

Work at an elephant sanctuary in Sri Lanka

Project Overview

Why not make a big difference to a big animal?

It's difficult to imagine a more exciting conservation opportunity in a more beautiful location. Set near the small town of Kegalle, amongst beautiful, lush green countryside our partner project on the paradise island of Sri Lanka helps to care for these gentle giants because even animals the size of buses need a little tender loving care once in a while. The project looks after injured or ageing elephants whose owners could no longer afford to care for them, and without the support of international volunteers and charitable donations efforts would flounder, so bring a lot of energy (but no mice).



Trip Highlights:

- Getting up close and personal with these amazing creatures
- Working alongside the mahouts and learning all about elephants and their place in Sri Lankan culture
- Exploring this incredible country in your free time - beaches, hill stations, forests and friendly people. What more can you want?

Placement details:

You will be working at a well-respected elephant foundation in Kegalle, which was established in 1999. The aim of the foundation is to improve the treatment and protection of elephants in Sri Lanka and it has cared for over 100 elephants since its inception. Currently, the foundation houses several elephants, who have come there to receive medical treatment or for a period of rest. The foundation also operates a mobile veterinary unit which travels around Sri Lanka treating elephants in need. Other initiatives currently run by the foundation include ecological farming and English teaching to members of the local community.

Why the placement needs volunteers:

Elephants are venerated in Sri Lankan culture and historically the killing of an elephant was considered a crime. However, in colonial times, the elephant began to be viewed as a commodity and as an agricultural pest and consequently the elephant population began to diminish. In the last 50 years, government initiatives to clear large areas of land for agriculture have led to the destruction of the elephants' habitat and brought humans and elephants into conflict. Without the support of international volunteers and charitable donations, the foundation would not be able to continue its work to look after some of Sri Lanka's most respected inhabitants.

What kind of skills you need to go on this type of placement:

Conservation volunteers will be hands-on people who love the outdoors. You must be prepared for some hard physical work, and you must be flexible, as this project involves a variety of activities. IT skills, research skills and English teaching skills may also be utilised during your conservation placement. This placement would suit a volunteer with a lot of initiative who is prepared to work hard individually and in a team.

Your role as a volunteer:

This project offers a mixture of hands-on animal care and office-based research or administration tasks. At the elephant foundation, you will assist with the daily care of the elephants, as well as helping to develop public information and raise awareness of the foundation. You may be involved with writing the foundation's newsletter or creating information displays for visitors. There may also be the opportunity to become involved with ecological farming or teaching English in the local community.

Where the placement is based:

The elephant foundation is located near Kegalle, a small town in the region of Kandy, about three hours from Colombo. The foundation is surrounded by beautiful, lush green countryside and is very peaceful. Local amenities, including internet cafés and banks, can be found nearby.

Please book your flight to arrive into Colombo (airport code CMB) on the advertised arrival date to ensure your airport pickup.

Fast Facts

Project Information

- Project Duration: Min 2 weeks - Max 12 weeks
- Project Costs: £999.00 for 2 weeks, £100.00 for every week thereafter
- Location of project: *Kegalle in the Kandy Region, about 100km east of Colombo*
- Arrival Airport: *Colombo Bandaranaike (airport code CMB)*
- Activities: *Various types of work including helping with feeding, facilities maintenance & administration.*
- Working Hours: *Flexible; around 3-4 hours a day, all other time is free.*
- Getting to the project: *Accommodation is on site*
- Requirements: *Minimum age 18*

What's Included

- Accommodation: *Shared room in bungalow on site*
- Food: *Breakfast and dinner are included; you will need to purchase your own lunch (budget approximately US\$20 per week)*
- Airport Pickup: *Included on arrival date. Ask us for details if you're arriving early!*
- Training: *In-country orientation*
- Support: *Pre-departure helpdesk, Local in-country team and 24hr emergency support*

What's not included

- *Flights, Insurance, Visas, Return Airport transfer, Local Transport, Food*

Country Guide - Sri Lanka

A little bit of history...

Sri Lanka's history is interwoven with myths and religious beliefs. In the central hill country, Adams Peak is fabled as the first place that Adam set foot after being cast out of Eden – his footprint is set in the rock seems indelible proof. Buddhists claim that the footprint is proof that Buddha placed a holy foot in Sri Lanka en route to paradise. To the north of the country a series of islands runs north to India – these are believed to be the stepping stones that Rama crossed in order to rescue his wife Sita from Rawana, the devilish King of Lanka. One thing that these myths do prove is that the religious and cultural history is both diverse and complex.

The Veddahs were the original inhabitants of the island, but they were gradually displaced by Sinhalese migrants from northern India. This migration took place from around the 6th century BC and led to the founding of the first great Sinhalese empire, Anuradhapura in the 4th century BC. This kingdom was converted to Buddhism in the 3rd century by Mahinda and the country has remained largely Buddhist ever since.

The city of Anuradhapura was the centre of Sinhalese culture for over 1500 years until invasion by Southern Indian kingdoms gradually eroded its power and Vijayabahu I abandoned for the more southerly and more easily defended Polonnaruwa. This kingdom lasted for another 2 centuries until the excesses of its rulers and increasing invasions from India led to a dispersal of the Sinhalese culture and the emergence of a strong Tamil presence in the north of the country.

The Portuguese trader, Lorenzo de Almeida, arrived in 1505 and began friendly relations with the king of Kotte, establishing a Portuguese monopoly on the lucrative spice trade. Over time the trade relationship changed from co-operation to colonisation and the Portuguese gradually gained control of the whole island. The Portuguese (like all colonial powers) exploited the island and ruled through a mixture of greed, avarice and intolerance. In an attempt to free themselves Portuguese rule the northern kingdom of Kandy enlisted the help of the Dutch, whose concerns were primarily mercantile and less intolerant of Sinhalese customs.

The Dutch ruled most of Sri Lanka until 1796, when the British swept to power. Over the next 150 years the British colonisers changed land laws and introduced the widespread planting of cash crops such as coffee, coconuts and cinnamon. The demands of these huge plantations saw a further migration of Tamil workers from Southern India, which would have devastating long-term effects on the future stability of Sri Lanka.

After India gained independence from British rule, the British government was under increasing pressure to grant independence to Sri Lanka and in February 1948 Sri Lanka became a sovereign state and a member of the British Commonwealth. In the years since independence tensions have run high between the Buddhist Sinhalese majority in the South and West and the Hindu Tamil minority in the North and East. Many wars have been fought, many ceasefires broken and an estimated 60,000 people have been killed and over a million displaced. At the time of writing, a Norwegian brokered ceasefire had been broken and fighting was raging in the around the eastern town of Vaharai.



Best time to go...

As with much of Southern Asia, the country's weather is dominated by the monsoon. To make things even trickier Sri Lanka experiences two monsoons!

The yala season runs from early May until August and sees the southwest monsoon hit the south and west coasts and the central highlands. The second monsoon – the Maha season – affects the north and east of the island between October and January. Dry season in this part of Sri Lanka runs from May to September while in the south and west it runs from December to March.

Temperatures during the dry season can climb to the mid-30°C, but the central highlands around Kandy can offer respite from the heat and warm jumpers are a common sight in the evenings. The seas around Sri Lanka remain warm all year but can be rough and sometimes dangerous during monsoon.

Getting around...

Travelling in Sri Lanka is can be a hugely frustrating experience. The only compensation that the traveller can gain from travelling in Sri Lanka is that the distances are relatively short. Whatever journeys you do decide to make in Sri Lanka, check security warnings from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see links below) before travelling to the north and east of the country.

Bus

When travelling by bus it is virtually impossible to reserve a seat. The only way to guarantee a seat is to arrive at the bus station a good half an hour before the scheduled departure time and hang on to your seat for dear life. There are a wide variety of bus services ranging from largely slow and uncomfortable CTB buses (Central Tourist Board) to privately run air-conditioned inter-city services that are faster and more comfortable.

Train

Train travel can be a more relaxing option than travelling by bus. There are three main lines: Colombo to Matara, Colombo to Badulla and Colombo to Anuradhapura. There are also two branch lines one to Trincomalee on the east coast and another to Polonnuruwa. Because of the relatively short distances involved there are very few overnight sleeper services. It is usually best to take a second-class seat as the seats are padded and they are usually slightly less crowded. For journeys along the south coast train travel is definitely the best option. Although the trains are often late, they are infinitely better than trying to negotiate the traffic jams, crashes and pollution of the Colombo to Galle road and there are normally people selling great food on the trains – corn on the cob, Sri Lankan sweets and fried prawns.

Taxis and car hire

While travelling around Colombo taxis and tuk-tuks are a great option. It is a good idea to arrange a fixed price before setting off. For longer distances car hire can be a great way to get around. Although the costs are relatively high, they offer larger groups more freedom and comfort. One consideration that should be taken into account are the state of some of the country's roads and the over-riding lunacy of many of the country's drivers – Sri Lanka is not a great place for inexperienced drivers, especially on the Colombo-Galle road. Another option is to hire a car and a driver. Again this is a relatively expensive option, but if you're short on time and have a little money to spare it can be a good option as not only do you get transport but you get a local guide into the bargain.