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Sri Lanka Elephant and Community Volunteers

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Sri Lanka Elephant and Community Volunteers **Trip Code:** SLEV **Duration:** From 2 weeks

Trip Highlights

Read Lisa's blog about her experience: Elephants and an unnecessary gecko!

- Help care for Asian elephants
- Get hands-on with the big fellas
- Experience Sri Lankan culture, learn to cook a curry and get to know local people
- Support local underprivileged children by teaching English
- Help to maintain the garden where fruit for the elephants is grown
- Slow your pace of life down - live the Sri Lankan way
- Relax by the river after a hard day's work and enjoy a cup of Sri Lankan tea

Overview

This project was started because the owners of the elephants there could no longer look after them. It aims to care for the elephants and their mahouts who rely entirely on their elephants for their own survival. The project works to slowly and continuously improve the wellbeing of the elephants by educating the tourists who come to visit and take a ride, the elephant keepers (mahouts) and the local community.

As well as a hands-on experience you will learn about what it takes to look after an elephant including health checks and finding out how to weigh an elephant without even attempting to move it! Two afternoons a week, you'll support local underprivileged children by teaching English and other useful skills.

You will be working with domesticated Asian elephants, getting to know these majestic animals. You will work with the elephant keepers – locally known as mahouts - helping with the daily care that is essential to keeping these animals happy and healthy. You'll also assist with tourist visits; bringing income to the project.

You will also support local underprivileged children by teaching English and other useful skills. You will be able to provide the children with not only English and Maths lessons but also to help with confidence, leadership and 'life' skills.

English is considered as a way of upward mobility especially for women and children from underprivileged backgrounds in Sri Lanka and the families we support cannot afford extra tuition for their children.

Destination Info

This great project is on the outskirts of Kegalle, a busy little town with lots of shops and eating establishments. If you plan to explore further afield in your free time, Kegalle is a good place to catch a cheap local bus to places like Kandy, with its world famous Temple of the Tooth. Kegalle is known for its large rubber plantations, and crops such as coffee, cocoa, and spices. The local train station offers connections to some of the island's best sites as well as the fast train to Colombo.

You'll love the slower pace of life round here and if you enjoy birdwatching don't forget your binoculars!

Itinerary

When you arrive into Colombo you will be met by a member of the in-country team and taken straight to your home near Kegalle for your time at the project. Depending on what time you arrive you will either go straight to your room for a sleep or be briefly shown around and have introductions at the project.

The next day will start with a detailed orientation, explaining the project, an introduction to Sri Lanka, the teaching and also the other trips we have scheduled. You will have the chance to meet the other volunteers and the in-country team is always on hand if you need anything else.

You will have the chance to visit Pinnawala - just down the road - to spend 3 - 4 hours walking around the elephant centre and watching the elephants bathe in the river, if you're lucky. There is also the chance for you to do a bit of souvenir shopping. **Please note that you will not be volunteering at the elephant centre**.

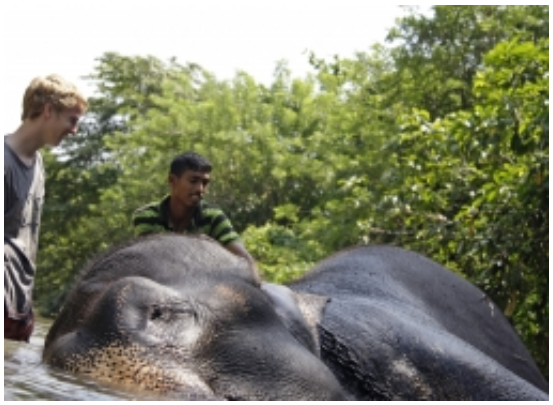
The following morning you will head for Kandy, the cultural capital of Sri Lanka where you will visit the Temple of the Tooth, Buddha on the hill, Kandy Lake and in the evening watch a traditional Kandy dancing show.

Now that you have seen some of Sri Lanka's cultural elements you will have a day trekking into the local jungles for a chance to see some of the country's abundant wildlife such as monkeys, bird and insect species, many of which you won't find anywhere else.

Not only will you have the great activities over these past few days but you will also be given lots of information about Sri Lanka and the basics of the language as you go.

The first Friday of your stay will be your first chance to start working with the mahouts and elephants, starting with the basics like cleaning up after and cleaning the elephants. Your weekends are free to either relax or explore more of this amazing country.

Please note: that excursions depend on the weather conditions and may be rescheduled if need be.



From now on you can truly immerse yourself in the project. You will rise early to meet the mahouts and assist with any elephant health checks that are required before leading the elephants to the water for a quick bath. After breakfast you will help out in the garden as well as planting and weeding (this is season dependent).

After a well earned tea break you'll help to clean the elephant beds and make them a nice fresh bed for the night. You'll then stop for lunch before assisting the mahouts with the tourists. During the afternoon you will have a chance to bathe the elephants and help feed them. You'll help the mahouts with further care of the elephants and tourist activities before tucking the elephants in for the day and going on to learn Singhalese or teach English to kids in the afternoons.

Elephants cost a lot of money to keep. Most elephant safaris actually rent the elephants including mahouts and food supplies. To pay for keeping the elephants substantial funding is required. Traditionally this income is generated from offering elephant encounters to tourists which can include riding the great giant.

As the project receives paying tourists your role will be to help the staff, assisting with the work of the mahouts when required. By the time you have finished your time at the project you should have a good understanding of the life of mahouts and elephants in Sri Lanka, plus some basic elephant communication skills too.

- On Mondays from 4pm you can learn Singhalese (Sri Lankan language).
- At 4pm on Tuesday and Thursday you'll support local underprivileged children by helping to teach English and other useful skills. There are some very poor families in the local area and they cannot afford to provide the additional tuition that will really help their child's future. You may also be able to teach adults whom greatly appreciate the chance to improve their English. The children are generally from ages 5 to 18 and will be divided into groups of three
- On Wednesdays from 10.30 to 12.00 you will have Sinhala cooking classes where you will be able to eat your delicious self cooked food. From 16.00 you can help teaching the local children and adults English and enjoy a variety of games.
- On Fridays you will stop early to give you a bit more time for the weekend.

Excluded:

To the girls home (orphanage) costs 500 LKR return by tuktuk

To the disabled home costs 800 LKR return by tuktuk. A bus also goes for much less.

Please note: The aim is to keep you busy and entertained but please bear in mind that plans can change as they often have to when working outdoors and with animals! Remember, the more flexible you are, the more you will get out of the project.

Accommodation

During your time at the project you will be staying in a volunteer house. The accommodation is purpose-built with a nice balcony to chill out on. You will be sharing a room with other volunteers in bunk beds (maximum of 4 to a room) with access to shared bathrooms and shower facilities.

There is an open living area at the volunteer house. Your accommodation has a washing machine and internet facilities (although connection can be sporadic) with Wi-Fi for your own equipment. In rural areas such as this there can often be power cuts so you should be prepared for this; there is emergency lighting at the house so you'll still be able to see!

The Senior Project Co-ordinator lives at the Volunteer accommodation.

Programme Services and Facilities

Telephones and Internet

The international telephone access code for Sri Lanka is +94.

There is free WI-FI in your accommodation, however please remember that conection will porbably not be as good as you are used to at home and may occasionally suffer from unexpected cut offs.

Laundry

There is a washing machines available at the accommodation.

Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included from Monday to Friday. The menu will be both local and western-style meals.

What's Included

- Project experience as described
- Airport transfers in Sri Lanka
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner - Monday to Friday
- Accommodation throughout your programme
- Detailed orientation
- On site project coordinator

What's Not Included

- Flights
- Visa
- Travel insurance
- Meals at weekends
- Drinks and snacks
- Local transport to afternoon community projects
- Any excursions other than those listed in the itinerary

Is This Trip For You?

A love for animals and willingness to work and learn is needed for you to make the most out of this volunteering project.

The community element of this programme does involve speaking English, therefore you will need to be able to speak the English language fluently.

Volunteers must be able to work independently within the guidelines of the project. Patience and perseverance are essential, although above all enthusiasm and a willingness to accept another culture will mean you get the most from your volunteering experience. After all, what you put into the project will be what you get in return. Each volunteer brings different ideas and skills to the project that can make a real impact towards furthering initiatives.

You may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. However, you will still have the full support of your in-country team and those at the project. If you are looking for a group volunteering experience we have plenty of options for you to consider.

What to Pack

Please note that this kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and, therefore, you may not need all of the listed items on your travels nor it is exhaustive.

Personal Admin

- Important papers such as passport, airline tickets and insurance documents, you should make photocopies of these and take these with you

General

- Day bag / rucksack (for excursions)
- A torch
- Mobile phone
- Camera and batteries
- Telephone charger with a two pin adaptor plug

- Playing cards for free time
- Diary - you will have so many amazing experiences to remember
- iPod/mp3 player and speakers (if you wish)
- Tissues
- Plastic bags
- Snacks (cup of soups, biscuits etc)
- Pocket-knife
- Towel
- Toilet paper - While toilet paper is included it is in limited supply as it is not normally used in Sri Lanka. Therefore it may be worth bring a small travel pack

Clothing

- Walking shoes
- Flip Flops
- A hat to protect you from the sun
- Rain coat
- Clothes. Long sleeve shirts and trousers are great. Remember to bring beachwear for beach time.
- Clothes worn around the local community should be respectful of culture and long trousers and sleeved t-shirts, shirts should be worn
- When visiting places of religious worship you should wear long white clothes

Medical Kit

- Small medical kit containing plasters, medicine for diarrhoea, head ache tablets, anti-histamine cream and any medication you will need.
- Mosquito repellent
- Contraception including condoms
- Biological soap
- Antibacterial soap gel (does not need water to rinse off)
- Travel wash for clothes

Minimum Age

The minimum age for this project is 17 years old.

Minimum Numbers

There are no minimum numbers on the trip.

Please note: you may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact us

Flights

Your flight to Sri Lanka should arrive at Colombo International Airport (CMB) on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date.

To book your flights, contact us on 01273 647219 for a great flight deal.

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your online account or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

The currency in Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan Rupee (LKR; symbol Rp or R), which is subdivided into 100 cents. Coins come in denominations of 1, 2, 5 and 10Rp and 1, 2, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents. Notes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1,000 and 2,000Rp. There are also large numbers of commemorative coins in circulation.

MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted and major cities have ATMs, although not all will accept international cards. It is best to change US Dollars, Pound Sterling and Euros at local banks as they may not be accepted as currency in their own right.

As some meals are not included in your itinerary, it is recommended that you allow US$200 for meals that are not included in your trip.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant 5.33 $

Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) 2.00 $
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) 0.88 $
Water (0.33 litre bottle) 0.75 $

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

You should ensure that you have a full passport that is valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information provided below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

You need a tourist visa to enter Sri Lanka. All nationals (except those from Singapore and the Maldives) require applying for their 30 day tourist visa online (ETA). ETA is an official authorization for a short visit to Sri Lanka and it is issued electronically. Please follow the following link to start the application process; www.eta.gov.lk

You are required to make payment online (please refer to the website for the latest fee).

Once your application is granted, the applicant will be notified accordingly. The ETA holder is entitled to enter Sri Lanka within three months from the date of issue of the ETA.

I'm going for more than 30 days, what next?

If you know you are going to be staying for longer than 30 days before you arrive into Sri Lanka you should apply for a visa through your nearest Sri Lankan Embassy instead of applying for the ETA.

Cultural Considerations

- Honour, or personal dignity, is extremely important to Sri Lankans and causing an individual to 'lose face' by public criticism or anger should be avoided
- If you're invited to someone's home, it's customary to bring a small gift. Don't be offended if they don't comment on the gift as it is considered rude to inspect a gift in front of the giver. Gifts could be anything you like such as kitchen utensils or tea. Flowers are not considered good gifts.
- The Right Hand Rule - always give, receive and eat with your right hand. The left hand is used for and associated with unclean functions. It can be viewed as acting disrespectfully if you choose to eat with your left hand.
- When visiting a Buddhist temple you should remove your shoes and hat. Your legs and shoulders should

be covered.
- You can bring gifts for the children at the school if you wish but you should avoid giving them out to kids in the street as it can encourage begging
- Clothing

Sri Lanka is a hot country and you should have plenty of lightweight, thin clothes with you. Be aware that standards are fairly conservative and you should dress modestly. Don't wear beachwear away from the coast and always cover legs and shoulders when entering a religious site.

Religion

Buddhism is the main religion, with over 70% of the population following it, mainly Sinhalese.

Local Laws and Customs

Don't pose for photographs by standing in front of a statue of Buddha. The mistreatment of Buddhist images and artefacts is a serious offence and tourists have been convicted for this. In March 2013, a British national was refused entry to Sri Lanka because he had a large visible tattoo of Buddha on his arm

Alcohol / Smoking / Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Sri Lanka and readily available. However, please respect others. You are not allowed to smoke in the host family home or on school premises, or in any public places by law. Drink in moderation and don't let it impact on your work during the week. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour gives volunteers a bad name and it will not be tolerated at the project.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into Sri Lanka. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, Sri Lanka has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, are ILLEGAL. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Unfortunately, tourists are often targets for pickpockets and thieves. Please educate yourself about Sri Lanka before you leave, so that you can be alert to all types of situations. Safety guidelines will be covered in detail at your orientation session upon arrival but please familiarise yourself with the following general travel safety rules.

- Avoid travelling alone, especially at night
- Find out where the unsafe areas are and avoid them
- When travelling keep all-important documents and valuables in a safe place, like an inner hidden pocket or money belt
- Carry only as much cash as you think you will need for the day
- Don't wear expensive jewellery or watches
- Be wary of people who seem too friendly too fast
- Keep cameras out of sight. Always keep bags and purses in your sight, especially on public transport.
- Before swimming, ask how safe the area is

Sri Lanka has suffered from turbulent and sometimes violent political tensions in the recent past. Visitors are advised to avoid large public gatherings and demonstrations.

Sri Lanka has recently had an influx of what they term 'Beach Boys'. This is not made up of a musical group, but rather unemployed youth who try to make a living from tourists. They are very fluent in English, have an understanding about foreigners and what they see as our 'liberal culture'. They are known to cause all kinds of mischief and try to get foreigners involved in illegal activities. At first these people may seem very friendly, offering to take you for a free ride on their bicycles but the best thing to do is to avoid them totally. Please do not let this alarm you, it is more of a warning and it will be discussed further in your orientation. If you have any further queries please feel free to contact us.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk
USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately

to the bank or cancel your card.

Language Guide

Sri Lanka is a country of diverse ethnic groups. Two of the main languages spoken are Sinhala, which is spoken by the Sinhalese, and Tamil, spoken by the Tamils. English is spoken, but you will find it is not that widespread in the rural location you are teaching in. Try to learn a few local phrases whilst there to broaden your cultural experience. We suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to. Here are a few Sinhalese phrases to get you started:

Pronunciation
a : as the ‘u’ in ‘cup’
aa : like the ‘a’ in ‘father’
ai: as the word 'eye'
au : like the ‘ow’ in ‘how’
e : the ‘e’ in ‘met’
i : the ‘i’ in bit
o : the ‘o’ in ‘hot’
u : the ‘u’ in put

Basic words and phrases

Hello - *hello*
Bye - *aayu-bowan*
Yes - *owu*
No - *naeh*
Please - *karuna kara*
Thank you - *stuh-tee*
Excuse me - *sama venna*
Sorry - *kana gaatui*
How much is it? - *ehekka keeyada?*
What’s your name? - *oyaaghe nama mokka’da?*
My name is.. - *maaghe nama…*

Food & Drink

Sri Lankan food can be very spicy so take care! A typical dish you will come across is a basic curry made with coconut milk, onion, green chilli and aromatic spices such as cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and saffron.

National specialities:

- Hoppers is a cross between a muffin and a crumpet with a wafer-crisp edge, served with a fresh egg soft-baked on top
- Stringhoppers are steamed circlets of rice flour, a little more delicate than noodles or spaghetti
- The durian fruit is considered a great delicacy

National drinks:

- Tea is the national drink and thought to be amongst the best in the world
- Toddy (sap of the palm tree)
- Arrack (fermented Toddy which comes in varying degrees of strength)

Whilst travelling in Sri Lanka you are advised to drink bottled water (widely available and cheap), avoid ice in drinks, and eat only well-cooked food.

Public Holidays

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from Sri Lankans who use long weekends to get away from the big city.

To view a list of the public holidays for Sri Lanka, please see the link below:

www.worldtravelguide.net/sri-lanka/public-holidays

Weather

Sri Lanka's climate is very much tropical and beach lovers can usually find some sunshine on the coast at most times of the year. There are two annual monsoons falling in the southwest between May and August and in the north and east of the country between October and January. If weather is a big factor in your trip, the best time to visit the west coast is between December and March and between April and September for the east coast.

Time

Sri Lanka is 5½ hours ahead of GMT.

Electricity

In Sri Lanka the electric system is 230 Volts and frequency 50 Hertz. If any of the devices you bring do not accept 230 Volts, you will need an adapter. Outlets in Sri Lanka generally accept 2 types of plug:

Three round pins arranged in a triangle

or

Two round pins

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

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