



ProjectsAbroad

The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad



Sri Lanka



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Hello everyone

EXPERIENCE SRI LANKA

2013 January | Issue no 94

THE LAND LIKE NO OTHER

Most amazing time in a truly incredible country.

Landing in Sri Lanka on a Wednesday, the first few days kind of passed me by in a whirl of colour, noise and smiles. Having only spent one night at my host family's house, I joined some other volunteers for a weekend at the beach in Mirissa; without a doubt the most beautiful place I have ever been. Although the waves are not exactly gentle, the atmosphere is so calm and relaxed, a bit different to the mayhem of Galle Road on the way!

It was then straight to work at the school I was volunteering at, where once you have shaken one child's hand you have a line twenty deep to shake hands with. Everyone smiles at you and wants to know everything about you, from where you are from, to your mother's name. The reproachful looks you get if you cannot produce photos of your family are simply hilarious. The kids are so funny; with one of my favourite things being that no matter how many games of 'hangman' you play with the letter 'v' never appearing, they will still shout it out with huge conviction before any of the vowels. The boys' obsession with Ben 10 is also evident within the first five minutes, although it was rather amusing that when they thought they were being naughty by writing it on the blackboard, they had actually got the 'e' and the 'n' the wrong way round. The 'Gangnam Style' dance is also one of their favourites.

My host family was so friendly, and although it is a strange situation to start with, especially if this is the first time you have ever done something like this, the welcoming that you begin to feel at home straight away. My host mother is the most amazing cook, with different curries, fruit, and types of rice always being presented. There is also always enough food to feed a huge group of people. Fresh bread or pancakes and fresh fruit at breakfast are the perfect way to start the day!

Although the first week or so in Sri Lanka can leave you totally confused and exhausted, the support system from the Projects Abroad staff and the other volunteers really is amazing, no problem is too small! And, after the initial shock of a completely new culture wears off, you find yourself having the most amazing time in a truly incredible country.

Katie Taylor

Message from the Editor

We had a great start in the New Year 2013 with 27 new arrivals to the country. The office staff was busy organizing following events in addition to normal duties in January.

- Medical Awareness Programme
- Three Care & Teaching Workshops in three locations
- Medical Workshop
- Outreach Programme
- Medical Camp

We see the high influx of volunteer arrivals parallel to the tourism industry as Sri Lanka has been named as one of the main Tourism Destinations in the world.

Recently added activities such as Medical Awareness Programme and Care & Teaching Workshops has positive impact in carrying out a meaningful volunteer programme.

2013 will mark the 10th year of Sri Lanka operations of the organization within last 10 years we have had over 1500 volunteers in the country, regardless of the tension developed due to war until 2009. Mainly we have served Care and Medicine volunteers.

We also managed to set up projects in Colombo North hospital which is second largest teaching hospital in the country. Within next 2-3 months we will be sending volunteers to this hospital. This hospital will be a great opportunity for volunteers who would like to base in Colombo.

Good Luck and enjoy reading..

Gishan Perera

Desk Officer
Sri Lanka

Bosco Sevena - The 1st time

Bosco Sevana is located between Colombo and Negombo and is about 15kms away from Colombo and less than 3 km to Negombo.

A new placement, new volunteers, the first time it's by the coast, with the azure waters of the Laccadive Sea in the Indian Ocean sloshing away at hot, white sands; fun, cheery and well-travelled Fathers with a wonderful sense of humor pace around the centre, watching and taking care of the daily needs....best of all-the centre has children. Fifty (50) or so cheeky and amazing boys and young adults from 12-17 years laughing, running, smiling and eager to learn. These amazing children and young adults are under a rehabilitation process after being emotionally and physically abused and traumatized, from homes, from the streets. All they look for is love, understanding, to be taught and cared for and if they are taught right and wrong and shown how to respect themselves and people around them. With skills and knowledge under their belt, they would be amazing adults.

Our first volunteers, Maxime Leboë and Henrik Hansen, went with Gishan and I to Bosco Sevena where we met with Fr. Milinda (Rector – Head of the institute), Rev. Bro. Terrance (Vice Rector) and Rev. Bro. Jude (who I was pleasantly surprised and then bubbling with excitement at the fact he was in Uganda for work for a period).

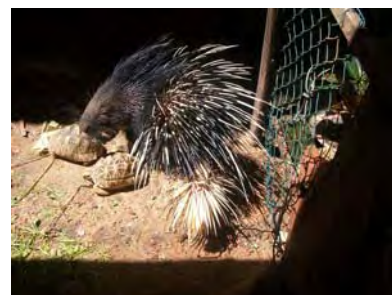
We got shown around the class rooms for the boys who do not go to regular school or have tuition classes after school, dorm rooms of the boys, dining hall, bathrooms and toilets, computer lab, chapel, English and other classes, the outside where the boys play football and volleyball and also the little "zoo", where there is a porcupine (who loves sweet biscuits, Marie preferably), rabbits and tortoises kept and fed and taken care of....I got to feed the porcupine (lazy guy he was 'til the biscuits came forth). It was absolutely amazing to see how the Fr. adored the little animals and it was easy to see why he was such a capable man to run a place like Bosco Sevena. The Fr. also mentioned how there was a music room with instruments and a small library.

It was agreed that Max and Henri would teach English (spoken practice with the older boys and written and spoken English to the younger children), IT, French and play beach football, volleyball and take part in the activities the children went through daily. One thing we talked about was that since the boys were with negative past experiences, teaching them valuable things to get their mind off trouble and helping them be better people would be useful, so promoting good morals, work ethics and discipline, exposing the children to various aspects of other cultures with the aim of positive growth would be much appreciated.

When I went there the first time, I immediately loved this peaceful and simple place that took the children in and loved them, cared for them and allowed them to grow and be well. When I went there the second time, I fell in love with the little giggly faces...so eager to learn, yet cheeky at the same time. How could I not love such innocence? How could I not want to give them all my love and show them everything that's good and pure and true....it was hard to leave. I wait to go there again and see those little faces that made my heart smile.

Aruni Jayawardane

Teaching & Care Supervisor



Welipitiya Temple' in Panadura

Another month has passed and now I have the tough job of choosing what to write about from the whole range of different activities that the Projects Abroad Sri Lanka team has been getting up to during the last month. Eventually I decided to write about 'Welipitiya Temple' in Panadura. Before indulging in the wonderful things that happen here, it is useful to briefly tell you about Buddhism in Sri Lanka and what it is like to work with the young monks in this, and our other, temples.

Sri Lanka is a predominantly Buddhist country, with around 75% of the population being Buddhist. When you travel across the country, you encounter many Buddhist temples. These range from massive golden Buddhas surrounded by elaborate uniquely Sri Lankan buildings, to small shrines in a room in a house with strong smell of incense as soon as you walk through the front door.

Projects Abroad Sri Lanka arranges for some of our volunteers to work at a number of different temples in Sri Lanka. Our volunteers have the opportunity to teach English, maths, geography etc, to the young monks (and sometimes to the older monks and even the Buddhist priests). Working at any of these temples is certainly an experience of a lifetime! A lot of the time, when you finish teaching for the day, the monks will show their appreciation by offering meditation classes and inform you about Buddhism. They are always keen to give you a blessing. This is where they tie a blessed bit of string around your wrist while chanting with their eyes closed. It is a pretty special and, for some volunteers, emotional thing to witness.

The majority of the temples to which we send volunteers are in Kandy (as mentioned in a previous blog, Kandy is the Buddhist spiritual capital of Sri Lanka and also a UNESCO World Heritage site), but we also have one in Panadura called 'Welipitiya Temple'. We have volunteers in Panadura all year round carrying out internships in Panadura Base Hospital, Kethumathi Women's Hospital, Dutch Anne Tsunami Camp and SeeriSeewali Government School. Therefore, our volunteers who are teaching these monks can usually meet up with the other teachers and nurses/doctors after a hard day at work.

Projects Abroad has been sending volunteers to Welipitiya Temple for around eight years now (just after Projects Abroad Sri Lanka was set up). There are 15 young monks aged between eight and 15 and they all live in the temple. They are supervised by one head monk who also prepares for ceremonies and blessings on Poya day (the Buddhist Holiday every month). It is easy to assume that these young monks must be completely different from 'normal' little boys because of these orange robes, so sometimes it comes as quite a shock when you realize that they are cheeky and like to fight and play. However, as soon as the head monk comes into sight, the young monks straighten their robes and are quiet and studious! Mind you, whether the head monk is there or not, they really do show such a great desire to learn. Whenever a new volunteer starts their placement at Welipitiya Temple, the monks are extremely excited and buzzing with anticipation! It is definitely evident that these monks have had a lot of contact with the volunteers, because their level of English is a lot more advanced than the monks of a similar age in the monasteries that we have started to work with more recently. Seeing these young monks speaking English because of our many volunteers that have worked here over the last eight years is a great honour for me and everyone involved with Projects Abroad in our 30 plus different countries. It really proves that volunteering does provide enormous benefit to so many people.

Rich Egan

Asst.Manager



Date : 11th January, 2013
Location : Malamulla Montessori - Panadura
Task : Teaching basic hygiene habits

Awareness programme for kids



Donations

- Projects Abroad donated dustbins & whiteboard to Kethumathi Hospital
- Marjorie Crane donated stationary and clothes to Tsunami Camp in Panadura.
- Janet Oliver donated Rs.14,000.00 to Welapitiya Montessori for food expenses



Medical Camp

Date : 19th January, 2013

Location : Ingiriya, Horana (Kalutara District)

Task : Medical check-up & medicine issue



Social Outreach!

Date : 18th January, 2013
Location : Ruhunu Orphanage
Task : Cleaning the Orphanage



Friendships, amazing memories

I came from Australia to Panadura in early January, 2013. I was so excited about my teaching placement but, having no teaching experience, had no idea what to expect. Within five minutes of my arrival at the school, I was standing with a piece of chalk in my hand like a deer in headlights in front of Grade 3A.

One boy piped up, "Teacher, name?"

Okay, I thought, I need to get them to start speaking proper sentences. So I said, "No, you say, 'What is your name?'"

The boy blinked, confused. "My name is Ruwan. Teacher name?"

"No, *you* say to *me*, 'What is your name?'"

He looked exasperated. "My name is Ruwan. Teacher name?"

This was only seconds before one boy jumped up and started singing *Gangnam Style* (merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg that was a whole-school infatuation with the song), while another boy started crying because his friend had kicked him in the head, and three girls started copying from their English textbook, clearly finding my teaching style to be ineffective. I tacked up a poster I had lovingly prepared at home and it immediately fell down, provoking shrieks of laughter from the class.

The point is, Sri Lankan schools and their students are chaotic, overwhelming and hilarious. I came away from my first day thinking that I was the world's most incompetent teacher but after speaking to other volunteers, I know that this is just all part of the fun of teaching English in a third world country. I think the most important things to remember are: don't get disheartened when some lesson plans inevitably fail, hang on to your sense of humour, and the Sinhalese word for "sit down" is "*indagunna*".

I probably paint a terrifying picture, but once they get over the excitement of meeting you, the majority of the kids are so sweet and so interested to learn about you, your family and the country you come from. Some of the best times I've had at the school have been during recess, when we've left the staff room and chatted to the kids on the playground. That said, the teachers are also lovely and while some speak little English, they really try their best to include you in their conversations.

What has been great about my placement is that whatever sort of day at school I've had, I know I will come home to an amazing meal and my host mother's friendly face. When you come to a town like Panadura where there are no tourists and not a lot of English being spoken, it is so comforting to know that there is a Sri Lankan family to look out for you.

On my first day, Richy told me the hardest thing about a volunteer project was just getting on the plane, and I couldn't agree more. Once you throw yourself into your project and Sri Lankan life you will undoubtedly come away with friendships, amazing memories and, in my case, a lifelong aversion to *Gangnam Style*.

Cassie Steinmetz



SRI LANKA

This is my second Projects Abroad volunteering experience in Sri Lanka. Last year I stayed for four months, this time 6 weeks. I requested to stay with the same host family, but was only able to teach at Welipitiya Temple School. However, I still go to the Montessori school (next to the temple) and play with the little ones, teaching them dance moves and songs and generally having fun together.

The monks are aged from eight to 15; the class size varies from 10 to 15, depending on the duties and obligations that the young monks have on that particular day. They have a good knowledge of written and oral English so I have been setting them more challenging lessons! They are very well behaved and we always enjoy the classes.

I attended Sinhalese lessons last year and I am very grateful to my host mother for helping me to learn more. This has been invaluable in everyday life. Although I cannot corrugate every verb I can understand a lot more than many Sri Lankans realize! Everyday life in Wadduwa and Panadura is a symbiotic mixture of crazy and calm! The crazy bus drivers, the Galle Road, everyone pushing in front, the 'hussle and bussle'; but also the peace and tranquility of the temple restores my level of tolerance!

I enjoy Sri Lankan food (but not too spicy!) and I wonder where all the chicken breasts go to... every time I eat chicken, I eat more bones than meat! I personally eat mostly vegetables which I eat at my host family, with the odd treat of happy cow cheese which I get from Food City (the biggest supermarket chain in Sri Lanka).

I think the teaching placements seem more rewarding than the medical placements. I really do get a sense of achievement at the end of each lesson.

I am the only volunteer in my house but another volunteer lives close by and we chat most days of the week. When I visited last year, it was my ambition to see as much of the Island as possible, but now I always just go to the beach and chill!! I personally have gained from volunteering. It has given me a good direction and made me fully appreciate everything in my bubble back home.

Jan Oliver

Hello everyone!

Updates from placements in down South... Monique and Tineke being the busy mamas to all the little babies in the Baby one, found themselves with a new batch of volunteers. Isabel, who's been part of the Care Project in India, Josephine from the Netherlands and Andrea from Australia. Josephine, Isabel, Alina and Chriske went on their first weekend trip to Yala National Park and were able to see a leopard and so many elephants!

Meanwhile, Tineke has been very lucky to witness a very traditional Sri Lankan ceremony; "Big Girl" Ceremony, marking the puberty of the host sister. She's taken loads of photos and was really happy to be part of such rare opportunity.

Alina and Chriske have been enjoying Senanee's delicious food and spending time with the children in Anula. Chriske is also planning to make some donations of things the orphanage needs very badly. They are off shopping in Galle at the moment and the weather has suddenly turned bright! They will also scrub and paint some parts which really need a bright shade. Also, they are buying dresses for the girls so that they will put on new clothes for New Year. Great job girls!

Happy New Year too! Spend it in style like we do here!!

Love and Hugs, Bianca :)

