cultural. Explain them briefly below. 2. After identifying 3-4, pick two of these and expand on them with the following:

- **Outline the context of the situation**

- **Describe any challenges you faced**
- **Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges**

Being able to have this amazing experience abroad has shown me how beautiful the world is. I've met incredible people on my journey here and have been exposed to diverse environments. Being able to witness life outside of the United States has motivated me to want to travel more. Here in Cambodia, life is so simple. The people here are so genuine and welcoming that I couldn't imagine another place to have spent my 3 months. Now that I've had my first taste of traveling independently, I can't wait to have another experience elsewhere. I would love to have another international abroad experience. I'd like to focus more on human resources or sex trafficking.

Secondly, being a teacher has opened my eyes completely. Sitting in class for most of my life, I didn't even think how difficult it could be being a teacher. Making sure you have a lesson plans planned out for the week and making sure the students aren't fatigued or bored. There have been moments when I've felt exhausted because of the language barrier, but that has made me that much stronger in finding creative ways in expressing my message. I'm happy that I have had this opportunity; however, I think as of now, being a teacher is not something on my mind. I love the hands on work, but I think there is another field that I'd love to be a part of. I would change nothing about this experience because these students have impacted and changed my life.

Lastly, before arriving here in Cambodia, I would describe myself as someone who was extremely organized and had my planner all the time. I arrived in Cambodia with an open mind, but of course I've had my fears too. Since spending almost 3 months here, I feel as if my whole life has changed completely. I see the world differently than I had before. I used to get so stressed out so fast about something so miniscule and when it didn't go accordingly to plan. Now that I've been here, I can honestly say that my life has been stress free. I've taken everything day by day and when changes happen - don't fret. Life goes on. I'm a punctual person and even though I have friends who are always late, I don't get angry at them because I know that they are doing their best. I'm leaving Cambodia with a change of pace and I'm

learning to appreciate every second and every moment of my life. If things don't go accordingly to plan, just find new ways to work it out.

2. What has been your greatest personal challenge on this internship? What has been the greatest reward?

One of my greatest personal challenge within this internship was working with the Sovann Komar students because there were a few that were difficult for me to control. At times I felt like I was a bad teacher because I couldn't control their behaviors. At times, I found it difficult to motivate me to want to teach them at times since some of them were misbehaving. I've never worked with a population that challenged me mentally and physically. Every time I worked with them, I felt burnt out and drained. However, working with them has made me gain more confidence in my abilities and has made me stricter. Of course we have fun, but academics is first and foremost.

My greatest reward of this internship has been meeting these students. Each student has their own defining personality and they all bring something amazing to the class. The community students are eager to learn and are so respectful. I feel like the respect that is here in Cambodia is completely different than what is present in the United States. Also, the Sovann Komar students have been wonderful.

3. What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

Just know that Cambodia is an absolutely breathtaking place. It is full of life and full of love. There is a certain charm that will affect you and will make you never want to leave. The idea of traveling independently to another country by yourself can be daunting, but it will change your world forever. Before I came to Cambodia, I didn't have high expectations of what needed to be accomplished and more. I had goals, but I didn't have it become a life or death situation. Go to the country with an open-mind and appreciate all it has to offer. In addition, being easy-going and getting out of your comfort zone will help a lot. I came to Cambodia not

knowing anyone and I did my best to attend events and make friends. You'll soon find out that there are so many amazing people around the world. With my internship, I didn't know if I wanted to become a teacher later on in life. I just decided that this would be an experience I wouldn't regret. Allow this internship/experience to allow yourself to grow as a person. It can be a path you decide to take in life or not, but no matter what, it has impacted your life.

Question Set #6

1. Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

Before going to Cambodia, I had no clue what to expect. I made sure that I read about it's history, culture and traditions, and much more. While going through some of my notes, I remember thinking to myself that some of the things they did and ate were similar to my culture. In preparation for my departure there was some information that we were told that definitely scared me. One of the main things that scared me was having thieves take my purse at night. But since I knew that was something that happened, I made sure to be very careful and nothing happened to me. Going into the internship, I knew that the life and culture in Cambodia was completely different from the United States. They have exceeded all of my expectations. Everything about the Khmer people and culture is amazing. The Khmer people are so kind and welcoming. They want you to learn their language and they welcome you with open arms. There is so much life to Cambodia despite their past. Being able to explore Phnom Penh, but also leaving the city and traveling through the other provinces have showed me that there is so much to the people and their culture. Depending on where you go, you will see so much that will change your perspective on life.

2. What, if anything, do you wish you had known or prepared before your internship?

One thing I wished that I had known before I went to Cambodia was that everything will fall into place perfectly. Before I had left, I was constantly so nervous and creating what if situations that could possibly happen. Understanding, preparing, and knowing that you are about to immerse yourself into a new environment is important, but scaring and making

yourself uncomfortable isn't okay. Just go with an open-mind and you will have an experience of a lifetime. I spent a few weeks creating scary situations and then choosing not to go out, which is something I deeply regret. Of course during the first weeks you will be adjusting, but just know that it's completely normal to feel overwhelmed at first and it will all get better.