



Statement on Orphanage Tourism

Visiting and/or volunteering at orphanages in Asia is a difficult topic, and one which Travel Indochina is often asked about. While we most certainly encourage our travellers to give something back to the countries and communities they visit on their journeys, we have adopted a policy in which we will not organize visits, volunteer projects, or ad hoc donations to orphanages in the countries in which we operate.

Unfortunately, due to the popularity of visiting and donating to an orphanage while travelling abroad in a lesser developed country, an “orphanage industry” of sorts has emerged. Studies by international organizations dedicated to child welfare (such as UNICEF and Friends-International) have shown that, in countries like Cambodia where orphanage tourism has become particularly popular, nearly three quarters of children living in orphanages have at least one living parent. Furthermore, a number of these orphanages lack any child protection services and/or maintain poor living conditions in order to garner sympathy for the children and thus increased donations from foreigners. It is not uncommon practice to have the children ‘perform’ in order to help solicit donations.

This is not to say that there are not ethical, reputable orphanages operating to an international standard – there indeed are. However, the vast majority unfortunately are not financially transparent and do not have any child protection measures in place which are in accordance with international standards. Those that do rarely allow visitors to simply drop in, as it can negatively impact and disrupt the children’s development. Because Travel Indochina believes that orphanages must be a safe place for children and not a tourist destination or attraction, we have decided to refrain from arranging visits to any such organization.

Over the years, we have identified and supported a number of non-profit, charitable organizations doing admirable work throughout Asia. We enthusiastically encourage you to support one of these organizations if you are interested in giving back to the countries you visit during your travels. We have links to these organizations on the Responsible Travel page of our website. If you do choose to donate to an orphanage, we strongly urge you to conduct background research to ensure your money goes to one which upholds international child protection standards and financial transparency.