



## PEPY Participant Primer: Chaperones' Compendium

In addition to the information and advice in the PEPY Participant Primer, there are a few points that we think will help prepare chaperones who have decided to join a group of students on their journey in Cambodia. While the aforementioned document is comprehensive in content, we at PEPY want to add that by joining this trip as a chaperone, your attitudes and actions will influence not only your own experience, but the experiences of your students as well.

From leading many experiential tours, we have learned that chaperones *always* shape group dynamics, whether they mean to or not. Just as an enthusiastic trip leader can motivate the group and a knowledgeable tour guide can educate it, a chaperone's approach to every situation sets the standard that students will believe they are expected to follow. This responsibility—for trip leaders, tour guides, and chaperones alike—is inescapable. It is inherent in the roles themselves, and we must therefore remain vigilant over the influence we create.

This responsibility can be empowering. It can also be burdensome. Depending on your affinity for the situation at hand, you might revel in your added influence one moment, only to feel intimidated by it the next. It is in these latter scenarios, situations in which you are least comfortable, that your actions matter most. If you find a situation difficult, your students likely find the situation difficult as well, and more than ever they need mentors who react in a manner that best facilitates learning and respect. Every trip includes situations that some participants will find difficult, and these situations are where truly life-changing experiences occur.

**Example:** Many of our trips include the experience of dining Cambodian-style, so we schedule lunch at one of our favorite local restaurants. This restaurant is rustic to say the least (open air, dirt floors, plastic chars, tin cups). We ensure that the food is delicious and completely safe to eat, but it's certainly not the restaurant environment you are used to. How do you react? By expressing disgust and distrust, or by expressing enthusiasm for the authentic meal to come? We have seen through experience that students' reactions to such unfamiliar situations depend *wholly* on those of their chaperones.

**Challenging scenarios** abound in Cambodia. On a PEPY tour, the most difficult (and enriching) of these will likely be home stays, whether at the PEPY school in Chanleas Dai or elsewhere. During these stays you will live locally—using squat toilets and bucket showers, sleeping without a fan, enduring heat and possibly tough physical work. Remember, you and your students signed up for this, and for good reason!

**It is easy** to say, before embarking on a home stay, "I'm up for the challenge. I'm going to make the most of an amazing opportunity!" **It is even easier**, while on the ground, to forget all about your pre-visit gung-ho mentality. Anticipate hitting a mental/emotional wall, and be prepared to overcome the challenge through positive talk and behavior.



**Seek understanding.** By now you know the theme: your students will follow your lead. Do you display frustration and impatience when faced with communication barriers and cultural differences? So will your students. Do you abandon your preconceptions and try to understand local perspectives and behaviors? So will your students. Use your influence thoughtfully!

**We're a team!** The preceding advice is the result of lessons learned through many past tours. We strive to craft the most enriching experiences possible, based both on our knowledge of Cambodia *and* on your input. This is *your* group's trip, and we are happy to address any goals, concerns, and hesitations you have. Consider yourself part of the trip leading/planning team, and let us know if you have concerns regarding any part of our proposed itinerary.

Not comfortable with the local restaurant scenario described above? No worries, just let us know *in advance*, and we'll adjust your itinerary accordingly. Problems tend to arise when concerns go unspoken, and questions unanswered. So if you feel that your group would not be comfortable with, for example, a certain type of restaurant, let us know well beforehand and we'll discuss alternative options with you. What we don't want is a situation where the group arrives at a destination or begins a scheduled activity, and *then* concerns are voiced. These scenarios invariably create stress, damage morale, and interrupt the flow of the itinerary. Please help the group by helping us to understand your goals and concerns ahead of time.

By being an active participant in the planning process, you can help PEPY fine-tune your experience to provide the best possible tour. We love suggestions, feedback, and all other forms of constructive input, and can't thank you enough for the care and effort that we know you'll put into this experience. On behalf of the PEPY team, we look forward to collaborating on our adventure together!

Kind regards,

The PEPY Staff