



Women's empowerment project



This project's primary goal is to **equip impoverished rural Sri Lankan women with much-needed English language and life skills** so they can grow personally, boost their confidence and self-esteem, interact with their families and children more effectively at home, and become more employable in the future. For a variety of social and economic reasons, most of these women have never had the chance to acquire these skills and pursue a successful career; therefore, it is imperative that this service be made available to them to support their development and well-being.

Availability: Full availability for 12 months of the year (Jan, Feb, March, April, May, June, July, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov and Dec); partial availability for 3 months of the year (Jan, April & Dec) – **please check with us to confirm exact dates for bookings made in these months.**

Project Start & End Days: Saturdays

Project Work Days: Monday to Fridays (weekends are free)

Support Provided: Program Manager provides detailed introduction and culture training on arrival. Area orientation tour provided within 1-2 days of arrival. Education Coordinator provides project-specific training and supervises classes daily, and also acts as a bridge between the volunteers and local women students, if necessary. Our staff also assist participants with lesson planning, guiding them on the specific curriculum to follow each day and conducting regular meetings with them to monitor progress. Participants also have access to our in-house teaching library consisting of manuals, books and various teaching materials to help with lesson planning and providing general guidance. Local transportation to and from the project is also included each day.

Age Requirement: Must be between **18-60** years. (Females only)

Nearest Airport: Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport

Location of Project: The project is run at AASHA Community Centre. Classes are generally conducted at a local school (15 minutes from the volunteer house) and occasionally, at other locations based on local conditions and project requirements at the time.

Meals Provided: Breakfast, lunch and dinner on all 7 days of the week. (Monday to Sunday). The cooking style tends to be a **mix of both local authentic Sri Lankan** cuisine in the form of various curries (vegetarian and non-vegetarian), rice, coconut rotis, kottu, hoppers, etc, and western cuisine such as pastas, bread, wraps, spaghetti, etc. Fresh ingredients are purchased on a regular basis from local vendors and markets for the preparation of these meals. We also source fresh vegetables from our own organic garden from time to time. The emphasis is on cooking fresh, healthy, organic and delicious food so participants get to experience authentic Sri Lankan flavours along with all its nutritional goodness. With every meal we serve a minimum of one tropical fruit and a fresh salad mostly at lunches and dinners.

There are also **multiple local supermarkets** near us from where participants can buy food they like (e.g., nuts, avocados, packaged goods, etc.). We can also accommodate varied food requirements (e.g., vegetarians, vegans, specific allergies, etc.) if these requirements are mentioned to us beforehand.

The volunteer house is also located in close proximity to **several restaurants**, bars and cafes that offer high quality international cuisines (Italian, Asian, Mexican, Persian, etc) which give our participants additional options.

Background to this Program: We typically work with rural Muslim women who are easily some of the most vulnerable sections of Sri Lankan society, where the need for support is greatest. The situation of these women has been shaped heavily by its traditional culture, colonial history and post-independence policies.

It is no secret that gender stereotypes adversely impact women, particularly in rural communities of developing countries like Sri Lanka. Women here continue to be seen as “dependent wives” or “supplementary earners” at best. Traditional familial responsibilities of a woman, especially as a mother/wife/homemaker, constrain them in their choice of employment, as do her family’s and society’s attitudes towards certain types of employment.

Most women in Sri Lanka are literate in Sinhala and/or Tamil, the two main local languages in the country. This is because in the 1950s, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, including university education, was made free and converted from English medium to the local languages. This led to a rapid expansion of educational opportunities amongst females. Parents no longer had to choose whether to invest in the education of sons or daughters. Educational participation rates rose rapidly amongst women and gender differences declined sharply by the 1960s.

Despite this, dropout rates were higher among females, especially in low-income neighbourhoods, settlements, and backward villages and particularly amongst rural Muslim communities.

In 1983, a massive civil war broke out in Sri Lanka, which lasted for 26 years ending in 2009. This led to substantial social dislocation and trauma. Social sector expenditure was cut back by the increasing financial cost of the war in the late 1980s and 1990s. As a result, there was a deterioration in the quality of health and education services which negatively impacted the quality of life for women and their families. Many women were pushed out of stable employment in the formal sector to marginal economic activities, and to unviable self-employment. Various studies have shown that for poor rural women, quality of life and employment conditions deteriorated the most during the last three decades and pushed them into unemployment or low-skilled jobs. The tsunami of 2004 was also instrumental in bringing large scale damage to the region, which further deteriorated employment prospects and quality of life for women and their families.

Women’s empowerment can come in many forms and we have chosen to focus on ‘English Education’ as a tool to equip women with more confidence and make them more employable, while developing their basic life and language skills. The women we work with come from poor to lower-middle income families and mostly from the Muslim communities, which have suffered the most during the turbulent times of the recent past. Most have had early marriages and have been denied the opportunity to pursue a viable career in order to raise families. A lot of these women are keen to learn English to enhance their personal growth, increase their self-esteem and confidence, and enable them to become more employable in the future. For many, conversing with our volunteers is also a welcome break from their mundane daily routine.

What our Volunteers do on the Project: Volunteers will be teaching English at basic level to women in small to mid-sized groups. Sessions will be held from Mon-Fri either in the mornings or afternoons, for about 2 hours each. Each session will

be conducted in a close-knit, comfortable environment with small groups of 5-20 of rural women. Daily preparation (1-2 hours per day) is expected from volunteers to plan for these sessions, since the classes are run entirely by the volunteers (with some assistance from our local staff as needed).

The classes are scheduled **4 days a week** and one specific day is dedicated for lesson planning where the volunteers plan the sessions and get the needed lesson materials prepared in advance. It is important to adapt to the ground circumstances and be flexible.

Volunteers can also get help from our staff on planning for topics / lessons and creative ways to teach, but lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers themselves. The classes are generally conducted at the local school (where many of the children of these women attend). Classes will focus more on spoken English (to maximise impact) and will also include basic grammar sessions. We employ various techniques, such as roleplay, in order to maximise the practical impact of this initiative.

This project is a good fit for anyone who is keen to help and has a **minimum intermediate level of English skills**. Prior **teaching experience**, while helpful, is not required.

We encourage you to **bring a notebook** and a pen to make necessary notes and records along with laptops or tablets for lesson planning.

Recommended Attire: A conservative dress code needs to be adhered to while at the project. Knees and shoulders must be covered, as well as any tattoos or body art. It is mandatory to wear our blue cotton teaching coats during sessions which we provide. The rest of the clothing can be comfortable and casual.

Accommodation

All bedrooms are equipped with open cabinets for volunteers to store their clothes and toiletries. Mattresses, pillows and cotton bed sheets/pillowcases are provided. We also provide drying racks and extension cables for each room. All rooms can be key locked. Each participant is provided with a **safety locker** in which they can store their cash, passports, jewellery and other valuables. Wall fans and/or floor fans are provided in each room and all rooms are ventilated well with windows. Room **cleaning is done twice a week** including the bed linen change, while bathrooms and common areas are cleaned regularly.

Participants have access to **refrigerators** in all the common areas on each floor. **Wi-Fi** is available to each participant in the villa (20 GB per person per month).

Air-conditioning is also available in an additional cost. Participants can bring self-attached mosquito nets that fit bunk beds should they wish to.

Transportation

Daily project transfers for all participants are provided in a van. The van is a 14 seater modern vehicle equipped with the necessary safety and security standards, while the driver is an experienced chauffeur with expert knowledge of Sri Lankan roads and

traffic conditions. However, for certain projects other transportation modes like company-owned tuk-tuks, locally contracted Tuk Tuks or buses are used. Our Operations team has a network of trusted and dependable tuk-tuk drivers that we have been working with for a longer period of time that meets our safety standards. Private transfers can be arranged upon requests of the participants at an additional cost.

Arrivals

Participants fly into the Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport (CMB) which is only a **2 hour drive** from the volunteer house.

The destined arrival date for our participants is **Saturday**.

The morning transfer covers the flights that arrive between 6:00-10:00 AM whereas the afternoon airport transfer covers the participant whose flights are arriving between 2:30-6:30 PM.

If a participant arrives outside of these time windows, then they can either wait longer in the airport to avail the shared transfer service or they have the option to book a private transfer for an additional fee.

Country Overview

Sri Lanka is home to some of the most beautiful sights in the world. Sandy beaches, lush green forests, over 100 beautiful rivers and clear waters populated by thriving marine ecosystem adds up to its beauty. These make Sri Lanka a special place for wildlife like elephants, leopards, sloth bears, deer, peacocks, small loris, wild boar and porcupines to live in.

The main religion in Sri Lanka is **Buddhism** (approximately 70% of the population). Buddhism does not advocate the belief in a God; instead expects the individual to seek truth within one's own experience.

Sri Lanka has a number of **languages** that are spoken in the country. The two official languages are **Sinhalese** (most prominent) and **Tamil**. **English** is also spoken widely, particularly in urban areas, and is prominently used in education, science and commercial purposes.

Weather

Being a tropical island, Sri Lanka has very little seasonal change in weather and is good to visit all year round. The temperature ranges from 15 to 30 degrees (Celsius) on average depending on the day and whether you are in the mountain regions or not. The weather in our vicinity (Galle) averages about 25 degrees Celsius throughout the year.

Electricity

In Sri Lanka the standard voltage is 230 V. The standard frequency is 50 Hz. The power sockets that are used are of type-G.

You can use your electric appliances in Sri Lanka, if the standard voltage in your country is in between 220V - 240V (as in the UK, Europe, Australia and most of Asia and Africa). Participants are advised to purchase an international plug adapter for convenience.



What to Bring:

A conservative dress code needs to be adhered to while at the project. Knees and shoulders must be covered, as well as any tattoos or body art. Additionally, participants need to wear our blue cotton teaching coats during their sessions which we will provide. The rest of the clothing can be comfortable and casual.

The most important thing to note is not to pack too much, as you are to live in a shared accommodation with limited storage space (helps to be fairly mobile), while leaving room to pick any clothing or souvenirs during your time in Sri Lanka. Along with your other travel essential, following are few of the important things required by participants over here;

- Passport /Visa
- Travel & Insurance documents
- Debit/Credit cards
- Towel
- Mosquito net
- Plug adapter (type G)
- Laptop (education projects)
- Sanitary products (tampons)
- Mosquito Repellent
- Sun Blocks
- Rain jackets
- Jeans / trousers (mandatory for education projects)
- Flipflops
- If any allergic medications
- Anti-Diarrhoea Medication
- Throat Lozenges
- Paracetamol
- Anti-inflammatory
- Anti-histamine

Money

The national currency of Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan Rupee (LKR). You can only purchase Sri Lankan Rupees in Sri Lanka (not an International Currency). On arrival at Colombo Airport, it is best to change some money at various Bank ATMs or traditional

money exchange centres (located in the Airport arrival lobby area).

It is essential that you notify your bank(s) in advance of the dates you will be in Sri Lanka to ensure access to your bank accounts and debit/credit cards while you are away.

You should carry a debit card to withdraw cash from the ATM and to take a credit card just in case you lose your debit card or it is blocked. **Avoid carrying large amounts of cash** in public as ATMs are well located and easily accessible in and around Unawatuna and Galle.

Activities

Following are the activities presented by the local team that is available for all its participants:

- Movie nights (weekly)
- Yoga Class (weekly)
- Guided Bike Tour (monthly)
- Monthly BBQ Nights (monthly)
- Special Events like Christmas, Buddhist & Hindu New Year, Easter, Ramadhan Fast Breaking, New Year Day...

The following are popular daily/weekend excursions around the area (at an additional charge):

- Wildlife Safari
- Whale Watching
- Rainforest hiking at Sinharaja Forest Reserve (UNESCO World Heritage site)
- Surfing Lessons
- Galle Fort Walking Tour
- Tea Plantation Visit
- Local Cooking Class
- Gem Cutting Workshop visit
- Jaffna Tour
- Ella-Kandy Tour
- Handloom Factory visit
- Hindu Temple visit
- Upper Diyaluma Waterfall Hiking
- Arugambay / East Coast Tour