



## Women's Empowerment Project



**Availability:** All Year

**Project Start & End Days:** Saturdays

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

**Support Provided:** Program Manager gives detailed introduction and culture training on arrival along with an area orientation tour. Head Teaching Coordinator provides project-specific training and supervises classes daily. Our teaching staff assists participants with lesson planning, guiding them on the specific curriculum to follow each day and conducting daily/weekly 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.

## What our Volunteers do on the Project:

The center welcomes women and young girls daily to learn essential skills in a safe, supportive environment. These women often come from BPL (Below Poverty Line) families and face cultural and financial barriers to education. Our goal is to break this cycle by offering:

- Basic literacy classes in English and math
- Training in employable skills like stitching, drawing, and henna painting
- Personality development and confidence building
- Group and individual counseling sessions for emotional well-being

Volunteers will be teaching English at basic level to advanced levels to women in small to mid-sized groups in the afternoons. Sessions will be held from Monday to Friday in the mornings from 10-12 pm and afternoons from 2-3.30pm. Each session will be conducted in a close-knit, comfortable environment with small groups of women. A significant amount of preparation (1-2 hours daily) is expected from volunteers to plan for these sessions.

Volunteers can get help from our staff on the topics for the lessons and creative ways to teach, but lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers themselves. The session will be conducted at our own teaching centre, which is well equipped with desks, chairs, white boards, books and various teaching resources. As this program is evolving, we welcome volunteers' input in any way to help make and design appropriate courses that can aid our programs. Our local team is always at hand to support you and for any language barriers they will be mediators. Any relevant resources and materials brought will be highly appreciated.

Classes will focus more on speaking English (than reading and writing) and will also include basic grammar sessions. We employ various techniques, such as role play, in order to maximize the practical impact of this initiative. We ideally prefer students who have some teaching background for this project, however anyone who is keen to help and has good English skills is also a good fit.

Depending on your skills and interests, you'll be involved in a variety of impactful activities such as:

- Teaching basic English and mathematics
- Conducting skill-building workshops (stitching, arts, henna)
- Promoting literacy and education awareness
- Helping with women's health and hygiene education
- Leading personality development sessions
- Supporting income-generating activities
- Assisting with counseling and emotional support

**Age Requirement:** Must be 18 years or over

**Nearest Airport:** Cochin International Airport (COK). Our driver will be waiting outside with your name on a placard so after you collect your bags please come straight outside and find your name on a placard. It takes about 1 hour without traffic or 1.5 hours with traffic to reach Fort Kochi from the airport.

## **Return Airport Transfer**

Return transport to the airport will be pre-arranged by your in country team. Accommodation is provided from the Sunday night through to (and including) the Saturday night of your final week. You must vacate the room by 9am on Sunday as we have arrivals on this day. In case there are no arrivals you can always take your time and depart by noon on Sunday.

**Location of Project:** Classes are conducted at the various community centres and private residences in Fort Kochi. Projects are all a 10 min walk from our volunteer house in Galle.

**Location of Volunteer House:** The house is in Fort Kochi itself (in the heart of Fort Kochi still) and walking distance to quite a lot of amenities such as ATMS, Supermarkets, Tuktuks, bus stop (just opposite us) and mobile shops etc all within 5 mins walk. The house is brand new so our volunteers are the first ones living in the newly built property. The house is split on two levels with three apartments and a gorgeous rooftop.

**Meals Provided:** Breakfast, lunch and dinner (Except Sunday dinners)

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.

## Transport

Volunteers need to arrange their own transport to and from their placements. Some placements are within walking distance but most placements will require a bus or tuktuk ride and the local team will be happy to provide recommendations for reliable tuktuk drivers.

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.

**Background to this Program:** The situation of Keralan 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 India. 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 Kerala are literate in Malayalam and whilst there is a high percentage of highly ‘qualified’ or ‘educated’ women there is relatively little space for women in leadership and empowered roles. In Kerala, especially in the lower strata of society, women sense of alienation and insecurity that comes in the midst of economic growth, increasing disintegration of community/family spaces, saturation of ‘secular’ dreams, and an increasing sense of social, economic and political insecurity.

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. Most have had early marriages and have been denied the opportunity to pursue their “dream 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.

**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. The rest of the clothing can be comfortable and casual.

## **Location**

The program is based in Kerala which is South India's tropical gem famously known as 'God's own Country'. Your accommodation, administration, orientation and all programs will be in the suburb area of Fort Kochi or city area of Ernakulum (which are part of Cochin or Kochi). Fort Kochi is a quaint area with 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.

Fort Kochi is a safe and welcoming area and you can enjoy an abundance of activities on the weekends including visiting the local beaches and backwaters that Kerala is known for. The local team will be more than happy to assist with your excursion plans within Kerala on arrival.

## **Accommodation**

Volunteers in Kerala are accommodated in a volunteer house run by local coordinators. Living is basic but 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. There are fans provided, however, it is important to be aware that there is no air-conditioning at the accommodation.

All bedding is provided and you can expect to be sharing a room with up to 3 other volunteers of the same gender. Typically mattresses in Asia are a lot firmer than what you may be used to, so please be prepared for that. If you also wish to use a mosquito net over your bed, you will need to bring a pop up net with you. You will be required to bring your own toiletries and towels.

Volunteers can either handwash their clothes in the volunteer house or arrange laundry service through the local team for a small fee.

## **Requirements**

- We request you to wear conservative clothing which means no shorts or sleeveless tops allowed. Your attire must be somewhat professional or formal.
- Feel free to bring resources such as activity or easy reading books, english language games, or art supplies. Any old laptops or ipads in working condition can be brought for donation to the women's project.
- Please keep a small budget for photocopying or any project resources you may need.

## **In your bag**

Casual, modern clothing is ok and normal in India. However, it is advisable to wear conservative clothing that covers the shoulders, chest and legs whilst at your volunteer placement.

- 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
- 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
- Rain jacket
- Small padlock for securing bags and valuables
- 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
- 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.

## 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 Fort Kochi and tourist areas, and hotels, shops and restaurants in Fort Kochi area generally accept credit cards and USD.

## Weekends and free time

Some of the absolute must dos are:

- The backwaters of Alleppey where you can stay for a night on a houseboat and meander 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.