

Turtle Conservation Project (TCP)

Volunteer Program

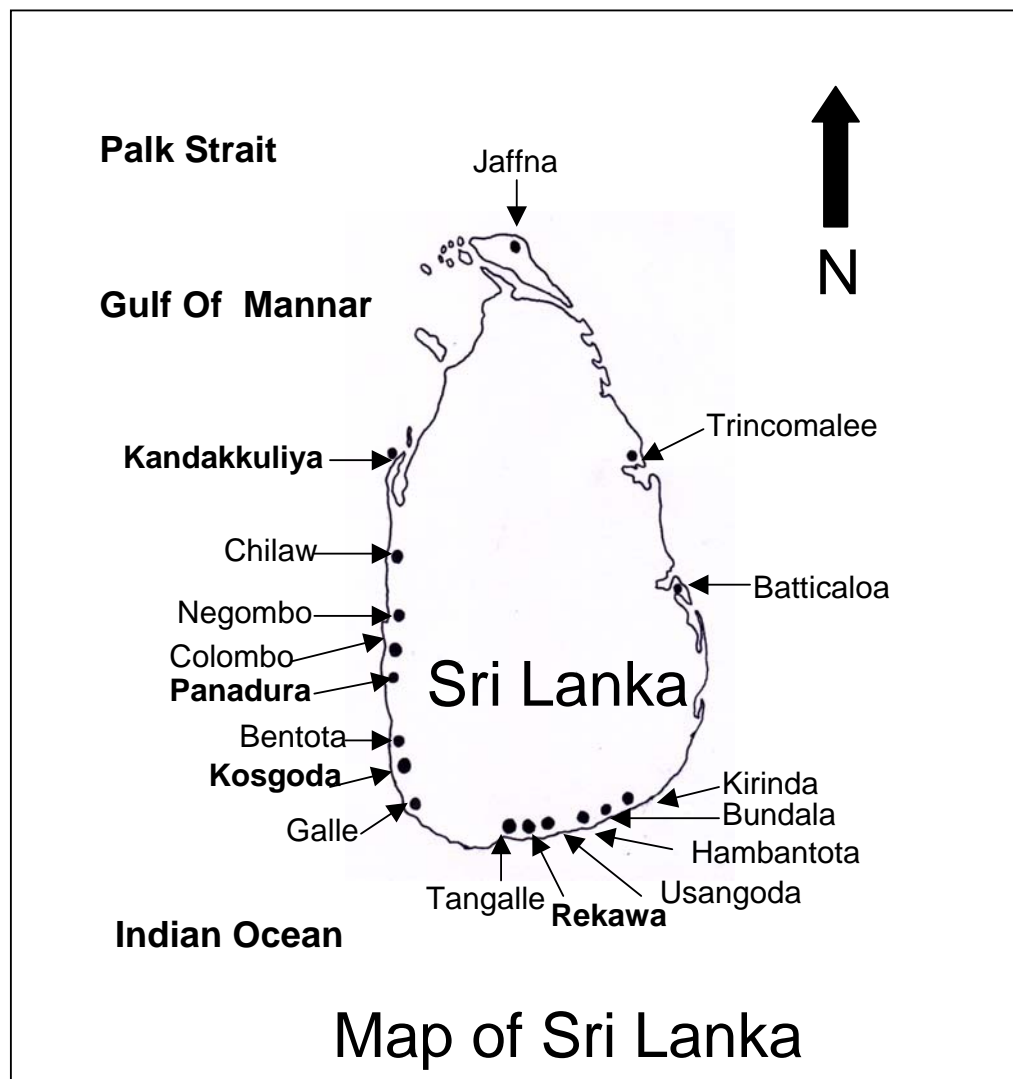


Turtle Conservation Project (TCP)
389, Godagama, Kosgoda, Sri Lanka
Tel/Fax: +0094 38 31919, 0094 777 810508/9
Email: turtle@slt.net.lk or tcpsl@slt.net.lk

Contents	Page No.
Information on Sri Lanka	03
The Turtle Conservation Project (TCP)	04
TCP Volunteer Programs	05
Duration	08
Costs	09
Application Procedure	09
What to Expect	10
Site Locations	10
Accommodation	10
Food	10
Transportation	11
Field Tours	11
Medical	11
What to Bring	11
Clothing	11
Miscellaneous	11
Logistics	12
Airfare	12
Money	12
Visas	13
Conditions	13
Code of Conduct	14
Articles Written By Past Volunteers	15

Information on Sri Lanka

Centuries ago the Arabic name for Sri Lanka was Serendib, so named by the Muslims who came to the island in search of gemstones. An 18th Century English writer certainly had Sri Lanka in mind when he coined the term “serendipity” – the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident. Those discoveries might not stretch to secret caches of gems or rubies these days, but as a volunteer for the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP), you’re sure to enjoy plenty of inspiring and adventurous days while staying with us amongst the amazing flora and fauna, as well as taking an active part in Sri Lankan marine turtle conservation.



Country Facts

Size: 65,606 sq km

Location: Island of the southeastern shores of India, 880km north of the equator

Commercial Capital: Colombo (Pop. 643,000)

Total Population: 18.5 million

Population Density: 296 people per square km

Life Expectancy at Birth: 74.2 female, 69.5 male

Languages: Sinhala, Tamil and English. English is widely spoken throughout Sri Lanka with the exception of remote villages.

Literacy Rate: 92.1 per cent

Annual per Capita GNP: US\$ 804

Ethnic Mix: Sinhalese (74%), Tamils (18.8%), Muslims (7.1%), Burghers (Descendants of Dutch and Portuguese Colonists) and Others (0.8%)

Religions: Buddhism (69.3%), Hinduism (15.5%), Christianity (7.6%) and Islamic (7.5%)

Major Exports: Textiles and garments, tea, diamonds and jewelry, petroleum products, rubber products, machinery and equipment.

Climate: Lowlands – tropical, average 27°C; Central Hills – Cooler, with temperatures dropping to 16°C. The southwest Monsoon brings rain to western, southern and central regions from May to July. The Northeastern monsoon occurs in the north and east in December and January.

Currency: Sri Lankan Rupee: Bank Notes – Rs10, Rs20, Rs50, Rs100, Rs200, Rs500, Rs1000. Coins – Rs10, Rs5, Rs2, Rs1 and 50 Cents.

Exchange Rate: 1 US \$ = Rs 96, £ 1= Rs 152, 1 A\$ = Rs 46.7, 1 Euro = Rs 105.

The Turtle Conservation Project (TCP)

Millions of years ago before man colonized Sri Lanka, marine turtles had been coming to the undisturbed beaches of this island to lay their eggs. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) lists all five species of marine turtle (leatherback, Green, Olive ridley, Loggerhead and Hawksbill) that frequent Sri Lanka's shores to nest as either threatened or endangered. The government legislation (1972) provides national protection for marine turtles. However, turtle nesting beaches (rookeries) are being disturbed by tourist industry development and feeding habitats, such as coral reefs, are being destroyed by pollution and unsustainable harvesting. Many turtles are accidentally caught and drowned in fishing gear/nets each year. The highly endangered Hawksbill turtle has been hunted to the brink of extinction for its carapace to provide raw materials for the illegal "tortoiseshell" trade. The greatest threat though, is the continued exploitation of both turtle meat and eggs throughout the Sri Lankan coastline; TCP surveys reveal that there has been 100% egg collection over the last 30 years.

With the marine turtle populations of Sri Lanka on the road to extinction, the incentive to create an organization to combat such exploitation was realized and the Turtle Conservation Project was established in 1993 as a registered independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO). The TCP began to initiate a myriad of local and national, marine turtle conservation programs to address vital environmental issues. The TCP, from the beginning, aimed to devise and facilitate the implementation of sustainable marine turtle conservation strategies through education, research and community participation. All operations are still conducted under an approved committee of five residents of Sri Lanka.

In 1996 the TCP, after conducting a national survey, established its fundamental program by pioneering an *in situ* marine turtle conservation program in Rekawa (7km east of Tangalle) after confirmed it to be Sri Lanka's most important nesting beach. Rekawa is a small village located on the south coast where 5 of the 7 species of marine turtles come to nest year round. Since the

most widespread form of marine turtle exploitation within this area is illegal poaching of turtle eggs, the TCP implemented an environmentally sound model – a program involving employment of local people formerly dependent of the collection of turtle eggs. Employing them as “nest protectors” and “research assistants”. Creating therefore, a symbiotic relationship of protecting the natural habitat through environmental awareness and conservation action, whilst also providing an alternate source of income to the community. Revenue from additional programs such as the “Turtle Watch” scheme, in which fee-paying tourists join beach patrols with the TCP to see marine turtles nesting, and a “Turtle Adoption” campaign, both provide funds for the salaries of employed local villagers, while also helping sustain other local environmental programs such as the Mangrove Nursery and Replenishment project, the Medicinal Garden and Nature Trail development. All current local programs help improve environmental conservation through awareness and education and by encouraging non-destructive income generation activities in Rekawa.

TCP Volunteer Programs

The TCP has established its volunteer service programs in order to increase the working capacity of the TCP and to allow communication links between people of various backgrounds who are able to provide new input and suggest new ideas and concepts to aid and improve the overall future success of the project and its respective programs.

As a volunteer for the TCP, you will be assigned a specific area of focus within the project depending on your previous experience, trade skills, goals and personal choice. In the past volunteers have provided their time and energy for the various duties mentioned below. Keep in mind though, the TCP is forever implementing new programs, while others are phased out, and new areas of involvement are always becoming available.

Kosgoda *In Situ* Research and Conservation Program

The TCP initiated a new turtle conservation project in Kosgoda, Southwest coast of Sri Lanka. This program is similar to the Rekawa In Situ program (no longer running) the first of our programs. You will work in conjunction with the local community members to encourage a safe nesting beach for the 5 species that nest there.

Research assistants are required to work demanding shifts, night or day, on the beach. In addition you will be expected to be involved in the standard research and data collection as well as any new research endeavors that the TCP wishes to initiate.

Previous marine turtle experience is preferable though not essential as volunteers will be provided training by a qualified professional where required. Volunteers may need to perform the following:

- ❖ Identify all five species of sea turtles that frequent the beaches of Sri Lanka
- ❖ Collect biometric data on each turtle
- ❖ Tag new migrants
- ❖ Locate nests by probing should a nest protector not be present when the clutch was laid
- ❖ Measure and Weigh eggs
- ❖ Identify false crawls
- ❖ Perform nest excavations
- ❖ Collect biometric data on hatchlings
- ❖ Be involved in the design of new concepts, strategies, and practical implementation of methods to further marine turtle conservation efforts.

Mangrove Growth and Replenishment Program

The Community Environmental Education Trainers (CEET's) trained by TCP, have established a mangrove nursery behind the TCP field office in Rekawa. The main goal of this program is to re-forest the locally degraded mangrove through seedlings generated in the nursery. The second goal is to develop sustainable methods of mangrove utilization for local people. The nursery currently houses approximately 8000 young plants of species *Rhizophora mucronata*. Once the young plants take root and are strong enough (after approx. 3 months) they are replanted in a number of selected sites in which the existing mangroves have been destroyed principally by human interference.

The current batch of seedlings has been successfully transplanted to Rekawa Lagoon. A second batch of seedlings is due to be started in the coming months. Volunteers will work closely with CEET's to maintain the nursery and also continue improving local community involvement for which the program was designed.

Model Medicinal Gardens

The CEET's have also established model medicinal gardens in the Rekawa School and in the Principal's garden. The aim of establishing these gardens was for dual purposes: promoting increased awareness of the medicinal uses of local plants and secondly, the exploration and development of the possibilities for income generation through the sale of fruit and medicinal plants themselves or the products they produce.

Volunteers interested in working within this realm of the TCP will be encouraged to assist with the growth, distribution and educational potential of the plants grown within the garden as well as exploring income development opportunities.

A third garden is currently being established at Panadura Temple. Volunteers are in the process of transplanting seedlings and established plants to the garden, and monitoring their growth.

Eco-Tourism – (Turtle night watch program)

The Turtle Nest Protectors at the Rekawa Rookery rely heavily on tourist donations to make up their salaries. Eco-tourism provides both vital income as well as promoting conservation awareness. Volunteers who have previous marketing experience would be valued in developing this area further (experience preferred but not essential). Volunteers can be expected to participate in the following:

- ❖ Distribution of leaflets and posters to hotels, restaurants and guest-houses in the Rekawa/Tangalle area
- ❖ Visiting hotels and giving slide presentations on marine turtle conservation and current TCP activities, whilst also selling merchandise
- ❖ Contacting tour agencies to promote TCP's nature tourism program
- ❖ Developing the eco-tourism business through a variety of promotional and marketing campaigns.

This placement is dependent on the tourist season and therefore only available between August and April.

Volunteers are also required to work on Eco-Tourism at the new site, Kosgoda. Here the volunteers have to support the program from the beginning and will involve aspects of leaflet and advertising design, liaising with local hotels and guesthouses and conducting presentations and talks to tourists at these hotels.

Volunteers may also be involved in the English classes and “turtle work” if they desire.

TCP Membership and Turtle Adoption

It is important that all new members and new turtle adopters to the TCP are receiving the correct information and merchandise regarding their current involvement. Participation within this program includes:

- ❖ Sending new members the merchandise they were granted by becoming a “Turtle Friend”
- ❖ Making sure all new “Turtle Adopters” receive the information packet, certificate and update on the turtle they wished to adopt
- ❖ Actively contributing articles and new ideas to the bi-annual newsletter
- ❖ Basic management of the program, including constructing files and keeping a current database of all members and adopters.

Teaching English

The TCP has been offering English classes to Rekawa villagers since January of 1994 and there continues to be a great demand for it, especially from the community members who are employed by the TCP within research and conservation activities. These classes also serve to help improve employment prospects of other participating community members in non-resource dependant jobs and therefore reduce community dependency on environmental exploitation. Classes are also an important means to further conservation awareness. Basic communications skills and every day conversational English is the focus.

Volunteers may also participate in English classes at Panadura Temple, if they are working at the Panadura site. Here we offer free, after-school English lessons to schoolchildren. This is simply a community-based project rather than Turtle orientated.

Annual Surveys

All volunteers will have the opportunity to participate in any of the annual surveys that we conduct every year. Examples include Nesting beach surveys, Turtle Hatchery surveys and Turtle habitat surveys. One important survey that requires the use of volunteers is the Tortoiseshell Trade survey, it is necessary for volunteers to conduct the majority of the survey in order to get as accurate results as possible.

If you are specifically interested in participating in one or more of these surveys, please enquire and we will advise you of future dates etc.

Office administration

TCP also hopes that volunteers will help in the general administration of TCP. Many of the employees work in the field and sometimes there are difficulties in keeping up with day-to-day admin work. Important aspects such as proposal writing, fund-raising and awareness, progress reports, project completion reports and research papers are always ongoing, and so any

contributions from volunteers would be greatly appreciated. Past volunteers have written news articles that have been printed in Sri Lankan English newspapers. If you are volunteering for a long period then it may even be possible to become a Project co-coordinator and help to liaise with local community groups, government agencies and other NGO's etc.

Contribute with your skills

If you have any specific skills for example photography or painting etc, this will give you an advantage. We appreciate any skill that can be used in the production of educational tools or that can be used for articles and reports etc, or that will improve the work of TCP.

Workshops and other Exhibitions etc

If you are good at and enjoy speaking in public the TCP holds many different workshops, exhibitions, presentations and even training programs. These can be for the general public, for the media, government officials and NGO members. We also hold many workshops that are particularly enjoyed by Schoolteachers and children or universities etc.

Research

Should any students (at any educational level) wish to take the opportunity to undertake their own research for school/university modules, we at TCP provide all the opportunity and as much help and advice as possible. All that we ask is that you use any spare time you may have to help on any TCP projects. We request that any data or information collected as part of the individual research be made available for our records, to help in further research that TCP may undertake. We also ask to be sent a copy of any reports produced to keep among our records.

None of our voluntary programs are rigid; volunteers can choose an individual program or participate in different ones to gain maximum experience. Simply state those that interest you when you apply and TCP can most probably accommodate you.

Duration

The turtle Conservation Project would prefer volunteers who would like to volunteer for at least 6 months, although shorter and longer terms are also available. TCP believes that volunteers should stay no less than 3 months, which we believe is the minimal amount of time needed to enable the volunteer gain sufficient experience and for TCP and to gain the best help for its programs.

Please remember that the application process may take time to be completed so please plan your trip at least two to three months in advance if possible.

Costs

Duration of stay	Cost £
2 weeks	500
1 month	800
3months	1500
6 months	2200
12 months or longer	Contact TCP

These costs are subject to change. Coast will be finalized once the volunteer interest has been confirmed.

Included in Costs

- ❖ Accommodation at placement
- ❖ Meals at placement
- ❖ Visa costs
- ❖ Airport pickup on arrival
- ❖ Initial transportation to Placement

Application Procedure

- ❖ Program information sent to applicant
- ❖ Applicant is required to send the completed application form with a copy of their Resume with references
- ❖ TCP will provide details of placement offer
- ❖ Applicant acceptance of offer
- ❖ Applicant to pay costs in full prior to departure and complete the Terms of Conditions form and the Flight and Insurance Form
- ❖ Arrive Sri Lanka

All costs must be paid in full two months prior to arrival at the placement. Payments can be made by money transfer direct to TCP. Details for this will be provided at a later stage of the application process.

Please note that if the volunteer decides not to proceed with the placement then the full amount shall be repaid in full, less any expenses already incurred during the application process, as long as the placement is cancelled within the first month after the payment has been made. Should the volunteer cancel after this time then the full amount cannot be refunded due to the fact that the TCP will not have sufficient time to organize another volunteer for replacement.

What to Expect!

Every marine turtle research project is unique; yet all continuously work towards the same goals of data collection, conservation and the preservation of turtle species overall. Differences between projects largely occur when comparing the local differences in culture, the people and the environment. What you'll find in Sri Lanka:

Site Locations

There are several sites that you may be living depending on the placement. These include:

- ❖ Kosgoda
- ❖ Kalpitiya
- ❖ Panadura
- ❖ Rekawa

See Map Provided above for geographical locations

Accommodation

Accommodation is provided by TCP and covered by the cost. Your accommodation will vary depending on which program you decide to choose. Areas like Panadura and Kosgoda will have accommodation that includes an inside bathroom and western style toilet etc. Rural areas may have more basic accommodation, for example in Rekawa conditions are rustic with no electricity (kerosene lamps in the evening), outdoor bathing facilities and a squat toilet. TCP will provide all bed linen and mosquito nets. Volunteers wishing to travel throughout Sri Lanka may also wish to bring their own nets too.

Food

Meals are also included in the cost and are prepared by a local family, either where you are living or close by. They usually consist of the local diet of rice, fish, and curried native vegetables (pumpkin, breadfruit, potatoes, okra and beans etc). The food, though very tasty, is usually heavily spiced with chillies, making it hot (the local norm); however arrangements can be made to reduce the chili content. Western food is available at any nearby guesthouses/hotels. These may be expensive compared to Sri Lankan standards but they are still very inexpensive compared to western standards. For example, a 3-course meal for two people at a 5 star hotel, cost less than 10 Sterling Pounds.

The local water is safe to drink in most places, or if preferred many local shops sell sealed mineral water at very low prices.

Please advise us in advance of any special dietary requirements.

Please note that accommodation and food will only be covered whilst working at the placement. You will be free to travel around Sri Lanka during your stay but TCP is unable to cover expenses incurred (hotels, food, transportation etc) by this.

Transportation

As of yet TCP does not own its own project vehicle and all traveling is done by public transport. Local buses are inexpensive, 3-wheeler taxis (tut-tut) are also available. TCP will cover the cost of any placement related transport but are unable to cover non-related costs.

Field tours

Tours and trips to other amazing habitat sites such as Sinharaja tropical rain forest and Yala and Bundala National Parks can provide volunteers with valuable experience of habitats other than coastal. TCP is happy to arrange and guide these but again any cost will need to be covered by the volunteer.

Medical

You may have to have various vaccinations before coming to Sri Lanka. It is best to consult your GP as soon as possible before you leave to find out what you need. Some vaccinations require more than one dose. You should seek advice on malaria. Although Tangalle and Rekawa are not risky areas, some volunteers have felt more comfortable taking the anti-malarial tablets.

There are two main health clinics and several good pharmacies in Tangalle and a hospital that can deal with most illnesses and injuries. Good local doctors are very knowledgeable and are often cheap.

Tropical conditions mean that cuts and infections can take several weeks to clear up, unless kept clean. It is a good idea to bring your own basic personal medication (paracetamol, band aids, anti-itch creams, mosquito repellent etc) and any other special medications that you require.

It is vital and a pre-requisite that you have some type of travel insurance to cover you whilst in Sri Lanka. We will request details regarding your policy to ensure that you have adequate cover on important aspects like medical and repatriation and legal expenses etc.

What to Bring

Clothing

Volunteers are expected to dress according to the expectations of the community in which they are living. Men can wear trousers, shorts, and shirts or t-shirts. Local men wear a sarong which is also acceptable. Women are advised to wear long skirts, trousers or sarongs in any rural areas. Women also need to wear long or short-sleeved tops/t-shirts but no strappy tops. Larger towns may be more relaxed towards what you wear but it is best to be on the side of caution. Although it is comfortably warm to hot most of the time it will be necessary to bring at least 2 sets of warm clothes for night work and any travel made to the hill country. Raingear is essential for night work and an umbrella is good for daytime sun and rain, especially if it is monsoon season! Good, comfortable walking shoes are a good idea for the beach and the town although many prefer to wear sandals, which are essential. If you are conducting beach patrols at night, dark cotton clothes – trousers/t-shirts are a necessity, not only for camouflage but also for protection from mosquitoes and cool ocean breezes.

There is plenty of opportunity for swimming so bring your costume – please can women be aware that in some rural areas it will be advisable to swim in shorts and t-shirts. At any tourist beach this is not necessary.

Miscellaneous

- ❖ The sun can be very dangerous, so make sure you have a hat and some effective SPF sunscreen.
- ❖ Due to the high abundance of great snorkeling places – bringing your mask and snorkel is a must.
- ❖ If you are a keen bird/wildlife enthusiast, it is definitely worth bringing a good pair of binoculars and your camera. The TCP has several good guidebooks on birds and wildlife of Sri Lanka.
- ❖ We recommend that you bring plenty of good reading material. We do have a number of books left by previous volunteers, but if you are an avid reader, you will soon work your way through them. Books can be bought in Colombo at the last resort.
- ❖ Keeping in touch with family and friends can be accomplished in two ways. The Sri Lankan postal system is fairly reliable (letters from western Europe take about 7-10 days), but be warned parcels don't always arrive. We also have Internet access at some office locations and messages can be sent that way with the TCP leader's permission.
- ❖ Toiletries can be bought in most towns but choice may be limited in smaller villages. Be warned that many shops do not sell a lot of the known brands from Europe etc – so if there is anything you absolutely cannot live without then remember to bring some with you. Girls should be aware that very few places sell tampons or the thin pads used in Europe and other places, so if you use them, it is advisable that you bring them with you as well.
- ❖ Remember that you will need adequate personal funds for traveling and other expenses though out your stay.

Logistics

Airfare

Ticket costs to Sri Lanka vary depending on where you are flying from and the time of year. Consult local travel agencies, newspaper adverts, the Internet etc to find the best deals. Sri Lanka is easily accessible. Sri Lankan airlines can bring you direct to Colombo with minimal annoyance (check on airport of departure). Emirates fly via Dubai and there are also flights via India, either through Madras or Delhi.

Many volunteers used this trip as a starting or end point to other travel opportunities to the rest of Asia. So consider changeable date return tickets or think about a multi departure ticket instead.

Money

The Colombo airport terminal has 24-hour money changing facilities and the bank counters on arrival give the best deals. There are many banks throughout Sri Lanka that will change travelers cheques (American Express, Visa or Thomas Cook are the most common). Most towns have numerous banks that will also give cash advances on credit cards, visa or MasterCard. The majority of banks in Colombo and other large towns now have Personal Electronic Tellers (PET) - cash machines that take credit cards and debit cards with the Cirrus symbol.

Visas

Most nationalities, including Australians, New Zealanders, British, French, German and Americans receive a valid tourist visa for 30 days upon entry. It requires a one-day trip to Colombo to the Department of Immigration before the expiration of your original tourist visa and can even be completed as soon as you arrive in the country. (Your original tourist visa constitutes a third of the final extended visa. A further 3-month extension is possible and will require a further fee. You will also be required to show a dated onward/return flight ticket if you wish to extend your visa.

All visa fees will be included in the cost of your trip.

Please note that if you stay for 3 or 6 months on a tourist visa you will be unable to extend the visa further and unable to change the visa type to that of resident visa.

Should any volunteer wish to stay for 12 months or longer, it will be possible for TCP to arrange a resident visa. Simply contact us if you wish to volunteer for 12 months or longer and we will answer any questions you may have.

Conditions

Specifically we are looking for volunteers with a calm temperament, patience and concentration. Someone who is creative and hard working and who is flexible regarding living conditions and has the ability to deal well with public speaking to moderate audiences regarding the TCP and its work, research and marine turtle conservation.

Volunteers also need to have a sense of adventure and an eagerness to see and experience new countries and culture.

We request that volunteers sign a simple terms and conditions form prior to departure to Sri Lanka.

Code of Conduct

It is of the utmost important for all volunteers to remember that even though they are working for a Sri Lankan based marine turtle organization, they are still guests in Sri Lanka. To become accepted into the small community, volunteers need to show respect for personal appearance, the culture around them and to show warm in who they are. Sri Lankans view western culture with a curious eye and constantly watch you daily methods. Unprofessional and disrespectful behavior can jeopardize the projects hard-earned reputation. In rural areas, as well as in the town of Tangalle, gossip travels very quickly and can critically undermine good work and the professional status that the TCP has established and maintained for the past 10 years. There are several rules that volunteers **must** follow.

- ❖ No Fraternizing with the locals. Any type of flirting may be misinterpreted and create a bad reputation for the parties involved.
- ❖ Women should avoid smoking in public as it is seen as unacceptable behavior in the Sri Lankan culture; smoking in private or in bars/restaurants is permitted.
- ❖ Women staying at sites with only outdoor shower facilities must wear a sarong or long dress to bathe in. Minimal privacy is allotted.
- ❖ No illegal drugs – **no exceptions**
- ❖ No excessive drinking of alcohol on TCP property, always be respectful of the local people and anyone who may also be working/living there.
- ❖ No guests on TCP property after dark without the TCP leaders permission.
- ❖ Women must be respectful of local dress in rural areas. Tourist areas and larger towns may not be quite as strict. Remember this is also for your own comfort as well as indecent attire may create unwanted attention.
- ❖ Email access must be kept to a minimum and only used at times advised by TCP staff.

Many of these rules may seem extreme; however, due to the fragility of the projects in a rural, local community, it is crucial to maintain a positive approach to all TCP activities and local endeavors. It is easier to break a reputation than to create one.

Please Note: The Turtle conservation project reserves the right to send any volunteer who acts with unprofessional or bad behavior, including failure to work, home.

Previous Volunteers - Thoughts and Opinions of TCP

Harry Price – From Cornwall, England.

Cardiff University, BSc Marine Geography.

Undergraduate, Year 3, Research Placement, 12,000 word project.

6 Months Research: 28th October to 28th April 2003.

Number of areas worked at: 12 – along the W, SW and S Coast.

The last six months have just been incredible. I arrived in October and was instantly shocked by everything. The crazy drivers, cows on the road, stray dogs, the heat, humidity, food and lack of usual luxuries. At first I stayed in Colombo and moved to the Panadura office where I first met Thushan Kaprusinghe who is the committee chairman. After a long chat about my hopes for the next 6 months, study of hundreds of photos and the opportunities that lay before me, I knew the trip would be a success!

I moved to Tangalle which was my home for these 6 months. After discovering the 8 Km stretch of palm lined beach leading to Rekawa (the most important turtle nesting beach in Sri Lanka) I felt at home. Days were spent researching how 12 beach factors affect the number the turtles nestings of 5 species at 3 beaches along the south coast. I designed my own research project, the data sheets and schedule, with help and guidance from TCP. I was given a full time TCP research officer who helped me with the data collection for my project. The beaches are deserted, no tourists in sight, only the odd fisherman with a seine net. No tourists get to see these places which is just one aspect of why volunteering is such a good idea. In the afternoons I surfed, bodysurfed, snorkeled, and explored the numerous beaches around the Tangalle area. As well as this, I processed my data and read extensive amounts of reports, books and articles about sea turtles furthering my knowledge. In the evenings after 2 weeks I was trained by TCP to be a tour guide for the “Turtle Watch” tourist attraction in Rekawa. During my 6 months, I visited the beach 3 times a week between other working commitments and guided over 350 tourists and witnessed numerous turtle nestings. This also gave me the opportunity to be tested about my acquired knowledge of turtles, and after a month I was able to give a 20 minute talk about various many different aspects of the turtles in Sri Lanka.

I also had to help with office work, such as this website, edit reports, write proposals worth thousands of dollars etc. I helped with 2 exhibitions where over 17,000 people attended and got to travel with the company during the “School Lecture Programme” and training days for government officials.

Between work I was able to explore a lot of the country with TCP staff and other volunteers. There was so much to see and do so I have taken over 1,400 photos in 6 months, both for my project and of my travels. Rock temples, Ancient Cities, coastal resorts, climb a mountain, visit 3 national parks and remote villages just to name a few! I became part of the local community and got close to many local families, all of whom were friendly and hospitable throughout my stay. I was recognized and aptly named “Mr. Turtle” by residents and after my 6 months it was very difficult to say goodbye.

I will be honest and say that there were annoyances, general frustrations and I found it tough living here in Sri Lanka at first, but the things I've witnessed and seen as well as the people I've made friends with here, make it all part of the experience. I have had a very memorable life experience, learnt many lessons, done some successful research and acquired a substantial amount of knowledge about the Sri Lanka marine environment and sea turtles. I am already considering a return visit to do further research for a masters degree or PhD, and look forward to seeing some of my great friends I have made here again soon. I can highly recommend this work to you in whatever field – the possibilities and opportunities are endless. It is tough, you will have difficulties and frustrations, but at the end you look back and just see how you have matured as a person, faced the challenges and come out with an invaluable life experience and a big smile on your face!

I am happy to answer any questions about any aspect of my stay and will answer honestly and truthfully. If you require any information, email me at:
harrylprice@hotmail.com

Zoë Orbell – Feb. 2003 to May 2003 – Working on Eco-tourism at Rekawa

My name is Zoe Orbell and I worked for TCP for three months from February – May 2003. I am from Hampshire in the South of England. I had an amazing time three months. I stayed in Tangalle, which I think is one of the most beautiful towns in the South.

What I liked most about working for the TCP was that everyday I did something different. I was mainly involved with the tourist project and spent a lot of time visiting the numerous guesthouses and making tourists aware of the 'turtle watch' program on Rekawa beach. About three times a week I went to see the turtles nesting and helped other volunteers with guiding the tourists. I learnt a substantial amount about turtles from doing this. Watching the turtles nesting was fantastic and is one of the most memorable experiences of my stay.

I helped to produce a report about the last tourist season and update leaflets and create posters about marine turtles. I was also involved with one of TCP's big exhibitions on Koscodra beach. This had national radio coverage and was a joint event with the Sirasa- a large Sri Lankan radio and TV Company.

The amount of work that you do is largely up to you. I spent a lot of time exploring the local area and swimming and snorkeling in the stunning sea. The Tangalle office where I stayed is about a minutes walk from the beach. I visited many different parts of Sri Lanka and I went on trips with other volunteers.

Although I was in Sri Lanka for three months I didn't feel that it was enough. I will definitely be back soon.