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## Traveling and Contributing In Cambodia

By Sophie Braccini



Tum Mao's family Photo provided

explains.

The story started three years ago when Lipa met Pandra Ou during a trip to Cambodia. He had been her guide during her vacation and as he drove her and a friend back to the airport she asked him about his next job. The young man, in his mid twenties, explained that he had been raising money to build wells for family farms. "The women and the children can spend hours every day transporting water to their homes and fields," explains Lipa, "the farms are scattered across the countryside and no centrally located water supply can suffice." Lipa inquired as to the price of a well - \$220 - she and her friend dug into their purses and gathered the money. "This is for another well," she told Ou.

"I was not expecting to hear from him again," remembers Lipa, "but a few weeks later I received a report with pictures about 'my' well." This was the beginning of their collaboration. Since then, both the local and US organizations have incorporated as non-profits, about 300 wells have been dug, and Friends of CCDO also supports an orphanage and four schools.

Last January, Olmer and her family decided to go to Cambodia. A characteristic of the Olmers' vacations is that they go to places where they can make a difference. "We had heard about (Lipa's) organization in the Siem Reap region and were very impressed with the loving care, efficiency and transparency of the management," said Olmer.

She started to correspond with Lipa and decided to lend a hand. "When (Lipa) came for a visit to California I organized a presentation through the local American Association of University Women (AAUW) chapter's International Travel Club. Their response, enthusiasm and generosity always surprises me, but this time they outdid themselves."

AAUW members and their friends donated funds for four new wells, a new kitchen for the orphanage, and a scholarship fund for village children. They were also interested in traveling to Cambodia and asked Olmer and Lipa if they would organize a trip. "I've always been passionate about combining travel with grass roots philanthropy," said Olmer, "this time I am excited to create an opportunity for others." The tour will be guided by Ou.

For more information, contact Olmer at [xenija@aol.com](mailto:xenija@aol.com) or Lipa at [jenni@spatrek.com](mailto:jenni@spatrek.com). For more information about CCDO go to [www.friendsofccdo.org](http://www.friendsofccdo.org).

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Jenni Lipa and Ksenija Olmer were destined to meet. The New York travel agent (Lipa) specializing in international luxury spa vacations and the Orinda mom (Olmer) on a mission to save the world may seem an unlikely pair, but they clicked last January in Cambodia, around a well. From this connection emerged Travel with a Purpose, which will take twenty interested adventurers to Cambodia in 2011.

The two planned excursions of ten travelers each, one departing in March and the second in October, will support the Friends of Cambodian Child's Dream Organization (Friends of CCDO). The first group will meet in Bangkok on March 27 and will depart for Siem Reap the next morning. For four days the group will visit the famed Angkor Wat Temples in the mornings; in the afternoons travelers will interact with schools and orphanages and visit a Silk Farm and Artisans D'Angkor, an organization dedicated to the survival of Khmer culture through its arts and crafts. The group will then visit Laos from April 1-4. Those wanting further adventures can visit the city of Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand, or continue their journey in Myanmar (formerly Burma).

Lipa says she priced the trip at cost, "I'm a travel agent, specializing in high-end spa all over the world; this is my way to give back," she