



PRIDE IN SIEM REAP

In 2023, for the first time ever, Pride was celebrated in an orchestrated way across the country starting in Siem Reap, Battambang and culminating in a massive event and celebration in Phnom Penh. Beautiful Life Organisation (BLO) was the sole organiser of Pride Siem Reap and organised a 4-day weekend of events for their beneficiaries and the public at large.

For the opening night of Pride, BLO organised a cultural night including an LGBTIQ+ themed photo exhibition, live art, poetry reading, fashion show and drag show. The poetry was written by staff and beneficiaries of BLO's drop-in centre, A Place to be Yourself (APTBY), a couple of months earlier during a 6-week creative writing course they joined, hosted by Writing Through. The theme of their poems was "Be Yourself" and BLO invited some of their beneficiaries and staff to read their poems on this evening.

"I was asked to read my own poem... First I was a little scared but then when I started to read, it was normal and I enjoyed it... I saw other people performing individually from one stage to another stage. There was dancing, modelling and other short performances. It was incredibly amazing. I might say that it was my first time and I really want to join it again."

- APTBY visitor (17 year old female)

The opportunity was given to me to read my poem on the stage. I felt very happy, but a bit nervous because that was my very first time...

There were audible wow's from the captive audience whilst our community read their very own poems that reflected their lived experiences and those of our community. There were loud rounds of applause after each poem.

After, there was an LGBT+ group showed about their fashion model... and dancing performances which had many many LGBT+ foreigners and Khmer together standing by to support each other. You knew immediately I said wow, it was touching my heart so much.

- APTBY staff (30 year old trans man)



Opening remarks from Shinta Mani's GM



APTBY staff and visitors reading their poems at the Opening of Pride

Amongst other fun and educational events, the Amazingly Fabulous Pride Race took place on the second day of Pride Siem Reap – a tuk tuk scavenger hunt where teams had to decorate their tuk tuks and race to various locations, scanning codes, answering questions and completing tasks along the way. APTBY had a team of staff and beneficiaries join the race, and our drop-in centre (unknown to them) was also a question and challenge stop on the race. Teams had to locate and identify the intersex flag, and complete our condom challenge by correctly putting a condom on a wooden penis. They could not pass the challenge without listing all the steps involved, including “Check the expiry date,” and “Make sure the packet isn’t ripped or torn.”



“Pride is the biggest celebration for LGBT community. I used to see people joyfully celebrate it in Western countries and I really wanted to join it. This year my dream came true.”

- APTBY staff, 27 year old male

“Being apart of this event is a great opportunity to show who I am and to celebrate diversity. This event inspire me to be brave, to be the voice for myself and also my community, and to enjoy the moment that has been lacking for a long time.”

- APTBY staff, 30 year old male

The evening event on the third day of Pride Siem Reap was Siem Reap’s first ever LGBTIQ+ themed Nerd Night (4-6 speakers who share their ideas, works, thoughts, passion or adventures in 20 slides, which play for only 20 seconds each). BLO’s very own director did a presentation on Intersexuality – other talks were on the Lavender Scare: Witch Hunt for LGBT in Government; How Love Became Love (history of the LGBT+ Pride movement); Asexuality; and another one of APTBY’s visitors bravely did a talk on Homosexuality vs. Religion.

“This year is the first time I was asked to give a presentation on LGBT community after I had been joining some events in LGBT community organised by APTBY. I was asked to share my perspective based on being an LGBT Christian... It was a new challenge for me, not just for a public speaking skill but also an opportunity to stand firmly in the public saying that I am an LGBT Christian and it was also the first time for me to come out in public... Thanks for having me in the Pride Siem Reap this year. I hope something I did this month could benefit or even inspire some other LGBT people to use their own voice to be heard.”

- APTBY visitor, 38 year old male



A big turn-out for our LGBTIQ+ themed Nerd Night