



freepackers

Kerala, South India

VOLUNTEERS PRE-DEPARTURE GUIDE 2019/2020

Location

The program is based in Fort Kochi, Kerala which is where volunteer orientation and general administration is carried out by the local team. Projects are located in Fort Kochi.

Fort Kochi is a quaint neighbourhood in the district of Cochin - Ernakulum. Its delightful lanes filled with influences from different parts of the world hint at a long, eventful history that began with Kerala's flourishing spice trade. The greenery filled streets of present day Fort Kochi are lined with colonial mansions, heritage hotels, beautiful churches, trendy cafes, souvenir shops, and fragrant spice markets; just perfect for a relaxed stroll into the past, with a piece of history at every corner. With a mix of Catholics, Muslims and Hindus, this peaceful residential area will give you a true flavour of the eclectic culture and history of Kerala.

Cochin is a safe and welcoming city and volunteers can enjoy an abundance of activities in the surrounding area, including visiting the hillside tea region of Munnar, cruising the backwaters, or staying in surf and yoga retreats on the coast.

Our Program Manager Geetha can help you plan your excursions within Kerala on arrival.

Fun Fact: Cochin is also known as Kochi by the locals. Fort Cochin is also called as Fort Kochi.

Arrival and Pick Up

We ask you to arrive in to Cochin International Airport (COK) on the Saturday before your start date as accommodation is provided from the Saturday night before your start date and your orientation starts on Sunday.

If you arrive one or two days earlier, or depart one or two days later, you will need to pay US\$18 per night directly to the local team in Kerala on your arrival (this includes meals). If you require an airport pick up outside the hours of 6am to 8pm on the Saturday, you will be charged US\$25 for your pick up.

We ask that you book a flight that arrives before Saturday afternoon so that you can join the tour of the Fort Kochi area in the afternoon; however, we understand this is not always possible and you will still be collected from the airport at the time your flight is due to arrive on Saturday. It is important to specify your flight number and airline in your arrival



details, so if your flight is delayed, the local team know what time you will be arriving. You will be met at the Cochin International Airport by our driver.

If you are traveling in India prior to your program starting and arrive in Fort Kochi overland, you will need to arrange your own transport to the volunteer accommodation. It is important that you arrive overland on Saturday as your orientation is held on Sunday. If you have any questions about your pick up, you can contact your in-country manager Geetha Raj.

Pick up

If you are arriving by flight our driver will be waiting outside with your name on a placard. Due to security at the airport drivers are not allowed entry inside the airport. If for any reason you do not see him you can call Geetha Raj.

Post Pick up

Once you have been picked up, you will be transported to the volunteer accommodation in Fort Kochi, and the procedure for the next few days will be explained in regards to meeting the other staff, volunteers and your orientation. If your flight is late night than our staff will meet you the next morning.

Programs

I. Teaching

The aim of the Teaching project is to promote greater literacy, support opportunities for higher education, build vocational skills and enhance career prospects among students. Kerala is known to be one of the most progressive states in India with very high reported literacy rates of almost 95%. However, literacy in Kerala is measured in the local language Malayalam, rather than in languages that are useful for education or employment outside of the state. School dropout rates after primary school are also very high, particularly among low income groups. As a result, many local people find it difficult to find employment because they lack qualifications in English literacy.

The Teaching project is well suited to volunteers who have strong English skills and a passion for education. Volunteers on this project will work in schools throughout the Fort Kochi area to build the English language ability of children between the

ages 6 and 12 years-old and provide an important support to under-resourced local teachers. Volunteers work alongside local teachers and project coordinators and may also be required to assist with math and science lessons, as well as English lessons.

Classes are typically small, with one volunteer working with no more than 10 students and volunteers are guided by competent local teachers and teaching guides. There is a significant amount of preparation expected from volunteers to plan for their lessons. The local team will help you with lesson planning, suggest topics for the lessons and provide ideas for creative ways to teach. However, Lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers.

The presence of volunteers helps to build the students' confidence in English from a young age, giving them a valuable head start in life, and enables local teachers to focus on students who might be struggling in other areas of study. The influence that international teaching volunteers have in Kerala schools goes beyond the classroom. Crossing boundaries to work side-by-side with students and teachers from different cultures fosters a two-way exchange, building cross-cultural understanding and global awareness. You are not required to have previous Teaching experience to participate on this project, however we encourage volunteers to come prepared by completing some relevant training, such as a teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) course.

II. Medical

The aim of the Medical project is to offer medical students a unique opportunity to be exposed to working conditions that may be very different from their home country, as well as the chance to exchange knowledge and cross-cultural learnings with local healthcare professionals and other international medical volunteers. Gaining experience internationally will also boost students career prospects within global healthcare. Kerala is famous for having the best public healthcare system in India and doctors in South India are well known to be among the best in the world. Medical and Nursing volunteers will be given a rotation in their chosen area or department and will observe all aspect of their mentor's work, including patient consultations and surgery. Induction training is provided and volunteers work in groups of no more than four other volunteers under the guidance of one mentor. As a volunteer on the Medical project, you have the unique opportunity to work under the supervision of practicing medical professionals within modern private

hospitals. You can choose from a wide range of specialities and have unprecedented, first-hand access to the daily duties of leading doctors and nurses working in that field. Departments that volunteers choose from can include paediatrics and neonatal, imaging and radiology, emergency and critical care, oncology, cardiology and cardiac surgery, neurology and neurosurgery, gastroenterology, urology, gynaecology, transplant surgery and one of the country's largest and most advanced dialysis practices.

Volunteers must be medical students, or students of nursing or another relevant medical field. The majority of volunteer work on this project is observational but medical students may have the opportunity to do basic tasks, which is at the discretion of the doctor you are working with. Nursing students can expect more hands on work including blood pressure measurement, helping with bandages and other basic tasks at the discretion of the nursing staff.

Community based health camps can also be arranged for groups of volunteers. In the past medical students have also conducted first aid workshops in school.

Note that only breakfast and dinner are provided on this project and lunch needs to be purchased at the hospital or clinic volunteers are placed at, for a very affordable price.

The hospital is 60 mins from the volunteer house so expect to commute for this program.

- Requirements for Medical in India You must be a student in Medical School, pre-medical students and fully qualified physicians aren't eligible to join this project
- You must email the local team your resume and reference letter from university before your arrival to the program
- You need to bring two passport sized photos as this is required for hospital registration and you will not be able to begin your placement without these
- You need to a white lab coat to wear while on this project

III. Women's Education

As a volunteer on the Women's Education project in Kerala, you will work on local initiatives that support and educate women and girls in the Fort Kochi community to develop their English skills, build their confidence and grow their leadership capacity.

Women in India face a wide range of social inequalities and many women do not have the opportunity to complete their education or enter the workforce because of an early marriage and a very conservative family environment.

The aim of the Women's Education project is to work with these women and girls to improve their English ability so those that wish to, are in a better position to gain paid employment and secure a better future for themselves.

This volunteer project primarily supports women aged 20-60 years old and occasionally younger girls in the community. It is important to understand that the project is open to all women within the community, this includes women from low and middle class families, as well as anyone who wants to learn.

You will be working with the women to improve their spoken English, and build literacy. The lessons are held in small groups in a close-knit, comfortable environment with various teaching resources available (whiteboards, books etc.).

There is a significant amount of preparation expected from volunteers to plan for these sessions. The local team will help you with lesson planning, suggest topics for the lessons and provide ideas for creative ways to teach. However, Lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers.

This project is well suited to volunteers who are compassionate and have the ability to communicate well with women. We ask that you come with realistic expectations about what you can accomplish during a short duration on the project and an understanding that the main focus is to improve the level of English and conversational skills of these women.

You are not required to have previous teaching experience to participate on this project; however, we expect volunteers to have a good grasp of the English language and we encourage volunteers to come prepared by completing some relevant training, such as a teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) course.

IV. Kindergarten

The aim of the Kindergarten project in Kerala is to give young students a good start to learning the English language. Kindergartens are typically associated and housed within primary schools and you will be working in the junior classrooms of schools throughout Kochi.

As a volunteer on this project, you can expect to assist local Keralan teachers with basic teaching and caring for children aged from 3 to 6 years-old. Classroom

activities include; familiarizing children with the English alphabet, playing word and picture association games, art-based learning, leading exercises based on songs and rhymes, supporting teachers with sports and physical games, and helping at meal times.

There is a significant amount of preparation expected from volunteers to plan for their lessons. The local team will help you with lesson planning, suggest topics for the lessons and provide ideas for creative ways to teach.

However, Lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers. Previous experience or qualifications in early childhood education is advantageous but not required to join this project, as you will be working under the guidance of local teachers and project coordinator.

V. Special Needs Care/ Disabled Care

As a volunteer on the Kerala Special Needs Care project, you will play an important role in providing people with special needs an opportunity to learn new skills and a level of care that they otherwise would not have access to. Having a child with a physical or mental disability creates negative social stigma for families in India and low income families find it very difficult to diagnose and support disabled children with the care they need.

This project is best suited to volunteers with a caring and compassionate nature who are patient, hardworking and willing to offer support with a range of duties. Volunteers work with disabled children aged between 2 and 18 years of age in schools and care facilities.

Disabilities range from severe to mild and many of the individuals supported by the project have both mental and physical disabilities. In addition to their disabilities, they only have a very basic understanding of English, therefore volunteers are supported and guided by passionate and expert carers at all times.

As a volunteer on the Special Needs Care project, you can expect to get involved with basic sensory activities, life skills learning basic English education, physical movement, or with vocational activities. There is a significant amount of preparation expected from volunteers to plan for their lessons. The local team will help you with lesson planning, suggest topics for the lessons and provide ideas for creative ways to teach. However, Lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers.

You are not required to have any previous experience to join this project, however any volunteers with skills or experience in special needs education and learning is welcomed.

Resources to bring

If you do want to bring anything we request you to bring the below that can assist our projects:

Reading books, English learning activity books, toys, Blu Tac, Funky Art material, Stickers, Colours, Puppets, Educational Games, Flash-cards, Used laptops and Used I-pads. Spoken English and grammar books are useful.

You can email us if you want to bring anything else also.

We also request you to bring your laptops or ipads as you can use these for planning your lessons.

Your routine: Program Structure

Orientation

Orientation in Kerala starts on the Sunday prior to your selected start date. Training will cover everything you need to know for your volunteer program including an Introduction to India and Indian customs, local language training, rules and expectations, safety and risk management, travel opportunities in India and a detailed introduction to your project and placement. The orientation will also give you a chance to meet other volunteers and explore the beautiful local area.

Example Volunteer Week

On your first day of volunteering, you will be escorted to your placement by a local coordinator and introduced to the placement staff you will be working with. A typical daily schedule would be as follows:

TIME EVENT

8.30 AM - 9.30 AM Breakfast at the volunteer house.

9.45 AM - 12.00 PM Volunteers leave home and travel to their placements. Work and hours are dependent on the project and placement that the volunteer is working at.

12.30 PM - 2.00 PM Lunch break either at the placement or volunteer house. Volunteers can also take this time to lesson plan their sessions for the following day.

2.00 PM - 3.30 PM Work at the placement. Volunteers are free to travel back to the volunteer house, lesson plan, go sightseeing or relax in one of the artsy cafes in town once placement is over

6.00 PM - 7.00 PM Dinner at the volunteer house.

There is a group meeting held once a week on Thursdays that all volunteers are expected to attend to discuss their program with staff and other volunteers.

Please note, this schedule does not apply to medical program participants as you will be having an early breakfast and leaving the volunteer house for your placement by 8.30am.

Accommodation

Volunteers in Kerala are accommodated in a volunteer house shared with other volunteers. Living is comfortable and you will have access to electricity, WiFi and western style toilets. Your showers are cold but being a warm climate almost all year it's never a problem. All bedding is provided and you can expect to be sharing a room with 1 to 4 other volunteers of the same gender. Mosquito netting is put on windows so you do not need to bring mosquito nets. You will be required to bring your own toiletries and towels. Private room upgrades are available for \$25 per night and you can inquire with your in country manager Geetha Raj prior to arrival. We have private rooms in the house and if this is booked out we will keep you in a private room at a guesthouse within walking distance to the volunteer house.

The volunteer house has tea and coffee facilities all day, fresh drinking water, a kitchen area (with a separate fridge) for volunteers use, a lounge area and a resource area. There is also a balcony and rooftop that are for your use. The house is fitted with CCTV cameras, basic medical first aid box, fire alarms, and fire extinguishers for your safety. WiFi is available in common areas but please do not expect this to be the same speed as back home. During power cuts WiFi may be interrupted which is beyond our control.

We have our office area on the ground floor where staff are available daily from 8 am to 5pm. We also have a safe in our office if you want to keep any extra cash or passports with us.

[Photos of the volunteer house are here on this link.](#)

Meals

Three meals are provided per day, excluding dinner on Sunday evening. Please note that only breakfast and dinner are available to volunteers on the Medical and Dentistry projects and lunch needs to be purchased at the hospital or clinic you are placed at, for a very affordable price.

South Indian food is tasty and diverse, and volunteers can expect to experience a myriad of local flavors and meals during their experience.

Breakfast is different on each day and would be either Indian Breakfast or on some days eggs, bread, fruit and tea and coffee. Lunch and dinner features local curry dishes made with a base of coconut, rice, roti or chapatti. Meals are typically vegetarian and include potatoes, okras, brinjal, gourd, carrots, beetroot and various pulses and lentils. If you have any dietary requirements, please let us know ahead of time so that we can make arrangements for you.

However, we need to stress the point that you should not expect to eat as you normally do at home, we will do our best to see that you are well taken care of, but as a volunteer there is also a need to be flexible. If you want western meals you can easily get this at the local cafes and restaurants in the area.

How to Prepare:

Visas

Ensuring that you qualify for and have sufficient time to obtain your visa for India should be one of the first things you organize when planning your trip. If you haven't already, we recommend you do this immediately.

Indian visa requirements vary depending on your purpose of travel, length of stay, nationality and place of residence.

Purpose of travel: We strongly recommend you select "tourism" as your reason for travel on your visa application and on your immigration form when entering India. This is because our programs fall under the category of "volunteer tourism" and while other visa types may be available, they are often unnecessary, very expensive, and time consuming to obtain.

Stating that your visit relates to "volunteer work" can cause issues because local authorities may interpret this to be paid work, for which you will require the appropriate



working visa. If you state “work” or “volunteer work” as your purpose, immigration officers could also demand that you pay extra in order to acquire an employment visa, which is not necessary for your volunteer program. Our programs are classified as “volunteer tourism” due to the structure of our volunteer programs. Volunteers participate on the program in India for a short duration (6 months or less), do not work on a full time basis (an average of 3 to 5 hours per day) and do not receive any pay or free accommodation/meals in compensation for their volunteer work, instead volunteers are self-funded.

Due to these factors our volunteer program is classed as a “tourist” trip. We understand, of course, that you will be actively contributing your time and skills to help the local community, however from a purely bureaucratic standpoint this type of a trip falls under the category of tourism.

A tourist visa is therefore best suited for your stay in India and if you arrive in India with an employment or volunteer visa, you will not be able to participate on the program.

Length of stay: The tourist e-visa is only valid for 30 days and must also be arranged online prior to arrival in India. An Indian tourist visa can be obtained from your nearest embassy prior to arrival in India and is valid for up to 6 months for multiple entries. To enter India, your passport must also be valid for at least six months beyond your date of arrival.

Nationality and place of residence: Volunteers of all nationalities are required to obtain a tourist visa prior to arrival in India. You will need to check with your nearest Indian embassy to verify your specific requirements.

How to apply: Only citizens of certain countries can prearrange a 30 day tourist evisa for India online, please see the following link for further details: (<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>). This is a double entry visa and cannot be extended beyond the initial 30 days. For volunteers of other nationalities, and for those staying longer than 30 days, a tourist visa can be obtained through your nearest Indian embassy. The cost depends on your length of stay. Allow at least 10 business days for processing, plus additional time if mailing your application.

All the information details to apply for the indian e-visa will be provided. Please contact reservations@freepackers.com if you have any question.

Fort Kochi, Kerala India - 682 001

Travel Documents:

It is highly recommended that you make two copies of all your important travel documents (passport, flight tickets, and travel insurance) before you leave home. Leave one copy with a friend or family member and take the spare copy with you. Bring your passport as well as an identification card (such as driver's license or student card) for traveling as you may be asked to present this when making tour bookings or checking in for flight/bus trips. To enter India, your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of departure from India.

Vaccinations:

Vaccinations are not typically required to enter India although this can vary depending on your travel path, including your home country and previous travels. We recommend carrying out independent research and talking to a travel doctor about the required vaccinations if you plan to travel before or after your volunteer program. You may choose to get vaccinated against some illnesses. Be sure to allow sufficient time to receive any vaccinations prior to your trip.

Please carry with you preventive agents, such as mosquito repellents, as well as other medicines for headaches and stomach aches. In the event you need a doctor's attention, the local team at the NGO has access to an emergency medical service and will take you to the hospital if necessary. There are very reputable hospitals in the area where you can be treated.

Travel Insurance:

It is mandatory to purchase travel insurance for the time you will participate on our volunteer program. Your insurance should cover medical emergencies, emergency evacuation, trip cancellation, personal belongings and personal liability.

We can recommend World Nomads Insurance and also STA Insurance for your travel to India.

Flights:

It is your responsibility to send us your arrival flight details. Please mail reservations@freepackers.com your flight name, number and exact arrival time and departure flights once you have these booked.

Clothing:

For all projects it is advisable to wear smart casual clothing that covers the shoulders, chest and legs whilst at your volunteer placement. For females dress pants, shirts, long skirts, blouses or tunics (knee length) are recommended. Tops should have sleeves and not be overly tight or show excessive skin, transparent/purely white). Hair must be neatly combed and tied up or pinned.

Males are NOT ALLOWED to wear t-shirts with prints or baggy pants. Shirts with sleeves, smart t-shirts that are single coloured, trousers or jeans are recommended.

For all tattoos should be covered. Sandals or slippers will be allowed but it is always better to wear closed shoes. It is recommended that you dress in smart attire as this will gain you respect from the placement staff and students you work with.

Please note that volunteers on the Medical and Dentistry projects are required to bring a white lab coat to wear while on the project and dress in smart professional attire or formal work wear. Closed shoes are mandatory for the medical and dentistry project volunteers.

[We will not allow you to goto the project if you are not dressed appropriately.](#)

At the volunteer house you can wear casual comfortable clothing including shorts.

What to bring:

- Copies of important travel documents, such as passport, criminal background check, travel insurance, visas, plane tickets and passport photos
- Medical kit with aspirin (or a similar pain reliever), antihistamine for relief from allergies or insect bites, diarrhea 'stoppers' such as Diastop, scissors and tweezers, band aids, antiseptic cream for cuts and grazes, sunscreen, lip balm, insect repellent, and any personal medication
- Towel Toiletries, including toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, soap/body wash, contact lenses and tissues to use as toilet paper while out and about.
- Mobile phone - you can buy a SIM card for around US\$10 (to make local calls, send texts and receive international calls) Laptop, iPad or Smartphone so you have access to Wi-Fi in the volunteer accommodation
- Camera Plug Adapters and chargers for your electronics and multiplug adapters
- Clothing - light, cotton clothing that covers your whole body is ideal for sun and insect bites. Smart attire for your time on the placement is expected. Casual attire is fine for weekend travel and time outside of your placement.

- Appropriate footwear for walking Sun hat and sunglasses
- Umbrella or rain jacket
- Small padlock for securing bags
- Day pack Books, music and other entertainment for long travel and 'downtime'
Travel guide (many volunteers find Lonely Planet to be very helpful for preparation and once they are in India) Journal and pens to keep a diary
- Project Resources such as story books, activity books, art materials, used ipads, used laptops or computers
- A small gift for the local team and/ or placement staff (optional) - you may like to bring a small gift from home as a token of your appreciation.

Background Checks:

To participate on our volunteer program, all volunteers are required to provide a criminal background check, and this must be sent prior to arriving in India. A basic disclosure check from your local police is sufficient and can be obtained by visiting or contacting your local police department. Please ensure you allow sufficient time to acquire this document before you depart, as processing times vary. A background check is important to determine whether any serious criminal offence has been recorded against your name. The check must be issued within 12 months of your program start date and is required to be presented in English. If your background check cannot be issued in English, a translated and verified copy will be accepted if presented along with the original.

Destination Information

Demographics:

Kerala has a population of 34.8 million people and the main language in Kerala is Malayalam followed by Hindi and English. In terms of religion, 55% of the population are Hindu with Muslims and Christians making up the balance of the population.

Socially, Kerala is very developed compared with the rest of India and there is a high priority placed on education and health. Kerala is the only state where the ratio of women to men is higher and the birth rate is much slower than other states.

Kerala is known for its spice plantations and the region has been a major spice exporter for years, which attracted Portuguese traders and began European colonization of India. The agriculture sector thrives on the growth of coconuts, tea, coffee, cashews, pepper, natural rubber and spices. Due to Kerala's coastal belt and the monsoon season which



leads to calm waters, Kerala is one of India's leading fishing producers and this plays a big part of the way of life in Kochi.

Climate:

Kochi has a tropical climate where the average temperature is 28-30 degrees Celcius throughout the year. There is a rainy season from May through until September and the temperatures typically drop a little at this time but you can still expect it to be humid. The hot and dry season is from November until March.

Transport:

Your transport to and from placements will be arranged by our local team. Some placements are within walking distance but most placements will require a tuktuk ride and the local team will be happy to provide recommendations for reliable tuktuk drivers. Please note that the Dentistry and Medical placements are around a 45-60 minute bus ride from the volunteer house depending on traffic.

The volunteer accommodation is very central so volunteers can easily walk into town and there is also a metro service and tuktuks available to get around the city. For travel further outside Kochi, it is possible to hire a driver and car, catch a flight, train or bus. India has a good rail network between major cities and this can be an affordable option if you have time and are unable to afford flights.

Money:

The currency of India is the Indian Rupee – please visit the XE website to check the current exchange rate at the time of your program. We recommend taking some United States Dollars (around US\$200) to keep away in case of emergencies and a VISA or Mastercard credit/debit card to withdraw cash in local currency as you need it. ATMs are easily accessible in major cities and tourist areas, and hotels, shops and restaurants in tourist areas generally accept credit cards and USD. You will need Rupee for public transportation, taxis and independent shops and hospitality venues. Most currencies can be exchanged easily at the airport (although you will not receive a favorable exchange rate) and at any bank. It is advisable to inform your bank that you are traveling abroad, so they will not block your accounts when they see transactions from abroad.

Communication:

Most parts of India have good communications infrastructure. WiFi access is available in the volunteer house and in many cafes and restaurants throughout the country. However, it is important to note that power outages are common and disruptions to the connection can be frequent. You can bring your mobile phone to India and, if it is unlocked and SIM card compatible, you can buy a local prepaid SIM card for approximately US\$10, which is great for keeping in touch with local staff, other volunteers and also loved ones at home. The major mobile operators are: AIRTEL, VODAFONE, RELIANCE AND IDEA.

It is easiest to obtain a SIM card at the airport when you arrive after the bag collection point, as they are equipped for selling Tourist SIM packages. You will need a copy of your passport (identification page) and a copy of your Indian Visa in order to get the SIM card. The airport staff will then also take an electronic photo for their records, before issuing the SIM card.

You can also get your SIM at a local shop but you will need to provide a copy of your passport, a copy of your Indian Visa, and 2 passport size photos, and the process can often take longer than it does at the airport. Our local team therefore recommend that you get the SIM card at the airport when you arrive (they are open 24/7).

Both international and local calls can be made and the country code of India is +91

Plugs and Adapters

The two most commonly found socket types in India are the typical European rounded two-prong plug (Type C) and the rounded three-prong plug (Type D), which was once commonly used in the UK. Powerpoints for both plugs can be found in the volunteer accommodation so either adaptor will be fine. You may wish to travel with a worldwide adaptor that is capable of connecting to multiple socket types. The voltage in India is 220 V and the frequency is 50Hz.

Laundry and washing clothes:

Volunteers can either handwash their clothes in the volunteer house or you can give your washing to our reliable laundry man for a small fee per item given. There is no washing machine in the volunteer house.

Public Holidays:

There are a large number of holidays and festivals celebrated in Kerala, while it is a great time to be in country for the festivities it is important that you are flexible as the structure of the program may be different during these dates. The local staff will advise volunteers of holidays that will impact the program as far in advance as possible. If one of the following holidays falls during your volunteer program, you may have a free day, as volunteer projects do not generally run on public holidays.

[The full list of public holidays for 2020 is here.](#)

Please note that during school exams and holidays, there will be holiday classes held in schools and community centers. You will have the opportunity to run more creative lessons with games, sports and art activities as you won't be following a curriculum.

Mar 15 - 30 School Exams

Apr - May School Holidays

Sep 02 -06 School Exams

Dec 16 - 20 School Exams

Culture and Customs:

Indians base their lives heavily on the traditional family values of politeness, modesty and respect. Pleasantries are very important and several minutes of greetings and handshaking will often take place when greeting and departing friends and associates. In India when being welcomed into a home you will always be offered tea (usually with sugar), which is a social and pleasant way to spend time with your hosts. An offered gift or invitation to join a meal should always be accepted, as to refuse may shame the person offering. Most importantly DO NOT take photos without permission. The local people in any country do not like to be treated like a tourist-attraction, and while the large majority will be more than happy for you to take their photo it is imperative that you ask first. It is also custom to remove shoes before entering your home as well as a temple.

Weekends and Excursions:

Kerala is a gorgeous part of India and your weekends are free for you to explore the incredible beaches, stunning backwaters, serene tea plantations and amazing culture. Some of the absolute must dos are the backwaters of Alleppey where you can stay for a night on a houseboat and meandre through the waterways surrounded by coconut trees.



Munnar Tea Plantations are simply breathtaking in terms of views and often compared to the Scottish Highlands! If you are looking for tan then head to the beaches of Marari or Varkala in the South of Kerala. It is easiest to take a train which is also an experience in itself! There are also great surf spots near Varkala. If you need more suggestions on how to get around or to book anything you can always talk to the local team.

If you are interested in travel to other parts of India (such as Delhi, Agra (Taj Mahal), Jaipur, Goa, Andamans) or Sri Lanka you can get in touch with our travel planner Kritika Batra. Her email is kritika@wanderbug.in

Safety:

Our programs are monitored on an ongoing basis to understand volunteers' experiences and we are continually improving our programs based on this feedback. The safety and security of our programs is constantly being reviewed and the local team will provide detailed health and safety guidance to you during the program orientation.

Listed below are some general safety tips for volunteers in India:

- Avoid wearing jewelry on the streets, especially gold neck chains or items that would be appealing to thieves. Handbags are always a temptation. If you must carry one, keep it in front of you.
- A backpack is better but should still be kept out of reach when possible. Be alert to your surroundings and the people around you.
- Stick to well-lit public areas and be aware of how to safely return to your accommodation at all times.
- Always tell someone where you are going before heading out and ensure you are confident with the directions to and from your destination.
- Use taxi drivers recommended by our local team. If you are unsure, always ask local staff who to use.
- Be especially careful at night, stay in a group and never walk down dark streets. If possible, use transport door-to-door after dark.
- Always leave valuables locked in your accommodation if you are heading out, regardless of whether it's night or day.
- Be aware of local traffic. It can be chaotic and it's important to take it slowly when crossing the road. Always look to the left and right to avoid hazards.
- Always keep an eye on your drinks when out socializing.

Safe Socialising:

We understand that it is common for volunteers to want to socialize and go out together during your free time. All we ask is that if you are going to consume alcohol, please drink responsibly and look out for each other. Limit your alcohol intake, be careful of ice, never leave your drink unattended and avoid accepting drinks from strangers. Remember that you are in a new environment, outside of the comfort of your home country and you may react differently to alcohol as a result. Enjoy your night, but be smart and drink responsibly.

Drinking is not allowed in the volunteer house.

Drugs:

The consumption of illegal and prescription drugs is forbidden on our programs. These rules will be discussed by our local team during your program orientation, and if a volunteer is caught or suspected using illegal drugs you will be removed from the program with no refund provided.

Security Warnings:

The following governments publish useful travel advisories, highlighting entry requirements, medical facilities, areas with health and safety risks, civil unrest or other dangers, and are generally very up to date:

United States <https://travel.state.gov>

Canada <https://www.voyage.gc.ca>

United Kingdom <https://www.fco.gov.uk/travel>

Australia <https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au>

New Zealand <https://www.mft.govt.nz>