

VOLUNTEER FAQ'S

Is there a Volunteer Application Form to complete?

If you are interested in volunteering with Bridging Lanka please complete the Volunteer Application Form: <https://www.emailmeform.com/builder/form/S6Yt9cHdeJ6fZaP2A>

This will enable us to contact you for a discussion about volunteer opportunities and plan for your visit to Sri Lanka.

How do I access the Bridging Lanka Volunteer Policy?

Please read the Bridging Lanka Code of Conduct Policy before deciding to volunteer with us.

What's the weather like in Mannar?

The monsoon season runs from December to February. Temperatures range between 25°C – 35°C. Night-time temperatures do not drop significantly from those during the day.

It is useful to have an umbrella for both sun and rain protection. These can easily be purchased in Mannar.

Is there anything I can bring to assist Bridging Lanka?

It will be appreciated if you email us with an offer to bring items. We regularly require restocking of small items such as peanut paste, milk powder and larger items. In addition, volunteers can sometimes bring in laptops that are no longer in use, or other electronic items, to donate. An offer to bring or transport needed items is always appreciated.

What should I bring for work?

Ensure you have a laptop, a USB stick, a power adaptor, and stationary. Stationary can be purchased in Mannar – it is not supplied by Bridging Lanka.

Are there ATM's in Mannar?

Yes there are a number of ATMs and Banks. It is useful to get small denominations when withdrawing money – E.g. 100/500 Rupee notes. Following is a link to find the AUD to LKR exchange rate. <http://www.xe.com/currencycharts/?from=AUD&to=LKR>

What should I wear?

It is a hot and humid climate. Light cottons and linen help absorb the sweat! The temperature does not change much between day and night. Bring clothes suitable for such a climate. It is useful to bring clothes that are fast drying.

Clothing for women

Women need to dress according to local standards. If in doubt, go for the modest option.

Office wear - inside the office and when outside representing Bridging Lanka women should wear short sleeved shirts or loose-fitting T shirts. Pants or skirts should cover the knee.

Outside of the office - it is recommended that women wear shirts that cover the shoulder. Shorts that go to the knee.

Clothing for men

Office wear - Men need to wear long pants to work in the office or mid-length shorts. Men should wear collared shirts or collared t-shirts in the office.

Outside of the office – Mid-length shorts and t-shirts are acceptable outside of the office and work times.

Footwear

Both at the office and outside the office males and females wear thongs/flip flops or sandals. It is sensible to wear shoes, sandals or thongs that are easy to remove as shoes are not worn inside residences and the office. You will remove shoes at the door.

What should I bring?

Volunteers are required to provide their own equipment such as laptops, cameras, mobile phones and materials needed to carry out their volunteer work while in Sri Lanka.

Please bring toiletries, medications, reading materials, snacks, favourite tea and coffee, as well as a towel with you.

How much will it cost?

A one-off admin fee of \$250 (waged individuals) and \$150 (unwaged individuals) will need to be paid upfront when applying to volunteer with Bridging Lanka. This covers all staffing and administrative costs associated with organizing and coordinating a volunteer's stay with the organization.

Volunteers are also required to cover their own travel and living costs throughout the project. This includes the cost of return air travel to Sri Lanka, travel insurance, any necessary medical vaccines, the cost of domestic travel in Sri Lanka and accommodation food and living expenses.

What sort of power adaptor do I need?

Sri Lanka uses Type G, Type D, and Type M power plugs and sockets. The standard electricity supply is 230 volts at 50 Hz. Socket Types

Type G: Three rectangular pins in a triangle pattern (the standard UK square-pin plug), which is the modern national standard for new installations.

Type D: Three large round pins in a triangle pattern, found mostly in older buildings.

Type M: Three round pins similar to Type D, but with a larger middle pin, occasionally used for heavy-duty appliances

Can you suggest what I could bring as gifts for local people?

Confectionery, stationery and food items from your own country

Do I Need a Working with Children Check?

Because we operate a Preschool and some children's programs at Hendro Illam, all volunteers must have a Working with Children check prior to arrival at Hendro Illam (please arrange this prior to travel to Sri Lanka). Each State in Australia provides a means of applying for your Working with Children Check online.

Insurance

Please arrange your own travel and health insurance before traveling to Sri Lanka. Bridging Lanka takes no responsibility of liability for your health and insurance requirements.

Travel Vaccines

Please visit your doctor before travelling to discuss your individual health situation and what medication and precautions you need before travelling to Sri Lanka.

Arriving in Sri Lanka

If my plane arrives late, can I still change my money into Rupees?

Yes. No matter what time your plane arrives, there will be several bank counters open and staff on hand to change your currency at the airport arrival lounge. A number of local banks are represented here. Just show the counter staff your passport and hand over your currency. They will give you rupees and a receipt. The exchange rate is lower at the airport than money changers in town.

How do I get from the airport to Colombo?

Option 1: Hiring a car service at the airport counter

Option 2: Arrange for an Uber / PickMe

Where to stay in Colombo

There is a large choice of accommodation in Colombo and using relevant booking sites will give you plenty of options.

There is a growing number of high-end hotels if you want a few days of luxury before heading North. You can also choose to stay in Negombo which is closer to the airport.

The Fort suburb area is most convenient for public transport as it is close to Colombo Fort Station and the Bus station.

Bambalapitya is further South of the centre of town and is an easy tuk tuk ride to the transport hubs however has more choice of Mall shopping and restaurants.

Pettah is a busy market area which is great to explore but may be a little crowded and busy to stay in for some on their first visit to Sri Lanka or Asia.

There are many boroughs of Colombo so take the time to find what's best for you.

What's the best way to get around Colombo?

Tuk-tuks are easily available. Ensure you get one that has a meter (ask the driver, or look for it at the top left of the windscreen). You can book a Tuk-tuk by downloading the PickMe app

Do I need a Sri Lankan driving license to hire vehicles?

Yes. Legally you do need a Sri Lankan driving license to hire cars, motorbikes or tuk tuks. You can apply for an international driving licence in advance of your arrival in Sri Lanka.

What are the travel options for Colombo to Mannar?

There is currently 1 train per day to Mannar from Colombo. Please check timings with the Colombo Fort railway station before you travel as times often change.

There are also air-conditioned buses available from Colombo to Mannar. Some depart from Colombo Central Bus Stand (Pettah), others from Marine Drive in Wellawatte.

You can also hire a car and driver through Uber, PickMe or other private vehicle hire companies.

If you are travelling from elsewhere in Sri Lanka, trains and buses are likely to be available but you will need to check online or at the local train station for times and durations.

Please liaise with the Bridging Lanka team to discuss which of the above options would suit you.

Do I need to bargain when I buy things in Sri Lanka?

People do not bargain but be aware that you may be charged more than local people. Mostly the price is written on a pre-packed item. If you feel you are being overcharged you can simply go to another shop.

Will there be a language barrier?

Sri Lanka has three main languages. In the South of the country, including Colombo, most people speak Sinhalese. In the North, where Bridging Lanka is based in Mannar, the principal language is Tamil. English is commonly a second language in cities and most staff at Bridging Lanka speak good English. In more rural areas, the locals have a much more basic grasp of English, and a translator will likely be required.

IN MANNAR

Where can I stay in Mannar?

All volunteers need to book their accommodation in advance and will need a Working with Children check prior to arrival at Hendro Illam. Please arrange this ahead of your travel to Sri Lanka.

A one-off admin fee of \$250 (waged individuals) and \$150 (unwaged individuals) will need to be paid upfront into the Bridging Lanka bank account when applying to volunteer with Bridging Lanka. This covers all administrative and staffing costs associated with organizing and coordinating a volunteer's stay with the organization.

N.B. Income from accommodation and payment of meals go towards supporting Bridging Lanka's programs, including supporting individuals from villages who provide services such as preparing meals, cleaning rooms, doing laundry, room maintenance, etc. Your payment for accommodation and meals at Hendro Illam ultimately provides livelihood support for local people.

There are also Guesthouses on Mannar Island that provide a range of accommodation from basic to rooms with facilities such as a fan, or air-conditioning, and ensuite. Room rates range from \$30 to \$50 without meals. The guesthouse will provide a towel and soap. A laundry service is provided at a very reasonable rate. Most guesthouses do not have coathangers and provide some hooks on the wall for clothes.

What transport is available in Mannar?**How will I get from my guesthouse to Bridging Lanka?**

You can arrange to be picked up from the bus stand or train station in Mannar for transport to Hendro Illum (about 12 km from Mannar Town).

Local buses and tuk-tuks are available. Tuk-tuks in Mannar do not have meters like they do in Colombo. We recommend you agree a price with the driver before departing.

What is the work environment like at Bridging Lanka in Mannar?

Bridging Lanka has a very dynamic and flexible approach to work to suit the changing environment of our projects. You will find the team very friendly and accommodating and happy to help you find your feet in what is probably a very different environment to what you are used to at home.

Before deciding to volunteer with Bridging Lanka, please communicate with Jeremy Liyanage, Executive Director, to discuss your volunteer placement and the type of volunteer work you will be involved in.

What are the working hours?

Volunteers are expected to work 9-5 Monday to Thursday and 9-12 on Fridays.

The charity does work 7 days a week, so we are flexible with regards to days and timings.

Where can I get meals?

Bridging Lanka can provide meals while you are staying at Hendro Illum - see the section above on accommodation and meal costs.

If staying at Hendro Illum you will also have use of the kitchenette in your room to store food and prepare your own meals, tea and coffee. You can purchase groceries in Mannar Town or bring some supplies with you.

Amma Russi is the Café located at Hendro Illum where you can purchase meals.

There are also cafes and street stalls in Mannar Town.

Is Alcohol available?

As we are running residential programs for young people abstaining from substance and alcohol addiction, we ask that no alcohol is brought to Hendro Illum.

Can I drink the water?

The quality of water in Mannar is good, but most non-locals drink bottled water. Bridging Lanka will provide filtered water for you to drink while staying at Hendro Illum and this is included in your accommodation and meals package.

What Wi-Fi options are available?

There is a Wi-Fi network available at the Bridging Lanka office. Additionally, some guesthouses have their own network available to guests. We recommend you get your own

data plan on a Sri Lankan sim card. This way you can still have access to the internet if there is no Wi-Fi or if the power goes out at the office.

What sort of food is available?

Most people eat rice and curry daily. Tropical fruit, bread, butter, jam, curd and ice-cream are easily available. Fast food is not available. If you have a food you enjoy such as muesli, chocolate, a particular sandwich bread, you should bring it with you.

People eat with their hands – one hand only – therefore it is useful to carry hand sanitizer.

Do I need to bring toilet paper?

Western toilets are available in guesthouses and at Bridging Lanka, and they are supplied with toilet paper. Squat toilets are also used, with washing facilities. There are no public toilets.

Is there a pharmacy in Mannar?

If you take regular medication, ensure you have an adequate supply for your needs. There are pharmacies in Mannar where you can buy a range of the usual pharmacy items but there is sometimes a shortage of medicines.

What is there to do in Mannar?

Hendro Illum (where Bridging Lanka is located): you can walk or borrow a bicycle to explore the area around Hendro Illum. In addition to your volunteer tasks, you can also assist with feeding and grooming the donkeys and other resident animals or spending time working in the garden.

Mannar Town (12 km from Hendro Illum): Please ask for a map of the town before you go exploring the town. There is the 4km walk along the causeway between Mannar Island and the mainland and the 500-year-old Dutch Fort to explore in town.

Mannar Island is famous for bird watching and there are several wetland and foreshore locations where you can see migratory and endemic bird species. Ask the Bridging Lanka manager for a guided tour.

Outside Mannar: There are a variety of tourist attractions within easy reach of Mannar. A day trip in an air-conditioned van can be arranged for you at local cost. The van can be shared by up to 7 people.