

The In's and Out's

of Volunteering at

Baan Unrak Primary School



January 2014

I. Project Information

What is Baan Unrak?

Baan Unrak, "Home of Joy" in Thai, is a project of the Neohumanist Foundation. The project in Sangklaburi has several components:

- The largest part of the project is the Children's Home which provides a safe and loving home to over 140 children.
- The Baan Unrak Primary School teaches over 200 students, is fully accredited by the Thai government and functions under its own budget.
- The Women's Project includes several enterprises including a weaving center, sewing center, a bakery, a shop and an internet café.
- The Outreach Program provides food and assistance to those in the community

Our school was founded after our experience with the local government run schools. While the schools met the basic needs of the average students, they did not have the resources and knowledge to care for the children from the Baan Unrak Children's home. Please read the website for a complete description of our history.

II. Neohumanism- our philosophy

What is Neo-Humanism?

Neo-Humanism is a philosophy developed by the Indian philosopher Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar. The practice of Neo-Humanism follows a set of principles based on the ethic of universal love. This includes respect for all beings including plants and animals. The women who founded and run Baan Unrak are called Didis. They are similar to nuns in that they are full-time volunteers who have devoted their lives to service.

Volunteers need not be followers of the Neo-Humanist philosophy, but are asked to respect the principles. While in school, we look for volunteers to follow our methods of education which are based on Neohumanist education ideals.

Aims and ideals of Neohumanist Education are:

- To develop the full potential of each child: physical, mental and spiritual.
- To awaken a thirst for knowledge and love of learning.
- To equip students with academic and other skills necessary for higher education.
- To facilitate personal growth in areas such as morality, integrity, self-confidence, self-discipline and cooperation.
- To develop physical well being and mental capabilities through yoga and concentration techniques, sports and play.
- To develop a sense of aesthetics and appreciation of culture through drama, dance, music and art.
- To encourage students to become active and responsible members of society.
- To promote an awareness of ecology in its broadest sense (i.e. the realization of the inter-relatedness of all things) and to encourage respect and care for all living beings.
- To encourage a universal outlook, free from discrimination based on religion, race, creed or gender.
- To recognize the importance of teachers and parents in setting an example.

General Principles of Neohumanist Education:

1. Integrated development of the whole personality

Neohumanist Education facilitates the integral development of all aspects of the human personality: body, senses, intellect, imagination, intuition and spirit. It emphasizes not only the content of thought – the subject matter – but the very process of thinking itself, to develop methodical thought processes and creative intelligence. This provides a harmonious balance between academic learning, creativity and inner growth to awaken the highest potential in every child.

2. Value-oriented curriculum

Universal moral values form the basis of an emotionally-balanced and discriminating individual life and a truly harmonious and cooperative human society. Neohumanist Education employs a comprehensive approach for imparting these values throughout all phases of school life and curriculum. The classrooms become moral communities in which the teacher serves as a role model, caregiver and mentor. Students deepen their own moral understanding through study and discussion, self-reflection, cooperative learning, conflict resolution and community service. This constant nurturing of moral values allows children to confront the moral challenges of today's society and to grow into exemplary human beings who both respect and take responsibility for all members of their universal family.

3. Spiritual oneness as the goal of life

The entire learning process is rooted in the conviction that the universe is an integrated whole in which everything is connected. In contrast to the separation and fragmentation that prevails in the contemporary world, the realization of this oneness fosters a deep sense of connection to self, to others, and to all of life. Based on the current paradigm shift from a mechanistic, materialistic view of the universe to a new vision of wholeness and interdependence, the entire curriculum helps the students rediscover the meaning and purpose of existence. An education that values their inner, subjective world instills in students a profound respect for the mystery of life and a commitment to care for all creation.

4. Integrated approach to learning

Instead of fragmenting knowledge into narrow and isolated academic disciplines, Neohumanist Education encourages the students in an active, multi-sensory and multi-disciplinary exploration of the world around them. Learning is a process, not a product: it is not merely an accumulation of objective facts, but rather seeing the world as a dynamic whole composed of a myriad of interrelated phenomena. Child-directed play in the early grades and self-chosen projects in later years stimulate a thirst for knowledge and a joy of learning which will remain with the children throughout their lives.

5. All disciplines

The subtle expression of beauty in music, art, literature and other aspects of life uplifts the human mind and nurtures a deeply intuitional awareness of the oneness of all. This universalistic love for all created beings is the essence of Neohumanism. In Neohumanist Education, aesthetic appreciation and experience suffuse all aspects of learning. The classroom environment is aesthetically vibrant and integrated with artistic activity: painting, sculpture, drawing, music, dance, mime and drama. The curriculum also includes systematic training to develop the creative imagination of the right brain through fantasy, guided imagery and metaphoric thinking. This training not only develops the child's creativity, but also enhances learning and academic performance and builds character by fostering a greater ability to empathize with others.

General Principles of Neohumanist Education (continued):

6. Blending of local culture and universal vision

Neohumanist Education emphasizes the teaching of local languages and cultural traditions hand-in-hand with the inculcation of a universalistic outlook. Deepening our understanding of our cultural-linguistic heritage develops our strength of character, while ignorance or neglect of our cultural roots makes us vulnerable to suppression and exploitation. Neohumanist Education also fosters an appreciation of the magnificent diversity of human experience, for our diverse cultures form the flowers of the garland of a universal human society which transcends caste, creed, color and race. Through a multicultural curriculum, students realize that this universe is all of ours; humans, animals, plants and the inanimate world. Only through such a universal outlook can we move collectively towards a global future of harmony and peace.

7. A new environmental consciousness

Environmental education must not merely impart the values and skills necessary for responsible stewardship of our planetary resources (organic agriculture, waste recycling, renewable energy, land and water management, etc.); it must also help the children develop an intimate living relationship with the web of life around them. Through intensive study of the local area, with its complex cycles and inter-dependencies, the students will naturally replace linear and analytic thought processes with the synthetic cyclical thinking that is essential for a sustainable society of the future. A more subtle environmental education will develop an entirely new consciousness that experiences on the deepest level of being a sense of wonder at the beauty and harmony of the world and a feeling of kinship with all life.

8. Exemplary role of the educator

In Neohumanist Education, the role of the teacher is of paramount importance, for teaching requires a subtle blending of intuitional insight, creative sensitivity, and scientifically grounded practices. Teachers must embody the noblest qualities of humanity: selflessness, strength of character, leadership and love for all life. They must constantly cultivate their own inner selves and therefore invite a co-learning, co-creating process with the students. They are the counselors and friends who treat each individual with special respect and affection. They facilitate the unfolding of the creative learning process by being attentive to the needs and abilities of each child. Teachers have the power to transform the students by their own example and loving guidance; to nurture the highest aspirations of the human spirit.

9. Inculcation of the spirit of service

Neohumanist Education imparts a sense of responsibility to children: the sense that education is not a passport to privilege but a sacred responsibility to serve others. Thus the spirit of service is inculcated in the children from their earliest years by fostering a sense of compassion that makes them want to alleviate the suffering of others. Through loving and caring interactions with their surrounding bio-community, through service projects and stories, skill-development and self-discipline, they are encouraged to work not only for themselves but for all members of their universal family.

10. Social justice and upliftment

Society in the true sense means individuals moving together towards a common goal, with no one lagging behind. Neohumanist Education encourages students to develop an awareness of social problems and equips them with the practical skills to solve them. They are thus inspired to work for social justice and for the upliftment of the neglected all over the world. A curriculum that liberates the intellect from dogmas and subtle forms of psychic exploitation instills in the students the conviction that change is possible and offers them the tools to create that change.

Methodology for achieving our goals:

For physical development:

1. Inculcating practical habits of preventive self-health through proper diet, yoga and personal hygiene.
2. Imparting curative techniques of alternative medical therapies (medicinal plants, naturopathy, acupressure massage, etc.).
3. Competitive and cooperative games and exercises to develop discipline, initiative, leadership, cooperation and active habits.
4. Participating in individual and group dancing to develop rhythm and grace, and collective spirit.
5. Exercises and crafts to develop fine motor coordination and respect for the mundane world.
6. Sensory exercises and games to sharpen the senses.

For cognitive development:

1. Acquiring knowledge in all spheres of life through analytical study and problem-solving, exploration and experimentation.
2. Techniques to develop memory (repetition, association, and visualization), concentration, methodical thinking and rationality.
3. Practical training in enhancing positive thinking and self-esteem.
4. Bio-psychological techniques to develop emotional equilibrium and higher order thought processes.

For moral development:

1. Dramas, songs, moral dilemmas, games, stories and other literary forms to inspire a natural morality in the students.
2. Moral examples of teachers of high integrity.
3. Reinforcement of moral behavior.
4. Ethical values underlying all disciplines.
5. Recitation of moral aphorisms.
6. Ideational techniques by teachers and students to transform non-moral attitudes.
7. Cooperative learning and conflict resolution.
8. Creation of a moral community in the school.

For creative development:

1. Training in the arts (music, theater, painting, modeling, crafts, etc.) and their utilization in all other disciplines to enhance learning.
2. Use of fantasy through stories and drama.
3. Techniques of metaphoric and lateral thinking.
4. Training in visualization skills.

For intuitional and spiritual development:

1. Elevating music, song and dance.
2. Mind-expanding techniques of concentration and relaxation ('quiet time').
3. Systematic exercises in deep-breathing and sensory withdraw.
4. Concept of interconnectedness underlying curriculum design.
5. Experiences of oneness with nature.
6. Spiritual stories and dramas.
7. Inspiration of the teacher.

Methodology for achieving our goals (continued):

For social and environmental development:

1. Service projects in the local community.
2. Lessons/discussions about social justice and human rights.
3. Environmental excursions and campaigns.
4. Inculcation of sense of responsibility through schools duties.
5. 'Child-to-child' programs (children teaching other children).
6. Vocational skills developed and applied in community service.
7. Communication and group dynamics exercises.
8. Leadership training.

Qualities of teachers

As such, the exemplary role of educators is of vital importance, as they themselves are setting the example for the children.

The necessary qualities of any teacher are:

- an innate love and compassion for all humanity
- a genuine love and affection for children
- moral integrity and righteousness
- dedication to the all-round development of the child
- self-restraint of behavior and temper
- decency of personal behavior
- discipline, punctuality and dutifulness
- strong character
- inspiring personality
- leadership ability
- good judgment and balanced mind
- academically qualified
- able to conduct a cooperative and communicative relationship with the parents
- free from the influence of political or other vested interests
- possessing a spirit of selfless service to the society
- teaching by personal behavior and example

II. Our Town Sangklaburi

Sangklaburi is located on the edge of Kheuan Khao Laem – an artificial lake created in 1983 when the Khao Laem Dam was constructed across the River Kwae Noi. The old town of Sangklaburi was submerged in the reservoir and the residents were relocated to the current site. The town is divided into two parts – what are commonly called “Thai Side” and “Mon Side.”

Officially known as Wang Kha, the Mon settlement is located across the lake from Sangklaburi proper and is connected to the Thai Side by the longest wooden bridge in Thailand. The Mon Side is populated by ethnic Mon people, who have resettled in this area from Mon State in neighboring Burma. Homes on the Mon Side are built in the traditional Mon style and Mon language is most commonly spoken. There is a market which sells carved wood and various fabrics on the Mon Side and also a small collection of food vendors who set up near the market each evening.

Baan Unrak is located on the Thai side of town, about a 30 minute walk from the town center. The main market area has shops, restaurants and fruit stands where you can buy almost anything you need. If you have an ATM card with a MasterCard, Visa or Cirrus (and other) logo, you can withdraw money from your bank at home in the ATM in town.

Guest Houses There are a variety of guest houses on the lake close to Baan Unrak. They offer rooms that range from basic (for about 150 baht) to very comfortable (for about 1700 baht).

Graph Cafe – 650 with hot shower

Cheun Jai Tea House – 45

Getting around

Sangklaburi is a small town and most places can be walked to. There are motorbike taxis which will generally cost 10 baht a ride; traveling between the Thai Side and Mon Side is usually around 40 baht. There are also sangteaws (pick-up trucks with two seats in the bed and a roof covering the back) which run set routes to nearby villages or they can be hired if you want to travel somewhere with a group. Motorbikes can also be rented by the hour or by the day (for about 200 baht a day) from local guest houses.

Directions to Sangklaburi from Bangkok

There are two ways to get to Baan Unrak from Bangkok.

The easiest/most comfortable/slowest way to get to Sangklaburi is to take the bus from Mochit (The Northern bus terminal), bay no.114-115 to Dan Chedi SamOng (3 Pagodas Pass), the journey is 7 hours.

The Fastest/Least Comfortable ways is to take a big bus from either the Southern Bus Terminal (Sai Tai) or Mochit (The Northern bus terminal) to Kanchanaburi, then transfer to minivan service to our town Sangklaburi. This is faster by an hour or more unless the minivan is sold out. The road to Sangklaburi is windy which can sometimes be uncomfortable for passengers in the minivan. The last mini-van leaves Kanchanaburi at 4 PM. If you are late, you can enjoy a night in Kanchanaburi.

We recommend that you get a seat towards the front of the bus or mini van especially if you are prone to motion sickness.

The last stop on both routes is the market in Sangklaburi. From there you can take a 20 Baht motorbike taxi ride to the Baan Unrak School. If you have any problems, call us at 0 34 595 181.

Daily Life In Sangklaburi

Our volunteers generally live in housing which we provide.

We ask that our teachers come to school Monday to Friday by 7:00. If you are doing a different type of activity, you may be on a different schedule.

As a teacher, you will create your own lesson plans.

You are welcome to eat all your meals at our school, but most volunteers tend to eat lunch at school, breakfast at home, and dinner in the market. The market comes alive at night when a dozen or so shops offer a variety of food from around the region.

As a resident, you will quickly be accepted into the vibrant community which includes a number of foreigners working for various NGO's that operate along the border.

Communication

Phone: Skype available at internet café; payphone nearby; Thai SIM cards available in town. Internet: Baan Unrak has an internet café. There are also several options in town.

Mail: The Post Office is on the main street. Mail can be sent to you c/o our address (on the website).

Things to do and see

The wooden bridge is a key sight in Sangklaburi. A walk to the Mon Side makes a nice evening activity, as sunset is very scenic on the lake. The Golden Temple (officially called Wat Wang Wiwekaram) on the Mon Side is an impressive sight to visit and there is a handicraft market beside the temple. For many, the one hour walk to the temple is a bit too far but you can walk to the Mon Side of the bridge and get a motorbike taxi from there. The Monastery on the Mon Side is also worth a visit.

Boat rides on the lake are very nice. You can visit the old temple, which is now submerged in the lake. The top of the bell tower can still be seen emerging from the water nearly year round. In the hot season, as the water level in the reservoirs recedes, the upper floors of several buildings in the old temple complex also rise up out of the water. Several guest houses rent canoes and kayaks for recreation on the lake or you can hire a long-tail boat. Local guest houses organize treks, which include boat rides on the lake, elephant riding and bamboo rafting.

Three Pagodas Pass is a 30 minute drive from Sangklaburi. The scenery around Three Pagodas is stunning and worthy of the trip. There is also a handicraft market on the Thai side of the border here.

On the way to Three Pagodas there a couple of nice stops:

- There are waterfalls in the area, which can make a nice stop. They are about 10 minutes off the main road and accessible by motorbike. In the same area there is a cave that is home to a simple temple.
- There is a great lunch spot along the Songkalia River. Here small bamboo huts are set out over the water and food is brought to you in your river hut. You can swim or wade in the shallow water or just dip your feet in and watch the lazy river flow by.

Things to Bring- Recommendations from Previous Volunteers

Suggested Packing List

1. Laptop Computer (we currently do not have enough computers to lend out)
Wi-fi is available in most coffee shops in town as well as on our home premises
2. Conservative clothing for hot weather (t-shirts that cover the shoulders, shorts and skirts to the knees)
3. Waterproof rain coat/ umbrella (during the rainy season which is May to September)
4. Quick dry trousers and shorts (to the knees)
5. Comfortable flip flop-style shoes
6. Walking boots, good grip sandals or trainers
7. Mosquito repellent
8. Sun screen
9. International adapter plug
10. Hat, sunglasses
11. Comfortable, loose clothing to sleep in
12. Underwear and socks
13. Warm clothing (if coming between December-February)
14. Torch/headlamp
15. Plate and spoon (if eating at the home)
16. Bed sheet and pillowcase (We provide a quilt and pillow)
17. Towel
18. Toiletries if you like particular brands
19. Women's sanitation products if you like specific brands
20. First aid kit that includes: bite and sting relief products, plasters and gauze
21. Small day bag or backpack
22. Camera (waterproof and water resistant handy during rainy season) and chargers
23. Travel water bottle
24. Materials for coordinating games and activities for the children: arts and crafts, sporting events, etc.
25. If teaching: Smart clothes (skirts/ trousers), 1-2 nice outfits for special occasions

Where to eat and drink in town?

For some of us food is an essential part of our experience in Sangklaburi, here are some recommendations of food and drinks to try while here, and where to find them:

Som Tam is a salad made from green papaya and a mix of other tasty ingredients. There is a small bamboo structure on the left-hand side of the road on the way to town. The friendly family who lives in the house next door makes Sam Tom, along with a few other dishes. If you're vegetarian ask for Sam Tom 'Jeh' – they are very familiar with this request. . . Sam Tom is great with sticky rice (khaoniaw).

Quality Beverages – T-House (Baan Cheun Jai) – You are very likely to spend quite a lot of time here as a volunteer, if you have money to spare on small luxuries. It is located outside the center of the town and a ten minute walk from the house or volunteer accommodation. Run by the unique P Ton and her family, it sells Thai food and snacks and has a very relaxed atmosphere, a home away from home. It is also possible to watch movies there on evenings and lazy afternoons.

Please remember it is Baan Unrak's Policy for volunteers to refrain from smoking or drinking alcohol during your stay as role modeling for our children is just as important as the work you do while you are here.

TRAVEL VISAS

Short term volunteers arriving by air can get a 30 day visa on arrival, which can be extended for another 7 days at any immigration office. As of December 2008 visitors arriving by land will only receive a 15 day visa on arrival.

If you apply for a Tourist Visa, you will be allowed to stay in Thailand for a total of 60 days, with an extension of 30 days possible. A tourist visa is easy to apply for at your nearest Thai embassy or consulate. More information about the tourist visa can be found here:
<http://www.thaivisa.com/tourist-visa.html>

Volunteers staying for more than 60 days should apply for a Non-immigrant B category 'O' volunteer visa. You must apply for this in your home country and provide Baan Unrak (via email) with your passport details, address, date of birth and the address of the Thai Embassy or Consulate to which you are applying, so that we can provide you with the invitation letter required to attain it. If you are staying for 6 months or more we recommend you get a 'multiple entry' visa. You will still need to leave the country every 90 days but it is easier than getting tourist visas and you don't have to pay for your recurrent entries to Thailand.

If you receive a Non-immigrant "O" visa to volunteer with Baan Unrak and then leave earlier than stated we are obliged to inform Immigration.

Visa run

The quickest way to cross the border is to go from Bangkok to Cambodia. You can get a bus from Khao san road at 8am, cross the border and return by 8pm that night. You require a visa to get into Cambodia; you can arrange this yourself or the tourist bus companies will arrange it, but they charge an exorbitant price for the convenience! Remember to take a couple passport photos with you. You can also go easily (and quickly) to Laos and Ranong. You cannot get a new visa at Three Pagodas Pass.

Travel to Cambodia, Laos or Malaysia is reasonably priced and good for a visa run.

There are overland routes to all of the countries mentioned above.

Many small air carriers offer reasonable rates for flights within Asia. Some budget airlines include:

- Air Asia – www.airasia.com
- Bangkok Airways www.bangkokair.com
- Lao Airlines – www.laoairlines.com
- Malaysia Airlines – www.mas.com.my

The website [-www.bangkoktickets.com](http://www.bangkoktickets.com) -is recommended by Lonely Planet as a good source for discounted fares leaving from BKK. (Be aware that some countries may require a payment of departure tax on international flights.)

Some volunteers have been able to purchase multiple entry visas in their home countries. This means the same visa is good for multiple visits to Thailand, each consisting of 90 days. You still have