



Volunteer Q&A

Wildlife SOS Elephant Conservation & Care Centre (ECCC) Mathura, & Agra Bear Rescue Facility

A

Accommodation

The volunteer accommodation comprises three large two-storey houses in a gated community in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, which is around half an hour's drive from central Agra.

Volunteer House Facilities

- Bedrooms: rooms are lockable with en-suite shower room with hot running water.
- Air-con available in some bedrooms, otherwise ceiling fans in bedrooms & public areas
- Living/hangout area with sofas
- Dining room
- Wi-Fi
- Books
- TV
- Fresh, filtered water
- Washing machine
- Towels & bedding provided
- Indoor games

Addresses

Volunteer House [WILDLIFE SOS, House no. B-22, Aastha City, Runkata, Agra, PIN-282007](#)

Elephant facility [Near Sachdeva Institute of Technology Thurmura Ghari, NH2, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh 281122](#)

Bear facility [Agra Bear Rescue Facility, Soor sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Keetham, Runkata, Agra, PIN-282007](#)

Alcohol

Alcohol is not readily available in the area surrounding the facilities, and not encouraged at the volunteer house. If you do wish to have a little alcohol please speak with our staff. They may be able to source for you but this is not guaranteed and not encouraged.

Alcohol is not allowed at our rescue centres at any time.

ATMs

There are ATMs at the airports and one a short drive from the volunteer accommodation which one of the staff members can drive you to on request.

B

Bears

There are around 118 sloth bears at the bear rescue facility. All are previous dancing bears. They live in individual or group enclosures depending on their needs. They enjoy a balanced vegetarian diet and enjoy eating treats, climbing on enrichment structures and sleeping in the sun. Although you can get close to the bears from behind the enclosure gates, direct physical contact is not possible. The bear facility is around 7km from the volunteer house and the WSOS staff transport you there and back every day.

Breeding

Wildlife SOS does not have a breeding program.

C

Coronavirus

Throughout our Volunteering Program the health and well-being of you and our staff is paramount. Please be assured that we will follow current government recommended guidelines at all times, we ask that you also do the same. Anyone not adhering to covid regulations may be asked to leave the program.

Proof of covid vaccinations: required in line with WHO and local government guidelines in effect at that time. Please do bring a face mask as they are required in some public place.

Clothes

Bring clothes suitable for working outdoors, and [suitable for the weather](#) Please note that it is hot, dusty and at times dirty work so don't bring your best clothes! Please also be aware of cultural differences in respect of clothing, especially women. We kindly ask that you refrain from wearing 'skimpy' tops/ shorts out of respect for our staff.

- Sturdy/waterproof outdoor working shoes/boots/trainers
- T-shirts
- Knee length shorts
- Long trousers/jeans
- Long-sleeved tops (helps keep arms from getting scratched during certain work)
- Cap/sunhat
- Waterproof jacket (depending upon time of year you visit)
- *We also ask that you avoid bright clothes as they can upset the animals*

We also request you to bring:

- Gardening gloves
- Covers for your arms (for preparing elephant fodder!) **Top Tip** - tubular bandages work well!
- Clothes for painting
- Re-usable water bottle
- Mask (for painting or to keep dust out)
- Insect repellent
- Sun-tan lotion

What does our Volunteer Program include?

- Accommodation at our modern Volunteer House
- 3 vegetarian meals a day
- Tour of, and volunteering at Agra Bear Rescue Centre & our Elephant Conservation and Care Centre.
- Transportation to and from the centres and volunteer house
- Volunteering days start at 0930 and generally finish around 1800
- Presentations by our Education Officers

Cultural Differences

Every country in the world has its' own unique culture, we advise that you read up on the general differences between your country and India in order that you can communicate and act in accordance with Indian culture which will enhance your visit to us/ India. A good source of information are [The Rough Guide](#) and [Lonely Planet](#).

Cigarettes

Cigarettes are not readily available in the area surrounding the facilities, and not allowed in the volunteer house or our centres. If you do wish to smoke please always smoke outside, being considerate to our staff and other volunteers. Our staff may be able to source for you but please be aware that this is not preferred, and availability not guaranteed. It is not safe to go to try to purchase locally so please adhere to our polite request as above.

D

Donations

We are very happy to accept and re-use unwanted mobiles (in good condition), clothes, shoes, towels, bags, toiletries, gloves, pens etc

Dress code

In the volunteer house and at the elephant and bear facilities, shorts, t-shirts, vest tops etc are fine for men and women. Outside the volunteer house and facilities' it's

advisable that you cover up a bit more. Refer to the Lonely Planet, Rough Guide or online articles on women travellers in India for advice.

E

Elephants

There are 29 elephants at ECCC: Elephant Conservation and Care Center, Mathura (at time of print). The males have their own enclosures, and are kept separate from the females at all times. Volunteers will work around the females but may get to observe the males on their walks. [Learn more](#) about our elephants and our work with them.

*Kindly note that, Wildlife SOS are strongly committed to the ethical treatment of animals, therefore **direct contact with the elephants is not a part of your volunteering, only trained keepers are allowed to directly interact with the elephants. On behalf of our elephants, we thank you for your understanding.***

F

Food

The volunteer program includes three home-cooked Indian vegetarian meals a day. The food is prepared on-site by Wildlife SOS housekeeping staff, is plentiful, organic, fresh and delicious. Every day is different and includes a mixture of vegetables, herbs, spices, rices, breads, pastas and pulses.

Please complete fully the required fields in our online application process. Please also remind our staff on arrival of your requirements or changes to them.

H

Hospitals

There is a hospital close to the volunteer house. Healthcare is not free to everyone in India so it's advisable to get health insurance before you travel **** please follow government guidelines regarding having sufficient cover for respiratory related illness.** Please let WSOS know at time of application of any on-going health issues, you will need to be fit and healthy as the work can be very physical and it will be hot.

If you want to visit a doctor, don't hesitate to ask your volunteer coordinator so that he/she can arrange this for you. Please note that the fee for the doctor/ hospital appointment will need to be paid by you at the time of the visit and is in no way the responsibility of Wildlife SOS or their staff.

I

India

Before coming to India for the first time you might want to get a travel guide so you're aware of the cultures / traditions, and what to expect. Good sources are [The Rough Guide](#) and [Lonely Planet](#).

Insurance

It is a requirement of your being accepted onto our volunteer program that you take out comprehensive health and/or travel insurance. It is advised generally when travelling to India, being sure to include full medical and Covid cover. Please check that your insurance covers you for volunteering duties.

L

Location

The Wildlife SOS rescue facilities are located around a half-hour drive from the town of Agra, in the state of Uttar Pradesh. See 'Address'. The volunteer houses are in a gated community, we ask/ advise that you do not wander around the local area on your own as we cannot guarantee your safety.

Language

The language spoken in Agra is Hindi. The Wildlife SOS volunteer staff speak fluent English.

Local Area: See 'safety'

M

Meals: See 'Food'

Money

At the time of print, non-residents are not allowed to bring a large amount of Rupees into India. Please check with your country's government guidelines on bringing money into the country.

Carry credit cards, travellers cheques and a small amount of Rupees as well as your country's currency.

There are ATMs at the airports and one close to the volunteer accommodation which issues Rupees.

Mosquitos

Utter Pradesh, at the time of writing, is not a mosquito danger zone. However, if you're prone to being bitten by mosquitos, it's advisable to bring enough mosquito spray to last your trip as it's not easy to buy in the area. There are mosquito plugs in the volunteer house bedrooms so you won't need a mosquito net at night as long as you spray yourself!

R

Religion

There are many religions/ religious beliefs in the world, India is no different. If religion is important to you, we advise that you read up on the varying religions and beliefs common to India.

A good source of information are [The Rough Guide](#) and [Lonely Planet](#).

Rupees: See 'Money'

Rooms: see 'Accommodation'

S

Safety

Although you never need to go anywhere other than the volunteer house or animal centres, you might want to explore the greater local area. The local area is traditional and, like much of India, poor in relation to many Western regions. It's advisable for women to wear long-sleeved tops and long trousers or skirts when not at the volunteer house or rescue centers (here, shorts/t-shirts/vests are fine, see Clothes). It is not advisable to go out and about locally on your own, please speak to our staff regarding organised additional activities or booking a reliable taxi/ guide.

Refer to a reputable guide (e.g. Rough Guide or Lonely Planet) for up-to-date safety recommendations. [This is also a great guide for women](#).

Shopping

For any basics/essentials you might need, there is a Walmart a short drive from the volunteer house. You will need to go with a member of the Wildlife SOS team as you need a Walmart card to shop there). There is a very small shop two-minutes from the house which sells soft drinks, sweets, crisps etc. but again we ask/ advise that you do not attempt to walk there.

Street dogs

There are many street dogs in India. The ones around the volunteer house (at time of print) are generally approachable, friendly and seemingly healthy. The staff at the volunteer house provide large bags of kibbles that you can hand out to the dogs. The local people tolerate and even occasionally feed them.

T

Taxis

You can book taxis, Ola/ Uber, to pick you up from the volunteer house and take you anywhere you like. Ask a member of staff who will have a list of reputable local taxis.

Temperatures

Weather and temperatures can really vary in Agra and they have definite seasons. Check out this Agra [weather and temperature guide](#) to help you decide when to come. Please note: WSOS needs volunteers all year round and the work still needs doing whatever the weather!

V

Volunteering Duties

On your first day you will enjoy an orientation day, visiting both facilities, learning about the animals and the work that is done at each, and the additional projects that Wildlife SOS operate.

The kind of work you will be doing varies depending upon the needs at the time, generally you can expect to be doing the following. **** If you have any specialist skills that you think may be useful to us please do detail them on your Application Form.**

- Gardening: digging, weeding, planting, tending to our vegetable garden/crops*
- Preparing food: weighing and chopping fruit, weighing and distributing elephant fodder, mixing porridge for bears
- Distributing elephant food by bucket
- Cleaning bowls and buckets after feeding
- Painting enclosures*
- Cleaning enclosures: sweeping, mopping, picking up poop
- Cleaning pools: sweeping, mopping, bleaching*
- Building enrichment structures: digging, tying ropes, carrying logs
- A visit to our Elephant Hospital is included and you'll get to accompany and observe our elephants on their evening walks

*** A limited supply of gloves and masks may be provided by WSOS, however it's strongly advised that you bring your own gardening gloves and long-sleeved top or covers for your arms (for elephant fodder which can scratch and irritate skin, also painting). Also bring a top and trousers/pants for painting. **Please also ensure you have a face mask.***

Important Information

*Kindly note that, Wildlife SOS are strongly committed to the ethical treatment of animals, therefore **direct contact with the elephants is not a part of your volunteering**, only trained keepers are allowed to interact with the elephants. **On behalf of our elephants, we thank you for your understanding***

Vaccinations

Check with your country's government travel health website and a reputable source, e.g. Lonely Planet or Rough Guide, for guidelines on which vaccinations to get. Please do follow their guidance.

Visa

You will need a visa to enter India – we would suggest the tourist eVisa. You will find travel information and entry requirements at Gov.UK <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/india/entry-requirements> Follow the links within this Gov.UK page to ensure you apply for your visa through the correct channels.

Veterinary care

Wildlife SOS employs their own teams of vets throughout our centres.

W

Women

See 'Safety'

Water

Fresh, filtered water is available (literally on tap!) at all our centres and the volunteer accommodation. **Please do bring a re-useable water bottle as this is the environmentally friendly option!**

We do hope that you feel inspired to volunteer with us, if you have any questions prior to making your booking please contact debbie@wildlifesos.org

Disclaimer: Kindly note that this document is correct at time of being published and we endeavour to update as and when necessary, however information is subject to change and can at times be out of our control.

May 2023