



Volunteering at LEOT

Welcome to the LEOT School

Your volunteer contribution to LEOT is highly valued but as with all organisations there are some requirements you should be aware of during your time at our school.

LEOT

LEOT is a UK registered charity which funds and manages the LEOT School which provides free structured English classes to disadvantaged young people in Luang Prabang Laos. We also run a scholarship programme providing support for higher education in Laos and undertake community outreach programmes focusing on education, protection of the environment and medical assistance.

The LEOT School

The basic objective of our School is to provide a facility for students who cannot afford the fees at commercial schools and colleges. LEOT is not in competition with other English language institutions, but is seeking to reach out to students who would previously have been excluded from English study due to an inability to pay for tuition.

Our no-fees policy is central to the LEOT philosophy and when interviewing candidates for admission an assessment is made of each student's circumstances and preference is given to those with the highest demonstrated need.

Location

Our School is located in a local community in Ban Phanlouang close to the town center of Luang Prabang and particular efforts are made to encourage and support students from Ban Phanlouang and other neighbouring villages.

Day to day management

The day to day management of our School is undertaken locally, but strategic policy and major funding decisions are made by the Trustees of LEOT. The Trustees maintain

contact with the School, and the Chair of Trustees is also Chair of our local Management Board. Our Trustees are based in the UK but regularly visit the School.

Our School has a School Director based in Luang Prabang and a Homeland Director Thalavanh Vongsonephet based in Vientiane. The teaching and administrative staff are Lao and report to the School Director.

Decision making:

The Chair of Trustees and our local Management Board is Peter Banwell, who has responsibility for the professional direction of all colleagues associated with LEOT. The local operational team is headed by the School Director. The Local Management Board is currently made up of the Chair of Trustees, the School Director and the Homeland Director.

English Classes

Our School offers day and evening classes for Beginners, Intermediates and Pre-Advanced levels from Monday to Friday and holds a Beginners' class on Saturday mornings.

Classes at LEOT are small with an optimum size of 17 and are 90 minutes each. We have 190 students who study with us each year for a period of one year.

We have two terms a year and our students are tested on their written skills on a monthly basis and on their oral skills on a yearly basis.

We monitor the attendance of our students and all students must be recorded on the class register at the start of each class. Students not registered for a class are not permitted to participate.

Teaching Style

Our classes are taught by Lao staff based on the Headway curriculum (4th Edition). They are student-centred and our staff are expected to ensure maximum student participation. In particular, we are anxious to give our students the confidence to use the speaking skills that we try and develop. One of our ambitions is to create independent learners, who can further develop the skills provided by LEOT.

Whilst we do not want to be dominated by a culture of rote learning, we do use drills and repetition, particularly in regards to teaching correct pronunciation. We also use video and audio to develop our student's speaking skills. Classes also generally include in each lesson a review of the previous day's learning which is found to be beneficial.

Teaching Topics

When using Western teaching aids such as Headway we try to tailor our class lessons so that they are culturally relevant, although we find that our students are also keen to learn about other cultures.

Whilst we do not subscribe to any political or religious views, criticism of the Lao Government is not permitted. This does not mean that issues of current relevance may not be discussed such as environmental issues including global warming and the impact of industrialization and de-forestation.

Lao people are very open but there needs to be sensitive handling by all colleagues of issues pertaining to matters such as religious tolerance or gender equality, which should be particularly borne in mind in classes with students who come from ethnic minorities. Discussions about different languages, customs and cultures do however provide interesting material if appropriately handled.

Conversation Groups

We also offer structured English conversation groups lead by our volunteers twice a day Monday to Friday. These are one hour sessions and take place mid morning and mid afternoon.

Other Classes

We welcome volunteers with a variety of skills and offer additional classes where other skills are available. In the past these have included; motorcycle repairs, yoga, computer studies and a talk on puberty for young girls.

Education Visits

We offer educational visits to our students and at least once a year we visit either a cultural, historical or educational local establishment such as the UXO Centre, The TEAC Centre and The National Museum.

Community Outreach Projects

We encourage our students to participate in our community outreach projects such as our regular litter picks around Luang Prabang and our visits to rural schools for painting projects.

LEOT Students

Our students are 16 or older. There is no formal upward limit on age but the tuition opportunities at our School mostly appeal to those in the 16 to 26 age group.

We encourage a gender balance and one-thirds of our students are currently female. Given the number of temples within the immediate area Novices and Monks comprise a significant proportion of our student body. Administrative arrangements ensure that no classes consist exclusively of Novices and Monks. When working in our school females should be aware that it is inappropriate for Monks and Novices to have physical contact of any kind with a female.

While some students may have the means to purchase books for general reading and study, volunteers are asked not to ask students to buy books to support their study, as this may result in some students having books which others cannot afford.

No uniforms are provided or required but we do provide our students with a simple printed badge which can be sewn onto a white shirt and which should be worn as appropriate.

The Role of the Volunteer

The role of the volunteer in our School is not to be a class teacher. The LEOT School is staffed by Lao qualified teachers. The prime role of our volunteers is to act as a mentor to our Lao teachers, supporting them where asked in class and providing teacher training outside of the class room setting.

Volunteers also hold structured small group conversation sessions outside of formal classes to provide remedial teaching and additional practice of conversational English with our students.

We welcome those with experience of teacher training or teaching English as a Foreign Language. We also welcome those with skills and experience in other areas and with a desire to assist and develop others. Practical and creative skills are also invaluable to help us maintain the infrastructure of our School building.

We encourage volunteers to coach our Lao staff where invited to do so by them. We ask our volunteers to be respectful of our staff at all times.

All of our teachers are graduates from Lao Universities and may not have experience of Western teaching methods employed elsewhere. We ask that our volunteers do not directly criticize their teaching methods in front of our students or other staff members. It is far better to have discussion with them on a one to one basis if you have an idea that you think would be helpful to them.

To gain the most out of your experience it is important that you develop a mutually respectful relationship with our staff and students. They are happy to learn and engage with new ideas but are easily offended when not treated as equals.

If you have any serious concerns about the teaching methods employed by our staff these should be discussed with our School Director in private.

Bullying and Harassment

LEOT has a Bullying and Harassment Policy which ensures mutual respect for all students and colleagues and all decisions are made without regard to gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Similarly, student grades are awarded on the basis of genuine attendance and achievement.

In order to be a volunteer at our School you will need to agree to abide by our Bullying and Harassment Policy.

Student Protection and our Code of Behavior

We take the welfare of our students very seriously and have a Student Protection Policy and a Code of Behavior that you will be asked to sign prior to volunteering with us.

Dress code

When at School our volunteers are asked to observe neat, if informal, attire. Vest tops, clothing with political branding and shorts or skirts above the knee are inappropriate.

For men, a shirt with a collar, including polo shirts and long trousers should be worn. Similarly, female colleagues are asked to dress modestly and appropriately.

Staff and students are also required to wear an identity badge whenever in the School.

Timekeeping

Our School's operating hours are 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 12pm Saturday. The hours for volunteers will be agreed on application. Volunteers are encouraged to set and maintain a high standard of timekeeping.

Building and facilities

LEOT tries to provide a first class facility for teaching and learning in an environment where teachers and students work profitably and enjoyably. Our School has 3 large classrooms each of which is equipped with whiteboards, a projector, speakers, chairs, desks and fans. We also have a library which is equipped with computers with headphones for our students' use, books, learning materials and a projector. We have modern toilets and a large staff room, which is equipped with printers and has a staff kitchen.

Such a facility is expensive to operate and LEOT depends on individual gifts from donors, organisations and UK Gift Aid. 99.9% of our income is spent in Lao and Trustees and Volunteers fund their own travelling costs.

We ask colleagues to help us in a number of small ways by practicing the strictest economy in the use of LEOT resources. This take various forms such as turning out lights and switching off computers when they are not needed; printing double-sided and recycling paper where possible and not using facilities such as the telephones and stationery for their personal use.

If you identify an equipment fault or something amiss in the building please advise the School Director or a senior staff member as soon as possible. If you observe mis-use of

our equipment or facilities please speak to them and report the matter if you feel you need further support.

At a housekeeping level, please accept your part in the collective responsibility of keeping the building clean by disposing of rubbish thoughtfully. Finally, when leaving the building after the last class please check that everything is made secure, laptops and remotes are locked away, as are other items of value and all windows and doors are locked.

What should I bring with me?

Firstly, an open heart with a desire to share your knowledge and experience with others. LEOT works together as a large extended family with each party playing an important role.

A laptop or tablet would also be useful for your own personal use together with pens and a notebook.

Purified water, tea and coffee is provided free of charge. There are a number of small village shops within walking distance of the school where you can buy very basic snacks and cold drinks. If you intend to spend the whole day with us we suggest however that you bring some food with you, we have a fridge and microwave to keep things cold and to warm them up.

At least six weeks prior to arriving in Laos we would also suggest that you visit your Doctor for advice on any immunisations you may require. Please be aware that Laos has malaria and we would strongly advise you to take anti-malaria medication and to use a strong insect repellent containing DEET whilst you are here.

Some materials such as Blue Tac and coloured pencils are difficult to find in Laos and we are always looking for people that can bring materials that we need with them when they travel to our School. There is no obligation for you to do so but if you do have room in your luggage to bring any materials with you please contact our School Director on 03009887088 who will let you know what is on our latest shopping list.

What will it cost to volunteer with you?

Unlike other organisations we make no charge to our volunteers we would rather than you came to share your experience with us than charge you a fee. You will however

need to fund your own travelling and living costs. Luang Prabang has a wide selection of guest houses and hotels for all budgets from \$10 a day. Costs between October and March which is the high season are higher. You can contact us for recommendations of places where people have previously stayed.

What is the minimum period I can volunteer for?

Generally we do not accept volunteers for less than two weeks, but it does depend on the skills you have to offer and we are happy to discuss shorter periods with you.

One last word.....

You are most welcome here. We shall depend on the contribution you make, not just in the classroom and in the office but to the general welfare of the School and its students. Senior management will always listen to anything you have to say. To that end we have regular, brief team meetings at which information and ideas can be exchanged. We also hold team training days in which your participation will be welcomed.

We can't promise that we will always be able to do what you advise but your comments and concerns will be treated with respect and attention and we are sure that we shall benefit from your input.

Thank you for your support and we look forward to meeting you soon.