



AN ELEPHANT EXPERIENCE! PINAWALA ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE SRI LANKA

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sri Lanka is famous for its 1,600 km of unspoilt, golden beaches

"Wow – where do I start?? I have just had the most amazing experience of my life, the only bad part was that it had to come to an end."

Sri Lanka is a vibrant country, rich in its diversity of culture, race, language and religion. The island has an abundance of natural resources, fauna and flora, mountains, rivers and beautiful beaches. It is located at the crossroads where East meets West and is regarded as the gateway to South Asia...



THE LOCATION - PINAWALA

In two words: absolutely breathtaking! Hot, peaceful and tropical, Pinawala is a remote village lush with vegetation and alive with the sounds of crickets, birds and elephants.

Our Elephant Experience Placement is based in Pinawala which is about 3 hours drive north and a bit West of Colombo. The Elephant Orphanage is 50 metres from the river where the Elephants bathe twice a day. It isn't possible to describe the sight of 70 plus Elephants trundling down a hot orange dusted road to the lake below. It is an awesome sight that stays with you always.

There is very little to do in the evenings, but with sunsets like the one above on your doorstep – it is easy to just sit back, put your feet up and unwind!

ON YOUR ARRIVAL!

When you arrive in Sri Lanka, you'll be met from the airport by our delightful Manager, Roshan and his big welcoming smile (which never leaves his face!). Roshan will take you to Pinawala where you will be introduced to the other volunteers on the placement and to our lovely staff at Pinawala – Our Volunteer Co-ordinator here is called Madusha and she is lovely!

Everyone is always extremely friendly and very excited to see a new face. You will be looked after immediately and taken under the collective wing soon to be absorbed in stories of wonderful weekend trips and the all important Sinhalese vocabulary such as *ali betty* (elephant poo) and *hari hundi* (very good!). You will be made to feel very welcome and at home and then you will most likely need a little sleep before a hearty meal and exploring your new surroundings and starting on your tan!

There is plenty of support at the house in Pinawala - 24 hours a day with live in staff who will happily help you to understand and get around this new and exotic culture. Plus, you have the support and friendship of the other volunteers which makes adjusting very easy and fast – a little homesickness is normal for a few days however, trust us, it won't last longer than your first experience washing an elephant down with a coconut husk.... There are usually about 10 volunteers on this placement and it *a/ways* fills up!



PINAWALA ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE

You may have heard of Pinawala Elephant Orphanage already – from the media or through friends or family who have travelled to Sri Lanka. It's a *must-do* stop on any tourists list and, quite frankly, usually an island visitor's highlight. It's a good place to spend some time, and call home for a while. Run by the Sri Lanka Government, Pinawala Elephant Orphanage is home to around 80 elephants, from new born to very old! The elephants here have all been rescued from the wild, whether they are orphaned, abandoned or injured.

Elephants... prepare yourself for some characters. You will notice Sama the aloof elephant who lost part of her leg in a land mine and Raja, the huge old blind elephant who was notoriously famous in his day for his extraordinarily long and beautiful tusks which he would proudly parade in ceremonies. There are Marley, Mia and Hiroshi the cheeky triplet teens and currently 3 newly born babies tripping along nimbly within Mum's stride.

Being close to an elephant is full of surprises. Their skin is grey, rough and wrinkly, with sporadically protruding coarse hair and their trunks are a phenomenon onto themselves. Far more sensitive than the tips of our fingers, elephants rely on their trunks to explore and discover anything and everything of interest to them and this will include you!! There is a sense of peace, intelligence and integrity about elephants that you certainly feel in the presence of 80 of them! Whilst elephants are unexpectedly fast movers when they chose, even with their huge hoofs an elephant will tend to go out of its way to avoid treading on an insect. These animals are compassionate, patient and well, just incredible... you have to experience them first hand!

YOUR WORK

You will work in the famous Government Elephant Orphanage at Pinawala. There are about 80 originally orphaned or injured elephants living at the orphanage and the institute is well known and respected as the largest breeding base for Asian elephants. Many of the elephants here are not tame and the majority of your work would be more behind-the-scenes, rather than hands-on with the elephants themselves, although you will have the opportunity to do some hands-on work.

Part of your duties will include some supervised bathing of the elephants in the river, which takes place daily, and:

- Washing the tame elephants in the river
- Possibly feeding the three baby elephants (subject to mahouts discretion)
- Mucking out (there is a lot of this!)
- The amount of work available for volunteers varies, so there may be some periods when you'll be working less than at others.

Generally the hours are approximately 9.30 a.m. to 12.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m., although these are a little flexible.

We are continually initiating new projects that volunteers can participate in within the Orphanage in order to increase the amount of work available for you and as these become available, we will keep you updated.

Please note that you must cover your shoulders and your knees at all times in Sri Lanka so as not offend the local community – Sri Lankan people are very conservative! This means you must work in long or cropped trousers and save your shorts only for the garden or the weekends at the beach!

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Travellers rent a house in the nearby village of Kegalle (about 30 minutes from the Orphanage). All the volunteers will here together, it is usually around 8 people at one time. It is a lovely house typical of the Sri Lankan style. You will have all necessary facilities such as a washing machine and a comfortable living area. There is a garden surrounding the house, a nice dinner table and a comfortable lounge where you can watch DVDs, talk or read in the evenings.

A chef will live in and cook all your meals for you and the local fresh food is delicious! We also provide a TV and DVD player. Sri Lanka is a great place to buy DVD's, costing about a pound to buy in the cities of Colombo and Kandy.



Kegalle is about 30 minutes from Pinawala Elephant Orphanage and transport will be provided to take you to work every morning, bring you back and forth for lunch, and take you home at the end of the day. There are internet facilities and bustling street markets in Kegalle during the day. The evenings are quiet with the Sri Lankan culture favouring early mornings and early nights.

It is a nice sociable atmosphere in the house. However, do keep the quietness in mind and be prepared for slow paced evenings. Most of the work you will be doing is manual so you'll probably be very tired in the evenings and quite happy to go to bed early! However, do keep the quietness in mind and take plenty of books, games and similar to keep you entertained. You will share a bedroom with at least one other Travellers volunteer of the same sex.

There is a phone in the house that your family and friends can call you on and with a phone card that you can buy locally you can make cheap international calls home.

Security and support at the house is great with a team of live in staff including a lovely housemother who will like to share her knowledge with you on the local culture. If you're unfortunate enough to fall ill or suffer any problems (even if just homesickness) at any time, these staff are on call 24/7 to help you out with whatever is needed.

YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

Don't worry about not having special qualifications. The whole idea of *Travellers* is to provide placements for volunteers who can help where they can in a variety of areas rather than formally trained conservationists. The fact that you are there to help and are not a drain on their resources makes the work you do valuable and much appreciated. However, if you do have any type of relevant qualification or past experience in the sector, please **take any certificate or reference** (preferably a good photocopy) with you.

FEEDBACK: A LETTER FROM A FORMER VOLUNTEER: CARINA ROGERS



Wow – where do I start?? I had just the most amazing experience of my life, the only bad part was that it had to come to an end. Sitting at my desk, now back in the boring routine that I once left behind, I ask myself why on earth did I come back??! I would give anything to be back out in Sri Lanka, playing volleyball with the orphan-boys, washing the elephants in the river, or just lying on a paradise beach somewhere, I'm not fussy, any of them would do.

Well for the past three months that was my life, not something that I wanted to give up and I hold such strong memories of all the experiences that I came across. I would recommend this experience to anyone.

I was lucky enough to have a friend to share the adventure with, as it turned out, we found that we were extremely compatible travelling partners (three months in each others pockets and not one argument – pretty impressive ay?!). All the other people we met out there had come on their own but we all soon became one big happy family in the house. It was so nice to have the support and companionship of the others it certainly gives you the confidence to do things you might not feel comfortable doing on your own.



One important fact that I learnt from this trip is that the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. It may sound an old cliché but it is so true.

You can join in as much or as little as you want to. And being the type of people that Nat and I are – we took full advantage of every opportunity!

Anyone wanting a taste of the celebrity life style – I highly recommend this to you. I don't know how many photos I had to pose for, how many autographs I had to sign, people will point and stare at you, at first it's quite off putting, but funnily enough you soon get used to it and now that I am back in England, I have to admit that I miss all the attention!!

The best part of the whole experience for me had to be working at Pinawala at the Elephant Orphanage. Oh my goodness, what an opportunity, those sorts of experiences don't come along everyday. Work in the morning was 'hard-work', but great fun at the same time, but you get your reward in the afternoon when the mahouts let you go in the river and wash the elephants. They had to drag me out of there everyday, as I didn't want to leave. I built up a close bond with one of the elephants 'Sapu' – a seven-year-old female. The mahouts taught us the commands, and I was over-the-moon when she actually obeyed me!! It was such a good feeling.

The general routine out there is that you work during the week and then you have the weekends free to explore the island. This works out perfectly, so every Friday afternoon we would venture off to different parts of the island. We did everything. From the rain forest to the beaches, Adam's Peak, the Ancient Cities, the Elephant Orphanage, the Zoo, the tea plantations, the waterfalls, I could go on! We certainly made the most of the time we had there.

Now back at my desk and back into the same old routine that I once left behind, I cannot wait to go back out there – it has certainly left me hungry for more. Like I said before, I would recommend this adventure to anyone. I owe a lot to Travellers, as the knowledge that I gained, cannot be bought, only experienced.

CATHERINE CLAPP – TEACHING AND ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE SEPTEMBER 2003



“I want to thank you for organising my placement, and giving me the opportunity to have such a rare experience. I loved both the teaching and elephant orphanage placements, both so different in their own ways. Sri Lanka fascinated me as a country, and it is definitely a place which I would like to go back to in the future. The placements put me in good stead for the rest of my travels, and definitely helped me have the confidence to travel by myself, and the drive to see and do as much as I possibly could.

What did you enjoy the most on your placement? Experience of being totally submerged in such a different culture – meeting locals at such a personal level and doing things a normal tourist wouldn't have the access or opportunity to enjoy.

I loved both of my placements. They gave me a completely different insight into how other people live. Sri Lanka is a fascinating country, rich in culture, wildlife, history and friendliness! The people were generally lovely to talk to and the landscapes beautiful and very diverse. My placement has given me the confidence to have independence and a huge desire to travel and see more of the world that we live in. Experiencing it at that level instead of as a tourist is a very special thing that can never be forgotten, thank you!

Thank you again for all your help, encouragement and organisation. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience which I will never forget.”

THE NEXT STEP

If you wish to join us on one of our exciting projects then please fill in either an online application form at our website (www.travellersworldwide.com) or one that is attached to our brochure. Once you have booked and confirmed your place we will send you detailed pack information regarding your placement and country.

I do hope you join us and please do call or email if you have any questions at all about this or any of our other projects – 01903 502595 or email info@travellersworldwide.com

If you would like to know more about Travellers in general, or about any of our other projects we run in over 18 countries worldwide, please visit our website at www.travellersworldwide.com

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