

lone buffalo

English is my future...

Volunteer Handbook



“My professional life has involved exposure to dozens of charities throughout the developing world. Lone Buffalo is one of the best I have seen. It’s big enough to make a difference, but small enough to remain focussed on doing a fantastic job.”

– James Thomas, UK - Media Workshop volunteer

What is Lone Buffalo?

www.facebook.com/lonebuffalo

Lone Buffalo is a community project and UK Charity which aims to teach young people English through quality education, sport and life skills to provide improved opportunities for individuals and their communities. There are growing job opportunities in Laos for young people who speak English and have a range of life skills. This relatively well paid work will benefit the whole community. As one student put it recently '**English is my future**'.



In the classroom

Lone Buffalo was born following the sudden tragic death of an inspirational local man, Manophet 'Lone Buffalo', who committed his whole life to helping others. By day he worked for the national programme helping clear unexploded ordnance left over from the Indochina war and in the evenings he taught English in a tiny classroom in his home. In 2006 he founded the school's football team on a dusty pitch opposite his home and two years later they won the National Day Cup. Everyone who met him was touched by his dedication, generosity, selflessness and stamina.

It was Manophet's dream to take his beloved football team to Europe. After meeting him Lone Buffalo co-founder Gareth Carter raised funding to take Manophet and his football team to Sweden to compete in the 2010 Gothia Cup, an international youth tournament. It would be the first time a team of Laotian footballers had competed outside of Asia.

Tragically, just before the team were set to go to Sweden Manophet died suddenly. Lone Buffalo charity was set up in his memory - and continued with the football project. The team returned to Laos with the Gothia Cup Fair Play Trophy - a fitting tribute to Manophet's legacy. This amazing journey is documented in the film *On Safer Ground*. This film created international interest in Laos, telling the story of the nations tragic past and exposing the deadly legacy of unexploded ordnance.

www.onsaferground.com

“The students and staff made the work and experience a pleasure and the kindness and acceptance from the local people gave me a sense of belonging. A great experience for anyone, and something I will forever remember fondly. ”

Australian Maddy - Volunteer Girls Football Coach and Teacher.

In late 2011, Lone Buffalo set up an English Development Centre in Phonsavan, with an inspiring teacher Nick Williamson teaching three levels of English, from Elementary to Intermediate, to nearly a hundred young people, including a sizeable amount from the H'mong ethnic group.

In a relatively short space of time Lone Buffalo has expanded to a teaching staff of six, with four Lao teachers from the local community, two of whom studied with Manophet. Lone Buffalo now teaches around 200 young people – with another 150 registered and waitin to join when classes become available.

The student ages ranging from 12 to 30, most are around 15 – 18 years old. Classes have a strong female presence and students and teachers come from Hmong, Lao and Khmu ethnic groups. Teaching takes place in the late afternoon and evenings after State school. Football practice in English is every Saturday and Sunday late afternoon and is generally supported by staff and volunteers.



After Saturday practice with volunteer coach Dirk

Lone Buffalo is unique because it teaches English by using a range of activities from its football teams, film making and ICT which also develop confidence and life skills.

Lone Buffalo's mission is to provide a centre where young people can study, exercise, engage in sport and develop creative skills in filmmaking and computers – all through the use of English.

“I volunteered at Lone Buffalo and came away with so much more than I gave. Thank you Lone Buffalo”

German volunteer Dirk – Football Coach and teacher

Laos in Context



Laos first emerged in the region as Lan Xang or the ‘kingdom of a million elephants’ in the 14th century. Despite some bursts of independence, the kingdom generally found itself paying tribute to more powerful neighbours, including the Siamese and Vietnamese. Geography ensured Laos was sucked into the Vietnam War and a lengthy civil war culminated in a communist takeover in 1975. After many years of isolation, Laos began to experiment with economic reforms in the 1990s.

Bordered by Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, Laos today has a population of 7 million in an area of 236,800 sq km making it one of the least densely populated areas of East Asia. The majority of the population are Lao Loum or Khmu and 8% are of Hmong ethnic origin.

Economically the World Bank rates Laos as one of the least developed countries in East Asia, with more than 75% of people living on less than US\$2 a day. More than three-quarters of the population still live as subsistence farmers and the total GDP per capita amounts to US\$2300 per person. Major exports are timber products, garments, electricity and coffee in that order. In recent years tourism has become one of the main generators of foreign income.

Transparency International ranks Laos 161 out of 174 countries in its Corruption Perceptions index 2012. Indeed corruption has become widespread at all levels, much to the frustration of the average Laotian and so the gap between rural and urban living standards and opportunities continues to widen.

Phonsavan



Phonosavan, Xieng Khouang Province is a spread out rural town of 60,000 people surrounded by predominately H'mong villages. It is located on a small plain in the Highlands at an altitude of 1100 metres and is surrounded by mainly wooded hills.



Using the Lone Buffalo bikes to visit the surrounding villages

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering is a relevant and cost effective way to increase equality of opportunity and in the longer term fight against poverty. Lone Buffalo runs a volunteer programme for volunteers to enable their commitment and skills to generate maximum results. Lone Buffalo is committed to ensuring the best possible volunteering experience and provides appropriate induction and training.

From the volunteers perspective it provides an opportunity to work at community level and gain a unique insight into the reality of life in Laos whilst developing their own skills and experience.

“The students have been the most rewarding part of my volunteer experience with Lone Buffalo. Their drive and passion to learn English in hopes to improve their future is remarkable. Interacting with them daily is teaching me what it means to live, work, and travel with meaning, which were my reasons for returning to Laos”.

American volunteer teacher True



Teacher True in the classroom with some of her students

Volunteering Opportunities

Because Lone Buffalo works to an academic cycle and makes a time commitment to induction and training, teaching volunteers in particular are encouraged to join the programme at set intervals e.g. September, December or April rather than mid term.

Longer term placements (3, 6 or 12 months)

- Senior trained teacher with supervision responsibilities
- Ideally, trained teachers

Short term placements (1-3 months) are usually:

- Sports coaching
- Administrative support
- Classroom assistants (Sep – June)

Short term projects (usually 1-4 weeks) could be:

- ICT technical support
- Training trainers/sports coaches
- Delivery of one off workshops e.g.:
 - Film making and media skills
 - Youth Entrepreneurship
 - Computer skills
- Library development
- Organisational Development e.g.
 - Development of financial controls/reporting
 - Governance development

E-Volunteering projects:

- Website design
- Organisational development initiatives
- Skype mentoring
- Development of training modules e.g. ICT

“You can be a tourist, a traveller or you can stay in a country long enough to get beneath the surface of local life, if you can offer some assistance along the way then you have a formula for a very rewarding experience”.

Jane, UK, volunteer organisational development adviser

How to apply:

Make sure it is for you – read risk assessment section, FAQs and email any further questions to: mark@lonebuffalo.org

Application process:

- Vacancies will be advertised on the Lone Buffalo Facebook pages and website
- Apply for an application pack, complete and submit electronically
- Skype interview
- Take up of References
- UK Disclosure and Barring Service background checks or equivalent

Safeguarding

Lone Buffalo operates Child and Adult protection policies, the details of which are available on request and will be covered in more detail during the initial arrival induction. Applicants should be aware that (DBS) for UK volunteers (or equivalent for other nationals) may be requested prior to taking up post.

What can you expect from Lone Buffalo?

Induction

On arrival you will be given an induction programme that will cover the following:

- Laos – the local context
- School orientation
- Personal administration – arrival form
- Phonsavan orientation tour and map
- Laos language lesson and loan of a phrase book.
- Cultural differences
- Communications
 - Internet
 - Local telephones
- Lone Buffalo – aims, principles and policies
 - Confidentiality
 - Safeguarding

- Job description with agreed objectives
- Training needs assessment
- Training programme if required

During your placement

- 2 days leave per month

On leaving

- An exit survey
- A reference

What does Lone Buffalo expect from you?

- A full commitment to the task and to your agreed placement period
- Good communications skills in written and oral English
- Open minded and respectful with non-judgemental approach that values other people and culture.
- Adaptability with a flexible approach and the ability to adapt behaviour to different situations
- Resilience
- The self-confidence to work with a variety of situations, diverse people and ambiguity
- Work to a high legal and ethical standard at all times, particularly in relation to issues such as child safeguarding and health and safety requirements

Practicalities

Visas

Currently volunteers are operating on 30-day tourist visas which are available on entry into Laos for most nationalities. You should check the full visa requirements relating to your passport.

Visas can be extended locally in Phonsavan and other regional centres. The ability to apply for Business visas is currently being pursued.

Communications

Wi fi is available at most guesthouses and popular local restaurants. Speeds do vary though depending on usage. Local sim cards cost a few dollars and calls/messages are cheap (15p per min for a UK Call).

Accommodation

Accommodation can be arranged, usually in a local guesthouse that provides rooms with en suite facilities, laundry facilities and wifi. The main accommodation and restaurant area of Phonsavan is located about 3 kms from Lone Buffalo school which can be accessed by walking, cycling or taking local 'tuk tuk' taxis.

Cost of Living

Accommodation is approximately \$10 per night, tuk tuk taxi ride \$1-3, main meal in restaurant \$2-4, beer \$1-3, coffee \$1. Market prices baguette 30c, bunch of bananas 60c.

Money

All transactions are done in cash in Phonsavan. There are plenty of reliable ATM's and advances from bank branches are straightforward (with a passport). Dollars/Euros and UK Sterling can be changed around town.

Shopping

- Markets – 3 local markets provide a range of goods from clothing and footwear to household requirements and local toiletries.
- Mini supermarket – western toiletries



Local market

Food

- Markets including wide range of fruit, vegetables and cooked food
- Mini supermarkets – range of Western and processed food.
- Laos restaurants
- Western food – pizza, pasta, breakfasts etc
- Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian

Transport

- Daily flights to and from Vientiane (30 mins)
- Long distance buses leave daily e.g. from Vientiane (10 hours), Luang Prabang (7 hours)
- Tuk Tuk Taxis serve Phonsavan but the service reduces considerably early evening.
- Motorbikes are popular and can be hired by the day/month.
- Lone Buffalo has a number of bikes for staff and volunteers use. Lights and helmets are provided.



Climate

- **November – March:** Pleasant daytime temperatures although can be cold (below freezing possible) at night in Phonosavan due to altitude. December to February can be particularly cold in the mornings and evenings.
- **July-August:** Wet with high humidity
- **April – June:** Hot with temperatures up to 40C.

Health and Security

Laos is generally a safe country to live and travel. However all life involves risk. You already manage risk in your life on a day-to-day basis. Taking up an placement in Laos may entail unfamiliar risks: it will mean living in a different culture and environment, facing different security and health risks and having limited access to medical support.

The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the risks you may have to face as a volunteer and to ask you to choose whether to accept these risks or not.

Assessing the risks

Lone Buffalo will advise of the current risks through this briefing and also during induction. Volunteers are expected to undertake their own research both before and during their placement, to make their own assessment about health and security risks, to identify suitable health facilities and to consider suitable evacuation routes. This is particularly important for volunteers with specific personal health conditions and risks that it may be difficult to treat with the medical facilities available locally.

The major causes of death for volunteers generally in any overseas placements are in fact the same major risk factors that prevail in most volunteers' home countries that is road traffic accidents and health-related. Political violence, war and kidnap situations remain a low risk. Incidents of burglary, robbery, sexual violence and harassment remain low when sensible precautions are taken.

Medical

The provincial hospital in Phonsavan deals with emergencies and minor injuries. For advanced medical care we recommend travelling to Vientiane or Nong Khai (Thailand).

Health Insurance

As medical and dental facilities locally are limited and it may therefore be necessary to relocate you for medical treatment (Bangkok in serious cases), you are advised to take out health insurance to cover you for the period of your stay.

Inoculations

You should seek advice from your local medical facility some weeks prior to your expected departure as to the current requirements and recommendations for inoculations/vaccinations including anti malaria and rabies.

Traffic Accidents

Scarcity of traffic in Laos means there are far fewer accidents than in neighbouring counties but accidents, particularly with motorbikes, are still the main risk to volunteers. Lone Buffalo advises on the use of crash helmets for both drivers and passengers of motor bikes, use of seat belts in vehicles when available and cycles should display both front and rear lights. Traffic laws should be followed at all times – even if the locals do not.

Social Media

There is a level of government monitoring of social media and political sensitivity, therefore social media posts that could be considered critical of government or other institutions, national laws, or sensitive political and social issues must be avoided. There are strict laws and tensions about relationships and sexuality; you should not openly discuss either.

Theft

Lao are generally a trustworthy people and theft is much less common than elsewhere in Southeast Asia. There are opportunistic acts that can be avoided by not leaving cash or other belongings on show and keeping valuables safe on crowded public transport.

UXO

Large rural areas around Phonsavan are contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO). Caution should be exercised by only walking on marked paths and never touching an object that may be UXO.

Relationships

Sexual relationships between foreigners and Lao citizens who are not married are illegal. Penalties of heavy fines, imprisonment or deportation can be applied.

Homosexuality

Technically homosexuality is illegal. Public displays of affection whether homosexual or heterosexual are frowned upon.

Government travel advice

Most home countries offer travel advice to their nationals which you should consider as part of your risk assessment.

UK

www.fco.gov.uk

US

www.travel.state.gov

Australia

www.smartraveller.gov.au

Visiting other areas of Laos

You may wish to add time at the start or end of your trip to travel around Laos. Independent travel is relatively easy and inexpensive; there is plenty of advice available from the staff at Lone Buffalo. Should you prefer to arrange a private tour Lone Buffalo recommends using Nakarath Travel.

<http://www.nakarathtravel.com>

FAQs

- **What clothing should I bring?**

- Check the climate for the time of year you will be in Phonsavan – it can range from 0C to 40C.
- To be culturally sensitive you should wear modest clothing, shoulders covered, trousers, long shorts and below the knee skirts.
- Dress in school is casual.

- In winter bring a jacket and sweaters – there is generally no heating in accommodation, and restaurants tend to be open to the street so you will need this for inside and outside.
 - During the wet season bring a lightweight rain jacket and over trousers if you are planning to cycle. It can also rain outside of the main wet season.
 - Umbrellas are useful for rain and sunshade.
 - Cotton and other natural fibres will keep you cooler in summer.
 - Bring a sun hat and good quality sunglasses.
 - Many guesthouses and shops offer cheap laundry facilities.
 - Larger size clothes and shoes to buy are very difficult to find.
- **What other items should I consider bringing?**
 - Face cream (all cream here has whitening added)
 - Prescription drugs
 - Sunscreen
 - Water bottle
 - Insect repellent
 - Tooth Floss
 - Tampons
- **Do I need a visa?**
 - You should check current visa requirements for your nationality. Visas are available at all international boarder checkpoints on arrival. It is useful to bring passport sized photographs.
- **Where can I renew my visa?**
 - Staff/Volunteers usually renew their visas in Phonsavan, Luang Prabang or Vientiane.
- **What can I bring that would be useful to Lone Buffalo?**
 - Stationery can be bought locally but there is not much choice
 - Markers, pens, pencils, teacher stickers etc
 - Educational games – learning to read activities etc
 - Graded learning to read books
 - Treat items
 - Pictures of your home, family and culture
- **How can I support Lone Buffalo when I return home?**
 - E-volunteer to support suitable projects
 - [Fundraise for Lone Buffalo with Just Giving](#)
 - Raise the profile of Lone Buffalo
 - Support ongoing resource collection projects

“From the moment my first class arrived wearing smiling enthusiastic faces, I knew working with Lone Buffalo would be rewarding. The added bonus was living in, rather than simply passing through, the quirky but charming town of Phonsavan, getting a real taste of life in Laos, and making new friends - both local and international”.

– Jackie Thomas, UK – Volunteer Teacher (now Chair of UK Trustees)

Data Protection

Data either in paper or electronic format is:

- Fairly and lawfully processed
- Processed for limited purposes
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Accurate
- Kept only as long as necessary
- Processed in accordance with the data subject's rights
- Secure
- Not transferred without adequate protection

Confidentiality

All Lone Buffalo staff and volunteers are bound by principles of confidentiality to ensure that they treat with discretion any sensitive information to which their work gives them access. All staff and volunteers sign a confidentiality undertaking to agree that they will not divulge or discuss details with others.

Equality and Diversity

Lone Buffalo is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive culture for:

- all those who need our services
- our volunteers
- our staff and
- other stakeholders.

Lone Buffalo recognises the positive value of diversity, promoting equality and fairness, and challenging discrimination.

Lone Buffalo aims to follow best practice, making equality, fairness and diversity a fundamental part of all our activities. We recognise people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions, and we wish to encourage and harness these differences to make our services more relevant and approachable.

Lone Buffalo will not discriminate or tolerate discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of race, colour, sex, gender identity (transgender), disability, nationality, national or ethnic origin, religion or belief, marital / partnership or family status, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, social class, educational background, employment status, working pattern, or any other factor.

Lone Buffalo

Trustees

Chief Operating Officer
(Mark Steadman)

Education Services –
Lead Teacher

Support Services
Manager (vacant -
local position)

- Development and delivery of English education service
- Teaching staff/volunteer management/supervision
- Student reporting
- Relevant Contract reporting
- Student awards

Teachers
Class room assistants

- Sports and creative skills programme
- Strategic development – business plan
- Communications (Marketing/PR, internal/external)
- Funding
- Induction
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Monitoring of Volunteer programme
- Social enterprise programme
- Data Protection
- Safeguarding

Volunteers

- Feasibility study 5 year goals
- Business plan implementation
- Office Manual development and maintenance
- ICT – maintenance and development
- HR
 - Records
 - Staff/volunteer recruitment administration
- Statistic collection
- Finance
 - Book keeping
 - Petty cash
 - Payroll
 - Invoices
- Office Supplies
- Infrastructure
 - Rent
 - Cleaning
 - Repairs
- Administration including:
 - Data Protection
 - Safeguarding

