

Complete update - Shalom Valley!

During the past months Shalom Valley became operational. As I am writing this now a new group has arrived. Wow, such beautiful first experiences. In this newsletter we like to catch up with you about all those things that have happened. Read with me.

From the time in October that we were back in Cambodia until the end of March it was just a long run to finish the first phase of Shalom Valley. And of course, "finished", is relative, but there had to be done so much before we could welcome the first guests. In the meantime we can look back on that time and have the time and rest to reflect. It was such a job, but with also such a beautiful result.

From the moment we set foot at Cambodian soil again, we rolled back

into a project that was running at full speed and where diverse problems - or so they say 'challenges' - were awaiting us. Challenges as in planning, money, technical specifications and more. And of course we had to accustom ourselves to being here. The school had to be restarted and we rolled back into the children work, super fun and super busy. Around Noel we noticed that this was way too much. Because there was no possibility to stop we worked on until the end of March. After this we had a wonderful time off as a family. Do you recognise it that you can only feel how tired you are when you stop running, and how even then you still are running full circles, even when you can take some rest? So the first week was still 'rake out'. The time after this became more 'normal', relaxed, rest, together.

At that moment we had again the emotional energy to look differently to Shalom Valley. Because behind concrete, walls and a roof lays off

course a vision that goes far beyond material things. It is easy to lose sight of this, but how cool it is to have a clear view on that again.

I remember the first camp at which we had about 80 people on our terrain and that there was a problem with the water. I was the only one who was worrying about it. The children and young people fully enjoyed themselves and took shower under a garden hose. No problem, everything just went on and during this 'imperfect' camp God touched these children and young people and let them feel - and us - His love and shalom.

The first groups have been here meanwhile and everyone is super enthusiast. All 652 children and young people have until now, heard about Gods shalom and His love for people. And that number grows every week. So extremely special!

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This News is sent out about 4 times a year in order to inform you well about the things that are happening in our lives and enables you to pray with us. Feel free to forward this letter to others.

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SHALOM VALLEY - TECHNICAL

To give a good view of the size of the Shalom Valley project and what we were able to build until now we had a [short video](#) made. When you didn't see it yet you surely should do that first.

Now some numbers for those who love that.

- The Shalom Valley terrain is about 5 hectare big at 800 meters distance (0,497 mile) from the sea
- There is one big dormitory with space for about 100 people with two stores in it
- 8 sleep makers, 2 small meeting rooms and two bathrooms with 4 shower cabins and 5 toilets in each
- we have also made 1 big meeting hall in which we can come together with 500 people to have worship, training, meals, games and a lot more
- there's one industrial kitchen with a capacity of about 1000 meals a day
- there's about 500 meter of drains underground to expose of waste and rain water
- around the territory a 700 meters of wall is build, beautiful with local stones to form a safe barrier and help us to protect our land more or less against the animals
- further on we drilled three wells to give us our own water supply
- we also build our own waste water system (biological)

- Shalom Valley turns fully on solar energy (is off-grid) and has storage batteries and everything that might be necessary. Very impressive!
- I spoke lately with the chairman of a big international camping organisation (CCI) and they said that this would be probably the first camping in the world to have this. That was not our purpose but it sounds fun.
- We made one big soccer field 95-55 meter on which we can play soccer but also play all kinds of games.
- We made 10 games outdoor above water. A super fun and educational experience for both children and adults.
- We also made in a quiet corner a fishing pond where people can sit nice and quiet and try to catch a fish

Another factor which complicates the project is the fact that we have no connection whatsoever to the, what we would call gas, water and light in the Netherlands. When we bought the land there were large, bare rice fields and wooded country. So we had to build everything from the bottom up.

First we had to explore where exactly the boundaries of our property were. That is quite a challenge as (also caused by the red Khmer and the years of civil war after) the boundaries are not predefined. Sometimes they are on paper but there are no boundary markers. Or these are moved. It is a complicated process

with neighbours, local authorities and (sometimes corrupt) other people who all have to say or think something about it. After this we had to level the land to the right ground level. Rice field is always a very 'low' land because a lot of water is necessary to grow rice. Therefore we needed to buy hundreds of truckloads of soil to bring all of the land to the right level. A big job.

Another factor which made this project complex is the fact that the terrain is positioned next to a red earth road which in combination with rain doesn't come in handy. To say it more simply: it doesn't work. You have to imagine that during the rainy season the roads are just one big mud hole and not usable near the camping terrain with a normal car. Sometimes you can manage with a motor with the consequence that you, when you arrive at the terrain are covered with mud. When we were on furlough in the Netherlands they had to lay down the work for a few weeks because there was simply no supply of building materials possible. It is difficult to explain because we have such a good drainage system in the Netherlands. Which 'simply' isn't here..

Just some factors that we share to give you a bit of insight. We don't want to say that the frustrating things prevail or that we don't think it cool to be able to work on this project, on the contrary. Especially these challenges make that we learn a lot. To start with ourselves, we experience that God teaches us who we are and how we can serve Him with our strong and weak sides. We enjoy being allowed to be part of a project that is so beautiful. So strategic. So appealing. That fits to us so well. It is really a privilege to be allowed to do this.

We are also allowed to invest a lot in the lives of others by this project. To learn how you, in this culture, can deal with a project. How you can e.g. solve a conflict with respect. Wonderful isn't it, when you can start a meeting about a problem with prayer?



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SHALOM VALLEY - PEOPLE

More important – much more important – beside the things that we build are the people with whom we work together.

When we moved to Kep two and a half year ago we had the opportunity to work together with Pon. Over time a very fine friendship grew with Pon and his wife Srey An. Cool to move along together but there was way too much work for this very small team.

Of course we were always supported by Alongsiders International. Praying together, planning together, searching together, discussing things. Sometimes one step forward and two backwards. Craig Greenfield (our international director) but also other staff members are a faithful backup from Phnom Penh. Since the end of last year our team in Kep grew very rapidly. At the moment about 15 people work at Shalom Valley. Some of them know the Lord Jesus and some yet don't.

It is very good to see how individuals are becoming a team. We enjoy working together considering norms and values. What is it we want to present? How does that show in what we do every day? We notice that a lot of staff members have to get used to look at this so consciously. Former work experiences were more headed

on 'just do your job', while we especially want to grow together, are genuinely interested in who they are as people. We want to stand beside them when things get tough and we want to join in laughter when there are things to rejoice.

Lately therefore we visited Srey An together. She gave birth to a beautiful baby and we wanted to celebrate this of course. Srey An lives in a corrugated iron house with tamped earth on the floor. Sober, you might even say she is 'poor'. But what we saw on that day was joy. A strong woman who stands for her family, and is (yet) the only one who believes in the Lord Jesus, but wants to be an example, a signpost towards Him.

At these kind of moments a lot of that which separates us falls away and we are

simply one in the Lord Jesus and share in the joy that He gives. We hope and pray that working at Shalom Valley will bring many people to Jesus. Do you pray with us?

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SHALOM VALLEY - FUTURE

It may look all beautiful on the pictures but we surely aren't ready yet. Phase one of the project can be (almost) ready, but we have more ideas. There will be the biggest part of our job in the coming period.

We want to build a separate office where we can sit as staff, can work and discuss. Now there is a temporary office in one of the dormitory buildings. Furthermore we will build a swimming pool to be able to do more games in and with water. The plans for it are already in an advanced stage. Cool!

Next to this we would like to make more outdoor activities above the water. We have the necessary space and would give opportunity to add more cool learning experiences. Think about things like building a raft with two groups and raft racing together. Two zip-lines above the water and see who will get the furthest. Etc. Above this we received a gift to build a playground for the younger children. Super fun!

Another nice development is that we notice that Cambodians are discovering camping in tents. Especially among youth who live in Phnom Penh is it becoming a popular way to celebrate holiday. It is relatively cheap and a very nice opportunity to escape the busy crowded concrete 'jungle'.

We want to respond to this as Shalom Valley and develop an area where we can place 20-30 tents. The nice thing is that these camping people can make use of the facilities we already have on the compound: the kitchen, the games etc.. In this way we can enlarge the capacity of the total because 25 tents means quickly about 50-70 people extra.

The facilities we have now are totally headed towards groups on groups, but we would like to welcome another group at Shalom Valley too: Families and kin. We believe that investing in families is investing in the future as well.

Time with each other, time in quietness and silence. Time to be quiet with God, read the Bible. Some people call this a 'silence retreat'. Rest with the intention to spend time with



the Lord. We think that this is 'gold'. That's why we would also like to build a couple of bungalows.

In the planning of the land we already considered this option for the bungalows. This means that we can start from the beginning with this piece of land: bringing the land to ground level, laying drainage, drilling for a well, arrange waste water, arrange for electricity, etc.. A wonderful challenge!

The complexity of building these bungalows is less than that from the buildings we made until now. I myself hope that the people whom I have trained in the past years, during the

building of the other buildings, can build now more independently and in this project they can take the role of project leader. I can superintend onto it as a director, that there will be quality, progress and I will be there when there are more nasty problems. I think this can be a very nice phase in which we can step further as 'Alongsiders' to the sidelines.

Of course there are even more plans and ideas but for them to be realised will take years. As for now we have more than enough work to do and time to go on training the team.

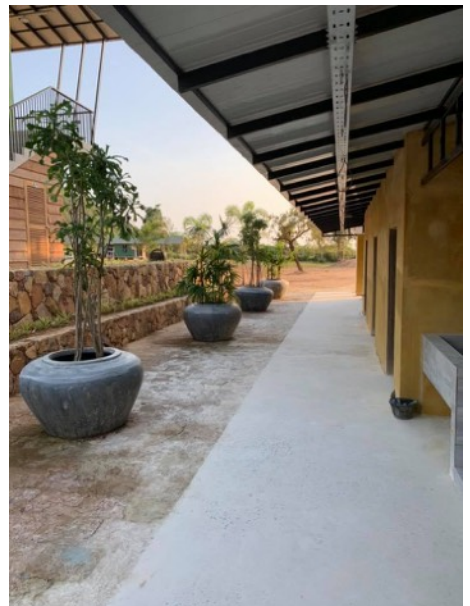
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SHALOM VALLEY - BUILDING



SHALOM VALLEY - FASE 1 'GEREED'





It became a long story. We are very grateful that you read it all unto this point. There has happened so much in the past months that we couldn't come to make a newsletter and yes, when we finally did it it grew long. Nevertheless we are very grateful about your sympathy.

We didn't write yet about the homeschooling, how Jessica is doing, the children work in the

neighbourhood and the Bible study on Tuesday evening. Family visit in February and a visit from Mart-Jan to New-Zealand. So much has happened!

The children work and the Bible-study-work go very well and we are grateful for nice developments, but we will write in a letter about this soon. We promise it will not take months this time ;-)
listed below are some specific points for prayer and also for thanksgiving.

Give thanks with us:

- for Shalom Valley and for the blessing which it has been already until now
- for the team that gradually forms. It is really beautiful to see people change.

- for more rest/ a normal rhythm to us as a family; thankful that we could receive Mart-Jan's mother in February together with Sjanneke (Mart-Jan's sister) and her daughter Roshanne
- for a good visit to New-Zealand where Mart-Jan stayed two weeks to learn about a new software program (Venue 360) which will be used for the camp. At the same time he could give a couple of nice presentations about Shalom Valley in a couple of sympathising congregations there. He is also grateful for the nice contact with Lucas and Erin Fraser which he had during that time and the nice camps he could watch to grow in experience.

Pray with us:

- for strength and health. We are in the hot season with feeling temperature around 42 degrees Celsius, this takes a lot of our energy
- for faithfulness in the various tasks we have
- for insight to attend the growing team well
- for wisdom considering all the plans we have with Shalom Valley
- for our relations and our example for all the people we meet. We really want people to see the Lord Jesus in us and be able to put their trust in Him

Until next time!

Kind greetings from us from Kep

Mart-Jan&Talitha,
Joy, Micha and Amy

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