

Dear Bamboo School friends,

this previous week Warwick and Marco experienced their first week in Ban Khon Khuen. Here, we have been busy painting all of the walls of the school as well as placing the in- and outside roof of the building.

It is astonishing to witness how fast the school is coming along! We are hoping to be finished by the end of the month. Our construction workers are also looking forward to this, since they have been away from home for about 5 months.

One aspect that is a little bit disappointing is that the villagers haven't been around at all to help and assist at the construction site. The construction workers have mentioned this aspect to me many times and Satheet and I have had numerous talks with the Naiban (village head), who always promises to take care of this issue, but in the end we can't force anyone.

We have offered them to donate the material in order for them to build a toilet for the school, but so far only a hole has been dug in the ground and it seems as if nobody is really interested in building it. It is personally a really sad behavior to witness since I compare this village to the smaller ones (like Mok Lep and Mok Eauy) who are always more than grateful for the smallest donation. For example: We donated the construction material for Mok Lep for them to build a water tank. We offered to send them one of our construction workers in order to help them with the building process (they haven't worked with cement before), but they thankfully and politely turned down this offer and built it by themselves. Apart from the tank looking great, they thanked us immensely by sacrificing a cow (a very precious animal!) and naming the tank 'Isabel' (haha, it was the biggest honor).

So part of our jobs here is to accept the reality and appreciation towards our work from different villages. It is not always an easy task but at the end of the day we are building this beautiful (one of the most outstanding schools I've actually seen all over the world! No exaggeration!) primary school for the kindhearted little children of this village who only deserve the best.

The village life itself is not easy for an expat person (here they call us "falang") either. There are days when the water is gone because it rained and the pipes are stuck with mud. On other days the temperature is almost unbearable and then it rains and the ground turns into the thickest mud ever, so adieu shoes. And then there are days where scorpions come out at night and sting you between your toes. That was a very, very painful "Life -in -Laos" -lesson for me to learn. I even became so desperate I called my health insurance in Germany trying to explain to them that I might have to be medevaced from a village in the middle of nowhere, somewhere along the Nam Ou river, that is definitely not marked on Google maps. I actually felt a bit sorry for the guy on the phone since I could tell he really wanted to help me and didn't know if he should try to organize a speedboat to get me out of here (an impossible task to do because the boats don't drive at night and trying to organize a chopper instead must be one of the hardest things to do in Laos, haha). So I had to rely on the Lao people telling me "bor peng yang"(don't worry) and that scorpions here are harmless (maybe, but the pain surely felt like dying).

So no, our jobs are not easy at times. It is especially in situations like these that I admire the long term volunteers like Tom, Silke, Klaus, Shay, Martin (who also got stung by a scorpion in the neck!!!!) and Franki who lived in these conditions for several months. I salute and really thank them for the umpteenth time for putting themselves through these conditions in order to contribute to a change for the better and wanting to help these villagers.

People like these (and all of our past and current volunteers) are the ones making a difference in this world and we are SO lucky to have had the honor and pleasure to work with them.

Hope that your week will be less painful than a scorpion sting:)

We will be back next Sunday with some further adventures.

Sabaidee,

Isabel