

LAOS



2023-4

## Programs 2024

### Authenticity in English Language Teaching Lao TESOL 2024 Feb. 1 / 2

Call for presenters:

- 18th Lao TESOL Conference  
1-2 Feb 2024
- Pre-Conference workshops  
30-31 January 2024.

### Bankuen TTC

Workshops for teachers and teacher trainees



### Rural High School Teachers

A new program proposed by Bankuen TTC.



### Magic Palms

Team teach Lao high school students in a warm student centered environment.

### Join a Student Led City Tour



## Come to Laos

You can be sure that your visit will be interesting and professionally invigorating. Stepping outside the box and learning from others, teaching in situations that are, *same same but different*, is an invigorating experience. It is a heartfelt reminder of what truly matters. Leave Laos knowing that what you have done is worthwhile and appreciated. Lao teachers need our support we need theirs. In these difficult post covid times it is more important than ever for us all to stand together. The Lao Program is THHT teachers helping teachers helping teachers, we all learn so we all benefit.

Over the past 15 years we have had over 200 visits to Laos. Our program aims to leave nothing but foot prints and good memories. We work hard to ensure that our visits are completely self supporting. Our programs are organized by Lao teachers and aim to respond to their expressed needs. It is always exciting for me to contemplate our next visit. This year in February we managed to have a full program in Laos with five visiting teachers and the kind support of THT. Our visit was wonderful, hospitality and kindness overflowed. Next year we are hoping that more people will join us. In the words of one THT member, "I am always surprised to see how much Lao teachers achieve with so little, when in Japan we often achieve so little with so much." (Continued on page 2)



## NEW Programs

### Lao TESOL Proceedings

Mentor Lao writers, assist with editing Volume 3 of the proceedings, submit an article to enhance the value of your visit..

### Develop Test Materials

Assist with the development of testing materials for primary and secondary schools in Laos.

### Stay for a year

Are you retired or on leave? Work with English teachers and students at the NUOL for one year. No money but lots of warm heart warming experiences..

### Presenters on Study in Japan

Offer presentations for private school students wishing to study in Japan.

### Refugee Education

Assist with English education programs for Save the Children Fund, in refugee camps on the Thai/Burmese Border.

### Led by Trish Summerfield

Assist with educational programs in developing positive thinking, emotional management and enhancing values in action. January/ February. LaoTESOL



(Continued from page 1) Lao TESOL was held together by an amazing team from the National University. The contributions our program makes can be seen in the warm reception we continue to receive year after year, a clear reminder of just how much our visits mean. In the words of one high school teacher, “without your teachers visit`s I would not have remained in teaching.” A teachers life is often difficult but it is also an inspiring life. The life stories of rural farmers children who have returned to Vientiane after receiving scholarships to study abroad are gratifying. We are still visiting many of the same teachers we first met 15 years ago. Many thanks this year to the NUOL for a great conference and to THT for supporting our program at Bankuen Teachers Training College and for offering support to rural Lao high school teachers to attend Lao TESOL.

Expect the unexpected go with the flow and learn why **Lao People Don` t Rush** join us and visit the **Lao PDR**, only a short flight away to another world. Join us in 2024.

Amanda and Donald joyfully flowing with the unexpected.

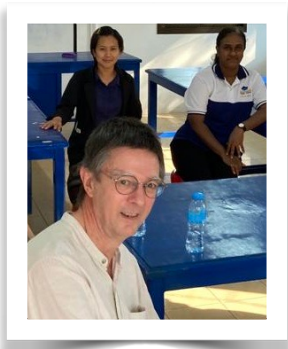


### Exploring Inner Space: Living Values and Quality of Life

Exploring Inner Space and Living Values. This coming year we are very pleased to be working together with Trish Summerfield an educator from New Zealand who has lived in Vietnam for 25 years. In Trish`s words, which concur strongly with my thoughts on Laos, “I think the Vietnamese are innately positive and innately resilient. In Vietnam and Laos people practice resilience and tolerance naturally.” Summerfield to date has written and directed over 200 TV programs exploring inner space and has set up seven Inner Space Centers in Vietnam. Programs are offered for free. She has contributed substantially to Living Values Education throughout Asia. Living Values programs help us to discover our own values and the benefits of living by them.

### Web Link Trish Summerfield

(Photo left side), Two fabulous educators Trish and Oulay.



## Michael Carroll Laos 2023

I have been part of several THT and BOLT programs over the last 10 years or so, and had always been interested in taking part in the Lao program. Finally I decided to give it a go this year, and it was all I had anticipated and more.

The program spanned six days in mid-February, beginning with the two-day LaoTESOL conference, a small, intimate conference for 250 Lao English teachers, with around 50 presentations over two days. On the following day we had a day of sightseeing with a group of students. Then we spent two days on school visits, one to a rural high school, and another to a private school in the city. Finally we visited Bankeun teacher training college to conduct workshops with teacher-trainers and students.

Laos is an astonishing country. The teachers and students we met were curious about us and our lives, eager to talk and easy to talk to, and knowledgeable about current trends in teaching. We were warmly welcomed everywhere we went, even being invited for meals in the homes of our hosts.

The classrooms we visited allowed us to see two very different aspects of Lao schools. First we went to a secondary school in the countryside outside Vientiane.

## Giving it a go!

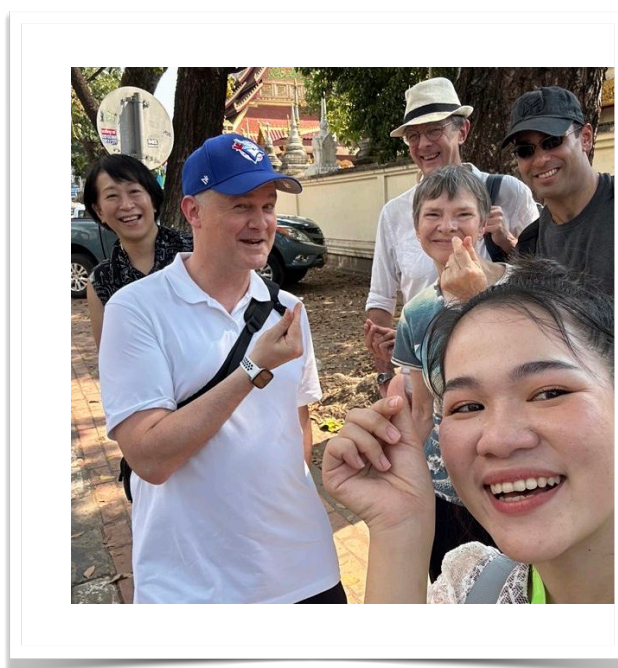
From the outside it reminded me of an Australian school, with classroom buildings set in extensive grounds shaded by clumps of trees. A closer look, though, revealed less basic resources. Despite these problems, the students we met were keen, disciplined, polite and friendly, and their teachers were skilled and professional in their teaching.

The second school we visited was a private bi-lingual school in the city itself which would not be out of place among the best schools in any city in the world. It provided a contrast with the rural school, and showed what some modest funding and a lot of dedication by committed and well-trained teachers can achieve.

For me the highlight of the trip was our visit, on the final day, to Bankeun teacher training college. Our small group of five presenters gave workshops here to one of the most engaged groups of teacher-trainers and students that I've ever encountered. They entered enthusiastically into the spirit of a wide variety of activities, asked searching questions, and made well-thought-out comments. That these were the people on whom the future of Lao education depends was encouraging. With sufficient resources the future of schooling in Laos will be in good hands.

I'm very grateful to Chris for organizing the program so efficiently, to my fellow attendees for their support and friendship, and to all the Lao teachers and students who welcomed us so warmly. I learned far more from all these people than I could possibly have contributed, and am looking forward to returning to Laos in the near future.

Michael and Seiko, Donald, Shalvin, Amanda, and one of their guides, off on a student led tour.



## Weaving threads together



### Learning to weave, a visit to the Lao House Museum.

#### Shalvin Singh

Joining the THT Program in Laos was a great experience, due primarily to the many friendly, kind-hearted, highly motivated educators I had the opportunity to interact with. This was my second trip to Laos, I had previously taken a vacation there more than a decade ago. Visiting as part of a THT group, following the end of the coronavirus pandemic, proved a very different, but overall more enjoyable and rewarding experience.

The trip began with the two-day conference held at the National University of Laos, the top university in the country. The conference itself was a warm human centered experience, certainly chaotic at times: schedules had to be changed last minute, a few presenters from abroad didn't show up, some presentations went way over time, etc. Certainly, those expecting JALT-style organization would be in for a surprise. But that's how things go in Laos, and it really wasn't a big deal, allowing our group more opportunities to chat with the Lao teachers and to make deeper connections. The presentations themselves were generally practical and well received, and the environment overall was very positive. Everyone seemed sincerely interested in sharing teaching ideas and approaches, and working to help to

improve English language education in Laos. The conference organizers were quite appreciative of our presence and very hospitable, inviting us in the evening to a banquet for presenters held in proper Lao-style, with large quantities of food, beer, dancing and karaoke available. It was a fun, relaxed time, and everyone there enjoyed themselves.

Following the conference, some students from the National University very graciously offered to show us around Vientiane. Although I had visited many of these sights before during my previous trip to Laos, it was quite a different and overall more enjoyable experience to do so with locals, who taught us about Lao culture and history, and were friendly, talkative, intelligent, mature people, keenly interested in the future of their country. Another highlight of the trip was the visit to Magic Palms School, a private kindergarten, elementary, junior and senior high school in one. It was a fantastic example of what can be accomplished, due mainly to the passion and hard work of its teachers and administrators. At the school, we were spontaneously asked to offer lessons to students, which was certainly a little unexpected, but the students themselves were highly enthusiastic, active, and a joy to teach. The dedicated staff effectively offered its students a high quality education. On the final day of the trip, we visited a teachers college some distance away from the capital, Vientiane. The campus itself was quite modest, most of the bathrooms, for example, lacked running water. However, the teachers there were serious about improving language education in Laos, and participated enthusiastically in our workshops. While many were not highly fluent in English, a situation not unfamiliar to language educators based in Japan, they were open to new ideas and approaches, and were passionate about improving their language teaching skills.

A big thank you to Chris, THT, my fellow attendees, and all the Lao teachers and students who made this trip such a positive, meaningful, memorable experience for us all.

A country lunch with fellow educators in Bankeun.



## Donald Patterson

I recently took my second trip with THT to Laos, which was long overdue as my first visit in 2017 was the most rewarding conference experience I have ever had. This second visit easily matched the first and, in many ways, surpassed it. I flew from Nagoya to Vientiane on February 9 and met up with my fellow THT colleagues the following morning for a delicious breakfast at Chris's home before heading off to the National University of Laos for Day 1 of the LaoTESOL conference. The conference was a special experience in that it brought together Lao teachers of English, Lao professors, and invited presenters from Vietnam, the US, and our contingent from Japan. In addition to the presentations, the conference provided ample opportunities to interact and socialize with Lao teachers, including leisurely coffee breaks, lunch at the university cafeteria, and a special dinner for presenters.



## An Overdue Second Visit

On Day 2 of the conference, I presented classroom activities to help students develop their ability to ask questions in English. The audience was eager to join in, and the time flew by. Looking back at the article I wrote for the newsletter in 2017, I realize that I was a bit anxious and overly prepared on my first visit. This time, I embraced the, "go with the flow" mentality, knowing that in Laos, unexpected events are par for the course and surprises are part of the journey. Despite this, things always came together, often resulting in a more fulfilling experience than originally planned.

In the days following the conference, we also visited a rural public secondary school and a private school in the city with classes from kindergarten to higher secondary. At both schools, we were invited to give impromptu lessons. Despite having no preparation time or access to materials, the lessons were well-received, and the teaching was a joyous experience. The visits were a reminder of how much schools in Laos are able to achieve with limited resources.

Another highlight of our trip was a guided half-day tour of the city by four 4th-year National University students who were knowledgeable, funny, kind, and intellectually curious. If they are any indication of Laos's future, it is bright indeed. Together, we visited several key temples and museums, the Patuxai monument, and the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) Visitor Center, which works to raise awareness of disabilities and rehabilitation services in Laos.

My second trip with THT to Laos was a truly enriching experience. It was an opportunity to share knowledge and expertise with fellow teachers, learn from their experiences, and gain a deeper appreciation of Lao culture and people. We were warmly welcomed everywhere, including into the homes of Lao educators for incredible home-cooked meals. I returned to Japan on February 15 with a renewed enthusiasm for teaching and a sense of gratitude for the experiences I had in Laos. I am already looking forward to the next opportunity to visit and work with the wonderful people there. *Khob jai lai lai deu.*





### Amanda Gillis-Furutaka Kyoto Sangyo University

This was my fifth visit to Laos with the THT team and I am delighted that we were able to resume our program there after the enforced 3 year hiatus. We could see the effects that the coronavirus pandemic has inflicted on the economy and tourism when looking at our usual hotel, now boarded up with a For Rent sign outside. While there were a few other favorite places and products no longer to be found, other innovations, thriving businesses, and a good number of tourists indicated that the country is recovering.

The two-day LaoTESOL conference is unique because people can attend and present only by direct invitation. It is held at the National University of Laos and is primarily an opportunity for Lao teachers from around the country to experience professional development. It also provides an opportunity for Lao academics to meet and present their research and to network with the foreign academics who have been invited. There is always a strong American presence because the conference is largely funded by the US RELO Office based in Hanoi. This year, there were also many Vietnamese presenters and one plenary speaker who added new perspectives to the discussions on the conference theme “Digital Advances in the English Language Classroom”. This year, the THT team members were given the chance to present twice. Presentations that introduce good teaching practices and activities, modeled by the presenters, seem the most appreciated and handouts

### My 5th Wondrous Visit to Laos

are always eagerly received. There are plenty of chances to network and talk with Lao teachers during the morning and afternoon breaks (with delicious Lao snacks and fresh fruit) and over delicious lunches, which were served this year at the university restaurant.

Although the conference is an important part of the Lao THT program, there are many other activities that are an essential part of the package. Sightseeing with students from the National University of Laos was especially enjoyable this time because we did this after the conference, rather than before, with some of the students who had been introducing and assisting us during our presentations. So, we already knew each other and felt very relaxed in each other’s company. They showed us how to bang the huge gong at the first temple and it was extraordinary to feel the power of the vibrations and hear the deep reverberations. I would never have dared to do this if they had not been there to encourage us! We were all impressed with the English level of these students. One of them spoke with the accent and fluency of an American teenager. He explained to me that he had achieved this mainly through watching his favorite American YouTuber – a testament to the power of digital technology, the main theme of the conference.

This year, our visit to a rural high school was planned for the second day after the conference. For me, this visit is as important as the conference because it gives us a glimpse of the daily reality of the Lao teachers and their students. Usually this visit comes before the conference so that first-time presenters know in advance the challenges Lao teachers face in their teaching, unfortunately this was not possible this year. The first class I attended was with about 25 junior high school students, the teacher worked patiently and diligently with his students. The students were confident and enthusiastic enough to repeat English with gusto after him. In the second classroom we had a chance to work with students in small groups which was a lot of fun. Lao teachers face many challenges in their daily teaching lives. The visit was highly worthwhile and inspiring.

The following day, our spirits were further uplifted by our visit to Magic Palms, a privately run school, for pre-school through to high school. They follow the Lao curriculum in the Lao language but also teach in English and have additional classes such as drama and performing arts and hands-on robotics for elementary to high school level. The students are very outgoing, polite, and friendly. We were all given a class of high school students to teach for an hour. Being asked to teach a class of unknown teenagers with no preparation time sounds daunting. In fact, we all had a wonderful experience. The students are highly engaged very positive and have a very high level of English. They are quick to understand and follow instructions and eager to try anything. They are a credit to their teachers and to the school’s educational approach. Some of the oldest students had just returned from Thailand where they had been participating in an international exhibition of technical innovations, the only representatives from Laos alongside adult researchers and organizations from 24 countries. Their inventions included pencils made from dead leaves (avoiding the use of wood), an edible spoon (reducing plastic waste), an automatic water dispenser triggered by dry soil, original perfumes made from local plants and a perfume dispenser, an automatic hand sanitizer and a device for raising homes above flood water. (Continued left column Page 7)



## Amanda (Continued)

On the final day of the THT program, we visited Bankuen Teacher Training College, a 2-hour drive from Vientiane. We were warmly welcomed by the college principle and vice-principle who attended both the morning and afternoon sessions.

The other participants were local high school teachers, college teachers, and students. We aimed to provide basic and practical language teaching sessions. All that we did was met with enjoyment and enthusiasm, a lot may have gone over the heads of the college students, who had had few chances to interact with English speakers. It was a wonderful day spent with teachers and students. Combining LaoTESOL with CamTESOL (usually held a week later) is a great idea because the teachers in the countryside experience similar difficulties and constraints.

Although CamTESOL is on a far bigger international scale and is hosted by IDP Cambodia rather than a National University, both conferences offer presentations of a high standard in an extremely warm and friendly atmosphere. Lao TESOL is funded by outside agencies and is primarily for Lao teachers of English and invited presenters. Participants in both conferences are happy to chat with everyone between sessions, and join in enthusiastically with whatever you ask them to do. Audiences are very receptive to new ideas.

If you go to both conferences and are looking for an adventurous way to see more of the Lao and the Cambodian countryside, I suggest

using buses. I did this and although it was a very long journey, I had a lot of fun. Interestingly, the many different people I travelled with were full of praise for Laos and especially for Lao people.

### Finally Notes of Gratitude

Thank you, again, Chris for all the work you put in, and showing us around. And thanks to all of you for making the trip so relaxing and enjoyable. I hope we'll see each other again at future THT events. I certainly hope to get back to Laos again.

Thank you so much Chris for organizing the whole program and making so sure that we were all OK all the time. Your care and consideration are very much appreciated. I now need to catch my breath after my 26-hour odyssey (magical mystery tour bus journey to Phnom Penh).

A big thank you to Chris, THT Laos, my fellow attendees, and all the Lao teachers and students who made this trip such a positive, meaningful, memorable experience for us all.

My thanks to all of you for making the Laos trip so enjoyable. I really appreciate having had the opportunity to take part, and to meet you all. Especially, thank you Chris for all the work you put in behind the scenes. I know how much time and effort goes into organizing these things, and its thanks to you that this program went so smoothly.

Firstly I am writing to thank you all. You were amazing. It was a perfect, fun visit in so many different ways. THT programs have a special kind of magic that inspires. Our efforts in going to Laos and other countries are sincerely appreciated by all the amazing teachers we all meet. In Laos over the past 15 years it has been most gratifying to see the development in skills of the many teachers we have worked with. A few simple words or deeds well placed can indeed make a big difference in peoples lives. We all certainly have had a lot of fun and in the words of one special visiting teacher, have learnt so much more than we have shared. THHT is certainly a great way to refresh our teaching practice.

I would like to say thank you to you and your team members, very much for your support in organizing the workshops. The workshops were very fruitful and productive. Our College teachers, secondary school teachers and students feel enriched about gaining the pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills that you offered. I hope that you will find more ways to help us.

