

## The Living Land Community Farm

The Living Land Community Farm is a co-operative enterprise that grows organic vegetables and rice. They work with and support the local community to help benefit the people of Laos and to provide educational and working opportunity to those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We spent half a day at the farm learning how to plant rice, in a place surrounded by mountains in the idyllic countryside. It was extremely breathtaking, and each moment seemed like such a good photo opportunity.

Before we got our hands dirty and experienced the life of a farmer, we each had to don our farmer's hat, which was a simple conical hat, to protect us from the sun.

The first place we went to was to plough the soil. The farm used Rudolph, the buffalo, to help with the ploughing. All of us had the opportunity to plough the soil by holding on to a wooden shaft attached to the buffalo, and commanding Rudolph to go or stop. It was an interesting experience as we had to go into the mud, to command the buffalo, definitely a first time experience for all of us!

After ploughing the soil, we were supposed to plant the rice seedlings. As every rice seedling is planted individually, it definitely took a lot of time and effort to ensure that all the seedlings are planted correctly and properly. We had to go into the mud (again), and planted each rice seedling 3 cm away from each other. The planting and placement had to be extremely precise in order to ensure that we are maximizing the space, without overcrowding and 'suffocating' the rice seedlings.

We then moved on to the next stage, which was harvesting and winnowing the rice. We used a pair of huge wooden sticks and hit the harvested rice against a wooden board. The moment the rice hits the wooden board, rice grains come out, onto the mat and we will have to keep hitting it until all the rice grains from the rice plant comes out.

After we were done with the winnowing stage, we collected all the rice, and proceeded to husk the rice grains in a huge pestle and mortar. We needed to use our entire body weight in order to get the pestle and mortar to work, and it was definitely a good workout!

(Fun fact: An average family does this for 30 – 40 minutes each day. No wonder they are all so fit!)

After husking the rice, we placed it in a woven and flat "basket" in order to sieve the rice grains and the husks out. It was an acquired skill, as we had to flip the basket up, in order for the husks to be blown away by the wind.

While our newly processed rice was being put in the steamer to steam, we had a chance to press our own sugar cane juice on an ancient wooden presser. Two people were supposed to hold each end of the presser, and run it around, while

the sugar cane is being pressed, to release the juice. After about half an hour of continuous running and shrieking, we tried the fresh sugarcane juice, before proceeding upstairs to enjoy our lovely rice feast.

We were given the glutinous rice that we just processed to try, along with other rice snacks such as rice puffs, wafer rolls, and even rice wine! It was a great way to end off our 3 hours of hard work, by ending off our short rice harvesting experience by feasting like kings and queens.