

## Shalom Valley – open for business and transformation

Tenth church has long had a special partnership with Alongsiders in Cambodia, and over the last weekend in January that partnership took a big step forward, as we celebrated the opening weekend of Shalom Valley – Cambodia’s first adventure camp for kids.



Guests came from overseas and within Cambodia – including more than 100 Alongsiders and their little brothers and sisters – some travelling more than 12 hours by bus for the camp. And the weekend kicked off with games and swimming at the beach.

Shalom Valley is nestled on the coast of Cambodia, 800m from the ocean, in the sleepy resort town of Kep. It is the place where Khmer kings and queens used to take their holidays before widespread bombing during the Khmer Rouge years destroyed the area.

For many of these children, living in villages dotted across land-locked provinces, it was their first time seeing the ocean. They jumped off the bus, with eyes-wide and huge smiles, as they felt the sand between their toes for the first time and raced into the waves.

As the weekend unfolded, the activities were based around four key areas of growth that Alongsiders seeks to nurture, called the Circle of Courage:

1. **Belonging.** Every person, every child, longs to belong. We long to be welcomed and to know that we are loved and accepted. For many children, chosen to be a “little brother” or “little sister”, they first experience that radical welcome through their Alongsider, a local Christian youth aged between 16 and 29, who comes alongside and encourages, mentors and discipless them. During the camp those bonds are strengthened as they get to spend extended time together. Alongsiders also gain a sense that they are part of a wider movement as they meet together in the larger group.
2. **Mastery.** Every child has a God-given need to grow and develop in their skills and understanding. For many living in poverty, repeated rejection is a central part of their experience. Their self-confidence is often low and they may struggle with fears or anxieties. The Water Obstacle Course at Shalom Valley is designed to be challenging – for both adults and children. But it is ultimately a place where they scale new heights (sometimes literally) and grow in confidence. At this opening camp, we took time to celebrate the “little brothers and sisters” who had recently become Alongsiders themselves by awarding them the official Alongsiders baseball cap.



3. **Empowerment.** This official opening weekend was marked by the leadership, not of foreigners, but of the young Cambodian Christians leading the way in everything from worship to preaching, sports to logistics. The aim is to create a space where young Cambodians can grow into leadership. Over the coming months we will not only hold the usual Alongsiders camps here, but also specialist camps for those who want to grow in their worship skills, children’s ministry, or entrepreneurship. This is an area Tenth hopes to contribute to as we come together for a learning exchange around a common camp theme.



4. **Purpose.** The official opening of Shalom Valley was celebrated at our Saturday evening worship event. The theme was that God has a purpose for your life no matter how young, or marginalized you are. We heard a challenging message about how the Shalom Valley land is marked by a scar – a bomb crater – from an American B52 bomber during the Vietnam war. But God delights in using those with scars (think of Jesus with the scars on his hands and feet) because scars show that we have been through pain and come out wiser.

This message tied in with the workshop earlier in the day where each Alongsider had painted a small clay pot. After painstakingly painting these pots, they were asked to break them. Finally, they put the pots back together and prayerfully considered how God puts us back together in our own brokenness. They learnt about Japanese pottery that is repaired with threads of gold to make something even more beautiful than before.



With these words of encouragement resounding in our hearts we lit candles to represent the Christ-light that shines within each of us, lighting up even the darkest place. Then we walked slowly towards the wood that had been prepared for a bonfire. The smallest “little brother” stepped forward and lit the bonfire as our official act of opening Shalom Valley. One by one we threw our own burning candles on the bonfire to add our light to the blaze.

It was a powerful moment, full of symbolism and emotion.

Thank you, Tenth Church, for helping build this beautiful place for the children of Cambodia. Phase 1 is officially complete – which puts us to the point where we can welcome children and youth.

In 2019, we are kicking off Phase 2, which will allow us to welcome families as well.

Shalom Valley. Officially open.

Christ's light shines.

