

VESL.ORG

**Unique, exciting & worthwhile
volunteer opportunities overseas**

INFORMATION PACK

Info at a glance...

- Where** - VESL sends volunteers to work within rural communities across Asia including **Sri Lanka, Thailand and India**
- What** - Volunteers can **teach English**, work as **language assistants in rural schools** and **orphanages** or work within **community development projects**
- When** - Projects run from **4 to 6 weeks** during July / August each year or **3 to 6 months** throughout the year
- Who** - We are looking for people of **all ages and backgrounds** who have energy, passion and enthusiasm. Our **application process is open to everyone** so send us your application as **you may be just who we are looking for**

“... it was the most magical time and was really fulfilling. An experience never to be forgotten.”

Antonia Watts, Sri Lanka 2005.

Why should you volunteer with VESL?

- VESL is a **registered charity** and is **not** run for profit.
- VESL is run by a dedicated team with **extensive overseas experience**, all of whom have been **past volunteers** themselves and have a **passionate commitment** to run projects that are not only **rewarding** but **beneficial** to host communities.
- VESL works closely with host communities to identify **worthwhile projects** before matching volunteers' skills and experience to them.
- VESL expects **every volunteer** to return feeling **proud of their achievement** and to have had an **experience they will never forget**.

“I had a brilliant time... the best experience of my life in fact!”

Amy Crinnon, India 2008.

Many thanks for your interest in the VESL overseas programme. We hope that your enquiry is just the first step on the way to a fantastic experience volunteering with VESL.

We want to make your decision to volunteer overseas with VESL as simple as possible. We understand that volunteering overseas is a big commitment and there is a lot to think about before making the final decision on whether to go for it or not. You probably have many questions going through your mind and we hope this pack can provide some of the answers you are looking for. We hope you find the pack useful but more importantly, **we hope it gets you excited about the possibility of volunteering overseas with VESL.**

If we have not answered all your questions after reading this pack please don't hesitate to call or email us with any further questions you might have. We are here to help...

VESL : the overseas volunteering charity

VESL (Volunteers for Educational Support and Learning) is a UK charity (no. 1117908) that has been sending volunteers to work on projects in Asia since 2003. VESL started out by sending volunteers to Sri Lanka and has since expanded into India and Thailand. We have built up a great reputation for making a real difference in the communities we work within as well as enabling our volunteers to have a challenging and highly rewarding experience overseas.

"I have not regretted my decision to volunteer for a moment. It has been an honour to be able to come to this community and be part of their lives for a short while. I am sure I will look back on this time in years to come as a special time in my life, when status and possessions were irrelevant, when kindness and being able to give to others made you richer than you ever felt possible. I have discovered new things about myself as well as shedding some old doubts and fears. I think I will benefit for the rest of my life from this experience."

Fiona Passey, India 2008.

Beautiful and interesting countries

Sri Lanka is a truly beautiful island and a fantastic country to volunteer in. For an island of its size it is packed full of things to see and do; it has countless ancient monuments, breathtaking views and stunning beaches as well as many game parks, great towns and even rainforest!

What volunteers gain most from living and working in Sri Lanka is the opportunity to spend time with the wonderful Sri Lankan people, experiencing their culture and way of life first-hand.

VESL volunteers have returned to the UK with huge enthusiasm for the country and many exciting stories to tell (such as new-found curry making skills, a unique insight into Buddhism and a great many new friends!)

VESL started sending volunteers to Sri Lanka in 2003. Working in co-operation with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education we have been able to identify the most needy rural schools in which to work. We have been able to send volunteers to projects right across the whole of Sri Lanka and have worked in Singhalese, Tamil, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities.

We have worked hard to maintain a safe and sustainable programme in Sri Lanka and the future continues to offer exciting and worthwhile opportunities to work within this beautiful country.

"Thank you very, very, very much VESL for giving me the opportunity to experience such great things, such a different life... such great memories."

Alicja Szlejf, Sri Lanka 2007.

India is a treat for all the senses. The diverse culture and landscape means the more time you spend there, the more you want to stay to take in the rich, colourful and unpredictable tapestry that is India. Volunteers returning from India have enthused about the contrasting culture and the numerous sights and new experiences they have had the privilege to witness and be involved in; from the bustling markets and hectic cities to the sleepy rural villages with their ox-drawn carts and fishing nets.

VESL is currently sending volunteers to work in Andhra Pradesh state in the south-east of the country. The projects include working in orphanages, bridge schools, hospices and in community development projects. These are based within rural communities near to the Indian Ocean and in the forests to the north.

One of the great benefits of volunteering in Andhra Pradesh is that volunteers are far from the tourist trail and experience the 'real' India.

Our programme in India is growing each year and we hope to develop projects in Tamil Nadu and Northern India soon.

"A big thanks again for accepting me on your program, truly an invaluable experience and hopefully a positive one for everyone we met along the way."

Anna-Kristina Larsson, India 2008.

Thailand has more UK visitors than any other country in Asia and it is easy to see why. As you travel across the country it is consistently beautiful and its famously smiling, friendly and generous people help to make Thailand a joy to volunteer in.

VESL always aims to get away from the tourist trails and our projects are in rural areas where our volunteers are most needed and will get an opportunity to really have that 'Thai experience'. In consultation with the Thai Ministry of Education, VESL has chosen to concentrate its efforts within Chiang Rai Province in the far north of the country. These projects include schools situated along the Mekong River within the valleys that form the Golden Triangle overlooking Burma and Laos. The area is famous for its fantastic scenery, hill tribes and history. Volunteers will be based at schools, running teaching programmes and clubs for children from the hill tribes and local communities.

In the future VESL aims to extend its volunteer programme into the Surin province to the east of Thailand close to Cambodia.

"I had such an amazing experience ...it's been incredible. The people were unbelievably welcoming and I couldn't have asked for more"

Caroline Abotts, Thailand 2008.

VESL's worthwhile projects

Every year our programme evolves to meet the needs of the communities that we work within. As a result we now run a number of different types of project. All our projects are established in consultation with government bodies and are often in partnership with local charities and non-government organisations that share our goal. VESL only sends volunteers to projects where it knows they are needed and wanted.

The range of projects now include running summer clubs, teaching in schools, working as a language assistants, helping in orphanages or children's homes and working for local charities in community development roles.

We have projects that suit volunteers with all sorts of backgrounds and skills and we are always looking for new ways to extend the programme. However, VESL is an educational charity and therefore most of our projects involve teaching in some form. VESL feels that it is in this type of project that its volunteers can make the most difference to local communities.

Each of our overseas projects is different from the next and it is difficult to generalise. However those volunteers in rural projects usually help to teach the basic building blocks of English, developing confidence in the children and unlocking the English they are learning at school. Our volunteers are able to bring language games and activities to the classroom in order to make learning engaging and fun. This brings enormous benefits to both the children and the teachers.

Not all volunteers take whole class lessons so please don't be put off if you don't have teaching or classroom experience. We are also able to place volunteers as Language Assistants that work alongside a school's English department. Language Assistants are able to work on conversational English through games and activities that support the local teachers, providing an important resource and valuable exposure to spoken English.

In addition to rural primary and secondary schools we have a number of projects in orphanages and bridge schools that help provide education to rescued child labourers. These projects require an element of pastoral care and volunteers are often able to assist in the teaching of a range of subjects in addition to English. We also have a number of community development projects in which our volunteers assist local charities working with young adult groups in rural community education programmes or out-reach schemes.

This year we have a number of new pilot projects that would benefit from volunteers with nursing skills or a medical background and a pilot project in which art and art therapy skills could be put to great use too.

"I just want to say a huge thank you for accepting me on the VESL programme, I really, really enjoyed my time in Sri Lanka! I couldn't have hoped for a better project, the school was terrific, a lovely principal and really friendly English teachers. Never have I seen so many children eager to learn and the smiles and appreciation they showed for having us there made it even more worthwhile!"

Beatrix Zwart, volunteer 2005.

Requirements

- We are looking for people who want to volunteer on a worthwhile overseas project and feel they have something to contribute. The VESL application process is open to everyone and, because we have a range of projects, VESL volunteers are taken from all types of backgrounds and experience.
- As our volunteers usually help teach English or assist in local schools, experience of working with children and/or teaching would be helpful. However, no formal qualifications are required as we have a selection of projects that suit differing skills and experience.
- Experience of overseas travel and an understanding of different cultures would also be useful.
- Enthusiasm, adaptability and sensitivity are the top attributes we will be looking for in any volunteer.
- All volunteers must be over 18 years old. VESL has no upper age limit.
- You must be up for a challenge. Most of the projects are very rural, some in communities without running water or electricity.
- Volunteers will, in most cases, be living with families within the local community, experiencing authentic rural life. Adaptability and cultural sensitivity are essential.
- You must be free for the full duration of the project and be able to attend both an info & selection day and training event in the UK. You will be free to travel within your country after your project ends.

Volunteer testimonials and feedback

VESL has been sending volunteers to a beautiful little village in the foothills near Kandy (Sri Lanka) since 2003. Volunteers have been working in the local primary and secondary schools, running after-school English clubs and also getting involved in other projects in the community. What follows is a selection of pictures and reflections from people who have been involved with the project over the years.

Mrs. Kumari, Primary School English Teacher

The benefits of hosting volunteers...

"The best thing about hosting VESL volunteers is that it enables a unique and exciting cultural exchange. The volunteers are very interested in learning about [Sri Lankan] customs and traditions and have really become part of the family. They play with the children all the time and become friends with everyone.

The volunteers have had a massive impact on the schools and community and really made a difference. They are very popular with the students and everyone is very proud to have them here. The older students take them around the village and to their homes. All the people in [the village] know about VESL and are very happy to spend time with the volunteers. Everyone here has improved their English as it has been really good for us to be exposed to native speakers."

Jenny Chalmers, Volunteer 2004

Village life...

"My time spent living and working in the a rural Sri Lankan community was truly wonderful. Charli (my VESL partner) and I were living with a local family for the duration of the project. Our host Mother looked after our every need and found any of our actions from attempts to speak Sinhalese to eating with our hands to washing our clothes hilarious. I wasn't aware I was such a comic! She force-fed us vast quantities of her delicious curries three times a day and we were to "take a tea" (tea, fried spicy snacks and numerous cakes laden with sugar) twice a day. For her to allow us to leave the table, we had to have sampled (and gone back for seconds of) everything she had prepared. Let me tell you, it was torture! If we hadn't learned the term 'badaa pireelah' [meaning] 'stomach full' on the first day, our host could have been lethal!

I must take this chance to thank VESL for its support and enabling me to spend a magical summer in Sri Lanka. Although small, I do feel as though the work I did was rewarding and worthwhile. Both the friends I have made with the other volunteers and those in Sri Lanka with the memories of teaching and living in such a beautiful rural village, shall stay with me for a long time."

Antonia Watts, Volunteer 2005

My experience...

"Our time in [this village] was by no means easy. It was exhausting and draining, but looking back it was the most magical time and really fulfilling. An experience never to be forgotten. I will always be pleased I did it. The people are so warm and grateful and saying good bye was so hard. I can guarantee any future VESL volunteers will have an amazing experience in an incredible place with gorgeous people. Finally without VESL I would not have met my partner, Emma, a great new friend."

Phillipa Burrows, Volunteer 2006

Running a VESL after-school club...

"In the afternoons, when school finished, my volunteer partner, Ali, and I ran an English club for the primary and secondary school children in the village. Applications to come to the club far exceeded the number of places available so the local teachers selected the pupils they felt were the most likely to benefit. The result was I worked with a group of bright, highly motivated children who were thrilled to participate in the English club.

It was clear that doing an extra hour and a half of English every day with a native speaker really made a great deal of difference, and they made rapid progress. During the club we did a lot of games, songs, vocabulary, quizzes and role-plays.

At the end of our stay we held a show for parents and teachers to showcase everything that our students had learnt. Above all we had a lot of fun, and the appreciation of the kids, parents and teachers coupled with the tangible progress they made and the pleasure they had in realising how much English they could understand, made the experience one of the most rewarding things I have ever done."

Mr Rathnayake, Deputy Head

Feedback from the school...

"The VESL programme this year, as before, was really valuable to our community. Thanks so much for your volunteers' contribution. The teaching programme was rich and the volunteer teachers so energetic as well as so enthusiastic. The schools have vastly benefited from the VESL volunteers' immense work and experience."

VESL : a transparent and accountable charity

Everyone within VESL has experience as an overseas volunteer. We understand the difficulties associated with trying to find an organisation that you can trust to arrange your project well, keep you safe overseas and be transparent with its costs.

VESL is a charity and not run for profit, however, we must still raise the funds required to set-up, run and support each project. Volunteers are therefore required to contribute towards the cost of their own project.

VESL does not ask for this contribution lightly and believes it is essential to adhere to the following key principles on which the organisation was founded :

- Keep the amount that volunteers contribute to a minimum to ensure VESL is able to select the best volunteers available and be as inclusive as possible.
- Support volunteers in their fundraising efforts.
- Send volunteers to projects at no cost to host families or the local communities.
- Keep all administration costs to a minimum to ensure that as much money as possible goes directly towards VESL's charitable aims.
- Make our costs as transparent as possible.
- Give volunteers reliable back up and support during their placement, using experienced in-country staff.
- Spare no expense in ensuring volunteers remain safe and healthy throughout their placement.

VESL volunteers are required to contribute the following towards the cost of setting up and running their project :

- **Summer programme (4-6 weeks) : £900**
- **3 month* programme throughout the year : £1350**

£250 of this fee will be required as a deposit, payable after you have been selected for a project. The remainder will be due two weeks before you depart to allow you plenty of time to fundraise.

*If you are looking for a project in excess of 3 months we will require a supplement of £250 for each additional month.

What do you get in return for your contribution?

- Accommodation at project
- All meals
- Comprehensive travel and health insurance for the duration of your time overseas (including any travelling)
- Selection and information events
- Training programme
- Project set-up costs
- Pre-departure support
- In-country induction
- In-country back up and support
- Airport pick-up and first night's accommodation near airport
- Travel to project (inc. an internal flight if within Thailand)
- Support on return

Don't let the cost stop you taking part in this once in a lifetime experience

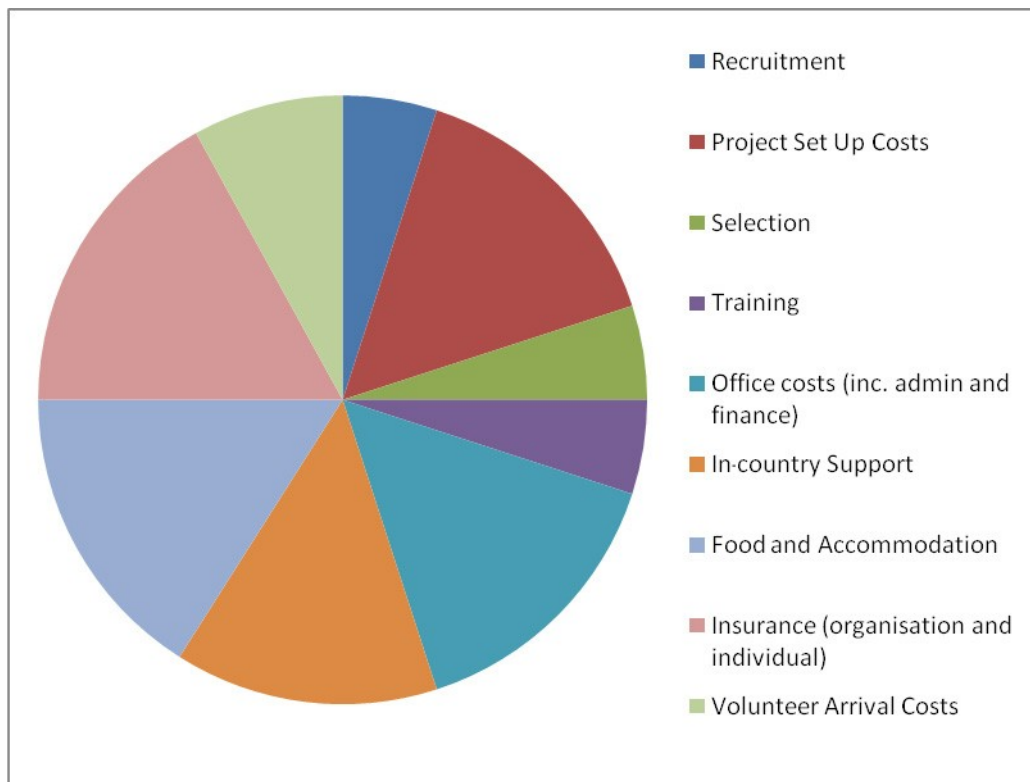
Despite the fact VESL is one of the cheaper organisations to volunteer overseas with, we understand it is not easy for our volunteers to meet the financial commitment required. Many past volunteers have initially felt this opportunity was outside their budget and, with our help, have gone on to **successfully fundraise their entire contribution**.

Before you rule yourself out of this amazing opportunity please bear in mind that VESL is a **registered charity** so you are able to **fundraise towards the cost** of your placement and apply to **sponsors** or **grant giving bodies** for assistance.

Fundraising may seem daunting, but it is also very rewarding and can even be fun! It is important to see fundraising as part of your volunteering experience and not to be put off by the challenge. VESL provides all volunteers with a copy of its fundraising guide and free use of the Just Giving website. This enables our volunteers to create their own online fundraising webpage.

How does VESL spend your contribution?

As a charity and a not-for-profit organisation we believe in being as transparent as possible. The costs associated with each of our projects are different, but the following chart gives a general breakdown of what volunteers' contributions are spent on.



What if I'm new to fundraising?

It is in the charity's interest to give you as much advice as possible. If you are prepared to put a little effort into fundraising before you go overseas a lack of money should not hold you back.

Once you get the ball rolling on your fundraising plans things really do fall into place and it can actually be fun! Friends and family will always get behind you and money can also be raised by approaching local and international businesses, trusts, university alumni and grant-giving bodies. You are of course also able to run your own fundraising events.

VESL has produced a 'Guide to Fundraising' which is given to all volunteers who attend our information and selection events. The guide is full of ideas to help you including case studies describing how our past volunteers have successfully raised their own contributions. Many of our volunteers have shown that if you start early enough, it is more than possible to raise the entire contribution. VESL also has a partnership with the 'Just Giving' fundraising website. This enables our volunteers to create their very own fundraising page and receive donations towards their contribution online.

What about my safety overseas?

- One of VESL's main priorities is ensuring that volunteers are kept safe and secure overseas. VESL does send volunteers to interesting, different and challenging placements away from tourist areas. However, VESL would never place volunteers in areas without being confident of their safety. VESL puts a great deal of effort into ensuring all our projects are safe before you arrive and that you remain safe throughout.
- All of our UK based staff are experienced in living, working or volunteering in Asia. We will also have back-up and **support staff** who are on call 24 hours a day in all our countries throughout the programme.
- All projects are vetted and **risk-assessed**. We also take advice directly from the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office** on the safety of the areas in which we work.
- VESL takes out **comprehensive travel and health insurance** for all volunteers and also holds organisational liabilities insurance to protect our volunteers.

What if I'm not confident about completing a project overseas?

Very few volunteers can have 100% confidence in their abilities before starting their project as they are typically doing something completely new. VESL has had a great deal of experience in selecting the right volunteers for the right kind of project and we strive to ensure volunteers are matched to projects they will enjoy and in which we know they will be able to make a real difference. Taking on a project overseas will always be a challenging prospect, however, VESL will only place you in a project that we believe you will be able to succeed in.

Before you go overseas, VESL runs an **induction and training event**. This is designed to give you some constructive advice and information to help you in your placement and to give you the opportunity to learn from our experienced team and from past volunteers. During this event we will also be able to address any concerns you may have.

Do I have to go overseas on my own?

Although we do have individual projects available, in the majority of cases volunteers are sent overseas in **pairs** or **small groups**. Some volunteers prefer to go on their own while others prefer the support of a partner. If you would prefer a partner we will endeavour to match you with a suitable volunteer who you will have the opportunity to meet before your departure.

In addition to partnering volunteers, we place almost all of our volunteers with a family in the local community. This provides, not only a direct link into the community, but also the support and encouragement of a friendly family structure. Volunteers soon become surrogate sons and daughters and form lasting friendships with their host families.

What if I'm not sure VESL is right for me?

During our information and selection events you will be given plenty of opportunity to learn about VESL and ask questions, in a formal and an informal setting. We are happy to answer any questions that you may have and we are able to put you in touch with past volunteers if you would like to hear more from their perspective. It is in our interest to ensure that you are **happy** and **confident** when you travel overseas as a representative of VESL. We aim to be as open and supportive as we can be so please contact us if you have any questions at all.

“Challenging, fascinating, interesting and fun – my summer with VESL gave me an amazing insight into what life is like in the most isolated communities on a most beautiful island. I have never taught such enthusiastic students in my life (or eaten such unbelievably hot food!). But best of all was the sense that I was making a small but measurable difference to people's lives. It's not often you get the opportunity to do something so worthwhile.”

Mags Fearon, Sri Lanka 2003.

What is the next step if I'm interested in volunteering with VESL?

Simply send us a completed application form by email or post. We accept application forms throughout the year and it is never too early to apply. The sooner you apply the more time you will have to prepare for the trip and to fundraise towards the costs of your project.

After sending us your application form you will be invited to attend an information and selection event where you will get an opportunity to find out more about VESL and decide if we are the right organisation for you. In an informal atmosphere you will get a chance to meet VESL staff, past volunteers and trustees and gain an insight into our projects.

VESL information & selection events

The events include the following:

An overview of VESL:

A chance to see first-hand what the organisation is all about.

A virtual tour of our projects:

A chance to see the type of projects and countries that VESL sends volunteers to.

A background to fundraising:

Essential and practical information about fundraising.

A past volunteer's view:

Find out what past volunteers think about their VESL experience.

A more formal individual interview with members of the team:

This allows us to really get to know you and therefore ensure we are sending you to the country and project that matches your skills and experience – increasing the chances of you having a successful placement.

You will get plenty of opportunity to chat informally with staff and past volunteers and ask all those questions you might have. It is also an opportunity to meet other potential volunteers.

We always let volunteers know if they have been selected for a placement within a week of attending an event.

Please visit www.vesl.org or email tom@vesl.org to find out about the next information and selection day near you.

Why do I have to attend an information and selection day?

We believe that the information and selection days are as much about you choosing us as it is about us choosing you. The events are an excellent opportunity for you to get to know VESL and find out if we are the **right organisation for you**. It also gives you a chance to ask any questions you may have. For us it is an invaluable opportunity to meet you and make sure we can match you to a project that we know you will be able to make a positive difference in and enjoy.

The project / volunteer matching process is extremely important and often the success of your placement depends on it. Therefore it is essential the VESL team get to know you before making any decisions. We are aware that it does take a bit more of your time and effort to attend an information and selection event, but we think you will find it well worth it in the long run.

Want more information?

If you have any more questions before you apply you can either:

- Email us at enquiries@vesl.org
- Phone Ian on: **0845 094 3727**
- Check out www.vesl.org

If VESL sounds like the right organisation for you then please apply as soon as possible to be included in our next information and selection event.