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Sri Lanka Sea Turtle and Community Volunteers

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Sri Lanka Sea Turtle and Community Volunteers **Trip Code:** SLTC **Duration:** From 2 weeks

Trip Highlights

Read Lisa's turtle-power blog about her visit

- Help preserve the future of endangered sea turtles in Sri Lanka
- Get to know the locals and help to give them a better understanding of English.
- Explore the natural beauty of Sri Lanka including its stunning coastline!
- Stuff yourself silly on curry and dhal

Overview

Make sure you don't miss this stunning island on any visit to Asia! Working on this project will enable you to help conserve and protect turtles in Sri Lanka and give them a better chance of survival.

You'll get involved with cleaning, feeding and releasing these adorable creatures as well as getting a real taste of local life working within the local community.

You can lend a hand teaching conversational English that will help impoverished locals to earn more money and build a better future and as there is a great demand from neighbouring villages for teaching you will also be going further afield to local temples and centres to teach English. The community centre at the project also helps to empower local women who come to the centre to weave and make crafts that they sell in local markets to help raise funds.

Destination Info

Famed as Marco Polo's favourite island, Sri Lanka is home to beautiful scenery, fascinating ancient architecture

and some of the friendliest people you'll ever meet. The palm-fringed beaches are breathtaking and you'll have plenty of opportunity to admire them working near to the city of Kosgoda. This tropical paradise offers the chance to get away from it all and relax, take a wander around the city, try the local seaside delicacies and test the locals on their newly learnt English!

Itinerary

Your time in Kosgoda will be split between two projects – volunteering at the community work project and a sea turtle conservation centre. Kosgoda is a beautiful area with stunning beaches and several turtle hatcheries which used to attract a lot of tourists. However, it was badly affected by the tsunami in 2004 and is now much quieter. Some local families are still living in partially damaged houses, while others are rebuilding their homes with the limited funds they have received from the government.

The sea turtle conservation project has been operating for twenty three years. Its purpose is to monitor and conserve the turtle numbers in the Kosgoda area. The project has been operating well with a mix of volunteers and local staff, however when the tsunami hit, much of the infrastructure was destroyed and an important source of funding - the tourists - were lost. In the years since the tsunami, the project coordinator has been maintaining a database of turtle activity to allow definitive measurement of turtle behaviour in this area.

If eggs are likely to be in danger or they have been gathered from further away then they are brought to the project's hatchery. Once the baby turtles emerge they are then transported to the sea but any weak turtles, usually 10%, are taken care of for up to three days in holding tanks and then released when they are strong enough.

Tourist and local education is offered through the project's visitors' area where weak hatchlings and some more mature turtles are kept for monitoring and gathering statistics.

English teachers are scarce in Kosgoda and your skills will be greatly valued by locals who are keen to learn! You will spend your afternoons interacting with the community teaching conversational English. There may also be the opportunity to work with local school children teaching English and a range of other subjects such as drawing, music, painting, singing and dancing.

You will have at least two days off a week depending on your workload, giving you ample opportunity to explore Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage.

While on the project you'll volunteer Monday to Friday, with a half day on Friday. Your shifts will vary as cover is needed at the turtle project 24 hours a day. You will be assigned 8 hour shifts with the rest of the team to manage this (don't worry, you'll get a lunch break!), and when at the turtle project should expect shifts at night as well as through the day, particularly during egg laying season.

Please be aware that the work pattern is different in Sri Lanka to most Western countries: the pace of work is often slower and more sporadic. You should not expect to work the same number of hours every day. Also, there may be some unscheduled breaks from your work due to the frequency of public holidays in Sri Lanka so you'll need to 'go with the flow" if this happens during your stay!

You'll be getting involved in a wide variety of activities, which will include:

- Nightly patrols
- Helping with awareness and education programmes

- Statistic and data gathering, entry and analysis
- Building holding tanks
- Cleaning tanks, beaches and the general project area
- Feeding turtles
- Releasing hatchlings
- Providing tours for tourists
- Developing the information resources for tourists•
- Helping to run educational programmes for children in the community centre
- Helping with informal conversational English teaching to community members
- Organising sports and games
- Singing and dancing
- Drawing and painting
- Weaving with the women of the local community
- Beach clearing

If you've got a special skill or interest you'd like to introduce to the children and community members, or if you'd like to give any additional time to either project then it will be very welcome!

Accommodation

For the first night of your arrival in Sri Lanka you will stay in a simple guesthouse on the outskirts of Colombo - in the Mount Lavinia area. Rooms are basic with fans and you will usually share with another volunteer. There is also a swimming pool that you can use when it is open.

Once at the project in Kosgoda, you will be staying in a basic but clean volunteer house in a room shared with at least one other volunteer. The house is just across the road from the project which is handy! It has running water, bathrooms attached to the shared rooms, a shower and a western style toilet. There is also a communal area inside and outside the house.

Programme Services and Facilities

Telephones and Internet

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

There is no Internet in your accommodation. However Internet access can be found easily in the town centre. There is a telephone at the accommodation to receive incoming calls but it will be cheaper for you to go to a call centre to make outgoing calls. There are many Communication Centres in any town. These Centres will help you to make international calls and to find Internet access nearby. Additionally there are many phone booths on local roads that can be used to call home.

Laundry

There are no washing machines available at the accommodation. You will have the opportunity to wash your clothes by hand or can pay to have your clothes washed at a local laundry.

Meals

Breakfast and dinner are included and will be cooked for you at the volunteer house. Breakfast generally consists of bread, butter, jam, milk, fruits as well as typical Sri Lankan rice and curries. Dinner is usually rice and various types of curry.

What's Included

- Arrival airport pick up and transfer
- Breakfast and Dinner
- Detailed orientation
- Volunteer project
- On site project coordinator
- 24 emergency contact in the UK

What's Not Included

- Tourist Visa
- Flights
- Travel insurance
- Return airport transfer
- Lunches and extra snacks

Is This Trip For You?

The most important skill you must bring to this project is flexibility, as the work will vary depending on the needs of the projects and will develop over time. This project would suit a volunteer with a lot of initiative, who can work and communicate with people from all walks of life. Team-work skills will be needed, as well as an appreciation of cultural differences.

You will be working in hot, basic conditions with few resources, and is important that you are reasonably fit and don't mind getting your hands dirty. This project is ideal for hands-on people who love animals and the outdoors. You should be prepared for some hard physical work, and IT skills, research skills and communication skills may also be utilised during your time at the project.

Some outdoor activities may be affected during the rainy season as the wet weather means that time spent outside can be limited. In the event of heavy rainfall, a variety of indoor activities will be organised. Remember, the more flexible you are, the more you will get out of the project!

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.

Additional Information

Arrival and Orientation

On your arrival day you will be met at the airport and taken directly to the hotel which will be your home for the first night in Sri Lanka. You will have the rest of the day to rest and recover from your journey or go out and explore! If you arrive in early enough one of in-country team will be able to give an informal orientation at the hotel from 6:30pm until 8:30pm, with dinner included.

The next day is orientation day. Orientation will take place at 8:30am in the hotel where you're staying in Colombo. All new arrivals will have their orientation together, and this will cover important information such as what it's going to be like at your project, dos and don'ts, fun things to do in Sri Lanka, a language lesson and how to stay safe on your trip. This is your prime opportunity to ask any burning questions that you haven't yet had answered and to meet your fellow volunteers!

In the afternoon the team will arrange for you to leave Colombo and head to your accommodation in Kosgoda for the rest of your trip. The journey will take around 2 to 3 hours and you'll have the rest of the day to relax and settle into your new home.

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. The main thing to remember is NOT TO TAKE TOO MUCH with you! It is really easy to wash and dry your clothes each day and moving around Sri Lanka (especially on the buses) with a small bag rather than a huge rucksack is highly recommended!

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)
- 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)
- Towel

Clothing

- Walking shoes/trainers - only if planning to trek
- Flip Flops
- A hat to protect you from the sun
- Rain coat
- Clothes. Long sleeve shirts and trousers are great.
- 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 - a MUST down on the coast
- Contraception including condoms
- Biological soap
- Antibacterial soap gel (does not need water to rinse off)
- Travel wash for clothes

Minimum Age

Minimum 18, maximum decided on the potential participants health.

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 on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date. Your last day of volunteering will be on the Friday but accommodation at the project is included for the Friday and Saturday night so you can choose to leave the project anytime between Friday and Sunday.

To book your flights, please contact your Travel Advisor who can look into the best flight quote for you.

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.

FAQs

1. **When is turtle season?**
   October - April is the main laying season. Babies are generally released when they are 2-4 days old.

2. **Where in Sri Lanka will I will be based?**

You will be based in Kosgoada. Kosgoada located 40km south of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.

3. **How much spending money will I need?**
   We recommend that you take between £50 - £70 per week.

4. **What type of clothing do you recommend I take with me?**
   Whilst volunteering you will need clothes that cover your shoulders, mid-rif and length should be to at least your knees.

5. **Why type of food should I expect?**
   Breakfast and dinner are provided in the restaurant. This will generally be local Sri Lankan dishes such as rice and curry, bread, milk, fruit and vegetables.

6. **Can I swim in the sea at the project?**
   There are very strong currents in the area around the project so while the sea may look very inviting for a dip, please do not go swimming for your own safety.

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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