

# Tour Report – Thais DE GAIL

09.12.2017 to 26.01.2018

Approximately 2 months volunteering in Horizon Lanka :

- 1<sup>st</sup> week in Mahawilachchiya
- 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Ralapanawa
- 3<sup>rd</sup> week in Mahawilachchiya
- 4<sup>th</sup> , 5<sup>th</sup> ,6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> week in Ralapanawa

I am from France and I was 18 when I came to volunteer in Horizon Lanka for 2 months. I was taking a gap year before starting my studies and I wanted to give meaning to my travels by volunteering wherever I go. I found Horizon Lanka through a french organisation called “L'Abeille Asso”.

## Sri lanka's warm welcome (2 days in Anuradhapura)

I arrived late in Anuradhapura on Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> of December. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> family that I stayed with and they welcomed me in the warmest way possible, although they didn't speak english at all. For dinner, they put a seat and a table for me in the middle of the room and they all watched me eat. I was a bit uncomfortable, but I understood that they were just very curious about me. Their shower was outside and you needed to wear a “cheeta” (like a sarong) or keep your clothes on. The first time I kept my clothes on and I was so tired that I forgot to take off my belt witch contained my pasport, my money and all the important papers!! Luckily none of it was damaged badly, it just had to dry.



The second night, we exchanged each other our family pictures and in the morning the kids did some dancing and they taught me some basic Singhalese words and sentences.

## Pramodya's Family in Mahawilachchiya



Pramodya was 13yrs old when I visited, and she is a student at Horizon Lanka Academy.

Copmared to the other students, she was the one with the best level of English.

She lives with her Mother, her little Brother (3yrs old ) and her Grandmother. Sometimes her father was here but I think he works in Colombo, so he is often away.

I shared a bedroom with Pramodya. They had western toilets and a shower inside the bathroom, which was quite nice. There was a drought when I visited, which ment at times there was not enough water for the shower.

The mother and the grandmother always prepared delicious meals for me and the whole famlily, sometimes it was a bit too spicy, but always very tasty. They gave me a bicycle to go to the Academy and get around the village, as it is quite big!



## The teenagers of Horizon Lanka- Mahawilachchiya



The first week that I was here, I was all alone, and I had no idea what to do with them. As there was no lesson plans and I didn't know the children yet.

It was quite hard to motivate them to work on English grammar and language lessons. For this reason we mostly danced and talked. The girls really love to dance and they are very creative when it comes to inventing choreographies. We also had to practice certain dances for the "Rainbow of Cultures" concert. In no time, I became really fond of this group of teenagers and I was especially close to the girls, we were like sisters.



I visited Mahawilachchiya again, the week before the New Years concert. This time I was joined by numerous volunteers. We had a great time practising the speeches and dances.



## The Kids of Horizon Lanka-Ralapanawa



The first time I came here was to meet the British family who was also volunteering for Horizon Lanka, except in Ralapanawa. I arrived in the middle of their lessons, so I was able to watch and learn how to teach English to small kids.

I decided to come here the next week, to replace the British family when they left.

The first 3 days, I was alone and I had to teach 30 children. I was quite anxious for my first class, but

luckily the British couple had left their former lesson plans and some tools. So I could use the lesson plans to see what had already been done and to get some ideas for the future lessons. I quickly got the hang of it.

Then, Hoa Nguyen joined me. She was a new volunteer from Vietnam and she was going to stay there for 3 weeks. We immediately got along, she was very enthusiastic and she always had some great ideas

to make the class even more fun! We would teach the class together and sometimes split it into two groups for certain activities or to help a child with difficulties. Indeed the levels are very different amongst the group as the class included students from 5 to 11 years old.



Later on, we decided to have only the grades 5, 6 and 7 on Monday and Thursday. The grades 1 and 2 on Tuesday. And the grades 3 and 4 on Wednesday and Friday.

This way the groups were smaller and more manageable.

We usually did 1h30 of English: activities, exercises, games and songs; and 30 min of sports.

## My Sri Lankan Family (In Ralapanawa)

Nadeeka (mother), Rohana (father), Sandushi (7yrs old daughter), Sasmitha ( 2 yrs old son).

During my stay at their house they treated me like a member of their family. They were the sweetest people and they surrounded me with love and support whenever I needed it. They introduced me to their friends and to their culture, explaining to me all the subtleties of their religion, traditions and politics (it was the local election time).



They always made sure that I had enough food and that I was not missing anything.

Their house is quite nice and I believe they are a pretty progressive family.

I already miss them so much and I plan to come back in a few years with my own family to introduce them to each other!



The food in general in Sri Lanka is amazing; lots of variations and all very delicious! When you are staying with a local family, you are often given way too much food but don't worry if you don't finish, it will be the dog's meal! You should also definitely try the local pastries ( usually served with the tea), some of them are really tasty (when there is not too much sugar).

## Volunteering at the public school in Ralapanawa

I don't know about the other public schools, but in Ralpanawa , it's all about improvisation!

Indeed, every time Hoa and I went there, we had no idea which grade we would be teaching and for how long. This is also the reason why I believe you have to be at least two volunteers, because having to improvise AND manage 30+ kids on your own is close to impossible.



To teach at the public school, you need to wear a Saree. It is the official outfit for women working in the public function (ex: bank, administration, school...).

When you buy a saree, it's not ready to wear yet: it needs to be cut and you have to sew the blouse yourself. I was lucky because Pramodya's mother offered to make the blouse for me, but in most cases you need to give it to one of the tailor shops, they will take your measurements and the blouse should be ready within than 2 days.



As much as I loved going to the public school, there were a few things that bothered me there. The uniforms, which are supposed to erase inequalities are actually enhancing them. Indeed, on a white uniform you easily notice that some are less white, not well cut or don't fit at all, therefore, it's showing social inequalities more than ever.

Additionally, there is also the fact that girls don't have a choice for their uniforms. They are all supposed to wear a short skirt, which doesn't give them enough freedom for physical activities. I've

seen many girls who were afraid that someone would see under their skirts if they bend down to catch a ball for example.

I'm sure that most of them would prefer to wear pants or shorts, like the boys.

Sex inequalities are not only present in school, it's also a problem at the academy. Girls and boys often refuse to be put in the same group/team for games and activities. They even refuse to hold hands to make a circle. However, I noticed that this is not the case for the younger kids, in grades 1 and 2, which only proves once again that sex inequalities are not natural, they are taught by society. Babies don't care if you are black, white, girl, boy, gay or heterosexual.



## The New Year's Concert: "A Rainbow of Cultures"



All 5 academies prepared some songs and dances for the New Year's Concert. This concert was a big deal, it was not just to have fun and gather all the children, no, it was a chance to show important people, sponsors, what the kids studying at Horizon Lanka are capable of. It was also on this occasion that Nanda distributed the Student Awards to the teenagers of Mahawilachchiya. For us volunteers, it was a great occasion to discover the traditional songs, dances and amazing outfits!!



## Week-ends and Day trips

If you don't mind taking the bus, there are many things to do and places to see in the area of Anuradhapura.



- The first week end, I went on a bicycle tour around Mahawilachchiya with the teenagers. I had completely underated the size of the Village and we ended up biking for more than 4 hours! At one point, I was starving and dehydrated so I begged them to take me home (I didn't think that our little



expedition would become a full day trip).

- I also went on a day trip with Hoa and Suzana to Dambulla (the Cave Temple) and the Lion Rock. We left early and came back late, as it is around 2-3 hours bus to go there.



- We also went on a weekend trip with two other french volunteers to Kalpitiya and Mihintale's Temples
- Finally there was the Tree house party with many other volunteers in Mahawilachchiya.





## The Safaris

I was lucky enough to go on 2 Safaris in Wilpattu National Park, and it was so worth it!!

In this park you can see:

peacocks, big lizards (Varans), elephants, squirrels, monkeys, crocodiles, wild boars, turtles and turtoises, snakes, sea eagles, storks, colibris, and many other



birds! And if you are lucky you could even see a bear and a leopard.

Apart from the animals, the park itself is magnificent!

And you can even have a break at a beautiful black sand beach around midday.

