



Dragonfly Building Projects

Mud-brick Library at Baan Luuk Rak

November, 2009

Our aim for building projects is to construct useful buildings for communities or organizations which need them the most, and to provide opportunities for local people to learn building methods which they can use in the future. For volunteers, our goal is to provide fun, rich, and rewarding experiences of both teamwork and immersion in the local culture. We hope you'll make great friends and get to feel the satisfaction of having built a building with your own hands.

The Project

The staff at Baan Luuk Rak, a children's home in Khon Kaen province, have asked us to build a library for use by their 30+ children and the local community. We'll work for over 2 weeks to construct and decorate the building, while also teaching the children and interested local people how to build with mud-brick.

The Location

Baan Luuk Rak ('Luuk' sounds like Luke Skywalker) is a large project run by the Child Help Foundation, an organization started by Utis Buddhasub Somjai (better known as Kru Noi) in 2001. It is home currently to around 30-35 children - the numbers fluctuate as children come return to their families if and when they can. The home is on the outskirts of the capital of Khon Kaen province in Northeastern Thailand (better known as Isaan). Khon Kaen is about 500 km Northeast of Bangkok and is known as the heartland of Isaan culture.

Dates

This build will span 18 days from **November 11-28**. Volunteers will meet in Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima) and travel to the project site on Monday, November 10th.

What will we be building?

The staff of Baan Luuk Rak have asked us to help them by building a modest library to house their collection of donated books and to be used as a reading and teaching space for the children, who are home-schooled at the project site. The building will measure approximately 6x5m and will include exterior benches for reading space. We'll build the walls using mud bricks, with a concrete floor and a tiled roof. This building will be an important addition to the site and will help to promote reading and self-study for the children, while also acting as a community library for the surrounding village.



Just what is "mud brick building"?

For some background, mud brick, or adobe, is a building technique that involves building using mud-based bricks and mortar in place of baked clay bricks and cement mortar. The bricks are made by mixing mud, water, and rice husks in a pit (just like crushing grapes!), and then slopping the mix into wooden brick moulds and letting them dry in the sun. A mortar is made the same way and the bricks are laid much like normal masonry, but with some added benefits: the bricks can be cut and shaped with machetes so that curved walls and openings can be made easily. Thus, the technique is well-suited for curvy, 'organic' designs, rather than rigid squared corners and straight walls.

Because the bricks are made of locally available materials, made by hand (and foot), and sun-dried, the technique is low-energy has a very low environment impact. Unlike many modern materials, mud bricks do not cause health problems or create pollution. Buildings built with these techniques can be very soothing to the eye – creativity is the biggest limit on building design!

Your Job

As a volunteer builder, **your job** (don't fall out of your chair) **is to build**. You and your team will work each day under the guidance of a Dragonfly facilitator and often with local craftsmen or Thai volunteers. As a group, we'll work together to set working hours and divide the work according to skills and interests. Some days there will be a lot to do, and others will require some waiting. Daily tasks will include:



- mixing and pouring concrete foundation
- mixing and making mud bricks (a big job!)
- building brick walls
- installing windows and doors
- plastering with natural finishes
- adding sculpture and decoration to walls
- constructing mud furniture
- cleaning up the site, ETC.

Bear in mind that different jobs require different levels of skill and effort. You will never be required to do anything you're not comfortable with.

We'll also have some time to work with the children, running games and activities in the evenings and weekends if we have the energy!

Housing and Food

For this project, volunteers will live in basic but comfortable shared accommodation at the project site. You'll have a bed with bedding provided as well as a mosquito net if needed, in shared rooms in one of the home's dorm buildings. There is electricity and running water, however showers are not heated. There is limited internet access at the home and also a shop down the road for keeping in touch with home.

Food is prepared on-site and volunteers will be provided with clean and nutritious meals daily. Special diets can be accommodated and should be indicated on application forms. Please expect to eat delicious THAI FOOD for nearly all meals. This means, generally, rice or noodles with stir-frys and curries. Some 'foreign' food like bread and coffee will be available from time to time and snacks can be bought easily from nearby shops. Finally, there will be opportunities for those interested to learn to cook some Thai dishes!

Price + Payments

The price for this 18-day project is 18,500 Thai Baht (THB). You can use this link to see how this translates to your own currency: xe.com

The price for a building placement includes:

- food + accommodation on placement
- project orientation
- transportation from Khorat to Yasothon building site
- Thai language and culture training
- visa assistance
- contribution to project administration and building materials

A large portion of your fees will help to fund the project directly. Other costs which are not provided are visa fees; air ticket; and transportation, insurance, and entertainment costs; as well as food and accommodation while not on placement.

About Baan Luuk Rak

Baan Luuk Rak (= *house child love* or Home for Beloved Children) is a home for children and youth that has been operating for over 20 years in the Northeast of Thailand. The home's staff have worked tirelessly to provide a safe and loving environment in which to grow and develop. Over the years the home has worked with dozens of children and the CHF also runs a related nursery project to help struggling families in the city.

Most of the children at the home have come from difficult backgrounds. Many have lived on the streets and been mixed up in drug use and petty crime, while others have been abused. The staff and children live together as a big family, rather than an institution, and they believe that love is the most important of a child's needs.

Visas

As a volunteer, you can get a Non-Immigrant visa. It's possible to arrange either a single-entry or a multiple entry visa. You'll need to apply for the visa from your home country by sending your paperwork to the nearest Thai embassy/consulate. Once you have signed up for the project, we'll send you the visa paperwork and detailed directions on how to run smoothly through the process of obtaining your visa.

Health and Safety

All Dragonfly volunteers are **required to provide proof of travel health insurance**. There is a large provincial hospital in Khon Kaen, about 10 minutes drive from the project site, and staff on-site have some first-aid training. You'll be given a safety briefing before beginning the work and you'll only be asked to do work that you feel comfortable and safe with. The majority of the work with mud building involves lifting moderate loads (up to 10 kg) and working with your hands or simple hand tools.

As well, there is no known malaria in this part of Thailand, but we still strongly recommend discussing your travel plans with your physician or local travel health clinic before departure. Recent flu outbreaks across the world (swine flue / 2009 flu) might make a flu vaccine a good choice before traveling.



Finally, when traveling it's common to experience 'digestive upset' due to any combination of factors, including physical stress, different food, different water, etc. It's a good idea to prepare anti-diarrhea and stomach settling medications or else buy them in Thailand (cheaply and readily available) when needed.

Requirements

We're happy to welcome to this project anyone who is hardworking and not afraid to get their hands dirty. Volunteers should have strong team skills and because we'll be building at a children's home, often with the children involved, patience and good communication are essential. You should be able to lift, repeatedly, loads of at least 5 kg of mud in buckets or mud bricks, and generally be in good health. Prepare to get some exercise!

What To Bring

You'll be provided a detailed packing list prior to your departure, but nothing special is really needed, aside from comfortable shoes, a hat, and work gloves if you like to wear them. If you have hand tools that you'd like to bring, please discuss with staff what would be useful.

How to Proceed

If you're interested and you're prepared for a great adventure, here's how to do it:

- You can sign up for this placement for November, 2009.
- Paying a deposit secures your place on the building team. You'll be given visa paperwork and lots of pre-departure advice to help you prepare for a great trip.
- You need to apply for a visa, purchase a plane ticket, and pack your bag. Then fly. Don't forget work clothes and a hat!
- You'll need to travel to Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima) where the team will assemble before traveling together to Khon Kaen.
- There you'll meet your host community and move into your home for the next 18 days.
- Then you'll start. Your team will plan a work schedule then work through it to completion, building from the floor to ceiling and everything in between!

For more information or to sign up for this project, please contact through our website [contact form](#). We hope you'll join us in building the future of Thailand!

